

A large proportion of preschool children now spend part of their week in day care, with many consequences for the child. Examine the truth of this statement.

Emily Ashford

Day care is often seen as a modern day norm so that parents can go back to work or so that they can have a rest for one or more days a week. Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis states that deprivation of attachment during a critical period of development would result in permanent damage.

There are factors of day care which are important to development, stimulation, which affects cognitive development, attachments to substitute caregivers, affects cognitive, emotional and social development; also, interaction with other peers affects social development.

Bus and van Ijzendoorn (1988) believed that day care may harm cognitive development because of bond disruption between caregiver and child. They found that children who were securely attached at age 2 showed more interest in written material three years later than insecurely attached children, regardless of their intelligence. Tizard (1979) also found that conversations between mother and child were more complex than those held between child and carers in day care. This is partly because of the need to divide attention between a number of children at day care.

On the other hand it has been shown that day care may boost cognitive development. Broberg (1997) compared Swedish children in nursery care with those looked after by a childminder, or remained at home. When these children were assessed at the age of 8, the children who had been to day care were consistently better than other groups on tests of verbal and mathematical ability.

The impact on emotional development is would be perhaps the most concerning to a parent so its encouraging the majority of studies on emotional development in day care suggest it has no ill affects. For example Anderson (1992) found that children who attended before the age of 1 did the best and Clarke-Stewart (1994) found that the amount of time spent in day care over the age of 15 months made no difference to a child, weather it be under 10 hours a week, or over 30.

However, Belsky and Rovine (1988) found that there was an increased risk of an infant developing insecure attachments if they were in day for at least four months, especially if this was before the child's first birthday. This supports the idea of Bowlby's critical period for attachment.

In 1981, Shea suggested that day care increases sociability. He/She? videotaped play times at nursery and found that the children became more sociable from the start of the year. The children stood closer together and engaged in more rough and tumble and peer interactions. They became less aggressive and had a lesser need to cling to the teacher.

Conversely, in the same year, Pennebaker found that nursery experiences were threatening for those children who were shy and unsociable and only became a catalyst for their behaviour.

All these studies are highly contradictory, this may be because, some children are insecurely attached and cope less well with day care and that agreeably, some day care services are poor and the children lack stimulation or lack emotional contact with substitute caregivers.

In 1997, 1000 infant and their mothers were studied when the child was 6 and 15 months. In general, there were no differences between children looked after at home or in day care, but the children whose mothers lacked responsiveness and who were in low quality day care were less secure.

In 1995, Egeland and Heister studies around 70 children either at home or in day care. The children all came from poor backgrounds and were assessed at age 1 and at 3 and a half using the S.S.E. Day care appeared to have a negative effect for secure children but had a positive affect on the insecure children.

In conclusion, quality not quantity of day care has a larger affect on children; previous attachment to primary caregiver, the child's circumstances and temperament also affect how they will respond to day care.