

# REACTIVE ATTACHMENT

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## Symptoms

- Lack of guilt or remorse
- Blames others; doesn't accept responsibility for own actions
  - Has difficulty with cause-and-effect
  - Views the world as unsafe and untrustworthy
  - Begins before age 5 and occur
- Factors that put a child at high risk are sudden separation from the primary caretaker, frequent moves and placements, prenatal exposure to alcohol/other drugs, unprepared parents with poor parenting skills
- Poor eye contact unless the student is lying (in which case they usually make good eye contact)
  - Stealing, chronic lying
  - Sexual acting out
  - Bossy
  - Often gives "stiff" hugs; child is not "cuddly"
  - Manipulative
- Difficulty understanding how their behavior affects others; lack of empathy
- Physical aggression, injuring animals or other people; usually a lack of remorse afterward
- When stressed, child may bang his/her head; scratch, bite or cut himself/herself; rock back and forth
- Overly friendly to strangers, but unable to be affectionate with those close to him/her
  - Mood swings
- Difficulty showing genuine care and affection

- Regressive behaviors (babytalk, noisemaking, animal noises, etc.)
  - Temper tantrums
  - Refuses to do assignments or does them poorly
- May “jabber” and speak nonsensically, slur words, mumble
  - Acts superficial and phony
  - Abnormal eating – either gorging or starving
- Generally has no friends – considered too controlling or bossy by other children
  - Fascinated by gore, evil, destruction, etc.
  - An underdeveloped conscience
  - Often prefers to be alone; does not do well in groups
  - An aversion to touch and physical affection

## Difficulty with Executive Functioning

Impulse control      Flexible thinking      Self-monitoring      Organization  
 Emotion Regulation      Working memory      Planning and prioritizing

## Reactive Attachment is a Brain Disorder

The brains of children with RAD look different from the brains of children who didn’t experience trauma. Reactive attachment disorder is a brain injury that typically occurs as a result of early abuse and neglect. Just as a person can’t simply “outgrow” the brain disorder of bipolar disorder, neither can a person simply outgrow RAD. The RAD brain can be healed in therapeutic ways.

## They expect to always be in control

- RAD is all about having a driving need to maintain absolute control in their relationships and associations.
- The desire for absolute control is what grew up in the period where normal bonding should have taken place.
- The RAD child needs to learn how to relinquish control, but those lessons cannot be confrontational; they must be learned from within.

## Children with attachment disorders can be divided into five categories:

1) The Ambivalent    2) The Anxious    3) The Avoidance    4) The Disorganized    5) RAD

## RAD children often have severe behavioral issues

- 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. 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?”
- 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.
- Because the youth with RAD has difficulty connecting to others, their value system is often severely impaired.

## Youth with RAD

Will 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.

## 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.

They believe themselves to be essentially bad, essentially unlovable, and that something is wrong with them. In an infant's developing mind, the infant controls the universe. Thus all bad things that happened to an infant are seen as the fault of the child and punishment

**There are several degrees of rage, but the rage of a reactive attachment child is that born of unfulfilled needs as infants.**

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ANY questions feel free to contact me

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