

ATTACH

What Parents Wish Their Therapists Knew About Them

- 1) We have other people in our lives that also need our attention. Our hurt child is important to us, but our other children, spouses, extended families, friends and neighbors sometimes also need our attention and help. This means that when you ask us to do something with our hurt child that takes a lot of time, we will do our very best, but we cannot always do what is best for our traumatized children at that very moment. As an example, if a traumatized child hurts another child or a pet, we may not have another adult at home to help us. We have to decide who to help first. Sometimes we have to help the other child before we can work on calming our traumatized children.
- 2) I feel a sense of failure. Just the fact that I have to bring my child to therapy means that I can't help my child enough on my own. This feeling worsens every time you tell me what I am doing wrong. Yes, I know in my head that I did not cause my child's trauma and that it does not mean I am a bad parent to have to ask for help, but my head and my heart do not always communicate well. It would help so much if you made sure to always tell me what I am doing right. I am so afraid that you will tell me I am doing my parenting job badly, that it makes me afraid to be totally honest with you sometimes.
- 3) I have many claims on my time. Some of your suggestions, while well meaning and probably well thought out, are also very time consuming. Besides parenting this child and trying to heal him, I have to also wash his clothes (and often the carpets, walls and furniture), cook his meals, pay the bills, keep up the house, deal with doctors, social workers and teachers, shop for food and other things the child needs. I might even have a job I have to go to. Oh, yes, and if I can find a little extra time I may want to eat, sleep or shower myself! :)
- 4) I am not stupid. I may be stressed, tired and overwhelmed, but I am not stupid. Please do not talk down to me. Please listen to me. You might be surprised to learn that I have done extensive research on my child's condition and that I have observed some important things about my child. I also may know things about his history that would help you. Treat me as a partner in my child's healing process.
- 5) Please give me concrete suggestions. Don't just tell me that my child needs more rhythmic stimulations, suggest rocking and swinging to me. Give me concrete examples of what to do. If you think a certain test or therapy would help my child, please give me some help in finding that therapy or test. If you think a certain product, book or game would help me or my child, tell me where I might find it.
- 6) Please be aware of the strains on me. I may not share all the strains with you, since they don't all have to do with my child. For example: I may be struggling to pay for therapy, so if you suggest more sessions, you might see a moment of panic on my face. You may take that as my disagreement to your suggestions, when in fact it's just me trying to figure out how I am going to pay for more sessions and still keep the electricity on at the house. The school may also be giving me grief about my child missing school for therapy. Yes, you and I know that it's important, but that does not stop the school from giving me a hard time about it. I may have family members or friends giving me their "free" opinions on how I should parent, or complaining about the time and cost of therapy. I may be having trouble getting off work to

take my child to therapy. Many of these things won't come up when I talk to you because I see them as my problems, not yours. However, they will make you see me as stressed.

- 7) I love my child and I desperately want to do what is best for him. You and I are on the same side, we both want to help this child. No matter how stressed or angry I seem, I would not be here if I did not care about my child. That love may seem hidden to you because my child has hurt me to the point where I am hiding my own emotions just to survive, but it's there.
- 8) My child abuses me. This is hard for an adult to admit. Whether it's physical or emotional, traumatized children tend to hurt their parents. I may not want to admit how much it hurts me when my child says things to me, or hits me. After all, I am supposed to be the adult, the parent right?
- 9) In case I don't say it enough, thank you. I am glad you are trying to help my child. I am glad you took the time to educate yourself about attachment issues and early trauma. Thank you.
- 10) I may have had a bad experience with another clinician. That experience might have made me a little shy about telling you everything.
- 11) We, as parents, are hurting as much as our kids. Please know when I come into your office and I am sad sometimes, it is because I am hurting just like my child is. Depending on why my child has an attachment disorder, their story could be impacting me as much as it is them. I am feeling as much pain as they are in talking about all of this. So yes I am sad and I need support in that sadness to enable me to work with my child better. I need soothing encouragement the same as my child sometimes.
- 12) Sometimes when you think I am disengaging from the session, it may be something else. I may be stuck because the subject matter is so hurtful for me to deal with. I may be stuck because it is bringing up something from my own past that I cannot talk about at that moment. I may, however, simply be stuck because I am afraid of doing or saying something wrong in front of you. I am afraid if I say the wrong thing, you will be upset and think I am not trying with my child. I may simply not know how you want me to respond in that moment. So when you think I am not present for my child, it may be one of these reasons. If I see dissatisfaction on your face I will get more resistant to trying. Please know I may need gentle reassurance and coaching in these moments.
- 13) I may come into your office completely burned out. This will never mean I don't want to work with my child. Please understand how much I am giving to this child day in and day out. I want to make them better. But getting nothing in return may be taking its toll on me. If I am angry and do not seem engaged with my child, it does not mean that is how I am at home. I need support to keep my fight and keep me going too.
- 14) Please understand how scary all of this is for me as a parent. I want to tell you everything that happens at home. I am afraid to tell you if my child hurts another child. I am afraid you will think I am not protecting my other children and call social services on me. I want to be open with you, but it can be very difficult in all of this to know who to trust and who to be wary of. Please do not get discouraged by this, I just need time and gentle, loving understanding of what we are going through.
- 15) Please understand that sometimes I come into your office with no support. My spouse may not even be supporting anything we are trying to do therapeutically. This does not mean he is

a bad person. This simply means I need a better support system in helping him to understand why this is all necessary.

- 16) Please don't be afraid to share with me. If I know you can really understand how I am feeling, I am more open to trusting you. If something in your own life has been triggered by something I share with you, please allow yourself to share with me. If I know your life is not perfect either, I will feel more connected to you and this will increase my trust and, therefore, my compliance with my child.
- 17) Please remember how much we struggle every day to connect with our kids. If I always hear how wonderful your children are it makes me feel like a failure. Although I am happy for you, it makes me sad that I cannot even connect with my child. Every once in a while this is ok as a reminder of hope for us, but not all the time. A constant reminder of what I don't have makes me feel defeated.
- 18) Please understand how sensitive we are as parents. If we get the feeling that we are too traumatized to even help our children, we will give up. Our past may very well be affecting our present ability to parent our difficult child, but we may not see that. We may feel attacked if you suggest that our backgrounds are preventing us from even parenting our own child. If we feel attacked, we lose hope and we will not have the ability to help our children.
- 19) As a parent who has been through a lot I might wonder when you will give up on us. I understand progress is slow with these kids. I may have read all of this in a book, but that does nothing compared to the encouragement you can give to us. I think it is important to give parents progress updates, if not on paper, at least in person. I need to know when I am doing a great job and when you see even a tiny bit of progress. I don't want you to give up on us; you may be our last hope for healing. But I may be scared of that as well. If I never hear that you see small bits of progress I may be scared you will walk away too.
- 20) Please don't forget to tell us when we are doing a good job. An email that simply says "Great Job" can mean so much to us and may enable us to get through one more day. You may have given me a much needed smile in two words in an email. A hug at the office, a "great job" in person can make the difference to us. Encouragement means a lot to us. Thank you for the times you give this to us.
- 21) IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!!!!!! And second, don't just bide your time with a difficult child you deep-down think can't be healed. If you don't think you can do it, don't give up on the child. Find another professional for us that can help us.
- 22) If a child has to leave their home, please understand the hell the parents are going through. This is not what they wanted for their child. They need a lot of support in this very difficult time. They love their child and had high hopes of healing within the home environment.
- 23) Don't forget that not all children with attachment disorder are adopted. Biological children have this disorder as well, and the needs of those families are different. Take the time to assess each individual family situation and realize some will fall "outside the box".
- 24) Thanks for taking time to read this, for giving us your feedback, and for the work you do to help us as we help our children. We love having you on our team!