



Attachment Disorder – PARENTS GUIDE



WHAT IS ATTACHMENT DISORDER?

There are 2 types of attachment disorder:

- **Reactive attachment disorder (RAD)**

Children with this type of attachment disorder show a consistent pattern of inhibited, emotionally withdrawn behaviour towards adult caregivers. They rarely seek comfort when distressed and rarely respond to comfort given to them. They may display episodes of unexplained irritability, sadness or fearfulness that are evident even during non-threatening interaction with adults.

- **Disinhibited attachment disorder (DSED)**

Children with this type of attachment disorder are excessively and inappropriately friendly towards people they do not know.

Attachment disorder arises from a failure to form normal attachments to parental figures in early childhood. This usually occurs when an attachment hasn't formed within the first few months of life and is evident before the age of 5. Attachment disorder usually occurs in children who have suffered neglect, abuse, who are in care or have been separated from their parents for some reason. It may also occur in children whose parents abuse drugs or alcohol or in children whose parents have a serious mental health disorder.

IMPACT OF ATTACHMENT DISORDER

The effect of not forming this bond can lead to behaviour problems and difficulties dealing with emotions and new situations. However, once identified that there may be an attachment disorder, it can often be put right by responding to the needs of the child

WHAT DOES ATTACHMENT DISORDER LOOK LIKE?

Children with attachment disorder may have:

- problems expressing anger and may be aggressive towards other children and adults
- poor eye contact
- a need for control
- difficulty showing affection or seeking affection from strangers
- an underdeveloped conscience
- inability to ask for help and difficulties accepting mistakes
- hypervigilance and panic at loud noises
- struggle to pay attention and focus
- dislike change
- dislike being touched or have difficulty showing affection
- have low self esteem
- Some children may be inappropriately friendly with children and adults that they don't know. They may hug strangers or people they meet for the first time such as Doctors and have no wariness of strangers so are at risk of going off with someone they don't know without checking it's safe to do so.

Some children with attachment disorder may use extreme measures to gain attention – such as aggression/disruption or overly affectionate.

WAYS TO SUPPORT AT HOME

- Providing a stable and consistent environment at home
- Have realistic expectations –accept that progress may be small and slow but celebrate all steps towards success
- Set consistent limits and boundaries and explain why these are needed and in place
- Remain patient and calm
- Be physically and emotionally available when the child is ready
- Be there after conflict – be ready to reconnect after any fallout as this reinforces your love and that you will be there for them no matter what. Owning up to your mistakes when a conflict has taken place can strengthen your bond.
- Be curious and sensitive to their thoughts and feelings. Encourage your child to talk about what it feels like for them
- create opportunities to celebrate self-esteem – engage in activities your child enjoys and is good at and reward/praise them when they do well or for the effort they put into completing an activity
- Allow opportunities for 1 to 1 activities and your attention to help your child feel loved and important. Be consistent in when this 1:1 activity takes place
- Look after yourself –keep your stress levels low, sleep well, eat well and exercise
- Seek counselling and family therapy

OTHER RESOURCES

<https://patient.info/childrens-health/child-attachment-disorder-leaflet>

<https://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/what-are-attachment-disorders/#:~:text=Attachment%20disorders%20are%20conditions%20that%20hinder%20the%20formation,have%20long-lasting%20effects%20on%20emotional%20and%20social%20well-being.>