

## HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND HELP HURTING KIDS

### WORKSHOP ON REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER

INTRODUCTION: I know that we've all been discouraged at times with the behavior of many of the kids we work with. Maybe when you began your ministry you didn't think you'd be dealing with kids who can be so defiant and even so violent. The truth is, in modern society many of our kids are suffering from the effects of abandonment or rejection or abuse by close family members. They are suffering from RAD—reactive attachment disorder. You can call it just 'attachment disorder'

#### Goals:

- Understand what reactive attachment disorder (RAD) is
- Understand why it is so important to understand and learn to deal with RAD children
- Be able to explain the main symptoms
- Be able to explain the main causes
- Be able to identify a child who suffers from RAD
- Discuss the extent to which RAD affects the children at Haven of Hope
- Therapy—understand what helps and what makes RAD worse
- Learn about techniques used by experts who effectively minister to emotionally damaged, hurting children. Evaluate which of these methods you could use in your ministry.
- Evaluate your interactions with the children in your ministry in terms of RAD
  - What are you doing right?
  - What do you need to change?
  - What two or three changes should you make first?

#### WHAT IS NORMAL ATTACHMENT?

Attachment is the God-given, normal emotional bond that takes place in the first two years of life between the infant and the primary adult who normally meets his needs and shows him love and human interaction. This is usually, but not always, the mother. God has planned for this attachment by causing birth and breastfeeding to release powerful hormones that facilitate the mother's emotional bonding to the child. This healthy attachment enables the child to develop normally, to form a conscience, and to understand that he can depend on others and ultimately on God, thus paving the way for happy human relationships and a happy life.

Attachment disorder occurs when for some reason that bonding process is stopped or interrupted so that the child does not bond normally to anyone. This results in severe and long-term emotional damage and often to antisocial and even criminal behavior.

## SYMPTOMS OF RAD (Spotting a RAD child)

- Superficially charming & engaging, especially to outsiders  
? Why do we say superficially? Why charming to outsiders, but definitely UNCHARMING at home?
- Chronic, crazy lying  
? What is the difference between ordinary sinful lying and chronic, crazy lying?  
? Can you give an example from your ministry?
- Lack of appropriate eye contact  
? Think about what good attachment is. Why is lack of appropriate eye contact a symptom of RAD?
- Try to aggravate you and keep you angry at them  
? Why would a child do that? What are they trying to achieve? If they can keep you mad at them, does that help or hurt the child?
- Try to feel safe by rejecting love  
? How does rejecting love make them feel safe?
- Indiscriminately affectionate  
? What is the difference between appropriate affection and indiscriminate affection for a child?
- Inappropriately clingy  
? What is the child really saying in nonverbal communication?
- Inability to give and receive love  
THE BIGGIE. The most common trait.
- Unable to connect well with others  
? Why does the child not connect well with others? (Always has to be in charge, not loving, not responsive to the needs of others, sometimes dangerous)
- Destructive to things, to self and to others  
ANOTHER BIGGIE. ? What examples can we give from the home?
- Ability to ignore pain – Overload, plus extreme survival instinct.
- Cruelty to animals—Deep seated desire to cause pain since the child hurts
- Learning lags and disorders
- Lack of conscience  
ANOTHER BIGGIE. No concept of right or wrong, no desire not to hurt others.
- Abnormal eating patterns—Often associated with fear of starvation.
- Preoccupied with blood, gore & feces
- Incessant nonsense chatter
- Abnormal, abusive speech habits
- False allegations of abuse—manipulative.  
How could we fall prey to dangers of false allegations here at Haven of Hope?
- APPLICATION:  
Which of these do you see most prevalently here at HH?  
In which kids do you see these traits?

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#### THOUGHTS FROM THE EXPERTS

From the book, THE CONNECTED CHILD

The child carries real although invisible scars that will take time, effort, love and prayer to overcome.

These children “can lack attachment skills entirely. These children may not have the basic moral compass that tells them not to hurt other people because they never connected closely with another person. They never got the lesson, ‘Mommy and Daddy respond positively to me, so I want to respond positively to others.’” P. 28

Child needs a tightly structured life.

He is going to test all the boundaries over and over to make sure they are really firm, and you are really strong enough to take care of him. If any boundary does not stand, the child’s insecurities and bad behaviors will increase. If the boundaries stand firm and child is treated with kindness, his insecurities will very gradually begin to increase and his unacceptable behaviors will decrease.

Ineffective with these children:

- Physical punishment
- Demeaning talk, insulting, name-calling
- Isolation from others
- Giving in to the child
- Warnings, whether verbal or by more complicated systems
- Bargaining of any kind (allows for manipulation)
- Giving them rewards
- Giving them too much stuff they did not earn.
- Taking unacceptable behavior personally
- Attributing unacceptable behavior to a child’s basic lack of character
- Insulting or shaming the child

Effective with these children:

- Close supervision
- “Keeping the child in your sight at all times.
- “Strong” sitting as a way of helping the child settle down and learn to control himself
- “Think it over” spot with you staying close by
- Restraint or “holding therapy”

- Interrupting unacceptable behavior immediately
- Interrupting unacceptable behavior every single time consistentl
- Zero tolerance policy on bad behavior
- Teaching the child how to express his feelings, meet his goals appropriately
- Recognizing & praising specific acts of good behavior with “I see you...doing...”
- Dealing with the source of the actions while not tolerating bad actions
- Noticing/journaling what calms the child and what sets him off
- Giving the child your full attention—looking in his eyes—really listening to him
- “(These) children need lots of individualized, focused time with their parents in order to catch up developmentally and to form close and loyal family bonds.”
- Playing WITH the child rather than handing him a toy to go play with alone
- Acting with kindness toward them even when you don’t FEEL loving towards them
- Telling the child ahead of time what is going to be happening and explaining new things as they happen, to decrease fear. (They need to FEEL safe as well as to BE safe.)
- Outlining the child’s day ahead of time
- Preparing a child ahead whenever you are going to leave him, and talking about your return (How many times do they ask me to reassure them of the day of my return?)
- Hugs (even when they are rejected) 7 hugs a day for maintenance, 12 hugs a day for healing.
- Limiting the number and kind of choices, NO open-ended choices
- Giving teaching in short segments using simple language. Most abused children have language deficits and a steady stream of words is confusing to them and can cause them to go into a mode where fears takes control of the brain.
- Having a zero tolerance on bullying and insulting. If the adults who are supposed to be in charge don’t stick up and speak up for the victim, the children will all feel insecure and feel more and more that they are “on their own.” Therefore their aggressiveness and destructive tendencies toward others will increase.
- Teaching Life Values with short, simple phrases often repeated and applied during life circumstances.

Examples: Show respect.

Listen and obey.

Who's the boss? Adults are in charge

Focus and complete your job

No hurting

Stick together

- Rejecting the behavior, not the child.

Example: "It is NOT OK to...."

- Redoing bad behavior, practicing good behavior, with immediate praise received.
- Practicing obedience with the "Stop" and "Go" game.
- Helping the child stay on task by asking, "What were you supposed to be doing?" (Child responds.) "OK, focus and complete your task."
- Using the "Voice of Authority" when you need to get the child's attention and to enforce boundaries, followed by immediate praise and a return to normal voice when the child responds.

"Baggage" abused kids bring with them:

- Abandonment, loss, and grief issues
- Attachment disorders
- Neurological alterations (problems with the functioning of brain & nerves)
- Cognitive impairments (problems in ability to learn)
- Coordination & motor skill problems—Clumsiness, etc.
- Sensory processing deficits (Afraid, confused or hurt by sound, light, colors, textures, human touch, etc.)
- Fear & anxiety
- Anger

- Confusion
- Flashbacks & posttraumatic stress (reliving old pains)
- Shame
- Depression
- Self-loathing, feelings of valuelessness (If I had value, my mother would not have abandoned me, my father would not have left the family, etc.)
- Destructive tendencies
- Sexual confusion
- Survival skills like being manipulative and deceitful
- Deep felt need to be in total control, yet an inability to control their own emotions.

What they don't have, need to develop:

- Conscience
- Concern for others
- Self respect
- Age-appropriate understandings and behaviors
- Ability to give and receive love

UNSPOKEN MESSAGES BEHIND A CHILD'S BEHAVIOR adapted from "The Connected Child" p. 36-37.

When a child does this...	You may think this...	He may be trying to express this...
Pulls away from your embrace.	He hates me. He rejects me.	I've never learned how to process touch, so being held is terrifying to me. I've been badly abused by adults, & I'm still learning to trust. I've never experienced appropriate nurturing affection from an adult, so this is all new and scary to me.
Becomes angry easily.	He's a bad, angry kid.	I am terrified & trying to protect myself from a situation that

		resembles a terrible experience I had in the past. I am so frustrated because I don't know how to express my feelings & needs. Please don't leave me alone. I am terrified of being abandoned again. I only feel safe when I am in control, because I've never known trustworthy adults before.
Wants to be left alone.	Doesn't like me. Doesn't like anyone.	I don't know how to cope with my surroundings. Everything seems new or confusing or scary to me. I'm on sensory overload & need to relax & let my body & mind recharge.
Disobeys instructions.	He's a naughty, bad kid.	I want to be in control because adults have always proven unreliable—I feel I can only depend on myself. I'm testing the boundaries to see if you are really strong enough to protect me. I have learning delays & difficulties that prevent me from understanding clearly.
Bullies or acts aggressive and mean toward other children.	He's a bad kid.	I'm treating others as I was treated. I'm scared and sad. I'm trying to numb my own pain by creating pain in others.
Flirts or acts sexually suggestive or masturbates openly.	He's over sexed and evil.	I'm doing what I was trained to do. I was sexually abused by caregivers or relatives. I was sexually aroused too young and I don't know how to handle those feelings. Inappropriate sexuality was the only way I ever got positive attention. I don't know how else to please people.



Is restless, fidgeting, overly reacts to accidental bumps	What's the matter with him?	I must stay alert and prepared to defend myself at all times if I am to survive because in the past there was no adult to protect me.
Hoards or steals food	Selfish, foolish	I was painfully hungry and undernourished and nearly starved before, and I am haunted by the fear that it could happen again.
Fears walking alone	Selfish, foolish	I was attacked and abused during my early years, so I feel a deep need for protection. I fear it will happen again.
Can't sleep	What's the matter with him? Just lay down and relax.	I must stay alert and prepared to defend myself because in the past I never knew when I would be hurt in the night by those I lived with. My brain chemistry is on overload and I can't shut down.

#### CASE STUDIES TO ACT OUT—UNACCEPTABLE WORDS

Tommy: "I hate you! I hate you! You are a bad mother!"

Mother: "Hold it. Stop right there. Tommy, it is NOT okay for you to talk to me with those kind of words." (She kneels down to his level and takes one of his hands gently.) "Tell me what you need, Tommy, and tell me with respect."

Tommy: looks away angrily.

Mother: Looks into his face. "Let me see those beautiful brown eyes."

Tommy: Glances at her quickly, hesitantly.

Mother: “Oh, I love to see those eyes. Sweetheart, you can say anything to me that you need to say. If you think I’m being mean, you can say that. If you feel angry with me, you can say that, too. Anything. Just say it with respect. Now, tell me what you need.”

Tommy: “I don’t want to go to bed yet!”

Mother: “I understand, Tommy. You don’t feel like going to bed yet. But who is in charge here, you, or me?”

Tommy: “I hate you.”

Mother: “No, Tommy. It’s not OK to talk to me that way. Answer my question.”

Tommy: Shrugs his shoulders.

Mother: “Use your words, Tommy. Who is in charge, the adults, or the kids?”

Tommy: Shrugs his shoulders.

Mother: “Use your words, Tommy.”

Tommy: “The adults.”

Mother: “Good job using your words, Tommy. Good job answering. They don’t put 14 year-olds in charge, do they?”

Tommy: Giggles. “No.”

Mother: Would you like me to read you a story after you are all in bed, or would you like me to sing to you?

#### CASE STUDIES TO ACT OUT—THROWING SOMETHING DISRESPECTFULLY

Five year old Kwame: Grabs Sammy’s child’s toy

Mother: (Goes immediately to Kwame and gets down on his level) “Kwame, it is NOT Okay to grab a toy while someone else is playing with it. Give it back right now.”

Kwame: (Throws the toy at his friend) “Whoa, Kwame! We treat toys with respect. Let’s have a re-do, and this time you show respect for Sammy and his toy.”

Kwame: (Looks confused.)

Mother: "Sammy, let me use your toy for just a moment, please."

Sammy: (Hands mother the toy.)

Mother: You hand the toy to Sammy like this. You show respect. (Hands the toy to Sammy)  
(Mother gives the toy back to Kwame.) "Now, Kwame, let me see you do it."

Kwame: (Hands the toy to Sammy, looking away.)

Mother: Look at Sammy as you give him the toy.

Kwame: Looks at Sammy. Sammy takes the toy.

Mother: "Good job showing respect, Kwame! Way to go! I like that!" (Gives him a high five.)

#### CASE STUDIES TO ACT OUT—EXPRESSING ANGER

Adjoa is throwing a temper tantrum, pounding her fists on the floor.

Mother: Adjoa, use your words and tell me what you need.

Adjoa continues.

Are you angry?

Adjoa stops & shakes her head yes.

What are you angry about? Use your words and tell me.

Adjoa says, "My mother is not coming to the party. She told me she would come and now she's not coming."

Mother: "Great job using your words, Adjoa. No wonder you feel angry. Now let's find out about your mother. How did you hear she was not coming?"

#### CASE STUDIES TO ACT OUT—HURTING ANOTHER CHILD #1

One child pinches another child.

Mother: "Stop!" (Looking into the child's eyes.) "No hurting!"

"Let's practice walking by without hurting anyone."

(The child walks by and does not pinch.)

Mother: "Ok! Good job of not hurting!"

## CASE STUDIES TO ACT OUT—HURTING ANOTHER CHILD #2

One child is throwing blocks at another child. The second child starts crying, saying "Stop it, stop it. That hurts. Stop it."

Mother: Comes in from another place. "What is going on here?"

Victimized child: "Kojo keeps throwing blocks at me!"

Mother: (Gets down to Kojo's level. "Kojo, it is NOT Okay to throw blocks. It is NOT okay to hurt someone. "

Kojo: Looks away.

Mother: "Let me see your eyes." (Mother gently turns his face using one hand. Looking into his eyes, she says, "It is NOT okay to throw blocks. People are not for hurting."

Kojo: No response.

Mother: "Kojo, do you hear me?"

Kojo: "mmm"

Mother: "Say, 'Yes, I hear you.'"

Kojo: "Yes, I hear you."

"If you throw blocks again, you will not be able to play with them any more today. Do you understand."

Kojo: Shrugs.

Mother: "Use your words, Kojo."

Kojo: Yes.

Mother: Okay, now let me see you playing kindly with the blocks.

Kojo: Starts playing with the blocks without throwing.

Mother: "Good job playing kindly, Kojo. I like the way you are playing now."

Mother: Moves away a little, still keeping an eye on the children. After a couple of minutes, she comes closer. "I see you playing kindly, Kojo. I like that." She gives him a warm smile.