

Common Behavior Problems for Children with Attachment Breaks

For parents a child's behavior may be a problem; for the child himself their behavior is often a solution. Children exhibit a range of behavior problems that vary from attachment disturbances to attachment disorders. The problem may be situational to an on-going problem. In order to truly connect relationships and reduce on-going child behavior problems we must understand and address them from a need meeting perspective. The following may assist in understanding children's needs by learning what motivates a child's behavior.

Attunement Paraphrased (Ainsworth)

A sensitive parent is tuned in to receive a child's signals, to interpret them correctly and to respond promptly and appropriately. These signals might be for attention, to reduce anxiety, to be challenged in a way that overcomes what they feel hesitant about, to receive affection and feel significant to caregivers. Rather than producing a demanding or self-centered child, attunement produces self-reliance, trust and security for the child through the parent/child relationship.

Problem/Symptom

1. **Charming or engaging with strangers, resistant to family closeness and nurturing.** They are superficially charming to others but fear and resist close interpersonal relationships in the family. May even be mean, threatening or hurtful toward family members or other caregivers. Keeps parents distant on their terms and invites others to relate superficially.
2. **Little or no eye contact with parents, teachers or even peers unless they are dictating the interaction.** Usually includes few smiles in interpersonal experiences with parents or other caregivers. May make direct eye contact if controlling others. Avoids being vulnerable to others for fear of being hurt or discounted.
3. **Ordering or directing adults.** Children lead adults not because they are in charge or know more than parents. Rather they control because they don't trust adult caregivers to manage their lives. On whatever basis this role reversal occurs it violates the natural order of relationships. The need is for adults to lead and present perspectives for children beyond their behavior. The need of all children is to feel secure with parents, be believed in beyond their behavior and tuned into by parents to have their needs addressed. This includes attention needs, reducing pain or anxiety, to feel significant through parent work and action.

4. **Distracting, persistent irrelevant questions, chatter.** A noisy, busy talk that relates more to controlling and distancing of a person rather than a true search to understand things. Often associated with a child's feeling of neglect. It keeps others involved with the child - by controlling, he is not being ignored.
5. **Displays excessive clingy behavior.** Here we see that behavior reflects a belief that their needs won't be met so they cling as a part of confirming wants and needs to others. This represents a fear by the child that their needs won't be met apart from their clingy dependence.
6. **Lying about the obvious.** Lying even if the truth would serve them better. Preschoolers (3-4 years of age) don't differentiate imagination from reality. The 3-4 year old may have imaginary playmates, be surprised at parent's knowledge when they've done wrong and see even death as reversible. A child using this "Crazy Lying" is developmentally frozen, believing that what they say is reality. They believe that others will perceive reality as they state it, just as the 3-4 years old does. The child sees their truth as controlling their reality. The child needs to relax and discover they are believed in, not over reacted to, and consequence for their actions.
7. **Stealing.** Often this occurs with important family members or others they interact with regularly. They steal in obvious ways that make them easily caught. When caught red handed they become angry and blame others. They again reflect the preschooler idea that their statement of truth should be your reality. They feel entitled to what they take. It represents a need to possess and control. Need meeting through consistency of response, not over reaction and structuring opportunities to obtain help here.
8. **Hurt self; hurt others, clumsy and accident-prone.** Often seen when a child doesn't feel protected and cared for. It's a way of acting toward self and others that reflects how he feels acted toward. It represents a need by the child to feel cared for.
9. **Eating problems such as refusing to eat, gorging or hoarding food.** Often represents an emotional emptiness and attempts to control those empty feelings in self-comforting ways. They control emptiness and self-comfort by controlling food. These children need structuring and a great amount of nurturing.
10. **Impulsive and hard to delay gratification.** Truly attachment disordered children are not merely impulsive they are manipulative. They present levels of agitation according to their intentional control. However, anxiously attached or attachment disturbed children may reflect this high attention need. They may present levels of agitation according to their intentional control. However, anxiously attached or attachment disturbed children may reflect this high attention need. They may present impulsive symptoms even if they are not truly attachment disordered. Other conditions such as attention deficit disorder must be ruled out. These children need structure to function, they need to work on delaying impulses, learn relaxation, and be given attention effectively on parent terms.

11. **Abnormal speech patterns.** Mumbling, peculiar speech may be signs of lacking confidence or being insecure in the child's development. These issues reflect a need by the child to be believed in. Help them feel significant on a being basis rather than on just what they do or don't do.
 12. **Poor peer relationships.** Here the child presents behavior as previously described, which also alienates peers. Often the issue of manipulation alone alienates peers and is reinforcing of a trust-disturbed identity. Parents may want to use feedback and specific opportunity to evaluate progress here.
 13. **Children who lack cause and effect thinking.** Don't respond well to caregiver logic. This problem reflects the idea that if they respond normally, it will be worse for them than if they responded out of their control. This makes problem solving difficult with these children because they don't trust anyone else's opinions. They react to situations, they don't problem solve. These children must see you identifying their needs and meeting them in order to give up control.
 14. **Conscience disturbed to lack of conscience.** Values of right and wrong are on his terms. He has his own standards to evaluate himself or others by. He has little or no sense of another's perspective because he trusts no one else's way. Spirituality can help here by learning to trust apart from their view of family. Also use "sensitivity training" to effect conscience development; use time out to help them become calm, then directs them through their effect on others.
 15. **Is cruel to animals.** Represents an unresolved rage in children. Involves incessant provoking, teasing, torment or torture of animals. Given enough rage can lead into cruelty to people. This is very dangerous. It's clearly indicative of an attachment break. May require rage reduction therapy.
 16. **Has a preoccupation with fire, blood or gore.** Here a child may (in a perverse way) be attracted to the power and violence of these experiences. The rage within often makes this element of power attractive as an expression. See: **Is cruel to animals.**
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An anxiously attached child, a sensitive child or an attachment-disturbed child may act withdrawn. This is an invitation by the child to be pursued. This behavior controls from a passive perspective. The need to be pursued is often protected by a child's denial of such needs. But seeing the child's need beyond the behavior allows parents to engage and draw out the child. Pursuing the child along with a great deal of nurturing and playfulness is needed to meet this need and draw the child out.

Overall attachment breaks orient children to withdraw or become controlling. Breaks can be minor and a child can have difficulties to get “stuck” briefly, causing some emotional development delays. The more problems the child is having the greater the break. Often by attending to the need of the child, he or she can progress in a more developmentally normal fashion.

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Learn to read a child’s needs beyond the behavior they present. Learn to meet needs and your child will relax and calm their life plus find ways to please you because of the security they feel with you.

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