

# What are Sexualized Attachments?

By Dr. Floyd Godfrey

When attachment drives become fused with sexual drives, it's called sexualized attachment. Everyone has legitimate needs for bonding and attachment that are inherent from birth. Our craving for connection is a survival mechanism wired into our genetics. These needs cannot be avoided, but are often wounded or neglected. In that scenario, a person becomes more vulnerable to having their legitimate needs for attachment become sexual in nature. Similarly, it's common for other emotions to become sexualized when they are related to attachment wounds or deficits. Abuse, abandonment, or neglect are common examples of situations that generate attachment wounds. They might leave a victim feeling intense fear, anger or confusion which then also becomes part of the sexualized attachment issue.



Sexualized attachments are easily observed in more severe scenarios. For example, a child who is sexually abused may find themselves as an adult seeking out sexual activity that mimics the abuse. This is called trauma re-enactments. Another example could be a child who is abused by an older adult, then later in life seeks out sexual partners who mirror the personae of the adult who abused them. This type of behavior stems from what we understand to be a trauma

bond. A third example could include a young teen who is abused in forceful ways that incite high levels of fear, then finds themselves as an adult looking for sexual activity that is dangerous, sadistic or masochistic in some ways.

## Why does this happen?

Attachment drive and sexual drive have a very similar objective: connection and union. Attachment drives are all about emotional bonds and intimacy; connecting on psychological levels for survival of the species. Sexual drives are all about physical bonds and intimacy; connecting on physical levels for survival of the species. Essentially, they both have the same goal but with a different angle of approach. Understanding this makes it easier to see how the two drives can easily become fused together.

## Attachment Needs

Every child is born with innate attachment needs. Essentially this means that everyone instinctively needs connection with other humans. Attachment and bonding are part of our human existence. We are biologically wired for attachment. The attention and nurture provided to infants and children is essential for healthy development and to meet their attachment needs.

## **Attachment Drives**

Attachment drives are the longings we experience toward bonding. This means every child yearns for connection with adult caregivers and peers. It's a survival mechanism. As such, the longing for attachment will persist throughout the lifespan. We have a genetic hunger for deep connection and a sense of belonging.

## **Attachment Deficits**

When ignored or neglected, the need for bonding and connection does not disappear. When attachment needs are left unmet or unfulfilled it creates emotional challenges. The deficit leaves an emotional void within the child. The unmet needs will persist until they are reconciled. You notice the strength of the attachment drive when mothers take their young children to daycare. Kids often cry due to separation anxiety. They've bonded with mom, not the childcare provider. It requires time and attention from the provider to generate a sense of bonding that ultimately reduces anxiety.

Sometimes children cannot attach due to medical or emotional issues. For example, kids with severe anxiety will have a more difficult time with attachment. Similarly, kids with Autism or RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder) will have difficulty with attachment. Regardless of obstacles impeding the attachment process, the longing for connection will continue.

It's also important to consider that children have moments throughout the lifespan requiring safe attachment beyond their parents. Boys have general attachment needs to belong with friend-groups. They look for bonding opportunities with same-sex peers; to fit into a group of buddies. Boys desire attachment with mentors: coaches, teachers, etc. Attachment has a larger implication than simply bonding with mom and dad, and includes a sense of belonging.

## **Attachment Wounds**

As children and youth strive toward attachment bonds, they will sometimes experience wounding. Legitimate needs for connection are wounded with experiences such as abuse – physical, emotional, or sexual. Emotional neglect can have a devastating impact. Wounds and deficits involving attachment leave a child vulnerable to emotional struggles and confusion. One author wrote that beyond actual abuse or cruelty, parenting styles that disrupt the attachment process contribute to mental health issues later in life.

## **Sexualized Attachments – Healing & Recovery**

Attachment needs and wounds can become “sexualized” when sexuality is fused with your needs for bonding and connection. If this has happened to you... it doesn't mean something is wrong with you. It's very common. Seek professional help to uncover the “roots” of the issue. Develop your self-awareness about how this happened, and you'll be on the road to finding a plan for healing and recovery.