

Depression And Parenting A Child with Attachment Difficulties

Beverly Baker White, MA, LPC

I see "IT" in my office every day. I hear "IT" repeatedly, yet no one directly addresses "IT". "IT" is the low-grade depression experienced by many parents of a child with attachment difficulties. The symptoms vary from very mild generalized feelings of not knowing what's wrong to a full-blown feeling that "I give up. If I have to live the rest of my life like this, then I want out". Out means things like leaving the marriage, relinquishing the child(ren), and (in rare cases) feelings of suicide. Some of the most common and notable signs of depression include: low energy; low to no motivation; changes in sleeping and eating patterns; feelings of ambivalence; an increase in irritability (not due to PMS or other factors); decreased self-esteem; decreased interest in sex; decreasing ability to focus and concentrate; memory problems; and sometimes thoughts of suicide or the intention to commit suicide.

Since so much of the energy of the parents of these children is extended toward the child, parents most often fail to see that they aren't saving enough or giving enough time and attention to their own needs. Once they do take notice that they have slipped into a depressive state, they typically blame themselves. The only thing they could be at fault for is forgetting to take care of themselves while parenting their children.

Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder don't learn reciprocity during the first year of life. Therefore, they don't function as reciprocal human beings. Parents end up giving and giving to the child, without getting anything back and being emotionally replenished.

Most of us who come from the 50's generation were taught by our parents to sacrifice for our children, and to put the needs of our children first. This philosophy will most assuredly lead us into the black hole of depression when parenting children who don't reciprocate. It can put us into a less than effective and co-dependent role when parenting our other children who do reciprocate.

Children with attachment and bonding difficulties are experts at controlling even the most meaningless situations. Their eternal vigil to obtain and stay in control leaves parents in a position of being continually tested and challenged for the role of parent. Since the attachment disordered child wants to be his/her own parent (boss), parents are constantly exerting energy to maintain their appropriate place and job as parent. Out of an unconscious fear that not being in control means not surviving, the child works overtime to wrest control from the parents. Thus, parents must unconsciously work overtime to stay one step ahead of the child, and wonder why, on a conscious level, they feel so exhausted all the time.

If you often find yourself wondering "what's wrong", or "why don't I feel better about my parenting skills" (or about my life), then it's time to recognize that the challenges of parenting your child with attachment difficulties may be creating a low-grade depression for you. Start talking to your spouse, friends, clergy, therapist, and/or other parents. Get some support and relief. Assert yourself to reach out and connect with others who can understand your situation and relate to your feelings. Otherwise, you may find yourself unable to function as a parent, or worse.

http://www.instituteforattachment.org/articles/article_31.htm