rainbowtrekkers Kita gGmbH

Settling-in concept

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1. Introduction

In everyday daycare, we repeatedly experience how confusing "settling in" can be for both parents and educators. The changes and dynamics triggered by the settling-in process in the child can trigger both a roller coaster of emotions and a certain amount of cognitive uncertainty for the adults involved.

Time and again, we experience parents in our daycare centers who have been more unsettled than empowered in their day-to-day competence by studying parenting advice books – especially since these clever books all seem to contradict each other:

> *"Behaviorist science teaches us: infants should sleep in their own bed and room right after birth. If they cry during the day or at night, they should not be comforted under any circumstances. In this way, children learned early on to soothe themselves. Eating and nursing should take place at certain times of the day so that they become accustomed to a regular daily routine. It is essential to avoid cuddling children or even rocking them. This only would make them soft. It is also said to be unhygienic and animalistic. Those who followed these rules, would have an emotionally healthy child.*
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> *The attachment-oriented scientists teach us: infants not only need to be nourished and nurtured, but they are also hungry for love. Their lives are dependent on other people. Alone, they could neither grow nor survive. That's why babies try to establish an emotional bond with another person at a very early age. With that person, they sought not only milk, but also physical contact, emotional affection, protective security and sensitivity. Only children who experience all this could develop in an emotionally healthy way."*
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> (Quoted from MOEWERT 2021)

For a successful settling in in the new environment, we as a daycare center need reflective parents and staff. Therefore, we try to understand the sources of uncertainty of many parents and employees within the framework of the settling in concept presented here. To this end, we first take a close look at the history and reception history of the so-called "attachment theory", on the basis of which (knowingly or unknowingly) not only the settling in process, but almost the entire daily routine in most daycare centers in the western world is shaped today.

We conclude that attachment theory in its current form cannot be a suitable model for use in daycare centers in general and during settling in in particular. Attachment theory puts pressure on educators and parents alike with unrealistic expectations, because it is oriented more to individual psychological issues than to the requirements of the group pedagogy that characterizes the daycare sector. In our view, it is based too much on behavioral ideas and largely ignores the principle of freedom of choice and autonomy of the child.

For our daycare centers we can therefore say: We consider a settling in based on the attachment theory to be more of a hindrance than a help. We have therefore completely abandoned both the "Berlin Model" and the system of "reference educators". Instead, we have developed our own criteria on our own responsibility and with scientific support, on the basis of which, from our point of view, a much more successful and gentle adaptation is possible. For us, these criteria include respect for the child's family ties as well as strengthening of the role played by the other children or the group of children in the settling in process. In addition, we need sensitivity as a quality criterion not only among "reference educators" but also among all colleagues in the team. And to avoid parental burnout, we need to spread the "burden of education" over many more shoulders than before: *It takes a village to raise a child!*

In the final chapter of our concept, we describe the concrete settling-in system that we derive from these principles and how settling in is done in practice. The most important component is the active involvement of parents in the group activities during the settling in phase. Parents do not have an observing role or a role that primarily supports the individual child. They do not sit in the corner and watch. Instead, they take an active role in the group activities. They do not focus on their own child, but on the entire group. They are actively involved in what is happening: they interact actively with other children and adults and thus become the best role model for their child who is settling in.

Our present setting in concept is based on practical experience and written for practical use. It has no scientific pretensions; we have deliberately dispensed with footnotes and a scientific apparatus. Nevertheless, we have received scientific advice. In this sense, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Heidi Keller for her guidance over the years and for the many expert discussions. Prof. Keller is a German developmental psychologist and one of the greatest critics of attachment theory in this country. Until her retirement, she was head of the Department of Development and Culture in the Department of Human Sciences at the University of Osnabrück and the Research Unit Development, Learning and Culture at the Lower Saxony Institute for Early Childhood Education and Development (nifbe). She is the Director of Nevet, the Greenhouse of Context-Informed Research and Training for Children in Need at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (my "alma mater").

Thank you, Heidi, for your passion and courage to rethink daycare outside of well-worn paths. May many more educators benefit from your wealth of experience and may your inspirations form the basis for gentle and better settling in processes for many more children.

Cologne, January 2022

Joel Mertens
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2. A theory goes around the world

2.1 History and basic assumptions of attachment theory

The psychoanalyst John Bowlby developed the attachment theory in the fifties and sixties of the last century together with the developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth. Their approach assumes that people have an innate need for attachment to ensure both their physical and psychological survival. For this purpose, the infant is equipped from birth with a behavioral system that becomes active in attachment-relevant situations in order to stimulate the nurturing behavior of the primary caregiver. If these systems are disturbed by external influences such as separation, this can have a negative effect on the child's development. Both the observations made by Bowlby after a prolonged period of separation between child and attachment person in English children's homes and the results of an anthropological study by Mary Ainsworth in Uganda, among others, form the basis of attachment theory.

According to this theory, attachment behavior is an innate system that brings a child closer to its caregiver. It becomes active when the child seeks closeness and attention from the caregiver or is exposed to a stressful situation. Stress situations could be pain, fear, hunger and fatigue. Attachment behavior is manifested in particular by crying, clinging, calling, following, and protesting separation. If the child's attachment behavior is "deactivated" by comfort and attention, then the child can freely explore the world again.

Attachment is biologically based and ensures the survival of humans and mammals. Through the innate attachment behavior system, the infant is able to draw attention to itself in cases of fear, fatigue, stress and hunger. In the first three months, the child still reacts very unspecifically to affection and care. However, through the repetitive experience that there are usually one or two special people who always take care and are there, the child builds up a bond with these people in the course of the first year of life. In principle, anyone who interacts most socially with the child and takes responsibility for care can become an attachment figure. In the Western world, however, this is usually the parents, especially the mother.

The attachment to a particular person becomes particularly clear in the phase where the infant fears strangers, which begins between the sixth and eighth month. The child is now able to distinguish between familiar and non-familiar people. In a phase of stress, the child looks for the person from whom it has learned to receive protection and comfort.

According to Mary Ainsworth, the degree of maternal sensitivity is formative for bonding quality. For the development of a strong attachment relationship it is important that the mother

1. perceives the child's signals,

2. interpret them correctly, and

3. responds promptly and appropriately

(reproduced from THON 2017). In an attachment relationship, the attachment figure functions as a safe haven to which the child orients itself in attachment-relevant situations and from which it goes on a journey of discovery after reassurance.

Mary Ainsworth's ambition was to make attachment theory observable and measurable. When she became a member of Bowlby's research team, she developed the so-called strange situation test based on her observations in Uganda and Baltimore. In this test, the quality of the bond between the attachment figure and the child is tested in a laboratory situation. The test examines the child's

reactions both when separated from the attachment figure and when reunited with the attachment figure. Four attachment patterns have been identified in the children:

- **secure attachment pattern** (when the mother practically implements the three points above, i.e. always perceives the child's signals, interprets them correctly and responds to them immediately)
- **insecure-avoidant attachment pattern** (when the mother regularly fails to perceive the child's needs and does not satisfy them promptly)
- **insecure-ambivalent attachment pattern** (when the mother is only occasionally affectionate and interested, but does not behave in a calculably rejecting manner)
- **disorganized attachment pattern** (in cases of family dysfunctionality, maltreatment, abuse, trauma).

Attachment theory must be understood first and foremost against the background of the behaviorist educational principles that were widespread in Europe as well as in the U.S. until the 1950s, according to which one should not spoil a child: excessive motherly love effeminates the child; cuddling is allowed for a maximum of ten minutes per day; babies should not be fed at night; if they cry, one should not pay attention to them in order to promote their independence and ability to self-regulate, and so on. (MOEWERT 2021) These theories essentially went back to Ivan P. Pavlov's research on conditioning in animals and humans.

Bowlby and Ainsworth pleasantly set themselves apart from these educational approaches, that are today probably perceived as cruel. While in the early years they still swam against the social and scientific mainstream of their time, the attachment theory found increasing social acceptance in the course of the late seventies and eighties. It led to a change in the most diverse areas of children's lives. Knowing the stress of separation in children and based on Bowlby's research on hospitalism among children, hospitals, for example, increasingly allowed parents to *roam-in* (stay overnight) after surgeries. A few years earlier, parents had been denied access to hospitals for infectious reasons, and children had often been left alone for days and weeks – with corresponding physical, mental and social-emotional consequences triggered by fears of loss (a realization that, incidentally, seems to have been forgotten again in Corona times, when parents have now been systematically denied access to daycare centers for years).

Bowlby/Ainsworth's attachment theory also had far-reaching effects on daycare centers (or, at that time, crèches and kindergartens). Above all, it influenced the way new children were accepted (settled) into the daycare center. From the point of view of attachment theory, the focus is on a smooth transition from the parental home to the daycare center. The settling-in process should be accompanied by the parents, be oriented toward the reference educator, and take place in a farewell-conscious manner and last about 2 to 3 weeks (THON 2017).

For pedagogical professionals in the Kita, it is important to know the attachment needs of children and that there are different forms of expression. Depending on the children's experiences with their primary caregivers and their social and cultural background, some children are more cheerful and open-minded, while others are more withdrawn and introverted or quick-tempered and impulsive. Overcoming this and giving each child what he or she needs requires sensitivity, openness and the willingness to offer a relationship on the part of the main caregiver. The principle of the representatives of attachment theory in the daycare center to this day is: "No education without attachment." However, in doing so, attachment theorists themselves define what children need - and are not guided by children's perspectives.

2.2 Scientific criticism at the time

Soon after its emergence, attachment theory spread into many fields of practice concerned with child development and well-being, such as custody decisions, child welfare and residency decisions, mental health diagnosis and related therapeutic interventions, in programs for transition to parenthood, and in support for young parents.

From the beginning, attachment theory has been accompanied by critical voices in the process. These included many Freudian psychoanalysts in the early days of the theory. Bowlby had broken away from the Freudians. According to his conviction, the family behavioral dynamics played a greater role than the inner-psychic conflict dynamics in the case of children with „strange" behavior.

From the beginning, however, critics included cultural anthropologists, ethnologists, and scholars from many other disciplines. They essentially accused Bowlby of not being open-ended in his studies. Rather, he had primarily searched for circumstantial evidence that confirmed his understanding of attachment. Other contradictory facts were neglected and ignored.

This may also be due to biographical references in Bowlby's work. He himself grew up as a child of a British middle-class family. His father was very busy as a surgeon and was not present for the children. The mother had delegated the children's education to a nanny and received the children only once a day for an afternoon "office hour." The nanny was the central caregiver for Bowlby in his early childhood. When Bowlby was four years old, the nanny left the family. This became a traumatic loss event for Bowlby.

During his training as a child psychiatrist, Bowlby constantly encountered traumatized children with real problems. During that time, he noticed something important: Many of his younger patients had experienced prolonged separations from their primary caregiver in early childhood – much like he had. He suspected that the magic ingredient for healthy emotional development might be hidden in a stable mother-child relationship. What was missing was evidence. He set out to find it and initiated the first stage of attachment research.

In 1944, he published the first study about 44 offenders. Bowlby saw separation from the main attachment person in early childhood as the unifying element and co-trigger of their respective criminal biographies. What he leaves out of his conclusions: A slide into delinquency can also result from other social factors and need not necessarily be exclusive to an emotionally distant primary caregiver. Generally chaotic conditions, abuse and violence, alcohol consumption, divorce, or socially conspicuous peer group behavior can also be considered as triggers.

In the years 1946 to 1951, Bowlby worked on behalf of the World Health Organization (WHO) on a study about mental health of orphans in Europe. Again, his conclusion is that maternal separation should be avoided at all costs.

However, the study focused exclusively on children who grew up in children's homes or foster families in their respective countries of birth. In view of the fact that millions of children were scattered across the continent without parents as a result of war, displacement and genocide, this is again a severe narrowing of the field of vision exclusively to the mother-child bond of children with difficult experiences. Bowlby, however, did not address children's war traumatization, loss, and flight experiences. His report was not translated into German until the early 1970s. Then already, there were numerous critical voices. The critics accused Bowlby of using the WHO exclusively as a platform to spread his attachment theory. His final report had been met with head-shaking in the Netherlands and Sweden because of its one-sided orientation. Bowlby had not answered the actual questions. For this reason, the WHO had commissioned and published a new research report ten years later. In particular,

the WHO criticized Bowlby for generalizing from sick children in hospitals and orphanages and children in severely disadvantaged circumstances to children who grew up in ordinary circumstances.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from his 1952 study of hospitalism (psychological consequences resulting from hospitalization of children). Here, too, the psychological effects of hospitalization had been attributed by Bowlby primarily to the pain of separation from the mother. Whether the disturbances could also be due to the nature of the placement or to other causes was not his issue.

The same applies also to his borrowings from the zoologist and behaviorist Konrad Lorenz. Bowlby refers impressively to newborn gray goose chicks. They follow the first moving object/subject in their field of vision, which is usually the mother. Whether there is also other behavior in the animal world, as for example among the field hares or seahorses, was not his topic. The same applies to the ethically problematic research on rhesus monkeys by Harry Harlow, to which Bowlby referred.

2.3 Today's Scientific Criticism

One of the major criticisms of contemporary researchers of attachment theory is the *strange situation test* developed by Ainsworth, which attachment theorists believe can be used to measure the degree of attachment between child and mother in a laboratory situation. For this purpose, the child is first left alone in a playroom with the mother and a stranger. Then the mother leaves the room and the child is left alone with the stranger. Later, the stranger also leaves the room and the child is left all alone. Based on the child's reactions (crying, tugging, resistance to separation), the degree of bonding between mother and child could be determined.

In such a laboratory situation, children are willingly and knowingly exposed to pressure and stress. Heidi KELLER (2021), who holds a doctorate in cultural psychology, therefore considers this test, which has become a cornerstone of the practical work of attachment theorists worldwide, to be unethical. She is surprised that the test is still approved by the ethics committee of universities and clinics at all.

KELLER (Universities of Osnabrück and Jerusalem) is one of the greatest critics of attachment theory today. From her point of view, the theory neither fulfills scientific demands nor is it helpful for parents or day care centers in everyday pedagogical life. In a scientific context, KELLER questions the foundations of attachment theory: What is attachment in the first place? What is the meaning of the exploration concept shaped by attachment theorists? She also critically examines issues such as the universality assumption, normativity assumption, sensitivity assumption, and competence assumption of attachment theory. For details of the scholarly discourse, please refer to KELLER's publication (2019, 2021).

Beyond science, however, KELLER also accompanies educators, for whom she provides a series of critical reflection questions in her book for their own respective professional engagement with the topic of attachment in daycare practice. We agree with KELLER's impression that attachment theory is more of an obstacle than a help in today's daycare centers and will return to this in detail in the next chapter of this paper.

Tanja MOEWERT (2021), a lawyer, also provides an interesting perspective on the discussion. From her point of view, attachment theory also bears the danger of an absolute overloading of the mother's role. Bonding is a bond and every bond has two ends. One end is the child and the other end is the mother. Attachment theory focuses one-sidedly on the needs of the child, not taking into consideration the situation and needs of the mother. Mothers are under immense pressure due to the high, also moral demands of the attachment theory and suffer from fear of failure. A bad conscience is pre-programmed, because the postulated immediate and sensitive reaction to every expression of the

child is not realistic in a family setting. This is not only due to fundamental social issues such as the compatibility of family and work life. Rather, the family setting as such, with its diverse requirements and its different participants and their respective needs, is not a setting in which a participant can always and exclusively receive attention. In contrast to the infant, the mother is concerned with the survival of several persons. In such a setting, the theories of Ainsworth, who herself remained childless, seem rather ideological and distant from practice.

3. Why attachment theory does not work in daycare practice

In our daycare centers we follow an inclusive pedagogical approach. This means that we use different educational methods in everyday life, depending on the child. This is not about a dogmatic implementation of pedagogical models, but always about the question of which approach we use to best reach and understand the individual child. From our point of view, there is no one size fits all in pedagogy, but each child should be considered individually.

Against this background, the attachment theory has a certain justification in our eyes, for example in the differentiation from behaviorist ideas of the old school or in the effort to understand the respective child as a social individual within the framework of his or her family relationships.

In the day-to-day life of a day care center, however, attachment theory remains - as its name suggests - primarily a theory. In practice, it regularly provides no support for parents, educators or children. This is mainly due to the fact that in a daycare setting, group pedagogy must have the priority over individual pedagogy, even though this is unfortunately not the case in most facilities.

In social work, group pedagogy refers to methods used in intentionally assembled groups to achieve pedagogical goals with the support of specially assigned educators. The classic principles of group pedagogy in daycare centers include cooperation instead of competition and the setting of necessary boundaries by adults. The work in educational groups is characterized by a dynamic that has little in common with the individual-centered research approaches on which Bowlby and Ainsworth had focused their attention. Such group dynamics in the daycare center are influenced by the personality traits of the group members, the group process, and the tasks that a group has to accomplish in everyday life. The group dynamic process includes the whole development of the group, the classical phases, the distribution of roles, the determination of goals and tasks, the formation of norms and rules, the shaping of culture, the distribution of power, the acceptance of new members, the interaction with third parties and other groups. A central underlying assumption of group dynamics is that characteristics and abilities of a group differ from the sum of the characteristics and abilities of the individuals in that group. Group dynamics cannot be prevented in principle, but can only be understood and influenced approximately (FREIGANG/BRÄUTIGAM/MÜLLER 2019).

As a daycare center, we see and understand children primarily in such a group context, i.e., in their interaction with other children and adults. Of course, an understanding of the individual nature of the child, his or her resources, strengths and weaknesses, is part of this view. But the focus of our everyday pedagogical work is different from the perspective with which Bowlby and Ainsworth looked at the child. We use a different angle. It refers to a different sphere of the child's personality. While attachment research primarily describes a child's *emotional* response, kindergarten is also concerned with the formation of *social* skills and the acquisition of *cognitive* skills.

3.1 Attachment theory puts pressure on educators

Daycare educators are being immersed everywhere. Beyond the expectation to meet the technical and organizational demands placed on them by the management, they are also expected to coordinate and balance the complete needs and demands of all the children in their group. These demands require not only planned action, pedagogical skills, organizational talent, empathy and self-confidence, but also permanent reflection and self-optimization.

Let's take a look at an average lunch time of an educator:

> **Excursus: A typical lunch time at the daycare center**
>
> It is *nap time*. Before resting time, the two-year-olds need to have their diapers changed. A one-year-old has already fallen asleep and must not be let out of sight. Meanwhile, the older kids are supposed to be told to go to the bathroom again, but many of them would rather play. Several girls have been blocking the toilet for over ten minutes. In the meanwhile, several boys start scuffling in the hallway. Another is hiding in the shower. Two employees of the Consumer Protection Office are standing at the front door and want to inspect the kitchen and cleaning protocols. Meanwhile, in the large group room, a child has run into the edge of a cupboard and its lip is bleeding. He wants to be comforted and wants an ice pack to cool him down. One by one, the children trickle into the resting room. Some children are already asleep, others stay awake and quietly occupy themselves. When it has become quieter, the colleague opens her laptop and wants to note down some observations about one of the children, with whose parents a development conversation is scheduled soon. Before she can do so, she finds a service directive in her e-mail with new safety regulations from the management, which she is supposed to study. Just as she begins to read, the phone rings. A mother calls and reports that she has just received a positive Coronatest result for her daughter, who has just fallen asleep in the daycare center's resting room.

Such a daily routine is difficult to reconcile with a theoretical construct that places an emphasis on exclusive ties. In the kindergarten, *no* bond is exclusive. Educators have not one child, but – depending on age – between ten and twenty children in their group with whom they are in daily contact. And the other way round, every child who reaches a relationship level with one of the adults in the daycare center always has ten, twenty or more other children around them who also need attention and care. The question often asked by parents, "who is my child's primary educator?" therefore inevitably comes to nothing. Neither does an assignment of "reference educators" by the group management pedagogically make sense. Nor is the choice of a "reference person" by the child in professional practice adequate.

Of course, with all professionalism, there are always personal preferences of a child for a particular adult based on its character and nature. If one honestly reflects on this, this always applies in reverse to the children as well, despite all professionalism. But precisely for this reason, the variant "favorite

educator" or "favorite child" is not an option for a transparent and professionally working daycare center. *All* children and *all* educators in the group are always in relationship with each other.

In contrast, the attachment theory assumes that bonds can only be formed with a few people, since too many caregivers overburden young children. Young children should not be exposed to too many impressions. According to the theory, attachments are also organized hierarchically, since there is a primary attachment person and all other persons can at most be "substitutes" for this person.

However, if the entire "burden of education" or "burden of attachment" rests on the shoulders of this oneperson (usually the mother), then a very specific interaction model in the communication between child and adult also develops from this. From the perspective of attachment theory, communication with the child is not only exclusive but also total. The mother would have to direct her undivided attention to the baby. A perspective always directed to the child should help to look for signals in the baby's face that would have to be answered. In addition to observing the face, the caregiver's gaze should also accompany the child's gaze in order to perceive its wishes and preferences and to translate and interpret them into language.

Science speaks here of a dyadic interaction ("1:1"). In communication sciences, this model is considered typical for the communication behavior in Western middle-class families. Other countries and cultures, on the other hand, are characterized by completely different communication behavior. There, parallel communication structures with several senders and addressees at the same time also work very well (as we will see in chapter 5). Such communication structures are much more similar to the communication behavior in day care centers than the exclusivity claim of attachment theory.

3.2 Attachment theory puts pressure on mothers

In the previous subchapter, we described the pressure that educators are under when they want to align their daily lives with attachment theory. However, parents are never off duty. For mothers in particular, the pressure is immense to meet the societal demands on them that have been shaped by attachment theory. Constant availability, immediate and sensitive interaction and attention turned towards their children are not always easy to implement in everyday life. This especially applies for working mothers or when there is more than one child at home. Tanja MOEWERT (2021) has described in detail and sometimes heartbreakingly how mothers, who are also only humans, can break down under these demands.

A helpful theory, however, must lift people up in their everyday lives and support them instead of depressing them or bringing them to the verge of burnout. Mothers who fail to meet the high standards of attachment theory are plagued by anxiety and guilty consciences. They fear attachment conflicts and later disorders in their children. They are under pressure because there are too many constellations in which the model of maternal sensitivity is doomed to failure.

If mothers with such experiences or self-doubts accompany children during the settling-in process in the daycare center, then things can get difficult. The same, of course, applies to fathers. If you as a parent have the feeling that you are not living up to your own expectations, you look all the more closely to see whether the educators in the group are doing so. Either because you want to be sure that the daycare center is providing a certain positive balance. Or out of fear of your own "loss of popularity" in the eyes of the child and that the effort invested in bonding with the child in the first year of life would be weakened by the child's new experiences.

Either way, the settling-in process then takes longer because parents' fears are projected onto the child. This is especially true when the parents realize that the daycare center works only as everywhere

else. Because there are no "super nannies" working in daycare centers, but pedagogical specialists. They are just people. A child senses very precisely whether the parents are emotionally capable of letting go. And it reacts unmistakably and clearly if it has the impression that they are not.

If

- parents consciously or unconsciously expect that the relationship of one or all of the educators to the child will be similarly exclusive as that between the child and the parental primary caregiver, or if

- educators consciously or unconsciously assume that they will have to take the role of a "temporary substitute mother (or father)" or if

- parents fear that new, strong emotional bonds will endanger the exclusivity of their own relationship with the child,

then it is foreseeable that the settling-in process will drag on for a long time and will not be without tears.

However, if all those involved understand the specifics of the daycare setting before settling in and can critically reflect on their own part in the settling in process, then there is a good chance that the child will be able to master the transition process emotionally and be strengthened in his or her autonomy thanks to newly developed relationships.

For this to succeed, we need a societal correction of the image of the child and of the mother. Less idealization and more realism. MOEWERT (2021) has also made exciting and in-depth proposals in this regard.

In one sentence: In the Kita we do not work with *bonds* but with *relationships*. A bonding is exclusively characterized, a relationship, on the other hand, is socially oriented. A bonding has a lifelong orientation; in a relationship, on the other hand, the focus is on the stage of life just ahead.

3.3 Attachment theory contradicts the principle of freedom of choice and autonomy.

According to a 2017 study, about a quarter of all children and adolescents in Germany suffer from anxiety, emotional or social disorders. Among preschool-age boys, almost fifty percent reportedly suffered from anomalies - and the trend continues to rise. At the same time, forty to fifty percent of children in Germany are considered "not securely attached by the standards of attachment theorists." (MOEWERT 2021)

A scientist would certainly first ask whether this comparison is a correlation or a causality, i.e., whether the falling (or rising) birth rate has anything to do with the extinction (or return) of the flapping storks. As non-scientists, we simply want to resort to common sense in the context of this concept. If the high number of boys with behavioral problems in preschool age is to be attributed to poor attachment quality to the primary caregiver, then this would mean that every second mother in Germany would not be able to nurture the basic emotional and physical needs of her child. A look at our day-to-day life in the daycare center reassuringly convinces us of the opposite. We see mothers, fathers, educators – all of them people with weaknesses *and* strengths. One more, the other less, but each is different. To say that every second mother cannot adequately respond to the attachment needs of her child would therefore be very presumptuous.

Such a monocausal derivation does not only disregard the described familial and social, psychological and physical influences. But also, the innate and acquired *child's agency* and self-regulation mechanisms remain completely unconsidered.

In sum, attachment theory negates one of our fundamental beliefs about human choice and autonomy. If success and social competence are essentially determined by a close attachment to the mother, then no further effort is worthwhile in the rest of life. To look at our children in this way would be an almost fatalistic view of life.

A comparative or historical view quickly shows how much this view of men runs counter to reality. During and after World War II, there were millions of children on both sides of the trenches who grew up without a close maternal (parental) bond. Some became mental cripples. Others have managed to build new lives, create families, give life and become exemplary parents themselves even without a close maternal bond.

Findings from resilience research are important in this context. For example, the psychologist Emmy WERNER showed in a study in Hawaii that children who came equally from difficult relationships, partly failed and partly went through normal developments, i.e. were resilient. This was then partly due to a teacher, a grandma or other persons who were important for the children.

Other people are resilient through their own efforts. As one among millions, I would like to mention the example of the Israeli author Ester Golan:

Excursus: "Motherless daughters

As part of the sixth International Conference on Holocaust and Education, Ester Golan gave a lecture on "Motherless daughters" at the Israeli memorial Yad Vashem in 2008. In the lecture, she recounted how, as a little girl in 1938, she had been sent all alone by her parents from Berlin to the safe England. Ester's own life was saved in consequence. But she had never seen her parents again, who were murdered in the German concentration camps a few years later. Ester suffered bitterly throughout her life from the early loss of her mother in particular. At the same time, she was successful professionally and socially in Israel, completed her studies on the second educational path and founded her own family. She concludes her presentation with the words:

Reflecting on 60 years of trials and tribulations, in spite of it all, coming from a Zionist background from early childhood, I found fulfillment in contributing toward building up the country as well as in my ongoing efforts to build a better world for my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

As educators, we assume that people can and want to develop. This is an organic process. The word "kindergarten" bears witness to this conviction – even if, unfortunately, it is slowly disappearing from our current language in favor of "daycare center". The essential feature of this process of growth is the acceptance of a human autonomy from infancy. The child has both innate and acquired abilities to make his or her own decisions independent of what is experienced. The human being always has a choice.

4. What is important instead for settling in

4.1 Respect for the child's family ties.

On our homepage we say: A respectful attitude of the child's personality is for us the starting point of all education. Extending this, we can say that a respectful attitude towards the early childhood attachment must be the starting point for all settling-in in the kindergarten.

People are never *self-made people*. Everything we possess on earth and need to live is given to us by others. The absolute dependence of children on adults, which ensures their survival, reflects this basic human experience, which in turn is taken up by attachment theory.

And even if attachment theory is not a helpful tool for everyday work in the day care center, awareness of and respect for the child's close family ties is fundamental to any pedagogical work with the child. Only when we see the child in the context of his or her family ties and value them, is there a chance of doing justice to the child.

The word "settling in" describes only very fragmentarily the processes and dynamics that take place during the first weeks of the child's stay at the daycare center. The idea underlying the word "settling in" is that of an existing group to which a new child is added from outside, who now has to "settle in" to this group. However, the exclusive focus on this "integration effort" to be made by the child does not consider the necessary adaptation effort of the other group members (staff, other children) to the child to be settled in, nor does it consider the transformation of the parents. Before acclimatization, the parent-child relationship was primarily of an exclusive-protective character. During the settling-in period, on the other hand, a more proactive and exploring component is clearly demanded and promoted. An old educator's joke says that settling in is complete when the parents are settled in. There is a spark of truth in this. But it is the task of the daycare center to support the parents in this transformation process. Therefore, the appreciation of the parent-child bond is indispensable.

4.2 Strengthening the "peers"

Daycare centers in the Western world today usually function implicitly on the basis of the assumptions of attachment theory discussed above – but usually without the actors involved being aware of this. The political and social discussions about pedagogical quality, for example, usually refer to the care ratio (so-called "structural quality"). This reflects the assumption that dyadic interaction structures, i.e. exclusive 1:1 communication situations (see above), are particularly important for the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. This is both an expression of Western individual lifestyles and one of the basic assumptions of attachment theory.

Furthermore, especially in Germany, day care centers offer a lot of time for playing freely. This, too, goes back to attachment theory and its focus on free "exploration" by the child: If a child is well attached, then he or she can safely and securely pursue his or her urge to explore and discover the world.

Dyadic communication patterns and exploration drive: These two basic assumptions of attachment theory thus shape everyday life in the daycare center. Studies by KELLER (2021) found that educators in German daycare centers spend about 47% of their time interacting with only one child and about 32% of their time with no child at all. KELLER interpreted this 32% as children's free playing. From her point of view, this shows that daycare teachers are generally concerned with dyadic relationships rather than addressing or moderating groups.

Such structures and initial conditions make settling in immensely difficult. Popular methods such as the "Berlin Model" focus primarily on familiarization with the "key educator". However, if educators primarily communicate dyadically with the child during the settling-in period, tears and painful partings are pre-programmed if dyadic communication with the mother is first reduced during the settling-in period and then, after a few days, dyadic communication with the "key educator" is also being reduced.

In the tradition of attachment theory, the "Berlin Model" is largely focused on the exclusive relationship of the child to individual adults. Largely unconsidered in the "Berlin Model" are the integrative potentials of the other children and the group as a whole. In Reggio pedagogy, the group of children is considered the "first educator". The social relationships, i.e. the emphasis on the importance of the community for the development of children should therefore be given much more attention from the first day in the kindergarten and the integrative competences of the other children in the group should be perceived and used much more.

Children go to kindergarten not to study the educational curricula of the country and also only secondarily because of the interaction with adults and educators. Children go to the kindergarten primarily to meet other children. This sets free certain dynamics that can be used in the settling-in process.

Instead of focusing on the attachment of the individual child to an adult during the settling-in period (which, as described, is likely to lead to a certain disillusionment on the part of the child at the latest after the end of the official settling-in phase), it is much more important to involve the child in *group situations* together with the accompanying family person from the very beginning. The aim is not to establish a 1:1 relationship between the child and the educator, but to allow the child to become involved and immersed in a shared playing environment.

It may be easier to help three-year-old children settle in than one-year-old children. The older the child, the greater his or her interest and ability to integrate into group activities. But in the end, it's not necessarily about *doing* things together, but about *experiencing* them together. And there are also many good starting points for peer-group based settling-in for the under three.

These could be based, for example, on the group pedagogical guidelines of theme-centered interaction, practiced in the Prague Parent-Child Program (PEKiP). The focus is on sensory stimulation of children and adults. In the joint play of educators, the accompanying parents and the child, the child with its individual competencies and needs determines the range of play. Through the shared experience of movement, playing, joy, creativity and singing, the first group experiences are created during the settling-in period.

From birth, children are not interested in objects, but in other people, especially other children. We should give more space to this natural urge of the children during the settling-in period. It helps everyone involved.

KELLER (2021) brings in her book many comparative examples from other cultures, where children take responsibility for each other much earlier and much more extensively than in our country and where the separation or transition problems existing in Western day care centers can hardly be understood. She reports on how, in Japanese daycare centers, children can comfort other children and regulate conflicts among themselves without involving educators. She reports how older children in Mexico take care of the food for the younger children as a matter of course, or how children in India sing and organize polonaises without being instructed to do so by an educator. Children form their own networks.

"Settling in" and its challenges are a concept or problem of the mainstream Western middle class in Europe and North America. In other cultural contexts, being a child works quite differently – and we may well be inspired by this even more, as we will show below.

4.3 *It takes a village to raise a child*

Education is a blessing. But it can also be a challenge. Every adult who regularly interacts with children, whether professionally or privately, knows this. So, if attachment theory is not adequate to support and build adults in their everyday interactions with children - who or what is?

In our view, one of the keys to solving this question lies in redistributing the "educational burden" among many shoulders. Where an individual threatens to break under the burden, the community can and must help. By community we do not mean the state, because wherever the state has interfered too much in family affairs and child education in the past, not much good has come out of it.

By community, we mean networking with like-minded people who are in a similar situation to oneself. We call the development of mutual support structures in the environment of the families and in the social space of our daycare centers *community building*. An African proverb says: "It takes a village to raise a child". The reality of our lives in Germany and that of the children in our daycare centers is of course different from that in Africa. It is characterized by the fact that many children grow up with only one parent or in a household where both parents work, where the grandparents live far away and where job-related relocations increase. Nevertheless, and precisely for this reason, we are convinced that we as parents in Cologne today need no less a whole village of supporters than parents in Africa and that we can still learn a lot from other cultures here.

Heidi KELLER (2021) writes: Babies and young children in the lifeworld of non-Western villagers are usually cared for by networks that can range from a few to many people. For example, among the Aka, a people of gatherers and hunters, caregiving networks have been well documented by scholars. Aka babies were held by an average of seven to fourteen different people per hour during the day. Aka infants did not have attachment relationships with all of their caregivers (statistically only with six out of 20 individuals involved).

Such multiple caregiver networks (*all parenting*) can be understood as a basic human condition. Humanity would not have survived if the mother alone had been responsible for raising descendants. Children raised in multiple care networks receive more physical, social, and emotional attention than children cared for primarily by one person. Children develop confidence in the reliability of their social network and thus a sense of security.

KELLER (2021) cites the large-scale ethnological or anthropological research project of an Indian cultural psychologist. She studied the different models of social bonds between children and adults in India. The "one child - one adult" format, i.e., the attachment theory model, was found exclusively in urban middle-class families. "One child - many adults" characterized the living situation of first-born children in large families with many elders. The constellation "many children - one adult" was hardly observed overall. The format "many children - many adults", on the other hand, was the most frequently observed constellation and characterized a multiple network of obligations with fluid transitions between persons. It is obvious that not only the personal constellation varies, but also the associated communication processes and the relationship structures implied therein. This is linked to specific developmental processes in the children, which result in a variety of different cognitive and social competencies.

The idea of *all parenting* means transferred to our daycare centers: We need more networks among parents – and not on WhatsApp, but on site in the daycare center! We need open houses where parents are not only present during the settling-in period, but also accompany their own child and its friends throughout the daycare center's life.

Excursus: Corona

Just as a side note: The necessity arising from *all parenting* to run daycare centers decidedly and always as open houses is the main reason why we, as the only daycare provider in Cologne, had spoken out vehemently, publicly and persistently during the Corona pandemic against all measures that make it more difficult for parents to access the daycare center – such as the introduction of a vaccine based access policy ("3G"), or child handovers that are moved from the inside of the kindergarten building to the outside area. We already have too few shoulders on which to spread our educational burdens. Therefore, any measure that leads to additional isolation of children and parents must be well justified.

The intrinsic desire to run open houses and enable *community building* among parents is also the reason why all our daycare centers are run as family centers. We hope that with this framework we can contribute to supporting and promoting networking tendencies among our parents. Our children need these networks, because neither the best family nor the best daycare center alone can replace the proverbial village, which we have lost.

4.4 Sensitivity in all adults

The social debates about quality in daycare centers often form the background noise against which the settling in of new children takes place. Especially when no sibling is attending the facility yet, parents rightly take a close look to see if the daycare center delivers in everyday life what it promises on its website or in its concept.

As mentioned above, for the sake of simplicity (or lack of creativity), these social and political debates usually refer to "measurable" facts such as the childcare ratio. Much more difficult to grasp are "soft" topics, i.e. above all the question of how the pedagogical staff interacts with the children on a day-to-day basis.

Parents generally have a good feeling for such questions, even if they sometimes lack concrete answers. However, the fact that the so-called "quality of interaction" in daycare centers is only discussed in the political debate as a "secondary topic" does not do justice to its importance. After all, every reasonably experienced principal knows that the question of "Which staff?" can be just as important as the question of "How many staff?". In practice, a daycare group of twenty children can sometimes show better results with two empathetic staff members than with four staff members who are less empathetic.

It remains one of the merits of attachment theory that Mary Ainsworth, in particular, first placed the issue of sensitive interaction with the child at the center of research interest at a time when a certain "adultism" toward children was still the social norm. Unlike Ainsworth at that time, however, we no

longer view sensitive responsivity primarily from the perspective of the mother-child bond or the child's relationship to an "attachment educator." Rather, we consider sensitivity to be an essential quality feature in the interaction of *all* adults with the children in the daycare center. We also see educational sensitivity not primarily as a prerequisite for a good bond, but rather as an expression of successful pedagogical work and as a children's right.

Dörte WELTZIEN, Professor of Childhood Education in Freiburg, has been teaching, researching and publishing on "The Design of Interactions in Daycare Centers" for many years. In her book with the same title (2014), she presents procedures and instruments that seem suitable for facilitating theory-based professional discussions about (one's own) interaction design, grounded in video-based observations. We are interested in trying out the reflection instruments developed by Weltzien in our kindergartens in the future as part of our staff development.

When we start from interaction as an important developmental resource, this does not mean that other resources – for example, playing with children of the same age, group-related activities and rituals, self-exploration, temporary withdrawal from group events, or unobserved activity – are not significant. Rather, it is a matter of recognizing the interaction as a (further), own developmental resource and of consciously and professionally shaping it in everyday pedagogical life, reflecting on it and evaluating it with regard to its significance and effects.

5. How the settling in process is structured at the rainbowtrekkers

In its almost clinical form, the common conception of "settling in" in Germany is very reminiscent of Bowlby's ethically questionable *strange situation test*: First the child is with a parent and the "key educator" together in the group, then without a parent, and finally the exclusive attention of the "key educator" is lost as well. And then you are surprised that the child shows stress symptoms? And when the child later successfully suppresses these stress symptoms and both parents can go to work, then you are happy about the "successful" setting in?

Seriously now? Is this how human relationship behavior works? In order to find answers to these questions, it is helpful to look at how people in general, and families with children in particular, form and adjust to relationships elsewhere in life.

Excursus: "Familiarization" in a family context

Let's imagine: We are invited to a distant sister-in-law's house for her birthday and bring our children with us. Of course, as parents, we have an interest in the child feeling comfortable during the stay and establishing a connection with the previously unknown aunt. How will this work? Certainly not by the unfamiliar aunt engaging the child in conversation at a time when it suits her, and then asking us parents to leave the room after a while. That would be more of a recipe for disaster.

Usually, however, such situations go differently: the adults sit together, eat and talk. The child observes the interaction – and after a while, it gets bored. It sees that the adults are enjoying themselves. This gives the child the security to follow its own exploration instinct. While the adults continue to be preoccupied with themselves, the child will first explore the room and later show a willingness to open up to others. However, it is more likely to turn to its cousins of the same age. The unknown aunt will have to wait.

The development of new relationships in everyday life is thus essentially achieved by children *not* being the exclusive focus of interest (as in the *strange situation test*) but being part of the existing social interactions with others. Children "run with" the others, so to speak. The fact that they are not the focus of attention gives them the safe space for an initial reticence from which they can observe the existing relationship networks and then decide for themselves how they want to fit into them. These networks of relationships (in the case of the daycare center: the group) exist even without the individual child. With this certainty, the child can then decide for itself how it wants to fit into this network of relationships and what role it wants to play in it.

An artificially created situation, on the other hand, in which a "key educator" with her eyes on the clock trying to get the child's attention, does not correspond to the natural way in which our relationships develop and grow in everyday life. The settling in situation becomes even more artificial if it is done strictly according to the manual, according to the motto: Five minutes without mommy today and 15 minutes tomorrow.

For successful settling-in, we need parents who are interested in and committed to spending time together with other parents, children and the pedagogical staff at the daycare center. And we need

staff members who are not unsettled or alienated by this, but who can recognize and use the resources inherent in this approach.

This basic understanding is a prerequisite for all steps in the settling in process, which we would like to briefly describe below.

5.1 Settling in concept

When the caregiving contract is signed, which can often be many months before care begins, parents receive a copy of this settling-in concept so that they can slowly familiarize themselves with our self-image and the basics of the settling in process in our kindergartens.

5.2 Settling in before settling in - our baby groups

In order to create a largely *natural* transition process, we believe that the *settling in* of child and family must begin long before the actual "settling in". Within the framework of our family center, we therefore invite all children who will be admitted in the future and their parents to regularly attend our *baby groups*. These groups meet twice a month. They are open to all future rainbowtrekkers and their parents from birth. This gives them the opportunity to get to know the daycare center and the "village" that we are building around the center from the inside already in the year before the "settling in".

5.3 Parents' meeting

Before the start of the summer vacations, we offer an information evening on the topic of settling-in, where we once again present our settling in concept and give an outlook on the first weeks of adaptation after the vacations. This evening is especially suitable for all parents who signed a childcare contract at short notice and were not able to attend the *baby groups*. If a child starts during the year, which can always happen due to termination or moving away, then the principal and/or the colleagues from the group are available for an individual meeting with the parents.

5.4 Welcome package

Safety information, contact lists, guidelines and the like are also available in written form as a "welcome package", which is handed out at the parents' evening or in the individual meeting.

5.5 Getting to know each you questionnaire

In order to provide our pedagogical staff with an initial picture of your child's living situation, character and interests, and to make it easier for them to establish contact, we send parents questionnaires to get to know each other at the beginning of the settling in period. To ensure that the information is as up-to-date as possible, we send out the settling in questionnaire only a few days before the start of care.

5.6 Home visit

To further facilitate the settling in process, we offer the parents of all new children two home visits (*play dates*). During the home visits, one of our educators from the child's group spends time together with the child and parents in the child's home environment. The goal is for the child to first experience the educator in a familiar environment and later recognize him or her at the daycare center. This offer is of course voluntary and also invades the privacy of the families to a certain extent. For this reason, we do not explicitly advertise it in the daycare center so as not to put anyone in an uncomfortable situation who does not wish to receive a visit. Interested parents can, however, actively contact the respective group leader or principal to make an appointment, referring to our settling in concept.

5.7 Parental accompaniment phase

During the parental accompaniment phase, the child gets to know all the staff and the other children in the group. It is usually accompanied by one parent at a time. Ideally, both parents and other familiar people can take turns accompanying the child during this phase.

Accompaniment means: involvement in the everyday activities of the group. The parents do not have an observing role or a role that primarily supports their individual child. They do not sit in the corner and watch. Instead, they take an active role in the group's activities. They do not focus on their own child, but on the group. They are actively involved in the group activities: they play, sing, tell stories and can also offer educational activities to a certain extent. This can range from handicrafts to puppet shows to accompanying an excursion. Of course, this also includes table service, serving meals and washing dishes. The main thing is that they are active and can get involved in the group activities. They interact actively with other children and adults. This is the best role model for the child.

Such a joint immersion of parents and child in the group routine of the daycare center also means that the daily settling-in time must not be too short. From the beginning, it should be at least two hours a day, so that the child can develop a feeling for the daily routine at the daycare center. Depending on the child's readiness to settle in, the amount of time can then be gradually adjusted, first to half days and then to full days.

If, ideally, the settling in is done in groups and if several parents are present who already know each other and their children from our *baby groups* and are perhaps even friends in private, then it will be relatively easy for individual parents to temporarily and gradually withdraw from the group context because enough familiar faces will still be present for the children. Through this type of "settling in by peers," the individual child learns that he or she is not alone in the adaptation and weaning process, but that the parents of the other children are also sometimes present and increasingly often absent as well.

5.8 Reflection phase

The accompanying parents' absence from the day-to-day life of the daycare center can begin when parents and staff *together* conclude that the child has arrived in the day-to-day life of the daycare center and feels comfortable enough to become comprehensively active and is willing and interested in visiting the daycare center even when the parents are not present.

This decision should be made jointly by parents and staff during the reflection phase. The following list of criteria, based on the five dimensions of the New Zealand "Te Whariki" curriculum, which is reproduced below in the transcription by EVANSCHITZKY/ZÖLLER (2021), can serve as a basis for the assessment. Of course, this list serves only as a guide; the assessments are sometimes subjectively influenced and need not be complete. Moreover, not all criteria fit all age groups in the same way.

Being interested - becomes possible when the child experiences of belonging	Staff	Parents
The child arrives at the facility in the morning and knows within a reasonable amount of time where he or she wants to go and what he or she can do there.		
The child has (at least) one place for him/herself where he/she feels comfortable.		
It purposefully takes a place or starts a certain activity at its own pace in order to arrive and anchor itself.		
It lets its eyes wander and observes other children, staff and processes in detail.		
It approaches other children or allows itself to be invited by other children to play.		
It explores the new environment with interest, without constantly seeking the proximity of the parents. It rarely or never checks that the accompanying parent is still there by looking, running back or calling out, but remains absorbed in its own activities or those of other children or staff.		
The child appears content and relaxed.		
The child opens up to the new situation with courage and curiosity, actively approaches other children and materials and explores the different areas.		
The child is interested in group activities and participates - either by observing them or by joining in as part of the group.		
The child feels part of the group, participates in group activities and gladly accepts the children's contacting and playing offers		
It makes it clear what it likes and what not, it shows its feelings and allows itself to be spoken to about them.		
It allows itself to be comforted by staff members.		
The child actively seeks out staff members when he or she needs comfort.		
The child listens when spoken to by staff or children.		

Being engaged - becomes possible, if the child feels comfortable	Staff	Parents
The child expresses well-being (laughing, whooping, babbling), even if the accompanying parent is not in the immediate vicinity.		
It can (more and more often) be happy about something, shows amusement or laughs.		
He/she feels like moving and approaching things, places and people in the room.		
The child knows its way around the facility, it knows where to find which material, it knows the rooms, many other children and some staff members.		

It is familiar with the routines, has already learned what follows one another in the course of the day and knows rituals that introduce the transition to new phases.		
The child has ideas for games and implements them.		
The child uses the variety of available playing opportunities in the daycare center, e.g. different offers in the room, such as the second level, movement equipment, playing materials, other educational spaces such as the studio, the washing room, the movement room, the outdoor area....		
The child begins to become absorbed in playing situations, keeps his gaze on what is happening and concentrates on its activity.		
The child begins to forget about time and becomes absorbed in playing situations.		
It shows clear signs of high engagement (flushed cheeks, open mouth, tongue bumps against front teeth and becomes visible in eagerness, body in good tension balance).		
The child feels comfortable in the care situations and allows the staff to shape them (diapering, meal accompaniment, sleep accompaniment, checkroom situation).		
The child eats actively and takes an active part in shaping the flow of the meal situation.		
It is able to relax and fall asleep on its own - and/or take advantage of the resting time offered.		
When it wakes up, it knows where it is and feels safe.		
If the child has to go to the toilet, it knows where it is and can go there either accompanied by a staff member, a child or even on its own and take care of its needs there, depending on its stage of development.		

Standing - becomes possible when the child can explore.	Staff	Parents
The child actively explores his environment, explores what is available and what he can do with it. It finds its own ways of exploring, tries out different possibilities that it discovers itself or accepts offers from others.		
It "tries out" the different staff members: Who is reliably present and there for me? Who is only temporarily present? Who reacts? What feedback can be expected?		
The child is involved in disagreements and begins to engage in them according to his or her stage of development.		
It finds places and ideas to play on its own and stays involved for longer periods of time.		
The child is well supported by the staff in the event of a conflict and is able to continue playing well after clarification.		
During the arrival phase, the child has learned that not every day in a daycare center is the same, so that he or she is able to deal with these differences and cope with them.		
The child is willing do with another colleague if a "preferred" person is not there.		
It lets itself be comforted by other children when it feels bad.		
He/she looks for a new activity and/or is willing to try something that others offer him/her in order to get over a difficulty.		

Communicating - becomes possible when the child can communicate.	Staff	Parents
The child expresses his or her feelings in body language: through facial expressions and voice, with vocalizations and his or her entire posture and movements.		
The child communicates with the staff and the other children.		
The child reacts to the other children and the staff, it listens when it is spoken to, it turns its head towards the staff when they call the child.		
It communicates when it wants or does not want something.		
The child expresses its wishes and needs nonverbally and verbally.		
The child accompanies his play with verbal expressions.		

Being part of a community - becomes possible when the child is able to contribute	Staff	Parents
The child cooperates in care situations, e.g. opens its mouth when offered food, lets itself be fed using the two-spoon method, serves its own food, eats alone, fetches its diaper, actively participates in diapering, takes off its socks, lets itself be dressed and undressed, lets staff accompany it to sleep.		
The child sits at the table with the other children and eats with them, changes his or her clothes after lunch to go to sleep or rest, goes to the bathroom, masters hand hygiene on its own or willingly holds out its hands for washing.		
The child allows staff to mediate and moderate in conflicts.		
The child actively seeks support from staff when he or she needs help.		
The child plays with other children and/or accepts their offers of contact.		
It clearly develops initial friendship preferences and looks for this child or these children as the first thing in the morning.		
It participates in group activities that arise spontaneously among children or are led by staff.		
The child begins to introduce his or her own playing ideas while playing with other children.		
The child follows the playing ideas of other children.		

5.9 Final discussion

When parents and staff have decided together on the basis of the above criteria (not on the basis of external requirements) that the settling in phase can come to an end, a joint final meeting is scheduled. This should serve to reflect on the past weeks and give parents and staff the opportunity to describe their impressions of the cooperation so far. If possible, both parents and a colleague from the group in which the child is being cared for should take part in the discussion.

The discussion focuses on the following questions: To what extent have parental expectations been fulfilled? To what extent was the reality different than planned? How has the child developed? What

are the mutual expectations for the future? Are there developmental goals for the child and/or things that should be given special attention based on past experience?
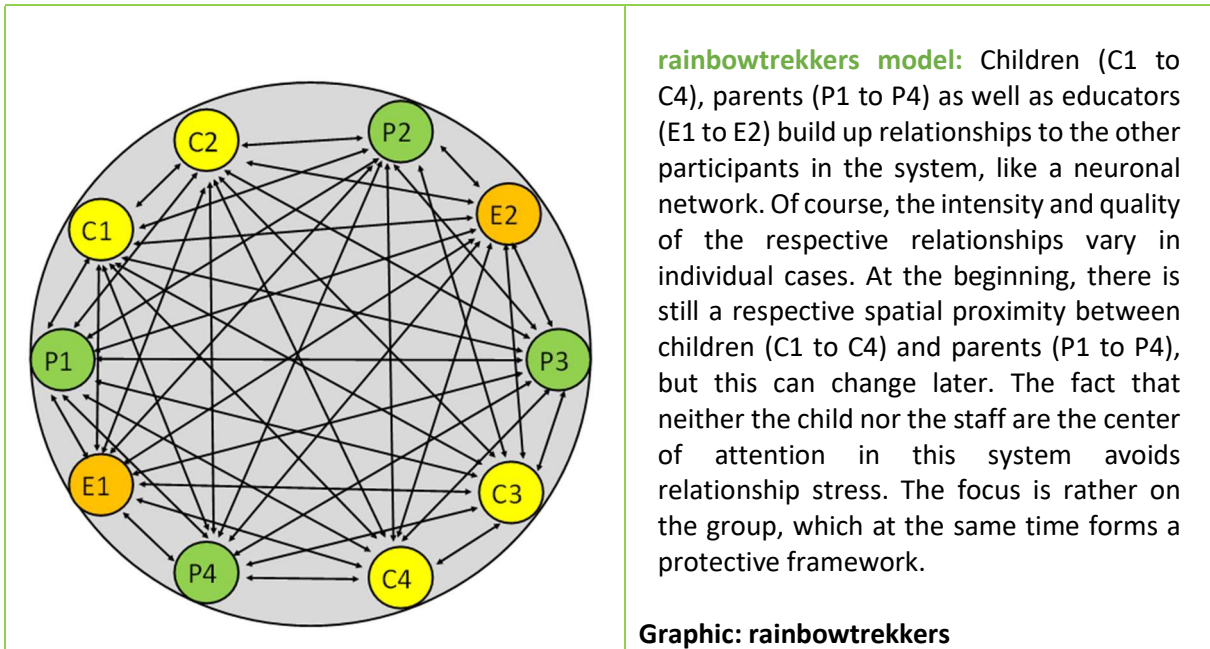
6. Summary

With our new settling in concept, we are ending a long era in which we settled in our kindergartens according to the "Berlin Model". This is because the assumptions from attachment theory on which the Berlin Model is based have proven in professional practice to be a stress factor for parents and staff and, as a consequence, for children as well.

We are not the only daycare provider who has become aware of the limitations of the "Berlin Model" in everyday life. Many other daycare centers have also set out to rethink settling in and to incorporate the "peer" approach. In doing so, they orient themselves on the so-called "Munich Model":

Berlin Model: Parents (P1 to P4) place their children (C1 to C4) in a dyadic attachment relationship with the respective caregiver (E1 to E2). The focus is on the child.

Graphic: rainbowtrekkers

Munich Model: Parents and children (C1/P1 to C4/P4) establish a dyadic relationship with the respective main educator (E1 to E2). The educator is the center of attention. At the same time, the children (C1 to C4) form a relationship with each other.

Graphic: rainbowtrekkers based on Anja Crantzler.

However, our settling in concept presented here goes even further than the "peer" approach of the Munich Model. We also place great emphasis on the active involvement of parents during and before the actual settling in period. We explicitly include the anthropological experiences of KELLER ("It takes a village to raise a child"). But in view of the socio-cultural characteristics of our target group, with whom we have been working for a decade and a half, it is equally our desire to make the parents themselves part of the "village community" that we form. In this sense, it is our ambition to settle in the parents together with the children, as the following model illustrates:

rainbowtrekkers model: Children (C1 to C4), parents (P1 to P4) as well as educators (E1 to E2) build up relationships to the other participants in the system, like a neuronal network. Of course, the intensity and quality of the respective relationships vary in individual cases. At the beginning, there is still a respective spatial proximity between children (C1 to C4) and parents (P1 to P4), but this can change later. The fact that neither the child nor the staff are the center of attention in this system avoids relationship stress. The focus is rather on the group, which at the same time forms a protective framework.

Graphic: rainbowtrekkers

Of course, our inclusive approach described at the beginning also applies to the settling in process: From our point of view, there is no *one size fits all*, but each child should be considered individually. We do think that the model presented here makes the transition process smoother for children, parents and educators than established models. Ultimately, however, it should always be seen on a case-by-case basis which approach can best reach and understand the individual child.

7. Recommended reading for parents and educators

Tanja MOEWERT (2021): *„Sie leben nicht von Milch allein". Brauchen Kinder Bindung?,* Weimar: verlag das netz.

Heidi KELLER (2021, 2. Auflage): *Mythos Bindungsthorie. Konzept. Methode. Bilanz.* Weimar: verlag das netz.

8. Additional literature

Petra EVANSCHITZKY / Sylvia ZÖLLER (2021): *Besser eingewöhnen! Fortschritt und Entwicklung im Münchner Modell.* Weimar: verlag das netz.

Werner FREIGANG / Barbara BRÄUTIGAM / Matthias MÜLLER (2019): *Gruppenpädagogik. Eine Einführung.* Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa.

Steffi THON (2017): *Bindung und Beziehung.* DVD, 72min, Kaufungen, AV1 Pädagogikfilme

Dörte WELTZIEN (2014): Pädagogik: Die Gestaltung von Interaktionen in der Kita. Merkmale – Beobachtung – Reflexion. Weinheim/ Basel: Beltz Juventa.