

### ***The School-aged Assessment of Attachment (SAA)***

The School-age Assessment of Attachment (SAA, Crittenden, 1997-2005, Crittenden & Landini, 1999) is a semi-structured interview which is administered to school age children between the ages of 6 and 13 years. The interview is taped recorded, then transcribed and coded using the DMM model of attachment and adaptation method. Most interviews take 30-45 minutes to administer.

*Assessment.* The SAA uses seven story cards depicting increasing levels of danger about which the child is asked first to tell a made up (fantasy) story and then to talk about a similar event in their own life. Once s/he has told a story (fantasy or real), the interviewer explores the child's understanding of his or her feelings, motives, and understanding of the perspectives of others, particularly attachment figures. Finally, the child is asked to rate each situation in terms of its perceived danger on a scale of one to ten. It is assumed that the fantasy child is a self-substitute, but this assumption may be confirmed for specific child respondents when they use first person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, ours) in the made-up stories.

The SAA is a non-invasive, child-friendly procedure that can be conducted in any quiet area such as the child's home, school or an office. It usually requires around 30 – 40 minutes to complete and 1 to 2 hours to code by trained coders. The coding manual is less precise than other manuals and the classifications are not as reliable as in assessments for older and younger children.

*Validity.* The SAA has a growing body of empirical validity studies (Crittenden, Kozłowska, & Landini, 2010; Crittenden, Robson, & Tooby, 2015; Crittenden, Robson, Tooby, & Fleming 2017; Kidwell, Sizemore, Qu, Fugate, Deaton, & Blevins, 2015; Kozłowska & Elliott, 2016; Kwako, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2010; Nuccini, Paterlini, Gargano, & Landini, 2015). Of these, the Crittenden, Robson, and Tooby study addresses child maltreatment, Kwako et al. addresses sexual abuse, Carr-Hopkins, DeBurca, and Aldridge, 2017 addresses foster care, and Farnfield, 2017 and Kozłowska and Elliott, 2016 address non-reported siblings' risk. There are also articles using the SAA in case studies (Brewerton, Robson, and Crittenden, 2017; Carr-Hopkins, et al., 2017; Crittenden, 2017; Crittenden & Kulbotton, 2007; Kozłowska, Foley, & Savage, 2012; Kozłowska & Williams, 2010). Like other assessments of attachment, reliability is not easy to achieve and, therefore, evidence of reliability should be reported.

*Outcomes.* The SAA yields the following information:

The child's generalized self-protective strategy and the information processing that underlies it.

The application of the strategy to relationships and problems in the child's life.

The experiences and relationships which present as sources of both protection and stress and elicit the self-protective behaviour.

A pattern of information processing.

Unresolved loss or trauma that could derail the child's attachment relationships in ways

that are disruptive to the child and his/her carers.

*Limitations.* Like other assessments of attachment, the SAA does not indicate whether a child is attached. Unlike enacted assessments of attachment (the SSP and PAA), the SAA does not yield a person-specific attachment strategy. Instead, it yields a generalized strategy. Further, it is not possible to be certain which story/recalled events actually happened and which did not; external information is needed for that.

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