

LAWRENCE B. SMITH LCSW-C, LICSW  
9305 MINTWOOD STREET  
SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND 20901  
TEL & FAX: {301} 588-1933 E-MAIL: [lsmith@md.net](mailto:lsmith@md.net) WEBSITE: attachmentdisorderdc.net

**OIL & WATER:  
THE ATTACHMENT DISORDERED CHILD AND SCHOOL**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL THAT DO NOT MIX WITH CHILDREN WITH ATTACHMENT  
DIFFICULTIES**

1. The primary focus of school is to impart information about the external world. Children with Attachment Disorder (AD) are focused on keeping themselves safe, as they see it. The school's objectives will truly engage the child with AD mostly in those moments when the child perceives the information to be relevant either to his immediate desires or to his longer-term survival. Otherwise, learning is often of little interest to AD children- it is just another of the adults' annoying agendas.
2. A second block to learning comes from AD children's emotionally-based belief that they already know everything, a belief that they need to retain to manage their anxiety. Obviously, a necessary condition for learning is the recognition that one does not already know. This, AD children generally won't acknowledge, just as they won't ask for assistance. They have little or no interest in engaging with an environment that comes to them with a presumption that their knowledge is incomplete.
3. School typically expects students to organize their behavior around external factors, such as the schedule, curriculum, and demands for performance. This clashes with the AD child's behavior being primarily based on an internal need for control in order to feel safe. Hence AD children tend not to perform on others' terms just as they tend not to show affection at home on parents' terms. In addition, due to early trauma and attachment disruptions, AD children's skills for regulating their feelings, thinking, and behavior are usually weak. This compromises their ability to adjust to external factors.
4. Much of the motivation for participating in school rests on assumed desires to interact collaboratively with others and to foster one's own individual growth and learning. These factors carry little weight in an AD child's thinking.
5. Many of the activities in a school setting are group-based. Having to deal with multiple people simultaneously increases the chances of stimulating the AD child's anxiety, which will lead to behavioral attempts to re-establish a sense of control.
6. Most of the sources of gratification offered by school (parent and teacher approval, public recognition of achievement, grades on tests/projects/report cards) are delayed gratifications. AD children's relentless focus on gratification in the moment, and distrust of the future and of

authority figures, leaves these gratifications stripped of most of their appeal, and hence, minimally motivating.

7. Teachers have a dual role: that of dispensers of “educational goodies” (instruction, attention, recognition for effort / achievement, granting of requests, etc.) and that of limit-setters. This dual role will inevitably conflict with the AD child's personal priorities sooner or later. As occurs at home with parents, no matter how many times a teacher has been an ally or support to an AD child in the past, the first time that teacher blocks the AD student's desires, all those past occasions will be forgotten and the teacher will be instantaneously transformed from an ally to a persecutor in the child's eyes. Authority which the AD student sees as unfair, deserves no respect. Now the AD student will feel entitled to be disrespectful to such a “morally bankrupt” authority figure.
  - Because teachers must deal with the numbers presented by a classroom, as opposed to a family, the authority of teachers can appear even more arbitrary and persecutory to AD children than parental authority. When teachers set limits for the greater good of the whole class, this will seem more arbitrary still, as AD children have no concept of “the common good”.
  - Understandably, teachers may feel attacked and unappreciated themselves at these moments, particularly given their degree of investment; and because these feelings can run very strong, it can be tempting to react. Reacting, however, will only worsen the situation, for the AD child will see the reaction as “evidence” that the teacher is, in fact, a punitive authority figure out to get the child.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL THAT THE AD CHILD “WELCOMES”**

1. One of the primary defensive maneuvers that AD children rely on to maintain their psychological safety is that of projection. The many people present in the school context offers the AD child an abundance of targets for their projections. Because of their hypervigilance, AD children are generally quite perceptive of others' vulnerabilities and skillful at striking at those vulnerabilities with their projections. This can make the projections seem very believable to the receiver which can put that person on the defensive.
2. In general, teachers change every year. This provides a model of “short term attachment” which makes minimal to no demands for emotional honesty and intimacy. This circumvents AD children's area of greatest vulnerability thereby avoiding provoking much of the problematic behavior typically seen at home. This can lull educators into seeing the AD child as more functional than is truly the case.
3. SCHOOL / HOME SPLIT: AD children frequently seek to pit school vs. home in the spirit of dividing and conquering the adults. Typically this takes the form of attempting to set the teacher up as a preferred parental figure and may go to the point of asking the teacher to adopt them away from their parents. These approaches can be quite seductive in their presentation and teachers need to be aware of not forming an opinion of the parents based on such interchanges with the child.

### **BEHAVIORS COMMONLY DISPLAYED BY AD CHILDREN IN SCHOOL**

1. **TEMPER TANTRUMS:** AD children are quite capable of full-blown temper outbursts at school. Such outbursts can consist of any or all of the following: screaming, shouting, throwing objects, use of obscene language, verbal threats, physical threats, physical aggression, and running out of the classroom and sometimes all the way out of the building. Such extreme outbursts usually indicate that the child's anxiety has escalated, and the outburst is a desperate attempt to ward off the perceived threat. AD children can get to this level of anxiety in as little 1-2 minutes if they perceive a danger of sufficient magnitude.
2. The onset of behavioral difficulties with an AD child in the school setting can be very rapid and often without any seeming apparent trigger. However, there is always a trigger- it just may not be very apparent. It often takes both close observation and thinking on one's feet to figure out some of these triggers. The more a teacher figures out about an AD student's triggers, the more effectively that teacher will be able to preventively minimize or avoid behavioral deterioration.
3. **REGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS:** AD children can exhibit a wide range of immature behaviors in the classroom, including: use of a babyish voice, crawling around on the floor, curling up under furniture, pretending to be an animal, noisemaking, perseverative verbalizations, speaking nonsensical language, making graphic sexual and / or excretory remarks, giddyish forced laughter, and others. These regressive behaviors usually signal an upsurge of anxiety in the child, and they function both as a way to get away from the anxiety as well as to remove the child from the teacher's immediate control which serves to lessen the child's anxiety. Though these behaviors can appear bizarre, they usually do not mean that the child is psychotic at that moment.
4. **NUISANCE BEHAVIORS:** These are frequently occurring minor infractions, such as interrupting, noisemaking, or asking excessive questions, that disrupt the simplest of everyday interactions. These nuisance kinds of behaviors serve a dual purpose. First, they serve as ongoing reminders that the AD student is not under the teacher's domain. Secondly, they are “probes” that the AD child sends out into the environment to acquire information about the situation. From others' reactions to these “behavioral probes”, AD children begin to piece together who is punitive and who is supportive; who will respond and who will ignore; who has a short fuse and who has a longer fuse, etc. The AD child uses the responses to his probes to figure out how to “work” the adults. When the AD child feels confident that he knows how to maneuver the teacher, the “honeymoon” will be over.
5. **PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR:** Like all passive-aggressive behavior, the passive-aggressive behavior of the AD student presents a compliant appearance that packages a defiant spirit. With assignments, it may take the form of doing some parts while leaving others undone or doing some parts correctly and others purposefully incorrectly. The name may be left off the paper or the wrong date used. Problems might be numbered improperly or done out of order. When given a certain number of problems or sentences, the AD student may do more or less than the specified number. When speaking, words may be transposed or omitted so as to distort meaning and confuse listeners. When asked to sit, the AD student may choose to kneel on the chair or slide down into a near prone position. And on and on it can go. Passive-aggressive behavior is designed to allow the AD student to hide in the “appearance of compliance”, and then challenge any confrontation by authority as “persecution”. This allows

the child to maintain a view of adults as untrustworthy and justifies the child's strivings for control.

6. **PROVOCATIVE BEHAVIORS TOWARDS PEERS:** AD children are deliberately provocative towards peers for a variety of reasons. Peers are vulnerable to react, and AD children will see the reaction as proof of their power to control others. Peers will need support and suggestions from adults to learn to minimize their responsiveness to the provocations. Provocative behavior, from an AD child towards peers, is almost impossible to eliminate solely by working with the AD child.
7. **TEACHER INSTRUCTION:** AD children often accept curriculum instruction from the teacher on an erratic basis. One day, the AD student can be focused, taking in information and on-task. The next day, he may seem completely unworkable, which can appear as "spaciness", "forgetfulness", "distractibility", haphazard work, outright defiance, or complaints of boredom and disinterest. Patterns of task incompleteness and completion typically reflect rising and falling levels of anxiety in the AD child. This fluctuating pattern of receptiveness to instruction then, is one more way the AD student seeks to remind the teacher that he doesn't readily submit to outside authority, particularly when anxious.
8. AD children presume to know the teacher's intention in assigning work- it has nothing to do with learning. To the AD child, academic tasks are given out simply as a way to control the child, keep her quiet, and prove to her that the teacher is in charge. Task completion is usually a reflection of how secure or insecure the AD child feels at a given moment. If the child feels confident about her control, then "yielding to the teacher" by doing the task won't be a problem. However, if the AD child isn't feeling so in control, then she is apt to choose to resist the task in order to "defeat the teacher".
9. **WORK PRODUCTION:** The AD child most often either refuses to do assignments outright or does them in a haphazard, perfunctory manner. Occasionally, these children will apply themselves and often turn in a credible product when they do so. These seeming "lightning bolts" of intelligence, motivation, and effort are generally all too appealing to the adult world of teachers and parents; and that is precisely their purpose. The AD child dangles these moments of production in front of the adults to tantalize them into a game of trying to figure out what to do to get the AD student to perform like this more often. Taking this bait and entering this game is exactly like stepping in quicksand. The more the adults struggle to get the child to perform, the deeper the adults sink into the muck.
  - \* Understandably, teachers and parents often view the AD child's unpredictable work production, despite having the ability, as pure stubbornness. This is partially correct, but there is more going on than just stubbornness. This is just one more part of the AD child's ongoing need to perceive he is in control to feel safe.
  - \* The AD child's never completing work on a consistent, longer-term basis serves a self-protective function for the child in addition to its maddening impact on the adults. By not turning out enough work so that it can be measured reliably, the AD child cleverly avoids having to confront the disturbing reality that there is ability, knowledge, and power greater than his. In keeping his true ability elusively unmeasurable, the AD child can keep his personal illusion intact that he is the smartest, most knowledgeable person in the classroom. Protecting this perception in school is important for the AD child to maintain his cornerstone belief that others are not smart enough to outmaneuver him, no matter

where he is.

10. **SUPPORT / PRAISE:** AD children commonly have one of three responses to receiving support and/or praise in the school setting: 1} accept the support without any clear overt reaction; 2} reject the support outright, and 3} accept and then denigrate the support. The AD student will recycle these three responses in an unpredictable sequence that defies any pattern. The teacher is left in the uncomfortable position of never knowing what will come back should support / praise be offered. Meanwhile, the child strategically creates the appearance of being immune to praise and support which is yet one more aspect of retaining control.
  - \* AD children rarely, if ever, express any gratitude for offers of support, as gratitude implies dependence and dependence is seen as dangerous by the AD child. Knowing this up front can be a buffer for teachers against feeling unappreciated and resentful when their extra efforts go unrecognized by the child.

### **INTERVENTIONS: WHAT IS LESS LIKELY TO WORK**

1. **PROBLEM SOLVING:** Traditional problem solving questions such as:  
What happened?  
What was your part in it?  
What could you have done differently?  
AD children will learn to spin off the "desired answers", but they will be meaningless answers.
2. **PRAISE:** Vague praise, such as "you are handling things well today" is generally seen by the AD child as a manipulative control strategy on the adult's part. In addition, overt praise for expected basic behavior such as sitting in one's desk is likely to provoke an oppositional appearance of the undesired behavior.
3. **CONVENTIONAL BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT PLANS / LEVEL SYSTEMS:** Such plans are based on consistency, and this consistency makes these plans easy targets for the strategic thinking of an AD child. AD children will see a behavior management plan, not as a way to change behavior per se, but as one more thing to learn "how to work" for their own purposes. Their movements up and down the levels and earning (or not) of rewards has all to do with their individual purpose at the time and typically little to do with a success / failure motivation or earning adult approval. AD children may even use behavior management systems as bait to draw the adults into unproductive discussions about how to sustain progress. The end result can be that it is the teacher's behavior, rather than the child's, that ends up getting "managed".
4. **ZERO TOLERANCE:** Consistent zero tolerance stances run a high risk of dragging the teacher into a cycle of escalating misbehavior followed by increasingly severe consequences. Zero tolerance does not allow the teacher sufficient creative flexibility to approach the AD child in a more unpredictable way that can circumvent an emotional escalation.
5. **NEGATIVE REPORTS ABOUT PARENTS:** Believing tales about horrendous treatment at home by parents and offering "compensatory" support and sympathy to the child for the perceived mistreatment is, in the case of an AD child, about the worst possible thing an educational

professional could do. Teachers then become “unholy allies” in the AD children’s emotional struggle with their parents.

6. **“REASONABLE”CONVERSATIONS:** Challenging the AD child's perspective with "objective evidence" in order to persuade her that her thinking is somehow incorrect tends to be futile. This approach assumes that the teacher and child share a common view of "reality"- not true. The teacher's view will make little or no sense to the AD child. In fact, the AD child is apt to see a reasonable approach as a manipulative attempt on the teacher's part to set the child up in some way.
7. Setting the parents up to be the “heavies” by leaving it to parents and home to impose consequences for school infractions or work not done only inflames conflict at home which will eventually reverberate at school.
8. **TEACHERS’ FEELINGS:** Taking AD children’s behavior or statements as personally offending reinforces the child’s unhelpful sense of being able to control the emotions of the adults. It is only about “you the teacher” in the sense that you are the authority figure present in the situation. It is really not about “you the professional or you the person” though it can feel very much that way. This is because AD children are unusually skilled at discovering adults’ tender spots and focusing there. So, this takes some practice to learn not to react in an unhelpful emotional manner.
9. Don’t look for THE answer. There is no “The Answer”. “The answer” leads to doing the same thing the same way every time. An AD child’s problems will flourish with such an approach.

### **INTERVENTIONS: WHAT IS MORE LIKELY TO WORK**

1. **FAIRNESS:** Defining fairness as meaning all students will be treated the same in the classroom, is a serious mistake strategically, not only with AD children, but in general. The AD child will learn to use such an application of the fairness principle to generate tales of unfair treatment which all too often, starts to divide the adults. It is much more effective to define fair treatment as meaning that everyone is treated according to what they need, and thus, comparisons between students are irrelevant. This allows the teacher the creative freedom to respond to the AD child (and others) in a truly individualized way.
2. **UNPREDICTABILITY:** A degree of intentional unpredictability on the teacher’s part is very useful in navigating around the AD child's vast array of avoidance maneuvers. An adult that is entirely consistent is an adult an AD child can predict, and an adult an AD child can predict is an adult an AD child will “work”.
3. **EYE CONTACT:** AD children tend to be eye-contact avoidant. Eye contact is a key nonverbal component of developing interpersonal trust and AD children’s avoidance of it helps to perpetuate their mistrust. Thus, it is important to encourage eye contact when speaking with them, and moreso than the average student. Some flexibility here on the teacher’s part is important as an absolute demand for eye contact in all instances will only degenerate into a

power struggle that the teacher cannot win. Repeated prompts on an intermittent basis and expressed appreciation when the student gives eye contact is the optimal balance.

4. **REWARDS:** Make some rewards absolute and not contingent on anything. This effectively subverts AD children's strong tendency to sabotage themselves and thereby prove to the adults that they can't "make them succeed". {Example: AD child participates in a "Fun Friday" activity regardless of their behavior, barring any safety concerns}. This approach puts the child's succeeding under the complete control of the teacher.
5. **CHOICE:** Teaching the concept of choice. Choice is an idea that is often absent in AD children's thinking. It is not simply that they refuse to accept responsibility- the idea of people making choices and having responsibility literally makes no sense to AD children. They need to have it pointed out to them, matter-of-factly, over and over, that they are making choices all the time. Then connect their behavior on an ongoing basis, as products of their underlying choices, for better or worse. This helps to block the predominant pattern of AD students to attribute all of their behavior to external factors. When choices are in the poor category, avoid the temptation to encourage better choices in the future. This is quicksand. The teacher cannot elicit improved choices the child does not wish to make. Simply continue to hold the student accountable for the choices she does make, good and bad.
6. **OMNISCIENCE:** Like the concept of choice, challenging the AD child's belief in his omniscient knowledge will require many repetitions to achieve results. This belief needs to be challenged at school, at home, and in therapy. These challenges need to be gentle and not heavy-handed, for there is much anxiety held in check by this belief. At school, such challenges should occur in contexts of semi-privacy and not in the middle of the classroom. Such challenges can take the form of wondering whether the child himself really believes he knows everything vs. directly telling him that he doesn't. That will only generate defensiveness.
7. **RULES:** Approach AD children with a matter-of-fact, firm, no nonsense, but not hostile, tone of voice. Directions should be phrased as directions, and not as questions (Example: "Do..." vs. "Would you..."). In addition, directions, as well as classroom guidelines, should be stated in proactive, concrete behavioral language vs. vaguer, catch-all phrases like "relax" or "settle down" or negative directions like "Don't..." or "Stop...". Rules need to be stated proactively because the unconscious mind does not process negatives. Negatively stated rules actually increase subconscious focus on the behavior being prohibited. This increases the future probability that the undesirable behavior will reoccur. Rules need to be communicated with the expectation that they will be learned and followed. This is best conveyed with a matter-of-fact tone of voice that is free of any emotional edge. (Example: "Have a seat at your desk and finish your math." Thanking the child in advance for his cooperation can improve compliance. The interaction should be broken off after the teacher expresses gratitude for expected compliance. In addition, establish the ground rule, ahead of time and always in effect, that the AD child needs to ask what the rules might be for anything that has never been discussed before. This removes avoidance efforts, by way of ignorance, from the AD child's repertoire. Teachers are also well advised to be skeptical of the AD student's plea of not knowing or having forgotten a rule that has been previously defined. Most such pleas fall into a category of being strategically "dumb on purpose" for purposes of avoiding personal responsibility. In such instances, rather than excuse the student from the rule (usually a significant mistake), it is

preferable to suggest to the student, without sarcasm, that she learn to listen and remember better in the future. That leaves the responsibility for change square in the student's lap.

8. **CONSEQUENCES:** While it is generally true from a behavior management perspective, that consequences should be imposed when inappropriate behavior first appears, it is essential for AD children if they are to develop any trust in the teacher. AD children will not come to trust any adult they can effectively navigate around; and in the absence of trust, AD children will not perform academically with any reliability. Multiple warnings, negotiated bargains, motivational pep talks etc. are usually viewed by the AD student as opportunities to turn an inch into a foot if not a mile, thereby erasing the possibility of developing the trust necessary for educational success. However, AD children are also very prone to perceiving discipline as intentional humiliation by the teacher. This generates shame and anger which obviously sabotages compliance. The teacher defensively clarifying his intentions will not help. Instead, acknowledge that receiving the consequence will be difficult for the student and might trigger anger. Nonetheless the teacher has faith in the student's ability to handle the consequence and expects the student to honor it.
9. **APPRECIATION/PRAISE:** After an AD child makes a cooperative choice, appreciation is often a better response than praise. Appreciation puts teacher and child on the same level for that interaction. Praise, on the other hand, can suggest that the one offering the praise (teacher) is the more powerful one, and therefore able to pass judgment on the less powerful one (student). Praise is, after all, every bit as much a judgment as is criticism. Praise can run the risk of the student feeling the teacher is rubbing his face in "the teacher having won". This can generate resentment which may undo the cooperative decision right then, or may fuel oppositional behavior in the future. Appreciation can avoid those risks and can strengthen the teacher-child relationship. Linking the appreciation to the specific behavior that is its focus is preferable to a generic expression of appreciation.
10. **ASSISTANCE:** Never offer an AD child help or advice without first asking the child if she wants it. This question forces the AD child to take some responsibility for stating what she wants in order to get it- this is priceless practice. Additionally, it helps teachers avoid the frustration of offering assistance only to have it rejected out-of-hand because the child wasn't interested in solving the problem in the first place. If the child says she does not want advice or assistance, do not offer it anyway. Just drop the subject and move on. This holds the child accountable for her negative answer. When the child gives teachers orders, as AD children may do, politely inform her that you did not ask for her advice and when you do want it, you will be sure to ask ahead of time. This can work better than reprimanding the child for being rude or disrespectful.
11. **TEACHERS AND PARENTS:** Teachers should follow the parents' lead in matters of behavior management. Parents will almost always have seen behavior far in excess of anything the school will ever see. This gives parents irreplaceable experiential knowledge about working with their child's behavior. The school needs to partner seamlessly with home and parents in order to undercut the AD child's considerable strategic wilyness. However, school and home should be kept separate in some matters. Incidents at school should be handled at school and not referred to the parents to provide consequences at home in the evening unless this is part of a collaborative plan arrived at beforehand. In general, parents **SHOULD NOT** be expected to be intimately involved with nightly homework and should not be pressured about undone



homework. That only takes the responsibility off the child, and when that occurs, AD children are likely to use “homework” as a stage to play out their attachment related conflicts and everyone loses.

12. **MOTHERS:** Mothers are generally the primary targets of an attachment disordered child’s fear distrust, and rage, a fear and rage most teachers will never experience. A supportive teacher, to a mother, is a resource precious beyond words.
13. **TRIANGULATION:** This is probably the most destructive hazard that teachers encounter with AD children. AD children are reliably on the lookout for other adults to play off against their parents so as to make their parents look deficient in some way. Teachers are a favorite choice. AD students often present their optimal side at school, a side the parents rarely see at home. On the other hand, when the parents describe home behavior that the teacher has likely never seen, teachers are often incredulous. It is tempting, on the surface, to ascribe the difference to faulty parenting. With AD children, that conclusion is almost always incorrect. With the adoption of this perspective, the teacher steps onto the Rescue Triangle. This is a dynamic that commonly occurs in human relationships, and it is always destructive. The Rescue Triangle has three participants. One is in the role of “victim”, one is in the role of “perpetrator”, and the third person arrives as the “rescuer”. This is the role the teacher plays. In attempting to “rescue” the child, the teacher unwittingly joins with the child as a co-perpetrator to victimize the parents. Now the initial roles have shifted. The child has gone from victim to perpetrator, the parents from perpetrator to victim, and the teacher from rescuer to perpetrator. This is the nature of a Rescue Triangle. The roles are always shifting over time. Nothing really changes. No healing happens. No one learns anything. It is essential for teachers to learn to recognize the invitation to enter a Rescue Triangle and decline it. What would be much more helpful for the child would be to ask how it is that the child’s behavior is so different at home vs. school and even to suggest that the parents, teacher, and child all sit down to discuss this difference. This sends a message that the teacher won’t allow the child to play “victim” and divide the adults. Of course, in denying the AD child the role of “victim”, the teacher will likely become a “perpetrator” in the child’s eyes. But this is the nature of the game at hand- any adult who refuses to support the child in the victim role, becomes a perpetrator by virtue of their refusal. This is part of the box the parents are in. This game can only be broken up by the adults not blaming each other, but supporting each other in exploring the AD child’s choice to be so very different with different adults.
14. Use of the word “trick” to describe AD children's strategic behavior works better than the more loaded words like manipulative, lying, etc.
15. **TASK COMPLETION:** AD children’s erratic task performance can be very frustrating for teachers. It is important (and a bit heretical from an educational perspective) for the teacher to be less invested in the AD child’s academic success than the child is. It is best to emphasize the child’s accountability for better and worse choices regarding work and behavior and the results related to each. Describe how the results flow from the AD student’s choices so it is clear he is the creator of his own discomfort and not someone else’s victim. One-liners can be useful here. This approach can leave any anxiety with the student, where it may be helpful, rather than with the teacher which will benefit no one.

16. **NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR:** Become a good observer of AD children's nonverbal responses {facial expressions, body position and movements, eyes, voice tone, etc}. These are the most accurate signs of what is going on inside the child. If you listen only to what AD children say, you will go in circles repeatedly.
17. **PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR:** Initially, teachers need to learn to recognize these behaviors as intentional and not “accidents” or “innocent mistakes” or “forgetfulness” or “sincere attempts at compliance”. The biggest mistake here is then to brook a conversation designed to unmask the defiance underneath the superficial compliance. This will quickly become a “far baby conversation”. With partially or incorrectly completed tasks, recognize that which has been done and add a reminder that the expectation is completion without specifying what remains to be completed. AD students know. With behavior, the teacher can choose ignoring or the imposition of consequences, depending upon the form of the passive-aggressive misbehavior. No explanation required- AD students know what they are doing.
18. **Act as an historian for the AD child.** As AD children live in the moment and lack a sequential, linear sense of time, they need adults to remind them of past events and choices the children have made that have led to a successful result. This supports the child’s coping skills in the present. This role of historian can be particularly useful in helping the AD child bridge the delay in time between completing academic work and later recognition for the effort. The teacher can again remind the AD student of having waited in the past for approval that was enjoyed. Additionally, the capacity to wait can be defined as something that makes people stronger as this may well appeal the AD child’s intrinsic valuing of strength as a means of self-protection.
19. **TEACHER ABSENCES:** Because of their histories of broken attachments, AD children tend to perceive separations as abandonment. Teacher absences, particularly extended ones, are apt to be seen this way. Anxiety and anger are the emotional results. The behavioral outcomes are likely to be experienced by the substitute teacher whom the AD student may well view as being at fault for the teacher’s departure (parallel to how adoptive parents are blamed by the child for having brought about the birth parents’ absence). Problems can be minimized by the teacher being clear beforehand about her absence and return date and communicating this to parents so they can follow-up at home. With an extended absence, it can be useful to have a calendar in the classroom with the teacher’s return date identified (at least approximately) and to again, share this with parents so a matching calendar can be posted at home. It is also helpful for the teacher to take the AD student aside privately, and reassure the student that she will be returning, that she understands her time away may be difficult, that the student has nothing to do with her leaving, and that the substitute has nothing to do with the teacher’s leaving. Therefore the teacher expects the student to handle her time away without taking it out on the substitute.
20. **DESCRIPTION VS. EVALUATION:** Understanding the difference between description and evaluation is an important tool for fostering change. Description is painting a picture of behavior in clear, observable terms, somewhat like a sportscaster describing the play-by-play of a game. Description answers the question, "What happened?" Example: (staring down at the floor, not talking or moving). Evaluation includes placing a value judgment on behavior and attempting to explain “Why it happened”. Value judgments usually break things down into two opposite categories such as "good / bad" or "appropriate / inappropriate". Evaluation

also includes drawing conclusions about behavior and its motivations. Examples of common conclusions are: "attention-getting behavior" or "manipulative behavior". Evaluation, whether it be a value judgment or a conclusion, tends to block change. Evaluations oversimplify. This greatly limits the possibilities of change. The behavior of children is too complex to be accurately captured by "either / or" categories. Conclusions, on the other hand, are too often accepted as true without having been carefully tested out. Change strategies, based on untested conclusions, not only may not help, but may make things worse. Description, on the other hand, creates opportunity for change. It clarifies things. It doesn't label. It reminds that behavior is dynamic, not static, and therefore change is always possible. It does not feed into a negative-based identity ("I am bad"). So it is helpful for teachers to be aware of how they think about, and communicate with, their students. If you catch yourself being evaluative, stop and shift into a descriptive mode.

21. **COMMUNICATION / QUESTIONS**: Four questions to almost never ask AD children:

"Did you...?"

"Why did you...?"

"Do you remember...?"

"What did you say?"

AD children can compose eloquent answers that mean absolutely nothing. A question to an AD child is too often an invitation to trick an adult. It works much better to phrase statements as guesses and let them react to the guess. (Example: rather than "Did you break your pencil?" try "I think you broke your pencil to get out of doing your work."). AD children's reactions to guesses will tell you much more than their answers to questions.

22. **COMMUNICATION / ONE-LINERS**: AD children often invite teachers into murky conversations from which there is no useful outcome or reasonable escape once the subject has been engaged. This is particularly likely if the subject matter is something about which the teacher lacks any direct knowledge. To avoid such "Tar Baby" conversations, one-line responses can be a useful tool. Some suggestions are listed below.

➤ "You can make an appointment with me to discuss that later."

➤ "What do you think I think about that?"

➤ "That's an interesting way to do that."

➤ "That's an interesting idea. How did you figure that out?"

➤ "I might have a hard time believing that if I said it myself."

➤ "I'm glad I don't let myself get bored."

➤ "I never would have thought of that. Hope it works out."

➤ "Hope you get over that."

➤ "Do you have a plan?"

➤ "If you don't understand why you have to, after you're finished, I'll be glad to explain."

➤ "What do you think you will do?"

23. **RESTITUTION**: AD children generally have little or no understanding of the concept of **restitution** and this is a very important social skill for them. When an AD child has a negative impact on another (child or adult) at school that warrants more than an apology, having the child carry out an act of restitution can be effective and likely more useful than a prolonged conversation about the incident. Define what is to be the act of restitution and have the child

**just carry it out without further conversation. This can be considered the consequence, but should not be framed for the child that way. Making restitution is an act of competence and can positively effect self-esteem.**

**February 1, 2008**