**Attachment Disorder**

Based in part on the work of John Bowlby and Phillip Flores

Attachment Theory

As humans **we cannot self-regulation our feelings** and mood for extended periods of time. **We require close proximity and emotional responsiveness** from other humans to maintain a normal mood. Inmates in solitary confinement will be extraordinarily depressed, anxious and eventually become psychotic if left alone too long. The same can happen to individuals who choose to live a solitary life. When **around other humans** we have bonded with, we each produce a neurochemical called oxytocin that **has a calming effect** on all of us. Proximity to caregivers in infancy is the time this is most important. Without close proximity and emotional responsiveness from caregivers in infancy, a baby’s brain will not develop normally. In severe cases many infants will not survive to 12 months.

Humans have an attachment system much like the attachment ducks, geese and goats have where the newborns imprint on the objects nearest them that are moving. These animals have been known to imprint on humans and follow them around as well as other species. Human ‘imprinting’ differs in that the infant becomes attached to its care giver and cries during the absence of the caregiver and feels soothed in their presence. Human infants cannot follow their caregivers in the first months of life.

**Children**, after the age of 3-6 months, will **crave the presence and attention of** familiar **caregivers** and become quite distressed without them. They will often **have emotional trauma when a caregiver** **is** permanently **removed** from the home or for an extended period of time. Sometimes caregivers are impaired in some way and the child will **experience distress at the** **lack of responsiveness**. Some parents are naturally less emotionally responsive than others. Children growing up with this parental characteristic may suffer from attachment disorder or a mild form of it.

Some examples of less than sufficient emotional responsiveness are below:

* Parent who never or rarely expresses love either verbally or physically
* Parent working more than 45 hours a week or working 2 jobs
* Frequent baby sitters for extended periods
* Frequent change of baby sitters/nannies
* Separation from a parent for extended periods
* Child who is sent to their room often with rare exposure to family members
* Children left alone for extended periods
* Locked in closets or rooms
* Parents with alcoholism, drug addiction or a mental disorder
* Physically ill parents
* Parents who are intellectually challenged
* Parents who have lowered frustration tolerance and avoid the children
* Traumatized parents

Parents all do the best they can. **The parent should not be blamed** for the circumstances that have occurred. Sometimes life is just too overwhelming to do more than put food on the table and keep a roof overhead.

According to Phillip Flores, PhD, **children** will be more likely to **feel securely attached** if they have:

* Several caregivers
* In close proximity
* Long term relationships with caregivers
* Strong, consistent, high quality relationships with caregivers
* Time, attention & emotional responsiveness from caregivers

**Attachment Disorder**

Adult Attachment Disorder

Adults who have had less than adequate attachments as children will have:

* Difficulty bonding with others—clingy or disinterested
* Anxiety in relationships
* Obsession in pursuing relationships or complete avoidance
* Exaggerated reactions to criticism or perceived criticism in relationships
* Lowered self esteem
* Poor self confidence
* More arguments with others
* Difficulty reading facial expressions and body language
* Trouble recognizing & responding to social cues
* More tumultuous romantic relationships
* Less satisfying relationships
* More difficulty letting other people close emotionally
* Great difficulty letting go of destructive relationships
* More anxiety and depression than other adults
* Low frustration tolerance
* Immature relational skills
* Immature emotional responses
* More jealousy in relationships
* Exaggerated fear of abandonment
* A sense of being somehow defective or different from others
* A strong desire to medicate or change their painful feelings
* Few close friends
* Difficulty trusting others
* More addictions
* More mental illness

Emotional responsiveness from other humans is a life-long need that helps to regulate ones’ feelings and mood. Without it, we become depressed and anxious. With attachment disorder, it is more difficult to interact socially and maintain friendships.

Adult **Attachment Disorder can cause painful emotions** that create significant life stress; but there is hope.

Attachment disorder **is highly treatable**. There are **many interventions** that can shift the paradigm created in childhood by less than adequate attachment. **Individual and group therapy are both effective** in treating it. Either can be very helpful; but in combination they provoke rapid healing.

Some **helpful things to do for** all people, but especially those with signs of **attachment disorder**:

* Find a support group or organization to join
* Do some volunteer work with other people
* Find a 12 Step group that fits your current circumstances in life
* Talk to a therapist, clergy or spiritual advisor about your feelings & thoughts
* Find a spiritual or religious affiliation that meets in groups
* Read about attachment disorder

Please call for more information or to make an appointment. We can help.