

## **CHRISTMAS AND FAMILY ATTACHMENT**

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Several families that seek our help at the Center for Family Healing have adopted children. As the children grow, some of them have symptoms called an “attachment disorder.” Part of what gives hints of this very difficult condition are an inability to form close relationships, distrust of people, hostility, and a high degree of sensitivity to rejection and anger. They often blame everyone close to them for problems in their lives.

At the same time, they often idealize their relationships at first. They become preoccupied with these relationships and desire large amounts of contact and affection...like I say, at first. Often “break ups” are rapid, climactic, and destructive. This come close/go away feature is also found in the ebb and flow of the family.

Understandably, these children have had great loss and early abandonment. Others besides abandoned children have similar reactions depending on the loss. What looks like a normal family with normal family members, can very easily have these difficult relationships. Though we at the Center have specific therapy for such situations, one basic thought we always encourage is to do a few things well: rather than taking on the whole condition, to approach a few things with consistency.

With this in mind, I recommend ritual at Christmas time. Jesus came to save the lost. What better time to affirm attachment and belonging through ritual than at Christmas?

Here are a few thoughts for connecting through ritual at Christmastime. These will not eradicate difficulties with attachment problems, but they will go a long way in beginning to build consistency during the celebration of Christmas.

Example: My friend Julie tells me of memories in her Grandmother’s kitchen as Christmas approached. They had Christmas music playing, baked cookies, and made what they called “creations.” It is a tradition she carries on today with her own children.

Rituals give a sense of home and a sense of belonging. A creating time at Christmas can give meaning and memories for all, not only for those who feel loss or abandonment. Julie, a fully grown woman, draws on her experience with her Grandmother when she feels abandoned.

My guess is most of you have had similar experiences of ritual or are able to make your own. The smallest gestures to the abandoned, and/or children of any experience is ministry to those close to Jesus’ heart (you being among them). May His peace fill you as you consider these things.

## **Some additional things to consider**

When desiring to provide family connection, find a way to be rested and prepared in your emotions. If you are not willing, it is better to think small until the point where you really do feel willing. Set a time to meet with your children or friends for Christmas activities. I am thinking of a time for example, of recipe exchange with adults, providing the children with ornaments to paint, singing Christmas songs, praying together, or your own tried and true activities.

Before the occasion, have the necessary items ready. Expect, with children or adults for that matter, that there may be chaos as the time to start develops. Plan in advance ways to handle situations that might disrupt the time. Have several strategies ready for redirecting things. Picturing a great time without planning for things that might be upsetting is a recipe for disappointment. Measure success with a broad definition. Sometimes getting loved ones together for five minutes is a success. A way to make it more successful is to not build it up too much to yourself or those involved.

People will be comforted by your effort whether they “show” it or not. Your desire to connect will make an impact. From where I sit many recall efforts like these going a long way to being “Jesus with skin on” even if it was 50 years ago.

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