



Indiscriminate Friendliness

Information sheet

for

Foster carers / adoptive parents / teachers

'Indiscriminate Friendliness' is used to describe children who are too friendly or cuddly with strangers and might wander off with anyone, putting themselves at risk.

Children with Indiscriminate Friendliness sometimes have difficulties developing and maintaining close relationships with family and friends.

About one in a hundred nursery or primary school children have Indiscriminate Friendliness and they are often children who have had a difficult early start in life. Most children with Indiscriminate Friendliness have other problems, such as hyperactivity or aggressive behaviour. We do not know how common this is in teenagers or in adults, but Indiscriminate Friendliness can persist throughout life.

What to look for:

- Being over-friendly with strangers.
- Younger children may:
 - display a willingness to interact and making physical contact, ie crawl onto a stranger's lap, hold their hand, sit too closely to them or lean against them
 - wander off without checking back, putting their safety at risk
- Older children may:
 - ask strangers inappropriate personal questions
 - tell the stranger too much about them
 - seek a lot of attention
 - have poor peer relationships
 - trust new people and want to please, even when it can put them at risk

Indiscriminate Friendliness can sometimes be associated with a more serious disorder of attachment known as Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). RAD can occur following early abuse or neglect.

Other symptoms associated with RAD can include:

- Wandering off without checking back with caregivers
- Asking personal questions of strangers, or disclosing too much information to strangers
- Emotional withdrawal (such as huddling, turning away from social approaches, making silly noises during attempts at conversation).
- Fearfulness/hypervigilance (eg scanning the room, fearful facial expression even in the absence of a real threat)
- Frozen watchfulness i.e. extreme stillness and failure to explore the environment with a fearful, watchful quality

Other symptoms MIGHT include:

- Poor social interactions with other children
- Aggression (or negative attitude) towards self
- Aggressive reactions to own or others' distress
- Misery that does not easily respond to comfort
- Contradictory or ambivalent social responses (eg gazing strongly away while being held, or resistance to attempts at comforting)

What can be done to help?

We don't know a lot about treatments for Indiscriminate Friendliness, but warm consistent parenting is probably the most helpful thing. Because children with Indiscriminate Friendliness have a tendency to wander off and might not think to go to parents or carers for help, providing this warm, consistent parenting is not easy! You might be interested in DVDs prepared for parents and carers by Dan Hughes, which can be found on his website www.danielhughes.org 'Attachment Focused Parenting for Traumatized Children with Attachment Problems'. Extra support in providing this might be needed and some parenting programmes (such as Mellow Parenting) might be particularly helpful. Some families might benefit from support from social work.