

If your child felt unsafe, unloved, or alone over a lengthy period of time, he or she may have learned to believe:

- "There is no one to help me."
- "It's not safe to trust my parents to care about what I need."
- "I'm not important."
- "I can't get what I need."
- "I'm not safe."
- "I can't get the closeness and love I need."
- "It's not safe to have needs or feelings."
- "I'm not good enough."
- "I'm a mistake."
- "It's not safe to love."
- "I'm all alone."
- "There is no one to whom I can go for comfort."
- "Bad things will happen."
- "I will always be rejected and abandoned."
- "Parents are mean."
- "Parents leave"
- "I don't belong anywhere."
- "It's not safe to trust or get close."

Common survival behaviors include ..

- "I must take care of getting my own needs met by myself, in any way I can." "I must take what I need/want whenever I have the chance." (A child, of course, cannot distinguish between what he or she wants and what he or she truly needs.)
- "I must cry and demand so that you will see me and hear me."
- "I must keep a wall up and not care about others, so I will not get hurt."
- "I must be vigilant to danger and mistrust others at all times."
- "I must stay in control of my environment in order to stay safe."
- "I must not allow myself to be open or vulnerable in any way."
- "I must fight to defend myself at all costs."
- "I must be ready to run to survive."
- "I must be ready to freeze, hide, or close up to protect myself."
- "My child dislikes me."
- "My child wants to hurt me."
- "My child is evil/bad/shameful."
- "My child is an embarrassment to me."
- "I'm a bad parent."
- "I'm not in control."
- "This is hopeless."

Parents and caregivers, practice noticing when you have these negative thoughts and read the following statements to yourself. Remind yourself that these are the facts:

- "My child is not bad-he has a narrow window of tolerance and he needs my help to widen it."
- "Even though I am a target when my child acts out, his behavior stems from his survival brain and really has nothing to do with me."
- "By using trauma-responsive strategies, over time, I can help my child develop trust, expand his window, and calm his brain."
- "I can improve my child's future and our future relationship by investing the time and energy today."

Denise Marler, MFT 10/26/2023 (Adapted from: Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma by Debra Wesselmann, Cathy Schweitzer, Stefanie Armstrong)