

## ECF Attachment Policy Statement

### Context

Psychologists use the term 'attachment', with reference to the early years, to describe the complex psychodynamic phenomena of infant/mother relationships, as well as other close relationships that children form with family members. The study of attachment relationships represents a scientific concern within the discipline where there are as many new questions as there are established theories.

When ECF uses the term 'attachment', it is taking the term from its context in psychological research and theory and placing it within the context of the day to day work and experience of a range of professionals who work with children. Used in this context, the term provides a working model to describe, and to create agreement on, fundamental aspects of the needs of infants to form close emotional relationships with parents\*, and latterly, with carers.

ECF believes that infants have an instinctive primary need for consistent, secure and responsive care-giving from at least one person who can be relied on by them to satisfy their basic need for food and protection and who can intimately tune in to their unique communicative and expressive modes. ECF believes that the meeting of this need for attachment relationships in their broadest sense is a fundamental right of every child.

ECF therefore supports:

- the right of children to have their needs met to form secure, long lasting attachment relationships necessary for their physical and emotional development and mental health, and which shape their future capacities for well being and learning. Usually these main attachment relationships will be with one or both birth parents, whether in traditional or more diverse forms of family structures. Where this is not possible, through other appropriate and permanent means, such as adoption or being cared for by family relatives.
- the right of parents to choose an appropriate form of early years provision outside the family for their children in the first years of life, to support their need to work, train or receive other family support services. Parents should be given reliable, evidence-based information about the needs of babies and toddlers upon which to base their choice.
- the rights of children who are cared for outside their families to be in early years provision that matches the recommendations from research on what constitutes quality care for babies and toddlers and that meets their needs for secure and consistent caring relationships or 'complementary attachments' (Elfer et al 2000) that are compatible with their main attachment relationships.

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To this end, ECF will campaign for and promote measures that:

- recognise the importance of the role of the family\*\* in providing for children's emotional well-being through main attachment relationships
- support organisations and provision whose aim is to promote, maintain and where necessary, heal those relationships where they have become damaged through, for example, illness or abuse
- raise public awareness of the importance of emotional security for children, especially in the first years of life
- promote 'family friendly' employment policies and work practices that enable parents to spend time with their children, especially in the first years of life
- provide financial support and reliable information to parents to enable them to make real choices about working or staying at home to care for their children, especially in the first years of life
- improve the quality of early years provision available to families by ensuring that knowledge about the importance of attachment relationships informs policies on
  - home-based childcare
  - staff/child ratios
  - qualifications of staff
  - length of time children spend in settings

and other key quality indicators which

- minimise transitions in the early years
- support and promote a 'key person approach' (Elfer et al 2000)<sup>1</sup> to the care of children in early years provision for at least the first two years, and where possible throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage
- enable trusting individual relationships with consistent carers who are able to demonstrate commitment to children and their families over time.

\* Parents – this is taken to mean those with responsibility for parenting a child and may be birth parents or others who assume that role within diverse forms of family structures, including same sex parents.

\*\* Family - this is taken to include traditional families comprising birth parents but also same sex parents, reconstituted families, extended families and adoptive families etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Elfer, P. et al (2003) *Key Persons in the Nursery – Building Relationships in Quality Provision* London David Fulton