



Including Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder in the Sunday School

By Jim Pierson

In the last fifty years, the disability world has become increasingly aware of a condition that prevents children from developing positive relationships with their caregivers. In the *DSM-IV Manual* the condition is labeled Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). While there is a wide range of severity in attachment disorders, the term is applied when the person shows a complete inability to be affectionate, develop a conscience, or trust people.

The causes of RAD are sad. The problem occurs when the child does not attach to the people who care for him. In short, he does not bond. In a typical situation, the baby is hungry. He communicates his need: he cries. His caregiver assesses the need and meets it. As a result the baby learns to rely on and trust his caregiver.

On the other hand, the baby has a need. He communicates his need: he cries. A caregiver does not respond or responds inadequately or inappropriately. Trust does not develop but, instead a kind of rage. The child learns he is in charge of his own life and world.

While there seems to be more awareness of RAD, there is no information about how many cases exist. There are no gender or ethnic distinctions. The thread that runs through the diagnosis is that children who do not bond to their caregivers are the victims. Studies of children in orphanages especially in China and Romania have provided information.

There are three basic causes of RAD:

1. The child is denied any basic emotional need-love, comfort, stimulation.
2. The child's physical needs are ignored.
3. The child's primary caregiver changes often.

A look at the following list will give more insight into the cause of RAD:

- Abuse or neglect
- Untimely death of a caregiver
- Multiple foster care placements
- Illnesses that were not treated
- Poor or inconsistent care
- Poor parenting skills

Because this material will be used by church staff members and volunteers, we need to look at the characteristics the child who has been diagnosed with RAD will display

1. An interesting one is that the child with attachment disorder will appear to be a together, happy, delightful human being but, is covering an angry, unhappy, not together person.
2. The child may talk excessively.
3. The child will lie and steal.
4. The child will destroy property
5. The child will hurt pets.
6. The child may express interest in horrible events.
7. The child has a lot of anger.
8. The child lacks self control.
9. The child has poor self esteem.
10. The child will hold adults/parents at bay.
11. The child enjoys power struggles.
12. The child believes she is not a nice person or worthy of love.
13. The child can be clingy.
14. The child has difficulty giving and accepting loving attention.
15. The child will try to get attention in negative ways.
16. The child does not give eye contact.
17. The child does not get along with age mates.
18. The child asks a lot of senseless questions.
19. Does not pick up on cues.

My, oh my, what is a Sunday school teacher to do?

- First, sincerely love the child and pray that the wonderful love of our Lord will show through you. Know that the child can attach.
- Second, find out all you need to know to make having the child in your classroom successful. For example, you need to know what causes him to respond negatively; you do not need to know all of the details of the situation that caused the attachment problem.
- Third, work with the parents. Do what they do at home so the child's progress will not be reversed. For example, if the children's department is less structured than the child's home, be sure the child has a similar structure in class.
- Fourth, tell teachers and volunteers to explain to the child that they will not be there every Sunday. Tell the child who will be there when they are absent. They have experienced having adults disappear without a word or having three or four foster parents in a year.
- Fifth, communicate the need for providing a secure place. That can happen by being consistent, available, open, warm, sensitive, non judgmental, and by listening, giving eye contact, and touching.
- Sixth, ask the parents to let you know if there has been a good day or a bad day. Knowing can help prepare the staff for what to expect.
- Fifth, help the typical students in the class understand their classmate's behavior.
- Sixth, provide enough help in the classroom. One-on-one is a good rule of thumb.
- Seventh, share information about the child with other teachers and volunteers. It is necessary for continuity and for consistency which the child lacks.
- Eighth, work closely with the family. In most cases, it will be an adoptive or foster care family.

At my home church, we have included a couple of children with RAD. Knowing the plan to follow with him will be helpful. The plan follows:

- When he is in the classroom, a volunteer will be assigned to him.
- Two volunteers will be trained in restraint techniques in the event his behaviors become extreme. The restraint will last as long as it takes his parent/caregiver to get him.
- His parent/caregiver will be provided with a pager in the event he needs to be removed.

Putting the child under the influence of loving, caring teachers will be a positive in the life of a child with RAD.

Useful materials on RAD are available online. The following sources will provide additional information.

<http://www.emedicine.com/ped/topic2646.htm>

http://www.attachmentdisorder.net/What_is_attachment_disorder.htm

<http://www.attach.org/whatisattachment.htm>

<http://www.radzebra.org>

Exceptional Teaching Website Resources

We recently received this question regarding *Exceptional Teaching Online*:

Are there resources available without listening to the video?

The answer is yes. However, the video is the core of *Exceptional Teaching Online*. It provides a wealth of information, personal experiences, and guidance for disability ministry.....

Visit the CCFH Blog at www.ccfh.org for the complete answer to this question.

Accessibility Summit 2007

Access Ministry - McLean Bible Church,
Tyson Corner, Virginia
March 23 and 24, 2007

For more information visit: www.mcleanbible.org (Access Ministry)
or call 703-770-2918

