



Kinship Care and Attachment

You may be aware that the circumstances, which resulted in the child you care for coming to live with you, may have had a negative effect on them.

There may have been an impact on their development and ability to express emotions and develop relationships. They may be displaying challenging behaviour which you may find upsetting and difficult to manage.

These behaviours may be linked to attachment difficulties and may have impacted on them since they were very young.

This guidance may help to inform you about how this happens, how your child may be affected and what you can do to support them, while seeking support for yourself and other family members.

What is Child Attachment?

Normally babies develop a close attachment bond with their main care giver (normally their mother/father) within the first months of life. If they are in a situation where there has been an interruption to their care, they may struggle to develop this close bond. This may mean that they are affected by attachment.

When a mother/father has provided food or milk when her baby is hungry, cuddles when the baby is upset, and nappy changes when needed, a close bond is established between them. The baby has learned that this person will be there to respond to their needs, giving them the confidence and stability to explore their environment and deal with new situations. For babies and young children who have never had this experience, there is no secure attachment, and so there is no safe base from which

Examples of children who are at risk of developing Attachment difficulties include:

- Children who have been neglected or abused.
 - Children who have been placed with a series of different carers.
 - Children who have been separated from their parents.
 - Children whose parents abuse drugs or alcohol.
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they can form relationships, explore new situations and deal with stresses.

The effects of not having this bond can mean that some children experience problems with behaviour and in dealing with emotions and new situations. This can cause them difficulties which carry on through childhood and into adult life. However, if these difficulties are identified early, it can often be put right. In a Kinship Care situation this can be achieved when kinship carers respond appropriately to the needs of the child.

Signs that a baby or child may have Attachment difficulties

- The baby may cry inconsolably.
- The baby or child may avoid being touched or comforted and may not smile in response.

“You can help the child identify emotions and express their needs, reinforcing the idea that all feelings are okay and showing them healthy ways to express their emotions.”

- The child may not show any affection towards his/her caregiver.
- The child may not play with toys or engage in interactive games with others and may become withdrawn.
- The child may have difficult, aggressive behaviour towards other children or adults.
- The child can be anxious, fearful, or depressed.
- The child may be unable to control his/her temper or anger and may not be getting on well at school.

By the time the child is a teenager, they are more likely to be involved in risk taking behaviours, or have anxiety, depression or phobias.

How can a child be supported?

Once a child is in a caring environment where their needs are responded to and met, most signs of attachment difficulties improve quickly. The most important treatment is for the child to know that they have a loving, responsive carer in you. There are simple techniques which you, as their main carer, can use to help the child to feel confident and secure.

Making a child with Attachment difficulties feel safe and secure

Feeling safe and secure is the core issue for children with an attachment difficulty. This can be accomplished by establishing clear expectations, boundaries and rules of behaviour, and by responding consistently so the child knows what to expect when they act a certain way and know that you can be counted on to maintain this.

E.g. taking charge yet remaining calm when the child is upset or displaying challenging behaviour – the child may act out when their feelings become too much for them. By staying calm, you show the child that the feeling is manageable. Where required it

A photograph of a woman with dark curly hair hugging a young child with curly hair from behind. They are both smiling and appear to be in a bright, indoor setting. The image is partially obscured by a large yellow curved graphic element.

may be useful to follow through with pre-established consequences in a cool manner. Following a conflict, it is important to reconnect with the child, reinforcing your love for them.

Maintaining predictable routines and schedules

A child with attachment difficulties may not instinctively rely on loved ones. Instead, a familiar routine or schedule can provide comfort particularly during times of change.

Helping the child feel loved

A child who has not bonded early in life may have a hard time accepting love. You can help them learn to accept love with time, consistency, and repetition. Physical acts of love in cuddling or holding hands will feel good to a child although you may have to go slowly.

You can help the child identify emotions and express their needs, reinforcing the idea that all feelings are okay and showing them healthy ways to express their emotions. They may act as a much younger child and you can respond in a way that is appropriate. (Listening, talking, and playing with the child). Carve out times when you're able to give the child your full, focused attention in ways that feel comfortable to them.

Supporting the health of a child with Attachment concerns

Healthy lifestyle habits can go a long way in reducing the child's stress levels and mood swings. When children with attachment difficulties are relaxed, well-rested, and feeling good, it will be much easier for



them to handle life's challenges. Good sleep, diet and regular exercise routines will also help to boost their physical and emotional health.

Looking after your own physical and emotional health
It's important to look after yourself so that you are able to look after the child you are caring for – you won't be fit to look after others if you don't first look after yourself. Try to keep stress levels low and factor in plenty of self-care – get enough sleep, eat well and exercise. If you can remain calm even in difficult circumstances, you will help the child to also stay calm.

Support can be gained through professionals, perhaps most importantly your GP. Also you could look for support from friends, family members and through Kinship Care support groups. It can help to talk to other Kinship Carers who have similar experiences. There may be a Kinship Care support

group in your area. The Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland may be able to provide details of any peer support groups in your local area.

Professional support available:

- Health Services – GP and Health Visitor
- Education – school and nursery
- Family therapy
- Individual psychological counselling
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Play therapy
- Special education services
- Parenting skills classes

Where the child you care for is classed as “looked after”, (you can confirm with the Social work department if you are uncertain if this refers to your child), there should be a Child's Plan in place. The local authority has a responsibility to keep you involved in the Child's Plan. This should include actions to deal with the emotional wellbeing of the child perhaps involving some of the supports mentioned above.

Where the child is classed as “non looked after” you can ask for help from your GP, your child's nursery or school and any other professionals involved with your family. If you are worried or have concerns about the child in your care you can also contact your local authority.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

GET IN TOUCH

Call our helpline: 0808 800 0006 (freephone)
Lines open 10am-2.30pm, Mon to Fri

Visit our website at: www.kinship.scot

Email: kinship@adoptionuk.org.uk

 [kinshipcarecas](https://www.facebook.com/kinshipcarecas)

 [@kinshipscotland](https://twitter.com/kinshipscotland)

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

www.maternal-and-early-years.org.uk/attachment-kinship-carers-factsheet-2

