

Adoption Insights

While adoption can be a very rewarding experience, it can also present a challenge to loving parents and families that contradicts the natural human instinct to attach. Attachment behaviors are essential for an infant's survival. They develop when an infant expresses a need and a primary caretaker consistently meets that need. Unfortunately, when needs are repeatedly neglected, or come from too many caretakers, the infant learns not to trust. This sets the stage for reactive attachment disorder or RAD. RAD is primarily found in adoptive children; however, it can also present itself with a biological child where bonding between a mother and her child is disrupted due to an extreme circumstance such as a severe illness.

To assure the best success with adoption, it is essential for prospective or adoptive parents to become educated as to what RAD is and how it can be treated. Even if a child is adopted at an early age, they may not exhibit RAD signs until later on. What makes RAD extremely challenging to deal with is that a parent cannot love it away and a parent's natural instincts may even hinder the adoptive child's chances of getting better. Often times a parent of a RAD child is left feeling inadequate or that something is wrong with them because their child does not respond to them in a positive way. A RAD child is very good at finding a parent's buttons and using them as a weapon so that intimacy can't happen. RAD children do this because their past experience has taught them that intimacy is too risky for their fragile hearts. In a RAD child's mind, they must not allow anyone to get too close in order to be safe. The good news is that with treatment, by highly specialized therapists, the success rate is 85 percent, even with teens and young adults.

The treatment that is most effective in treating RAD is called attachment therapy. Attachment therapy involves two attachment therapists and the primary care takers with the child in each session. The number of sessions required ranges from 6-12 and is usually 2 hours in length. The focus of this therapy is to create intimacy between the primary care takers and the child by utilizing eye contact and holding. Often times a child or young adult with RAD has unresolved trauma. The brain gets stuck with a negative imprint, which can be cleared and reprogrammed with a positive imprint by utilizing methods such as EMDR. EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. It is a specialized form of treatment for trauma and is highly effective. Another effective method being implemented with RAD is neurofeedback. Neurofeedback is a process of biofeedback that retrains the brain to work at its optimal capacity. Attachment therapy is directive, empathic, and solution-oriented with a high success rate. Traditional psychotherapy usually fails with a RAD child or young adult because it is based on a trusting relationship.

One of the centers that offer this highly specialized treatment is the Attachment Institute of New England located in West Boylston, Massachusetts. This Institute consists of 4 therapists working in interchangeable teams and is headed by Peg Kirby Psy.D. Dr Kirby has both personal and professional experience with RAD. She is the adoptive mom of 4 children and has been a pioneer of attachment therapy in the New

England area for over a decade. Dr Kirby is joined by Ken Frohock, LMHC, LRC who also combines his extensive professional and personal experience as an adoptive dad of three. Suzanne Allen, Ph.D. and Joe Lyons, Psy.D. complete this highly specialized team of therapists offering powerful strategies and treatment to often desperate and frustrated adoptive families.

According to the Attachment Institute of New England, common symptoms of insecure attachment include: a history of abandonment, neglect, abuse and/or multiple placements; a child who indiscriminately seeks affection and/or comfort from strangers; lack of authenticity, spontaneity, flexibility, and empathy; lack of physical affection and closeness and/or inappropriate clinginess; poor eye contact; lack of a conscience; problems with learning, attending, self regulating, and self monitoring; abnormal eating and elimination patterns such as wetting, soiling, or hoarding food. To help educate parents and therapists, the Attachment Institute of New England is sponsoring a 3-day conference March 11- 13, featuring Nancy Thomas, a well-known Therapeutic Foster Parent Specialist from Colorado. Nancy is an international presenter who has trained over 15,000 parents and professionals with her powerful parenting methods. Nancy has worked as a co-therapist in intensive attachment therapy sessions for over 10 years with leading attachment therapist, such as, psychiatrist Foster Cline, M.D. and Daniel Hughes, PhD. Nancy has also shared her life and home with severely emotionally disturbed children for over 25 years. Nancy specializes in bonding and conscience development with children who have been diagnosed with conditions that include: Reactive Attachment Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Tourette's Syndrome, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and others. She has an 85% success rate with this high-risk population. Nancy defines RAD as "a condition in which individuals have difficulty forming loving, lasting relationships. They often have a nearly complete lack of ability to be genuinely affectionate with others. They typically fail to develop a conscience and do not learn to trust. They do not allow people to be in control of them due to this trust issue. They can be surface compliant for weeks if there is no loving relationship involved. With strangers they can be extremely charming and appear loving. Uneducated adults misinterpret this as the child trusting or caring for them. If they cannot trust and love their own family that loves them, they will not trust and love a casual acquaintance!! They do not think and feel like a normal person. Some famous people with RAD that did not get help in time: Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Edger Allen Poe, Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy. One famous person with Attachment Disorder who did get help in time (in 1887!), and became one of our greatest humanitarians, is Helen Keller."

If you are a parent or therapist interested in attending a part or all of this conference, you can contact Dr. Suzanne Allen by calling the Attachment Institute of New England, (508) 853-2663 or e mailing, www.attachmentnewengland.com.