The Dance of Attachment

The parenting challenge for carers fostering or adopting children with attachment difficulties

Kim S. Golding
Child signals attachment needs clearly

Sensitive parenting: parent meets the attachment needs of the child

Secure Attachment
Secure Attachment

Secure Base

Need for comfort and protection

Exploration

The world
Dancing Different Steps

Foster/Adopted Child signals attachment needs in a distorted way

Carer tries to meet the needs sensitively

Child resists sensitive parenting
Child re-enacts early experience & resists change
Developing a Complex Dance

- Responding to expressed needs.
- Gentle Challenge.
- Responding to hidden needs.
- Lead child into a new dance within which they can express their needs openly and respond to sensitive parenting.
Ambivalent Attachment Pattern

Need for comfort and protection

保安 Base

“You will attend to me, I fear abandonment”

The world
Parenting the Child With an Ambivalent Attachment Pattern

Expressed need:
- Reassurance of availability when child needs it.
- Predictability and consistency.
- Structure and routine.
- Co-regulate emotion that is expressed.

Hidden need:
- Support to be apart from you – need help to be apart and to feel secure that you will be there when needed.
Avoidant Attachment Pattern

Secure Base

Exploration

The world

“I will do it by myself, I fear closeness”
Parenting a Child With an Avoidant Attachment Pattern

Expressed need:

- I don’t need you.

Hidden need:

- Help to feel comfort and safety with you.
- Support to accept nurturing.
- Co-regulate emotion that is hidden.
Disorganized/Controlling Pattern

Secure Base
Frightening

The world

I am powerful, I am scared, I fear
Parenting the Traumatized Child.

Expressed need:
- I need to be in control.

Hidden need:
- Need help to feel safe.
- Need low stress environment.
Dancing a Dysfunctional Dance

Fostering a child with attachment difficulties can lead to complex feelings within the carer:

1. Projection: the child projects feelings that the carer picks up and experiences as his/her own.

2. Triggers for unresolved issues: the child evokes feelings in the carer that trigger a reaction to a past relationship. The carer responds automatically and stops being able to respond flexibly.
Dancing a Dysfunctional Dance

- The carer is left feeling angry, sad or discouraged.
- These feelings are communicated to the child.
- The dance becomes even less connected.
Case Study

- Jane was removed from her mother when she was 30 months old because of her mother’s mental health problems.
- She is placed into a short term foster placement.
- Her behaviour becomes increasingly difficult and she moves into a new short term placement.
- Jane initially settles in very easily and appears to get on well with all family members.
- At review it is decided to pursue adoption for Jane, but the foster carers are willing to offer long term foster care.
Case Study

- Jane’s foster carers offer her a close and loving relationship.
- The foster mother wants to give Jane the experience of a loving mother that she didn’t have herself, because her mother left them when she was 3 years old.
- Jane resists this. She becomes very rejecting and self reliant.
- This pushes her carers into a distant and frustrated relationship to her.
Case Study

- Jane becomes very aggressive towards the foster carers’ own children.
- Grandparents can no longer babysit because of Jane’s behaviour.
- No adoptive family has yet been found.
- The carers wait to hear whether she will be staying with them or moving. They are uncertain about what is best for them.
Parenting Task

- Provide a home where emotional, behavioural and developmental needs are met.
- Stability and security.
- Predictable, contingent & responsive nurturing and care.
- Age appropriate experiences.
- Appropriate boundaries.
- Meet need for dependence and independence at different developmental stages.
The Challenge of This Parenting Task

- Prior experience which influences how child responds.
- Needs can be presented in a distorted or hidden way.
- Need to be available & responsive and gently challenging.
- Challenge beliefs –
  - This family will be lost as well.
  - Parents can’t keep you safe/parents are dangerous.
  - I am so bad nothing you can do or say will change this.
- Child’s disturbance can trigger own past, unresolved parenting history.
The Challenge of This Parenting Task

- Children need nurturance but present difficult/alienating behaviours.
- Children need support for independence but present a need for continuing attention and involvement of the carer.
- Children need to feel safe but behave in ways that increase their danger.
- Children need to trust and rely on parents but maintain a rigidly controlling and rejecting relationship.
The Challenge of This Parenting Task

- Success can lead to increased anxiety.
- Triggers defensive behaviour in child.
- Fear of close relationship and of its future loss leads to:
  - rejecting, controlling or challenging behaviour.
  - overwhelming need of carers time and attention.
- Carer is left feeling inadequate.
Case Study

- Carers are helped to understand Jane’s behaviour in relation to her past experience.
- Foster mother relates her own feelings and frustrations to her own early experience.
- They are taught to provide empathy for Jane’s fear of close relationships and gently challenge her need for control and self-reliance.
- They are taught to meet the need for nurture that she does not express.
Case Study

- Gradually Jane learns to trust in their availability and develop some dependence upon them.
- These more secure relationships help Jane, but she remains a very controlling little girl.
- A decision is made that Jane will remain with them in a long term foster placement.
- They are exploring special guardianship or adoption to help Jane to feel more secure.
Parent Training Interventions

- Traditional or innovative.
- But need expanded curriculum that goes beyond social learning theory.
- The impact of early adverse experience on development.
- The impact of early adverse experience on attachment needs of the child.
  - Child development
  - Brain development
  - Trauma
  - Loss
  - Transactional theory
  - Attachment Theory
Examples of Interventions

- Adapted Webster-Stratton Incredible Years (Pallett et al).
- Circles of Attachment (Marvin et al).
- Attachment & Biobehavioural Catch-up Intervention (Dozier).
- Attachment based multi-dimensional model of parenting (Schofield & Beek).
- The Attachment, Self-regulation and Competency (ARC) model (van der Kolk).
- PACE & PLACE (Hughes).
Fostering Attachments Group

FOSTERING ATTACHMENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER AND ADOPTED

Kim S. Golding

Training Manual
A Group for Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents
**A home for containing anxiety and building trust and security**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rewards &amp; Sanctions</th>
<th>Help child to manage behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Step aside from confrontation.**  
*Discipline with empathy, avoid battles, remain calm* | **Choices & Logical Consequences** |
| **Structure**  
*Provide familiar routines and clear boundaries* | **Security**  
*Help the child to feel safe* |
| **Attunement**  
*Help the child to experience emotional connection and understanding* | **Interactive repair**  
*Let the child know that they are still loved and valued* |
| **Family Rituals** | **Re-attunement**  
*Re-establish attunement following episodes of mis-attunement* |
| **Looking after yourself**  
*Support, rest, relaxation* | **Family atmosphere**  
*Maintain positive emotional rhythm* |
| **Be Playful** | **Be Accepting**  
*Accept the child and what child feels* |
| **Be Curious**  
*Understand child’s feeling, thoughts and beliefs* | **Maintain empathy** |

**Secure Base**  
*Provide security and a solid foundation for the relationship. Everything else builds upon this foundation.*
Module 1: Attachment Theory

Session 1.1. Introduction to Attachment Theory
Session 1.2. Caregiving and the Attachment System
Session 1.3. The Internal Working Model and Patterns of Attachment
Session 1.4. The Organized Attachment Patterns
Session 1.5. The Disorganized Attachment Patterns
Session 1.6. Parenting Children with Attachment Difficulties
Module 2: A Model for Parenting the Child with Attachment Difficulties.

Part 1. Providing a Secure Base

Session 1.1. Introduction to the Model and Creating a Secure Base
Session 1.2. Empathy and Support from the Secure Base
Session 1.3. Attunement and Empathy
Session 1.4. Protecting the Family Atmosphere
Session 1.5. Creating a Feeling of Belonging for the Child
Session 1.6. Looking After Yourself
Module 3: A Model for Parenting the Child with Attachment Difficulties.
Part 2: Building Relationships and Managing Behaviour

Session 1.1. Helping the Child to Enjoy Being Part of the Family
Session 1.2. Learning to Parent with PACE
Session 1.3. Providing Structure and Supervision
Session 1.4. Managing Confrontation and Coercive Interactions
Session 1.5. Thinking, Feeling and Behavioural Choices
Session 1.6. Managing Behaviour whilst Maintaining a Secure Base
Carers report increased understanding, confidence, and ability to relate to child.
Carers report difficulties of child as less.
Carers report high satisfaction.
These self report changes were greater cf W/S group.
Evaluation (N=7)

- SDQ (carer rated) hyperactivity, peer problems, total difficulties improved (stat sig), conduct problems and emotional problems improved (not stat. sig.). Effect sizes greater cf changes in conduct problems in W/S group.
- Relationship problems Q. Small improvement (not stat. sig.).
- CF 10 children, routine service, no group training. SDQ – small improvements in prosocial and peer dif. (no stat. Sig.). Total dif unchanged. Conduct problems worsened.
“Sometimes when I go on training things I think the time would have been better spent with the children, but I haven’t felt that once on this course.”

“This session tonight has helped me to restore some faith in myself and what I am doing.”

“In a word relevant! Gives confidence in what we are doing and strength to carry on. Brilliant discussion.”
“…foster care is an arena in which the dramas of attachment are played out. This can lead to mutual rejection. More positively it seems to offer the opportunity for resolving previous issues.”

(Sinclair et al, 2005)
References


