

Trauma-Informed Practices With Children and Adolescents

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ATTACHMENT

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Early childhood attachment determines whether a child's brain, body, sense of self, capacity for relationships, and conscience all develop properly. In the Sanctuary Model we focus on seven key domains of attachment: (1) safety and security, (2) emotional management, (3) learning, (4) communication, (5) participation in relationship, (6) reciprocity and justice, and (7) coping with loss and change. The grandfather of attachment studies, Sir John Bowlby, referred to attachment as creating for the child an "internal working model" that determined the child's view of self and others across the lifespan. We have updated this notion with the idea of an "operating system," with the child's brain and body representing in this metaphor the "hardware," and all that the child learns over time, the "software." We believe that the core issue for traumatized children who present with complex problems is disrupted attachment and that one single therapeutic approach is unlikely to be a sufficient remedy for all that is disrupted in the child's basic operating system because of the intertwined complexity of the developmental impacts. Let's look for a moment at what disrupted attachment frequently does to a child.

When the child has a less than optimal attachment experience as a result of exposure to conditions of toxic stress, the damage to the normal developmental integration of body, brain, mind, and soul can be extensive, but is likely to appear differently in every child. In the Sanctuary Model we group these complex problems in parallel with the main attachment domains: (1) lack of basic safety, security, and trust; (2) lack of emotional management and chronic hyperarousal; (3) learning problems ranging from mild to severe, impaired decision making, problem solving, judgment; (4) poor communication skills; (5) problems with authority ranging from passivity to defiance to bullying; (6) inadequate moral development, impaired sense of reciprocal relationships; and (7) reenactment behaviors, inability to grieve, and inability to imagine future outcomes, including consequences of actions.