

## UPF Nuremberg, Germany marks the UN International Day of Families

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Nuremberg, Germany—To mark the UN International Day of Families, UPF held a discussion on “Attachment Theory, or How Love Really Works.”

Psychologist Hildegard Piepenburg’s talk fit very well to the motto of the 2017 International Day of Families, “Families, Education and Well-Being,” with its focus on the role of families and family-oriented policies in supporting early childhood education, lifelong learning opportunities and the overall well-being of family members.



The May 20 event was well attended, with an audience of about 40; the topic generated an atmosphere of anticipation. Mrs. Piepenburg’s presentation was complex and detailed.

Insights gained from Attachment Theory are really not revolutionary when seen from a common-sense perspective, she said. But they will play a large role in society, because we are all strongly influenced by current doctrines.

Until the 1950s, educational experts recommended a distant, unemotional approach to raising children so that they would quickly become autonomous adults and not spoiled and emotionally unstable. One of the founders of behaviorism, John B. Watson, even recommended that a child should not be embraced or cuddled, but rather be left alone to cry himself to sleep in order to learn self-control and how to bear discomfort.

However, the most recent insights of psychological research into attachment, as well as research into the brain, suggest that it is precisely a steady, constant experience of closeness, security and emotional attention that is of paramount importance for babies. Humans are created to cooperate with others, to trust and to love, and this is developed in early childhood through bonding experiences.

In the initial stage of life, a child is totally dependent on the help of others in order to live and grow. He is equipped with inborn needs for attachment and exploration, which must be satisfied in order to survive. Reliable, loving care allows the child to develop a feeling of security, leading to emotional strength and good adjustment. Autonomy, then, develops best with the experience of unconditional parental love. One cannot spoil a young child by taking care of his needs. On this secure foundation, the child is able to best

satisfy his natural desire to explore his surroundings. The observed paradox is: The stronger the attachment, the easier the path to independence, Mrs. Piepenburg said.

The next big stage of development is puberty. It is recognized that at this stage the development of autonomy is the toughest for both young people and their parents. Educational experts used to be of the opinion that the independence of young people meant total detachment from the parents. Today research into attachment shows that the best way for all concerned is “autonomy with connections”!

Parents who allow their teenagers to freely share their thoughts give them a secure foundation to test their autonomy. Even when there are differences of opinion, children are given the security that they will not lose the support of their parents. That is the way to be increasingly “seeing eye to eye.” Once these hurdles have been overcome, a good foundation is established for a successful partnership in which the partners provide a “safe haven” for each other to satisfy emotional needs and a “secure base” for further autonomous self-development.

One can summarize attachment theory as follows: We feel loved when our basic inborn needs for attachment and exploration are met by the right kind of care and support. A balanced fulfillment of these basic needs encourages optimal development and well-being. An important point is how to deal properly with emotions, and here much has been contributed by research into the brain. The presentation also dealt with this in depth.

If we keep in mind that a safe haven, a primal trust, is the starting point for a successful life, then the first two to three years of life, in which this is formed, are of central significance. Currently government support hands over early childhood education to external “experts” and supports non-parental child care. However, research into attachment and the brain shows that bonding comes before education and that constant, reliable care by the mother is generally the best for the child. The promotion of daycare is thus questionable, Mrs. Piepenburg said. It would be better for the family to encourage early child attachment by strengthening the competence of parents and a child’s right to be cared for by its parents, she said.

The message of this presentation was that a paradigm shift has taken place in the field of science, and it is to be hoped that this will find its way into social policy, Mrs. Piepenburg said.

The presentation, supported by excellent PowerPoint slides, stimulated many questions. The answers were of necessity brief, but the audience was grateful to have heard about the topic of love and attachment from a scientific perspective.

Before the presentation began, entertainment was provided by the Ugandan choir Oasis of Love.

