

INSECURE ATTACHMENTS

Beginning at birth, every experience a child has impacts his ability to *attach* (or form an emotional bond) with another person. Many infants and children who have been abused or neglected have difficulty with attachment. They have learned that it is not safe to trust another person. This difficulty developing or maintaining healthy relationships is called *insecure attachment*, or an *attachment disorder*. This can affect all types of relationships from family relationships to friendships to future romantic relationships. Raising a child with an insecure attachment can be a very difficult job.

What are some of the signs that your child may have an insecure attachment?

Remember, only a trained person can diagnose an attachment problem. If you are seeing the signs, talk to a professional therapist or clinician skilled in attachment issues.

Emotional problems. Your child may always need to be around you, often feel depressed, or often express anger. The child might not want to do activities that typical kids enjoy. He may want to spend a lot of time alone, or sleeping. He may refuse to play with others.

Physical problems. The child might get sick a lot or complain of aches and pains frequently, without any physical cause. She may also take longer to begin walking, talking, or doing other development tasks. The child may have an obsession with food. He may hide or steal food, even if he is not hungry. He may also develop eating disorders.

Social problems. Your child may have trouble making friends and/or keeping friends. For example, the child may tell you about friends, but when you ask for the friends' names, she may not be able to tell you. Another sign is a lack of boundaries - the child might walk up to complete strangers and hug them or tell them details about her life. In addition, she may display a lot of aggression or violence towards others. She may yell at you and call you names or try to hurt you. She may not feel sorry after hurting someone. In general, the child usually has a hard time trusting anyone, especially adults.

Learning problems. Your child might have a lot of difficulty at school, such as trouble with schoolwork and following directions. He may have a learning disability or have a hard time staying on task at school.

What can you do to help your child?

Seek help from a therapist or clinician. A therapist can assess your child to determine if she has an attachment disorder, or if there is a different issue. The therapist can provide recommendations for how to best respond to your child's behavior.

Continue providing a safe, secure environment. This is one of the best things you can do for your child. By consistently providing for their needs, your children can begin to learn that you can be trusted.

Offer gentle, reassuring words and touch. By giving your child a hug or encouraging words when he does well at a task or when he is crying, you can begin to show him that he is valuable and worthy of love, regardless of his behavior.

Teach appropriate social behaviors. Some children with attachment problems need very clear teaching on social cues and boundaries. Prepare children before social outings so the child knows what is expected.

Some of the above information was adapted from www.helpguide.org including the articles entitled "Insecure Attachment and Attachment Disorders" and "Parenting and Attachment."

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