

ARE WE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS ABOUT ATTACHMENT?

Everett Waters and Jennifer McIntosh

Everett Waters is involved in a wide range of longitudinal research projects and educational programs that advance the Bowlby-Ainsworth tradition of attachment study. His empirical and theoretical knowledge is far reaching. Here, Waters explores the family law field's hopes and expectations of attachment theory, identifies a number of myths about attachment theory that may influence divorce decision making, and challenges why we ask the questions we do. His views encourage hardened supporters and detractors of attachment theory alike to identify a middle ground where the essence of attachment knowledge might best inform family law practices in divorce and separation matters.

Keywords: *attachment theory; divorce; family law; custody evaluation; research*

ON THE TERM "ATTACHMENT"

McIntosh: Professor Waters, as you know, I surveyed professionals in the divorce field, asking them to nominate key questions they had about attachment theory and its application to their work. Having read the survey findings, your first comment to me was, "We should do a paper on why these are the wrong questions to be asking."

Waters: Or on why family law professionals genuinely thought these were the right questions. First, let me say thank you for involving me in this important project. Here's my first thought on this: the people who ask these questions are trying to do something I'd like them to be able to do, but that neither they nor I can do. That is, to single out from attachment theory one logical set of predictions that can be applied to family law matters.

In psychology, and more so, attachment theory, the words we use to label ideas often get in the way. They misdirect us in what we think we should do next. Many implications that people draw from their knowledge of attachment theory are probably not rigorously derived from the logic of the underlying theory. Take this example: you ask a college class, what kinds of developmental problems might arise from being insecure in your attachment to your mother? They start thinking that insecure sounds like afraid, fearful, anxious, shy, uncomfortable, maybe incompetent, and the reasoning goes on to a conclusion that insecure is therefore a bad thing. This is not being deduced from some mechanism that is spelled out in attachment theory. It is merely associative; an extrapolation forward.

Attachment theory is not so elaborate that you could logically derive one set of specific predictions and not some other set of predictions. This leads me to feel that the less often we use the word "attachment" in this discussion, and the more often we refer specifically to what you are asking about, the better off we'll all be. Better to say, would this arrangement interfere with the child's confidence or would this help the child be more confident to explore? A lot of individuals are attached to attachment research because it has an emotional, dynamic connotation, and they like the language of attachment and anxiety and security. However, for the practical context of family law, it would be more useful to be specific about what is meant, rather than use the word "attachment."

McIntosh: How did Bowlby view the use of attachment terminology?

Waters: John Bowlby never intended for "attachment" to be a generic term for "relatedness," but for referring specifically to a facet of a certain kind of relationship that you only have to a few people, called the secure-base phenomenon. The attachment, or secure-base aspect of a relationship, has two components. First, it has to do with the caregiver being a haven of safety, someone you can retreat to.

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For many people, the function of attachment is to extinguish emotions that have run amok as a result of something you did not understand or did not expect. So the comforting side of attachment is about being able to reduce distress that arises when expectations are violated. This is very important, and it is complicated. It is one side of the relationship. The other side, equally important, is the role attachment can play in support of exploration, in enabling the child, or your adult partner, to live a bigger life than they would be able to on their own.

McIntosh: You are describing two halves of the attachment relationship: launching and soothing of the child. Bowlby originally couched those ideas in evolutionary language.

Waters: Bowlby emphasized the comforting side, the emergency side of attachment. It can be as simple as saying attachment has the evolutionary function of protection and safety because honestly, our ancestors' predator problems were significant! In evolutionary terms, running to your mother was not going to save you from a big cat. So as the youngster, maintaining contact, proximity and conspicuousness, and supporting your mother's efforts to keep track of you by every once in a while pointing out where you are, makes you more supervisable. In survival terms, this makes it more possible for her to avoid the predator, a much better result than having to resolve a predator attack.

The function of attachment is not simply emotional, and it is not simply relational. It plays a very important role in the development of the human way of adapting. The human nervous system is not automated from birth. We have to learn about our environment, we have to build a flexible open nervous system through experience, and a very, very long period of time is required for that. You need supervision and accompaniment, enrichment as well as protection, over the course of your developmental life, in order to develop a human-type nervous system. The parents' roles as a secure base and a support for exploration, includes helping the child construct mental representations and an understanding of themselves and of the environment. You cannot give the child these understandings. He has to learn them through interaction with his attachment figure. Attachment means we are capable of maintaining this accompaniment, this secure-base support relationship over such a long period of time, and through this, to build the kind of minds that we have.

WHY THE WRONG QUESTIONS?

McIntosh: You are promoting a layered view of attachment phenomena. This does challenge some of the hope depicted in our survey of the family law field, that attachment theory might simplify things in divorce disputes.

Waters: The language needs to reflect the complexity of the attachment concept and the developmental processes that it feeds. The more you realize the complexity of normal attachment processes, what parents ordinarily are able to do, the more you are able to see what we want to support in these judicial proceedings. On the child's behalf, we need to ask, "Do you think this parenting arrangement will interfere with secure-base support, or support for exploration, or construction of mental representations?" and so on.

McIntosh: I agree that attachment is a much misunderstood and abused term in the mental health vocabulary.

Waters: It is not essential, is my point. You can say what you mean without using the term "attachment." Attachment is essential, but the word is not. So, whenever we say "attachment," we should wonder whether we are underdefining what we are asking, and whether we couldn't be more specific.

McIntosh: With that in mind, let's go back to one of these questions from the survey, such as "how does marital conflict affect attachment?" What is the better question to ask?

Waters: The word "attachment" distracts you from seeing what you are talking about. But, if you say, "how does discord in the relationship affect the mother's ability to support exploration?" it becomes clear! Supporting exploration is a highly skilled task: a parent cannot be an effective secure-base for exploration if he or she is angry, impatient, selfish, frightened, or exhausted. Attention, investment, motivation and coordination, foresight and sensitive response would all be disrupted by spousal conflict. The child's secure base is compromised.

I am laboring the point that it is too easy to use the word “attachment.” Sometimes the word “attachment” can be used as shorthand, and that should be left to people who are experts and know what the shorthand is being used for. Others should say what they mean.

McIntosh: I am not sure I see that day coming quickly in family law. It requires a standardized view of attachment and an in-depth understanding of its mechanics.

Waters: Perhaps that day isn’t coming soon to the whole field, but in the meantime, you experts could be asked, “What do you mean by attachment?” What is required for a mother to do her attachment job? What does the child lose or benefit from this? What is the mechanism by which this effect occurs? Judges need to be more demanding, and say, “I do not understand what you mean, what are you referring to? What would that look like if I saw it?” Then, people who cannot do that would quit appearing in court and others will appear in court having done their homework, ready to provide that kind of information.

McIntosh: What other misuses of attachment terminology do you see as problematic for the divorce context?

Waters: I think that it is helpful to clarify the notion of “strength of attachment.” This is a fallacy. Some think that a stronger attachment should be treated with greater respect than a weaker attachment. Or that maybe doubling up on parenting time could get you even more attachment, a higher dose so to speak. That causes you to ask the wrong questions and frame the wrong answers.

McIntosh: How do we achieve a common language about attachment and a common understanding?

Waters: Let’s first look into the roots of the idea. They are as simple as this. In psychoanalytic theory 75 years ago, the idea was that the bond between mother and child consisted of what they call a cathexis. That is, as a child, I have a certain amount of attention and, quantitatively, the more attention I invest in my mother, the closer I am to her and more able I am to watch her and be safe. The myth then extended to attachment theory that the more attention I invest in my attachment figure, the stronger the relationship.

McIntosh: So the origins of the myth about more time with a parent making a stronger attachment go back to psychoanalysis?

Waters: Correct. It was Bowlby who completely dismissed the idea of attachment being rooted in libidinal bonding. The notion that attachments differ in strength plays no role whatsoever in current attachment theory. There is no way of measuring the “strength” of attachment. It is important to get rid of this idea of strength of attachment because it makes you think that by sharing the amount of time available, the attachment will be the same strength with each parent. This is simply not true.

McIntosh: Many in the family law field will not know the history, especially the major departure Bowlby took from the traditions of psychoanalytic theory. He was a revolutionary of sorts, who, in my view anyway, made what were previously very complex psychological concepts accessible.

Waters: Bowlby was very interested in replacing magical mechanisms with ordinary mechanisms. In his view, to explain a phenomenon in terms of ordinary mechanisms did not diminish it.

ATTACHMENT ACROSS CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

McIntosh: Of the misapplications of Bowlby’s theory that still go on today, and which frequently influence family law matters, it seems there is a dominant theme about infancy being a “do or die” period for attachment formation. As you alluded to, the fallacy of that “logic” goes that time with both parents and therefore needs to be shared around quickly and equitably for the right kind of attachment experience to occur with each parent.

Waters: It is important to realize that attachment development runs the entire lifespan. Otherwise, you think of infancy as a period of inoculation, so that if the job is done well there, it guarantees certain outcomes in the future. That is not the case anymore than saying if you take care of a new car well during the first year, it will be fine after that. It is very important to realize that the building of

attachment representations, the building of skills for using people as a secure base, for knowing who to call on, knowing how to use them, continues through childhood. Bowlby unfortunately suggested it wrapped up very early—we now know differently.

McIntosh: This is where modern attachment theorists in the post Bowlby era come into play. You are suggesting that family law needs to move beyond Bowlby's beginnings to incorporate a broader view of attachment development across childhood.

Waters: Yes. Now we have good evidence that the child's mental representations of secure-base relationships continue to be elaborated and consolidated and become more available in a wider range of contexts, all the way into late adolescence. This includes what it entails to seek, find and work with someone who is a secure base in emergency and in ordinary exploratory situations. There are big differences between ninth graders and twelfth graders. The ninth graders are still learning how attachment works. They understand relationships in which they participate, but they are not yet clear on how relationships that they observe work. And that is important because a lot of learning about how to conduct your own relationships depends on observing the successes and failures of other people. It is not until eleventh or twelfth grade that this is consolidated.

McIntosh: This comes to the myth of the closing window again. What you are telling us is that these systems go on to become more elaborate and more complex, that they are revisited and open new information as the child develops. The implications for family law are?

Waters: I think the first implication for the context of custody is that a solution for today is not necessarily the solution that is going to be effective going forward. Attachment is a process and the question becomes whether early problems are especially difficult to overcome. The evidence regarding the effects of early attachment difficulties was reviewed by Michael Rutter. He reached a conclusion that from the end of infancy into toddlerhood, there are lots of things that can happen to children that could perhaps lead to some difficulties. Later on, as the child is older, they are more able to understand things, but at the same time, they are more able to seriously misunderstand things. So things become complicated.

McIntosh: Where would you want family law to place attachment security in the hierarchy of factors that are crucial for children's development?

Waters: Attachment is a central context in which the child has an adult partner who can help them put together a learning device and behavioral system of the type that humans need. In addition, the attachment relationship is a context in which you have the safety and the level of comfort to explore and get a lot of information about the world that you need. As a developing child, you do not need to be working with the familiar edge of the world. You need to be working on the unfamiliar edge of the world. That can be a little distressing unless someone is there to reshape the whole context, so that novelty and challenge all seems safer.

Attachment is also important because of the understanding it builds of others; how we relate to other people, what other people are for, what's the nature of the relationship I am trying to have with other people. Is it manipulative, coercive, indulgent, competitive, or always there for me? You learn that in the context of early relationship experience. It is not explicitly taught, it is learned through experience. There are many things that are learned in the infant–mother relationship that are learned and relearned and elaborated and consolidated and built upon over time. It is not an inoculation, it is not a vaccine that you get and you are immune from now on. What the mother teaches you now, she teaches you again with relation to a bigger world when you are a little bit older. And as you understand more, you bring more into that understanding that you have. Infant attachment is a starting point. Every journey has to start somewhere. But it is not the end of the story.

A lot of these questions from your survey are predicated on the notion that early experience is some kind of critical period, that it is the sole mechanism for certain types of developments, and that attachment is inoculating in the sense that if this gets done well, everything will be fine. Many things that you are trying to learn through the mechanism of attachment are contributed to in other ways. The peer group, for example, is a great source of learning about yourself and about the environment. You also need a few problems to come along to make the attachment relationship do what it should do. It

is not clear to me that being a mother unperturbed in a socially empty environment is an ideal context in which to try and be a secure base. You need some things to intrude on the relationship so you can save or support the child. You need some things to happen that can be explained. You need some help and support, you need to see other people's successes and failures. So it is not as if secure attachment existing by itself would really be sufficient. I do not want to diminish attachment, but I do want to put it in a context.

ATTACHMENT ASSESSMENT

McIntosh: In that light, how relevant are attachment measures for custody evaluations, and does value-added compensate for the cost and time involved in using formal attachment measures?

Waters: The issue of value-added is important, because there is no use in spending the time and money if you already essentially have this information from some other source. It is not obvious to me that, because attachment measures go to a certain kind of depth, I would invest in them before I would invest in some other ordinary things. On the other hand, it is often useful to have convergent evidence.

McIntosh: It may be useful here to return to the illusion that we can somehow measure the strength of attachment. Often we see in a custody evaluation a line that says "the child was very attached to the father" or "the attachment to mother was strong." It is not accurate.

Waters: As I said earlier, the concept of "strength of attachment" plays no role whatsoever in modern attachment theory. We are not able to measure the strength of ties. The Strange Situation assessment procedure is not a measure of whether the child is or is not attached to the mother. That mistake is made often. On top of understanding what to measure, and the skills to know how to assess attachment, attachment assessment results do not speak for themselves, by any means. They require clinical interpretation. It is going to require a certain kind of person to deal with information gained from these specialist attachment tasks. Therefore, I would say, the value-added comes with having the resources to do that.

McIntosh: It seems to me that one of the value-adds of the attachment lens is through identifying significant risk in the caregiving platform, in being able to say with confidence, there is a significant attachment risk or problem here.

Waters: Disorganized attachment is a very worrying thing to see; that is quite clear. Not because of how it looks, because technically it usually looks minimal and trivial, but it clearly is related to difficult outcomes. Yet, it is not clear to me that we would know what exactly is causing the problem, or that you can bring it to bear in designing custody arrangements. I do not think that disorganized attachment in an infant, or unresolved attachment in an adult, in and of itself, would be the sole basis for a court decision.

There are a number of statistical and methodological reasons why attachment measures cannot be expected to work very well in individual cases. Pointing these things out discourages our courts from wanting to hear about attachment assessment.

McIntosh: Statistical and methodological problems with psychological tests are potentially true of all measures.

Waters: It is absolutely true of all measures. It is true of IQ tests and all sorts of other tests. It does not mean attachment research has no policy implications. The idea of stopping the use of attachment measures would stop the progress toward better practice. We simply should not use a measure for something it cannot do well. Not playing a major determining role in custody situations does not mean these attachment measures, applied competently, cannot be very useful. I would not take attachment out of the custody assessment picture. I would let somebody assess it competently and incorporate it into their clinical formulation. Using scores on attachment measures to make decisions is not the same as using attachment-based observations and assessment to inform your formulation of what's going on in the family. We need to be very articulate about how attachment findings can be used and be very articulate about how people need to stop using them.

ON LOSS IN THE CONTEXT OF DIVORCE AND THE ROLE OF TIME

McIntosh: Highly pertinent to divorce, attachment theory and Michael Rutter's work since Bowlby contributes a great deal to our understanding of parental loss and its impacts for the child. What leads should we take from this on the issue of deciding post separation parenting arrangements?

Waters: Following Bowlby, Rutter showed that if you divide the cases of childhood loss into those that occur by accident or illness, and those that result from family dissolution, family violence, these kinds of things, it is not the loss per se, but the history of family disorganization that creates adversity, depression and delinquency. Now, Bowlby pointed out, and Rutter confirmed, that the context in which the loss occurs can be aggravating or ameliorating. The effects of loss vary quite a bit from one individual to another, and what seems salient to the course of loss is the kind of meaning attached to the loss.

This takes attention away from notions of the strength of attachment, and the amount of time the child is given to spend with one parent or another. It minimizes the importance of whether a child's time share with a parent should be quarter-time, half-time, alternating time, and so on. Time with each parent is much less the issue than the meaning of the time and what it enables: would it enable more toxic communication to a child by a parent who wants to blame, alienate, or diminish the other parent? In fact, that kind of dynamic is central to the predictable impact of the divorce experience and the aftermath for the child, whereas spending 2 days a month versus 2 weeks a month in and of itself has no predictable meaning. Now, what this says to me is that courts should focus less on the structure of the arrangements and should spend much more time on how the arrangements are going to affect the kinds of things children are told and exposed to.

Using attachment theory correctly, you can re-formulate the mechanisms that are really in play. You talk about the child's representations and expectations about availability, responsiveness and safety—and all of a sudden, these concerns about the structure of the solution are recast. It is not about amount, it is about what is going to guarantee and safeguard the meanings that the child builds about relationships. He needs not only to avoid toxic meanings and explanations, but he needs to learn about the meaning of relationships as an asset, and he needs to learn about the secure-base role that an adult plays toward him, and he needs to know that he is worth someone committing to in such a way. He needs to know relationships are about always being there for me, not about a parent's self-interest. Those are important because they maintain his sense of safety and comfort and because they support his exploration.

ATTACHMENT: PRIMACY AND HIERARCHY

McIntosh: There remains a good deal of debate in family law about whether attachments are focal or distributive. Can we talk about the idea of primary figures and hierarchies in attachment and how those notions are viewed these days within the Bowlby-Ainsworth tradition?

Waters: Bowlby provided an ethological rationale for the idea that early experience seemed to be important to normal adjustment. In this, he posited that the infant developed early patterns for searching for, monitoring and remaining proximal to a specific person. This was critical to their survival. For a while, people thought this tendency was exclusively available during a very early window of time. We now know that the window does not close completely, but the learning is easier during an early period of time.

McIntosh: Is it correct to say that most have dismissed the idea of monotropy, that there is only one attachment figure?

Waters: Bowlby softened up on the idea of monotropy, and it is not well justified in the logic of the theory that is understood today. There are people who would assert this, but there are no propositions of attachment theory that lead you to deduce that we must have this monotropic tendency. On the other hand, if instead of using the term "attachment," you refer to developing expectations about the caregiver's availability and responsiveness, it is clear that an infant is going to be more able to build

such expectations if he or she is looking at the contingent responses of one or only a few figures than if he is trying to watch what everybody in town is doing. There are cognitive constraints on building effective attachments. It is true, Freud mentioned this and Bowlby thought this was an excellent observation, that we do tend to be in love with only one person at a time, as if there were some activation of emotional associations which then inhibits collateral systems.

The idea that there should be one figure only was not Bowlby's view in the end. It is also difficult when you use a term like "hierarchy" which is a very specific claim about superordinate-subordinate relationships; this one is more important than that one, that one is more important than that one; it implies a rank ordering. Rather than saying that there is a hierarchy, I think a better perspective is this: it is possible for infants and children and for adults to use a multiplicity of figures for secure-base support. Multiplicity does not imply any particular relationship among them. You are not more or less, you are just another. So people are used for different things for which they have expertise. Parents have different areas of expertise, and usually have and play complementary roles, like a pitcher and a batter in baseball, or like a pilot and air traffic controller. Practicing the one role does not give you much advantage toward becoming the other. Knowing one role does not teach the other. One parent may be more able to provide a coherent sense of attachment-related meanings than two for obvious reasons, but not for a magical reason that you cannot divide libidinal energy. If you are going to learn expectations, how are you going to learn? You learn them by consistent, repeated experience. The more noise you put on that system, the harder it is to learn what the pattern is. It is not magical.

ATTACHMENT INFORMING FAMILY LAW

McIntosh: What are the developmental priorities for our field to contemplate when thinking about secure-base development in an infant whose parents have separated?

Waters: A useful framework in which to view the situations that come up in court is to ask yourself: Are there other people who are getting along in situations like these? Is the problem I am worried about being managed in people I do not see in my court all the time? Of course, there are children of single fathers, single mothers who do well all the time, children of shift workers and people in the army who are regularly away, who do well. Of course, a father can be a good attachment figure. If you work from a pathologizing theory of relationships in custody decisions, and the best-interest-of-the-child theory, you see problems everywhere, when right outside the courtroom, there are countless people who are managing very well under all kinds of circumstances.

I am simply saying it is a mistake to assume that a parenting arrangement is per se a danger or a risk. A given parenting arrangement is a danger because these two people cannot make it work for the child: cannot collaborate, cannot cooperate, have proven to be violent or selfish or disinterested or disturbed. The nature of the time solutions may not be the thing that is damaging to the child; it is the incompetent, uncoordinated co-parenting.

McIntosh: Then, let's take the child who is court ordered to do a particular overnight time arrangement between the parents. Unlike two parents who may be doing shift work, but are still under the one roof, the child in divorce will move every couple of days or weeks between parents and their separate homes and networks of care. What is your thinking on this set of issues?

Waters: First, you make the child lose the father, then lose the mother, then lose the father, and so on. Second, the child is always coming into the midst of what someone else is doing. Third, in a broader context, it seems unnecessarily complicated and disadvantageous quite aside from what it may be doing to attachment. It is possible to do these kinds of things if they are done in a quality, coherent, sympathetic, synchronized kind of way. But if there is a fight at each transition, and if there is a coldness and separation and distance imposed, and if the arbitrariness and difficulty of it is highlighted at every juncture, it is not living in two places that is the problem, it is the way you are doing it. There are parents who can certainly make that an impossible situation. Optimally, the child would have a sense of there being one extended place. Parents who are working well together, build an intersection

within their two worlds, so the child sees them as the same, and is not experiencing the loss of one parent or the other 26, 52, or 104 times a year, or whatever it amounts to. But if you will not let it work, I am sure it can be a failure.

McIntosh: With uncooperative parents who cannot contain their conflict, what are the danger flags when we think about their infant's growing attachments?

Waters: Reducing the child's exposure to conflict is the most important decision for judges to make. It is easy to see how toxic parents can become in their ability to serve as a secure base or a haven of safety when they get so preoccupied with their own needs, pride, shame, or selfishness, or their anger at the other parent over betrayal or humiliation. How can I comfort my child when I myself am frightened? How can I tolerate my child having successes under your supervision if it is all about me, not about them? Parents need to operate in such a way that the child would think he lives in one big place.

McIntosh: Sadly that is not reality in most families who find their way to court.

Waters: I agree. It is such a strange and strained solution to make a child live in certain ways, when their parents are so rigid and so troubled. These so-called "solutions" to custody do not go to the nature of the problem. I am put off by the inelegance and the magical thinking that there is something equitable in dividing the time 50–50 like in an alternating biweekly split. That might work if you are sharing the car. Unless the dad is home and doing the same kind of things the mother is doing, and they are both under the same kind of stress, I do not see how equal time is equal. It is just magical, fantastic thinking.

McIntosh: As we found in our research with school-aged children, the effect for the child lies in the interaction of the living arrangement with the parents' capacities.

Waters: Sure. Some custody solutions compound parents' incompetence, in making troubled parents do something that is skillful instead of something simple. Why give them an impossible task? Better to diagnose and treat why they cannot cooperate.

McIntosh: What are the guiding questions attachment theory provides in determining the time issue?

Waters: What has to be acquired by the child are beliefs, expectations, and a coherent representation of how you and the world work. When you frame it that way, you realize it is not the amount of time, it is the clarity and coherence of the information that is presented to you that matters.

If I present the vocabulary for Spanish to you consistently in a structured way so that you can see synonyms and you can see word roots, you can learn quite a bit in a small amount of time and retain it. On the other hand, if we spend five minutes a day, and I give you a random word in some kind of crazy context, like maybe while we are having lunch, or while we are playing tennis, I toss another Spanish word at you, there is no chance you are going to retain any of it. So when you view the process in play as one of learning, then you say what shapes learning? The organization of the material and the meaningfulness of the context is more important than the mass of the training. You can train children or adults over and over and over on something, and have no effect at all. And yet, you can teach somebody something on one stroke, through the meanings attached to it. I am not saying once in a blue moon is the same kind of relationship, because there is a lot of information that has to be exchanged over time.

McIntosh: And the child needs to build a pattern, rather than a once-off impression.

Waters: A certain amount of exposure and trials over time is necessary to learn something. That said, you cannot make up with time for the lack of coherence or organization in what is learned. So if I spend 2 weeks with the father, and the babysitter is taking care of me, or if I spend 2 weeks with the mom, and the mother spends the time alienating me or being depressed, what will I learn about trusting them to respond to my needs? The child needs enough time for challenges to have arisen and be dealt with; bouncing back and forth every 2 days, you breaking up any chance the child has to learn these lessons.

Some of the kinds of things that a child has to learn require continuous and multiple experiences. Some of the things they have to learn are about the way things unfold in time, that my mother can be less available but she comes back around, that a person can be sad but things that are bad can be

overcome. But these things have a long timeframe that cannot necessarily be learned in alternating week windows. Focusing on time only, you could never guarantee the best attachment experience for the child.

McIntosh: Any concluding thoughts on what has been a very far-ranging and penetrating discussion?

Waters: There are value judgments involved in family law decisions, concerning which outcomes and whose outcomes to prioritize. Successful attachment as an outcome is very important. To have a secure-base in childhood is an asset that I would like a child to have, on a par with having an education, good health, and a safe neighborhood. Openness to a wide range of developmental needs and possibilities should be our focus, rather than any particular outcome. Things that we decide in court matters should not preclude a child developing and going to many different places with his or her life.

McIntosh: Professor Waters, thank you for sharing these thoughts with the Family Court Review.

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