

WHAT BEHAVIOURS CAN RESULT FROM ATTACHMENT ISSUES AND WHAT MIGHT YOU DO?

Attachment type	Behaviour	What this means for child	Possible triggers	What might you do?
AVOIDANT (I'm OK, you're not OK)	Withdrawn Unable to make or keep friends Bullies other vulnerable children	I have to rely on myself and nobody else. I respond to frightening situations by fleeing. I don't expect other people to like me. I pretend to be strong by making other children do what I want.		Introduce a buddy system. Consider 'circle of friends' approach. Encourage the child to help around the school.
	Refusal of help with work	I was left helpless before. I'm not going to be left helpless again.	Singled out for 1:1 support	Encourage work in pairs or small groups. Ask the child to help another who is less able.
	Loses or destroys property	I have no sense of the value of anything. I have little interest in things if they are not mine. I am angry and I take it out on things.		Validate the child's feelings, "I can see that you are angry...". Help the child repair/restore where possible - together.
AMBIVALENT (I'm not OK, you're OK)	Talks all the time, asking trivial questions	I feel safer if I do all the talking. I want to communicate but don't know how.		Have set routine. Make sure all first tasks are simple and achievable. Seat child close to you. Allow child to wait quietly.
	Demanding teacher attention all the time	I fear that if I don't let you know I'm here you may leave me on my own. Even negative attention is good. I fear getting it wrong.		Notice the child explicitly. Give child something to look after for a while. Give child responsibilities for things (not people).
	Hostile when frustrated	I will feel shame and humiliation if my difficulties are discovered.	Task that is hard/new/unusual	Small step differentiation. Use timer to divide tasks.
	Poor concentration, fidgeting, turning round	I must scan the room all the time for danger. I must stay hyper-aroused. I dare not relax.	Sights, smells and sounds can trigger panic as reminders of past trauma	Arrange seating so there is no one behind the child but where you can stay in contact. Laugh with the child, even at silly things.
DISORGANISED (I'm not OK, you're not OK)	Refuses to engage with work	Getting things wrong is frightening. Being wrong will lead to rejection AGAIN.	Task that is hard/new/unusual	Offer choices. Make sure both are acceptable! Make lessons/tasks very structured (multiple choice/cloze/sentence completion. All materials to hand.
	Tries to create chaos and mayhem	It feels chaotic inside so it feels safer if it is chaos outside as well.		Focus on modifying most serious behaviour. Validate the child's feelings. "I can see that you are angry/upset....."
	Oppositional and defiant	I need to stay in control so things won't hurt me. I do not want to be exposed as stupid. You are horrible like all adults.	Task that is hard/new/unusual	Be assertive but keep emotional temperature down. Avoid showing anger, irritation or fear. Start each day with clean slate.
	Sexually aggressive	I know from past experience that sex = power and I want to be in control.	Variety of stimuli including stress	Record all incidences very clearly. Seek advice from other agencies such as CAMHS.
INDICATORS OF ATTACHMENT DIFFICULTIES GENERALLY	Unable to accept praise or to have fun	I am not worthy of praise and you are stupid if you don't realise how bad I am. I am unlovable.		Do praise but don't be too effusive and be specific about what you are praising. Privately may be more acceptable to child.
	Physically or verbally abusive	I respond to frightening or threatening situations by fighting, fleeing or freezing.		Avoid threat of removal or rejection. 'Time in' not 'time out'. If unavoidable, do so positively "I need to get on with the class - you come and sit here till you feel better. Speculate aloud why it might have happened (don't ask child to explain).
	Ignores instructions	I have too much anxiety to be able to listen. I can only retain one instruction at a time as too much going round in my head. I am easily distracted.		Keep format same each day. Describe plan of activities for session at outset. Do the child's remembering for him/her! Let the child make lists on Post-Its.
	Sulkiness, avoids eye contact	I don't dare see what others think. I have no words to describe my feelings - looking sulky is a cover-up.	Face-to-face contact. Being told "look at me when I'm talking to you"	Find ways to reassure - smile, thumbs up. Encourage playing games to make children laugh. Sit side by side.
	In trouble at break times	I fear rejection by my peers. I panic in crowds. I cannot self-regulate when stressed.	Unstructured time	Reduce time in playground, introduce tighter structure and supervision, create inside 'retreat', establish nurture group.
	Lying or living in fantasy	I prefer to make things up how I would like them to be. I'm not sure who I am or what the truth is. I don't know the difference between fantasy and reality.		Avoid accusing child of lying or fantasising. State the truth of the matter briefly and simply.
	Stealing	I have no expectation of getting something so I'll just take it. I have no idea you may feel hurt or anger and when I see the effect I have I feel powerful.	Rejection by peers	Do not insist on 'sorry'. Suggest an action that might repair damaged relationships. Try not to leave desirable things lying around!
	Behaviour suddenly deteriorates	There is a painful anniversary coming up. A new sibling has arrived. I have got contact with birth family coming up/ have just come from contact with birth family.	Special occasions like Christmas, birthdays or Mother's Day Before and after weekends	Be sensitive in curriculum delivery. Allow child time and space to manage feelings away from the classroom.

If you have a child who exhibits a number of the behaviours outlined on this chart, you should consider convening a multi-agency meeting.

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