

PACT

(Pre/Post Adoption Consulting and Training)

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DSM IV Reactive Attachment Disorder in Infancy and Early Childhood

“Markedly disturbed and developmentally inappropriate social relatedness in most contexts, beginning before age 5 years, as evidenced either by:

- (1) persistent failure to initiate or respond in a developmentally appropriate fashion to most social interactions, as manifest by excessively inhibited, hypervigilant, or highly ambivalent and contradictory responses (eg. the child responds to caregivers with a mixture of approach, avoidance, and resistance to comforting, or may exhibit frozen watchfulness.)
- (2) diffuse attachments manifested by indiscriminate sociability with marked inability to exhibit appropriate selective attachments.

It is presumed that his disorder is caused by emotional and/or physical neglect and/or multiple changes of the primary caregiver.”

Above is the description in the DSM IV for RAD

It is my belief that this is less a diagnosis, than it is a normal description of a child's lack of trust and belief in safety. The reactions that these children have are normal survival instincts that have set in and need to be altered. The therapy for this alteration is much less about the child, than it is about the caregiver. We see great success with the appropriate help and the ability of the caregiver to provide the attachment style and strategies on his/her side that will allow the child to reframe his/her bad experience into one that will be different.

In our ‘home study’ of pre-adoptive parents, we might also assess their attachment style and their ability to be consistent and structured in providing a sense of safety and the correct strategies for a child with these issues. Since a very large number of our public adoptions are of children who have had multiple moves and losses and neglect or abuse and since a growing number of our international adoptions have even more probability of the above, it is in our best interest to provide education, training, support, and celebration of these parents who are choosing to take on the challenge of attaching with child who needs a family and a new experience of safety and love.

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