

Child Maltreatment and Relationships in Childhood

Adapted from Cicchetti & Toth, 2016¹

This fact sheet highlights lessons learned from decades of science regarding child maltreatment. Learn how child abuse and neglect affects children's relationships.

ATTACHMENT



Attachment is the bond between caregiver and baby.



The development of a healthy secure attachment relationship between a baby and their caregiver is one of the most important developmental tasks of the first year of life.



A secure attachment relationship with a caregiver provides the baby with a secure base from which to learn about the world and their place within it.



Children develop their beliefs about how loveable (or unlovable) and acceptable (or unacceptable) they are from their attachment relationships with their caregivers.

SECURE ATTACHMENT

Children with secure attachment trust their parent to meet their emotional and physical needs.

DISORGANIZED ATTACHMENT

Children who show a mix of avoidant and resistant behaviors when close to their parent, fear their parent, or seem dissociated or confused around their parent may have disorganized attachment.

When parents maltreat their children, they are placed in the impossible position of having a parent that is simultaneously their source of safety and their source of fear (Hesse & Main, 2006). This contributes to the development of disorganized attachment and negative beliefs about the trustworthiness of others and negative beliefs about the children's own self-worth.



IT IS ESTIMATED

that 80-90% of maltreated children develop disorganized attachment (Cyr et al., 2010).

Disorganized attachment is especially problematic because it is associated with life long relationship problems and psychopathology.

¹ Cicchetti, D., & Toth, S. L. (2016). Child maltreatment and developmental psychopathology: A multilevel perspective. *Developmental Psychopathology*, 1-56.

PEERS AND FRIENDS

Maltreated children are more likely than their non-maltreated peers to...

Struggle with making and keeping friends

Exhibit heightened aggression toward peers

Experience withdrawal from peer interactions

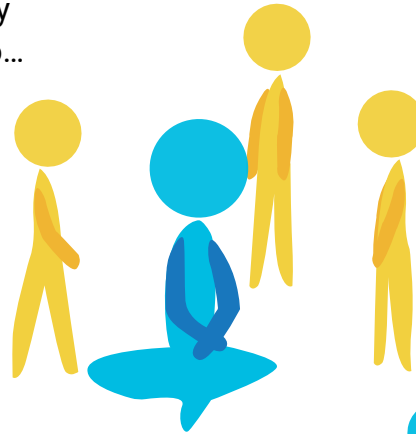
Have friendships that are characterized by greater conflict and betrayal

Be involved in relationships that include victimization and manipulation

View other people's behavior as hostile, and may then respond more aggressively

Bully other children and are more likely to be bullied by their peers

Struggle with managing their emotions, which can lead to more aggressive behavior



SCHOOL

Maltreated children are more likely than their non-maltreated peers to...

Repeat a grade

Achieve lower grades

Lower educational goals

Higher rates of expulsion

More unexcused absences

Perform worse on standardized tests

However, having friends can protect maltreated children from feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and victimization by peers.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

CHILD PARENT PSYCHOTHERAPY (CPP)

Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) is an intervention for parents and their children aged birth to 5 years old. The therapist meets with the parent and child together and works to improve the parent-child relationship. Research shows that it helps improve the attachment relationship among maltreated children.

INTERPERSONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR ADOLESCENTS (IPT-A)

Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Adolescents (IPT-A) is an intervention for teenagers with feelings of sadness or depression. It is a short-term therapy focused on relationships and social support. Recent research shows that it is especially helpful for reducing depressive symptoms among teenagers with maltreatment histories, including sexual abuse.

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