

## Reactive Attachment Disorder: Tips for families

Developed in collaboration with the mental health centers of NBHP and FBHP & the Client and Family Advisory Board

1. **Be an active part of your child's treatment.** Family therapy, including the caregiver(s) and child, is central to overall success. Be actively involved in setting treatment goals and educating yourself about RAD. Let your teachers and daycare providers know about the diagnosis and any interventions you are using. Ask for written materials and additional information from your providers (see attached resources.)
2. **Ask questions.** RAD is a very rare disorder (less than 1% of the population). Be sure your child has been diagnosed by an experienced evaluator. Your therapist should be open to answering questions you have about the treatment of RAD. You may want to ask about your therapist's experience working with other children with RAD, what treatment approach they use, and how they involve the family in therapy. Feel free to seek a second opinion if you have questions or concerns about the treatment plan. Avoid therapies not based in research such as therapies that include terms such as "holding," "re-birthing," "reattachment." The primary goal of therapy should be to support you and your child in developing and enhancing a trusting and positive relationship that meets your child's specific emotional needs.
3. **Care about yourself.** It is important that you take care of yourself in order to care for your child. Establish a healthy lifestyle of regular exercise, good eating habits, adequate rest and participating in activities with others that you enjoy.
4. **Interact** with your child through activities that your child enjoys (singing, playing games, shopping, etc.) and encourage your child to participate. Quality time builds relationships. Practice activities that promote trust. Work with your child's therapist to assist you in choosing these activities. Your child needs your help to learn how to trust.
5. **Develop a routine.** Consistency and structure are essential to your child's success. This includes mealtime, homework time, bedtime, and setting times for privileged activities such as TV, games and computer. Regular schedules, planning for transitions and routines will help your child feel safe and cared for. Ensure that structure is as consistent as possible between home and school. Disruptions in routine can sometimes cause emotional and behavioral outbursts. Develop and practice skills for coping with unexpected changes in plans.
6. **Pay attention to your relationships.** Caring for a child with RAD can be challenging and stressful. It is important that you support others in your family, especially other children, and provide them with information about the nature of RAD, and keep your family relationships and friendships strong. Create a support network that includes support groups. Ask about respite care resources as well.
7. **Consistency** in responding to challenging behaviors is important and can be difficult. Be sure to discuss the best ways to praise your child and discourage inappropriate behavior with your therapist. Children with RAD may be more sensitive to physical methods of discipline, and these should be avoided. Instead, use methods that involve logical and consistent consequences (see parenting resources).
8. **Always listen** when children are ready to share their thoughts and feelings. They may open up when you least expect it.
9. **Try to be hopeful.** Many adoptive and foster parents feel frustrated and hopeless at times when building a relationship with the child. It is normal for children with RAD to push others away in the beginning. It may take time, but these relationships can improve with therapy and support. Supportive and consistent environments improve outcomes.

## Resources for Clients

The Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/reactive-attachment-disorder/DS00988>

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:

<http://aacap.org/page.do?name=Reactive+Attachment+Disorder&section=Facts+for+Families>

Child Trauma Academy: Articles for caregivers

<http://www.childtrauma.org/index.php/articles/articles-for-caregivers>