Attachment disorder is a mental and emotional condition, which can be identified in young children before the age of five and often in school children. Research shows the concept of attachment reflects the quality of early years interactions and could be considered as an early developmental factor. Both emotional and behavioural regulation have been thought to be attributes to attachment disorder and symptoms can often overlap with ADHD.

How can you create a secure attachment?

When children are born, they are completely dependent on their care givers for survival. This is when the child will begin to develop healthy or unhealthy attachment styles, depending on the child’s basic needs being met. A child with a healthy attachment style has been able to create a bond, or connection, with their primary care giver; by receiving repeated positive experiences and trusting
them to meet their basic needs. This will enable the child to go on and build healthy relationships as an adult.

Attachment disorder can happen if there is an inconsistency of connection between the child and primary care giver. If a child feels abandoned and uncared for repeatedly, the child may learn to not trust others, or become dependent. If a child suffers a trauma during early years such as abuse or parents’ separation, they can feel neglected of the love and nurturing that can profoundly affect their development. This can delay the child’s cognitive and social development, thus impacting relationship skills as the child grows, continuing into adulthood.

Children with attachment difficulties can show signs of anxiety, depression, inattentiveness, lack of self-worth and aggression. The child can become emotionally detached making relationships extremely difficult to build pushing people who try to get close away from them. They may feel the opposite, seeking attention from anybody who will give them it. Children with attachment difficulties are more likely to struggle emotionally, socially, academically and behaviourally; making early intervention important.

There are various ways that can help the attachment bond that include one to one therapy to enable the child to learn interactive skills. Parent or carer groups can bring awareness to responding to the child’s age, emotionally.

Emotions can be confusing for a child with attachment difficulties as they might not be able to identify what they are feeling. Encouraging the child to become more aware of how they are feeling and learning interventions to express emotions appropriately will enable the child to be able to emotionally regulate. The most important aspect of developing a secure attachment is to create a consistent, stable, and healthy environment. Parental caregiving and positive parenting practices can be a main factor in the development of attachment along with creating a consistent, stable, and healthy environment. This has shown to be connected to more positive outcomes in children.
Helping a child with attachment difficulties feel secure can be a challenging process. The child can be protective of themselves and distrusting to others, creating a barrier to them accessing the love and nurture that it is imperative for their growth and well-being. When building the relationship, it is important for the adult to be open and honest to create a sense of security. Setting clear boundaries and offer consistency, listening to the child without judgement can help create a strong bond. It is important for the relationship between the care giver and child that the adult can acknowledge when they are wrong. This can help the child feel that it is ok to make mistakes and will still be accepted and loved. Being a parent is one of the toughest jobs there is. The pressure of parenting can be challenging and parenting a child with attachment difficulties can be exhausting for the care giver. It is ‘normal’ to feel overwhelmed at times. We all need a helping hand now and again. Therefore it is important to find support, asking family for help or accessing parental groups can avoid reaching burn out and help look after their own well-being. Remembering to not only show patience and kindness to our children but to ourselves as parents too.