

## Early foster care boosts quality of institutionalized children's ties to caregivers

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A new study of young children in orphanages in Bucharest, Romania, has found that children placed in foster care before age 2 were more apt to develop secure attachments to their foster parents than those who entered foster care after age 2.

The study is based on data from the Bucharest Early Intervention Project, the first [randomized controlled trial](#) of foster care as an alternative to institutional care. It was carried out by researchers at Tulane University School of Medicine, the University of Maryland, Harvard Medical School/Children's Hospital Boston, and the University of California, Los Angeles, and appears in the January/February 2010 issue of *Child Development*.

The study's goal was to determine whether a family-based intervention such as foster care could improve the quality of attachments between Romanian 3-year-olds and their caregivers. The researchers studied 169 children: Some had been in institutions from birth, some were institutionalized at birth and later placed in foster care, and some were raised by their families at home.

Children who were put in foster care before 24 months were much more likely to develop secure attachments to their foster parents than those placed after 24 months, the study found. Children show secure attachment when they show behaviors that indicate they can reliably turn to caregivers for reassurance, comfort, or protection if they are frightened or need help.

In contrast, children cared for in institutions who weren't placed in foster care were more likely to have unusual and abnormal patterns of attachments to their caregivers, the study found.

"These findings are important for abandoned and abused or neglected children around the world who receive nonparental care," according to Anna T. Smyke, associate professor of [clinical psychiatry](#) at Tulane University School of Medicine, the study's lead author. "[Foster care](#) is often thought of as 'just a place to stay,' but it actually can be a powerful intervention to help young [children](#) recover from a variety of difficult early experiences."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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