

It's really all about **control!**

When children miss the early experience of trust with a caregiver, whether through neglect and/or abuse, they may feel that the only people on whom they can rely are themselves. These children become their own bosses, making the transfer over to a safe parent/child relationship an overwhelming task. As parents work to change the self-defeating thoughts and feelings of their child, they must also face the insurmountable issue of *c-o-n-t-r-o-l*.

These children feel a great sense of empowerment by reaffirming their sovereignty through power struggles. Parents are zealously sought out for these tussles, and they are as necessary to these children as food and air. Even though these children suffer severe consequences for their behaviors, these consequences

are frivolous in comparison to their need for autonomy, and parents find themselves winning many battles but losing the real war. Before bonding, parenting, or peace can occur, parents must laboriously earn their position as victor in the real war.

This victory can gradually be won by neutralizing the control revolving around "push-pull" cycles. After the child foregoes a period of total defiance and distancing, he/she begins to feel shielded enough in order to become friendly. Although most children stay in the confrontational stage the majority of the time, many do show a nicer side of themselves, no matter how brief, before reverting back to safety in the opposite direction.

These "push-pull" cycles can take place as many as several times a day or over the duration of a few months, depending on the degree and stage of the attachment disorder. This cycle not only involves the emotions of the child, but also entangles those of the parents. Parents often feel obligated to show affection on their child's cue, even though they, themselves, may be busy or still angry. Then parents turn around and feel hurt and betrayed when their child pulls away after feeling close.

Many parents are drawn into this emotional roller

need a little more time and will let him/her know as soon as "they" feel ready for closeness. When parents are ready, they should return the favor by asking their child if he/she feels like it as well.

Parents will feel more empowered and fulfilled by reclaiming their own feelings which, in turn, teaches the child appropriate boundaries, respect, and the difference between feelings and behavior. This "pull" end of the cycle should neither always be about touching, kissing, and/or cuddling. Although these techniques are important to the bonding process, they should not occur every time the parent sits down to communicate with their child. For instance, parents might merely rock their child for five minutes and then tell him/her that its time to go on outside and play. This high emotional swing of the pendulum should be

kept in moderation and performed only when both parties are emotionally available, reducing the urge for the child to push again in the opposite direction.

The degree and stage of attachment disorders will vary from child to child, but the one thing they all have in common is c-o-n-t-r-o-l. These children have an emotional disability within themselves, and their dysfunctional behaviors should not be perceived as a personal assault against parents, although many times it may feel like that. Intensive therapy, where children can work through their individual issues, is also a vital component for recovery. This is a very slow and gradual process. The old saying, "three steps forward and two steps back" readily applies. Parents are fighting a war that they must win before their child can obey, love, and live. -R&W-