

# Identifying Attachment Disorders

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Children who are securely attached demonstrate an ability to show trust in the world. Initial attachment occurs in the first year of life when the child learns that not only is their primary care giver the source of food but also can comfort them when they are frightened or upset. Disruptions in attachment in the first five years of life can impact the child's development and personality for a lifetime. Disruptions in attachment can occur following the first five years especially if there is a loss of a parent, a move from familiar surroundings and friends, divorce, or a traumatic event.

**Genetic Factors:** Temperament and personality style can play a part in attachment disorders. Some children may be genetically predisposed to having the identified personality traits of those who have attachment disorder.

## **Prenatal Factors:**

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- Drug and alcohol use by the mother
  - Failure of the mother to bond with the child during pregnancy
  - Attempts by the mother to harm and/or abort the fetus
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## **Post-natal Factors:**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Severe neglect of infant needs</li><li>• Physical abuse of infant</li><li>• Infant's prolonged separation from the mother</li><li>• Changes in primary care giver and day care providers</li><li>• Living in an orphanage</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronic ear infections</li><li>• Severe and prolonged colic</li><li>• Chronic pain from other causes</li><li>• Starting day care prior to four weeks of age</li><li>• Maternal depression or physical illness</li></ul> |
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## **Traits:** Children with attachment disorders may show the following traits:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The child can be superficially engaging and charming</li><li>• There is a lack of eye contact with the parent</li><li>• The child can be indiscriminately affectionate with strangers</li><li>• The child is not affectionate or cuddly with the parent</li><li>• The child has been known to be cruel to animals</li><li>• The child has a tendency to steal and has done so from a very early age</li><li>• Child will lie regardless of truth in plain sight</li><li>• Child shows a lack of impulse control and frequently acts hyperactive</li><li>• There is evidence of learning problems</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a lack of cause and effect thinking</li><li>• There is a lack of conscience</li><li>• There are abnormal eating patterns, hoarding of food, eating odd things like flour or baking chocolate</li><li>• Poor peer relationships</li><li>• Preoccupation with fire, blood and gore</li><li>• Persistent nonsense questions or incessant chatter</li><li>• Inappropriately demanding or clingy</li><li>• Abnormal speech patterns</li><li>• False allegations of abuse</li><li>• Presents with a lack of ability to give and receive love</li></ul> |
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Early identification of the potential for attachment problems means early intervention. If the risk factors are known and the traits are present further assessment may be warranted. Programs such as Birth to Three are noted for identifying high risk situations and intervening. Those who are identified later in life are at risk of multiple problems that impact their relationships as well as society in general.