



NATP
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF THERAPEUTIC PARENTS



Centre of Excellence in
CHILD TRAUMA

7 REASONS KIDS WITH REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER HOARD FOOD



From crumbled packages of noodles in bedsheets to toothpaste stuffed under mattresses, we've seen a lot in regard to "food" hoarding. We've even come across a young child who disassembled her bed at home to ingest her bed bolts. No matter the item of choice, children with reactive attachment disorder often gather, store, and sometimes eat strange things. Food (and sometimes non-food item) hoarding often leaves caregivers and clinicians bewildered.

The reason children with reactive attachment disorder hoard depends largely on the individual. It's important to note that not *all* children with RAD take part in hoarding behaviours. Just as all people on the planet differ from one another in various ways, so do children with traumatic histories. To decipher as to why people do what they do requires in-depth consideration and evaluation about their histories and current situations. That's why we create individual treatment plans for all of the children in our program here at the Institute for Attachment and Child Development. That said, we can't provide one answer as

to why all children hoard. However, we *can* share the reasons behind why the children in our program have hoarded in the past—

Some reasons why children with RAD hoard

1. **Some children hoard food as a means to reject their primary caregivers—** For some parents, feeding their children is more than pure nourishment (see “Acts of Service” in the book *The 5 Love Languages*). Many parents prepare meals to also express their love and care for others. Children with RAD typically work hard to [reject their primary caregivers](#) in various ways. To snub food that their parents prepare for them only to stash other food in their rooms, etc. is one form of such rejection.
1. **Some children hoard to gain power over their surroundings—** Children with RAD seek power to avoid the vulnerability they experienced at early ages. [They feel safe only when they are in control of their surroundings and the people around them.](#) They will seek power at all costs, even to the point where such behaviors are to their own detriment or seem trivial to others.
1. **Some children hoard as a survival mechanism—** Children who are neglected learn to care for their own needs at extremely young ages. It is a tragic and sad fact that some children still store food or clothes to take care of themselves even when they live in healthy and safe environments. The items they store serve as sorts of “emotional security blankets”.
1. **Some children hoard because they don’t trust their caregivers—** Similarly to the reason above, some children hoard items because they don’t trust their current caregivers will take care of them due to past neglect experiences.
1. **Some children hoard because they feel entitled to do so—** The children we work with were abused or neglected at young ages, right in the midst of important developmental stages. When children with RAD don’t receive treatment for attachment issues, they remain “stuck” in the toddler years developmentally (watch the video “[How to recognize attachment disorder in your child](#)”). Both kids with attachment disorders and toddlers feel entitled to get everything they want.
1. **Some kids hoard because they’ve seen other kids with RAD do it—** Children with RAD who spend a lot of time with other children with RAD who hoard may pick up the habit simply as a learned behavior. This is a common dynamic in situations such as in [residential treatment centers](#) where the children’s rewards for meeting goals include spending time alone with their peers.
1. **Some children hoard because food is a coping mechanism—** The same reason that many adults self-soothe with food is the same reason children with RAD do so. Food is their form of self-medication to make them feel better in the moment.

When faced with children who hoard, parents must separate the behavior from the child. Parents who personalize the behavior only add to the issue. Rather, parents should remain calm, talk with their children, and focus on empathy as opposed to feelings of anger. Anger will only fuel their symptoms. Although the behaviors children with RAD display may *feel* like a personal attack against their parents, they are merely symptoms of reactive attachment disorder.

Parents raising children with RAD must focus on building their relationships with their children rather than troubling behaviors. Of course, that's not always an easy task as parents who are also human. Punishing children with RAD for "misbehavior" or even rewarding them for "good behavior" doesn't work for kids overcoming early trauma though. This philosophy is contrary to how many adults in our society typically address parenting, education, and therapy. It is the same reason why [traditional parenting](#), [behavior modification in schools](#), and [traditional therapy](#) don't work for children with RAD. The only way to remedy any problem is to get to the root of it. The root for these children lies in their disorder—their inability to attach—not their symptoms.