**Strategies for Classroom Response of Students with Attachment Needs**

*Adapted from Exceptional Teacher’s Factsheet, Brandon University, Manitoba R7A 6A9*

If you have been given this factsheet, it is presumed that you are working with a student who is suspected to have or diagnosed with attachment issues. Generally speaking, children with attachment issues have had experiences in their life at very young ages, which have caused their biological response to relationships and trust to distort. This cognitive distortion is not a choice for these children; they have learned that people whom you are close to also cause pain.

**Insights to possible thoughts inside the child’s head:**

1. I like getting attention. Getting people to respond to me feels good.
2. If people are responding to me, I feel in control, and that feels good too.
3. It’s hard to get attention and to get people to respond to me when I’m just sitting somewhere being good.
4. It’s really easy to get attention if I can get people mad at me.
5. When I can make people lose it, then I’m in control and that feels good.
6. That negative attention is much more high-voltage attention than the positive attention and it’s more exciting as well.
7. The best way for me to get attention (and get my adrenalin fix) is to create a crisis, so everyone is reacting to me.

**Possible accommodations/interventions:**

(Use at your discretion and under supervision from school mental health personnel)

* Keep in consistent contact with the parent(s) and/or caregivers. These children are excellent at triangulating people and can very effectively play a game of “victim, persecutor and rescuer.” This game may involve telling one person bad things about the other person, in order to manipulate and control the attention of a specific person at that moment. The child will always assume the “victim” role.
* A day planner, home note, tracker is not an ideal way of communicating with the guardian. Communication needs to be done directly either in person, by phone or via an email.
* This child will attempt to evoke a power struggle in the smallest of situations; recognize it as such, and don’t allow yourself to be engaged.
* A structured classroom environment, with clear expectations and explicit instructions is a must. Any unstructured moment, leaves an opportunity for control.
* This child needs to feel a sense of control, without such, he/she will attempt to gain in a negative way. The choices need to be provided by the teacher, not by the child. For example, “You may choose to do your math assignment or reading assignment first, but both are expected to be done by the time we go to recess.”
* The goal for this child is to get you to lose your temper. He/she will push the boundaries and limits in order to evoke this response. If you feel as if you need a break, please ask for help. The moment you choose to lose control, the child has learned that he/she has control and can gain it again inside your classroom by exhibiting the same type of negative behavior.
* Maintain strict boundaries. Boundaries are virtually unrecognizable by this child, and they have a need to push even the most personal of topic areas. It is best to be calm, neutral and firm when responding. An example would be, “I do not talk about my family and home when I am teaching school,” rather than, “You know better than to ask me those questions at school.”
* All communication with this student should be calm, direct and positive based.
* Natural consequences, rather than a behavioral reward system work best. Clear expectations and logical, neutrally enforced consequences. For example, “I am sorry you left your coat at home today. You can choose to have recess inside the office, or go outside without your coat.”

Reward positive choice making, and always put the most positive choice option first.

* “Cause and Effect” thinking is typically quite impaired in this child (which is why logical, consistent and natural consequences are most effective). Direct instruction is required for this student, even though it may be painfully oblivious to all the other students. Stating directly what will happen is crucial. For example, “If someone chooses to stab someone with a pencil, then ….will happen.”
* Consult the mental health team at your school to help with a safety plan and/or behavioral plan that can address what the classroom protocol would be for physical/emotional meltdowns. Though this child will see leaving the classroom as a reward, it may be necessary to ensure the safety of others in the immediate environment. (Refer to Escalation Procedure for further details).
* This child will only work with someone they respect, and he/she does not respect someone they can manipulate. Though boundaries will be pushed to extreme limits, once the adult (teacher, etc.) has proven that the consequences are consistent, the extreme behaviors will lessen.