



Focus on Module 3: Attachment and Separation: The Impact on the Development of Children



What is Attachment and Why Does It Matter?

Attachment is a close, enduring and reciprocal connection between two people that develops over time through interactions that satisfies needs and brings pleasure. Secure attachment is essential to the healthy development of a child. Without secure attachments, children are at risk of developing mental health problems and/or a range of delays and deficits.



Dr. Karyn Purvis states, “there is no hope of healing without a nurturing, caring, attachment relationship” – underscoring the importance of permanence. *Handout – Symptoms That Are Commonly Seen in Children with Attachment Challenges* provides a list of common symptoms of attachment problems in children and youth. Do you recognize any of these symptoms in the children on your caseload? **Module 3** offers a number of strategies and resources to address attachment problems and support healthy attachment.

Attachment Categories



A child will typically develop one dominant attachment style by the age of 3:

Secure / Ambivalent / Avoidant / Disorganized

Handout – Attachment Styles in Infant-Caregiver Relationships discusses these attachment styles. Use this handout as an exercise with parents to help them understand their own early life experiences, to recognize their child’s attachment style, and to enhance their potential to develop secure attachments with their children. Can you identify your own attachment style? Your own child’s attachment style? How have your styles impacted your relationships?



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Minimizing the Impact of Moves

Handout - I Was Taken is a study of how 90 inner city children experienced removal from their parents and placement into foster care. These children expressed

- A sense of being apprehended;
- Fear and bewilderment;
- Loss and abandonment; and
- Profound helplessness.

Module 3 Lesson 2 provides suggestions to minimize the impact and trauma of removing a child from home, including:

- Prepare the child for the separation in advance
- Involve birth or foster parents in planning for move
- Provide consistency in support of the child
- Keep the child connected to significant, safe attachments



Tools for Assessing Attachment

Module 3, Lesson 3 features several tools and activities that you can use with children and youth to assess their attachments with birth family. These include:

- Mr. Nobody
- Whose Job Was It
- The Bird's Nest
- Youth Connection Scale



Supporting Healthy Attachments

Children and youth who come from hard places have real potential to develop secure attachments. At times, this might require family therapy, involving the child and the parent together. It is important for child welfare workers to maintain open communication with the parents and therapist to help them understand the child's unique story and support the therapeutic work.

Module 3, Lesson 5 includes resources describing interventions designed to support healthy attachments. *Handout – Attachment-Based Therapeutic Interventions with Research Support* is a listing of research supported attachment-based therapies. Share this list with the mental health practitioners that work with foster and adoptive families.



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