



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 3.1.2 is a list of common symptoms of attachment problems in children and youth. *Review this list.* 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 3.1.1 discusses infant and adult 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?



Minimizing the Impact of Moves

Handout 3.2.1 “I Was Taken” is a study of how 90 inner city children experienced removal from their parents and placement into foster care. 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
- Involve birth or foster parents in planning for move
- Provide consistency in support of the child
- Keep the child connected

Potential for Policy or Practice Change?

Module 3, Lesson 3 includes an approach piloted by the Iowa Department of Human Services Polk County. In a team meeting, read the article linked in this module (M3L3.9). As a group, discuss the approach and develop a list of ways your team might utilize some of Polk County’s strategies. Can you imagine how this might work?

Child Welfare Role

Module 3, Lesson 3 features a video of Lyida Joyner. By the time she was 18, she had lived in 35 places, had 18 social workers and had her name changed four times. In a team meeting, watch the video (Module 3.3.28). Following the video, discuss Lydia’s experience:

- What might have caused Lydia to experience so many moves?
- How do changes of social workers impact children in care?
- Lydia talks about moving with her possessions in a garbage bag – how might this affect a child’s self-worth?
- How do you feel about changing a child or teen’s name? How might changing names feel to a child or teen?

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 a number of resources describing interventions designed to support healthy attachments. Handout 3.5.1 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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