

The Evolution of Attachment Therapy

By Dianne Allred and Gregory C. Keck, PhD

We've been hearing some confusion being expressed by folks across the country regarding attachment work, specific techniques, and "who" does "what."

There are many attachment therapists and attachment programs in Colorado, and a growing number around the country. Each practitioner has his/her own philosophies and methods, which may or may not be similar to others who are also doing attachment work.

For example, there seems to be a fair amount of confusion and misinformation about a therapeutic technique called "holding therapy." Over the years, therapists have developed their own versions of this technique (which often don't even resemble the original holding therapy), but most of them call it by the same name. Television programs which have depicted particular methods of certain therapists, have misled the public into believing that everything called holding therapy looks the same, and is practiced in the same way - by every therapist - for every child.

Many people have also been misinformed by well meaning child activists who have either never actually seen our work, or have seen small clips of old tapes taken completely out of context. They have mistakenly generalized all attachment therapies and therapists. As a result of these overzealous attempts to protect (and the passing on of outdated or incorrect information), some children and families may not get the help they need.

Like any other field of work, attachment therapy has evolved with time. Techniques that worked with children 25 (or even 5) years ago have evolved into different techniques that have been developed to help children today. Methods that will be used 5 or 10 years from now might look entirely different as well.

Constant research, study and self-evaluation is necessary to be able to find the best ways of reaching each child's heart. At Institute for Attachment and Child Development, and at The Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio, a thorough assessment is done of each child and family. Therapeutic and parenting techniques are designed around the needs of that family. These may include; reparenting, inner child work, cognitive restructuring, psychodrama, holding therapy, EMDR, sensory integration work, auditory reprocessing, offender treatment, therapeutic foster parenting, and/or a number of other methods that can be accessed to facilitate healing.

All work is done in a safe, nurturing manner and environment, by highly skilled professionals.

When holding therapy is used, the therapists cradle the child in their arms, much the same way you would hold a small infant.

All of the key components of bonding are present: eye contact, smiles, touch, movement, voice. This facilitates "connection," physically, verbally, visually and emotionally. It recreates the feeling of security that a baby experiences with a nurturing, consistent caretaker.

It also initiates the reprocessing of the infant bonding cycle, which was interrupted for children with attachment disorder. It allows the child to safely release, and receive help to resolve, the emotional trauma which has prevented them from developing trust and love and the ability to experience joy in their lives.

Some people have referred to holding therapy as "rage reduction" therapy. This has been a source of much misinformation, as well. We think it is a limited description of what is accomplished during the therapeutic process. While reducing rage that a child may be feeling is a desirable and necessary outcome, not all children who have attachment issues operate out of a rage state. For those who do, the releasing process helps to clear away the rubble so they can begin to experience other feelings. Emotions that they often attempt to ignore - sadness, hurt and fear - can surface within a safe context, with safe people.

The majority of the process is spent using a variety of other interventions and strategies to facilitate healing of core issues of abandonment, grief and loss. to opening their hearts to trust and love, developing reciprocal relationships and responsible behavior.

Institute for Attachment and Child Development, Inc. has been involved in Attachment Therapy since 1972. Next year will be ACE's 25th anniversary of helping children and families. The mission of the center is "...a commitment to transforming the lives of children with attachment disorder and their families, and promoting healthy parent/child attachments."

The Institute published book, "Give Them Roots, Then Let Them Fly," is available by calling the office of Institute for Attachment and Child Development.

The Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio has been doing Attachment Therapy since 1990. It has an adoption sensitive focus, and strives to support the adoptive family. Maintaining adoptive families is a clear focus, as children who grow up in institutional or other non-permanent situations are consistently over-represented in both the penal system and the homeless population. ABC of Ohio also provides training and educational services to a wide array of parents and professional groups in an effort to familiarize people with the unique difficulties associated with children/adolescents experiencing attachment difficulties.

Dr. Greg Keck and Regina Kupecky, LSW, have published two books, "Adopting the Hurt Child," and "Parenting the Hurt Child" both available through bookstores as well as through their office. Anyone with questions about the programs or therapeutic techniques is invited to call Institute for Attachment and Child Development at (303) 674-1910, or The Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio at (216) 230-1960.