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Attachment, defense mechanisms and emotion usage in children in institutions during middle childhood within a South African context.

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Abstract

Although the importance of Attachment in the normal development of a child has repeatedly been shown (Bowlby, 1961; 1979) there is a limited amount of research into its relationships with the usage of defense mechanisms and emotions. This research, therefore, investigated the relationships between attachment type, defense mechanisms and emotions during middle childhood (8-12 years) in 64 children from 4 children's homes and 1 hospital in the Gauteng area. The children completed the Deferential Emotions Scale IV (DES-IV), the Attachment Story Completion Test (ASCT) and the Attachment Security Scale (ASS). The legal guardians of the children completed the Comprehensive Assessment of Defense Scale (CADS). Significant correlations were found to exist between the usage defense mechanisms and emotions. The results obtained from the analyses therefore suggest a complex interplay of relationships between attachment, defense mechanisms and emotion during middle childhood for the children in these institutions. For example, the research found that certain defense mechanisms and emotions were found to be correlated in a complex and interrelated system of interactions. Similarly, although no significant associations were found between attachment, defense mechanisms and emotions were found, the frequency distributions provided detailed information suggesting that attachment does influence the defenses used and emotion during middle childhood. These finding suggest that further research needs to be conducted in this area to further this knowledge base and to inform the caregivers and staff at institutions such as those included in the study.