

OVERVIEW FOR SESSION II ATTACHMENT, SEPARATION AND LOSS

Trainer's Instructions Session II

Instructions:

The title of this module is "Attachment, Separation, and Loss." The emphasis, however, is on attachment. Separation and loss are studied as factors that impede healthy attachment.

This module has three main components:

- understanding secure attachment
- understanding insecure attachment
- developing a securely attached relationship with a child.

In the first session, the focus was on understanding secure attachment. The closing information on separation and loss introduced understanding insecure attachment and will be covered in more detail in this session. Developing a securely attached relationship with a child will also be addressed in this session.

2. EMPATHY FOR THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE - PERSONAL LOSS

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can express empathy for the child in care's experience and for the child's feelings of confusion, sadness, anxiety, and anger when separation or loss occurs.

Materials:

Overheads

- Overhead #12 Questions for Discussion

Instructions:

One of the difficulties children in care may experience when developing secure attachments is the loss they experience when they are separated from their parents or primary caregivers. This difficulty in attachment formation is intensified for those children who have been moved from home to home and have experienced a succession of losses.

The purpose of this exercise is to help you empathize with the losses children in your care may have suffered and understand the impact this may have on their behaviour.

Exercise:

This exercise is about personal loss and its relationship to attachment.

Sit back, relax, and make yourself comfortable. Take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds, and then let it go. At your own pace, continue to take a few more deep breaths, holding them for a few seconds and then letting them go - letting go of the tension in your body as you exhale.

I invite you now to recall someone or something you felt very attached to and then lost. Perhaps it was a personal belonging that had great personal meaning for you. Perhaps

it was a pet or a loved one. Perhaps it was the person you were attached to as a child whom you talked about earlier today. Maybe the loss was through death, or divorce, or someone moving. Maybe, in the case of a pet or a personal belonging, it was literally lost.

I want you now to recall some details about that person, pet, or object and your relationship to it, her or him. Why were you so attached? What memories do you have now of that someone, or something?

When your loss first occurred, can you remember, now, what your first reaction was? How did you feel? Can you remember what you did? How did you feel after a few days, after a few months, after a few years?

Do you feel you have come to terms with this loss? Have you been able to get on with your life even though you may still have strong feelings from time to time about this person or object?

Try to imagine for a moment that you were not able to go through the grieving process - to come to terms with this loss. Imagine, for a moment that something blocked you from doing that.

Reflect - How do you think that might or does affect you today - in your relationships - in your family - as a caregiver?

Questions to reflect on

1. How did you feel about and react to the loss (how was your behaviour affected) immediately and later?
2. Were you able to grieve the loss and move on in your life?
3. How does this loss affect you in your relationships, in your family, and as a caregiver?
4. What have you learned from your experiences with separation and loss?

Summary Remarks:

Secure attachment is important to a child's development in all areas (social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual). When the ability to attach is impaired by profound loss, a child's development may be blocked or delayed in many areas. Experiencing a loss is certainly not the only thing that impairs the ability of children to form healthy attachments, however, it is a significant factor and it is certain that all children-in-care will have experienced a profound loss at some time in their lives.

It is essential for caregivers to understand that when a child is in a grieving process, the child will have very little energy available to develop healthy attachments. It is equally essential to remember that a key task is to maintain, as much as possible, the child's contact with, and knowledge of, important attachment figures. By doing this, as well as by providing support, the child can be freed up to begin developing the attachments needed to adjust to the caregiver's home and perhaps to develop new attachments and relationships. This will be discussed later.

The process will involve:

- intellectual recognition and explanation for the loss. How did it happen? Why did it happen? Otherwise the child can never relax their vigilance against the threat of new losses and will continue to feel anxious.
- emotional acceptance of the loss so the child will no longer find the reminders so painful.
- integration of the child's identity so that it combines his family with new circumstances.
- formation of new relationships.

3. INSECURE ATTACHMENT

Learning Outcomes:

The caregiver can define insecure attachment and can identify factors that contribute to or cause insecure attachment.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #11 The Characteristics of Insecure Attachment
- Handout #12 Understanding Insecure Attachment

Overheads

- Overhead #13 Characteristics of Insecure Attachment - Instructions
- Overhead #14 Questions for Discussion
- Overhead #15 Understanding Insecure Attachment

A. Identifying Insecure

Attachment Instructions:

You examined secure attachment in Session I. In this section you will learn to identify some of the behavioural characteristics or indicators of insecure attachment. Two types of insecure attachment have been studied and identified (Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton, 1971).

The following is definitions of two types of insecure attachment:

Anxious/Resistant Attachment. Children have difficulty in a strange situation. They stay close to their mothers and appear anxious even when their mothers are near. They become very upset when their mothers leave, but are not comforted by their return. They simultaneously seek renewed contact, but resist the mothers' efforts to comfort them. They have difficulty exploring and resuming play.

Anxious/Avoidant Attachment. When mother and child are left alone in a playroom, anxious/avoidant children are more or less indifferent to where their mothers are. They may or may not cry when their mothers leave the room. If they do become distressed, strangers are just as likely to be able to comfort them as their mothers. When the mother returns, these children may look away from her instead of going to her to seek comfort and closeness.

Children described as either anxious/avoidant or anxious/resistant may be described to as

“insecurely attached.”

Exercise:

Review Overhead #13, “Characteristics of Insecure Attachment-Instructions.”

- Think of a child you know and whom you believe experiences insecure attachment.
- Describe the behaviours and characteristics the child exhibits that you believe demonstrate insecure attachment.

Review Handout #11, “Characteristics of Insecure Attachment.”

What do you think would happen if children’s attachment needs were never met?

Summary Remarks:

It is extremely unlikely that any one child would demonstrate all the characteristics of insecure attachment. Most children with attachment difficulties will display some of the characteristics and only in certain situations.

These characteristics or indicators can be helpful in assessing if a child's difficulties are related to attachment. Several of the characteristics may also be indicators of difficulties in other areas (abuse, neglect, or physiological problems).

The characteristics are only part of the picture. Caregivers need to be cognizant of, and assess for, characteristics in many other areas as well (abuse, neglect, suicide, developmental delays), as well as attending to and reinforcing positive characteristics.

Refer to Handout #11, “The Characteristics of Insecure Attachment.”

- The child may develop cognitive difficulties.
- The child may demonstrate developmental difficulties

or delays.

- The child may display severe psychological or behavioural difficulties.

When caregivers are unsure about how to interpret the information they've gathered, they should take their notes and observations to the child's worker or to other members of the care team (child and youth care worker, counsellor) for further exploration.

B. Causes/contributors to insecure

attachment Exercise:

In the previous exercise you learned some of the characteristics of insecure attachment. In this exercise you will examine some of the potential causes and contributors to insecure attachment.

Review Overhead #15, "Understanding Insecure Attachment" and review the following.

Understanding Insecure Attachment

List on a sheet of paper as many things as you can think of that might impair or inhibit a child's ability to develop a secure attachment.

Review Handout #12, "Understanding Insecure Attachment".

Summary Remarks:

Understanding insecure attachment in children is a complex task. Other modules in the British Columbia Foster Care Education Program may help caregivers be more effective in helping children with attachment issues (e.g., "Recognizing Abuse and Neglect" or "Child and Youth Development", "Guiding Behaviour of Children and Youth").

4. PROMOTING SECURE ATTACHMENT

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can identify and articulate ways to support children or youth to develop secure attachments in relationships.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #9 Responding to Separation and Loss (from Session I)
- Handout #13 Promoting Secure Attachment
- Handout #14 Attachment-Setting Goals

Overheads

- Overhead #16 Promoting Secure Attachment-Small Group Instructions

A. Promoting Attachment

Instructions:

In this exercise you will examine ways to help children-in-care who have difficulties with attachment. This is a critical skill at all phases of fostering.

Exercise:

Review Overhead #16, "Promoting Healthy Attachment - Small Group Instructions".

Promoting Healthy Attachment:

- Think of ways that you can promote healthy attachment in children-in-care.

- Write these ideas on a sheet of paper.

Review Handout #13, “Promoting Healthy Attachment,” and refer to Handout #9, “Responding to Separation and Loss.”

Caregivers need to develop their own ways of promoting healthy attachment to meet the needs of children placed in their care.

Summary Remarks:

Remember the child’s difficulties with attachment have developed over a period of time. Caregivers are not going to change this in two days, two weeks, or two months, but they can have an impact by implementing some of the methods discussed in the exercise.

Refer to the module, “Guiding the Behaviour of Children and Youth” if you require more information on relationship building.

Now that you have some understanding of secure and insecure attachment, you will have an opportunity to explore ways to develop a relationship with a child who is not securely attached.

B. Setting

Goals

Instructions:

Caregivers need to know how to look for indicators of secure or insecure attachment in children in their care. They also need to be able to work with the child's worker and other members of the care team to develop goals and strategies for assisting the child. The Plan of Care will be much more effective if the caregiver is able to assist in the initial assessment of the child and participate in actively developing the Plan. The services to the child will also be much more effective. As most placements are short term, caregivers need to prepare for their own sense of loss and grieving as the child leaves the home. There are two parts

to this: preparing the child to leave, and preparing the caregiver's family for the child leaving.

Review Handout #14, "Attachment: Setting Goals."
Consider it as a possible tool to assist in setting goals regarding attachment.

5. PREPARING A CHILD TO LEAVE

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe ways to prepare children and youth to move from foster home back to birth family, to another caregiver, or to independent living.

Exercise:

Brainstorm ways for caregivers to assist children and youth to prepare to leave their care, whether they are returning home, moving to the home of another caregiver, or moving into an independent living situation.

Answer the following on a sheet of paper

1. What might the child or youth be feeling? And why?
(scared that things will be the same at home, anxious about moving to the unfamiliar, excited about moving back with mom and dad, sad about leaving the foster family, etc.)
2. How would you respond to these feelings?
(with active listening and empathy, letting them express their feelings and know that they are normal responses to change.)
3. How could you facilitate the process of leaving in a way that would be most helpful and least traumatic for the child/youth?
 - Start talking about the move well in advance.
 - Ask the child or youth what they need to make the move less difficult.
 - Discuss expectations and provide accurate information
 - Have the child/youth meet and spend time with their parent(s), or new caregivers before the move.
 - Encourage the child and parent(s) or new caregivers to

express their feelings and expectations about the changes.

- Encourage the open expression of feelings between the caregiver's family members and the child or youth about their departure from the family.
- Ensure that the child or youth can take their personal belongings with them; transitional objects are especially important.
- You may want to give the child or youth something to remind them of their relationship with you.
- Once the child has moved, provide opportunities for the child or youth to have scheduled and ongoing contact with you. This is helpful even if it is just phone calls or a letter or two. Gradual separation is much more "normal" and much less difficult. Scheduled contact is important so that the child knows when he will see you. Unscheduled contact can occur as well, based upon the child's needs.

Reminder that you will likely go through a similar process of loss and grieving as the child leaves the caregiver's family to return to his own home or move to other placements. Caregivers need to develop their own plan for this and to prepare for their own sense of loss.

Summary Remarks:

Note that attachment is a major issue for most children entering care. Although the main areas relating to attachment were covered in this module, participants should be encouraged to read and study more about this important subject and to discuss it in their support groups.

6. CLOSURE

Handout #15 Suggested

Resources

References

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., Bell, S.M., and Strayton, D.J. (1971). Individual Differences In Strange-Situation Behavior of One Year Olds. In H.R. Schaffer (Ed.), *The Origins Of Human Social Relations*. New York: Academic Press.
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Rutter, M. (1984). Continuities and Discontinuities in Socioemotional Development: Empirical and Conceptual Perspectives. In R.N. Emde, and R.J. Harmon (eds.), *Continuities and Discontinuities in Development*. New York: Plenum.