Starting age and dose effects

Belsky himself only claimed that daycare starting in the child's first year might have harmful effects. There is no evidence and no serious suggestion that later daycare, such as pre school, is bad for children. The amount of time spent in daycare might be significant. Belsky (2002) explored the ‘dose effect’ and looked at a national longitudinal study of the development of 1083 children across the USA. He noted that children who had averaged less than 10 hours of daycare in their first 4.5 years were 5% more likely to have higher than normal levels of aggression. Whereas those averaging 30 hours or more showed a 16% increased probability of elevated aggression. This strongly suggests that the amount of time spent in daycare is important.

The transition to daycare

Daycare is sometimes introduced gradually. Parents will stay with the child in the daycare setting, and then leave them for a short period. Ahnert et al (2004) followed 70 German children in their first year as they entered daycare. They assessed attachment before and 3 months after daycare began using the Strange Situation. A large number of children who started daycare abruptly changed attachment type from secure to insecure. When mothers spent time introducing their child to daycare, the secure babies became securely attached. This suggests that the stress of starting daycare affects the child, but it can also be avoided by making a gradual transition.

Quality of daycare

Allhusen & NICHD (2003) carried out a study of the effects of quality of daycare. 985 children and their professional carers were observed 2 times a day in their daycare setting. Observers rated the carers for sensitive responses, positive attitude towards the child and the amount of stimulation they provide. Their findings suggest that the quality of daycare is important, as well as the amount of time spent in it.