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| Attachment type | Behaviour | What this means for child | Possible triggers | What might you do? |
| **Avoidant**  (I’m ok you’re not ok) | Withdrawn Unable to make or keep friends Bullies other vulnerable children  Refusal of help with work  Loses or destroys property | I have to rely on myself and nobody else. I respond to frightening situations by fleeing. I don’t expect other people to like me. I pretend to be strong by making other children do what I want.  I was left helpless before. I’m not going to be left helpless again.  I have no sense of the value of anything. I have little interest in things if they are not mine. I am angry and I take it out on things. | Singled out, i.e. for 1:1 support | Introduce a buddy system. Consider ‘circle of friends’ approach. Encourage the child to help around the school.  Encourage work in pairs or small groups. Ask the child to help another who is less able.  Validate the child’s feelings, “I can see that you are angry…” Help the child repair/restore where possible – together. |
| **Ambivalent**  (I’m not ok you’re ok) | Talks all the time, asking trivial questions  Demanding teacher attention all the time  Hostile when frustrated  Poor concentration, fidgeting, turning round | I feel safer if I do all the talking. I want to communicate but don’t know how.  I fear that if I don’t let you know I’m here you may leave me on my own. Even negative attention is good. I fear getting it wrong I will feel shame and humiliation if my difficulties are discovered  I must scan the room all the time for danger. I must stay hyper-aroused. I dare not relax. | Task that is hard/new/unusual  Sights, smells and sounds can trigger panic as reminders of past trauma | Have set routine. Make sure all first tasks are simple and achievable. Seat child close to you. Allow child to wait quietly  Notice the child explicitly. Give child something to look after for a while. Give child responsibilities for things (not people)  Small step differentiation. Use timer to divide tasks.  Arrange seating so there is no one behind the child but where you can stay in contact. Laugh with the child, even at silly things. |
| **Disorganised**  I’m not ok you’re not ok | Refuses to engage with work  Tries to create chaos and mayhem.  Oppositional and defiant | Getting things wrong is frightening. Being wrong will lead to rejection AGAIN.  It feels chaotic inside so it feels safer if it is chaos outside as well.  I need to stay in control so things won’t hurt me. I do not want to be exposed as stupid. You are horrible like all adults. | Task that is hard/new/unusual  Task that is hard/new/unusual  Variety of stimuli including stress | Focus on modifying most serious behaviour. Validate the child’s feelings. “I can see that you are angry/upset……”  Be assertive but keep emotional temperature down. Avoid showing anger, irritation or fear. Start each day with clean slate.  Record all incidences very clearly. Seek advice from other agencies |
| **Indicators of attachment difficulties generally** | Unable to accept praise or to have fun.  Physically or verbally abusive.  Ignores instructions  Sulkiness, avoids eye contact  In trouble at break times  Lying or living in fantasy  Stealing  Behaviour suddenly deteriorates | I am not worthy of praise and you are stupid if you don’t realise how bad I am. I am unlovable.  I respond to frightening or threatening situations by fighting, fleeing or freezing.  I have too much anxiety to be able to listen. I can only retain one instruction at a time as too much going round in my head. I am easily distracted.  I don’t dare see what others think. I have no words to describe my feelings – looking sulky is a cover-up.  I fear rejection by my peers. I panic in crowds. I cannot self-regulate when stressed  I prefer to make things up how I would like them to be. I’m not sure who I am or what the truth is. I don’t know the difference between fantasy and reality.  I have no expectation of getting something so I’ll just take it. I have no idea you may feel hurt or anger and when I see the effect I have I feel powerful.  There is a painful anniversary coming up. A new sibling has arrived. I have got contact with birth family coming up/ have just come from contact with birth family. | Face-to-face contact. Being told “look at me when I’m talking to you”  Rejection by peers  Special occasions like Christmas, birthdays or Mother’s Day Before and after weekends | Do praise but don’t be too effusive and be specific about what you are praising. Privately may be more acceptable to child  Avoid threat of removal or rejection. ‘Time in’ not ‘time out’. If unavoidable, do so positively “I need to get on with the class – you come and sit here till you feel better. Speculate aloud why it might have happened (don’t ask child to explain  Keep format same each day. Describe plan of activities for session at outset. Do the child’s remembering for him/her! Let the child make lists on Post-Its.  Find ways to reassure – smile, thumbs up. Encourage playing games to make children laugh. Sit side by side.  Reduce time in playground, introduce tighter structure and supervision, create inside ‘retreat’, establish nurture group.  Avoid accusing child of lying or fantasising. State the truth of the matter briefly and simply.  Do not insist on ‘sorry’. Suggest an action that might repair damaged relationships. Try not to leave desirable things lying around!  Be sensitive in curriculum delivery. Allow child time and space to manage feelings away from the classroom. |