**What happens when an attachment is disrupted?**

If a child fails to form an attachment there could be serious consequences for their development. Attachment is an important component in laying the foundations of a healthy individual.

**The short term effects of separation:**

The **protest-despair-detachment model**. Many children experience separations from their attachment figure(s) during childhood. Research has focused on the separation of the mother and baby, although recent research has acknowledged the importance of the father in separations. A child is likely to form their first attachments at around eight–nine months. They are likely to respond to separation with a behaviour pattern characterised by three stages. **You have to identify the three stages and the behaviours displayed in each of the stages.**



PROTEST…



DESPAIR…



DETACHMENT…

**Robertson & Robertson 1969:**

The Robertsons wanted to document how young children’s brief separation from their mothers affected their mental state and psychological development. The Robertson’s case study of John involved them carrying out naturalistic observations on the 17 month old while he stayed in a residential nursery for 9 days when his mother went into hospital to have a baby. John experienced extreme distress while separated from his mother.

To begin with John behaved fairly normally, however John found it difficult to cope with some of the other assertive children. He was unable to find anyone to respond to his needs and so sought comfort from a big teddy bear. This wasn’t enough, over the next few days he gradually broke down: he refused food and drink, stopped playing, cried a great deal and gave up trying to get the nurses attention. To begin with, John was pleased to see his dad when he visited, but as the time progressed he became quiet and stopped responding. When John was eventually visited by his mother, he screamed and struggled to get away from her, giving her a hard stare. For weeks afterwards he continued to have outbursts of anger towards his mother.

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| **Identify the different stages of separation as demonstrated in the study of John.** |
| **Protest** |
| **Despair** |
| **Detachment** |

**Support/criticism**

The study provides clear evidence that a young child’s separation from his mother sets in motion a sequence of psychological reactions likely to have long term effects. The Robertsons recorded the separation of four other children but this time they acted as foster parents caring for each child round the clock. The effects of the separation were far less than John experienced, but the Robertsons concluded that however good the substitute mothering, separation is always dangerous and should be avoided.

Importantly, the findings of this study changed hospital policies that had always restricted access to parents of sick children to a few hours a day. Now parents are allowed unlimited access to their sick children and this is largely down to the findings of this study.

The study was a naturalistic observation which gained a wealth of detail about John’s experiences and the behaviours he displayed in a real life setting – it is high in ecological validity.

The study was a case study so it makes the findings difficult to generalise to other children’s personal experience in a similar scenario.