

## **Introduction: Bonding is a Critical Issue**

When two items are attached with crazy glue, they are bonded. Pulling them apart is very difficult. Separation is possible but at some considerable cost. Parts of both sides may be ripped apart. The result is ugly.

Bonding between humans shares this quality. Bonds are tight and they are broken at the considerable risk of harming both sides. Bonding is a stronger term than attachment. Much more than attachment, bonding has a tenacious sticking quality. One breaks or violates a bond at a high price. The severance of a bond is more critical to the child's well-being than many have allowed.

Relationships are essential to the human condition. We need some degree of trust and intimacy with our fellows. Failure to develop intimate ties deprives us of personal growth and the capacity to perceive the needs of others as our own. No one is self-sufficient. We all need one another. Bonding is vital for survival and our sense of self.

Our connection to other humans, especially to our parents and siblings, shapes our development. Our self-image is fashioned in good part by the way that we imagine we are perceived. Children internalize and view themselves in accord with how they are treated.

Children depend on adults for nurture and survival. Children who have suffered significant loss may see no safe options. To a child, love and bonding mean safety. They have no lasting experience with separation. Each loss becomes global and forever, a dire prophecy of what will happen in the future. The child may decide: "It hurts to count on others. No one will ever love me. I will never again let myself get this close to anyone."

Early and repeated loss of a bonded and loved parent may cause a child to pull back, to guard against any future attachments. A frightful dilemma is created. While all love may end in the tragedy of loss, as C. S. Lewis said so well, not to love is the very definition of hell. The child who resists significant relationships (bonding) faces the same bleak choices.

Children are too often left to drift in foster care. This poses a nearly impossible dilemma for foster parents. Foster care is intended by law to be temporary. Unfortunately, in the real world, it is not. Children and their foster parents may become bonded over the time spent living together. Such relationships are often carelessly interrupted and the child suffers serious harm from the loss of family and friends.

The rights of the child are paramount, according to the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act. ASFA shifted the legal emphasis from the absolute right of birth parents to the child's own need and right for safety and a secure home. Bonding and permanence are legally recognized as issues critical to a child's development.

Permanence is the outward expression of bonding. Every child has the right to a permanent home. Bonding and permanence are the reverse side of one another. Bonding is psychological. Permanence is the necessary milieu or the objective reality in which bonding may take place.

Much has been written about attachment disorders and their treatment. This book is different. First, objective definitions of attachment and bonding are provided. Second, evidence-based practices are suggested to help foster parents, therapists, attorneys, and judges find a permanent home for every child.

Bonding and permanence are critical issues. Clear and evidentiary definitions for key terms are provided, along with factual data to predict outcomes. When does an attachment pass the tipping point and develop into a bond, a relationship so strong that its rupture tears a hole in the lives of the persons involved? What do the statistics show about the immediate and later-life effects in increasing the likelihood of ental illness, crime, homelessness, and poverty?

How can foster parents help? What is the role for caseworkers and psychologists? How can the case for bonding and permanence be presented in court? Federal laws and state welfare policies are provided, together with appellate court decisions that define and decide in favor of bonding in disputed adoptions.

We, the authors, are grateful for the attorneys who have worked extensively with foster children and been our advisors as we prepared this book. Thank you, Peter Kenny and Mark Bontrager.

We thank my grandson, Patrick Kenny, for his detailed editing, and my son, Bob, for his thorough and detailed formatting.

We have nine adopted children between our two families, and have had many more foster children. We appreciate the down-to-earth experience so lacking in sterile manuscripts, sometimes teaching us more than we wanted to know. We are grateful to them all for the wisdom and common sense they forced on us. Thanks to all of you. You made us grow up.

Finally, we thank our spouses.

To Mary, my wife and lifetime partner in raising our children, for her constant wisdom and practicality, and for her careful editing of this book.

To Ken, my husband and best friend, for his constant encouragement, patience, and support as I pursue my dreams.

James Kenny and Lori Groves

**Source URL (retrieved on May 19 2012):**

<http://adoptioninchildtime.org/bondingbook/introduction-bonding-is-a-critical-issue>