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OIL & 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 that are common results of their histories of early 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.

GRATIFICATION: 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 gratifications. AD children's focus on gratification in the moment, and distrust of the future and of authority figures, leaves these gratifications stripped of most of their believability, and hence, they tend to be minimally motivating.

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 child'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 child 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. Authority which the AD student sees as unfair, deserves no respect. Now the AD student will feel entitled to be disrespectful to such an "untrustworthy" authority figure. Because teachers must deal with the numbers presented by a classroom, as opposed to a family, the authority of teachers can appear even more arbitrary and persecutory to AD children than parental authority. When teachers set limits for the greater good of the whole class, this is apt to make little sense to the AD student, as AD children typically have no concept of "the common good".

OMNISCIENCE: A potential block to learning comes from AD children'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 children generally won't acknowledge, just as they won't ask for assistance. They have little or no 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 children's area of greatest vulnerability thereby avoiding provoking 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 seeing the AD student as being overall, more functional than is truly the case.

SCHOOL / HOME SPLIT: AD children 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 parental figure and may 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

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS: AD children are quite capable of full-blown temper outbursts at school. 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. Such extreme outbursts usually indicate that the child's anxiety has escalated, and the outburst is a desperate attempt to ward off the perceived threat. AD children can get to this level of anxiety in as little 1-2 minutes if they perceive a danger of sufficient magnitude.

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 child to maintain a view of adults as untrustworthy and justifies the child's strivings for control.

REPETITIVE BEHAVIORS: These are frequently occurring minor infractions, such as interrupting, noisemaking, or asking excessive questions, that 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, repetitive behaviors can be "probes" that the AD child sends out into the environment to acquire information about the situation. From others' reactions to these "behavioral probes", AD children begin to piece together how they will handle themselves in that situation

or with a certain person. When the student feels confident that he knows how to maneuver in the classroom, any honeymoon that might have occurred will be over.

REGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS: AD children 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, perseverative verbalizations, speaking nonsensical language, making graphic sexual and / or excretory remarks, giddyish forced laughter, and others. These regressive behaviors usually signal an upsurge of anxiety in the child, and they function both as a way to get away from the anxiety as well as to remove the child from the teacher's immediate control which serves to lessen the child's anxiety. Though these behaviors can appear bizarre, they usually do not mean that the child is psychotic at that moment.

BEHAVIORS TOWARDS PEERS: AD children are deliberately provocative towards peers for a variety of reasons. Peers are vulnerable to react, and AD children will see the reaction as proof of their power to control others. Peers will need support and suggestions from adults to learn to minimize their responsiveness to the provocations. Provocative behavior, from an AD child towards peers, is almost impossible to eliminate solely by working with the AD child.

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, the AD student 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. For the next day, the same student 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 student's 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, the student with attachment insecurities cleverly avoids having to confront the reality that there is ability and knowledge greater than hers. Instead, the AD student can keep the omniscient illusion intact that she is the smartest person in the classroom since her work is too elusive for accurate measurement. This illusion supports the AD student's sense of safety in the classroom.

SUPPORT / PRAISE: Children with attachment vulnerabilities commonly have one of four responses to receiving support and/or praise in the school setting: 1) accept the support without any overt reaction; 2) reject the support outright, 3) distrust the praise as an adult trick, or 4) 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. This can strategically create 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.

INTERVENTIONS: WHAT IS LESS LIKELY TO WORK

COMMUNICATION / QUESTIONS: Five questions to almost never ask children with attachment problems:

”Did you...?”

”Why did you...?”

“What could you have done differently?”

“Do you remember...?”

“What did you say?”

Children who are insecurely attached are usually skilled at composing eloquent answers that mean absolutely nothing, as part of their self-protective skills. Question to an these children are too often invitations to trick an adult. It works much better to phrase statements as guesses and let them react to the guess. (Example: rather than “Did you break your pencil ?” try “I think you broke your pencil to get out of doing your work.”). Attachment children’s reactions to guesses often tell you much more than their answers to questions.

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 tend to facilitate change. Evaluations oversimplify and rest on the assumption that labeling a behavior will lead to a change. The behavior of AD children is too complex to be accurately captured by "either / or" categories. Such evaluative labels imply that the child either does not know, or has forgotten, that the behavior in question is “inappropriate”. This is rarely the case with AD children. The behavior’s strategic purpose trumps any evaluative label, The teacher’s use of such values judgments is likely to reinforce the AD child’s belief that he has the teacher outsmarted. This only increases anxiety.

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 an student with attachment problems. Attachment children 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. Children with attachment problems may even use behavior management systems as bait to draw the adults into unproductive discussions about how to sustain progress.

ZERO TOLERANCE: Consistent zero tolerance stances run a high risk of dragging the teacher into a cycle of escalating misbehavior followed by increasingly severe consequences. Zero tolerance does not allow the teacher sufficient creative flexibility to approach the AD child in a more unpredictable way that can circumvent an emotional escalation.

TEACHERS AND PARENTS: 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. Teachers then become “unholy allies” in the AD student’s emotional struggle with their parents. In addition, leaving it to parents and home to impose consequences for school infractions runs the risk of setting the parents up to be the “heavies”, unless this has been worked out ahead of time. Otherwise, conflict at home will likely be inflamed and this won’t help anything at school.

“REASONABLE” CONVERSATIONS: Challenging the AD child's perspective with "objective evidence" in order to persuade her that her thinking is somehow incorrect tends to be futile. This approach assumes that the teacher and child share a common view of "reality"- not likely true. The teacher's view is apt to make little or no sense to the AD child. In fact, the AD child is apt to see a reasonable approach as a manipulative attempt on the teacher's part to set the child up in some way.

INTERVENTIONS: WHAT IS MORE LIKELY TO WORK

BELIEF VS. TRUTH: Explaining the difference between belief and truth is useful. The central ideas are that people frequently believe things that aren't true and disbelieve things that are true. What someone believes and what is true don't necessarily have anything to do with each other. This then becomes the basis for suggesting that the AD child may be fooling herself into thinking that some things are true just because she believes them. This can further promote some self-reflection on the child's part.

CHALLENGING BELIEFS: Rather than challenging a belief directly, which is rarely effective, invite the child to flip the belief into its opposite and then verbalize it. This is almost always met with enormous resistance which reflects the emotional investment in the belief. That resistance can be pointed out along with the suggestion that the opposite idea is an uncomfortable one. Ask the child 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 child needs to keep the belief for some reason, true or not, which shifts the focus from what's true about the outer world to what's true about the child's inner world. The final step can be to develop an experiment to test the belief out. Ask the child to predict what else will happen if the current belief really is true. It then becomes incumbent on the adults to keep track of relevant events going forward and allow the future to "tell the story". The teacher should state that if the future proves her wrong, she will acknowledge that and congratulate the child on being right all along. The implication here, though it should go unstated, is that the same is expected of the child if the future story goes the opposite way. The teacher then needs to bring this back up after some future data has been gathered.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR BELIEF: Before offering an AD child love or reassurance or a complement, ask first if the child would believe it. If this is answered affirmatively, then the adult should follow through. If answered negatively, accept the child's answer, and withhold the offering. This is an implicit lesson in accountability for what is believed, or not. It also avoids giving AD children yet one more opportunity to reject caring from an adult, an opportunity they hardly need. This should be used on an intermittent basis, as it is also helpful for adults to offer positive input independent of what the child will do with it.

FAIRNESS / UNFAIRNESS: Defining fairness as meaning all students will be treated the same in the classroom, is a serious mistake strategically, not only with children with attachment difficulties, but in general. The child with attachment difficulties will learn to 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. In addition, this subject of fairness is often raised by children with attachment insecurities (and often by children in general) as a rationale to get the adults 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". Fairness then, is often sophisticated wording for pursuing one or both of these agendas. The most unproductive response is to engage the child in a debate about whether things were "fair" or not.

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 children, 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 children are quite liable to read expectations into circumstances that

aren't absolutely clear. That's when the Train of Expectations leaves the station, and the goal is to keep the train from leaving in the first place. This involves the adults 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 child that "indefinite" is not the same as "yes" and therefore the child should not make up their mind that the answer is yes. Instead they need to tell themselves that it might or might not happen, and if it doesn't they can manage it without an outburst.

EYE CONTACT: Students with attachment problems tend to be eye-contact avoidant. Eye contact is a key nonverbal component of developing interpersonal trust and attachment children's avoidance of it helps to perpetuate their mistrust. Thus, it is important to encourage eye contact when speaking with them, and moreso than the average student. Some flexibility here on the teacher's part is important as an absolute demand for eye contact in all instances will only degenerate into a power struggle that the teacher cannot win. Prompts on an intermittent basis and expressed appreciation when the student gives eye contact, is the optimal balance.

CHOICE: Teaching the concept of choice. Choice is an idea that is often absent in AD student's thinking. It is not simply that they refuse to accept responsibility- the idea of people making choices and having responsibility literally makes no sense to many AD children. They need to have it pointed out to them, matter-of-factly, over and over, that they are making choices all the time. Describe their behavior on an ongoing basis, as products of their underlying choices, for better or worse. This helps to block the predominant pattern of AD students to attribute all of their behavior to external factors. When choices are in the poor category, avoid the temptation to encourage better choices in the future. This is quicksand. The teacher cannot elicit improved choices the child does not wish to make. Simply continue to hold the student accountable for the choices she does make, good and bad.

OMNISCIENCE: Like the concept of choice, challenging the AD child's belief in his omniscient knowledge will require many repetitions to achieve results. This belief needs to be challenged at school, at home, and in therapy. These challenges need to be gentle and not heavy-handed, for there is much anxiety held in check by this belief. At school, such challenges should occur in contexts of semi-privacy and not in the middle of the classroom. Such challenges can take the form of wondering whether the child himself really believes he knows everything vs. directly telling him that he doesn't. That will only generate defensiveness. One can also ask whether believing this helps the student to feel safer, more relaxed, more in control.

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 negative directions like "Don't..." or "Stop...". Rules need to be stated proactively because the unconscious mind does not process negatives. Negatively stated rules actually increase subconscious focus on the behavior being prohibited. This increases the future probability that the undesirable behavior will reoccur. 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 rules might be for anything that has never been discussed before. This removes efforts to avoid responsibility, by way of ignorance, from the attachment child'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 excuse the student from the rule (usually a significant mistake), it is preferable to suggest to the student, without sarcasm, that she learn to listen and remember better in the future. That leaves the responsibility for change square in the student's lap.

CONSEQUENCES: Students with AD need clear structure more than the average student if they are to develop any trust in the teacher. In the absence of trust, AD students will not perform academically with any reliability. Multiple warnings, negotiated bargains, or motivational pep talks are all risky propositions. However, students with attachment difficulties are also prone to perceiving discipline as intentional humiliation by the teacher. This generates shame and anger which will sabotage performance and compliance. The teacher defensively clarifying his intentions will not help. Instead, acknowledge that receiving the consequence will be difficult for the student and might trigger anger. Nonetheless the teacher has faith in the student's ability to handle the consequence and expects the student to honor it.

APPRECIATION/PRAISE: After an child with impaired attachment makes a cooperative choice, appreciation is often a better response than praise. Appreciation puts teacher and child on the same level for that interaction. Praise, on the other hand, can suggest that the one offering the praise (teacher) is the more powerful one, and therefore able to pass judgment on the less powerful one (student). Praise is, after all, every bit as much a judgment as is criticism. Praise can run the risk of the student feeling the teacher is rubbing his face in "the teacher having won". This can generate resentment which may undo the cooperative decision right then, or may fuel oppositional behavior in the future. Appreciation can avoid those risks and can strengthen the teacher-child relationship. Linking the appreciation to the specific behavior that is its focus is preferable to a generic expression of appreciation.

ASSISTANCE: Never offer an student with attachment insecurities help or advice without first asking the child if she wants it. This question forces the child 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 child wasn't interested in solving the problem in the first place. If the child says she does not want advice or assistance, do not offer it anyway. Just drop the subject and move on. This holds the child accountable for her negative answer.

TEACHERS AND PARENTS: Teachers should follow the parents' lead in matters of behavior management. Parents will almost always have seen behavior far in excess of anything the school will ever see. This gives parents irreplaceable experiential knowledge about working with their child's behavior. The school needs to partner seamlessly with home and parents in order to undercut the attachment child's considerable protective behavior. 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 child, and when that occurs, children with impaired attachment are likely to use "homework" as a stage to play out their attachment related conflicts 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.

TRIANGULATION: This is one of the more damaging hazards that teachers encounter with students with attachment difficulties. Students with attachment difficulties reliably on the lookout for other adults to playoff against their parents so as to make their parents look deficient in some way. Teachers are a favorite choice. Students with attachment problems 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 attachment children, that conclusion is almost always incorrect. With the adoption of the perspective of blaming the parents, the teacher steps 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”. This is the role the teacher plays. 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. The child has gone from victim to perpetrator, the parents from perpetrator to victim, and the teacher from rescuer to perpetrator. This is the nature of a Resuce Triangle. The roles are always shifting over time. Nothing really changes. No healing happens. No one learns anything. It is essential for teachers to learn to recognize the invitation to enter a Resuce Triangle and decline it. What would be much more helpful for the child would be to ask how it is that the child’s behavior is so different at home vs. school and even to suggest that the parents, teacher, and child all sit down to discuss this difference. This sends a message that the teacher won’t allow the child to play “victim” and divide the adults. Of course, in denying the child with attachment problems, the role of “victim”, the teacher will likely become a “perpetrator” in the child’s eyes. But this is the nature of the game at hand- any adult who refuses to support the child in the victim role, becomes a perpetrator by virtue of their refusal. This is part of the box the parents are in. This game can only be broken up by the adults not blaming each other, but supporting each other in exploring the attachment child’s choice to be so very different with different adults. If triangulation is not blocked, its success will amplify the child’s sense of being unsafe even though there may be no behavioral reaction in the moment.

SCHOOL TRICK LIST: “Trick” is a useful word to use to reference AD children’s many self-protective stratagems. Trick is preferable to manipulation, dishonesty, conning, sneakiness, or lying, as it is a more “child-friendly” word that lacks the heavy-handed baggage of these other words. A useful intervention is for the teacher to make a trick list for a given child. As the name implies, a trick list is a list of the child’s repertoire of self-protective strategies. Each item on the list is composed of a behavioral description followed by the word “trick”. For the child who avoids sharing information by saying “I don’t know”, this would appear on the list as the, “I don’t know trick”. This is done in the spirit of description vs. criticism and judgment. This intervention can have a bit of a playful air to it and should acknowledge the child’s creativity in devising such an array of tricks. A trick list has to be compiled over time, as the range of any single child’s tricks doesn’t all emerge at one time. The trick list compiled in school should be shared with parents and therapist as some of the same tricks likely occur in these other settings. Trick lists have multiple uses. Naming and describing the tricks can partially interfere with their use. Having a list can aid teachers in identifying the tricks rather than simply reacting to them on the basis of their surface behavioral appearance. The emergence of a trick is a reliable indicator that the child’s anxiety has just increased. This can be important information for the teacher. Finally, trick lists can be used to teach the child that his use of tricks fuels his distrust of self and others. At some level, AD children know they are being tricky, and this will reinforce their expectation that others will be tricky with him which perpetuates their wariness. Once a list of tricks has been identified for a child, it is constructive to attempt to identify the target the tricks are designed to avoid (examples: sharing information, taking responsibility, insecurity about doing a task, not knowing something, etc). Knowing the targets can help a teacher with prevention in the future as problematic situations can be identified in advance.

TASK COMPLETION: Attachment children’s 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 attachment child’s academic success than the child is. It is best to emphasize the child’s accountability for better and worse choices regarding work and behavior and the results related to each. Describe how the results flow from the attachment student’s choices so it is clear that he is the creator of his own discomfort and not someone else’s victim. One-liners can be useful here. This approach has a better chance of leaving anxiety with the student, where it may be helpful, rather than with the teacher which will most likely benefit no one.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR: Become a good observer of attachment children's nonverbal responses {facial expressions, body position and movements, eyes, voice tone}. There are several qualities to the appearance of the eyes (clear/bright, dark, empty, steely/piercing, mirrors). These are the most accurate signs of what is going on inside the child. If you listen only to what children with attachment difficulties say, you are likely to go in circles.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR: Initially, teachers need to learn to recognize these behaviors as disguised intentional noncompliance and not as “accidents” or “innocent mistakes” or “forgetfulness” or “sincere attempts at compliance”. However, it is a mistake to then to initiate a conversation that is designed to unmask the defiance underneath the superficial compliance. 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 child with attachment problems knows. With behavior, the teacher can choose ignoring or the imposition of consequences, depending upon the form of the passive-aggressive misbehavior. No explanation required- again students with attachment difficulties know what they are doing.

TEACHER AS HISTORIAN: Act as an historian for the child with impaired attachments. Since children with attachment difficulties live in the moment and lack a sequential, linear sense of time, they need adults to remind them of past events and choices the children have made that have led both to successful and unsuccessful outcomes. This supports the child’s coping skills in the present. This role of historian can be particularly useful in helping the child with attachment insecurities bridge the delay in time between completing academic work and later recognition for the effort. The teacher can again remind the AD student of having waited in the past for approval that was enjoyed. Additionally, the capacity to wait can be defined as something that makes people stronger as this may well appeal the attachment child’s intrinsic valuing of strength as a means of self-protection.

TEACHER ABSENCES: Because of their histories of broken attachments, children with attachment vulnerabilities tend to perceive separations as abandonment. Teacher absences, particularly extended ones, are apt to be seen this way. Anxiety and anger are the emotional results. The behavioral outcomes are likely to be experienced by the substitute teacher, whom the student with insecure attachments may well view as being at fault for the teacher’s departure (parallel to how adoptive parents are blamed by the child for having brought about the birth parents’ abandonment of the child). Problems can be minimized by the teacher being clear beforehand, about her absence and return date, and communicating this to 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 student with attachment disorder 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.

RESTITUTION: Children 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 child 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.

COMMUNICATION / ONE-LINERS: Children 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. 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.”
- “I never would have thought of that. Hope it works out.”
- “Hope you get over that.”
- “Do you have a plan ?”
- “If you don’t understand why you have to, after you’re finished, I’ll be glad to explain.”
- “What do you think you will do ?”

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