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Book Review from *Relational CYC Practice journal*

Rygaard, Niels P. (2005). *Severe attachment disorder in childhood*. Springer New York/Springer Wien.

The author presented a workshop at the recent International CYC Conference in Montreal, which was highly praised by participants. He has worked as a clinical psychologist in Denmark for many years with children and youth with Attachment Disorder and shares the wisdom he has developed in this recent book.

The book begins with a readable description of attachment disorder and the basic issues for our focus as helpers. He describes the poorly attached child as being pre-social rather than anti-social. The “difficult to live with” behaviors of these children and youth are described well and the focus is on creating healthy environments in both foster care and residential settings.

AD children have experienced very damaging parenting at an early age, and the 0-3 year age is the critical period. Abuse in various forms is typical for AD children and the developmental lags and limited abilities that result are often misunderstood by future care givers. These children have had parents that act like children at the time in their lives that caring adults are most needed. Emotionally these children exhibit low frustration tolerance, they consume both things and people from a pure survival instinct and have powerful and swiftly changing emotional states or no emotions at all.

The book describes strategies for caring for AD children at different ages, infancy, 3-6 years, school-age years, and teen years. Some very practical, as well as theoretical, information is provided for each stage. The two biggest stumbling blocks for adult care givers are overestimating the developmental abilities of these children and trying to increase intimacy in crisis situations when the opposite response is needed. Clear behavior management ideas are presented throughout the book.

Chapters are specifically titled and organized around age range or problem focus. He describes the issues for these AD youth in the classroom, giving the teaching staff some very practical advice. The daily struggles of AD youth in the home and how we can minimize the confusion and conflicts are also presented. I found the description of teens to be very insightful, he sees AD teens believing that they will be grown up with very little effort expended on their part and that sexual behavior and drug use will be major concerns for caregivers of these teens. He states that the normal regression to earlier developmental stage issues of the early teen period creates increased stress on AD teens. There is a very powerful description “... (the) problem of the youth can now be re-defined as being very young and very experienced at the same time or as having received so many different gifts that it is almost impossible to make use of them or assemble them into a whole.”(p.167)

There is a separate chapter on AD youth who have been sexually abused and ways to break the cycle of becoming an abuser. Safety issues for both youth and staff are covered well.

The final three chapters deal with staff development and training, team building for a residential staff as well as supervision strategies. Adults work with attachment dynamics will regress themselves and will need support and supervision to handle these issues. The author believes it takes 2-5 years to develop through the growth stages required and describes the thinking patterns that a new worker goes through in that time. There are many valuable ideas for supervisors and trainers also.

I recommend this book as a serious read for the professional who is dealing with AD youth or supporting foster parents who struggle with this problem. We all work with attachment damaged youth in most CYC settings and this resource is a valuable addition to the available literature.

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