

Attachment Q-Sort (AQS)

The AQS is a method for assessing attachment in young children based on observing their behavior in a natural setting, most often at home. It relies on a trained observer sorting 90 behavioral descriptions, sometimes supplemented by a parent who knows the child well. The tool mainly aims to estimate attachment security from everyday behaviors such as proximity seeking, exploration, emotional regulation, and the way the child uses the attachment figure as a secure base.

Number of questions	90 questions
Estimated duration	120 minutes
Language	English
Original name	Attachment Q-Sort
Target audience	Young children
Authors	Everett Waters, Karen E. Deane (1985)
Category	Childhood

Preview of the 90 questions

Child readily shares with mother or lets her hold things if she asks to.

Low: Refuses.

1 - Least characteristic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 - Middle | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - Most characteristic

When child returns to mother after playing, he is sometimes fussy for no clear reason.

Low: Child is happy or affectionate when he returns to mother between or after play times.

1 - Least characteristic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 - Middle | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - Most characteristic

When he is upset or injured, child will accept comforting from adults other than mother.

Low: Mother is the only one he allows to comfort him.

1 - Least characteristic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 - Middle | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - Most characteristic

Child is careful and gentle with toys and pets.

1 - Least characteristic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 - Middle | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - Most characteristic

Child is more interested in people than in things.

Low: More interested in things than people.

1 - Least characteristic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 - Middle | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - Most characteristic

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Scoring & interpretation

After an observation period that is usually extended, the 90 items are distributed in a forced sort into 9 categories, from the behaviors least characteristic of the child to the most characteristic. The main score is obtained by correlating the child's sort profile with a criterion profile representing secure attachment. A higher correlation indicates greater attachment security. Interpretation must take into account the observation context, the child's age, and the quality of the rater's training.

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Basile R. - Clinical Psychologist