

Quick Tips for Supporting Students with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

Tip Sheet

Students with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) face unique emotional and behavioral challenges stemming from early relational trauma. This guide provides educators with evidence-based strategies to create a safe, supportive environment that fosters trust and growth for students with RAD.



Key Facts About RAD

Fact 1: RAD is a rare condition caused by a failure to form healthy emotional attachments, often due to neglect or inconsistent caregiving in early childhood.

Fact 2: Students with RAD may struggle with emotional regulation, social relationships, and trust, leading to challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Fact 3: A stable, consistent, and nurturing environment can help students with RAD develop healthier attachments and improve their emotional well-being.



Supportive Classroom Practices

Practice 1: Create a predictable, structured classroom routine to provide a sense of security and reduce anxiety.

Practice 2: Use clear, calm communication and set consistent expectations to help students feel safe and understood.

Practice 3: Foster positive teacher-student relationships by showing empathy, patience, and offering frequent positive reinforcement.



Positive Behavior Supports

Support 1: Use relationship-based interventions that emphasize trust-building, such as offering choices and control within safe boundaries.

Support 2: Implement a calm-down corner or designated quiet space for students to self-regulate when feeling overwhelmed.

Support 3: Reinforce positive behaviors related to attachment and connection, such as participating in group activities or responding appropriately to peers.



Accommodations for Students with RAD

Accommodation 1: Allow for flexible seating or break times to help students manage emotional stress during the day.

Accommodation 2: Provide extra time to complete tasks, especially during emotionally challenging situations or after an emotional outburst.

Accommodation 3: Collaborate with a school counselor or therapist to support students through individualized emotional and behavioral interventions.



Build Social and Emotional Skills

Strategy 1: Teach emotional identification and expression through activities like emotion charts, journaling, or role-playing scenarios.

Strategy 2: Encourage small group interactions where students can practice relationship-building skills, offering guidance and feedback on appropriate social behaviors.

Strategy 3: Use cooperative learning activities to foster trust and teamwork, gradually increasing the student's comfort level with peer interactions.



Trust Building Strategies

Skill 1: Be consistent with boundaries and consequences to provide a sense of safety and predictability.

Skill 2: Acknowledge and validate students' emotions, helping them understand and work through difficult feelings rather than dismissing or punishing them.

Skill 3: Offer positive reinforcement for efforts to connect with others, no matter how small, to encourage gradual emotional growth and relational trust.