

## How does this affect the child at school

We want the child to . . .



The child may be dealing with . . .



## Some general thoughts on intervention

Children and young people with disrupted relationships benefit from predictability, routine, preparation for change, consistency and structure.

They may experience ambivalence around the need for adult attention and the fear of rejection. An indication that they are being 'held in mind' in a busy classroom can be enormously helpful.

'Think young'. The child's emotional age may be a much earlier stage than his/her chronological age.

If the child's experience has been one of overwhelming unpredictability and chaos, he/she may be hyper vigilant and super sensitive, over reacting to seemingly trivial incidents.

Words may be very difficult for the child and explanations may be hard to give or seem fraught with the risk of rejection. This can be masked by sulkiness.

Take care of yourself, seek support and try not to take personally. Children and young people can inadvertently provoke feelings in us that they are experiencing themselves.

**For more help or advice or a copy of this leaflet on audio tape, in large print or in other languages, please contact:**

Compiled by Alison MacDonald and Angela Jefferies, Inverclyde Educational Psychology Service

☎ 01475 715430

✉ [psychological.service@inverclyde.gov.uk](mailto:psychological.service@inverclyde.gov.uk)  
[www.inverclyde.gov.uk/EducationandLearning/InverclydeEducationalPsychologyService](http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/EducationandLearning/InverclydeEducationalPsychologyService)

getting it right  
for every child  
in Inverclyde

# Attachment patterns in school



**Understanding the impact of disrupted relationships on school behaviour**

**Education, Communities & Organisational Development  
Inverclyde Educational Psychology Service**

**Inverclyde**  
council  
[www.inverclyde.gov.uk](http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk)

## What is Attachment?

Babies and young children are entirely dependent on adults for their survival. The human journey to autonomy and independence is a relatively long one. When the infant's basic needs are met by a responsive and consistent adult, a sense of basic trust develops – the child's 'internal working model' is one of a safe world in which security and survival are assured. This is a basic building block for emotional development and the way the individual relates to the world.

This process can be disrupted for a variety of reasons. When this happens, the infant responds in ways which are designed to ensure his/her needs for survival are met. A pattern of attachment can develop which becomes less adaptive as the child grows. Since these patterns are rooted in early experience, resultant behaviours can often seem intractable and less open to change through the normal route of behavioural intervention. This can be a frustrating experience for all concerned.

This leaflet is designed for staff working in schools to help inform approaches to intervention by enhancing understanding of the attachment patterns which may underlie difficult behaviour.

Some children who have experienced broken relationships fear dependency and neediness and adopt 'self reliance' as a defence. Others can appear both clinging and controlling. Some children have extreme difficulty with self-regulation and control. The following is a sample of behaviours, their possible meaning and suggested strategies. These are examples only and are by no means an exhaustive list.

## Behaviour

## What it might mean

## What we can do

Refusal to start work

Fear of failing

Ensure tasks are attainable, clear and structured

Denial of need for support

Proximity of teacher feels threatening

Focus on the task in highly structured way

Ignoring teacher

Fear of showing need

Provide concrete, mechanical or repetitive activities as much as possible

Refusal of written tasks

Self-expression risky

Give highly structured writing tasks e.g. cloze procedure

Reluctance to accept direct teaching

Denial of need for support in favour of self-sufficiency

Dilute teacher's presence – pairs/small groups

Cannot work independently/high need for adult attention

Strong wish for closeness

Ask child to keep something for teacher/make eye contact/nod i.e. 'hold in mind'

'Bossy'/dominates peers

Stress response as result of feeling adult attention not under his/her control

Give responsibility for tasks not for peers

Poor concentration

Hyper vigilant to risk and danger

Provide predictable routine and plenty of structure

Critical of the work

Difficulty in accepting 'not knowing'

Build in success