

## Treatment Plan Sample for Court-Involved Attachment Bonding Pathology

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### Orientation to Attachment Pathology

There are four categories of attachment bonding. All humans show one of these four patterns of attachment bonding.

When assessing attachment pathology in the parent-child bond, identify the parent-child attachment category. In addition to identifying the four categories of attachment, research has also identified the parental behaviors causing each category of attachment, and the treatment for each category of attachment pathology.

Treatment depends on what the nature of the problem is. Identifying the nature of the attachment bonding problem begins with identifying the category of the parent-child attachment bond.

There are only four categories. All humans have one of the following four categories of attachment bonding.

### Secure Attachment

- The child feels secure in the parent child bond and so separates from the parent and explores the world away from the parent
- The child is comfortable emitting protest behavior, and when a breach occurs in the parent-child bond, they are able to effectively repair their relationship

### Insecure Attachment: Anxious-Ambivalent (also called Preoccupied attachment)

- The child displays high protest behavior to elicit increased involvement and regulation from the parent.
- This type of attachment is associated with inconsistently available parent contact.
- Treatment: increase the availability and stability of the parent-child contact.

### Insecure Attachment: Anxious-Avoidant

- The child shows no protest or distress at separation and does not make efforts to restore the parent-child bond following a breach.
- This type of attachment is associated with an overwhelmed parent who withdraws if the child is needy of involvement.

- Treatment: increase the availability and degree of parental involvement with the child in response to child protest behavior; treat parent for emotional stress that overwhelms the parent.

#### Insecure Attachment: Disorganized

- The child shows no organized approach to forming an attachment bond to the parent, the child's behavior is high-protest and chaotic, it is not organized toward a goal.
- This type of attachment is associated with a frightening parent or a parent who gives chaotic, disorganized, and mixed-message communications.
- Treatment: increase the stability of parental communication and parental involvement with the child, foster guidance-based parenting strategies and parental empathic responsiveness to the child.

Children develop a specific and unique attachment bond to each parent, one to mother and a separate one for father. Each gender-relationship has unique attachment features (mother-son; father-son; mother-daughter; father-daughter).

The child also develops a generalized bonding expectation for "others" and a generalized sense of self-worth from the attachment bonding experiences with the parents. The future spousal relationship will form from a general attachment pattern that develops in response to parenting, and from the gender-specific features of the unique parent-child bond (mother-son, father-son, mother-daughter, father-daughter).

In a family with attachment pathology (parent-child bonding problems), identify the child's attachment category with each parent.

#### Identifying the Child's Attachment Category

**Secure Attachment:** The child evidences occasional communicative protest behavior when warranted, and the breach to the parent-child relationship caused by the child's protest behavior is effectively resolved with the parent. The child explores away from the parent.

**Insecure Anxious-Ambivalent:** The child evidences frequent protest behavior that elicits parental involvement, yet the parent and child are not able to effectively resolve their relationship breach.

**Insecure Anxious Avoidant:** The child is low-protest, compliant, and does not place demands on the parent. The child responds to the parent's approach but seldom initiates bonding with the parent.

**Insecure Disorganized:** The child is high-protest and highly demanding of parental involvement yet is unable to develop a shared attachment bond with the parent. The child displays a mix of approach and avoidance behaviors toward the parent.

Sample Treatment Plan for  
Court-Involved Attachment Pathology Surrounding Divorce  
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**Targeted Parent:** The child displays goal-directed high-protest behavior toward the targeted parent that seeks to terminate the parent's involvement with the child.

- Secure?

The child is secure enough to venture away from the parent. The child and parent are not able to repair relationship breaches.

Conclusion: The child does not have a secure attachment bond to this parent because of the dyad's inability to repair relationship breaches when they occur.

Treatment: The child feels secure enough to venture away from the parent yet is unable to recover and restore the relationship with the parent. Improve the parent-child ability to repair the breach to their relationship by developing effective dyadic communication skills.

- Insecure Anxious-Ambivalent?

The child is high-protest, but the protest behavior does not have the goal of eliciting greater parental involvement but is instead directed toward the disorganized attachment goal of terminating the child's attachment bond to the parent.

Conclusion: The child's attachment category toward the targeted parent may be Anxious-Ambivalent with Disorganized features.

Treatment: Increase consistency and availability of the targeted parent's involvement with the child, develop effective dyadic communication skills.

- Insecure Anxious-Avoidant?

The child is highly non-compliant and high-protest with this parent.

Conclusion: The child does not have an Insecure Anxious-Avoidant attachment toward the targeted parent.

Treatment: Not indicated for Insecure Anxious-Avoidant attachment.

- Insecure Anxious-Disorganized?

The child displays the disorganized attachment goal of severing the parent-child bond.

Conclusion: The child has Insecure Disorganized attachment toward the targeted parent (with Insecure Anxious-Ambivalent overtones).

Treatment: Increase the targeted parent's affectionate involvement with the child. Increase stability in the parent-child involvement.

**Allied Parent:** The child displays low-protest behavior generally, yet high-protest at separation indicating insecurity in the parent-child bond and parental signals of anxiety and threat perception at separation.

- Secure?

The child does not venture away from this parent to explore a relationship with the other parent. The child seldom presents protest behavior generally and there is generally insufficient separation (differentiation) between the allied parent and child.

Conclusion: The child does not feel secure in the attachment bond to this parent. Formation of an alliance with this parent against the other parent would stabilize this insecure attachment bond (“Us vs. Them”)

Treatment: Increase child protest behavior with this parent during non-separation events (non-retrieval events), and help the dyad effectively recover and restore their relationship breach following these general child protest behaviors by developing effective dyadic communication skills.

- Insecure Anxious-Ambivalent?

The child displays a high degree of protest behavior when separated from the allied parent to engage in exploratory behavior with the other parent. The child evidences effective goal-directed strategies for eliciting the involvement of the allied parent.

Conclusion: The child evidences situation-specific features of an Insecure Anxious-Ambivalent relationship with this parent at separation (anxiety), but not when in contact. The child’s protest at separation triggers parental approach and protective behaviors (“retrieval behaviors”) indicating that the parent is providing situation-specific cues of anxiety and threat perception at specific (and possibly generalized) separations.

Treatment: Reduce parental anxiety and signals of threat perception at separations. Reduce contingent affection, involvement, and love from this parent and increase the consistency and stability of parental responding to the child.

- Insecure Anxious-Avoidant?

The child displays low-protest and low-demand behavior with the allied parent, yet protests increase significantly only surrounding separations and resolve quickly if the child is allowed not to separate and remains in the physical proximity of the allied parent. The allied parent responds to the child’s protest behavior at separation with parental approach and protective behaviors (“retrieval behaviors”), indicating that the protest behavior at separation is designed to elicit parental involvement (“retrieval behavior”) and effectively achieves parental involvement from the allied parent.

Conclusion: The child evidences an Insecure Anxious-Avoidant attachment to this parent, with elevated protest at separation triggered by parental signals of anxiety and threat perception at specific (and possibly generalized) separation.

Treatment: Decrease parent's stress to reduce the parent's emotional fragility and to build the emotional resilience of the parent. Increase general child protest with this parent and facilitate dyadic repair of the bond by developing dyadic communication skills.

- Insecure Anxious-Disorganized?

The child's behavior toward the allied parent is organized and goal-directed.

Conclusion: The child does not display a disorganized attachment toward the allied parent.

Treatment: No treatment for disorganized attachment is indicated.

### **Attachment Categories for the Parent-Child Relationships**

Targeted Parent: Insecure Anxious-Disorganized attachment toward the targeted parent with Anxious-Ambivalent overtones.

Treatment Goals:

1. Improve the parent-child ability to repair the breach to their relationship by developing effective dyadic communication skills.
  - Intervention TP-1: Increase parent-child time and involvement.
  - Intervention TP-2: Teach parent-child dyad relationship repair communication skills  
  
Psychoeducation: Organize parental intentions; I message; reflective listening; negotiation communication skills; affectionate displays and communications; social skills development of cooperation and kindness.
2. Increase consistency and availability of the targeted parent's involvement with the child.
  - Intervention TP-1: Increase parent-child time and involvement.
3. Increase the targeted parent's affectionate involvement with the child.
  - Intervention TP-2: Teach parent-child dyad relationship repair communication skills
4. Increase stability in the parent-child involvement by developing effective dyadic communication skills.
  - Intervention TP-2: Teach parent-child dyad relationship repair communication skills

Allied Parent: Insecure Anxious-Avoidant attachment toward the allied parent with parental signals of anxiety and threat perception at separation (triggering parental retrieval behaviors).

Treatment Goals:

1. Increase general child protest behavior with the allied parent during non-separation times (non-retrieval) and scaffold the dyad's recovery and restoration of their relationship bond following these general child protest behaviors by developing effective dyadic communication skills.
  - Intervention AP-1: Playful encouragement of child "defiance" of allied parent using graduated scale of increasing severity (systematic desensitization to parent-child conflict).
  - Intervention AP-2: Teach parent-child dyad relationship repair communication skills (scaffolding relationship repair skills).
    - Psychoeducation: Organize parental intentions; I message; reflective listening; negotiation communication skills; affectionate displays and communications; social skills development of cooperation and kindness.
2. Reduce parental anxiety and signals of threat perception at separations.
  - Intervention AP-3: Assess severity and source of parental anxiety (potential unresolved trauma).
  - Intervention AP-4: Exploration of multi-generational trauma through developing a family genogram.
  - Intervention AP-5: Teach anxiety management skills
    - Cognitive restructuring of false beliefs, relaxation skills, mindfulness skills.
  - Intervention AP-6: Teach sadness regulation skills (down-regulatory system) of seeking and acquiring nurture for sadness from appropriate adult sources (in situ or in the therapeutic relationship).
3. Reduce contingent affection, involvement, and love from the allied parent and increase the consistency and stability of parental responding to the child.
  - Intervention AP-1: Playful encouragement of child "defiance" of allied parent using graduated scale of increasing severity (systematic desensitization to parent-child conflict).
  - Intervention AP-2: Teach parent-child dyad relationship repair communication skills (scaffolding relationship repair skills).

- Psychoeducation: Organize parental intentions; I message; reflective listening; negotiation communication skills; affectionate displays and communications; social skills development of cooperation and kindness.

4. Build the allied parent's tolerance for holding distressing emotions.

- Intervention AP-3: Exploration of multi-generational trauma through developing a family genogram.
- Intervention AP-4: Teach anxiety management skills
  - Cognitive restructuring of false beliefs, relaxation skills, mindfulness skills
- Intervention AP-5: Teach sadness regulation skills (down-regulatory system) of seeking and acquiring nurture from appropriate adult sources for sadness (in situ or in the therapeutic relationship).

Focus 2: Child defiance of authority

The child is defiant of the the parental authority of the targeted parent, and the child is defiant of court authority (non-cooperation with court orders).

Treatment Goals: Targeted Parent Authority

1. Increase child cooperation with adult directives

- Intervention TP-1: Define Rules of the House
  - Intervention TP-1a: Collaboratively negotiate and develop with the targeted parent and child the *Rules of the House* for the targeted parent's home.
  - Intervention TP-1b: Establish token economy for reinforcing positive cooperation with the *Rules of the House*.
  - Intervention TP-1c: Establish response-cost system of discipline consequences for non-cooperation with parental authority (loss of privileges, loss of object use, chair- or room-restrictions).
- Intervention TP-2: Increase parent-child affectionate involvement, communication, and displays.
  - Intervention TP-2a: Increase frequency of physical affectionate communication (hugs; rub-pat-pats).
  - Intervention TP-2b: Increase frequency of verbally affectionate communication (compliments; self-disclosures of appreciation and bonding).

2. Increase compliance with court orders

- Intervention AP-1: Hold allied parent responsible for teaching the child the importance of compliance with court orders (the allied parent has acknowledged parental influence with the child while the targeted parent is the recipient of the child's violation of court orders).

- Intervention AP-1a: Sanction allied parent for child violations of court orders (i.e., for failing in the primary parental responsibility of teaching the child fundamental pro-social values and behavior; attend school, cooperate with medical treatment, follow court orders).
- Intervention AP-2b: If child defiance of court orders does not resolve, the court should consider increasing the time the child has with the targeted parent due to evidenced failure of the allied parent to teach the child fundamental pro-social values and behavior, in order to provide the targeted parent with the opportunity to teach the child fundamental pro-social values and behavior (i.e., that all court orders must always be obeyed; that the child must cooperate with medical treatment; that the child must consistently attend school).