

Tips

...for people who live and work with children who have had problems with Attachment

~express pleasure in seeing them when they come home or enter a room

~Never threaten violence (spanking) or act in a violent manner (yelling.) These children already have deep seeded issues of trust. If the parent is perceived as frightening or easily frightened, the child cannot feel safe. If a child does not FEEL SAFE he/she cannot heal.

~focus on the child's feeling state with empathy, rather than the details of the child's words. "Wow, you sound very angry about that. That must've been very difficult for you. I'm sorry that happened to you. Would you like to talk about it? ...Ok, well I'm here if you change your mind." It helps to match the child's volume initially. Healing happens in the present moment.

~Try to communicate in close proximity (2 feet or less) with eye contact. Say the child's name before speaking as they may otherwise enter the conversation slowly and miss most or all of what has been said. Keep the tone of voice gentle, but clear (10 words or less), and pay attention to your facial expression (kind smile.)

~These children will have a better chance to regulate if given 20 minutes per day of a child directed activity. Preferably around the same time each day. The child may wish to read or do something alone. If so sit in the same room and read a book yourself or play to the side with a similar activity until the time is up. At this time, child needs to know that they have all of you.

~The parent must find a way to emotionally regulate themselves. We cannot expect emotionally regulated behavior from the child when we yell or lose our own temper or react in any manner. Any time we react, even if only in facial expression, the child has a secondary gain to continuing the behavior. Save the PIZAZZ response to encourage the good behaviors. Be firm, yet calm and respectful when addressing the negative behaviors.

~In order to be able to do the above tip, the parent must do self-care ON PURPOSE. Schedule a hot bath, time to read, at least a 20 minute walk. Parents can schedule to tag team so that each has a daily opportunity. If your spouse won't do self-care, do yours anyway.

~Maintain clear boundaries, "no" means "no." When the child tries to negotiate, smile gently and compassionately with eye contact and say, "Nice try." Do not allow continued negotiations.

~The child will misbehave or say something disrespectful. Give them a "do-over." They have that moment to try to say that again in a respectful manner...or there will be a consequence. Do not tell them the consequence in advance or it will have less power. The child may be building a

bridge towards a relationship with you. Expect that they child will get too uncomfortable with the closeness and then blow up the bridge (acting out). If you expect this, it will not feel so personal. You can think, “Oh, he was getting too uncomfortable with the closeness. When he wants to rebuild the bridge...I will be here.”

~Generally the consequence should be something that is over by the end of the day (or within 24 hours) and applies to the behavior. These children will not learn from grounding or punishment...they will just “do their time” with no change in behavior. The RELATIONSHIP is more important than the CONSEQUENCE. Be on the child’s side. “I wish I didn’t have to take your phone, you were doing so well. But you know the rules about texting while doing homework. You will get your phone back by 6pm tomorrow.” The child should be told when the consequence ends. (Consider collecting electronics for meals, homework and bedtime as a routine.) EARNING privileges is far more effective than taking privileges as a consequence.

~These children will need much more structure for building life skills. Give them just enough freedom as they show they are able to handle and walk them through before during and after each new experience. Emotional development must be considered.

~These children are very good at splitting parents or any alliance with the primary caregiver which does not involve them. It is subconsciously perceived as a threat to their survival. The child needs to observe that the parents are a team and support one another. It is a privilege to sit between the parents for to snuggle or a watch a movie and this must be on the parent’s terms, not the child’s demand. The child may act out when someone is visiting with the mother or may align themselves with the guest against the mother. Discuss this with the child in advance and tell them that you will gently bring this to their attention when it happens so that they better understand appropriate behavior.

~Early trauma of abuse and/or neglect affects the brain development of these children. As a result, they are likely to have emotional dysregulation, impulse control, attention/concentration, negative self-image, aggression/risk taking. Where there is trauma, different parts of the brain are not in communication and results in out of sync messages or triggers which do not appear to be rational. The child has difficulty filtering out irrelevant information and cannot fully take in new information. They do the same thing over and over and do not learn from their experience. They often live in a fog. Additionally, the frontal lobe, responsible for rational thought and judgment, is not fully developed until the age of 22-28. Therefore, for both the child’s sake and our own well-being it is very important to adjust expectations while the child develops and heals.

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