

Counselling Connection:

Influence of Insecure Attachment on Behaviors/Relationships

For more information on Attachment and influence on behaviors and relationships, contact Paula Knox, School Counsellor.

ARE YOU CARING FOR A CHILD WHO HAS EXPERIENCED ABUSE?

Children who are victims of caregiver abuse/neglect can have attachment disturbances (insecure attachment), which will influence their ability to trust and connect with others. These children might struggle with managing behavior and emotions because they *lack the skills* and resources that allow for appropriate behavior.

A child's misbehavior can be viewed as a way to push buttons or seek attention. However, understanding the role of attachment can help us to develop clarity around the motivation for a child's behavior.

The purpose of this reflection is to provide information about trauma and attachment, and to reflect upon how the children in your care might have been influenced by attachment.

ATTACHMENT: HOW A CHILD LEARNS TO CONNECT WITH SIGNIFICANT OTHERS



COMMON BEHAVIORS AMONG CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA AND INSECURE ATTACHMENT....

- Excessive clinginess
- Lack of Self Control
- Overly Anxious
- Lack of empathy
- Difficulty forming friendships
- Antisocial Behaviors
- Academic Difficulty
- Oppositional to Caregivers/Authority
- Aggressive and Violent
- Difficulty with Trust
- Difficulty showing/receiving affection
- Negative view of self/family
- Behavioral Challenges at school/home
- Signs of apathy/depression
- Learning Difficulties
- Repetitive Chatter
- Hoarding/Hiding food
- Obsessed with food
- Lack of Empathy/Remorse
- Self Harm

CHANGE BELOW = CHANGE ABOVE

Negative Physical/Emotional
Behaviors

Fear/Mistrust/Instability/Confusion/

Emotional Dysregulation/Disrupted

Brain Systems

SECURE ATTACHMENT develops when a child's caregiver consistently meets his or her needs. The trust and sense of security that is built directly impacts how a child is able to:

- manage emotions
- trust /count on the caregiver
- learn that negative emotions are temporary
- develop flexibility
- view the world as predictable / safe
- view others as trustworthy/reliable
- become comfortable with emotional/ physical closeness
- gain confidence in exploring new things
- develop positive views about him or herself

Children who have secure attachments tend to be happier, more socially competent, trusting of others, and are able to form positive relationships with family and friends. They tend to do better in school and stay physically healthier.

INSECURE ATTACHMENT develops when a child's needs are inconsistently met, and/or is exposed to neglect or frightening parent behaviors. A solid sense of security is not developed. A child might learn that he or she:

- is not loved and cared for unconditionally
- must conceal needs since they don't get met
- does not feel comfortable with emotional closeness
- is unable to manage feelings
- is unable to trust others as they are unreliable, unavailable and unsafe
- lives in a world that is unpredictable/dangerous
- is not worthy and does not belong

Children who have experienced trauma and insecure attachments tend to have a more difficult time forming positive relationships with themselves and others, and adapting to new environments.

GOOD NEWS!!!

Attachment disturbances can be repaired as a child engages in new experiences. As little as one nurturing relationship can assist a child with adopting new behaviors, creating trust towards others, and developing a more positive view of him/herself and the world!

WHAT YOU CAN DO...

- Set clear limits/boundaries when child is calm
- Be patient (Change will take time)
- Adjust expectations (Child might need to learn new skills in order to change behavior)
- Model positive reinforcement
- Advocate for support/mentor at school (school counsellor)
- Seek community therapeutic support for yourself/child
- Follow lead of child (Do they need space or to be held close?)
- Reflect on *motivations* for behavior
- Validate the feelings of the child when misbehavior is present
- Identify triggers (What happened prior?)
- Eliminate fear based discipline
- Try to stay calm when child is not
- Remind child he or she is loved unconditionally
- Spend time with child doing an activity he/she enjoys
- Give the child choices when possible so he/she can feel empowered
- Remind yourself that kinship caregiving is a challenge and you are not alone
- Engage in Self-Care activities/support group

**“KIDS DO
WELL IF
THEY CAN”**

ROSS GREENE

References

Association for Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children (2011). *Hope for healing: a parent's guide to trauma and attachment*. Minneapolis, MN: ATTACH

Parenting: Attachment, Bonding and Reactive Attachment Disorder. Retrieved from: http://www.healingresources.info/children_attachment.htm