

Attachment Disorder

Attachment Disorder is a general term which describes disorders of mood, behaviour, and social interaction arising from a failure to form normal attachments to primary caregivers in early childhood.

It mainly results from early experiences of neglect, abuse or abrupt separation from caregivers between the ages of 6 months and about 3 years. Other factors might be frequent change, excessive numbers of caregivers, excessive response or severe lack of response to a child's attempts to communicate.

The key is emotional attachments so even if a child is fed, clean, warm, dry and safe but with a caregiver who, for instance, may be depressed and unable to communicate emotionally with the child then there could still be attachment difficulties.

An infant whose primary requirements for food, water, love, comfort and security are poorly met or ignored will be anxious that future needs will not be satisfied and may become acutely mistrustful. The anxieties that surround these own essential life-preserving needs gradually force the child to focus exclusively and aggressively on them self: the acquired insecurities and feelings of rejection are only kept at bay by being in total control of everything around them.

There are three different kinds of insecure attachment:

Ambivalent – a parent has either been inconsistently or intrusively responsive to their child's needs. The child will either be too clingy and submissive or reject their carer. There is a longing for closeness but the fear of rejection or being over-responded to prevents this.

Avoidant – not often abused or neglected but needs have been met by an insensitive or dismissive response. Children may show lack of interest in caregivers but remain in distant contact in case this leads to rejection. There's a desire for closeness but anger that needs have not been met. With other children they are emotionally defensive or use passive aggressive behaviour to manipulate.

Disorganised – the most recently recognised and often with the most extreme consequences. These disturbed children have often been severely abused or neglected and can end up feeling unloved, unlovable, rejected, unworthy, abandoned, bewildered, bad and evil. They will exhibit challenging behaviour from total apathy to outright aggression, both physical and verbal, against people and property. They may lack the emotional words to understand and express their feelings. They may be oppositional, refusing to do as requested, no matter what the request.

They will manipulate situations. In their teens they may seek consolation in alcohol, drugs or precocious, promiscuous sex. They may not see the truth as others see it. They will not respond to reason or logic.

Children with an attachment disorder may be:

- superficially charming (phoney)
- indiscriminately affectionate with strangers
- destructive to self and others
- cruel to animals
- unable to give or receive affection
- inappropriately demanding or clingy.

May show signs of:

- guilt

- depression
- pseudo-maturity
- passive aggression
- abnormal eating patterns
- repressed anger
- abnormal speech
- poor peer relationships
- erratic behaviour.

May lack:

- cause and effect thinking
- a conscience
- self-esteem
- impulse controls.

May:

- ask persistent nonsense questions
- chatter incessantly
- tell lies
- avoid eye contact
- exhibit extreme behaviour – stealing from family, solvent abuse etc.
- sabotage placements – foster-care, school etc.

May need support in order to:

- be able to respond positively to a significant other and feel valued
- thrive in the dynamics of a family
- comply to the basic rules of society and with reasonable requests
- have a realistic sense of self and surroundings
- develop a non-confrontational attitude
- accept responsibility for own actions
- manage feelings appropriately.

To meet their needs we must:

- provide a positive role model
- create win/win situations
- give clear, consistent guidelines and boundaries; yet allow some flexibility
- be honest and truthful, with sensitivity to the young person's feelings
- give calm, measured responses in confrontational situations
- always endeavour to let them know it is

their behaviour that isn't liked, not them

- tell them which behaviours annoy/irritate, and tell them why
- allow our emotions to be seen: parents/carers are people too
- support them in building positive relationships
- listen to them: hear what they have to say – but remember, they communicate in more ways than just verbally
- remember that the adult is responsible for helping young people make appropriate, positive attachments
- give them a safe, secure environment to express their innermost feelings, fears, hurt, etc.
- plan with them for their adult life; help them to understand the attachment process and how they can be positive as an adult.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Action for Children

offer support to parents from birth onwards; run children and family centres; adoption and fostering support. They have many regional offices – details are on their website.

Tel: 0300 123 2112

Website: www.actionforchildren.org.uk

Email: ask.us@actionforchildren.org.uk

Adoption UK

provide support, information and training for parents & foster carers (before, during and after adoption), practitioners and teachers, a Buddy Support Scheme and their Parent Consultation Service offers parents long-term 1-1 support over the phone and attending meetings. Run local support groups, and run a training course 'It's a Piece of Cake?' which is a parent support programme providing a fresh approach to parenting hurt children. They have a fact sheet on Attachment Disorder.

Helpline: 0844 848 7900

Email: helpdesk@adoptionuk.org.uk

Website: www.adoptionuk.org

Attachment Disorder

After Adoption

offer a wide range of services and provides information, support and advice to those affected by adoption, including the SafeBase Parenting Programme to help adoptive parents deal with behavioural problems and attachment difficulties.

Action Line: 0800 0 568 578

Website: www.afteradoption.org.uk

Braveheart Adoption Support West Midlands provide a range of services including adoptive parent coaching and training for educational settings on attachment and trauma.

Tel: 0121 288 1215

Website: www.braveheartadoptionssupport.co.uk

Child and Adolescent Adoption and Fostering Service

London
Michael Rutter Centre for Children & Young People, Maudsley Hospital, London SE5 8AZ
A national and specialist service for young people who are adopted or fostered and experiencing difficulties. Operate an open access referral policy.

Tel: 020 3228 2546

Website: www.national.slam.nhs.uk/camhsadoptionfostering

Chrysalis Associates Sheffield

A multi-disciplinary therapeutic team of professionals specialising in the assessment and treatment of developmental trauma and attachment difficulties, offering services to children and their carers/families. Referrals through Social Services, but carers/parents can call direct for information/advice.

Tel: 0114 250 9455

Website: www.chrysalisassociates.org

Email: info@chrysalisassociates.org

Contact a Family

UK wide advice on all aspects of caring for a child with any special need, disability or rare disorder; national SEN help line; downloadable fact sheets and publications; Connected magazine; local support groups and parent reps; campaigns and research etc.

Web: www.cafamily.org.uk

Tel: 0808 808 3555

Email: info@cafamily.org.uk

They also run a separate site Making Contact where you can share your experiences, get advice or local support from other parents with children with the same condition.
www.makingcontact.org.uk

Family Futures Consortium

London
an adoption agency and adoption support service. They offer an assessment and treatment service for children who have experienced early trauma and have

Attachment Disorder; also offer training/ workshops for parents and professionals. Accept self-referrals as well as referrals from local authorities, health professionals, etc.

Tel: 0207 354 4161

Website: www.familyfutures.co.uk

Email: contact@familyfutures.co.uk

Inspired Foundations West Midlands provide support to parents and professionals who live or work with children with attachment and trauma difficulties.

Tel: 07870 602296

Website: www.inspiredfoundations.co.uk

Keys Group UK and N Ireland

an agency, providing a wide range of specialist support services including therapy, education, training, assessment and residential care. Will take initial enquiries, but referrals come through Health and Social Services.

Tel: 02890 386050

Website: www.keyschildcare.co.uk

Email: info@keyschildcare.co.uk

Post Adoption Centre London and SE England provide independent advice, support, counselling and training to anyone affected by adoption and permanency including adopted adults. Also offers therapeutic input to individuals, couples or families.

Advice Line: 020 7284 5879

Website: www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk

Email: advice@pac.org.uk

READING

See the CAMBIAN information sheet 'Books – where to find them' for a list of specialist publishers with a huge range of books.

First Steps in Parenting the Child who Hurts – Tiddlers and Toddlers

Next Steps in Parenting the Child who Hurts – Tykes and Teens

Both by Caroline Archer, Adoption UK. 1999.

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Website: www.jkp.com

Inside I'm Hurting; Attachment in the Classroom; What About Me? Teenagers and Attachment.

All for educational staff and available from Worth Publishing.

Website: www.worthpublishing.com/products.php

The Making of U by Kendra Fairbairn £6.99

Written by a group of adopted young people attending an After Adoption group. It addresses questions every child needs to consider – Who am I? What does home mean to me? Where do I fit in the world? How do I shape my own future? – the book provides a framework for discussion within the family through a fun and engaging story.

Website: www.afteradoption.org.uk/page.asp?section=00010001000300070001

CDs

Information Plus Ltd has produced a number of Social Learning Software CDs on fostering and adoption issues aimed at children, parents and professionals. The interactive CDs include My Life Story and SpeakEasy, and animated storybooks Bruce's Multimedia Story, Bridget's Taking a Long Time and Billy Breaks the Rules covering topics including separation from family, uncertain futures, restoring relationships in substitute families.

Tel: 0845 605 0230

Email: orders@loggerheadpublishing.co.uk

Website: www.information-plus.co.uk

INTERNET SITES

As well as those mentioned above in Useful Contacts, try the US sites:

www.attachmentdisorder.net

www.instituteforattachment.org

www.nancythomasparenting.com

www.attachmentexperts.com

www.attach.org

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Cambian is the largest provider of specialist residential education and care for young people with Autism, Asperger Syndrome and other associated complex needs in the United Kingdom. Cambian is trusted by hundreds of parents and over 70 Local Education Authorities. www.cambianguroup.com

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