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Oil and Water:

The Attachment Disordered Child and School

Characteristics of school and attachment disorder

External vs. internal: School typically expects students to organize their behavior around external factors, such as the schedule, curriculum, demands for performance and rules. This expectation clashes with the AD child's overriding internal need for control in order to feel safe. As to performance demands, AD children tend not to perform on others' terms just as they tend not to show affection at home on parents' terms. Their capacity to adjust to external factors is further compromised by the weak regulatory skills common result from their early histories of trauma and attachment disruptions.

Group activities: Many of the activities in a school setting are group-based. Much of the motivation for group activities rests on a desire to interact collaboratively with others for purposes of learning. Such a motive is apt to be weak in AD students. Having to deal with multiple people simultaneously increases the chances of stimulating the AD student's anxiety, which will lead to behavioral attempts to re-establish a sense of control.

Temporal experience: Time is experienced by AD students as a series of disconnected "nows". Attention is primarily focused on the "now" and neither past nor future is commonly invoked, for both lack a sufficient sense of "reality" to consciously impact the thinking, problem solving, planning, or behavioral functioning of students with AD. This leads to a host of time related problems. The two most prominent are a lack of learning from experience and a lack of advance planning. Past experience and its related learning are typically not accessed by AD students. Present behavior and decisions do not benefit thereby which often leads to the repetition of identical or similar mistakes. Because the future seems basically "unreal" to AD students anticipating future consequences or rewards does not get factored into current choices.

Deadlines and appointment times, being abstract markers in future time, tend to exert little influence on behavior. Hence, AD students are frequently "late for life" and oblivious to deadlines. Additionally, many of the sources of gratification offered by school (parent and teacher approval, public recognition of achievement, grades on tests/projects/report cards) are all delayed in time. AD student's perception of time and

distrust of the future strips these delayed gratifications of most of their believability. Hence, they tend to be minimally motivating. For AD students, time tends to be viewed as a commodity to be spent, like money, rather than a resource to be used. It is typically spent on staying safe and the procuring of “interesting experience”. These are what matter to the AD student and not time itself. Hence, saving time, wasting time, or using time efficiently all tend to be pretty meaningless adult concepts to AD students.

Dual role of teachers: Teachers have a dual role: that of dispensers of “educational resources” (materials, instruction, recognition for effort / achievement, etc.) and that of limit-setters. This dual role will inevitably conflict with the AD student’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 student in the past, the first time that teacher blocks the AD student’s desires, all those past occasions will be forgotten and the teacher may be instantaneously transformed from an ally to a persecutor in the child’s eyes. Now the AD student will feel entitled to be disrespectful to such an “untrustworthy” authority figure. When teachers set limits for the greater good of the whole class, this is apt to make little sense to the AD student, as they typically have little or no concept of “the common good”. Such limits are apt to seem arbitrary to the AD student.

Omniscience: A potential block to learning comes from AD student’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 students generally won’t acknowledge, just as they generally won’t ask for assistance. They have often have little interest in engaging with an environment that comes to them with a presumption that their knowledge is incomplete.

Projection: One of the primary protective strategies that AD students rely on to maintain their psychological safety is that of projection by which something that is really true about the AD student is attributed to someone else. The many people present in the school context offers the AD student an abundance of targets, particularly peers, for projections. Because of their hypervigilance, AD students are generally quite perceptive of others’ vulnerabilities and skillful at touching those vulnerabilities with their projections. This can make the projections seem very believable to the receiver, which can put that person on the defensive.

Emotional closeness: Emotional closeness is not a priority in the academic environment. This circumvents AD student’s area of greatest vulnerability thereby avoiding much of the more problematic behavior that is typically seen at home. In addition, teachers and classroom groupings tend to change every year, which dilutes long-term relational demands. That the emotional dimension is downplayed at school runs the risk of lulling school personnel into a view of the AD student as being more emotionally and behaviorally functional than is truly the case.

School / home split: AD students 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 adult figure which can 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 should be aware of not forming an opinion of the parents based on what is often highly distorted information from the AD student.

Behaviors Commonly Displayed by AD students in School

Response to instruction: AD students often presume to know the teacher's intention in assigning work, and it has nothing to do with learning. To AD students, academic tasks are given out primarily as a way to control them, keep them quiet, or prove that the teacher is in charge. Partly as a result of this attitude, AD students often accept curriculum instruction from the teacher on an erratic basis. One day, AD students can be focused, taking in information, and on-task. When they are, AD students are often quite capable of turning in a credible product. These seeming "lightning bolts" of intelligence, motivation, and effort are appealing to the adult world of teachers and parents. The adults can get hooked, by these moments of production, into a game of trying to figure out what to do to get the student to perform like this more often. This is a game the adults will not win. The next day, the same students can be completely unworkable, which can appear as "spaciness", "forgetfulness", "distractibility", haphazard work, outright defiance, or complaints of boredom and disinterest. Task incompleteness is usually seen as "defeating the teacher" thereby re-establishing the students' control. Patterns of task incompleteness and completion typically reflect rising and falling levels of anxiety or anger in the AD student and are really a form of emotional regulation. By not turning out enough work so that it can be measured reliably, students with attachment insecurities cleverly avoid having to confront the reality that there is ability and knowledge greater than theirs. This allows AD students to keep their illusion of omniscience. This illusion is another AD tool of emotional regulation in that it supports the students' sense of safety in the classroom.

Support/Praise: Students with attachment vulnerabilities commonly have one of three responses to receiving support and/or praise in the school setting: 1) accept the support without any overt reaction; 2) reject the support outright, or 3) sabotage their performance to contradict the praise (parents are very familiar with this one). The student with attachment problems may recycle these three responses in an unpredictable sequence. For teachers, the experience can be confusing and leave them unsure about affirming AD students. For AD students, this creates the appearance of being immune to praise or support which is yet one more aspect of retaining control. Attachment students rarely, if ever, express gratitude for offers of support, as gratitude implies dependence and dependence is seen as dangerous by the student with attachment difficulties.

Boundaries: AD students' boundaries can vary from wholly absent to defensively rigid. Insufficient boundaries leave AD students open to absorbing the emotional states

of others and acting them out, and/or attributing their own affective states to others (projection). Simply put, AD students are forever mixing up “inside and outside”. AD students are also vulnerable to merger/fusion fantasies such that they fear being taken over and controlled by another, as if they were merely puppets. This fear leads to rigid boundaries and oppositional behavior, much like the toddler who initially establishes her separateness by opposing the parent with “No”. AD students can be oblivious to others’ personal space, but overly reactive to others’ physical proximity to them. They typically don’t understand, or don’t care about, the concept of personal ownership and are susceptible to presuming on others’ possessions simply because they want them. All of these boundary problems can wreak havoc in a school environment; and as long as the boundary between self and the world is insufficient, it is impossible to feel safe.

Repetitive behaviors: These are frequently occurring, minor infractions, such as interrupting, noisemaking, talking out, or asking excessive questions. They can disrupt the simplest of everyday interactions. These kinds of behaviors serve a dual purpose. First, they can serve as ongoing reminders that the AD student is not fully under the teacher's domain. Secondly, they tend to draw attention to behavior when the relevant issue is probably in the emotional realm.

Regressive behaviors: AD students 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, speaking nonsensical language, making graphic sexual and / or excretory remarks, giddy, forced laughter, and others. These regressive behaviors usually signal an upsurge of anxiety in the student and they function both as a way to get away from the anxiety and to draw everyone’s attention to behavior vs. the much more threatening area of feelings. Though these behaviors can appear bizarre, they do not indicate psychosis.

Dependent/ Helpless Behavior: AD students generally do not want teachers to have an accurate view of their abilities. This allows AD students to maintain their belief that they are smarter than everyone else and allows them to perform at varying levels without being able to be held accountable that they definitely could do better. Dependent behavior can serve as task avoidance while simultaneously inviting the teacher (and to parents at home) to over function for the AD student. Should the teacher take this “bait”, then this also confirms the AD student’s sense of being in control. Dependent/helpless behavior may take various forms: “I can’t do this”, “It’s too hard”, “I don’t understand”, “You (teacher) didn’t explain this”, “I need help”, “We already did this”, “This is stupid”, whining, disengagement, ... Whereas AD students are truly loathe to genuinely ask for assistance when they need it, they can exhibit these behaviors because the behaviors are intentional pretense for strategic purposes, vs. real requests.

Passive-aggressive Behavior: Like all passive-aggressive behavior, the passive-aggressive behavior of the student with attachment vulnerabilities presents as a

compliant appearance that packages a defiant spirit. With assignments, this 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 student to maintain a view of adults as untrustworthy, of self as “victim”, and justifies the child’s strivings for control.

Aggressive behaviors: AD students are capable of full-blown temper outbursts at school. . Such extreme outbursts usually indicate that the child's anxiety has escalated to a crisis level, and this can happen in a matter of minutes and the outburst is a desperate attempt to ward off or escape the perceived threat. 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.

Behaviors towards peers: AD students can be deliberately provocative towards peers for a variety of reasons. The provocation may be in the spirit of a “payback”, and this may be for a subjectively perceived slight that the other child never intended as a slight. Socially maladaptive behavior can also emerge out of the AD student’s scarcity model and sense of entitlement. This leads to “looking out for #1” and framing peers as competitors. Provocative behavior can also be a clumsy attempt to initiate social interaction. Should peers react expectably negatively, this can then become the basis for a payback from the AD student and a downward spiral can ensue. AD students can also be socially ineffectual because of their poor boundaries. This is a major concern as research has identified that violation of personal space is the most damaging social gaffe in the peer culture. Provocation can also be an emotional regulatory tool for the AD student. Because peers are vulnerable to react, AD students see the reaction as proof of their power to control others and this reinforces their sense of power and lowers their anxiety. Peers will need support and suggestions from adults to learn to minimize their responsiveness to the provocations. Provocative behavior from an AD student towards peers is almost impossible to eliminate solely by working with the AD student.

INTERVENTIONS: What is less likely to Work

Overconfidence: “We are prone to think the world is more regular and predictable than it really is. Memory continuously maintains a story about what is going on. Confidence is a feeling determined mostly by the coherence of the story and the ease with which it

comes to mind, even if the evidence is unreliable, rather than by any reasoned evaluation of the probability that the story is accurate... Facts that threaten people's livelihoods and self-esteem are simply not absorbed. This makes it difficult to distinguish professionals who are true experts from professionals who don't know they are out of their depth. Overconfidence arises because people are often blind to their own blindness."

-Daniel Kahneman (Nobel Laureate Professor of Psychology @Princeton University) 2011

Evaluation of behavior: Evaluation of behavior is simply the imposition of a value judgment on behavior. Such value judgments usually break things down into two opposing categories such as "good / bad" or "appropriate / inappropriate". Evaluative statements do not facilitate change. Evaluations oversimplify and rest on the misguided assumption that labeling a behavior will lead to a change. The behavior of AD students is too complex to be accurately captured by simplistic "either / or" categories. Such evaluative labels imply that the AD student either does not know, or has forgotten, that the behavior in question is "inappropriate". This is rarely the case. The teacher's use of such values judgments is likely to reinforce the AD student's belief that the teacher is not too bright and has been outsmarted. This will not nurture a sense of safety in the classroom.

Manipulation: Although a percentage of the behavior of AD students could accurately be labeled "manipulative", "calculated", a "con-job", etc. such labels miss the forest for a tree. Such behavior emerges out of AD students' fundamentally feeling unsafe in the world, and as that lack of safety is healed, "manipulative behavior" fades. Labeling the student "manipulative" is thus, not only ineffective, but emotionally damaging. It is damaging because it reinforces the student's sense of self as untrustworthy which will generate expectations of reprisals from the world, thereby enhancing their sense of not being safe. This will likely lead to behavioral escalation in school.

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 students with attachment problems. Attachment students are apt to 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 motivation or the earning of adult approval. Students with attachment problems may even use behavior management systems as bait to draw the adults into unproductive discussions about how to sustain progress. AD students need tight clear structure, which is based on unchanging expectations. However, the consequences/rewards and the contingencies that tie them to behavior need to change on an irregular basis to interfere with attempts to "work the

system". This need for behavior management to have some element of unpredictability in it to be effective with AD students, makes "zero tolerance" policies counterproductive with these students. The rigidity of such policies forces teacher's hands and gives AD students a predictable way to draw the teacher into power struggles that serve the AD student's purpose in the moment.

Verbal interactions

There are specific forms of verbal input that are typically ineffective with AD students:

Reasonableness: Challenging the AD child's perspective with "objective evidence" in order to persuade her that her thinking is somehow incorrect practically guarantees futility. This approach assumes that the teacher and child share a common view of "reality"- not likely the case. The teacher's view of reality is likely to make little sense to the AD student. "Objective evidence" also immediately brands the student as being "wrong", a judgment AD students are all too used to experiencing at the hands of adults. The AD student may well then assemble a view of the teacher as being just one more critical adult who likes devaluing her. This will lead to no good classroom outcomes.

Explanations: Explanations do not persuade AD students, and are apt to be used as leverage to challenge the validity of the adult's position (like giving a prosecuting attorney more information to work with). In addition, explanations undermine the teacher's authority, for they implicitly say that adult authority rests on a valid explanation rather than on the teacher's role. This will also tend to increase the AD student's sense of being unsafe.

Information: It is fine to withhold information from AD students, even information they directly ask for, when teachers have a sense that that information will somehow be misused. It is instructive to tell the student that you are not providing the information requested because her past behavior (you are teaching connected thinking across time by doing this) has shown you that she is most likely to use the information poorly.

Quantity of Input: With AD students, it is important for teachers to discipline how much verbal input they provide. AD students frequently don't pay much attention to adults, or pretend not to understand ("What did you say?"), or immediately forget, what was said to them. Teachers repeating themselves, only reinforces the AD student's not taking any responsibility to listen ("They'll just say it again."). Teachers also should beware of offering too much encouragement, too many reminders, or too much assistance to prompt an AD student's performance. Passivity on the AD student's part can induce over functioning on the teacher's part to fill the vacuum (Dependent Helpless Behavior). This only shifts responsibility that truly belongs to the student, onto the teacher. Teachers should establish the policy that they will repeat themselves at most, one time, and provide at most, one reminder. The message to AD students is to sharpen their listening skills.

Teacher Defense: Teachers should never ever defend themselves to an AD student (example: trying to clarify the goodness of their intentions). AD students will likely reject this as adult manipulation. Teachers defending themselves, keeps their motivation the focus of the conversation, thereby leaving the student's child's contribution out- a huge mistake. It is AD student's distrust of adults that usually drives their challenges to authority, not teachers' motives per se. It is the AD student's distrust that should be the center of the conversation. Thus, it is a much better strategy for teachers to remain confident in their position and ask the AD student how she got to her suspicious viewpoint.

AD students' "why" questions: "Why" questions from AD students are almost always maneuvers to undercut teacher authority by getting information the child can use to argue that the teacher's position is illegitimate. "Why" questions are also usually false questions, in that the student already knows the answer. The best teacher responses to "Why" questions are to either: 1) point out that the child already knows the answer, or 2) ask the child to tell you the answer to his own question.

Unintelligible speech: AD students may purposefully speak so that what they say cannot be clearly understood. Sometimes they mutter. Sometimes they speak very softly. Sometimes they make up words. Sometimes they scramble the order of words in a sentence. Sometimes they leave words out. While some AD students do have language disabilities, the majority of unintelligible speech used by them is a purposeful strategy. Thus, if asked to repeat what was said unclearly, the AD student is likely to say it unclearly again, or refuse to repeat it, or blame the teacher for not listening, or tell teachers that they had their chance and blew it. This secondary frustrating of the teacher only adds to the student's unhelpful sense of power. Unintelligible speech is fundamentally, a way to keep the teacher in the position of "not knowing and trying to find out". Therefore, teachers should assume that if something was said unclearly, that it wasn't important, and so the teacher moves right on as if the student never spoke. If the AD student later says that she had already told the teacher something, just tell her she wasn't clear. Instruct her, that in the future, when the student has something that she wants the teacher to know the student should make sure she speaks clearly. This shifts the responsibility for functional communication onto the AD child.

Unresponsiveness: When attempting to talk with an AD student who is responding minimally, the teacher can tell the student that if he chooses not to answer, that you may make up the answer for him, count that as his answer, and then use it in any related decision you might have to make. For this strategy to be useful, the adult needs to have a sense of the student's unspoken answer. Otherwise this strategy can appear arbitrary and punitive.

Communication / questions: Four questions to almost never ask AD students:

"Did you...?" (The answer will be "no").

"Why did you...?" (The answer will be I don't know").

“What could you have done differently?” (Either “I don’t know” or an “appropriate” answer that means nothing).

“Do you remember...?” (The answer will be “no”).

AD students see such a “problem solving” exercise as basically being about blaming them. They also tend to view teachers who ask such question as not being very bright to think such an exercise will have any effect. So, AD students either disengage or weave eloquent answers that are essentially fluff. Accepting such an answer only gets a teacher branded as an easy mark. What works better than the above questions is to phrase statements as rhetorical guesses and let the AD student react to the guess. “Guess” is the key word here- it is not about boxing the AD student into a corner- that will only yield an oppositional pushback. (Example: rather than “Did you break your pencil?” or “Why did you break your pencil on purpose?” try “I think you broke your pencil to possibly get out of doing your work.”). It is important to watch the nonverbal response to the guess, for that will carry the real answer no matter what is said verbally. In general, AD students’ reactions to guesses often tell you much more than their answers to questions.

Communication / one-liners: Students with attachment difficulties often invite teachers into murky conversations from which there is no useful outcome, nor reasonable escape, once the subject has been engaged. Many of these invitations are attempts to shift an intrapersonal issue within the student to an interpersonal issue between the student and the teacher. This is particularly likely if the subject matter is something about which the teacher lacks any direct knowledge. To avoid such “quicksand conversations”, one-line responses can be a useful tool. Many of these one-liners serve to block the student’s attempt to export her issue into an interpersonal context because they do not admit to a readymade retort. 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.”

EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

Teachers and Parents: A collaborative planning meeting with parents early in the school year is invaluable. Who initiates it does not matter- all that matters is that it happens. Teachers should incorporate the parents' experience at home in designing the behavior management plan at school, as parents will almost always have seen behavior in excess of anything the school may ever see. The school should partner seamlessly with home and parents in order to undercut the attachment student's propensity to triangulate people and situations. Believing tales about poor 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, a serious mistake. This does damage to all concerned. 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 student and onto the parents. When that occurs, students with impaired attachment are likely to use "homework" as a stage to play out their attachment related conflicts at home and everyone loses. Finally, regarding mothers, mothers are generally the primary targets of an attachment child's fear and rage, a fear and rage most teachers will never experience. A supportive teacher, to a mother, is a resource precious beyond words. Parents should also inquire as to how the teacher(s) is feeling as AD children often take a toll on them. Emotional support around the circle of adults is essential for long term success.

Teacher absences: Because of their histories of broken attachments, students with attachment vulnerabilities tend to perceive separations as total abandonment. Teacher absences, particularly extended ones, may be perceived in this way. Anxiety, covered over with anger / withdrawal is the most likely reaction. The behavioral outcomes of these feelings 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. Cause and effect get reversed as AD students are prone to do (parallel to how adoptive parents are blamed by the child for having brought about the birth parents' abandonment of the child). In the spirit of prevention, it is helpful for the teacher to be clear beforehand, about her departure and return dates (if known), and to communicate this to the 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.

Triangulation: This is one of the more potentially damaging hazards that teachers encounter with AD students. AD students 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 students, that conclusion is most likely incorrect. By adopting the perspective of blaming the parents, teachers step 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. AD students usually place themselves in the position of Victim and then invite teachers to play the role of Rescuer from the Perpetrator parents. 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. This is the nature of a Rescue Triangle. The roles are always shifting over time but nothing else really changes. No healing happens. No one learns anything. This same dynamic can develop involving only school personnel wherein one teacher is devalued (Perpetrator) while another is idealized (Rescuer). AD students always place themselves in the Victim position. It is essential for teachers to learn to recognize the invitation to enter a Rescue Triangle and decline it. In denying the AD student the role of “Victim”, the teacher will likely instantaneously become a “Perpetrator” in the student’s eyes, and may start to see behavior more reminiscent of the student’s behavior at home. This is the nature of the game at hand: any adult who refuses to support the AD student in the Victim role becomes a Perpetrator by virtue of their refusal. Instead of accepting the Rescuer invitation, teachers should suggest that the parents, teacher, and student all sit down to discuss how it is that the child’s behavior is so different at home vs. school. This breaks the Rescue Triangle for it requires one of the three roles to be absent at all times. If triangulation is not blocked, the teacher will become an unsafe adult in the AD student’s eyes- it’s just a matter of when, since failing at Rescuer is inevitable.

Trust: AD students come into school carrying their generalized distrust of the world. It is not a teacher’s job to “convince” AD students that he is trustworthy. It can’t be done with verbal assurance anyhow and such assurance will likely be viewed by AD students as some kind of stealth move on the teacher’s part. Such assurance also makes the AD student “wrong” from the outset and transforms the teacher into a Persecutor. Instead, acknowledge the students’ distrust, when it appears, as understandable. Such a response will earn the teacher “credibility points” in AD students’ eyes, and this will contribute towards developing trust. Now the teacher has “shown” his trustworthiness vs. “telling” the AD student she is trustworthy.

AD Students need clear structure more than the average student if they are to develop any trust in the teacher. Multiple warnings, negotiated bargains, or motivational pep

talks all tend to undermine the development of trust. However, AD students are also prone to perceiving discipline as intentional humiliation by the teacher, particularly given school's public context. This can generate shame and anger which may sabotage performance and compliance. A teacher defensively clarifying her intentions, at this point, is a major mistake. Instead, acknowledge that receiving the consequence may be difficult for the AD student, and the student feel very negatively towards the teacher at that moment. Grant her the freedom to do so. A non-defensive stance by the teacher helps promote trust. Nonetheless the teacher should express faith in the student's ability to handle the consequence and expects the student to honor it.

Appreciation / Praise: After an AD student makes a cooperative choice, appreciation is often a better response than praise. Praise is a hierarchical interaction, with the more powerful one (teacher) able to pass judgment (albeit positive) on the less powerful one (student). Praise runs the risk of triggering payback behavior as a result of the AD student perceiving that the teacher is rubbing his face in "having won". Appreciation is an egalitarian reaction that avoids triggering oppositional behavior and can strengthen the teacher-student relationship. Linking the appreciation to the specific behavior that is its focus is preferable to a generic expression of appreciation. The positive attention should also be delivered in an attenuated fashion, as positive attention can trigger internalized shame in an AD student. This is painful and a teacher offering positive attention that triggers shame can, paradoxically, end up being seen as a Persecutor vs. a support.

Motivation & Performance: AD students' 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 student's academic success than the student is. However, this is often a necessary part of an effective approach, for AD students are quite content to allow the teacher to carry the anxiety while they continue their mediocre performance. Nothing is likely to change as long as teachers are more invested in AD students' learning than they are. It is best to emphasize the students' accountability for better and worse choices regarding work and behavior and the results related to each choice. Additionally, in the spirit of counter intuitiveness, the teacher acknowledging that the AD student has the freedom throw away his education, increases the chances that he won't. Both teachers and parents should feel free to remind the AD student that school always gives them the chance to stay in the same grade the next year.

Comprehension & Performance: Asking AD students to repeat/paraphrase directions can be useful for establishing that the student understood the direction (beware of unintelligible speech as above). However, with AD students, comprehension does not automatically translate into performance. Thus, it is useful to ask AD students to demonstrate their comprehension now that the ploy of "not understanding" has already been taken away. Nonperformance at this point can be clearly framed as an intentional choice, which becomes another lesson in accountability.

Classroom behavior: In managing the behavior of AD students, focusing on the form/appearance of the behavior (“Calling out is inappropriate”) is almost always a mistake in the long run. It may be successful in the moment, but focusing on the form of the behavior pretty much guarantees its perpetuation. Effective longer- term management requires a focus on the underlying strategic purpose of the AD student’s behavior vs. its appearance on the surface. Several types of behaviors common to AD students, along with the purposes they serve are described throughout this article. In addressing the purpose, teachers can contribute to resolving the factors that keep promoting the behavior patterns that AD students demonstrate.

The School Toolbox: “Tool” is a useful word to use to reference AD students’ many self-protective stratagems. “Tool” is preferable to manipulation, dishonesty, conning, sneakiness, or lying, as it is a more neutral word that lacks the heavy-handed baggage of these other words. The “Toolbox” contains the AD student’s repertoire of self-protective strategies. Each tool in the box is identified by a behavioral description to which the word “Tool” is added. For the student who avoids sharing information or performing by saying “I don’t know”, this would be labeled “The - I don’t know tool”. This is done in the spirit of description vs. criticism or judgment. A useful intervention is for the teacher to identify the contents of an AD student’s toolbox and make a list for future reference. This intervention can have a bit of a playful, bemused air to it that acknowledges the student’s creativity in developing such a toolbox (there is true competence here). As tools are identified by the teacher, it is helpful to identify the target the tools are designed to avoid (examples: sharing information, taking responsibility, insecurity about doing a task, not knowing something, feeling left out, ...). Knowing the targets can help a teacher with prevention as problematic situations can be identified in advance. The toolbox can be shared with parents and therapist. There will likely be overlap and the sharing allows the adults to more efficiently come to a complete understanding of the student’s collection of tools.

Knowing a student’s toolbox provides the teacher with intervention options. Sometimes, simply naming the tool being used in a moment can block its use. Knowing the toolbox contents can aid expedite the teacher’s understanding of a behavior’s strategic purpose and avoid reacting to the surface behavioral appearance. Recognizing the use of a tool gives the teacher a valuable warning sign that the AD student’s anxiety is on the increase. Knowing the toolbox contents can be used to enhance AD students’ self-awareness of their protective tools. It can also be used to teach AD students how their use of tools fuels their distrust of self and others. With younger AD students, Trick List can be substituted for Toolbox as it is more “user friendly” for the younger student.

Passive-aggressive Behavior: It is important for teachers to recognize these behaviors as disguised intentional noncompliance and not as “accidents” or “innocent mistakes” or “forgetfulness”. However, it is a mistake to then attempt to unmask the defiance that lies underneath the passive-aggressive behavior. This will quickly become a “quicksand

conversation”. Instead, 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. The student with attachment problems knows. With behavior, the teacher can choose ignoring, imposing consequences, or addressing the underlying strategy of the passive-aggressive tool. No explanation is required- again students with attachment difficulties know what they are doing.

Choice, Consequences, & Responsibility: AD students typically have little real sense of personal responsibility or choice. Instead, a sense of victimhood often predominates in AD students. However, even “victims” still make choices. Personal responsibility and choice are literally central lessons that AD students need to learn. Most basically, AD students should be held accountable for their choices and the behaviors that then flow from them. Thus “education” needs to be experiential, and not simply verbal/cognitive. This experiential learning requires establishing specifically, what the child did. Once this has been done, whatever the behavior was, it is simply defined as a “choice” that the AD student made (this is taking responsibility for choice). The next step is to make a best effort to establish the reason for making the choice (this is taking responsibility for motive). If the choice was a positive one (adult view) this should be acknowledged. If the choice was a negative one (adult view), teachers should avoid the temptation to encourage better choices in the future. This is quicksand for the teacher, as the teacher cannot elicit improved choices the child does not wish to make, and AD students are very aware of this. Simply hold the student accountable for the choice and determine whether to impose a consequence of some form. In general, a consequence should be imposed no later than the second time a behavior appears. The first appearance can be used to identify the behavior as problematic and establish the expectation that the student should replace the behavior with a more constructive alternative in the future. Though AD students will likely test this, it is still a process worth doing for it lays the groundwork for the teacher to clearly establish the student’s responsibility, experientially, should he choose the same behavior a second time. The linkage between each choice (positive or negative) and its outcome should be made explicit (responsibility for result of the choice). The child should then be reminded that she will always have the choice of which outcome she wants to receive in the future (responsibility for future outcomes). This effectively replaces teacher-student power struggles with lessons in choice and responsibility for the AD student and helps to block the predominant pattern of attributing all behavior to external factors.

Holding AD students accountable for themselves will likely be met with blaming the teacher in some fashion. The last thing for teachers to do here is to defend themselves. A defense will be seen by AD students as proof the student is right in his blaming and the teacher is trying to “get away with something”. Instead, grant the AD student the freedom to view the teacher however the student wishes and go right back to the accountability topic. AD students should also be held accountable for their response to support/appreciation/praise from the teacher. Doing this involves, again, granting the student the right to reject any affirming that is offered, while pointing out

that the rejection says nothing about the truth of the teacher's affirmation. It only speaks to the student's unwillingness to accept it. AD students will usually work to get the teacher into a debate about whose position is correct. This is obvious quicksand to be avoided and granting the AD students the freedom of their perception provides that avoidance.

If the teacher determines that some form of consequence is needed, there are several types of consequences to choose from. Probably the most common, and paradoxically least effective, form of consequences is time limited consequences. Time limited consequences simply lapse after a certain amount of time has passed with nothing required of the child but waiting it out like a jail sentence. Below are more effective options:

Environmental consequences: here the environment is modified to either interfere with problematic behavior or induce more constructive behavior. Ex.: 1) AD student procrastinates on a task- access to everything that was used to procrastinate is successively blocked.

Behavioral change consequences: Here, the consequence ends when the AD student changes the behavior that led to the consequence in the first place, no matter how long that takes. Time is an irrelevant factor. The behavioral change should occur not just once or twice, but several times as repetition facilitates learning. This puts the responsibility, for the consequence ending, on the student.

Incremental consequences: These are useful for repetitively occurring minor behaviors such as interrupting or noisemaking. They are based on something dimensional, like time or money, from which deductions can be made in successive small increments for each behavioral infraction. Teachers just quietly add up the number of infractions, occasionally reminding the AD student of the running total. Ex: Student that he earns 5 minutes after school for each interrupting behavior.

Cyclical consequences: These are consequences that can be tied to an hourly, daily, or weekly cycle. The "consequence" consists of waiting for the cycle to complete itself, thereby presenting the child with another opportunity. Ex: 1) Student makes a demand instead of a request. The student can try the request again next hour, next day, etc., depending on the cycle.

Teacher as Historian: Given AD students' fragmented time perception, it can be very helpful for teachers to act as historians. This role involves teachers reminding AD students, at moments, of past events and the student's choices that have led both to successful and unsuccessful outcomes. This role of historian can be particularly useful in helping the student with attachment Insecurities Bridge the delay between completing academic work and later recognition for the effort. The teacher can remind the AD student of having waited in the past for approval that was enjoyed or of having made a future plan that worked out. The capacity to wait can also be defined as something that makes people stronger, and strength carries currency for AD students

given its relationship to protection. When functioning as historian, teachers should simply convey the relevant data from past experience and remind the AD student that the choice is his now whether to make use of this data or not in the present. Teachers should not convey an investment in which choice the student makes as that increases the odds of an oppositional choice- just a neutral stance of providing information.

Rules: Approach children with impaired attachment in a matter-of-fact, firm, but not hostile, tone of voice. Directions should be phrased as directions and not as questions (Example: “Do...” vs. “Would you...”). 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 “get ready”. Negative directions, like “Don’t...” or “Stop...” can backfire because the unconscious mind does not process negatives. Negatively stated rules actually increase the subconscious focus on the behavior being prohibited. This increases the future probability that the undesirable behavior will reoccur for that is image that has been retained in the brain. There should be an overall expectation communicated that the rules will be learned and followed. In addition, establish the ground rule, ahead of time and always in effect, that the student with attachment problems needs to ask what the rule might be for anything that has never been discussed before. This removes efforts to avoid responsibility, by way of ignorance, from the attachment student’s repertoire. Teachers are also well advised to be skeptical of the attachment 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 give the Ad student a second chance, (usually a significant mistake), it is preferable to suggest to the student, without sarcasm, and that she learn to listen and remember better in the future. That leaves the responsibility for change square in the student’s lap.

Assistance: It is generally unwise to offer an AD student help or advice without first asking the student if she wants it. This question forces the AD student 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 AD student wasn’t interested in solving the problem in the first place. If the student says she does not want advice or assistance, do not offer it. Just drop the subject and move on. This holds the student accountable for the results of her negative answer.

Nonverbal Behavior: Communications research has repeatedly found that in social interaction, body language carries about 50% of the message, vocal characteristics 40%, and the verbal content 10%. These results highlight the importance of tracking nonverbal behavior, a task that is very important to working effectively with AD students. Below are listed the most important elements of nonverbal behavior:

Body position

Gestures and movement of body parts

Head tilt

Breathing: location (abdomen or high in the chest) and rate

Jaw position

Lips: pursed / drawn, sucked inward, corners upturned / downturned

Voice: tone, volume, rate of speech, articulation, fluid vs. staccato, dismembered sentences

Eyes: six broad categories

- 1) Clear / bright-** indicates that the child is present, engaged, in a positively balanced mood and more aware of the big picture.
- 2) Dark-** the eyes appear as if a shadow has fallen across them and this usually reflects anger, rage, or depression.
- 3) Empty-** the eyes appear as voids, giving the impression that “no one is home”. This is the look of depletion, of giving up, and of disconnection from self and the environment.
- 4) Steely / piercing-** the eyes appear focused outwards with an intensity that seems to “look right through” an observer. This is the gaze of hypervigilance and of focusing on individual details. It telegraphs anxiety and distrust.
- 5) Mirrors-** The surface of the eyes appears only as a reflective surface that masks anything beneath it such that an observer is essentially, shut out. The basic message is, “I don’t want you to see me.”
- 6) Receptive:** These are the eyes of the infant just taking in or absorbing the immediate world like a sponge. This, in many ways, is the gold standard of attachment work.

Eye contact: AD students tend to be eye-contact avoidant and this perpetuates their distrust of the adult world. Eye contact, on the other hand, facilitates interpersonal trust and supports the management of attention. Thus, it is important to encourage eye contact when speaking with AD students, more so than the average student. Depending on the context, this can be done with a verbal cues such as “eyes on me” or “look at my eyes” (more precise), or a nonverbal cue like pointing at the student’s eyes and then the teacher’s eyes. Some flexibility on the teacher’s part is important as an absolute demand for eye contact will only degenerate into a power struggle that the teacher cannot win and injects unhelpful tension into the idea of eye contact. It is also important to remember that extended eye contact in a relationship with a power differential, such as teacher-student, tends to make the one with less power feel defensive. Depending on context, expressing appreciation, verbally or nonverbally, when eye contact is given, will likely promote more of it.

Teachers' Nonverbal Behavior: Due to their hypervigilance, AD students are exquisitely sensitive to the nonverbal dimension of teachers' interactions with them. This places a demand on teachers (and other adults) to teach themselves to be attuned to their own nonverbal communication. A careless look of annoyance or an edge of irritation in the voice will sabotage the most technically elegant intervention. This occurs because the nervous system processes nonverbal behavior faster than verbal information. Hence, the students' reaction to the nonverbal cues will already be in motion before the verbal message has been interpreted.

Emotional/Behavioral Regulation (De-escalation): Verbal input, by its nature, is stimulating, and as such, it is a poor method to help AD students relax when they become emotionally escalated. Statements like "calm down", "relax", "it's not a big deal" are often counterproductive as the AD student interprets them as simply controlling. This will engender a stronger behavioral pushback and further the escalation. Thus, in the face of rising emotion, conversation should be cut back, slowed down, packaged succinctly, and done in a softer voice. Giving the child verbal and physical space is usually helpful as well. Asking what just happened, early in the escalation cycle, can also be effective.

Belief vs. Truth: Instruction in the difference between belief and truth is useful for AD students (and the entire class for that matter). The central idea is that people frequently believe things that aren't true and disbelieve things that are. What a student believes and what is true don't necessarily have anything to do with each other. This becomes the basis for suggesting that AD students may be fooling themselves into thinking that some things are true just because they believe it. This provides a springboard for beginning to gently prod AD students' typically maladaptive belief systems.

Challenging beliefs: Rather than challenging a belief directly, which is rarely effective, invite AD students to flip the belief into its opposite and then verbalize it. This is almost always met with resistance which reflects the emotional investment in the belief. That resistance can be pointed out as indicating that the opposite idea is an uncomfortable one. Ask AD students to describe how things would be if "the opposite of what you believe now is true?" This usually meets with more resistance, which can again be pointed out. Now there is a clear basis to suggest that the student needs to keep the belief, true or not, which shifts the focus from what's true about the outer world to what's true about the AD student's inner world. The suggestion can then be made that it will be of much more benefit to the AD students to notice that they retain their belief no matter what is happening in the situation around them.

Fairness / Unfairness: Defining fairness as meaning all students will be treated the same in the classroom, is a serious mistake strategically, not only with AD students, but with children in general. AD students will use such an application of the fairness principle to generate tales of unfair treatment which, all too often, start 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. The most unproductive response a teacher can select is to engage in a debate about whether things were “fair” or not. This concept of fairness is often raised by AD students (and often by children in general) as a rationale to get the teacher to either “do” or “not do” something. This can be effectively handled by defining “fair / unfair” as code language for one of the following: 1) “things aren’t going the way I want them to”, or 2) “I don’t want to be held responsible for my behavior”; and the teacher wondering aloud, if one of these is the real agenda here.

The train of expectations: At the level of the nervous system, there is a difference between a desire/wish and an expectation. An expectation has more momentum and stronger feelings attached to it than does a wish. This is reflected in the greater disappointment that accompanies an unmet expectation vs. an unmet wish. For AD students, with their weak emotional regulatory skills, avoiding disappointed expectations is a key prevention skill, as unmet expectations run a high risk of generating an emotional outburst. This is a challenge, as AD students can read expectations into circumstances that aren’t absolutely clear. That’s when the Train of Expectations leaves the station... The goal is to keep the train from leaving in the first place. This involves teachers being very clear with their language, about whether something will happen or not. If things are indefinite, then it is important to tell the AD student that “indefinite” is not the same as “yes” and therefore the student should not make up her mind that the answer is yes. Instead she needs to tell herself that it might or might not happen, and if it doesn’t, she can manage it without an outburst.

Restitution: Students with impaired attachments generally have little or no understanding of the concept of restitution, and this is a very important relational skill for them to learn. When an insecurely attached student 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 affect self-esteem.

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