
Long-Term Effects of the Failure of Childhood Attachment

We are learning more and more about the long-term effects on children who do not make positive and nurturing connections with their parents or other consistent adult caretakers during their childhood.

We now know that it is crucial for parents to form a strong and loving attachment to their babies. If they do not, their children will be at risk for a variety of emotional, social and learning problems as they go through childhood and into adolescence and adulthood.

Developmental Problems

- May have difficulty with processing what they hear
- May have difficulty expressing themselves verbally
- May have gross motor problems
- May experience delays in fine motor adaptive skills
- May have inconsistent levels of skills in all of the above areas

Conscience Development

- May not show normal anxiety following aggressive or cruel behavior
- May not show guilt on breaking rules or laws
- May project blame onto others

Self-Esteem

- May be unable to get satisfaction from tasks well done
- May see self as undeserving
- May see self as incapable of change
- May have difficulty having fun

Impulse Control

- May exhibit poor control
- May need external controls on behavior
- May exhibit lack of foresight
- May have poor attention span

Interpersonal Interactions

- May lack depth in relationships
- May lack trust in others
- May demand affection and exhibit hostile dependency
- May need to be in control of all situations
- May have impaired social maturity

Emotions

- May have trouble understanding basic cause and effect
- May have difficulty expressing feelings appropriately; especially anger, sadness, and frustration
- May have difficulty in appropriately recognizing feelings in others

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Cognitive Problems

- May have trouble understanding basic cause and effect
- May experience problems with logical thinking
- May appear to have confused thought processes
- May have difficulty thinking ahead
- May have an impaired sense of time
- May have difficulties with abstract thinking

Our prisons are full of adults who missed the opportunity for early bonding and attachment. We also see many parents in the Nurturing Program who suffer from the effects listed above.

In the Nurturing Program, we can help parents develop a stronger attachment to and appreciation for the young beings in their care. This can be done through the teaching of Infant Massage and by coaching parents in playing with their small children.

Adapted by David R. Preininger, LISW, from:
Attachment and Separation: Putting the Pieces Together
V. Fahlbert
Ann Arbor, MI 1979