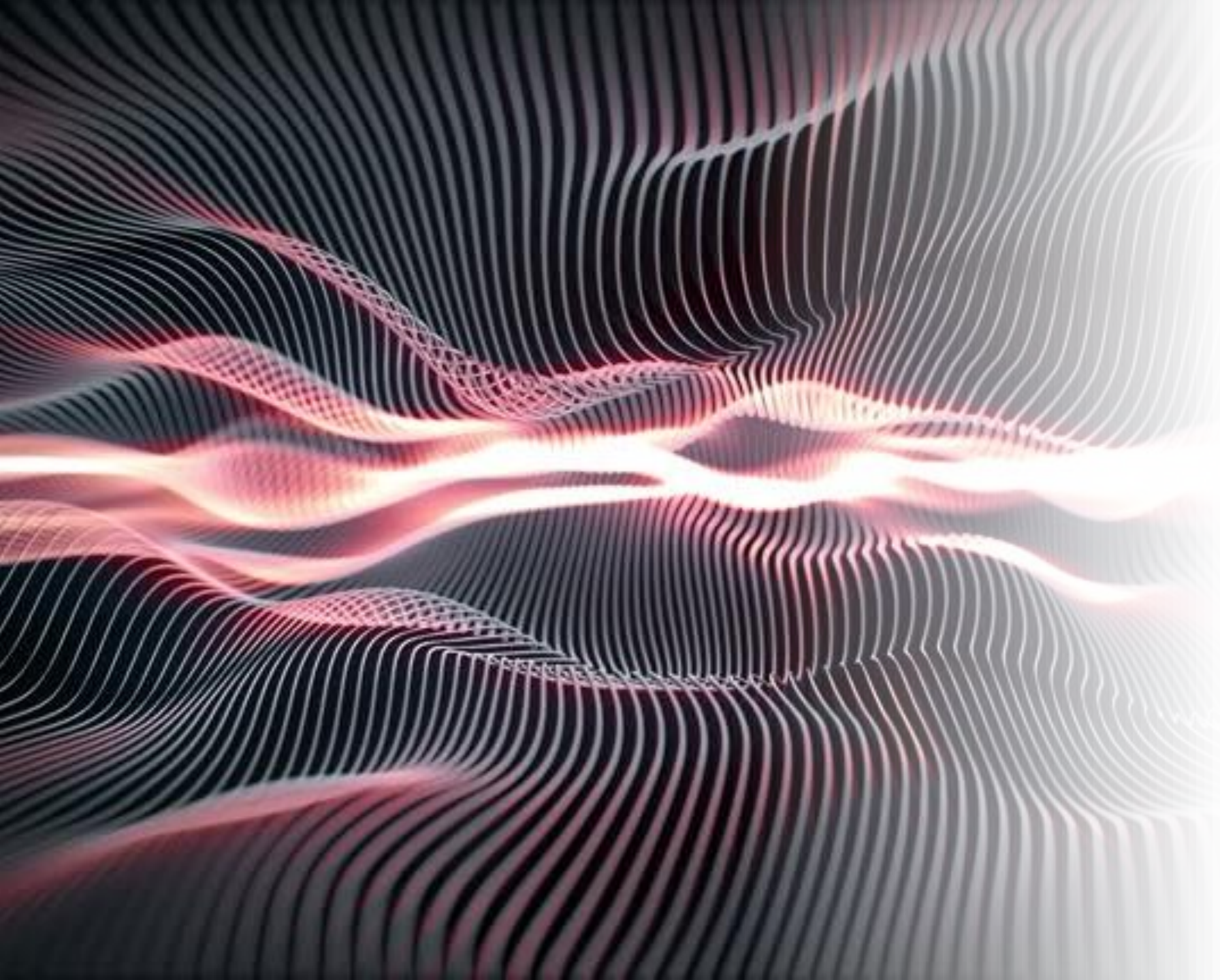


(istockphoto, ND)

Weaving Invisible Threads of Connection:

A Client's Emotional and Neurobiological Journey Back to Themselves Through the Lens of Attachment and Humanism

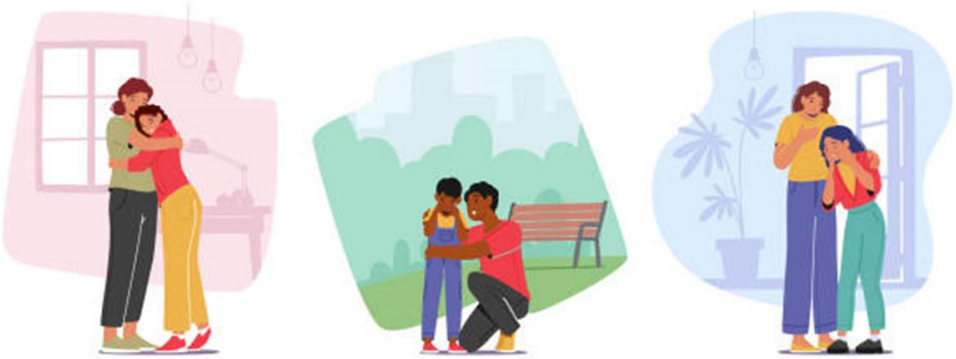
Emma Davies
2206803

A.I. Statement

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Content

- Attachment Definition and Considerations
- Attachment Behaviours/States
- ACES
- The Role of Therapy
- Theories of Change and ‘The Paradox of Direction’
- Case Study
- Conclusions



(istockphoto, ND)

(istockphoto, ND)

What?

- Attachment is an inbuilt **biobehavioural state**
- **Withdrawal** and **approach** behaviours in relation to significant others are used to **maximise safety and security** (survival)
- Goal is **physiological and emotional balance** within the individual

(Bowlby, 1969; Gander and Buchheim, 2015)

(istockphoto, ND)

PowerPoint stock image, ND

(istockphoto, ND)

How?

Responsive caregiving and **coregulation** will develop;

- Sense of **safety** and **trust** in the world
- Sense of **self**
- **Internal Working Model's (IWM's);** rules and templates that govern current and future relationships.

(Bowlby, 2005; Deng et al, 2021)

Attachment Styles in a Nutshell

- Bowlby's work **originally** meant for clinical **therapeutic settings**
- Collaboration between **Ainsworth and Bowlby:** first 3 attachment styles; **secure, anxious, avoidant**
- Mary Main later created **'disorganised'** attachment style and **Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)**

(Wallin, 2009)

PowerPoint stock image, ND

Recent Considerations of Attachment Styles…

- Ongoing **lack of consensus** regarding terms and definitions
- Empirical evidence based on **narrow parameters** in children (e.g. Strange Situation) or **self-report** for adults (AAI)
- Evidence for **flexible** attachment **behaviours/states** that are relationship specific rather than **'fixed'** styles

(Allen 2016; Bosmans et al, 2020; Fraley, Gillath and Deboeck, 2021; Thompson, Simpson and Berlin 2022)

(istockphoto, ND)

(istockphoto, ND)

Attachment State Internal Working Models (IWM) 'Core Beliefs'

Secure (Secure – Organised)

"If my safety or security is threatened and I freely express my negative emotions, **someone will comfort me**. It is safe to explore the world and my emotions because I can always come back here"

Anxious (Insecure – Organised)

"If my safety or security is threatened and I freely express my negative emotions, **someone might comfort me**. If I explore the world and my emotions, I might not have a safe place to come back to"

Avoidant (Insecure – Organised)

"If my safety or security is threatened and I freely express my negative emotions, **someone will reject me**. If I move away from this place, I will not experience rejection and I will therefore stay closer"

Disorganised (Insecure - Disorganised)

"If my safety or security is threatened and I freely express my negative emotions, **someone will act unpredictably, sometimes frighteningly**. I don't know whether to stay or go"

(Allen, 2016; Benoit, 2004; Bosmans et al, 2020; Deng et al, 2021; Mohammadzade Nagashan et al, 2021; Wallin, 2009; quotes author's own words)

(istockphoto, ND)

Attachment State Presentation and Characteristics

Secure (Secure – Organised)

Presentation: **Seek** physical and/or emotional **proximity** with attachment figure (or therapist) for comfort. Can attach or explore (detach) with emotional security in either scenario.

Characteristics: Freely express and process emotions. Feels secure in relationships and self.

Anxious (Insecure – Organised)

Presentation: **Extreme emotion** in presence of attachment figure (or therapist) during times of distress (with hope that this will prompt the desired response).

Characteristics: Worry and anxiety related to relationships leading to preoccupation with attachment figure. Needs high levels of reassurance and/or proximity.

Avoidant (Insecure – Organised)

Presentation: **Avoid** attachment figure (or therapist) in times of distress. **Minimise** displays of negative emotion in caregiver's presence.

Characteristics: Independent and/or 'aloof'. Focus on environment as attachment figure is reliably rejecting (e.g. ridicule, shame, blame etc). **Reducing rejection** means maintaining proximity.

Disorganised (Insecure - Disorganised)

Presentation: Confusion in how to act - sometimes 'anxious', sometimes 'avoidant' and many times in a state of indecision, **freeze or 'collapse'.** Seeks out relationships then 'pushes away'.

Characteristics: Wants to be close but also frightened of closeness creating a **'biological paradox'.** May exhibit **'push/pull'** behaviour with attachment figure (or therapist).

(Allen, 2016; Benoit, 2004; Bosmans et al, 2020; Mohammadzade Nagashan et al, 2021; Wallin, 2009)

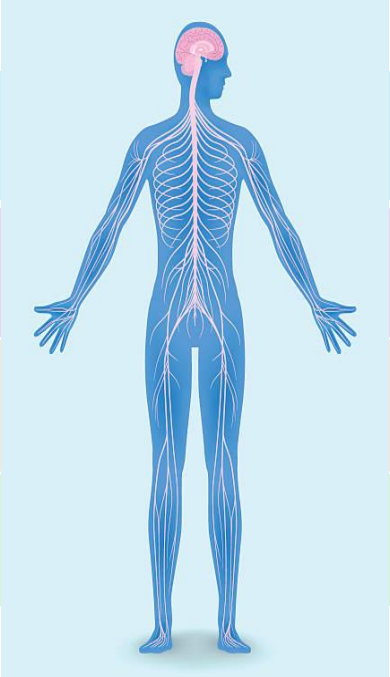
(istockphoto, ND)

🦴 ⊞ Comparing 2 Concepts ⊞ 🕓

Attachment Behaviour/States

- Disorganised (Freeze/Collapse)
- Avoidant (run away)
- Anxious (prone to arguments)
- Secure (just right/safety)

(Allen, 2016; Benoit, 2004; Bosmans et al, 2020; Mohammadzade Nagashan et al, 2020; Wallin, 2009)



(istockphoto, ND)

Window of Tolerance

- Hypo/Hyper-arousal (Freeze/Collapse)
- Hyperarousal (fight/run away)
- Hyperarousal (fight/run away)
- Window of Tolerance (just right/safety)

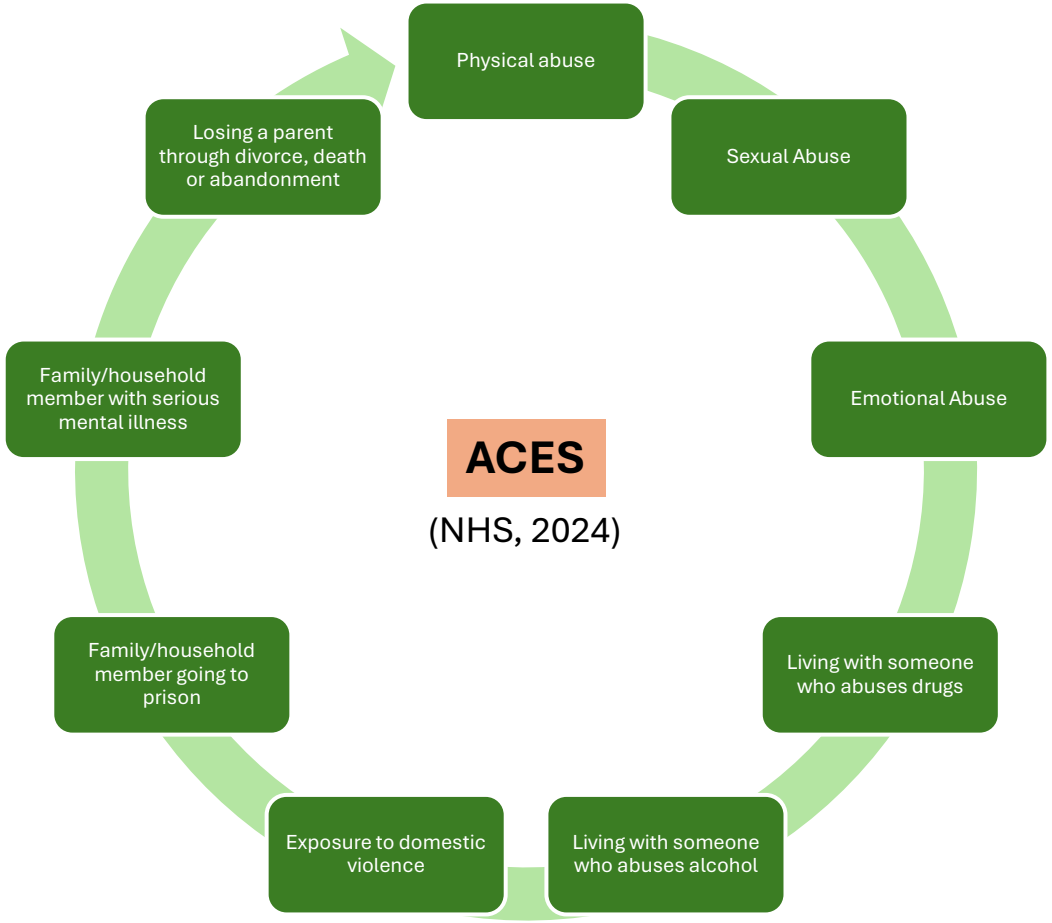
(Siegel 2020; Rothschild, 2023)

Flexible attachment behaviours that can be relationship specific and **travel between**
(Allen, 2016)

fMRI evidence for **neural basis** of attachment traits
(Deng, et al, 2021)

'Attachment Trauma' as an **emerging neurobiological concept**
(Naeem et al, 2022; Zagaria et al, 2024)

Impact of ACES on Attachment



- ACES **associated** with **insecure attachment** styles and **reduced CNS functioning** (Taunton et al, 2021; Hambrick et al, 2019)
- Stability and quality of **preceding attachment relationships** affects impact of ACES (Hambrick et al, 2019)
- Presence of **'Counter ACES'** reduces impact; resilience, wider relationships etc (Crandall et al, 2019)
- **Timing developmentally of ACES** significantly impacts level of attachment disruption (Hambrick et al, 2019)

(istockphoto, ND)

Intergenerational ACES: the great baton race of insecure attachment!

(Rowel, 2022)

(istockphoto, ND)

Generation 1: ACE

ACE's effect on G1 parenting (e.g. emotional availability/discipline style)

Generation 2: **Household dysfunctions** produce 'ACE-like effects'

Where does therapy come in? Weaving new threads...

Secure Base

"...the therapist's role is analogous to that of a mother who provides her child with a **secure base** from which to **explore** the world"

(Bowlby, 1988, quoted in Wallin, 2009, p1)

Reparative Experiences

Therapist's may "provide **relational experiences** that **challenge** pre-existing schemas or models of the world"

(Carvalho, Nata and Mena Matos, 2024)

(istockphoto, ND)

Theories of Change in Humanistic Psychotherapy

Gestalt

Paradoxical Theory of Change whereby ***embodied acceptance*** of oneself as one really is, inevitably results in organic change via reorganisation of the self

(Joyce and Sills, 2018)

Person-Centred

Actualising Tendency of the person to grow towards positive change under the ***Core Conditions*** of Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR), Empathetic Understanding and Congruence. Change can be **'seismic'** or **'osmotic'.**

(Mearns and Thorne, 2013; Rogers, 2004; Renger, Macaskill and Naylor, 2020)

(istockphoto, ND)

The Paradox of Direction;

An argument for Humanism to be held within Herman's (1992; Zaleski, Johnson and Klein, 2016) 3 Phase Oriented Approach (POA)

Stabilisation (safety)	
Window of Tolerance 'W.O.T.' (Siegel, 2020)	Putting on the Brakes ('Fizzy Coke') (Rothschild, 2009)
Processing (mourning and remembrance)	
Dual Awareness (Rothschild, 2023)	Explore 'what happened' (Zaleski, Johnson and Klein, 2016)
Integration and Reorganisation (Reconnection)	
Looking to the future (Zaleski, Johnson and Klein, 2016)	Connect to self/others (Zaleski, Johnson and Klein, 2016)

(istockphoto, ND)

(Light in the Darkness, 2020)

(istockphoto, ND)

Case Study 1: Presentation in Therapy (Davies, 2024)

History of ruptured attachment:

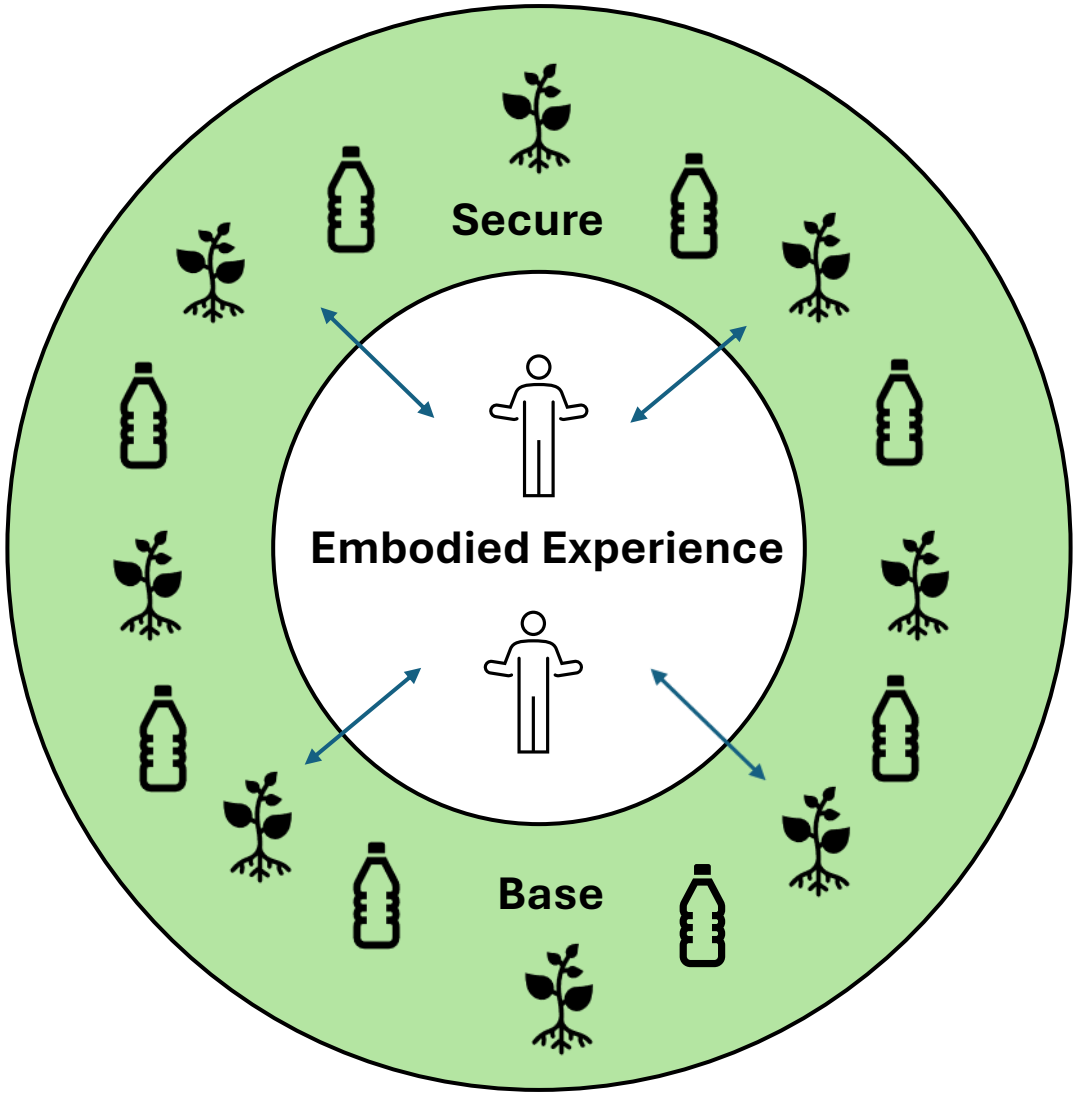
- **Multiple significant relational trauma's** spanning from adolescence to adulthood
- Recent DV and **'grooming'**
- Current **ongoing trauma** regarding client's child and **family court.**

Beliefs and behaviours at assessment:

- Self as **'bad'**
- Mistrusting of people **(particularly professionals)**
- **Severely** dysregulated
- Enquired re additional sessions

Case Study 1: Breakdown of Interventions

(Davies, 2024)



Stabilisation: (Rothschild, 2023; Zaleski, Johnson and Klein, 2016)

Provide safety and trust through **boundaries, pacing/grounding** and **psychoeducation**. Can come back from 'extreme state'. Uncover and expand on current strengths.

Example

Severe dysregulation – Bring back to W.O.T. - 5 sense check/grounding exercise/discuss light subjects – back in window/cortex online

Gestalt Embodied Acceptance

'seismic change' (Joyce and Sills, 2018; Mearns and Thorne, 2013)

Example:

Crying – acceptance – compassionate witnessing/therapist in window/allowing process/stabilisation – sense of relief/release (cortisol processed)

(istockphoto, ND)

Core Conditions: (Mearns and Thorne, 2013; Renger, Macaskill and Naylor, 2020; Rogers, 2004)

Reparative Experience through 'Osmotic Change' and **gradual revision of IWM's**

Examples:

Self as bad - UPR – reflect client's own 'goodness' with statements e.g. "you are being a good mother" – "I see myself as a good person again"

Untrusting of professionals - congruence/transparency - note taking process – "I feel like I can trust people again"

Transactional Objects (Stagg and Li, 2019) **as 'threads'**

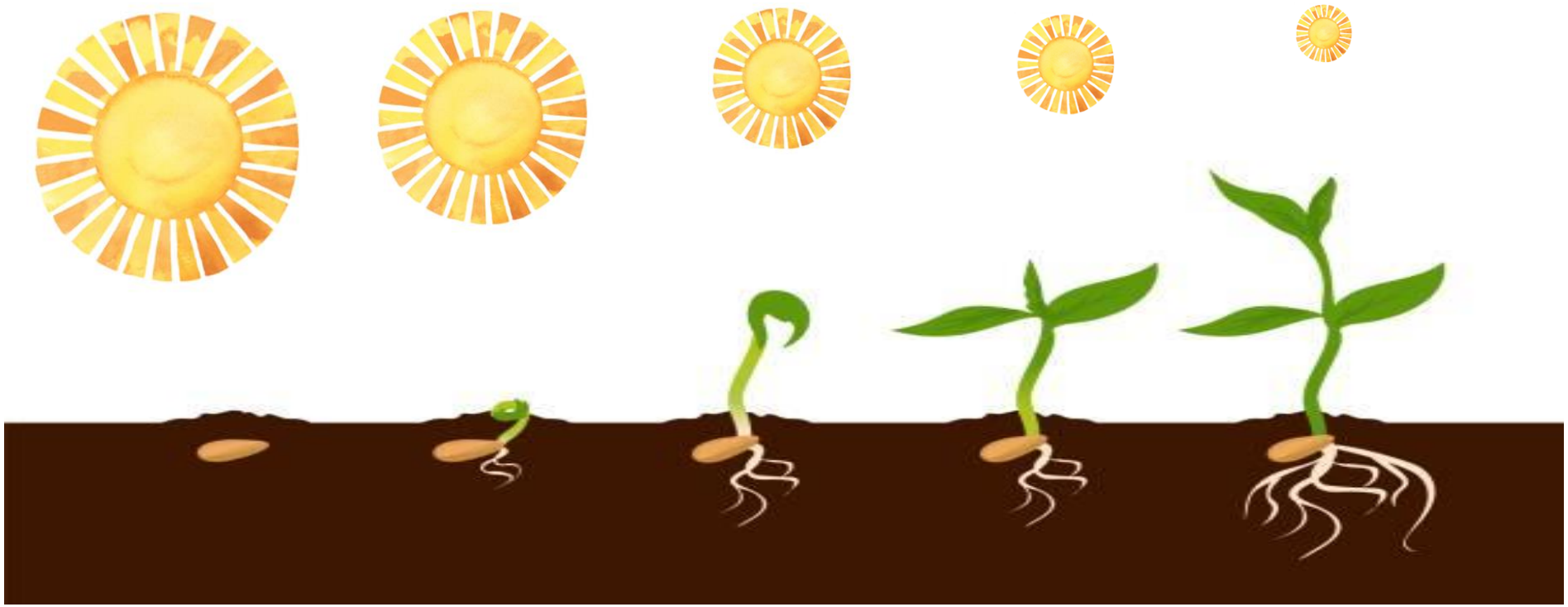
Examples:

Sensory Grounding items ('label'), sending resources via email, holding in mind 'I will give that some thought',

Case Study 1: Representation of levels of therapist active stabilisation vs client self-stabilising behaviours over time (Davies, 2024)

As **therapy progresses** Secure Base is **less with therapist** (sun) and **more with client's inner resources** (plant);

- IWM's are revised and become more trusted/stable.
- Learnt self-stabilising behaviours become more established.
- Window of Tolerance expands and strengthens (client was **ready to end** at session 10 of 13)



(istockphoto, ND)

(istockphoto, ND)

Case Study 1: Journey from Insecure Attachment to an optimum 'Secure Base' state through the Gestalt Lens of 'The Paradoxical Theory of Change'

(Davies, 2024; Joyce and Sills, 2018)

(Light in the Darkness, 2020)

(Creative Fabrica, ND)

(Khomoutova, ND)

(Hawkyard, ND)

- Severely ruptured/insecure attachment with self and others
- Stabilisation
- Transparency/Core Conditions

"I can begin to trust people again"

(Case study 1 quoted in Davies 2024)

"I feel like I'm a good person again"

(Case study 1 quoted in Davies 2024)

- **Sit with/process sadness**
- Psychoeducation (shame reduction re grooming/self-regulating techniques)
- Client self-care through exercise
- **Acceptance of self as good**

- **Hidden emotions "I haven't felt safe to voice my hate before"**
- Planned ending at session 11 (of13) with artistic reflection
- "I feel like a can trust people again"

"Place of acceptance and want(ing) to move on with my life"

(Case study 1 quoted in Davies 2024)

(Corden, 2020)

(Parrish, ND)

(Siegel, 2023)

(Freepik, ND)

Conclusions

- ‘States’ rather than fixed
- Fluid like Window of Tolerance
- Based in CNS/ANS

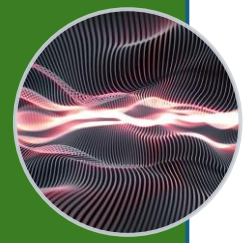
Flexible Attachment Behaviours

- Humanism within containment via stability in P.O.A.
- Containment leads to ‘openness’

The Paradox of Direction

- Strengthen attachment
- Revise IWM’s/‘self’
- Expand and strengthen secure base

Invisible Threads of Connection



(istockphoto, ND)

References

- Allen, B. (2016). A RADical Idea: A Call to Eliminate “Attachment Disorder” and “Attachment Therapy” From the Clinical Lexicon. *Evidence-Based Practice in Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 1*(1), pp60–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/23794925.2016.1172945
- Benoit, D. (2004). Infant-parent attachment: Definition, types, antecedents, measurement and outcome. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, *9*(8), pp541–545. https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/9.8.541
- Bosmans, G., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Vervliet, B., Verhees, M. W. F. T., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2020). A learning theory of attachment: Unraveling the black box of attachment development. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, *113*, pp287–298. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2020.03.014
- Bowlby, J. (2005). *A secure base : clinical applications of attachment theory*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203440841
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss; 1. Attachment*. London: Hogarth Press
- Carvalho, H., Nata, G., & Mena Matos, P. (2024). How secure is the secure base? Romantic attachment, emotion regulation, and psychotherapists’ role as secure base figures. *Research in Psychotherapy (Milano).*, *27*(1). https://doi.org/10.4081/ripppo.2024.733
- Corden, C. (2020). *Creating Light in Dark Times*. Available at: https://utorontopress.com/blog/2020/11/10/corden-creating-light-in-dark-times/ Accessed:01/11/24
- Crandall, A., Miller, J. R., Cheung, A., Novilla, L. K., Glade, R., Novilla, M. L. B., Magnusson, B. M., Leavitt, B. L., Barnes, M. D., & Hanson, C. L. (2019). ACEs and counter-ACEs: How positive and negative childhood experiences influence adult health. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *96*, 104089–104089. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104089

References

- Creative Fabrica. (ND). *Butterfly Emerging From a Cocoon*. Available at: https://www.creativefabrica.com/product/butterfly-emerging-from-a-cocoon-clipart-7/ Accessed: 01/11/24
- Davies, E. (2024) Weaving Invisible Threads of Connection; A Client's Emotional and Neurobiological Journey Back to Themselves Through the Lens of Attachment and Humanism. Case Study 1. *Professional Practice and Therapist Competencies. ECPR7003.* University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Unpublished Assignment.
- Deng, M., Zhang, X., Bi, X., & Gao, C. (2021). Neural basis underlying the trait of attachment anxiety and avoidance revealed by the amplitude of low-frequency fluctuations and resting-state functional connectivity. *BMC Neuroscience*, *22*(1), pp11–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12868-021-00617-4
- Fraley, R. C., Gillath, O., & Deboeck, P. R. (2021). Do Life Events Lead to Enduring Changes in Adult Attachment Styles? A Naturalistic Longitudinal Investigation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *120*(6), pp1567–1606. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000326
- Freepik. (ND). *Family Symbolising Unity & Connection*. Available at: https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/adorable-vector-artwork-white-family-symbolizing-unity-connection_56454031.htm Accessed: 01/11/24
- Gander, M., & Buchheim, A. (2015). Attachment classification, psychophysiology and frontal EEG asymmetry across the lifespan: a review. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, *9*, pp79–79. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00079
- Hambrick, E. P., Brawner, T. W., Perry, B. D., Brandt, K., Hofmeister, C., & Collins, J. O. (2019). Beyond the ACE score: Examining relationships between timing of developmental adversity, relational health and developmental outcomes in children. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, *33*(3), pp238–247. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2018.11.001

References

- Hawkyard, J. (ND). *Goddess Walking*. Available at: https://www.jezhawk.com/angelic-art/goddess-walking Accessed: 01/11/24
- istockphoto. (ND). Available at: https://www.istockphoto.com/ Accessed: 01/11/24
- Joyce, P., & Sills, C. (2018). *Skills in Gestalt Counselling and Psychotherapy. 4th Edition*. Sage.
- Khomoutova, E. (ND). *'Surfing Light'* . Available at: https://lightfromart.com/content/surfing-light-your-joy-love-well-being Accessed: 01/11/24
- Light in the Darkness. (2020). Available at: https://natureinart.org.uk/event/light-in-the-darkness/ Accessed: 01/11/24
- Mearns, D., & Thorne, B. (2013). *Person-Centred Counselling in Action. 4th Edition*. Sage.
- Mohammadzade Naghashan, N., Mazaheri, M. A., Gustafsson, E., Sadeghi-Firoozabadi, V., & Zabihzadeh, A. (2021). Attachment and joint attention in infants: The role of expectation. *Infancy*, *26*(2), pp223–237. https://doi.org/10.1111/infa.12382
- Naeem, N., Zanca, R. M., Weinstein, S., Urquieta, A., Sosa, A., Yu, B., & Sullivan, R. M. (2022). The Neurobiology of Infant Attachment-Trauma and Disruption of Parent-Infant Interactions. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, *16*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2022.882464
- NHS. (2024). *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Attachment*. Available at: https://mft.nhs.uk/rmch/services/camhs/young-people/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-and-attachment/ Accessed: 05/11/24
- Parrish, M. (ND). *Nola Mindful Counseling*. Available at: https://nolamindfulcounseling.com/about/ Accessed: 01/11/24
- PowerPoint stock image. (ND). Available at: www.office.com Accessed: 02/11/24

References

- Renger, S., Macaskill, A., & Naylor, B. (2020). Learning and change within person-centred therapy: Views of expert therapists. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, *20*(3), pp535–544. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12291
- Rogers, C. (2004). *On Becoming a Person*. Constable.
- Rothschild, B. (2023). *Help for the Helper: Preventing Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious in an Ever-Changing World*. W.W.Norton and Company.
- Rothschild, B. (2009). *Safe Trauma Recovery*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhuzpUlaX_k Accessed: 06/11/2024
- Rowell, T., & Neal-Barnett, A. (2022). A Systematic Review of the Effect of Parental Adverse Childhood Experiences on Parenting and Child Psychopathology. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, *15*(1), pp167–180. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00400-x
- Siegel, D. J. (2020). *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are. Third edition*. The Guilford Press, a division of Guilford Publications, Inc.
- Siegel, K. (2023). *Mother and Daughter*. Available at: https://www.dailypaintworks.com/fineart/a58ce9cc-531a-43ed-979d-39a508d1c4f7 Accessed: 01/11/24
- Stagg, S. D., & Li, Y. C. (2019). Transitional object use, attachment, and help-seeking behaviour in Taiwanese adolescents. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *22*(2), pp163–171. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12352

References

- Taunton, M., McGrath, L., Broberg, C., Levy, S., Kovacs, A. H., & Khan, A. (2021). Adverse childhood experience, attachment style, and quality of life in adult congenital heart disease. *International Journal of Cardiology Congenital Heart Disease*, (*5)*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcchd.2021.100217
- Thompson, R. A., Simpson, J. A., & Berlin, L. J. (2022). Taking perspective on attachment theory and research: nine fundamental questions. *Attachment & Human Development*, *24*(5), pp543–560. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2022.2030132
- Wallin, D. J. (2009). *Attachment in Psychotherapy*. The Guildford Press.
- Zagaria, A., Baggio, T., Rodella, L., & Leto, K. (2024). Toward a definition of Attachment Trauma: integrating attachment and trauma studies. *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, *8*(3). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2024.100416
- Zaleski, K. L., Johnson, D. K., & Klein, J. T. (2016). Grounding Judith Herman's Trauma Theory within Interpersonal Neuroscience and Evidence-Based Practice Modalities for Trauma Treatment. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, *86*(4), pp377–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377317.