

# What is RAD?

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## Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder) is found in children under 18 years of age who have not attached to a primary caregiver during the first two years of life. Erik Erikson in his 8 stages of Psychosocial Development identifies this phase of life as Trust vs. Mistrust. If a child has not learned to trust their primary caregiver, they will learn that adults are to be mistrusted. This belief manifests not only in childhood but adulthood as well.

While the belief can be reversed, it takes a number of years for a child who learns to mistrust adults to then learn to trust them. As a result, the RAD child will display a Fight or Flight response to any

situation in which they feel out of control or feel they cannot trust the adult. It is essential that the primary caregiver, the teachers, and other influential adults in the child's life consistently and persistently reassure the child that they will continue to care for them. Threats of sending the child away are counterproductive as the child who most likely already experienced a change in caregivers will not trust the current caregiver.

Rather encouragement, unconditional love, a safe environment, and gentle physical touch provide a child with the potential to learn to trust adults. A child cannot be made to trust adults, it is a choice that they must

choose and trying to force a child to make this decision will backfire and cause even more distrust. For the child, they will perceive all efforts to control them as dangerous and threatening and as a result will take measures to protect themselves against harm. By nature, humans try to protect themselves from perceived harm and the RAD child tends to perceive more harm than other children due to their lack of attachment.



## Signs and Symptoms of RAD

Here are the signs and symptoms of a RAD child (Note—the child does not have to display all of the signs in order to be properly diagnosed):

- ◆ Superficially engaging and charming
- ◆ Lack of eye contact when requested
- ◆ Overly and inappropriately affectionate with strangers
- ◆ Unequally affectionate with parents
- ◆ Destructive to self, others, and material things (includes being accident prone)
- ◆ Cruelty to animals
- ◆ Lying about obvious things
- ◆ Stealing
- ◆ No impulse controls
- ◆ Learning lags without appearance of a learning disorder
- ◆ No cause and effect thinking; does things with recognizing consequences
- ◆ Lack of conscience
- ◆ Abnormal eating patterns; hoarding of food
- ◆ Poor peer relationships
- ◆ Preoccupation with fire
- ◆ Preoccupation with blood and gore
- ◆ Persistent nonsense questions and chatter
- ◆ Inappropriately demanding, clingy, or temper tantrums
- ◆ Abnormal speech patterns
- ◆ Triangulation of adults, especially with parents but also extends to teachers
- ◆ False allegations of abuse
- ◆ Presumptive entitlement issues
- ◆ Parents appear hostile and angry

# Classroom Accommodations

Some of these accommodations are difficult but if you apply these strategies with empathy instead of anger, the RAD child will respond better.

Strategies for you:

- Do not show intense emotions with the child no matter how you feel in the moment as these emotions are seen as your area of weakness which can be later manipulated by the child.
- This is not personal, so don't take it that way.
- Recognize that you have control in your classroom; do not give control to the child.
- Focus first on the little problems rather than tackling the bigger problems to gain the child's trust.
- Use one sentence responses to avoid power struggles such as, "Too bad", "I'm sad for you", "That's interesting", "I know you can handle it", "Thanks for the honest answer", "How are you going to handle this next time", "I listen to one person at a time", "Thanks for sharing", and "I know you hate to write".
- Do not argue with the child. "I respect you too much to argue."
- Stay calm and model desired behavior.
- If you want good eye contact, you must model it first with the child.
- Remember the child must choose to modify their behavior, you cannot force this issue.

Strategies for the classroom:

- Use reverse positives such as, "I see you did your homework, did you get aliens to help you?" Humor is very effective.
- Avoid statements like, "You never work," "You are too smart," or "You did not study."
- Use "yes" statements instead of "no". "Yes you can go draw just as soon as your math is finished."
- Do not set unreasonable expectations; expectations for a RAD

child are different than for other children. The child will act out during the day so don't expect different.

- Do not give the child a second chance, consequences must happen the first time but must be appropriate and fair. Do not give warnings, just state your expectations and expect they will be followed.
- Whenever possible, use actions such as removing dangerous things (running with scissors) instead of lectures (why this is bad).
- Recognize child's control tactics of interrupting, asking for repeat instructions, asking to leave classroom, getting out of their seat, walking ahead of an adult, mumbling, ignoring, hitting, stealing, lying, learned helplessness and not turning in work but do not address every single one. You can recognize an attempt at control without give consequences for every time. Too much discipline can be as bad as too little.
- Overemphasize positive behaviors by exclaiming, "Oh no! Don't do this to me! Stop doing your homework! My heart can't take this!"
- Tell the child to do what they normally do to minimize power struggles. "You are going to have a huge temper tantrum when I ask you to complete this math assignment." This takes all the joy out challenging your authority.
- Have regular parent-teacher meetings at least two times per year to maintain good contact and monthly emails.
- Do not send daily notes home to the parents. Behavior that needs correction at school should be handled at school. Parents should not be adding additional correction at home.
- Be respectful of the child and provide gentle reassuring touch when appropriate. Warm greetings, a gentle touch on the arm to reas-

sure, and hugging child back only if initiated by the child are all helpful.

Strategies for discipline:

- Allow child to experience natural consequences such as being hungry because they threw their lunch away.
- Behavior modification such as prizes does not work; the child will manipulate the system to gain control.
- Punishment produces resentment, retaliation, or retreat into sneakiness so use punishment as little as possible. Rather, state consequences in a positive way like, "How lucky you are that you get to spend extra time with me to finish your work today."
- When a good choice is made by the child, recognize it but do not reward it. Child should not be rewarded for doing what is expected; rather they should be rewarded for achieving above their expectations which is different from other children.
- Consequences for inappropriate behavior must be given without anger, lectures, or sarcastic statements.
- When the child steals, two times the value of the property stolen must be given back. A child can complete chores in the classroom to work the stolen property off.
- When the child lies, play along at first to see how far they take it then apply logic to dismantle the lies. Do not show anger and do not lecture.
- If the child harms themselves or another student, do not ask "Why did you do that?" rather recognized that they might have been harmed as well at some point. Instead state the obvious emotion, "I see that you are angry with \_\_\_\_, I do not harm you when I am angry."