

Child Attachment Interview (CAI)

The Child Attachment Interview (CAI) is a semi-structured interview designed to assess attachment patterns in children aged 7 to 15. It gathers the child's representations of their attachment relationships through narratives and answers to questions about situations of closeness, separation, and comfort with parental figures.

Number of questions	19 questions
Estimated duration	30 minutes
Language	English
Original name	Child Attachment Interview
Target audience	Children and preadolescents
Authors	Mary Target, Peter Fonagy, Yael Shmueli-Goetz (2002)
Category	Adolescent care, Childhood

Preview of the 19 questions

Can you tell me about the people in your family? The people living together in your house?

Then ask about extended family. Establish who the main carers are.

Tell me three words that describe yourself, that is, what sort of person you are.

Examples for each.

Can you tell me three words to describe your relationship with your mum, that is, what it's like to be with your mum?

Examples for each.

What happens when your mum gets cross with you or tells you off?

Example. Feel? How she feels? (Questions 3 and 4 are repeated for Dad or other main caregivers.)

Can you tell me about a time when you were really upset and wanted help?

Example.

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View the questionnaire on mentaal.org ›

Scoring & interpretation

The child's responses are transcribed and then coded by trained raters using a specific coding grid to classify attachment into main categories (secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent, disorganized). Interpretation is based on coherence, the richness of the descriptions, and emotion regulation strategies.

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“Automatic scoring saves me a huge amount of time, and my patients are far more willing to fill out the questionnaires.”

Samia T. - Online Psychologist