Why Attachment Matters
Anxiety → attachment behaviours → Child-carer proximity → comfort from caregiver → reduction in anxiety

The attachment process

Internal working model of the relationship
Internal working model of the relationship

- A template
- Influences expectations
- Can change with experience
Secure attachment

- Infant goes to parent when stressed
- Easily comforted
- Back to the job of exploring/learning
Insecure-avoidant attachment

- Infant doesn’t use parent for soothing
Insecure-resistant/ambivalent attachment

• Infant goes to carer when stressed
• But not easily comforted

Some insecure attachment patterns make perfect sense!
Insecure-disorganised/disorientated attachment

• Acts as if not sure what to do when stressed
From 6-9 months, we prefer intimates:
• Parents
• Extended family – even in very large extended families
Children’s attachment: attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care

NICE guideline
Published: 25 November 2015
nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26
Selected Recommendations

Ensure that all children, young people and their parents or carers get equal access to interventions for attachment difficulties:

Ensure that the stability or instability of the child or young person's placement does not determine whether psychological interventions or other services are offered.

Ensure safeguarding is maintained during any intervention for a child or young person with attachment difficulties.
Example of process for investigating and treating attachment difficulties as recommended in NICE Guidelines

1. Preschool-age children with, or at risk of, attachment difficulties
2. Video Interaction Guidance
3. Multi-agency review
4. Parental sensitivity and behaviour training
Attachment Treatment

Video Interaction Guidance
Attachment Treatment

Video Interaction Guidance
But what about maltreated children?

- Neglectful and/or abusive early experiences
- Turbulent journeys through the care system
- Foster carers are “temporary”

Essentially no mental health services for children under 5 - especially if maltreated
Disinhibited Social Engagement Disorder
indiscriminate sociability with marked inability to exhibit appropriate selective attachments
Maltreatment specific disorders

Notice the “faulty signalling”

Reactive Attachment Disorder
Emotional withdrawal, hypervigilant or highly ambivalent and contradictory responses
Typical development
Maltreatment specific disorders

Reactive Attachment Disorder
Emotional withdrawal, hypervigilant or highly ambivalent and contradictory responses

Notice the “hypervigilance”
In the context of maltreatment, certain parts of the brain suffer...

- Most susceptible are the areas still developing long after birth
- And those with a high density of receptors for stress hormones

Teicher, 2003, 2016
So can these problems be treated?

Yes!
The most effective intervention is loving family care - with support!

- Children who grew up in terrible conditions in Ceaușescu's Romania had psychiatric and cognitive problems that resolved almost completely once adopted to the UK
  - O’Connor and Rutter
- Trial evidence has shown that changes to cortisol profile can be reversed with “extra nurturing” care
  - Dozier et al
- Romanian orphans randomised to foster care do MUCH better physically and mentally
  - Zeanah et al
Gentle challenge
Why Attachment Matters

- Attachment keeps us safe
- Our attachment figures soothe us when we are too stressed
- Our attachment figures activate us when we need stimulation
- Attachment helps us understand the world
- Attachment helps us navigate the social world
How can we be Celtic partners in taking attachment into action throughout our countries?