

Disconnected and extremely Insensitive Parenting (DIP)

Manual for coding disturbances in parent-child interactions



Version 3, 2009

D. Out, C. Cyr, F.T.A. Pijlman, M.D. Beijersbergen,
M.J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, & M.H. van IJzendoorn

Centre for Child and Family Studies
Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

Rommert Casimir Publishers

Introduction

The DIP coding system assesses disconnected and extremely insensitive parental behavior. Items from Main and Hesse's (1998) coding instrument, entitled "Frightening, frightened, dissociated, sexualized and disorganized parental behavior: a coding system for parent-infant interactions" are included, as well as items from the system by Bronfman, Parsons and Lyons-Ruth (2004), entitled "Atypical maternal behavior instrument for assessment and classification" (AMBIANCE).

In the DIP, the disconnected behavior dimension includes parental behaviors that may indicate a dissociative state; and the extreme insensitivity dimension includes parental withdrawal and neglect, as well as intrusive, negative, aggressive or otherwise harsh parental behaviors. For each dimension, a list of parental behaviors with scoring guidelines is provided. It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive; other behaviors that fit the theme should be coded as well. A score is assigned to behaviors that meet the specified criteria. On the basis of these scores, a final score is given for each subdimension and for the general dimensions. Based on the final scores classifications of parental behavior as disconnected and/or extremely insensitive can be assigned.

General description of the dimensions

Dimension 1. Disconnected behavior

This dimension covers disconnected behavior that may indicate a dissociative state of mind. An altered or dissociated state of consciousness is assumed to result from traumatic and threatening experiences that have not undergone normal processing (Hesse & Main, 2006). Traumatic experiences may concern the loss of an important person, physical or sexual abuse, a car accident or any other frightening experience. Unresolved memories and emotions regarding these traumatic experiences are (partly) dissociated from and not integrated in the parent's consciousness, memory or identity. Instead, they have a separate mental existence.

As a manifestation to the sudden intrusion of unresolved memories and affects related to past traumatic events, the parent may display different forms of disconnected behaviors, which are coded in the DIP under disconnected behavior, the first dimension.

- A. *Frightening/threatening* the child (e.g. by assuming attack postures; 1A).
- B. *Frightened behaviors* (e.g. frightened facial expression; 1B).
- C. *Directly dissociative behaviors* (e.g. stilling or freezing; 1C)¹.

Furthermore, *deferential* and *sexualized or spousal behaviors* (1D) can also be indicative of an altered state of awareness, and are also included in this dimension. Fear and anxiety may play a role in the tendency to display deferential behaviors (Main & Hesse, 1998). Sexualized and spousal behaviors that occur when a person is in a dissociated state are also included under 1D.

Disorganized or disoriented behaviors (dimension 1E) are more specifically indicative of a collapse of behavioral strategies. These behaviors originated from the coding system for disorganized attachment (Main & Solomon, 1990), but have been observed in parents of disorganized attached children and may be indicative of dissociative processes (Main & Hesse, 1990).

Dimension 2. Extreme insensitivity

This dimension covers two forms of extreme parental insensitivity:

- 2.1 Parental withdrawal and neglect.
- 2.2 Intrusive, negative, aggressive or otherwise harsh parental behaviors.

¹ These three categories have clear parallels to animal behaviors that are displayed in the face of severe threat or trauma (Nijenhuis, Vanderlinden & Spinhoven, 1998).

The concept of sensitivity involves the following components (Ainsworth, 1974):

- The parent's awareness of the signals of the child.
- Accurate interpretation of the signals.
- Appropriate response to the signals.
- Prompt response to the signals.

In the extreme insensitivity dimension, only extreme insensitivity in the form of parental withdrawal and neglect and in the form of intrusive, negative, aggressive or otherwise harsh parental behaviors is coded. Mild insensitive behaviors are not the focus of this coding system. The distinction between extreme insensitivity and mere insensitive responses lies in the duration, frequency, quality and severity of the behaviors (e.g. aggressive behaviors), as well as in the context in which the behavior occurs (e.g. when the child was already in distress). However, if these behaviors fulfil the criteria for disconnected behavior, they should be coded under the first dimension of the coding system.

Examples listed under these two subdimensions were taken from the AMBIANCE coding system by Bronfman, Parsons, and Lyons-Ruth (2004). Lyons-Ruth, Bronfman and Attwood (1999) suggested that the parent's unresolved loss and trauma may not only result in disorganized attachment in the child through behavioral manifestations of a dissociated state (Main & Hesse, 1990), but also through extreme insensitivity. Lack of resolution of the trauma may cause the parent to repeatedly respond in an extremely insensitive way to the child. These helpless or hostile behaviors repeatedly arouse fear or intense distress in the infant, but the parent does not provide the necessary comfort and soothing (Lyons-Ruth, Bronfman, & Parsons, 1999). Helplessness is reflected in the parent's lack of response or in withdrawn behaviors, while hostility is reflected in more negative, intrusive or controlling behaviors. Here, unresolved fear "compromises the openness of the caregiving system to hear and respond to the child's cues appropriately" (p. 39). The parent is not able to terminate the activation of the child's attachment system ('failure to repair'). In this sense, these extremely insensitive parental behaviors prevent children from developing an organized attachment strategy.

Overall coding instructions

1. Coding individual behaviors

- Watch the whole episode at least twice. The coder needs to have an overview of the episode and of the context before any specific behavior is coded.
- Identify parental behaviors that are either disconnected or extremely insensitive.
For each behavior criteria are given that need to be met before a score is assigned. Consider whether the behavior fits the criteria for disconnected behavior. If the behavior does not fulfil these criteria, consider scoring the behavior under dimension 2 (extreme insensitivity).
- On the coding form, describe parental and child behaviors in a concise manner, as well as the context in which these behaviors occur (e.g., feeding). Note time and setting (e.g. free play).
- Assign a score to the parental behavior on a scale ranging from 1 to 9. This score is based on the scoring guidelines that are provided for each of the behaviors listed under dimension 1 and 2. Each behavior is coded only once under one of the (sub-)dimensions.
- Code discrete behaviors every time they occur. When two or more behaviors occur in a given episode, each behavior should be rated separately. However, when a specific behavior occurs repeatedly or when it is accompanied by other behaviors belonging to the same dimension, one score is assigned for the whole sequence.

2. Scores and classification

- Note all individual scores on the first page of the coding form (see Appendix).
- Assign a final score for dimension 2.1 and 2.2. The final score should be equal to the highest individual score, but the coder can also consider giving a final score of one point higher than the highest individual score.
- Assign a final score for dimension 1, which should be equal to the highest individual score, but the coder can also consider giving a final score of one point higher than the highest individual score.
- Assign a final score for dimension 2, based on the final scores for dimension 2.1 and 2.2. The final score of dimension 2 should be equal to the highest final score of dimension 2.1 and 2.2. The coder can also consider giving a final score of one point higher when behaviors are scored under both subdimensions.
- Assign two classifications, one for disconnected behavior and one for extreme insensitivity, based on the final scores for disconnected and extremely insensitive behavior. Ratings of 5 or higher lead to the disconnected or extremely insensitive classification. When the final score equals 5, the coder decides whether or not a classification as disconnected or extremely insensitive is assigned.

Dimension 1 Disconnected parental behavior

The coder determines whether the parent displays the following disconnected behaviors: frightening/threatening behaviors (1A), frightened behaviors (1B), dissociated behaviors (1C), deferential and romantic/sexualized behaviors (1D), or disorganized/disoriented behaviors (1E).

Descriptions of these behaviors are provided on the following pages. For each behavior, criteria are provided that need to be met before a score is assigned. When the parental behavior does not meet the criteria, consider scoring it under extreme insensitivity.

When the basic criteria are met, a score is assigned to the behavior on a scale ranging from 1-9 (do not use halves). The context in which the behavior occurs as well as the quality, frequency, intensity and severity of the behavior are taken into consideration.

- For each behavior, a description is provided of behaviors that receive a low score (**4** or less). Sometimes, several situations are described that would receive a low score, but these situations do not have to occur simultaneously.
- Similarly, for each behavior several situations are described in which the parental behavior should be assigned a high score (**5** or higher). These situations do not have to occur simultaneously but constitute several examples of severe disconnected behavior.

Overall, higher scores are assigned in the following situations:

- Parental behaviors are repeated or prolonged.
- For most of the items, the behavior should occur for a specified number of seconds before a score of 5 or higher can be assigned. However, these rules should not be applied without consideration of the context in which the behavior occurs (i.e. in some situations the coder may also decide to assign a low score to behaviors with substantial duration).
- Parental behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 1 or co-occur with other behaviors listed under the same description (e.g. fear is expressed in the facial expression and in the posture of the parent).
- The child is in distress, frightened or hurt and in need of the parent. However, when assigning a score, do not take into account whether the child *responds* to the parent's behavior by crying or by other distressed behavior. When the child is distressed because of the frightening behavior of the parent, and the parent *continues* to display disconnected behavior, a higher score should be assigned.

Dimension 1A Frightening/threatening parental behaviors

I. Pursuit movements, assumption of attack postures, attacking or threatening to attack

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. These behaviors are manifested in one or more aspects:
 - a. Voice alterations (e.g. hissing at the child)
 - b. Altered facial expression (e.g. showing teeth and raising upper lip)
 - c. Attack posture (e.g. seizing arms of chair in rigid posture, neck and head thrust forward)
 - d. Attack or pursuit movements (e.g. rapid animal-like clawing movements)
2. No meta-signals indicating play or affection (such as smiling)
3. Not preceded by vocal explanation or predictable from previous movements

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

When the behavior occurs only once or twice, for a short period (less than 4 seconds) and not accompanied by other anomalous behaviors.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the behavior is repeated or prolonged (4 seconds or longer); when two or more aspects listed under the first criterion co-occur; when the behavior is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1; or when the child was already in distress. Consider assigning a score of 7 or higher when aspects of these situations are combined, or when the behavior is even more prolonged (8 seconds or longer).

Dimension 1B Frightened parental behaviors

I. Parent suddenly retreats from the child or startles in response to the child's behavior.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. These behaviors are manifested in one or more aspects:
 - a. A frightened **facial expression** (e.g. mouth corners back and down, widening of the eyes, sudden intake of breath, brows raised and pulled together, mouth opening, possible initial freezing of facial muscles or bottom lip stretch).
 - b. A sudden rise in **intonation** or other **vocalizations** indicating fear.
 - c. A frightened **posture or movements** (e.g. suddenly backing away or moving arm away from the child, raising shoulders, hand to mouth, raising hands).
2. Unpredictable and not explicable behavior. The child may be doing something dangerous, but the parent is frightened for him- or herself instead of being frightened for the child.
3. No playful and/or affectionate behaviors, or indications of surprise.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When the parent shows a fearful facial expression for a short time (less than 4 seconds); the parent shows a sudden rise in intonation or a vocalization indicating fear; or the parent suddenly backs away/moves his or her arm away from the child. The behavior occurs only once or twice, for a short period (less than 4 seconds). The parent is able to return to his or her activities quickly.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When several indications of fear listed under criterion 1 are observed (e.g. frightened facial expression and moving arm away); when the behavior is repeated or prolonged (4 seconds or longer) and the parent cannot return to his or her activities quickly; when the behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1; or when the child was already in distress. A score of 7 or higher is assigned when aspects of these situations are combined.

II. Parent appears frightened by the child, indicated by a frightened facial expression, comments to or about the child and/or by posture and movements.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Fear of the child is indicated by one or more aspects (which do not have to occur simultaneously):
 - a. A **frightened facial expression** (see previous item for a description).
 - b. **Posture or movements** intended to keep the child at a distance (e.g. the parent reaches to the child over an unusual distance, holds the child at a distance, moves away whenever the child approaches, moves around the child, or offers an object to the child over an unusual distance).
 - c. **Comments** to or about the child indicating that the child is capable of frightening the parent.
When the behavior occurs suddenly and is comparable to a startle response, score under 1BI.
2. The behavior is not explicable.
3. No playful or affectionate behaviors.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When the parent shows a fearful facial expression for a short period of time (less than 4 seconds, the parent is able to return to his or her activities quickly). Or the parent inexplicably moves away when the child approaches, moves around the child, or shows other behaviors intended to keep the child at a distance, also for a short period of time.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When several indications of fear listed under criterion 1 are observed (e.g. moving away from the child with a fearful expression, making a comment about the child while simultaneously moving away); when the behavior is repeated or prolonged (fearful facial expression for 4 seconds or longer) and the parent cannot return to his or her activities quickly; when the behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1; or when the child was already in distress. A score of **7** or higher is assigned when aspects of these situations are combined.

Dimension 1C Dissociated parental behaviors

I. Stilling or freezing in trance-like posture with trance-like expression

Basic criteria that need to be met

The following criteria need to be met in order to score **stilling**:

1. The parent looks in one direction for a minimum of 3 seconds without focusing on an aspect of the environment (staring).
2. The parent is not blinking and does not make other movements.
3. If something happens in the environment (e.g. noise, the child moves into the parent's sight), the parent does not respond.

If the coder is not sure whether the parent is stilling (criterion 1 and/or 2), then an additional criterion is that the parent makes a sudden movement with his or her head after the period of possible stilling.

Freezing is scored when the parent suddenly stops moving and is stilling but the posture is not relaxed (for example, stoppage of movement with arms raised), in addition to the above-mentioned criteria.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

When the parent is stilling or freezing for a short period of time (less than 7 seconds). The child is playing quietly and is not in distress.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent is stilling or freezing for 7 seconds or more; when events occurring in the environment are more pronounced and the parent remains unresponsive (e.g. a very loud noise, a high tower of building-blocks falls over); when the child is in distress; or the behavior is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1. A score of 7 or higher is assigned when aspects of these situations are combined or when the stilling or freezing lasts for 12 seconds or more.

II. Voice alterations

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Voice alterations as a form of disconnected behavior concern simultaneous voicing and devoicing or a 'haunted' voice, and voices that are very deep and low, or an extreme drop in pitch.
2. The sounds are not imitations of other sounds (such as vocalizations of the child).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** is assigned when two short (each less than 4 seconds) altered vocalizations occur; a score of **3** is assigned when one short altered vocalization occurs, without any other anomalous behaviors.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When altered vocalizations are repeated (at least three times) or prolonged (4 seconds or longer); when the vocalization is accompanied by an altered facial expression (such as widened eyes) or by other disconnected behaviors; when the child was already in distress or approaching the parent. A score of **7** or higher is assigned when aspects of these situations are combined (for example, three altered vocalizations while the child is approaching the parent).

III. Handling as though the child is an inanimate object, and other handling indicating lack of sense of child's animate status.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent picks up the child in an inappropriate and insensitive way, or holds the child in a very uncomfortable position, or handles the child in a rough and insensitive way.
2. These behaviors are accompanied by an altered or blank/expressionless facial expression.
3. There is no interaction between parent and child (no gaze interaction and the parent does not talk to the child). Playful and/or affectionate behaviors are not present.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When the behavior occurs only once, for less than 4 seconds. The child, though in an awkward position or somewhat roughly handled by the parent, is not in distress.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the behavior is prolonged (more than 4 seconds) or occurs repeatedly; when the child was already in distress, handled very roughly or put in a very awkward position; or when the behavior is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1. Consider scoring **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined.

IV. Sudden inexplicable and unpredictable change or shifts in mood

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. A change in the parent's mood occurs, which cannot be predicted from previous verbalizations or interactions. The parent's mood may change from happy to neutral, angry to sad, happy to sad, etc.

2. Sudden and unpredictable.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

When the mood change occurs only once, is not extreme and the expressed emotions are not very intense. In addition, the child is not in distress.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the change in mood is more extreme; the expressed emotions are intense (e.g. parent is crying, or the parent suddenly starts to yell at the child); the behavior occurs repeatedly; the child was already in distress and cannot turn to the parent for comfort; or the mood change is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1. Consider scoring **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined (for example, the change in the parent's mood is extreme and the child is crying).

V. The parent shows inexplicable fear regarding aspects of the environment which have no intrinsically frightening aspects.
--

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Fear regarding aspects of the environment is indicated by one or more aspects:
 - a. **Frightened facial expression** (see page 8 for a description).
 - b. **Sudden retreat** (e.g. the parent suddenly backs away or moves his or her arm away).
 - c. **Comments** indicating fear about something in the environment.
2. Unpredictable and inexplicable in this context, e.g. there is no reason to be frightened.
3. No meta-signals of play and/or affection.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

When the parent shows a frightened facial expression, suddenly backs away, or makes a comment indicating fear about something in the environment. However, the parent is able to return to his or her activities quickly (the behavior occurs for less than 4 seconds).

- **Score 5 or higher**

When several indications of fear listed under criterion 1 are observed (e.g. frightened facial expression and moving arm away); when the behavior is repeated or prolonged (4 seconds or longer) and the parent cannot return to his or her activities quickly; the behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1; or the child was already in distress. A score of **7** or higher is assigned when aspects of these situations are combined.

1D. Deferential and romantic/sexualized behaviors

I. Handling the child or interacting with the child in a timid, submissive and/or deferential manner

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. These behaviors can be observed in several aspects, which do not have to occur simultaneously:
 - **Posture.** The parent assumes a submissive posture by lowering him- or herself in order to look up at the child and see the signals of the child.
 - **Initiating behavior.** The parent hesitates to initiate any behavior towards to the child: the parent may wait for the child's response for an excessively long time or the parent repeatedly initiates movements towards the child without completing them (start-stop movements). For example, the parent wants to pick up the child, but holds out his or her arms for an excessively long time, leaving the child to decide whether he or she wants to be taken up.
 - **Handling the child.** The parent handles the child in an extremely careful way, monitoring him/her for any signals of displeasure or distress.
2. The parent is (too) focused on the child and looking very attentively in order to see the signals and reactions of the child.
3. The behaviors are not appropriate in this context.
4. The behaviors are inexplicable (e.g. careful handling because of a sore elbow would not be coded).
5. The behaviors are not part of a game and no playful and/or affectionate behaviors are observed.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned for any of the situations that are described under criterion 1, but these behaviors are not repeated, not accompanied by other anomalous behaviors and occur for less than 5 seconds, while the child is not in distress.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the behavior occurs more than once throughout the session or is prolonged (5 seconds or more); when the child was already in distress; when the behaviors are accompanied by other anomalous behaviors that are listed under dimension 1; or when several aspects listed under criterion 1 occur simultaneously. Consider assigning a score of **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined.

II. The parent is overly responsive, deferential and submissive in response to the child's anger, rejection or displeasure.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The following behaviors must be observed:
 - a. The parent immediately stops his or her activities or movements when there is any indication that the child is angry, in distress or indicates displeasure.
 - b. The parent is focused on the child, and looks attentively at the child for any signals.
 - c. The parent does not resume his or her activities before the child seems to be at ease and calm. For example, while the parent is approaching, the child indicates displeasure, the parent then stops and folds hands, waiting for the child to encourage further approach.
2. This behavior is not part of a game, no playful/affectionate behaviors are observed.
3. Parental behaviors are not explicable and are inappropriate with regard to context.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

The parent responds in an overly responsive, deferential and/or submissive way to the child, but the behavior is not accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1, occurs for 4 seconds or less, is not repeated and does not occur when the child is in distress. If the coder is not sure whether the parental behavior is overly responsive, deferential and/or submissive, or whether the parental behavior is inexplicable and inappropriate in this context, assign a **2**.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent responds more than once in an overly responsive, deferential and/or submissive way; other anomalous behaviors listed under dimension 1 are also observed; when the behaviors occur for 5 seconds or more; or when the child was already in distress. Consider assigning a score of **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined.

III. The parent fails to stop the child from parent-directed aggression.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The child is aggressive towards the parent (e.g., hitting or pulling hair) but the parent does not try to stop the child although he/she may try to protect him- or herself.
2. The parent is clearly focused on the child. The parent's facial expression, posture or movements indicate that the parent feels helpless.
3. The behavior is not part of discipline (i.e. by ignoring the child's behavior, the parent tries to stop the child from acting aggressively). The child's behavior is too aggressive to ignore, or other pa-

rental behaviors (e.g., focusing on the child, shrinking back, or a frightened facial expression) exclude this alternative interpretation.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When the parent once or twice fails to stop the child from acting aggressively and no other anomalous behaviors are observed. If the coder doubts whether the behavior is part of a game or a discipline strategy, assign a **2**.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the child displays several aggressive behaviors (e.g. hitting, yelling, kicking) or the child is clearly hurting the parent; when the parent seems fearful (e.g. fearful facial expression); when the behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 1. Consider assigning a score of **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined.

IV. Spousal/romantic and sexualized parental behaviors

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. These behaviors can be manifested in several ways:
 - The parent kisses, strokes or touches body parts of the child in a too intimate and sexualized manner. The parent seems to be absorbed in these behaviors.
 - The parent encourages the child to caress the face, hair or intimate parts of the parent's body.
 - The parent speaks in hushed intimate tones to the child.
2. These behaviors are accompanied by a blank or 'dreamy' facial expression (e.g. faint smile, eyes somewhat closed and not focusing on something in the environment).
3. The parent is not responsive for any signals of discomfort or distress of the child, the parent does not seem to be aware of the environment.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned for any of the situations that are described under criterion 1, but these behaviors are not repeated, not accompanied by other anomalous behaviors listed under dimension 1 and occur for less than 4 seconds, during which the child is not in distress.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

The behaviors occur more than once during the session or are prolonged (4 seconds or more); when the behaviors are accompanied by other anomalous behaviors that are listed under dimension 1; or the behaviors occur when the child was already in distress. Consider assigning a score of **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined or when the behavior is very extreme.

Dimension 1E Disorganized/disoriented parental behavior

I. Simultaneous and sequential contradictions in behavior and/or vocalizations

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Contradictions between behavior patterns, vocalizations, facial expression and/or voice tone:
 - a. Simultaneous contradictory behavior patterns (e.g. the parent reaches down for the child with head sharply averted).
 - b. Sequential contradictory behavior patterns (e.g. the parent offers the child a toy but then withdraws it).
 - c. Contradictory vocalizations (e.g. the parent directs child to do something than not to do it).
 - d. Verbal content is incongruent with behavior (e.g. the parent asks the child to approach, while simultaneously and inexplicably stepping back).
 - e. Verbal content or voice tone is incongruent with facial expression (e.g. the parent smiles while using a stern voice or the parent exhibits an angry facial expression but speaks pleasantly).
 - f. Verbal content is incongruent with voice tone (e.g. stern voice but permissive message, or sweet voice with derogatory, demanding or impatient message).
 - g. Voice tone is incongruent with behavior (e.g. the parent uses friendly tone while maintaining a threatening posture).
2. These behaviors occur suddenly and inexplicably.
3. The behavior does not occur in the context of play.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

When the behavior occurs only once or twice, for a short period (less than 5 seconds) and is not accompanied by other anomalous behaviors.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the behavior occurs repeatedly or is prolonged (5 seconds or longer); when the child was already in distress; or when the behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1. Consider assigning a score of 7 or higher when aspects of these situations are combined, or when the behavior is even more prolonged (9 seconds or longer).

II. Anomalous movements and postures

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Anomalous movements or postures occur that can be characterized in one of the following ways:
 - a. Misdirected movements (e.g. the parent approaches the child as though to greet him or her, but then inexplicably moves away to greet or speak to another person instead).
 - b. Incomplete movements (e.g. the parent moves his/her hands towards the child but withdraws before touching the child, without rationale).
 - c. Mistimed movements (e.g. sudden unpredictable bouts of activity that are not preceded by normal preparation time and/or which have a robot-like or unmonitored quality).
 - d. Rhythmic, repeated movements without a clear function (stereotypies, e.g. repeated rocking).
 - e. Other anomalous movements or postures (e.g. extreme asymmetries, exceptionally slow movements).
2. The behaviors occur suddenly and are inexplicable (no evidence of an immediate goal/rationale).
3. No playful and/or affectionate behaviors are observed.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When one or two misdirected or incomplete movements occur for a short period (less than 5 seconds); when rhythmic and repeated movements with no clear function occur for a short period (less than 5 seconds); when the parent assumes an anomalous posture for less than 10 seconds. These movements are not accompanied by a blank or disoriented facial expression.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When misdirected, incomplete or mistimed movements occur repeatedly; mistimed movements are prolonged (5 seconds or longer); the parent assumes an anomalous posture for 10 seconds or longer; rhythmic and repeated movements without a clear function occur for 5 seconds or longer; when the child was already in distress; or when the behavior is accompanied by an altered facial expression or by other anomalous behaviors listed under dimension 1. Consider assigning a score of 7 or higher when aspects of these situations are combined.

III. Disoriented parental behaviors

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent shows disorientation or lack of orientation to the environment, as evidenced by a dazed or blank/inexpressive facial expression and by slowed or aimless movements. For example, the parent wanders aimlessly around the room with a dazed expression.
2. These behaviors are unexpected and inexplicable.

3. No playful and/or affectionate behaviors are observed.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

When the facial expression and movements indicate disorientation or lack of orientation to the environment for a short period of time (less than 5 seconds) and no other anomalous behaviors occur. The child is not in distress.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the behavior occurs repeatedly throughout the session or is prolonged (5 seconds or longer); when the child was already in distress; or when the behavior is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 1. Consider assigning a score of 7 or higher when aspects of these situations are combined, or when the parental behavior occurs for 9 seconds or longer.

Dimension 2. Extreme insensitivity

Parental withdrawal and neglect can be coded under dimension 2.1, which concerns the failure to initiate responsive behavior (2.1A), behaviors that act to create physical distance from the child (2.1B), or lack of interaction with the child (2.1C). Withdrawn behaviors that reflect fear of the child should be coded under disconnected behavior. Dimension 2.2 captures intrusive behaviors (2.2A), and negative and aggressive behaviors (2.2B). Behaviors should be *extremely* insensitive in order to be scored under this dimension. Descriptions are provided for each behavior, and criteria are given that need to be met before a score is assigned to the behavior.

When basic criteria are met, a score is assigned to the behavior on a scale ranging from 1-9 (do not use halves). The context in which the behavior occurs as well as the quality, frequency, intensity and severity of the behavior are taken into consideration.

- For each behavior, a description is provided of the behaviors that should receive a low score (**4** or less). For some times, several situations are described that would receive a low score, but these situations do not have to occur simultaneously.
- Similarly, for each behavior several situations are described in which the parental behavior should be assigned a high score (**5** or higher). These situations do not have to occur simultaneously but constitute several examples of (severe) extreme insensitivity.

Overall, higher scores are assigned in the following situations:

- Parental behaviors are repeated or prolonged.
For many items, the behavior should occur for a specified number of seconds or number of times before a score of 5 or higher can be assigned. However, these rules should not be applied without consideration of the context in which the behavior occurs (i.e. in some situations the coder may decide to assign a lower score to behaviors with substantial duration).
- Parental behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 2 or co-occur with other behaviors listed under the same description (e.g. physical aggression and hostile comments).
- The child is in distress, frightened or hurt and in need of the parent. However, when assigning a score, do not take into account whether the child *responds* to the parent's behavior by crying or by other distressed behavior. When the child is distressed because of the behavior of the parent, and the parent *continues* to display extremely insensitive behavior, a higher score should be assigned.

2.1A Failure to initiate responsive behavior to the child

I. When the child is in distress, the parent does not respond or the parent's response is too minimal.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. When the child is distressed, frightened or hurt and in need of the parent, the parent fails to respond in one of the following ways:
 - The parent does not respond and does not attempt to sooth the child for at least 5 seconds after the child started crying at high intensity (severe distress vocalizations, intense and continuous crying, which can be indicative of pain, fear, hunger). The child is clearly in distress and in need of the parent. The parent does not talk to the child nor moves towards the child in order to sooth him or her.
 - The parent responds to the child within 5 seconds after he or she started crying (severe distress vocalizations) but the response is too minimal (e.g., the parent only murmurs something to the child and continues to read her magazine, or the parent only glances at the child).
2. The parent is capable of receiving and responding to the signals of the child (i.e. the parent must be present in the same room as the child).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

The child is crying, but the parent does not respond or attempt to sooth the child within 5 to 10 seconds or the parent's response is too minimal.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent does not respond and attempt to sooth the child 10 seconds after the child started crying; not only does the parent respond to the child's distress within 5 to 10 seconds after the child started crying, the parent's response is also too minimal; the child approaches the parent and seeks physical contact; or the parent's (lack of) behavior is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.1 (e.g. the parent also moves away from the child).

II. The parent does not intervene when the child engages in potentially dangerous or harmful behavior.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. When the child engages in potentially dangerous or harmful behavior, the parent remains passive and does not intervene, or the parent looks at the child or talks to the child as means of intervention (e.g. the parent may support or forbid the child from doing something), but the child engages in such dangerous or harmful behavior that more intervention from the parent is required. The child's behavior can vary from climbing on an unstable chair, to reaching for the socket.

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the child's behaviors do not put him or her at great risk to get hurt. The parent remains passive for a short period of time and then moves towards the child to help him or her. Or the parent remains at a distance but is looking at the child, alert and ready to intervene when necessary. The child does not indicate the need for help.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent remains passive for a prolonged period; when the child repeatedly indicates that he/she needs help from the parent; the child's behaviors are very dangerous (e.g. it is very likely for the child to fall or otherwise get hurt), but the parent is not involved in what the child is doing or looks at the child but does not immediately intervene; or parental behaviors are accompanied or followed by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 2.1 (e.g. moving away from the child). Consider scoring **7** or higher when the child's behaviors are extremely dangerous (serious injuries may result that require medical assistance).

III. The parent does not respond to the child's repeated vocalizations and cues.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent does not respond or responds in a very minimal way to the child's repeated vocalizations and/or cues. For example, the child wants to show the parent a new toy but the parent does not respond, or murmurs something while reading a magazine. These parental behaviors are scored when the child's vocalizations/cues occur repeatedly – at least four times in a row or within a short period of time.
2. The parent is capable of receiving and responding to the signals of the child (i.e. the parent must be present in the same room as the child).
3. The child is not in distress (otherwise, consider scoring the parental behaviors under 2.1AI).

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the parent fails to respond to the child's repeated signals and vocalizations (which occur 4 to 6 times in a row) or responds very minimally. The parent is involved in other activities which are not interrupted to attend to the child. The parent may eventually react to the child.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent does not respond to the child's vocalizations/cues repeatedly (vocalizations or cues occur 6 times or more in a row); or when parental behaviors are accompanied or followed by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.1 (e.g. walking away from the child).

2.1B Actively creating physical distance from the child

I. When the child is in distress, the parent actively creates physical distance from the child.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. When the child is in distress, the parent responds in one of the following ways:
 - The parent holds the child, but then puts the child down before he or she is settled. The parent may continue to sooth the child from a distance (e.g. by pointing to an interesting toy or by saying that the parent will soon return to the child).
 - The parent does not hold the child, but physically moves away when the child is in distress (e.g. the child is crying while the parent moves to the chair, or picks up a magazine).
2. Contextual circumstances do not justify the parent's behavior (e.g. no score is assigned when the mother puts the child down because another child is doing something very dangerous).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When the parent puts the child down before he or she is settled or when the parent physically moves away when the child is in distress. In both cases, the parent continues to sooth the child at a distance. Or, the child is not very upset, not seeking contact with the parent and eventually calms down on his or her own.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent puts the child down too soon and then moves away while the child is still in distress (i.e. combination of both aspects listed under the first criterion); the behaviors are accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.1; when the child is very upset and continues crying, or tries to re-establish physical contact with the parent without success, and the parent does not sooth the child at a distance.

II. When the child seeks contact or approaches the parent, the parent responds in such a way as to create or maintain distance from the child.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent actively creates or maintains distance from the child when he or she seeks contact or is approaching the parent. These behaviors are passively rejecting the child (e.g. the parent walks away from the child). The parent ignores the child's behaviors or seems indifferent to the child's attempts to seek contact. The behaviors are negative in the sense that the parent does not want the child to be near him or her.

If the parent actively rejects the child by directing him or her to a toy or by shouting to the child 'go away', these behaviors should be coded under 2.2BIII.

2. Contextual circumstances do not justify the parent's behaviors.
3. The child is not in distress (otherwise, score under 2.1BI).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the child seeks physical contact or is approaching the parent but the parent actively creates distance from the child. This occurs only once, the child is not in distress and the parental behavior is not accompanied by much negative affect or by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 2.1.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

A score of **5** or higher is assigned when the behavior occurs more than once; or when behaviors are accompanied by negative affect or by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 2.1.

2.1C Lack of interaction with the child

I. Lack of interaction between parent and child

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Lack of interaction is manifested in one of the following ways:
 - During play or caregiving situations, the parent minimally interacts with the child. For example, involvement is sporadic and does not involve turn-taking, or the parent rarely speaks, has a flat voice tone, or hardly expresses affection to the child.
 - There is a complete absence of verbal and nonverbal interaction between parent and child during play or caregiving situations. For example, during a free play episode, the parent sits quietly on the ground and watches the child play, without participating in the play or saying anything to the child. The lack of interaction should occur for at least 3 minutes (continuous) before receiving a score.
2. The child is not in distress (in this case, consider scoring under 2.1AI).
3. Contextual circumstances do not justify the parent's behaviors (e.g. the parent feels ill).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

When the parent minimally interacts with the child for a period lasting between 3 and 4 minutes (continuous). The parent shows sporadic verbal and nonverbal initiatives and hardly expresses affection. He or she may once or twice smile or speak to the child or initiate play actions.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

- During most of the play session or an episode in which the parent takes care of the child, the parent minimally interacts with the child. Or a complete absence of verbal and nonverbal interaction is observed for 3 minutes or longer (continuous). When this lack of interaction is even more prolonged (7 minutes or more), consider assigning a score of 7 or higher.
- Absence of verbal and nonverbal interaction or minimal interaction with the child is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.1. For example, the parent is not interacting with the child for a prolonged period during which the child repeatedly vocalizes or engages in dangerous behavior.

2.2A Intrusiveness

I. The parent displays physically intrusive behaviors towards the child.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. Physically intrusive behaviors are observed, in which the parent gets too close to the child, overstimulates or intrusively overrides the child's cues during interaction (e.g. the parent tickles the child for a prolonged period of time while the child is trying to get away; ignores the child's cue for distance or the child's 'no'; physically crowds or hovers closely to the child).

These interactions are too intense and too vigorous; as a result, the child may indicate discomfort, displeasure or distress or tries to escape from the parent.

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

The parent overstimulates the child for a short period of time (less than 10 seconds). These interactions are too vigorous and too intense and the child may show signals of discomfort. If the child gets distressed, the parent stops and comforts the child. Intrusive parental behaviors are not accompanied by other extremely insensitive behaviors.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent overstimulates the child for a prolonged period (10 seconds or more) during which the child may show signals of discomfort or distress, but the parent either continues to be intrusive or stops but does not comfort the child; when intrusive behaviors are accompanied by other extremely insensitive behaviors listed under dimension 2.2; or the parent responds to the child's distress by overstimulating the child, which is clearly inappropriate and insensitive.

II. Looming or other fast movements towards other vulnerable areas of the child's body.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent moves his or her face, hands or an object suddenly into the area immediately surrounding the child's face or eyes, or to other areas of the child's body. The parent overwhelms the child, as he/she does not take enough time to prepare the child for this (playful) behavior. The child may produce a wince, startle or withdrawal.
2. The behavior occurs suddenly.
3. The behavior does not fulfil the criteria for disconnected behavior (1A. Attacking/threatening to attack).

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the behavior occurs once or twice, not at very high speed. The child is not frightened or in distress.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When the behavior occurs repeatedly (at least three times) in a short period of time; the behavior occurs at a very high speed; the child was already in distress; looming is accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.2. Consider a score of **7** or higher when aspects of these situations are combined.

2.2B Rough, negative and aggressive parental behaviors

I. The parent handles the child in a rough and insensitive way.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent handles the child in a rough way during play situations or when providing care to the child. For example, the parent pulls the child by the wrist, forces the child in a certain position or restrains the child. The behavior can be considered negative (e.g. the parent is impatient, wants to leave and pulls the child by the wrist) but this does not have to be the case (e.g. the parent pulls the child by the wrist in order to show the child how the toy works). When the child signals discomfort or distress, the parent may remain unresponsive.
2. The circumstances do not give good reason for these behaviors (e.g. when the parent pulls the child by the wrist in order to prevent the child from falling down the stairs, this would not be coded).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the parent handles the child in a rough manner once or twice. The child may show signals of discomfort. However, if the child shows signals of distress, the parent stops handling the child in a rough way. The parental behavior is not accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.2.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When parental behaviors are prolonged or repeatedly within a short period of time; the behavior is accompanied by negative comments, physically aggressive behaviors or other behaviors listed under dimension 2.2; the child shows signs of distress, but the parent remains unresponsive; or the behaviors are extremely rough.

II. Parent displays aggressive behaviors towards the child.

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent displays aggressive behaviors towards the child (e.g. hitting, slapping, pushing, or throwing toys or other objects to the child) or towards objects (e.g. slapping a puppet, kicking an object in the room). Important factors in deciding whether the parental behavior is aggressive are indications of frustration, the intensity of the behavior (e.g. too forceful), and the consequences for the child (e.g. the behaviors may result in pain or injury). The accompanying affect does not have to be negative (e.g. these behaviors can also be displayed when the parent teases the child in a very

insensitive and aggressive way). The behaviors may be accompanied by rejecting or hostile comments (see 2.2BIII).

2. The behavior can occur in the context of harsh discipline and does not fulfil the criteria for disconnected behavior (1A Attacking/threatening to attack).

Instructions for assigning scores

▪ **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the parent displays one or two physically aggressive behaviors towards the child or towards aspects of the environment. The behaviors are not very aggressive, do not have the potential to inflict much pain and the child does not appear to be frightened or in clear distress. Furthermore, the behaviors are not accompanied by hostile or rejecting comments or other behaviors listed under dimension 2.2.

▪ **Score 5 or higher**

When the parent repeatedly displays aggressive behavior (at least three times); the parent displays physically aggressive behaviors that are severe or clearly pain-inducing; the child was already distressed; aggressive behaviors are accompanied by hostile and rejecting comments (see 2.2BIII) or by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 2.2; or the parent displays severely aggressive behaviors towards objects (e.g. breaking something). Consider scoring 7 or higher when aspects of these situations are combined (e.g. the parent repeatedly displays severe physical aggression).

III. The parent makes negative, rejecting or hostile comments concerning the child or to the child.
--

Basic criteria that need to be met

1. The parent makes one or more of the following negative comments:
 - Hostile or rejecting comments concerning the child in which the parent expresses his or her anger, frustration, contempt, humiliation, or disgust.
 - Teasing the child by making negative comments (e.g. criticizing, or mocking the child).
 - Negative and inappropriate verbal responses to the child's distress (e.g. laughing at the child in a negative way or hushing the child distinct from comforting sounds).
 - Threatening to use physical punishment (e.g. when the child does not comply).
 - Attribution of negative feelings or a negative motivation to the child's behavior, which is not justified (e.g. when a young infant does not want to drink his milk, 'you are doing that to annoy me').

The parent may use a loud, sharp or angry voice when making these comments. Furthermore, the comments can be directed at the child, but the parent may also be talking to someone else.

2. These comments are not accompanied by metasignals of affection (e.g. if the parent teases the child but simultaneously smiles, these behaviors would not be coded).

Instructions for assigning scores

- **Score 4 or less**

A score of **4** or less is assigned when the parent once or twice makes hostile or rejecting comments, or teases the child, or threatens to use physical punishment or attributes negative feelings/motivation to the child which is not justified. These behaviors are not accompanied by other behaviors listed under dimension 2.2. The child is not in distress or frightened.

- **Score 5 or higher**

When comments are expressed several times within a short period of time; comments are expressed with anger or are very negative, hostile and rejecting as indicated by the intensity and intonation (e.g. yelling) or by the content (e.g. comments are violent, degrading, humiliating, shaming or ridiculing a child); comments are accompanied by other behaviors that are listed under dimension 2.2; the child was already distressed or frightened (consider scoring **6** or higher when the parent also does not comfort the child afterwards); or the parent responds in a negative and inappropriate way to the child's distress.

References

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., Bell, S.M & Stayton, D.J. (1974). Infant-mother attachment and social development: 'Socialisation' as a product of reciprocal responsiveness to signals. In M.P.M. Richards (Ed.), *The integration of a child into a social world* (pp. 99-135). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Bronfman, E., Parsons, E., & Lyons-Ruth, K. (2004). *Atypical Maternal Behavior Instrument for Assessment and Classification (AMBIANCE): Manual for coding disrupted affective communication* (2nd ed.). Unpublished manual, Harvard University Medical School.
- Hesse, E., & Main, M. (2006). Frightened, threatening, and dissociative parental behavior in low-risk samples: Description, discussion and interpretations. *Development and Psychopathology*, *18*, 309-343.
- Lyons-Ruth, K., Bronfman, E., & Atwood, G. (1999). A relational diathesis model of hostile-helpless states of mind: Expressions in mother-infant interaction. In J. Solomon & C. George (Eds.), *Attachment disorganization* (pp. 33-70). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Lyons-Ruth, K., Bronfman, E., & Parsons, E. (1999). Maternal frightened, frightening, or atypical behavior and disorganized infant attachment patterns. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, *64*, 67-96.
- Main, M., & Hesse, E. (1990). Parents' unresolved traumatic experiences are related to infant disorganized attachment status: Is frightened and/or frightening parental behavior the linking mechanism? In M.T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E.M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in the preschool years: Theory, research, and intervention* (pp. 161-182). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Main, M., & Hesse, E. (1998). *Frightening, frightened, dissociated, deferential, sexualized and disorganized parental behavior: A coding system for parent-infant interactions* (6th ed.). Unpublished manual, University of California at Berkeley.
- Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1990). Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized /disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation. In M.T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti, & E.M. Cummings (Eds.), *Attachment in the preschool years: Theory, research, and intervention* (pp. 121-160). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Nijenhuis, E.R.S., Vanderlinden, J., & Spinhoven, P. (1998). Animal defensive reactions as a model for trauma-induced dissociative reactions. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, *11*, 243-260.

Coding form *Disconnected and extremely Insensitive Parenting*

ID:

Coder:

Date:

Episodes

	begin:	end:
	begin:	end:

Scoring

	1. Disconnected behavior				2. Extreme insensitivity					
					2.1 Withdrawal and neglect			2.2 Intrusive, negative, or aggressive		
Episode										
Episode										
Total										

Total score: **1. Disconnected behavior (range 1-9):** **Classification:** **non D / D**
 2. Extreme insensitivity (range 1-9): **Classification:** **non I / I**

Has to be checked by other coder

Explanation:

Other remarks

Coding form *Disconnected and extremely Insensitive Parenting*

ID:

Coder:

Date:

Description coded parental behaviors

Begin:	end:	Episode:									
Description of parental behaviors:											
Description of child behaviors:											
Description of the context:											
Score (range 1-9):											
Subdimension (mark below):											
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Disconnected parental behaviors	<input type="radio"/>	A.	<input type="radio"/>	B.	<input type="radio"/>	C.	<input type="radio"/>	D.	<input type="radio"/>	E.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.1 Parental withdrawal and neglect	<input type="radio"/>	A.	<input type="radio"/>	B.	<input type="radio"/>	C.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.2 Intrusive, negative, aggressive or otherwise harsh parental behaviors	<input type="radio"/>	A.	<input type="radio"/>	B.						

Description coded parental behaviors

Begin:	end:	Episode:									
Description of parental behaviors:											
Description of child behaviors:											
Description of the context:											
Score (range 1-9):											
Subdimension (mark below):											
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Disconnected parental behaviors	<input type="radio"/>	A.	<input type="radio"/>	B.	<input type="radio"/>	C.	<input type="radio"/>	D.	<input type="radio"/>	E.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.1 Parental withdrawal and neglect	<input type="radio"/>	A.	<input type="radio"/>	B.	<input type="radio"/>	C.				
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.2 Intrusive, negative, aggressive or otherwise harsh parental behaviors	<input type="radio"/>	A.	<input type="radio"/>	B.						