

## Understanding attachment problems and disorders

- ▣ Kids with RAD or other attachment problems have difficulty connecting to others and managing their own emotions.
- ▣ This results in a lack of trust and self-worth, a fear of getting close to anyone, anger, and a need to be in control.
- ▣ A youth with RAD feels unsafe and alone.

## *Common signs and symptoms of RAD*

- ▣ • Difficulty showing genuine care and affection. For example, kids with RAD may act inappropriately affectionate with strangers while displaying little or no affection towards their moms and dads.
- Control issues. Most kids with RAD go to great lengths to prevent feeling helpless and remain in control. They are often disobedient, defiant, and argumentative.
- Anger problems. Anger may be expressed directly, in tantrums or acting out, or through manipulative, passive-aggressive behavior. Kids with RAD may hide their anger in socially acceptable actions, like giving a high five that hurts or hugging someone too hard.
- An underdeveloped conscience. Kids with RAD may act like they don't have a conscience and fail to show guilt, regret, or remorse after behaving badly.
- An aversion to touch and physical affection. Kids with RAD often flinch, laugh, or even say "Ouch" when touched. Rather than producing positive feelings, touch and affection are perceived as a threat.

## What do RAD children expect to gain from such outrageous behavior

- ▣

- ▣

**CONTROL**

## R.A.D. Control

- ▣ The RAD child therefore develops habits of dealing with the world in a way he believes will keep him safe.
- ▣ He manipulates in order to control a world he literally thinks will kill him if he does not control it.

## To complicate matters even more, RAD rarely travels alone.

- ▣ In the vast majority of cases, RAD exists alongside **Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)** bipolar disorder, and other neurological disorders.
- ▣ until the ODD bipolar disorder, and other neurological disorders is addressed, care givers will continue to struggle for solutions to the behavior problems, but with no positive outcome.

## Want to Connect

- ▣ Ironically, RAD children actually have a strong desire to connect and be close to parents, brothers and sisters, and others.
- ▣ They need to feel valued and nurtured but really do not have a language to understand what that is supposed to feel like or look like.

### What happens in the home during those first two years of life is so pivotal to later healthy brain and personality development

- ▣ The parents are nurturing, caring and present. The child learns from such parents that the world is a safe, nurturing, caring place.
- ▣ The type and quality of the bonding during this critical period reinforces a loving relationship with the parents which directly determines the quality and strength of conscience formation, cause and effect thinking and frustration tolerance.
- ▣ Critical neurological wiring in the brain takes place as a result of the child's experiences. This brain development is foundational to how the child will respond in future situations.

### Symptoms of Attachment Disorder may include:

- ▣ Superficially engaging, affectionate, charming, or phony behavior
- ▣ Lack of eye contact
- ▣ Oppositional and defiant behaviors
- ▣ Extreme control problems
- ▣ Sneaky or bossy personality
- ▣ Affectionate with family and others at the child's discretion -- not on others' terms
- ▣ Destructive to self, others, or property
- ▣ Cruelty to animals
- ▣ Lack of conscience, empathy, remorse, compassion
- ▣ Impulsive behavior, lack of self-discipline or self-control
- ▣ Obvious lying
- ▣ Stealing
- ▣ Poor peer relationships
- ▣ Inappropriately demanding or clingy
- ▣ Manipulative behavior
- ▣ Learning difficulties or disorders
- ▣ False allegations of abuse
- ▣ Preoccupation with fire (or fire setting), blood, gore, and violence

## Inhibited RAD vs. Disinhibited

*RAD-- As kids with RAD grow older, they often develop either an inhibited or a disinhibited pattern of symptoms:*

### INHIBITED RAD

- Inhibited symptoms of RAD. The youth is extremely withdrawn, emotionally detached, and resistant to comforting. The youngster is aware of what's going on around him or her – hypervigilant even – but doesn't react or respond. He or she may push others away, ignore them, or even act out in aggression when others try to get close.

### DISINHIBITED RAD--

- ▣ Disinhibited symptoms of RAD. The youngster doesn't seem to prefer his or her moms and dads over other people, even strangers. The youngster seeks comfort and attention from virtually anyone, without distinction. He or she is extremely dependent, acts much younger than his or her age, and may appear chronically anxious.

Children with attachment disorder can be divided into four categories:

- ▣ The Ambivalent
- ▣ The Anxious
- ▣ The Avoidance
- ▣ The Disorganized

## The Ambivalent

"in-your-face" child.

- ▣ Are angry, defiant & can be violent.
- ▣ Will push affection away to keep control
- ▣ Are destructive both with their own belonging and others
- ▣ Are extremely difficult children to parent because they sabotage or destroy almost everything positive that happens to them.
- ▣ When they want something, they act very affectionate.
- ▣ Have few friends if any, although they will say they do, listing several acquaintances - keep friends only for a short time
- ▣ Lack the ability to give and receive love
- ▣ Lack empathy for others - often cruel to animals and other children.

## The Anxious

- ▣ Tend to be overly clingy, showing extreme separation anxiety when separated from their mothers.
- ▣ Incessantly chatters to control conversation
- ▣ Appear to be eager to please and are superficially compliant.
- ▣ Are often passive aggressive, constantly doing little things wrong, but never doing anything really bad, but frazzling the parents patience and control.
- ▣ Usually recover faster than those in the other categories

## The Avoidance

- ▣ Are often overlooked as they are very compliant, agreeable & superficially engaging,
- ▣ Lack depth to their emotions & functions – robotic like, not genuine or real in emotional engagement.
- ▣ Don't enjoy being around others because they don't feel safe.
- ▣ Believing that they can care for all their own needs by themselves, and do not need others, especially their mothers.
- ▣ Are sullen and openly oppositional, but mostly in a passive aggressive way.

## The Disorganized

- ▣ Have highly disorganized behavior and a bizarre showing a variety of symptoms.
- ▣ Hide anger deep inside, they are easier to deal with, harder to treat.
- ▣ May have atypical psychosis, bipolar disorder, and other neurological disorders.
- ▣ Often will have mental illness in the family history.
- ▣ Are excessively excitable (other RAD children are usually moody.)
- ▣ Are most difficult to treat in therapy because they have so many different problems and often require medication and out-of-home care.

As children with RAD become teenagers and adults the outward issues change, but the root cause is the same:

- ▣ inability to form intimate reciprocal relationships or to empathize, inability to trust, and lack of conscience.
- ▣ These may manifest in varying degrees and forms.

The teens are a time when even healthy young people are seeking approval of others.

- ▣ The young person with RAD has a great gaping hole, an intense craving for love and approval, but doesn't believe it can be genuine when it is given. Relationships are more like contracts: I give you this if you give me that. For example, a girl will have sex in order to have the status of having a boyfriend, A boy will be friendly in order to have privileges of sharing another's games.
- ▣ He may steal from his friends or parents in order to get what he wants. he will lie in order to keep receiving the benefits of a relationship.
- ▣ These characteristics are common in many teenagers, but with RAD youth they go to an extreme. The incidences of crime, drug use and teenage pregnancy are almost universal

## R.A.D.

- ❑ Friendships and relationships don't last long. When the time comes to become more intimate, it is easier to start over with someone else. Or if a better option shows itself, they switch.
- ❑ Rules and restraints become intolerable as they develop individuality. Many run away, or get arrested. Suicide and self mutilation are very common due to their need to control

## RAD and Empathy

- ❑ A child with an attachment disorder does not have these early interactions to build on.
- ❑ He only knows what he has to do to have his needs met.
- ❑ The ability to empathize does not develop.
- ❑ Later the child may realize that he is supposed to be able to do this, and may learn some of the words to say to make it appear that he is empathizing.
- ❑ He may try hard to imagine what he should be feeling, but does not have the ability to really put himself in the other person's place.
- ❑ This leaves him puzzled about many social interactions and reactions.
- ❑ The RAD child usually has great difficulty in interpreting facial expressions for this very reason. They will continually cross the line because they can't tell from your face that they are going too far.

## POSSIBILITIES

- ▣ Left untreated, youth can maim, kill and torture without conscience or feeling.
- ▣ They can start fires, kill pets and terrorize their families.
- ▣ It has been said that untreated RAD
- ▣ children grew up to be such persons as Ted Bundy, Charles Manson, Adolph Hitler, the teenagers who shot up Columbine High.
- ▣ They feel no remorse, have no conscience and
- ▣ see no relation between their actions and what happens as a result
- ▣ because they never connected with or relied upon another human being in trust their entire lives.

## Video

- ▣ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME2wmFunCjU&feature=email>

## Normal Attachment

- ▣ the normal child treasures positive care, statements, and rewards so will model their behavior after their caregivers.
- ▣ There also appears to be a biological component to children's behavior - on some level, children understand that they have a higher chance of survival if they are pleasing to the caregiver.
- ▣ As children go out into the world they learn to model their behavior to other authority figures and to peers in order to please them and to receive rewards.
- ▣ Most of the time, this modeling is a positive process wherein children learn to be positive members of society, with good values and behaviors.
- ▣ Eventually, normal children will internalize or "absorb" these values and will be increasingly self-regulating as they mature.

## Why are children with Reactive Attachment Disorder so impaired?

- ▣ Because the youth with RAD has difficulty connecting to others, their value system is often severely impaired.
- ▣ RAD children do not value their caregivers and often distrust them due to previous negative experiences.
- ▣ Therefore, they do not model positive behaviors, and are often not motivated by the typical rewards that most children seek (e.g. praise, privileges, or material items).
- ▣ They may be uncomfortable with affection and reject it. Since they experienced poor care, and see the world as a place where they must take what they want by whatever means to survive. Many have not internalized social rules and regulations, so do not try to control impulses to break rules or laws. If people obstruct their goal, they may use negative means such as aggression to get what they want. From their standpoint, their behavior is logical, with the attitude (conscious or unconscious), "No-one cared about me, so why should I care about anyone?" Therefore, RAD children often have severe behavioral issues. Because they are not motivated by caregivers' displeasure or psychological distress, are not motivated by the usual methods of behavior management, and will go to great lengths to get what they want even if it may include breaking laws or using violence, they can be very challenging to work with and treat.

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## R.A.D.

- ❑ Youth with RAD talk for 3 reasons: to interrupt, to make noise, and to control.
- ❑ A youth with RAD is reinforced when adults “lose it”.
- ❑ Adolescents with RAD are often part of the juvenile justice system.
- ❑ Youth with RAD may make false accusations of abuse against parents, school staff, or other caregivers.
- ❑ They may pretend to be fearful of their parents to reinforce the false allegations.
- ❑ Youth with RAD often try to triangulate (separate; play one off the other) parents and school, and or court personnel.
- ❑ Good communication with the parents is critical.

## RAD youth have difficulty doing stages of maturity

- ❑ The RAD youth has fears of maturing
- ❑ They will display inappropriate age behavior
- ❑ The RAD youth will display regressive behaviors doing stages of maturity.

## Teaching / Learning

- ❑ Behavior: RAD kids tend to see only the payoff of their strategic behaviors as that is what's immediately relevant. Consequently, they rarely have much understanding of what their behaviors may be costing them
- ❑ Choice: Because of disconnected thinking, RAD kids commonly lack any real concept of personal choice in their world view.

## Choice

- ❑ They must first recognize connections between things before they can grasp how their choices affect the connections.
- ❑ RAD kids need to have connections of all kinds made for them repeatedly before the concept begins to take hold.
- ❑ Connections between triggers and feelings, between feelings and behavior, between behavior and its results, connections across time, and connections across situations are all examples.
- ❑ Visual aids (drawing) are useful supplements to verbal explanations.

## Emotions:

### FEELINGS

- ▣ RAD kids usually need to be taught about their feelings. Some of them are so disconnected from their bodies that not only don't they experience their feelings
- ▣ .In addition, they need to be taught the language of feelings and to apply the correct word to the correct feeling state

### PHYSICAL

- ▣ they are often unaware of physical sensations like cold, warmth, pain, hunger, tiredness, etc. They need help with just identifying that they are having a feeling or sensation.

## Thinking connectedly

- ▣ Because their early histories usually lack reliable, predictable caretaking, RAD kids tend to perceive the world as a fragmented place in which things are discrete and separate rather than connected.
- ▣ They are apt to see feelings and behavior as just "happening" without influencing each other.
- ▣ RAD kids need to be taught, over and over, that behavior is connected to triggers on the front end, to choices in the middle, and to consequences on the back end.
- ▣ The same is true of feelings; they need to learn that feelings are connected to triggers on the front end, to some form of expression (bodily, behavioral, or verbal) in the middle, and to outcomes on the back end.

## Time:

- ❑ Because RAD kids typically have a distorted sense of time that lacks reliable continuity running from the past, through the present, and out into the future, they import things from the past into the present, believing those things belong in the present.
- ❑ These misplaced imports in time usually compromise the youth's present functioning.
- ❑ To prevent this, RAD kids literally have to be taught a sense of linear time
- ❑ This involves repeated instruction in the difference between then and now. Much of this can be done by reiterating the concrete differences between "then vs. now" and the use of a visual time line.

## Unintelligible speech:

- ❑ RAD kids frequently speak so that what they say cannot be clearly understood.
- ❑ Sometimes they mutter.
- ❑ Sometimes they speak very softly.
- ❑ Sometimes they make up words.
- ❑ Sometimes they scramble the order of words in a sentence. Sometimes they leave words out.

## Unintelligible speech:

- ❑ While some RAD kids do have language disabilities
- ❑ the majority of unintelligible speech used by RAD kids is a purposeful strategy.
- ❑ Like lying, unintelligible speech is another way to keep parents in the position of "not knowing and trying to find out".
- ❑ Thus, if asked to repeat what was said unclearly, the RAD youngster is likely to say it unclearly again, or refuse to repeat it, or blame the parents for not listening, or tell the parents that they had their chance and blew it.
- ❑ This follow-up frustrating of the parents only adds to the youngster's unhelpful sense of power.

## Victimhood & Responsibility:

- ❑ When self-pity, which usually takes the form of blaming others, while playing "victim", is used by the RAD youth to try to get parents to lower their expectations, parents should simply tell the youth that he is choosing to feel sorry for himself and that is an easy out which the parents will not support.
- ❑ Empathy is the last thing to offer the RAD youth in such situations- that would essentially be enabling.
- ❑ Instead, the goal is to use the situation to promote personal responsibility for the RAD youth



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