

National Quality Improvement Center

QIC • AG

Adoption & Guardianship Support and Preservation



**Children's
Bureau**

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**Quarterly Learning
Opportunity**

**February 9, 2018
12:00-2:00 pm EDT**

QUARTERLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITY AGENDA

- Welcome
- Deborah Gray, MPA, LICSW: Promoting Attachments:
Roots and Resilience
- Feedback Survey
- QIC-AG Administrative Meeting (1:30 to 2:00)

Promoting Attachment: Roots and Resilience

QIC-AG

Webinar 2-9-18

Deborah Gray, MPA. LICSW

Nurturing Attachments

Nurturingattachments.com



Corbis.com

Attachments are exclusive,
intimate, emotional and
physiological relationships
between people.



Attachments

- Emotional Connections, essential to our well-being and basic to survival
- Within optimal Attachment relationships our brains develop the abilities to regulate (modulate) stress and understand social and emotional information.
- Through attachments we develop simultaneous awareness of our thoughts, emotions, and our physical reactions.



Attachments are always between two people...because they are relationships.

Siblings have attachment relationships.



Attachments and toxic stress

- Secure Attachments confer greater resiliency in children who have experienced traumas and traumatic losses.
- One reason we are so keen on helping families to develop security in attachments is because it is the most robust way we have to help children after neglect and trauma.

Moving children

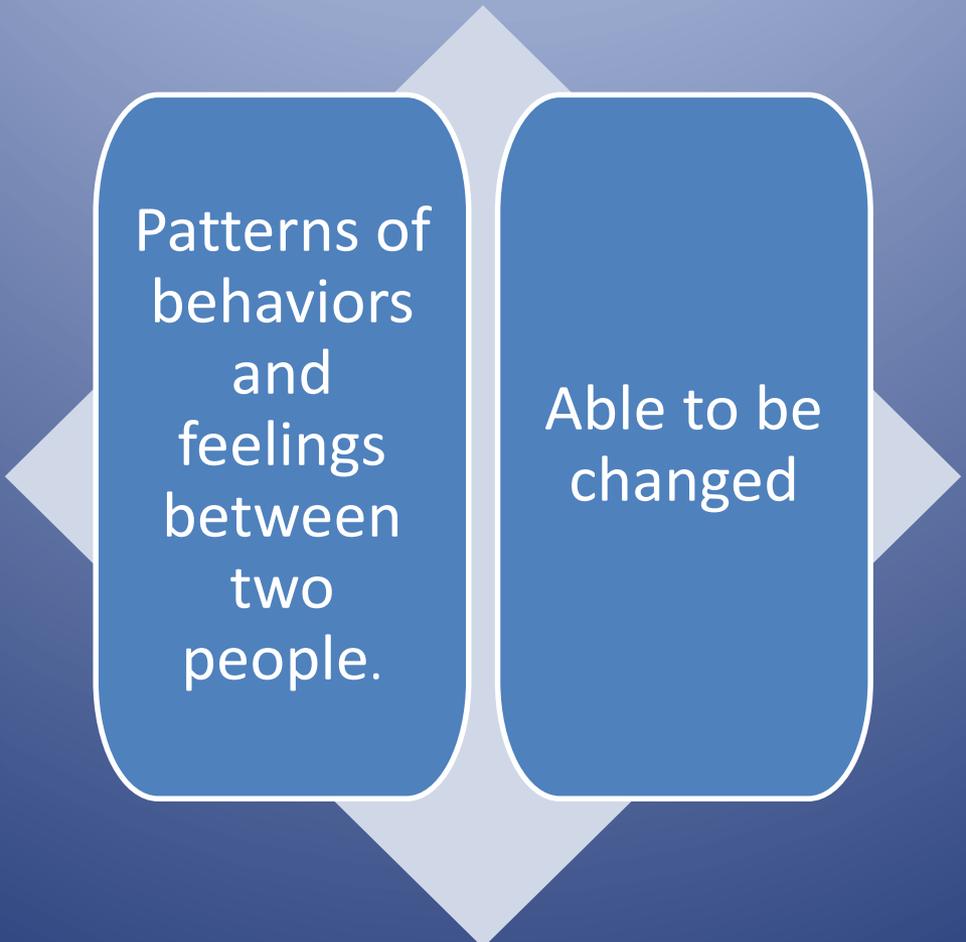
Results in dysregulation in developing brain systems. Sudden moves are especially deleterious to forming new attachments.

Placement instability is linked to: attachment problems, executive dysfunction, depression, and behavior issues. It increases the risk of sexually aggressive behaviors.

You are an influencer. Raise awareness of problems from quick moves and those of convenience.

- You may be able to encourage or discourage placement practices that shape children's brains—for life.
- Important to move children carefully and over a period of time. (Schedule and best practices for moving children, by age, is supplied in attachments.)

Attachments are:



Patterns of
behaviors
and
feelings
between
two
people.

Able to be
changed

What changes attachment patterns from insecure to secure?

- Someone to care about the parent, helping the parent to feel emotionally supported and balanced,
- Therapy for parents that helps them with trauma, grief, and emotional balance,
- Reductions in stress,
- Help with parent sensitivity to their children in real-time moment-to-moment alterations.

Attachments between children and parents come in styles

Secure

Insecure
(anxious,
anxious
resistant,
ambivalent)

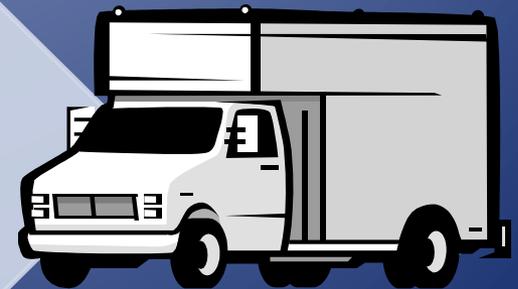
Disorganized/
disoriented

Children and Parents have corresponding patterns. Children will come into homes showing their former pattern.

Secure: Parents who are sensitive, available to their children, nurturing, and able to meet their children's needs promptly. Parents have stable, positive moods.



Even “secure” parents will have a harder time connecting with children who left people they loved.



The parents will have to try harder and try longer until they get positive responses.



Parents need to know that this is normal.

Do not personalize the children or teen's confusing responses to nurture. They are still changing their pattern to fit yours.

Parent styles--Preoccupied

Parents who are too busy, or who are too caught up with their own emotional lives, tend to have anxious children. Many children adopted from kinship placement in which they were passed between relatives will have had preoccupied parents and will show high anxiety.

Parent styles--Preoccupied

This is also a common pattern after busy orphanage care in which food was present, abuse was absent, but babies and toddlers simply did not get enough mindful attention.



Parent styles and Children's styles

Parents who are shaming and insensitive will have children who avoid them.

While the parents are not abusive, the parents are emotionally bruising. They are often rigid and autocratic. From an early age children keep some distance.

Note to the wise: Avoid advice on parenting that is “my way or the highway.”

Parenting styles and children's Responding Patterns

Parents (or caregivers) who emotionally abuse or traumatize their children will form a disorganized/ or disoriented pattern with their children.

Children will behave in a confused manner. They will be afraid, controlling, bossy, and punitive towards their caregiver. About 82% of children in our foster care system have this pattern.



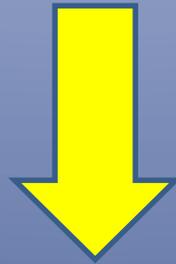
Parents may find themselves responding to the pattern that children learned prior to adoption.

It is important that they continue to take the emotional “high road.” That is, stay sensitive, kind, nurturing, and consistent. Use consequences for older children, not “emotional” parenting (yelling and ranting).

After placements parents are often confused by the children's signals. Without taking this personally, they begin to decode children's signals, which can be confusing and contradictory, and respond sensitively. Gradually we teach our children a different way of signaling their needs.



Lost attachments are grieved no matter what type of attachment.



Children will grieve lost parent figures. In fact, they will have a harder time completing the grief process for that person because it is confusing to figure out what that person meant to them.



Attachment styles are formed by the seventh month of life if there is an available parenting figure. When forming attachments it will take a while.

Children can have different attachment styles with different parents.



Through our secure attachments we learn the mind's "skill set" of connecting with the hearts and minds of others.

We learn a sense of joy in relationships.

We learn to calm, put things into perspective, and how to reach out for help.

In infants and young children, secure attachments connect them to the steady and stable brain of the attachment figure.



We will need to have extra emotional support of the caregivers so that they stay sensitive and keep trying to connect to children who may be harder to connect with.



In secure base attachments people use discipline that promotes attachment—They don't hurt kids.

Frightening scary parents don't form secure attachments with their children.

Instead, use re-dos with children. Have them practice the preferred behavior, or have them do restitution.

Stretch positive moods

Keep the mood in the home positive.



Find activities that are mutually enjoyable



Do more of these and find variations of these



The positive patterns of connection in
real time
(It is not about IQ!)

- Use modalities that are rich with potential: food, gaze, touch, voice tones, hand-holding, sensitivity to children's needs. People have relaxed bodies, time, and curiosity about knowing the other person.

Eye-
to-
Eye
contact



Play



We tend to be blah, blah for kids who want some fun! Play more!



Touch



Corbis.com

Feeding and Mealtimes



Comforting and calming children so they feel safe.



Discipline That Promotes Attachment

- Limits that are enforced.
- Authoritative parenting, not authoritarian.
- Emphasis on practice preferred behaviors, real-time, with praise.
- Re-dos are great.
- Keep the emphasis on the positive.

Commitment—keep on keeping on.



Lessons from a secure attachment



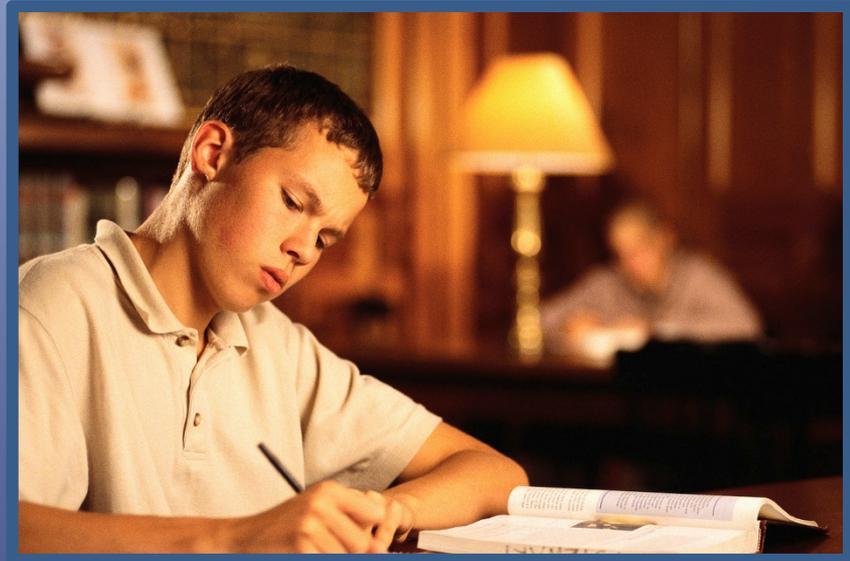
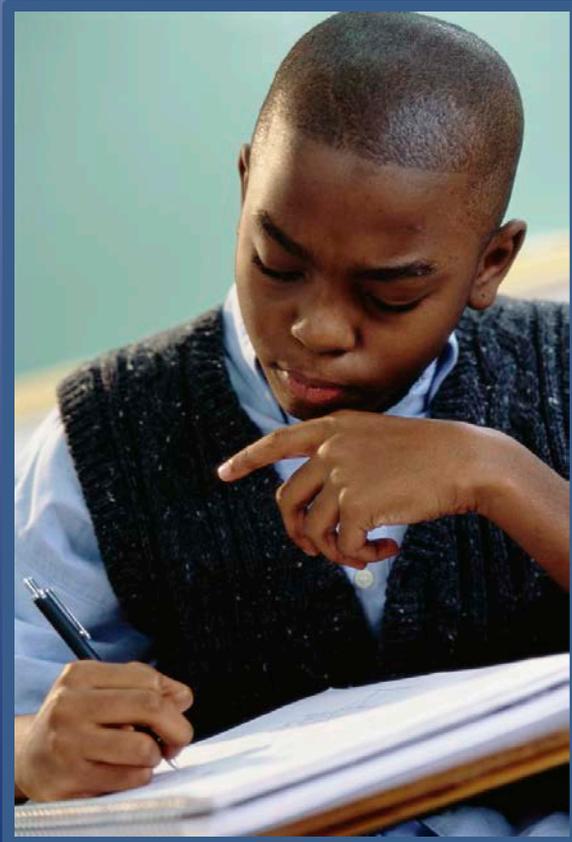
My parents will come back after an absence. They are reliable.



I am worth coming back to.



Secure attachments give children a better experience with educators.



I am rewarded with attention and compliments for being competent, for my curiosity, and for my happy moods.



I can get help with
overwhelming events and
feelings. Parents will help.



*I learn a smoothly cycling rhythm of intensity
and calming.*

Parents will teach me how to cope with problems and how to solve them. My autonomy is based not only on self-confidence, but on understanding that I have a cheering team.

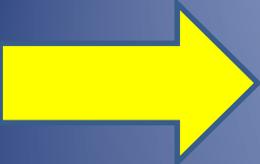
My needs are routinely met in a timely, sensitive manner. When something disrupts our relationship, our “repairs” are empathic and prompt.



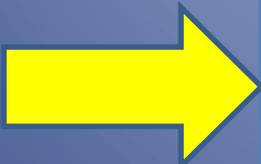
Repairs=We talk things out and recognize our part of the problem. We apologize, hug, and get back on the same wavelength.

What does trauma look like in children?

- Nightmares
- Complaints of physical problems that have no physical basis
- Dissociation, “zoning out” that is not daydreaming, but a shutting down after a frightening reminder
- Unstable moods with aggression
- Fearful. (May be controlling to mask fear.)
- Frightening memories that do not fade.
- Strongly avoids places, people, or topics.



Get professional help for
an evaluation and
treatment.



Stay nurturing.



Do not “wait and see.”

- Attachments that are secure help the brain to wire in a particular manner. We are wired for safety, curiosity, and sustained attention.
- Disorganized attachments, toxic stress, and placement instability all contribute to executive dysfunction.

Executive functioning is impacted.

- Executive dysfunction: impulsivity, lack of self-monitoring, mood issues, verbal memory problems, attention problems.
- Children see things in parts or details and miss the big picture.

High Stress and Trauma in the Early Years and executive functioning

- Brain is wired for high alert.
- Brain is impulsive, rather than selectively inhibiting.
- Brain sacrifices the development of memory. Brain's chalkboard is short. Working memory is impacted.
- Brain favors scanning or hypervigilance versus sustained attention.

Executive dysfunction

- Brain sees details rather than the “big picture.”
- Brain has a hard time sustaining attention when it takes an effort.
- Brain struggles with complexity.
- Brain has a hard times with categories, or seeing things in an organized manner.

As long as stress stays high in childhood.

- The brain continues to be shaped.
- High stress is toxic along the life cycle, but is especially harmful to developing psychobiologic (brain and body) systems.

Child Welfare Task

- Reduce Stress
- Stop terrifying children with abrupt moves
- Put supports in families to decrease stress and increase emotional support
- Maintain contact with children's important people
- Educate our families about attachment and trauma

Healing the Brain's Functioning

- Children who develop secure attachments to caregivers start to show a pattern in which the brain rewires.
- Kids sleep better. They start to show improvement in the areas of executive functioning.

**SECURE ATTACHMENTS IN TEENS:
RELATIONSHIPS MARKED BY TRUST,
COLLABORATION, AND
ENCOURAGEMENT OF
EXPLORATION**

In secure attachments with teens,
there is a sense of their being “seen”
by parents.

In preoccupied attachments the teen is preoccupied with past losses and hurts.

- This includes grief and loss that has never been processed, but shut away instead.

Unresolved losses in earlier life are strongly correlated with depression in teens—and along the lifespan.

In avoidant attachment patterns teens have decided that parents are not available for emotional support.

- They already reject your worth as a helper. Their world view is that you are inadequate or unreliable.

Teens shut down opportunities for emotional support. They decide to be self-reliant.

- There is little sharing or reciprocity.
- If avoidance fails, they get highly anxious.

Teens may be involved in a role reversal. We see this pattern when parents have been hostile or frightening to teens or children.

We see this pattern with Domestic Violence in families. Criticism and shaming are prevalent. Bizarre bits of behavior or speech pop up.

Teen does not know which strategy to use.
Highly correlated to later psychopathology.

The issue for caregivers/parents is to engage teens in the process of moving into patterns of security.

- We help them to process painful experiences, which helps them to integrate events in their lives in a context of empathy.

What encourages security in teens?

Sensitive and available parents

- Parent availability is often “right now” I need you! I didn’t need you until I needed you desperately!

Reasonable and reasonably enforced limits.

- Parents do not use high emotion.
- Instead, they stay steady.
- Parents are authoritative, not authoritarian.

There are reliable family routines
(Family dinners are an example
of this.)

- Families have rhythms.
- Families have reliable structure.

Neural networks that help brain cells (neurons) communicate through chemical signals are enlarging in teen brains.

Learning takes place at the synapses between neurons, as cells excite or inhibit one another and develop more robust synapses with repeated stimulation.

Harvard Magazine

This makes work with teens to be especially fruitful. Great time to put effort in.

- Brain will prune back about 20% of cells
- Will speed up what it needs, what is relevant.

What does the Home Look Like?



Predictable and Structured



Parents repair quickly after upsets. Model how to take blame and apologize—but don't make yourself look weak or flakey.



Pursue accommodations in school situations and at home, as necessary.



Explore options—teach thoughtful decision-making

- Pros

- Cons

Sustain and stretch positive
moods

Restore Hope. Point out how much they have learned.

Parents “hold children in their minds” giving them a sense of being seen, of being connected.

Parents are not on their phones or mentally elsewhere.

Parents are good at conveying their internal states (feelings), giving children/teens a model for connecting thoughts and feelings.

- Parents are easy to figure out.
- Parents are predictable.

Children/Teens insights are respected. They are encouraged to develop emerging skills.

Lots of hopeful comments are made by parents, encouraging skill development.

Parents are warm, but have boundaries—not intrusive—but, they don't get shut out.

- Mention that “I don't need to know everything...”

Parents are curious and open about their teen's world view. They look for chances for discussion.

As you discuss with teens, they can take on information about the world—as can you.

Parents do not use threats, violence, or criticism to get their own way.

- Use your emotional arguments for support. Use your cool brain for limits and supporting limits.

Connect before you ask for better behavior. That will result in easier compliance.

Parents hope for and with their children/teens. They model “learned optimism.”

If children/teens withdraw, the parents do not withdraw in return. They remain emotionally available.

Play

Have pleasant activities on the schedule daily.

Emphasis on physical play if children are open.

Increase overall pleasure in life.

Encourage positive looping, “serve and return.”

Use food to connect parents with nurture. Invite the teen's friends, as well.

Find a positive focal point if interests change—paintball, shop, ski or get a family dog.

Value the teen's appearance—
recognize that the parent's
decade of popularity in clothes
has truly passed.

Parents do not snipe at children or teens or make negative comments.
7:1 ratio of positive to negative

Major Attachment-Facilitating Projects for children/teens after trauma and losses.

- ABC, Mary Dozier's team.
- ARC, Kristine Kinniburgh and Margaret Blaustein, Attachment, Regulation, Competency.
- CCP and PPP, Alicia Lieberman, Patricia Van Horn, Chandra Ghosh Ippen.
- EFT, Diamond's work with teens and attachment,
- MCTFC, Oregon Social Learning Project, Phillip Fisher.
- NMT, Bruce Perry and Child Trauma Academy.

QUESTIONS?

Additional Information on the QIC-AG
can be found at:

www.qic-ag.org



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