

Weaving Invisible Threads of Connection:

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

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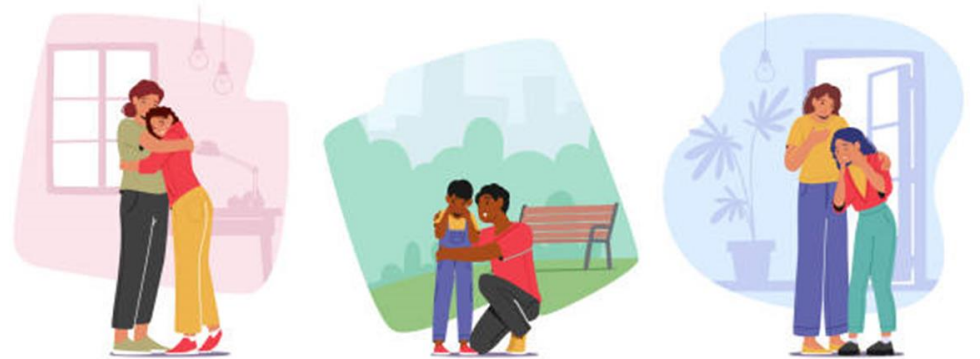


A.I. Statement

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**





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)

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)**

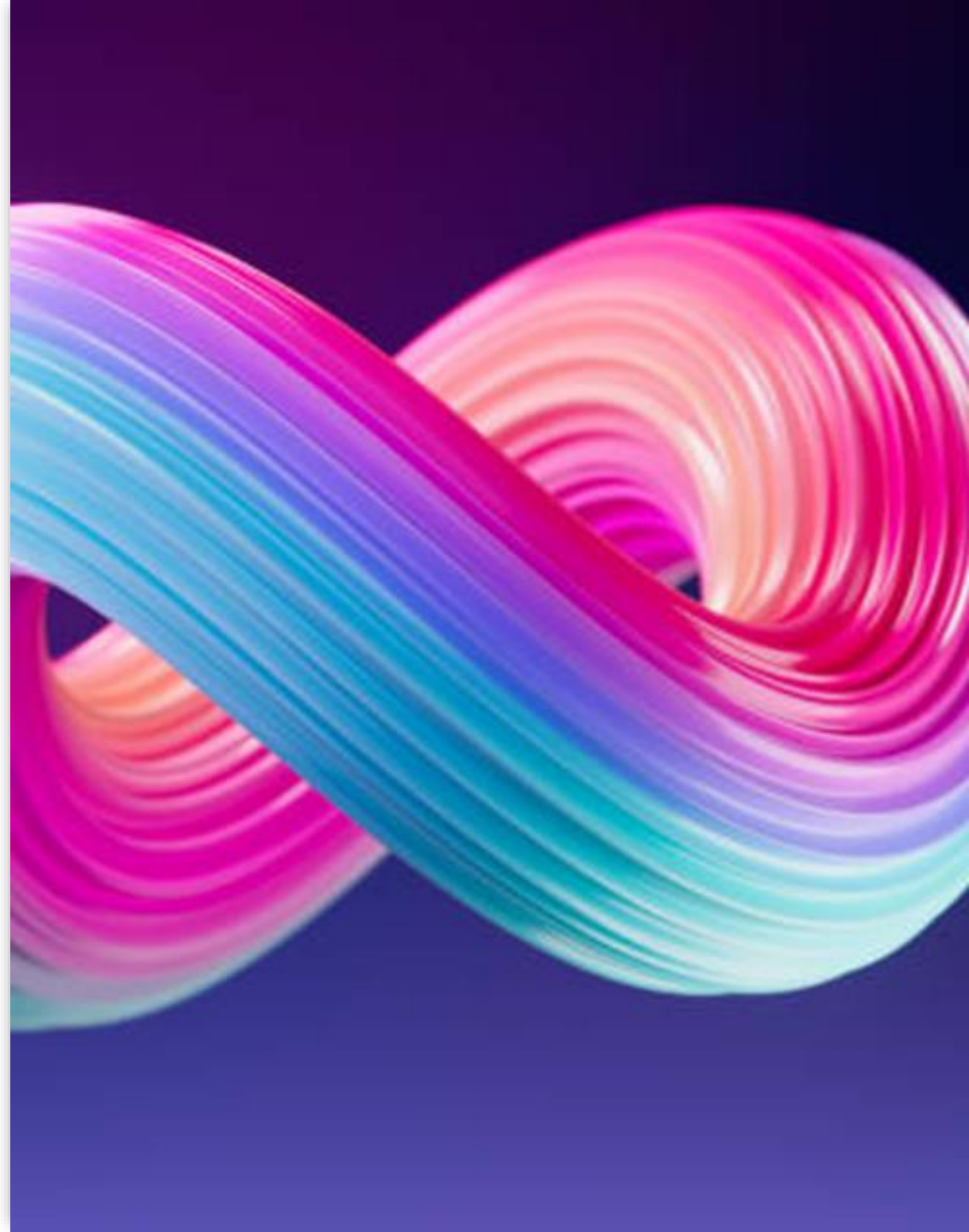
(Wallin, 2009)



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)





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”



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).

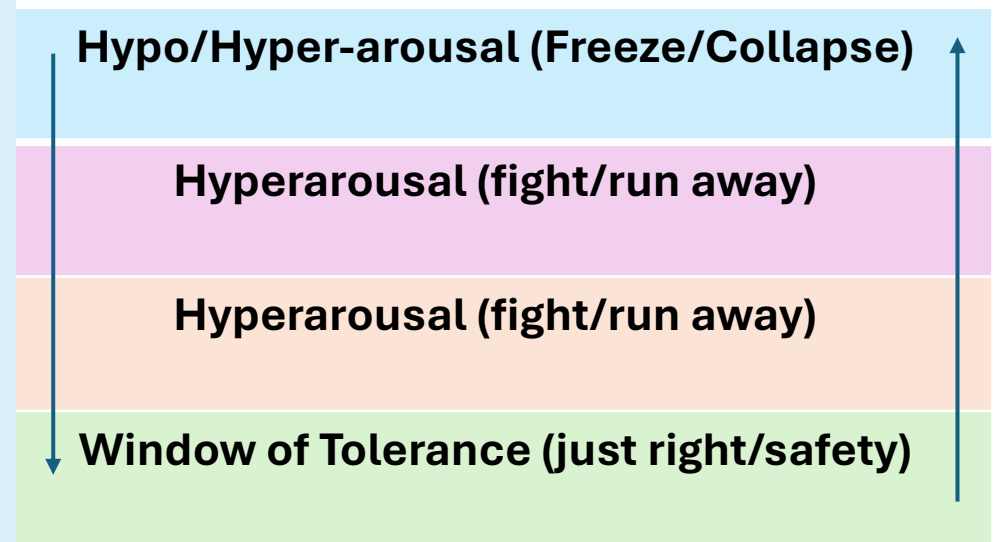
👉 📊 Comparing 2 Concepts 📊 🕒

Attachment Behaviour/States

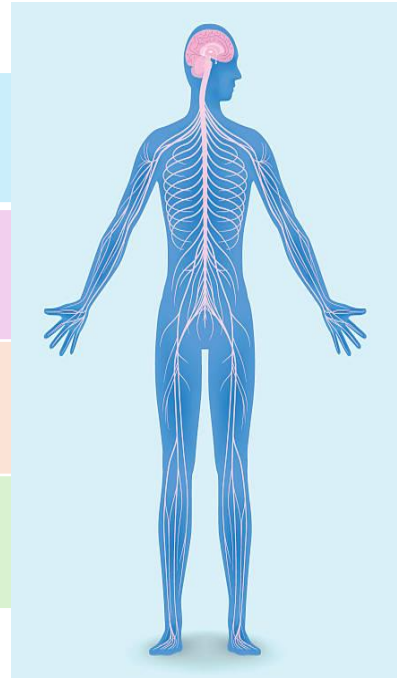


(Allen, 2016; Benoit, 2004; Bosmans et al, 2020; Mohammadzade Nagashan et al, 2020; Wallin, 2009)

Window of Tolerance



(Siegel 2020; Rothschild, 2023)



(istockphoto, ND)

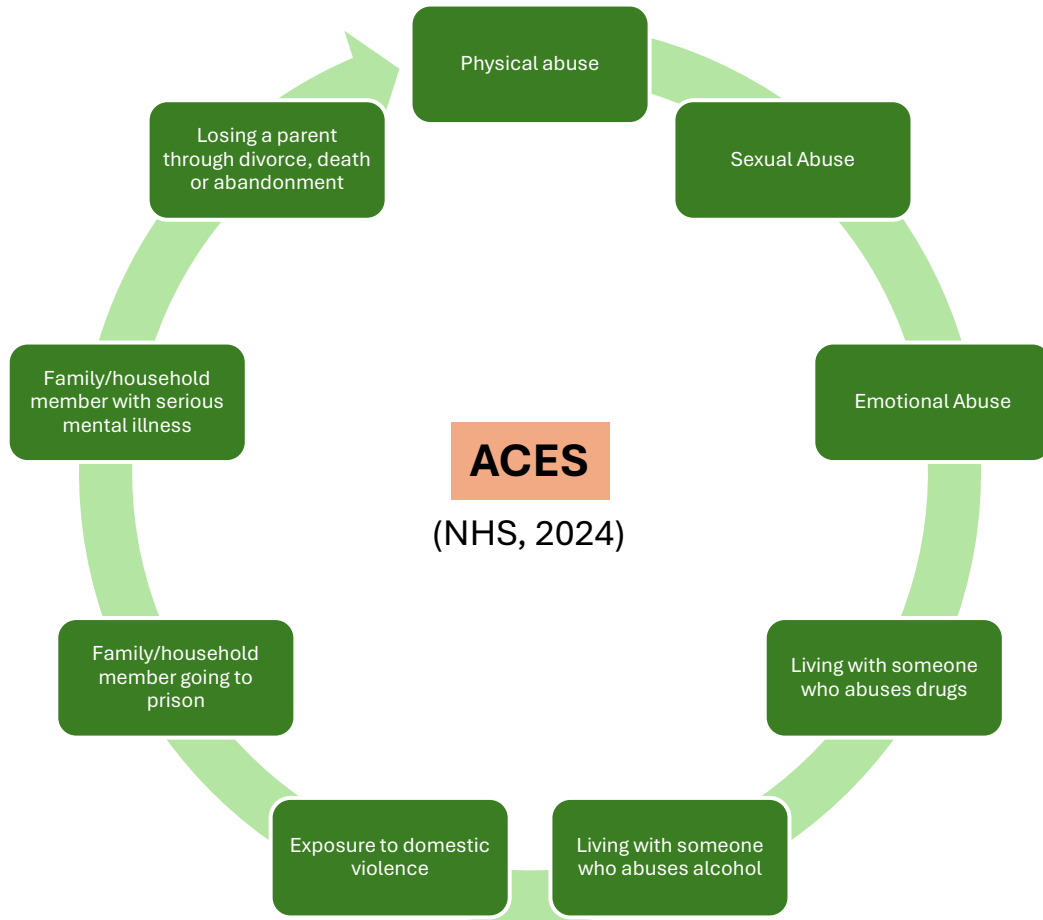
Flexible attachment behaviours that can be relationship specific and **travel between**
(Allen, 2016)

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)

$$X^2 =$$

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)

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”

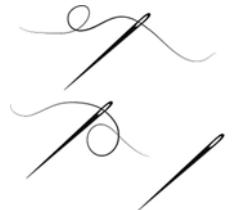
(Bowlby, 1988, quoted in Wallin, 2009, p1)



Reparative Experiences

Therapist’s may “provide **relational experiences** that **challenge** pre-existing schemas or models of the world”

(Carvalho, Nata and Mena Matos, 2024, pp1-2)



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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)

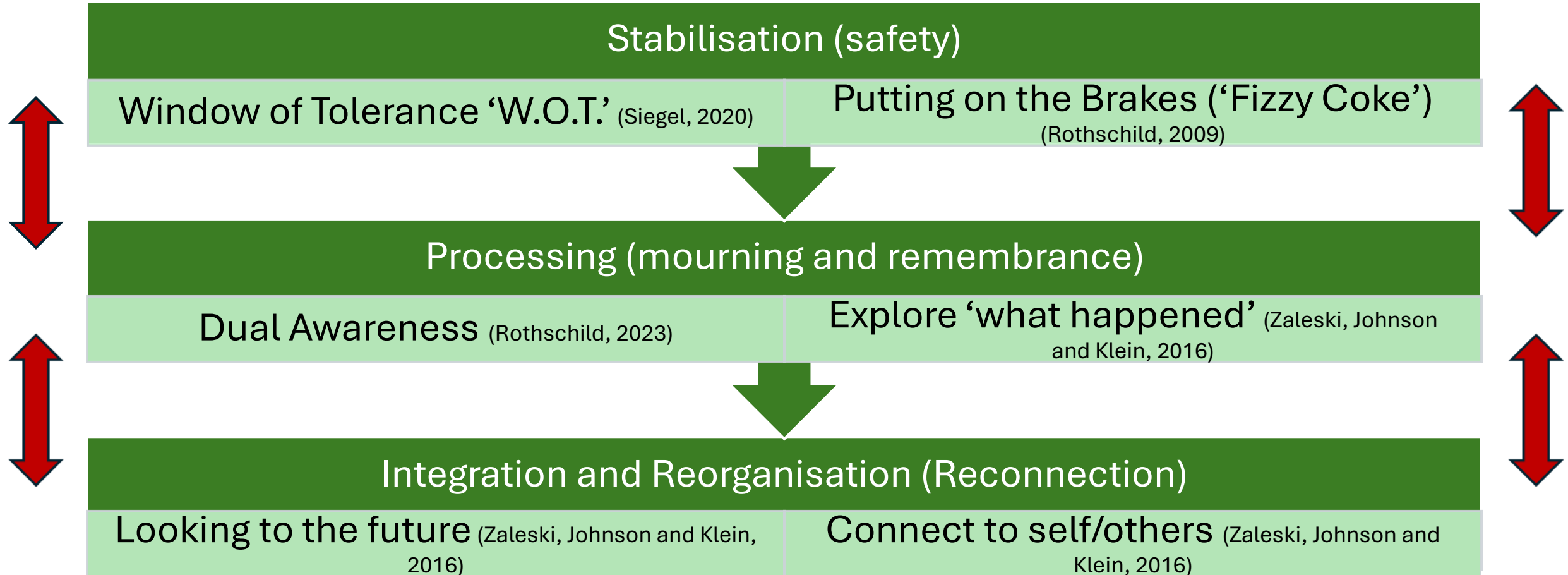
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The Paradox of Direction;



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



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



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:

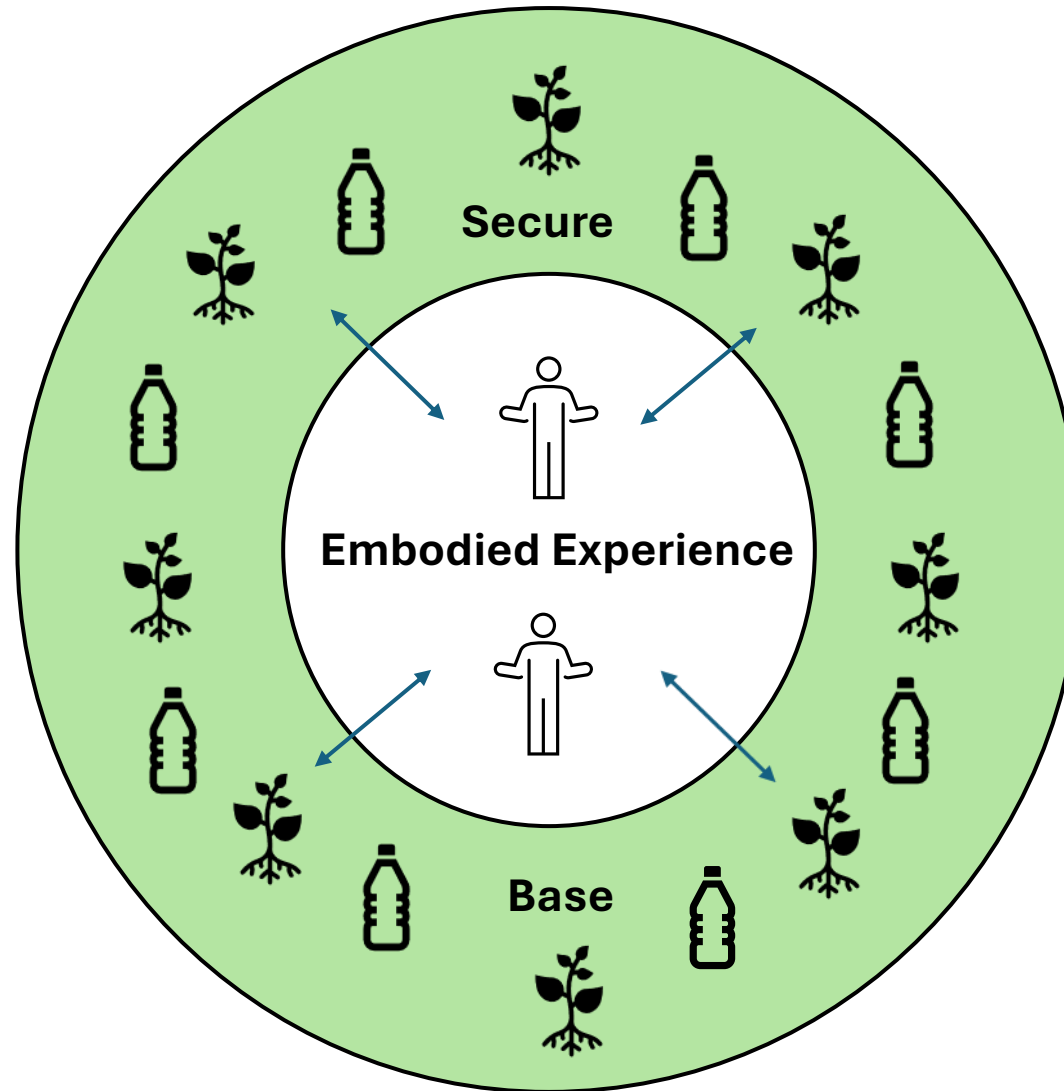
Crying – acceptance – compassionate witnessing/therapist in window/allowing process/stabilisation – sense of relief/release (cortisol processed)

(istockphoto, ND)

Case Study 1: Breakdown of Interventions



(Davies, 2024)



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'

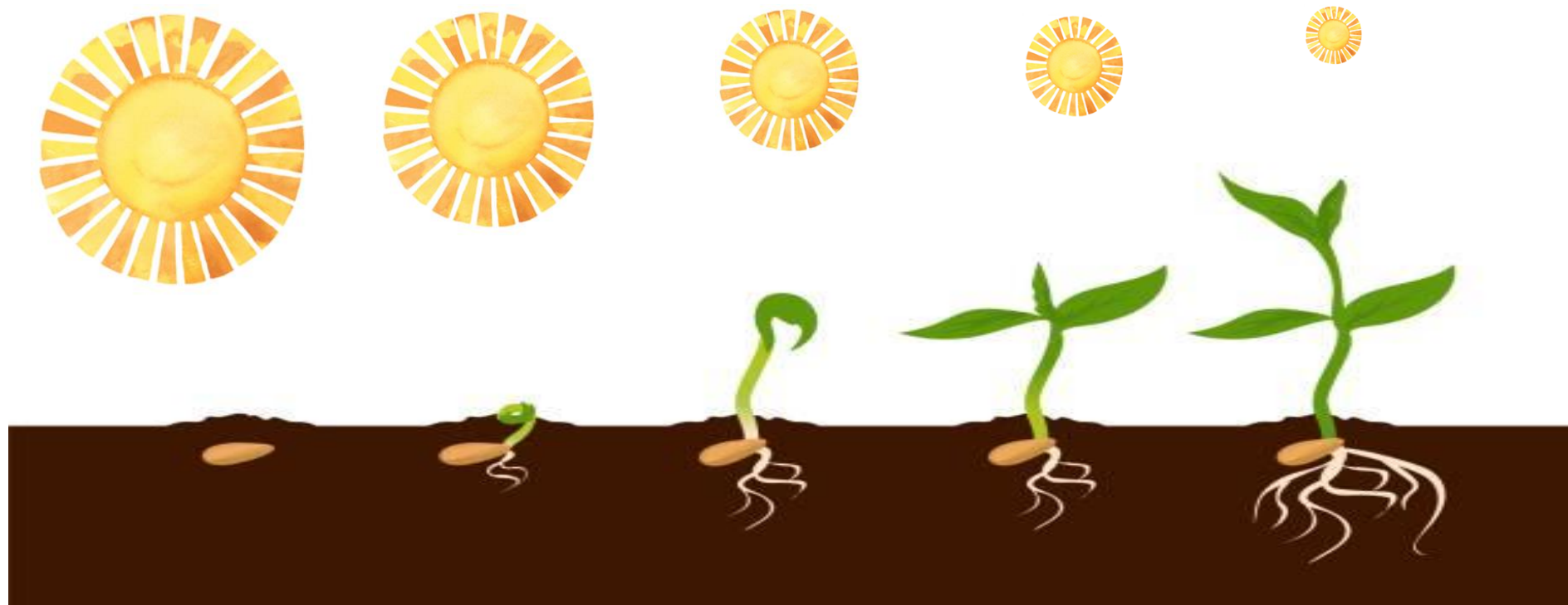
Examples:

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)





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)



(Corden, 2020)



(Parrish, ND)

"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**



(Siegel, 2023)

- **Hidden emotions "I haven't felt safe to voice my hate before"**

- Planned ending at session 11 (of 13) 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)



(Freepik, ND)

Conclusions

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

Flexible Attachment Behaviours



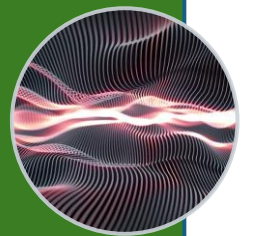
- Humanism within containment via stability in P.O.A.
- Containment leads to 'openness'

The Paradox of Direction



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

Invisible Threads of Connection



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