

Attachment issues

Attachment describes the quality of the initial relationship between baby and mother. This later broadens out to include the father and other close family members. It may later include substitute care givers such as child minders or nursery staff. It affects all later relationships.

When mothers are attentive to their baby's needs, there is an 'attunement' or empathy between mother and child. Babies get their needs met through their mother's understanding and responding to their distress signals. As a consequence, the baby feels valued and safe, develops a sense of self worth, builds its own capacity for making and maintaining caring relationships, becomes confident that supportive care is available and begin to regulate himself/herself. Securely attached children develop different brains.

When this doesn't happen, children:

- live in a constant state of 'hyperarousal' or of 'defensive dissociation'
- feel insecure
- don't understand 'normal' attachments and have only their own faulty experience as a model
- may experience fear in the presence of the very person/people on whom they are dependent for survival.

'Naughty' behaviour is actually a cry for help.

Why is it relevant for schools?

In the classroom, teachers may observe that the young person cannot/finds it hard to:

- take responsibility for his/her own actions
- accept praise or blame
- let others take charge.

Additionally, the child:

- needs to control
- may provoke stress in others
- is often unavailable to learn/unresponsive
- pushes the boundaries
- is inattentive - looking over shoulder etc
- says or displays an attitude of 'I am worthless' / 'I can't accept the blame'/'I already feel so bad' / 'Everything is out of control - I need to take charge'.

Helpful things school staff can do to show empathy and help the child feel safe:

- Prepare children for change
- Acknowledge their feelings by putting them into words
- Avoid confrontation
- Give limited but acceptable choices
- Think about seating to make child feel safe
- Be proactive and anticipate difficulties
- Model the behaviours you want to develop in the child – listening, waiting, showing respect etc.