

R.A.D.

Reactive Attachment Disorder

Reactive Attachment Disorder is a condition in which a child has difficulty forming loving lasting, intimate relationships with others.

WHAT IS ATTACHMENT? (Source #1)

More and more children are failing to develop secure attachments to loving, protective caregivers. These children are left without the most important foundation for healthy development. They are flooding our child welfare system with an overwhelming array of problems - emotional, behavioral, social, cognitive, developmental, physical and moral - and growing up to perpetuate the cycle with their own children. Research has shown that up to 80% of high risk families (abuse and neglect, poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, history of maltreatment in parents' childhood, depression and other psychological disorders in parents) create severe attachment disorders in their children. Since there are one million substantiated cases of serious abuse and neglect in the U.S. each year, the statistics indicate that there are 800,000 children with severe attachment disorder coming to the attention of the child welfare system each year. This does not include thousands of children with attachment disorder adopted from other countries.

Disrupted and anxious attachment not only leads to emotional and social problems, but also results in biochemical consequences in the developing brain. Infants raised without loving touch and security have abnormally high levels of stress hormones, which can impair the growth and development of their brains and bodies. The neurobiological consequences of emotional neglect can leave children behaviorally disordered, depressed, apathetic, slow to learn, and prone to chronic illness. Compared to securely attached children, attachment disordered children are significantly more likely to be aggressive, disruptive and antisocial. Teenage boys, for example, who have experienced attachment difficulties early in life, are three times more likely to commit violent crimes. Disruption of attachment during the crucial first three years can lead to what has been called "affectionless psychopathy", the inability to form meaningful emotional relationships, coupled with chronic anger, poor impulse control, and a lack of remorse.

Attachment disorder is transmitted intergenerationally. Children lacking secure attachments with caregivers commonly grow up to be parents who are incapable of establishing this crucial foundation with their own children. Instead of following the instinct to protect, nurture and love their children, they abuse, neglect and abandon. The situation is out of control.

Consider the following:

* The number of children seriously injured by maltreatment quadrupled from 1986 (140,000) to 1993 (600,000).

* Three million cases of maltreatment were investigated by Child Protective Services in 1995. Over one million were confirmed as serious abuse and/or neglect with risk for continued maltreatment. Surveys indicated the actual number of cases are 10 to 16 times higher.

* Child Protective Services are unable to handle the vast increases; only 28% of seriously maltreated children were evaluated in 1993 compared to 45% in 1986.

Children who begin their lives with compromised and disrupted attachment are at risk for serious problems as development unfolds:

- * Low self-esteem.
- * Needy, clingy or pseudoindependent.
- * Decompensate when faced with stress and adversity.
- * Lack of self-control.
- * Unable to develop and maintain friendships.
- * Alienated from and oppositional with parents, caregivers, and other authority figures.
- * Antisocial attitudes and behaviors.
- * Aggression and violence.
- * Difficulty with genuine trust, intimacy and affection.
- * Negative, hopeless and pessimistic view of self, family and society.
- * Lack empathy, compassion and remorse.
- * Behavioral and academic problems at school.



* Perpetuate the cycle of maltreatment and attachment disorder in their own children when they reach adulthood.

SIGNS OF ATTACHMENT DISORDER IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Listed below are behaviors and patterns of relating that indicate compromised and disrupted attachment in toddlers and young children:

Showing Affection

- * Lack of warm and affectionate interactions.
- * Indiscriminate affection with unfamiliar adults.

Comfort Seeking

- * Lack of comfort seeking when frightened, hurt or ill.
- * Comfort seeking in odd or ambivalent manner.

Reliance for Help

- * Excessive dependence.
- * Does not seek or use attachment figure for support when needed.

Cooperation

- * Lack of compliance with caregiver requests.
- * Excessively demanding.
- * Compulsive compliance.

Exploratory Behavior

- * Failure to check back with caregiver in unfamiliar surroundings.
- * Exploration limited by unwillingness to leave caregiver.

Controlling Behavior

- * Excessively bossy and punitive controlling of caregiver.
- * Oversolicitous and inappropriate caregiving behavior toward caregiver.

Reunion Responses

- * Failure to reestablish interaction after separation.
- * Includes ignoring and avoiding, intense anger, lack of affection.

ATTACHMENT DISORDER: TRAITS AND SYMPTOMS

Attachment disorder affects all aspect of a child's functioning. A child may display some combination of the following primary symptoms:

Behavior: oppositional and defiant, impulsive, destructive, lie and steal, aggressive and abusive, hyperactive, self-destructive, cruel to animals, irresponsible, fire setting.

Emotions: intense anger and temper, sad, depressed and hopeless, moody, fearful and anxious (although often hidden), irritable, inappropriate emotional reactions.

Thoughts: negative beliefs about self, relationships, and life in general ("negative working model"), lack of cause-and-effect thinking, attention and learning problems.

Relationships: lacks trust, controlling ("bossy"), manipulative, does not give or receive genuine affection and love, indiscriminately affectionate with strangers, unstable peer relationships, blames others for own mistakes or problems, victimizes others/victimimized.

Physical: poor hygiene, tactily defensive, enuresis and encopresis, accident prone, high pain tolerance, genetic predispositions (e.g., depression, hyperactivity).

Moral/Spiritual: lack of faith, compassion, remorse, meaning and other prosocial values, identification with evil and the dark side of life.

The above information from: Evergreen Consultants In Human Behavior, LLC: evcons@aol.com (mailto:evcons@aol.com)

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