

# Parental Attachment Styles in Adoption: Assessment Through Post Adoption

Holt International Children's Services  
Celeste Snodgrass, LCSW  
Abbie Smith, LCSW

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## Today's Agenda

- Why Holt went to this approach
- Who
- How
- What
- When



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## Reasons for this Approach

- Older children at higher risk for PP difficulty
  - How old is an older child
  - More of these placements run into difficulties
  - Already integrated cultural and personal values
  - Formulation of expectations for interpersonal relationships
  - Expressions of grief and trauma can be more disruptive to family
  - Yet some progress smoothly
  - Disruptions – recommendations from staff on good families and these kids have thrived in their second placements



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What is going on? Is there a way to measure this?



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### What is the Adult Attachment Interview?

- A 20 question semi-structured interview about a person's child and adult relationships with each parent.
- Specific questions, audio taped, and transcribed
  - Assessed linguistically for best fit to specific styles
  - 97% of adults fit into the four attachment styles
  - Reliable and valid in meta analysis of n > 20k

It is predictive 75 – 85% accuracy!!  
Ah ha!!



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### WOW! How can we use this to help our parents??

1. Teach our social workers
  - about the AAI
  - how to apply it to improve a family's experience
    - during match
    - during post placement
    - throughout post adoption



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**WOW! How can we use this to help our parents??**

**2. Educate our parents in the four styles**

- the strengths and challenges of each style in older child adoption
- how they can work most effectively with their style.

This is what we did.




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**The Four Attachment Styles  
"According to Holt"**

We use the following four designations:

- 1. Reflective 55%**
- 2. Independent 22%**
- 3. Sensitive 18%**
- 4. Unresolved 20%**  
(grief or trauma)




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**Reflective Style**

**Characteristics**

- Understand and accept feelings motivating behavior
- Turn to others when stressed
- Flexible
- Maintain long term relationships
- Calm and supportive during crisis

**Challenges**

- Need to maintain a steady self care schedule




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## Independent Style

### Characteristics

- Value personal strength, achievement, independence,
- When stressed tends to need to be alone
- Stoic
- Great at meeting child's physical needs
- Routine oriented – good for older child adoption from orphanage

### Challenges

- Delays in development may be hard to accept
- Touchy Feeling Stuff
- Insight into values different from their own
- High expectations

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## Sensitive Style

### Characteristics

- Has strong emotional reactions
- Anxiety about ability to care for children
- Role reversal possible
- Can be intrusive
- Has not yet separated or individuated from own parent
- Over protective

### Challenges

- Can fan the flames of child's emotional reactivity
- Can get angry easily
- May have difficulty advocating for their child
- They can be manipulated
- Can be threatened by child's grief for foster parents

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## Unresolved

### Characteristics

- Experienced a loss or trauma that is not metabolized
- Can be triggered by child's history or behavior
- Can exhibit disassociation or disorientation

### Challenges

- Transference of unmetabolized memory on to current situation
- Inappropriate reaction to child's distress
- Blank spells can lead to misunderstandings

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## SW Curriculum

- **23 hours of training:**
  - **History of Attachment**
    - Bowlby to Main
    - Strange Situation
    - AAI
  - They each had the AAI done on them
  - Wove into our work with Families
  - Use of Assessment Tools Holt Created

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## Holt's Application

- Revamped our home study interviews to include specific questions from the AAI
- Five adjectives to describe each parent and supporting memories
  - What would you do when you were hurt as a child?
  - Did you ever feel rejected by your parents?
  - How would you describe your current relationship with your parents?
    - How has it changed from when you were a child?

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## Creation of Tools

1. Relationship questionnaire
2. Scoring form
3. Follow up questions
4. Guiding Grid for child matching
5. Guiding Grid Formulation Worksheet
6. "Know Your Attachment Style"  
(article for parents)

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## Relationship Questionnaire

- Self administered during home study (20-30 minutes)
- 104 questions on a Likert scale
- Following home visit social worker scores (20-30 minutes)
- Rooted in AAI concepts
  - Inquires about childhood experiences with caregivers
  - Inquires about current relationship with caregivers
  - Inquires about current adult relationships with spouse and friend

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## Relationship Questionnaire

- Is a screening tool not definitive
- DOES NOT REPLACE AAI
- Goal to get us in a possible ballpark
- Supplemented with observations of parent – child relationship behaviors if children in the home.

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## Relationship Questionnaire

- It is being researched in conjunction with Dr. Phil Fisher's lab at U of Oregon
- Want sample size of 300 expect 3 years to obtain so expect 3 years before publishing results

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### Now You Get to take the Questionnaire

- Review instructions on the hand out
- Will score immediately after returning from lunch

# LUNCH

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### Scoring Sheet

- Transfer parent's values which are  $\geq$  to 4 to the score sheet
- Add up columns
- Provides values relative to each other; if one score more than 30 pts > than others use as the primary style
- Questions?
- Now Score your questionnaire (15")

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### Follow Up Questions

- Note questions with asterisk
- These are ambiguous questions whose results could not definitively be put in one style category
- So the social worker will go back to the parent and seek clarification.
- They have been trained in assessing the responses

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## Follow Up Questions

- Then the response is applied to its category
- Now the results are ready for their final tally
- Results now applied to Guiding Grid

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## Guiding Grid

Guiding Guiding Guiding!!!

Reflective	Independent	Sensitive	Mixed
RISMU	RISMU	RISMU	RISMU

Orange primary parent  
Green secondary parent

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## Guiding Grid

- Note the additional category of Mixed
- This is NOT a Holt style
- AAI results ends up with style/s selection
- This application doesn't the have reliability to do that
- Use mixed when one style is not clearly standing out from the others

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## Guiding Grid Child Experiences

- 6 mo to 3 yr old at placement
- 12+ yr old at placement
- Interpersonal grief
- Siblings
- Prenatal exposure to substances
- Orphanage for first 3 years
- Weak boundaries in care setting
- Always in orphanage
- 2+ placements
- Abuse and/or neglect in birth family
- Abuse in care center
- Trauma history
- Strong boundaries and limits in care setting
- Extended hospital stay
- No family history
- Foster Care

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## Guiding Grid

- Find applicable pairing of parent styles across the top
- Find applicable child experiences from list on left
- Find where these two intersect
- Estimated amount of PP support is indicated
- L = low support
- M = medium support
- H = high support
- AAI means may need to refer for the real deal

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## Guiding Grid Page 2

- Takes into account situations when primary parent is Unresolved

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## Guiding Grid

### Various Applications

- Can use this to assess if parents have skills for a particular child
- Can use to pick out previous child experiences that the parents have the skills for

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## Parent Education

- Excited about parents learning their style
- Hope and Dreams for impact on parents
  - Awareness
  - Mindfulness
  - Increase support between parents
- Article or Video presentation
- Discussions with social worker

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## Parent Education

- Awareness
  - Understanding how each of us developed our style: the intergenerational aspect
  - Older kids tend to be more challenging to create secure healthy relationships with
  - Older kids come home with an attachment style already strongly developed.
    - This may be in direct conflict with the parents' styles

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## Parent Education

- **Mindfulness**
  - Better equipped to review interaction
  - Think of their contribution to the difficulty
  - Where it comes from
  - Do they want to change?

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## Parent Education

- **Increase cohesion of the parental unit**
  - Understanding the strengths and challenges of each other's style
  - better understanding of each other's buttons and where, when to offer help
  - Set up tag teams for tapping into each other's strengths
  - Creates a framework for discussion of different parenting views

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## Holt's Parent Curriculum

- **Article written for parents explaining:**
  - each style
  - strengths of each style in older child
  - challenges of each style in older child
  - suggestions for mitigating challenges by styles (read from article)
  - suggestions for self care
- **Creation of educational video on styles**
- **Discussion with social worker**

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## Benefits after Placement

- Knowing a parent's attachment tendencies can inform the social worker's post placement interventions
- The parents may even be able to predict how they might respond to certain behaviors
- Jointly they can review styles and problem solve about conflicts that may have developed.

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## Thank you

We hope this has been helpful to you

[abbies@holtintl.org](mailto:abbies@holtintl.org)

[celestes@holtintl.org](mailto:celestes@holtintl.org)

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