

## Reactive Attachment Disorder

Reactive attachment disorder occurs when a child does not form a healthy bond with their parents or caregiver at an early age. The detachment can be caused from early childhood abuse, neglect, or sudden separation from the parents or caregivers.

### Signs & Symptoms

Reactive attachment disorder can start in infancy, and typically does not occur in children older than five years old. Children with reactive attachment disorder often show a lack of ability to be genuinely affectionate with others. They usually do not develop a conscience and do not learn to trust others. A child with reactive attachment disorder may display:

- Unexplained sadness, fear, or irritability
- Not seeking comfort or not showing a response when comforted
- Watching others closely but not engaging in social interaction
- No interest in playing interactive games
- Rarely smiles

### Causes & Risk Factors

A child whose needs are ignored or met with little to no emotional response from parents and caregivers learns to not expect care or comfort and does not form a stable attachment to caregivers. There is an increased risk for children developing reactive attachment disorder from serious social and emotional neglect or the lack of opportunity to develop stable attachments. However, not all abused or neglected children develop reactive attachment disorder. Other risk factors include:

- Home environment is a children's home or institution
- Frequent changes in foster homes or caregivers
- Parents have severe mental health problems, criminal behavior or substance use disorders
- Prolonged separation from parents or caregivers

### Diagnosis & Treatment

A mental health professional can conduct a thorough assessment to diagnose reactive attachment disorder. The examination may include observations between parents/caregivers and the child, examples of behavior patterns over time in different situations, questions about home life and living situation since birth, and an evaluation about parenting/caregiving abilities and styles. Treatment plans may be designed to help both the child and parent/caregiver. Treatment commonly consists of individual and family counseling, parenting classes, and assistance with creating a nurturing, loving and caring environment for the child to thrive in.

Source – Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/reactive-attachment-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20352939>