

# **MODULE 9**

## **AGENDA**

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- II. Defining Attachment
- III. Cycle of Attachment
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  - B. Disturbed Attachment Cycle
- IV. Barriers to Attachment
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## **MODULE 9**

### **VOCABULARY**

**Attachment:** A reciprocal, enduring, emotional, and physical bond between a child and a caregiver.

**Attachment disorder:** Occurs when “normal” attachment does not take place, caused by traumatic relationships that include neglect as well as physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse.

**Bonding:** The provisions of nurturing care during infancy that is consistent, predictable, and continuous that facilitates the development of attachment between infant and caregiver (Ashford, et al, 2001).

**Detachment:** An inability to accept and resolve issues which creates a lasting inability to become emotionally involved with other people.

# DANIEL

You are 8 years old. You recently had a birthday and your foster parents gave you a birthday party to celebrate your 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was your **first** birthday party ever! You have been in foster care for 2 years. You are not sure why, except that you know that your mommy used to put her cigarettes out on your back and beat you when she was “not feeling well.”

Now you are in a home and your parents seem to care a lot about you. This is the only foster home in which you have lived. Your new mommy and daddy care a lot about you. They smile when you come home from school, and you show them your schoolwork. You try real hard to make good grades because you like it when they smile and seem happy. You do fun things with your foster parents -- things you have never done before, and you feel almost happy, but you don't know when things might change.

Sometimes you steal things, even though you know that if you asked, your parents might let you have what you've stolen. Sometimes, at night, you have to bang your head against the wall in order to go to sleep. You wish you could feel warm and safe when your foster mom reaches out to you, but you draw back. You are just not sure about this family.

- Identify attachment concerns that Daniel is exhibiting.
- What indicators of attachment issues are applicable to Daniel?
- How would you help Daniel, if he were in your home?



## MICHELLE

You are 8 years old. You recently had a birthday; however, no one knew until the next week because you were placed in a new foster home and the case manager “forgot” to tell the new family about your birthday. At least this is what you tell yourself. It doesn’t really matter. You have been in five different foster homes since the “welfare department” took you and your sisters away from your grandmother five years ago. The worker said that your grandmother had gotten too old to take care of you. Your mother “hangs out” and was never around much. You don’t know your father.

You are afraid of the foster fathers in these foster homes, and you are glad that this one leaves you alone. You like to be left alone. You don’t talk much, speaking softly, most of the time, with your head down. Sometimes you stutter when you speak, and it makes you really angry when people laugh at you. You don’t like to look grown-ups in the eye. It makes you very uncomfortable when they stare at you.

You don’t eat much and people are always saying that you are too thin. You think that these people might change their mind about you at any time, so you try to keep some cookies and crackers hidden under your bed just in case. You feel like slapping your foster parents’ five year old – you’re not sure why. You know that the foster parents are watching you, so you pretend to like their child, even though you don’t. You are relieved that you don’t have to explain how you feel about them, as they have never asked.

- Identify attachment concerns that Michelle is exhibiting.
- What indicators of attachment issues are applicable to Michelle?
- How would you help Michelle if she were in your home?



## Specific Concerns of Maltreated Children With Attachment Problems

**Developmental delays:** Children experiencing emotional neglect in early childhood often have developmental delays in other domains. The bond between the young child and caregivers provides the major vehicle for developing physically, emotionally, and cognitively. It is in this primary context that children learn language, social behaviors, and a host of other key behaviors required for healthy development. Lack of consistent and enriched experiences in early childhood can result in delays in motor, language, social, and cognitive development.

**Eating:** Odd eating behaviors are common, especially in children with severe neglect and attachment problems. They will hoard food, hide food in their rooms, eat as if there will be no more meals, even if they have had years of consistent available foods. They may have failure to thrive, rumination (throwing up of food), swallowing problems, and, later in life, odd eating behaviors which that are often misdiagnosed as anorexia nervosa.

**Soothing behavior:** These children will use very primitive, immature, and bizarre soothing behaviors. They may bite themselves, head bang, rock, chant, scratch, or cut themselves. These symptoms will increase during times of distress or threat.

**Emotional functioning:** A range of emotional problems is common in these children, including depressive and anxiety symptoms. One common behavior is "indiscriminant" attachment. All children seek safety. Keeping in mind that attachment is important for survival; children may seek attachments - any attachments - for their safety. Children who have been abused and neglected may be quite loving, and hug virtual strangers. Children do not develop a deep emotional bond with relatively unknown people; rather, these "affectionate" behaviors are actually safety-seeking behaviors. These behaviors often contribute to the abused child's confusion about intimacy and are not consistent with normal social interactions.

**Inappropriate modeling:** Children model adult behavior - even if it is abusive. They learn that abusive behavior is the "right" way to interact with others. As you can see, this potentially causes problems in their social interactions with adults and other children. Children who have been sexually abused may become more at risk for future victimization. Males who have been sexually abused may become sexual offenders.

**Aggression:** One of the major problems with these children is aggression and cruelty. This is related to two primary problems in children who have been neglected: (1) lack of empathy and (2) poor impulse control. The ability to understand emotionally the impact of your behavior on others is impaired in children with attachment difficulties. They really do not understand or feel what it is like for others when they do or say something hurtful. Indeed, these children often feel compelled to lash out and hurt others - most typically at someone or something less powerful than they are. They will hurt animals, smaller children, peers, and siblings. One of the most disturbing elements of this aggression is that it is often accompanied by a detached, cold, lack of empathy. They may show regret (an intellectual response), but not remorse (an emotional response) when confronted about their aggressive or cruel behaviors.

# Indicators of Attachment Issues

**Note:** This list can also be partially attributed to ADHD or other diagnoses. It is important to understand the complexities of dealing with children, and how difficult it is to “simply diagnose.”

1. Superficially engaging and charming.
2. Lack of eye contact (On adult terms).
3. Indiscriminately affectionate with strangers.
4. Not affectionate (On caregiver’s terms).
5. Destructive to self, others, and material items (Accident prone).
6. Cruelty to animals.
7. Lying about the obvious.
8. Stealing.
9. No impulse control (Can appear hyperactive).
10. Learning lags.
11. Lack of cause and effect thinking.
12. Lack of conscience.
13. Abnormal eating patterns.
14. Poor peer relations.
15. Preoccupation with fire.
16. Preoccupation with blood and gore.
17. Persistent nonsense questions and incessant chatter.
18. Inappropriately demanding and clingy.
19. Abnormal speech patterns.

## How to Encourage Attachment

- ✓ Eye contact: Warm, loving, soft.
- ✓ Touch: Unrehearsed, appropriate touches.
- ✓ Movement: Rocking, bouncing.
- ✓ Smiles: The smile in the eyes is the child's focus.
- ✓ Sing a favorite song together.
- ✓ Do chores together in a fun way.
- ✓ Respond to the child when they are not feeling well.
- ✓ Help the child to express and cope with feelings of anger and frustration.
- ✓ Share in the excitement that the child has over his/her achievements.
- ✓ Help the child to cope with feelings about moving.
- ✓ Start working with the child to create a Life Book.
- ✓ Read to the child.
- ✓ Play games with the child.
- ✓ Go on special outings with the child (i.e., - park, plays, picnics), etc.
- ✓ Help the child with his/her homework.
- ✓ Teach the child to cook and/or bake.
- ✓ Help the child to understand family jokes and sayings.
- ✓ Teach the child to participate in family activities, such as camping, swimming, or biking.
- ✓ Hang pictures of the child on the wall.
- ✓ Include the child in family rituals.
- ✓ Create a family ritual that includes the child.
- ✓ Avoid control battles! Control battles are lose-lose. Try win-win approaches (i.e., "When you do this, then I'll do ...").



## The Pinocchio Principle

From..."Connections", Association for Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children newsletter, February 1998 (Printed in Horizon Institute Handbook, April 2000)



*"...When children who were naughty become good, it gives a new smiling appearance to the whole family."*

That quote from Pinocchio is what I wish for all families parenting hurt children. And since every cause needs a mascot, after rereading the tale of Pinocchio and watching Disney's version, I wholeheartedly nominate Pinocchio. Although most of us remember his nose growing as he lies, it was not until I reviewed the movie that the striking similarities between the tale and parenting a child with attachment disorder jumped out at me.

First there is Geppetto, a kindly, lonely, single father whose only wish is to have Pinocchio be "a real boy," to fill his life with joy. The fairy (social worker) brings Pinocchio, and says "to make Geppetto's wish come true will be entirely up to you..." Prove yourself brave, truthful, and unselfish, and you will be a real boy." It's not exactly the respectful, responsible, and fun-to-be with quoted in attachment therapy, but close. But does Pinocchio listen? No. Pinocchio, although not a real boy, becomes mobile, and in his first dance (that honeymoon ended quickly) kicks Figaro, the cat (cruelty to animals), sets a fire, burns his finger (self-injurious), and pollutes the fish's bowl (destructive to property). As they try to sleep, Pinocchio asks questions about sleep, school, why? (Persistent nonsense questions).

Undaunted, poor Geppetto continues to work hard, hope for the best, and parent Pinocchio. Poor Geppetto....He needs to form a support group fast. Pinocchio, having no conscience, is given one by the fairy, in the person of Jiminy Cricket. He's a great guide, but unfortunately not integrated by Pinocchio, who continues to plague Geppetto with truancy, running away, and poor peer relations. He lies to the fairy and his nose grows and grows with each obvious untruth. Even though this is a vivid memory for most of us, it only happens once. The social worker (oh, I mean Fairy) bails him out once again, but the young puppet doesn't learn from past mistakes, and continues to choose bad peers. Indulge in abnormal eating patterns at Pleasure Island, and adds fighting and destruction of property to his crimes.

Even his conscience, Jiminy Cricket, in a moment of despair laments, "After all I've done for him". His father, even about to face death, continues to feel guilty, and laments in the whale's belly about poor Pinocchio, who was such a good boy. Well, as we all know, the story has a happy ending. After he receives the corrective help he needs (containment in the belly of a whale), his fairy does turn him into a real boy. A very happy ending for all...

Pinocchio is a delightful way for parent and children to discuss some attachment issues in a fun non-threatening way. Rent it, buy it, enjoy it and put some laughter in your life. I give it two thumbs up!

Regina M. Kupecky LSW, MAT