

## Maturity

Emotional feelings and reactions develop and change over a lifetime. An adolescent has a capacity for emotional reactions that children do not. Parents have feelings that come with having children. Older people have emotions unique to their own experiences. But what influences our emotional development to begin with? Studies such as the Harlow experiments indicate that no matter what stage of life we are in right now, events in early childhood have already had a profound effect on our emotional behaviour.

## The Harlow Experiments

Psychologists Mary and Harry Harlow isolated rhesus monkeys in order to produce disease-free specimens. Their experiments revealed some unexpected side effects when the monkeys showed signs of emotional distress. Some stared into space or rocked back and forth for long periods. Others flew into rages when approached. Those who later became mothers ignored and sometimes attacked their young.

Realizing they had stumbled onto something important, the Harlows set up a series of experiments to investigate further. They raised a number of monkeys with surrogate mothers. Some surrogates were made of wire mesh with wooden heads; others were covered with soft cloth. The Harlows found that the monkeys spent much more time clinging to the "cloth mother" than to the "wire mother." This was true even when the wire mother had a bottle of milk attached. The monkeys would feed from the wire mother, then run to snuggle with the cloth mother.

In further experiments, the Harlows brought flashing lights, loud noises and mechanical "monsters" into the monkey cages to observe their reactions. They found that monkeys raised with the cloth mother would run to her, gain courage, then investigate and even attack the source of danger. Monkeys raised by a wire mother cringed fearfully in a corner. Even cloth monkeys, however, were a poor substitute for real mothers. Monkeys with real mothers learned how to play with other monkeys more quickly and showed mating and maternal behaviours that were more characteristic of monkeys in normal settings.

The Harlows and others have concluded that the early years are important in developing the ability to feel and express emotions. Later research has shown that human babies, too, need to be raised in a warm and loving environment in order to become mature and emotionally stable adults.

### CASE STUDY

1. Why did the first group of isolated rhesus monkeys display unusual behaviour?
2. What conclusions can you draw from these experiments?
3. How can these conclusions be related to human behaviour?

Figure 4-10

A young monkey clings to its cloth surrogate mother.

