

Question and Hypothesis

Questions

1. What is attachment trauma and what cognitive, behavioral, and emotional symptoms are likely to be exhibited?
2. How do children with attachment trauma perceive themselves?
3. What perceptions do they develop about others?
4. How do their perceptions of "self" and others lead to disengagement?
5. How do their cognitive, behavioral, and emotional symptoms contribute to disengagement?

Hypothesis

Attachment trauma in childhood leads to student disengagement in school

Abstract

- Addresses the assertion that attachment trauma in children leads to disengagement in school.
- Explains how children with attachment trauma develop negative self-perceptions and negative perceptions of teachers as unsupportive, leading to disengagement
- An integrative model of Attachment Theory (Main, 1996) and Interpersonal Theory (Sullivan, 1968) is utilized to identify the factors that lead children with attachment trauma to disengage from school. Current interventions are explored and best practices for school psychologists are discussed.

Literature Review

Background Information

- Children with attachment trauma often struggle academically, behaviorally, and emotionally in school (Oehlberg, 2008; Ford et al., 2013).
- School staff often fail to recognize students with attachment trauma and misunderstand symptoms as resulting from a disability, such as ADHD (Oehlberg, 2008).
- Children with attachment trauma are likely to have a disorganized attachment style (Main, 1996; Oehlberg, 2008).
- **Definition of Terms**
- *Attachment Trauma* – the experience of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional distress that results from early parental emotional abuse and neglect
- *Emotional abuse* - pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth
- *Neglect* - the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs

Theoretical Foundations

Main's Theory of Attachment Trauma (Main, 1996)

Mary Main (1996) discovered a fourth style of attachment, disorganized attachment style. Children with disorganized attachment styles have had early relationships with their primary caregiver(s) characterized by a fear of the primary caregiver(s), often including emotional abuse and neglect. They exhibit symptoms such as - distress around separations and rejections

- exhibit characteristic and inconsistent responses to separations
- aggressive/externalizing behavior in school
- dissociative behavior in school

Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory (1968)

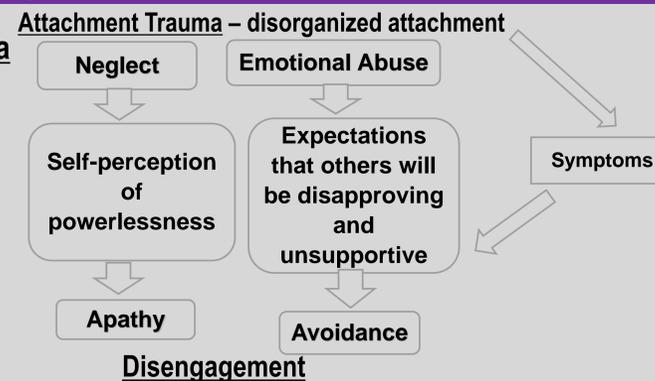
Early relationships with primary caregivers impact a child's perceptions of "self" and expectations about future relationships with others.

- When Primary caregivers neglect a child's basic needs, the child forms self-perceptions of powerlessness.
 - When primary caregivers consistently disapprove of the child and lack support and tenderness, the child expects that others will be disapproving and unsupportive of them, as well.
- These negative perceptions of self and others lead to disengagement:
- Self-perceptions of powerlessness lead to apathy.
 - Perceptions that others are disapproving and unsupportive lead to avoidance.

Proposed Integrative Model

Student Disengagement due to Attachment Trauma

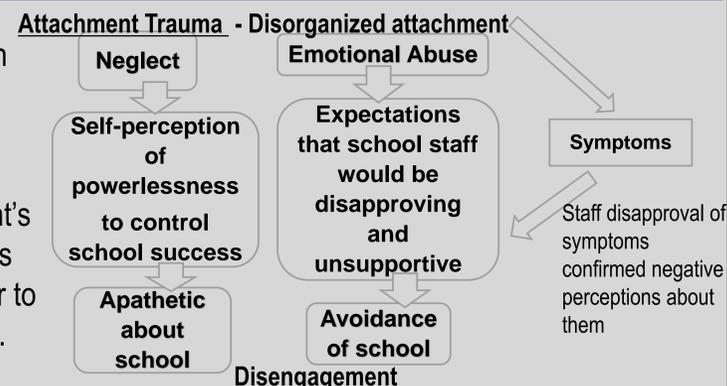
- Attachment Trauma leads to negative perceptions of "self" and others, which lead to disengagement.
- This model reveals how schools can prevent disengagement in children with attachment trauma by addressing their negative self-perceptions, negative perceptions of others, and symptoms of disorganized attachment.



Application of Integrative Model

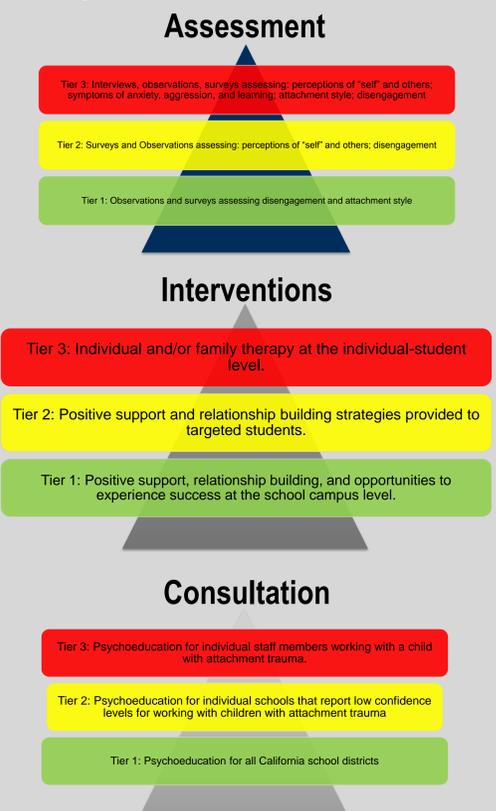
The integrative model is applied to an example of an elementary-aged male, suffering from attachment trauma.

School staff must gain an understanding of a student's symptoms of attachment trauma and the perceptions they develop, which lead to disengagement, in order to appropriately intervene and prevent disengagement.



Best Practices

Response to Intervention (RTI)



Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the integrative model, school psychologists can prevent student disengagement for children with attachment trauma by:

- Providing opportunities to experience success to reduce self-perceptions of powerlessness.
- Providing support and limiting disapproval to reduce negative perceptions of staff
- Building positive relationships to support secure attachments

Recommendation:

- School staff must receive psychoeducation about attachment trauma

References

- Main M. (1996). Introduction to special education on attachment and psychopathology: 2. Overview of the field on attachment.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1968). The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry. Norton and Company Inc. New York.
- Oehlberg, Barbara (2008). Why Schools Need to be Trauma Informed. *Trauma and Loss: Research and Interventions*.
- Ford, J. D. et al. (2013). Developmental trauma therapy models. *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders in Children and Adolescents: Scientific Foundations and Therapeutic Models*, 261.