

Parenting for the Future

Building emotional connection with
traumatized children experiencing
attachment difficulties

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Overview

Emotional Connection for the Future

Challenges of Parenting:

- Challenge one: Loss of Trust in Infancy
- Challenge two: Fear of Intersubjective Relationships
- Challenge three: Living with Shame
- Challenge four: Miscuing through hidden needs

Therapeutic Parenting:

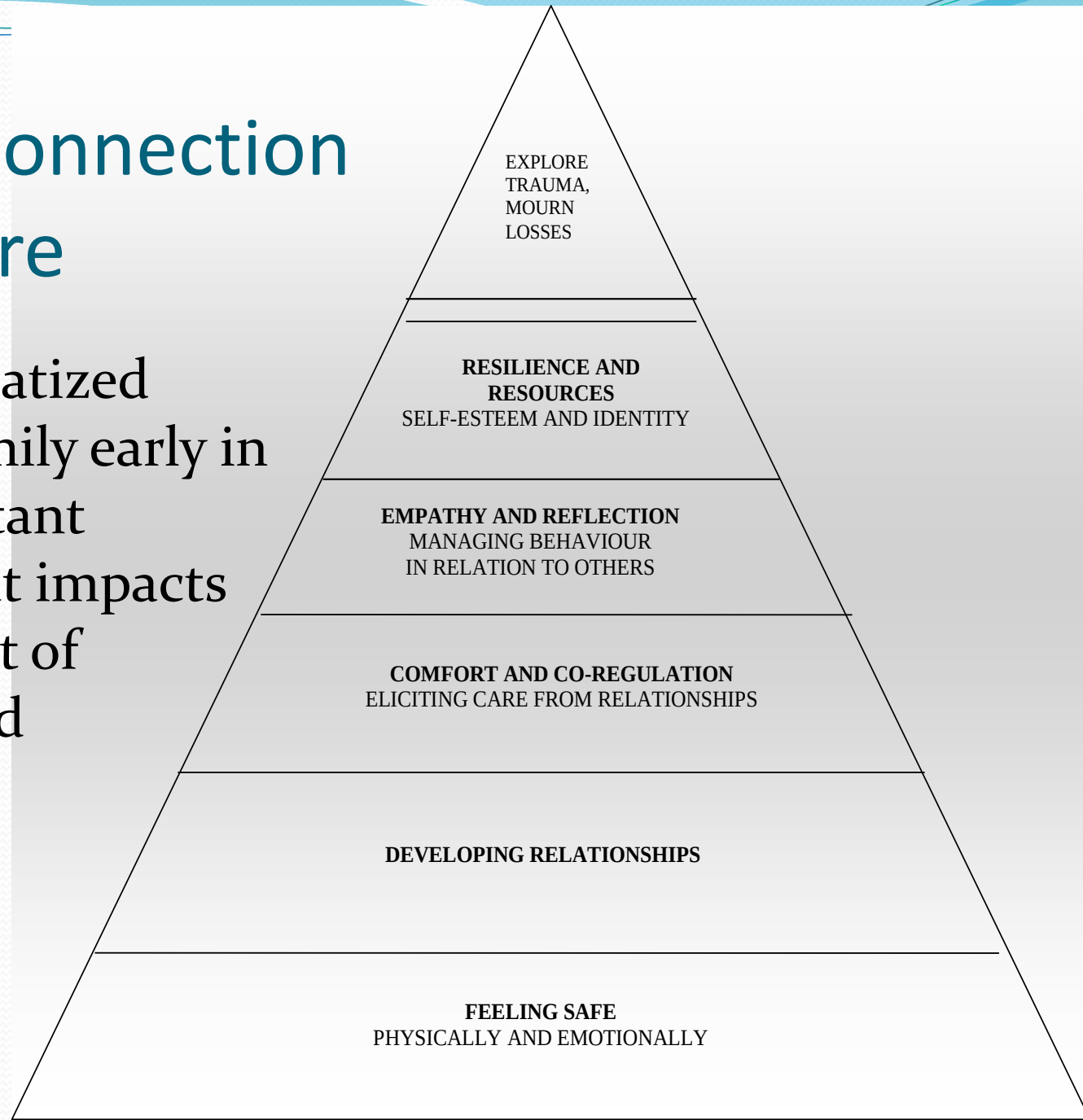
- Mind-minded parenting and PACE
- Connection and Correction: managing behaviour whilst building security

“....it is a clinical commonplace
that only after a patient has
become emotionally aware of
how and what he is feeling can
therapeutic change be
expected.”

John Bowlby, 1969/1997

Emotional Connection for the Future

- Children traumatized within their family early in life miss important experiences that impacts on development of dependency and independence.



Building Healthy Futures

- If we want children to grow into healthy adults, able to be independent and safe to be dependent, we need to attend to their emotional life as well as their behaviour.
- We need to parent to build emotional regulation and mentalization.
- But fear and insecurity means the children will not feel safe experiencing parents co-regulating emotion and thinking about their experience with them. They fear emotional connection.
- Behavioural parenting is not sufficient without additional attention to helping children overcome their fears of emotional connection.
- We need to attend to connection as well as 'correction'.
- In order to do this we need to be mindful of four challenges the children present to the parenting they need.

Challenge One: Loss of Trust in Infancy



Blocked Trust

Blocked Trust = “When young children block the pain of rejection and the capacity to delight in order to survive in a world without comfort and joy.”

Hughes, 2014



Blocked Trust and development of Mistrust

- No experience of unconditional love in early years – fear and doubt instead of trust and hope.
- Development of mistrust sensitizes nervous system.
- Social monitoring system is hyper-alert and social defence system is active, whilst social engagement system becomes inactive.
- Later experience of unconditional love and acceptance is confused by need for boundaries and discipline. Child anticipates pain and abandonment. Ordinary parenting triggers social defence system.

Impact on child

- ‘You do not love me. I am not good enough. You will hurt me and leave.’
- Child learns to resist authority and to oppose parental influence.
- Do not trust in parents’ good intentions or in unconditional support and love.
- Trust in self rather than others and thus are controlling in behaviours. Not open to reciprocity. Influence without being open to influence because this feels safer.

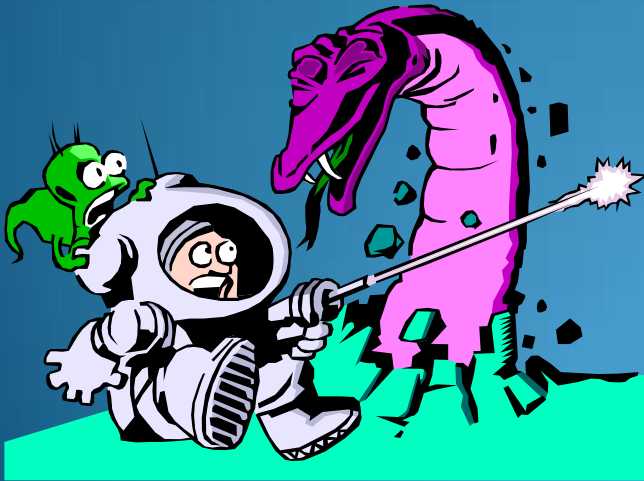
Intersubjectivity and Attachment

Mistrust in infancy impacts on :

- development of capacity for an intersubjective relationship.
- development of attachment relationships.



Challenge Two: Fear of Intersubjective Relationships



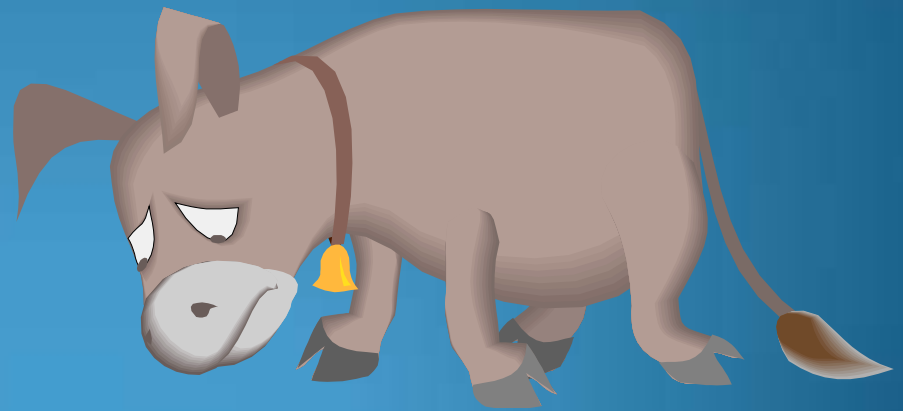
Intersubjectivity

- Safety and intersubjectivity are interwoven.
- Trevarthen studied infant intersubjectivity. The contingent and responsive relationship between parent and child.
- Parents discover what is unique about their baby.
- Baby discovers he can influence the parent.
- Primary intersubjectivity.
- Leads to secondary intersubjectivity.
- Impacts on the developing sense of an autonomous self.
- Lack of intersubjectivity – parent and child experience shame.

Intersubjectivity

- Intersubjective experience = reciprocity. Children are open to influence and enjoy influencing.
- Lack of intersubjectivity leads to social defensiveness. Need to take control of relationships rather than engage in mutual influence.
- Children who experience neglect lack early intersubjective experience. They feel not special and not loveable.
- Children who experience anger, fear, or rejection experience terror and shame. They learn to avoid intersubjective experience.
- Living with alternative parents – child continues to avoid intersubjective experience.
- This impacts on carer's beliefs about self as a parent leading to a sense of failure, feel unsafe with child.
- Carer also withdraws from intersubjective experience.

Challenge Three: Living with Shame



Understanding and Managing Shame

- Shame is a complex emotion that develops later than the development of more straightforward feelings or emotions such as anger, joy or sadness.
- Shame is uncomfortable for children who learn to limit shame-inducing behaviours.
- Shame is protective, it helps children to learn socially acceptable behaviour and thus to be able to develop relationships.
- This experience of shame is integrative.

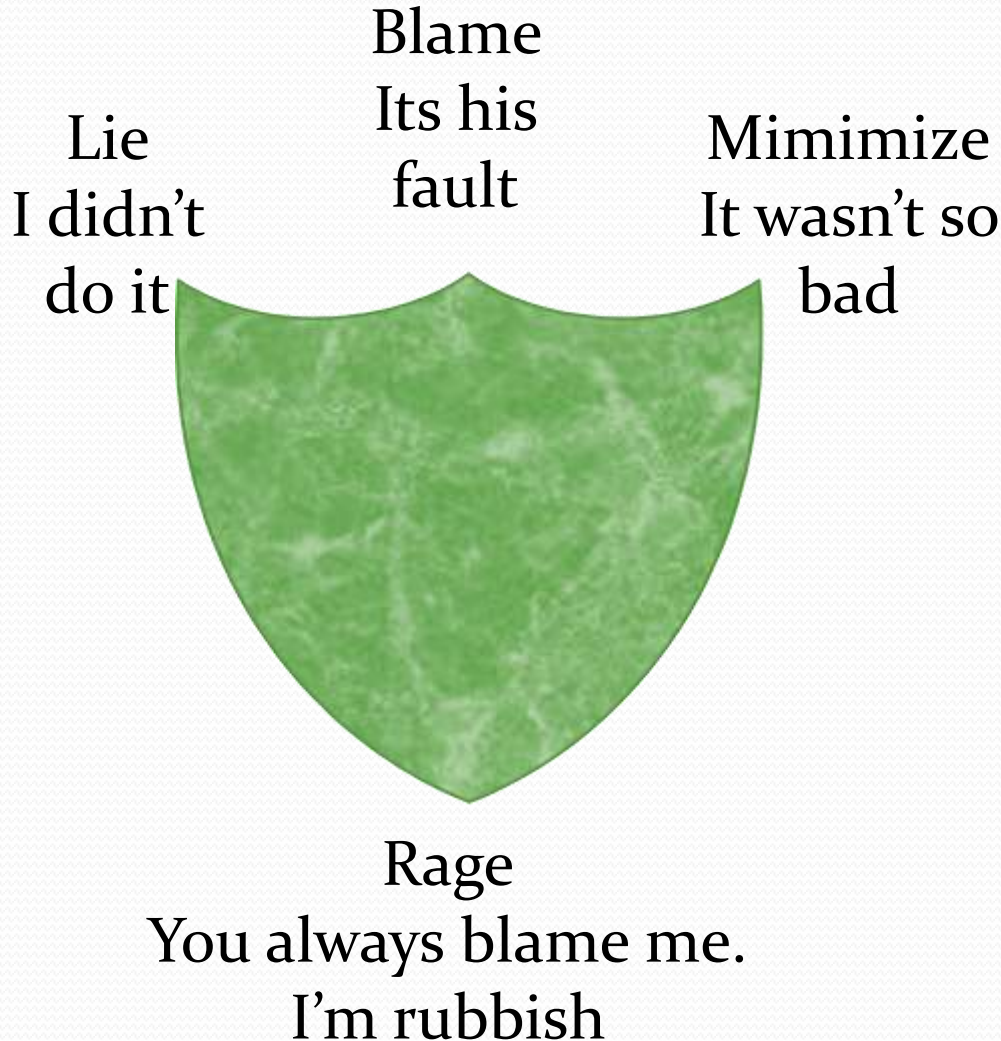
When Shame is Disintegrative

- Children do not experience attunement-relationship rupture/shame-re-attunement cycle, instead they experience overwhelming, unregulated shame.
- Many experiences of disintegrative shame forms core-identity. 'I am a shameful person', leads to chronic anger and controlling behaviours.
- Children feel alienated and defeated, never quite good enough to belong. Trapped in shame, abandoned. Shame becomes toxic.

When Shame is Disintegrative

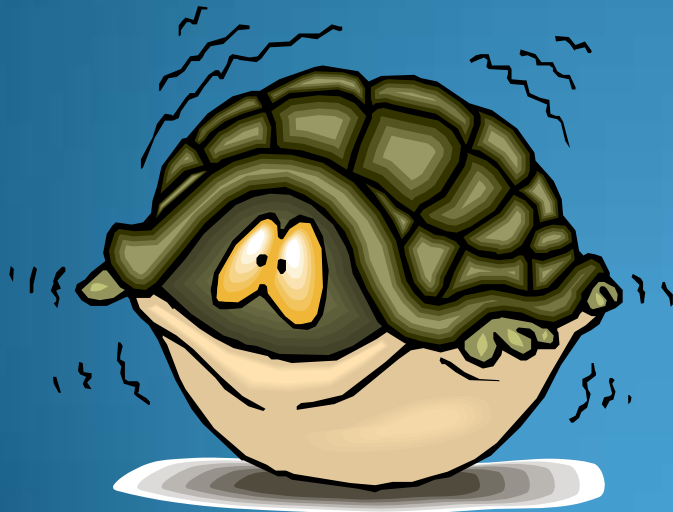
- Children experience difficulty regulating emotion & thinking rationally. Thus unable to respond flexibly or to control impulses.
- Children need to develop defences against overwhelming shame.

The Shield Against Shame



- Behavioural management strategies increase shame.
- Connection with emotional experience regulates shame.
- As anxieties, worries and fears are understood behaviours reduce.
- Then child can experience remorse and make amends.
- Connection before correction reduces shame and improves behaviour.

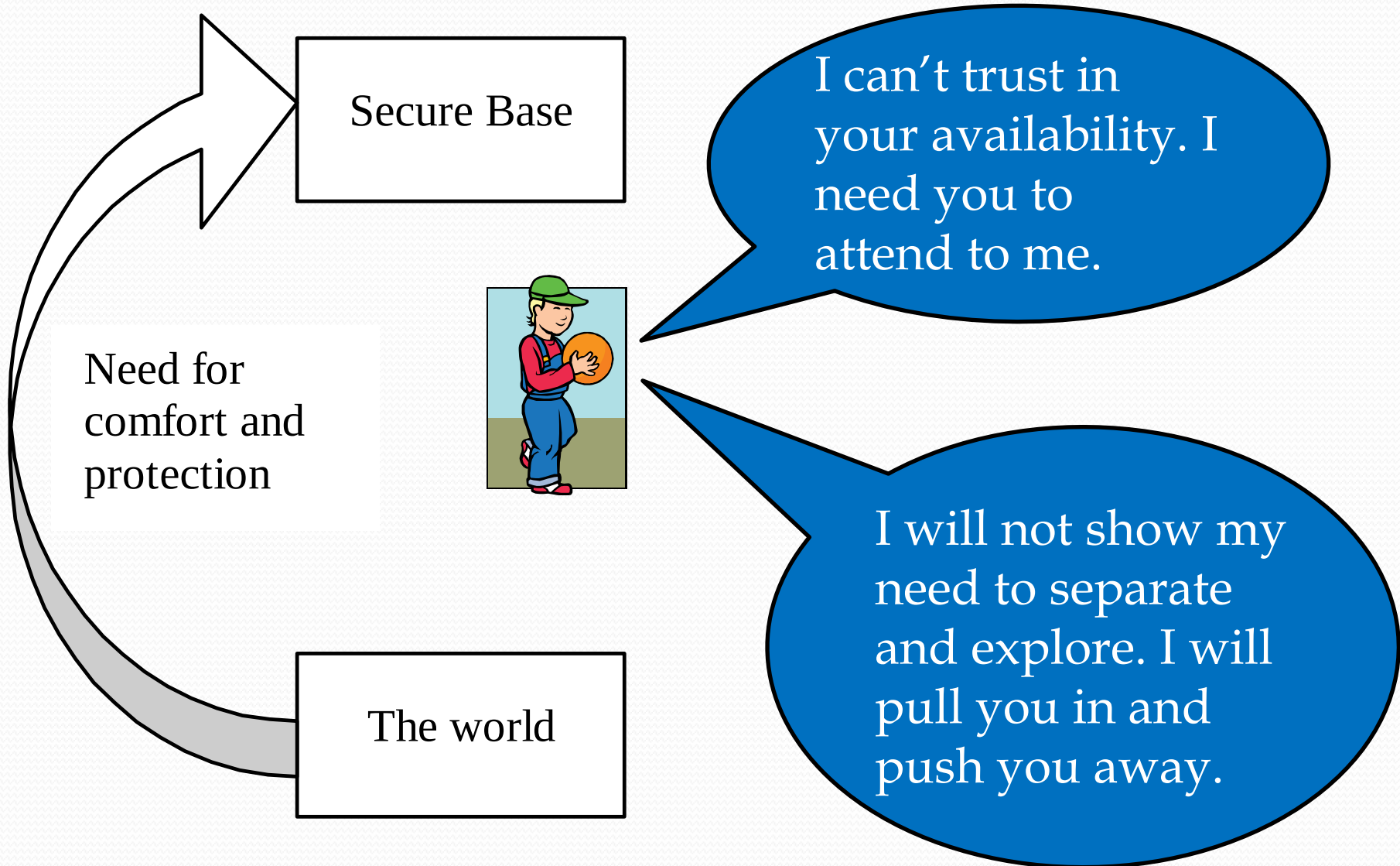
Challenge Four: Miscuing through hidden needs



Miscuing Attachment Needs

- Attachment = Safety. When children feel safe they engage socially and are receptive to learn from another person.
- We are most healthy when we are in social-emotional relationships. Lack of safety = hypervigilance to the environment.
- Developmentally traumatized children find parents more frightening than strangers. They anticipate that all parents will hurt them.
- To cope with this they develop a pattern of hidden and expressed needs in their attachment behaviours.
- Parents feel rejected and experience a sense of failure in their parenting.

Ambivalent Attachment Pattern



Avoidant Attachment Pattern

I will not show my need for comfort and protection

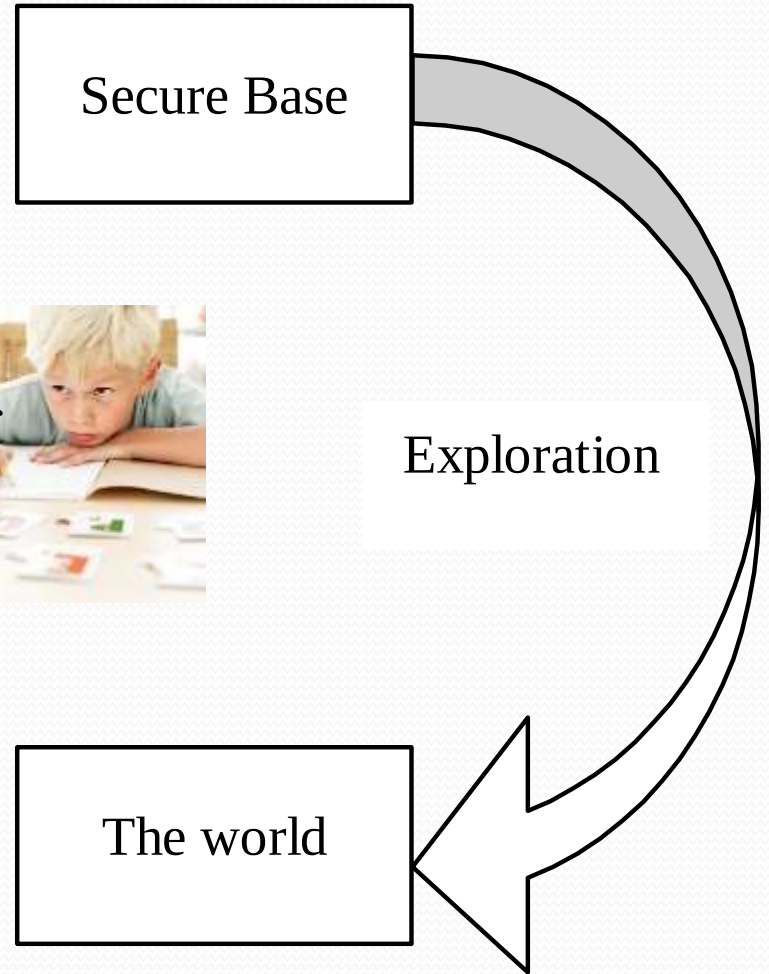
I will do it by myself, I fear my need of you. I will push you away



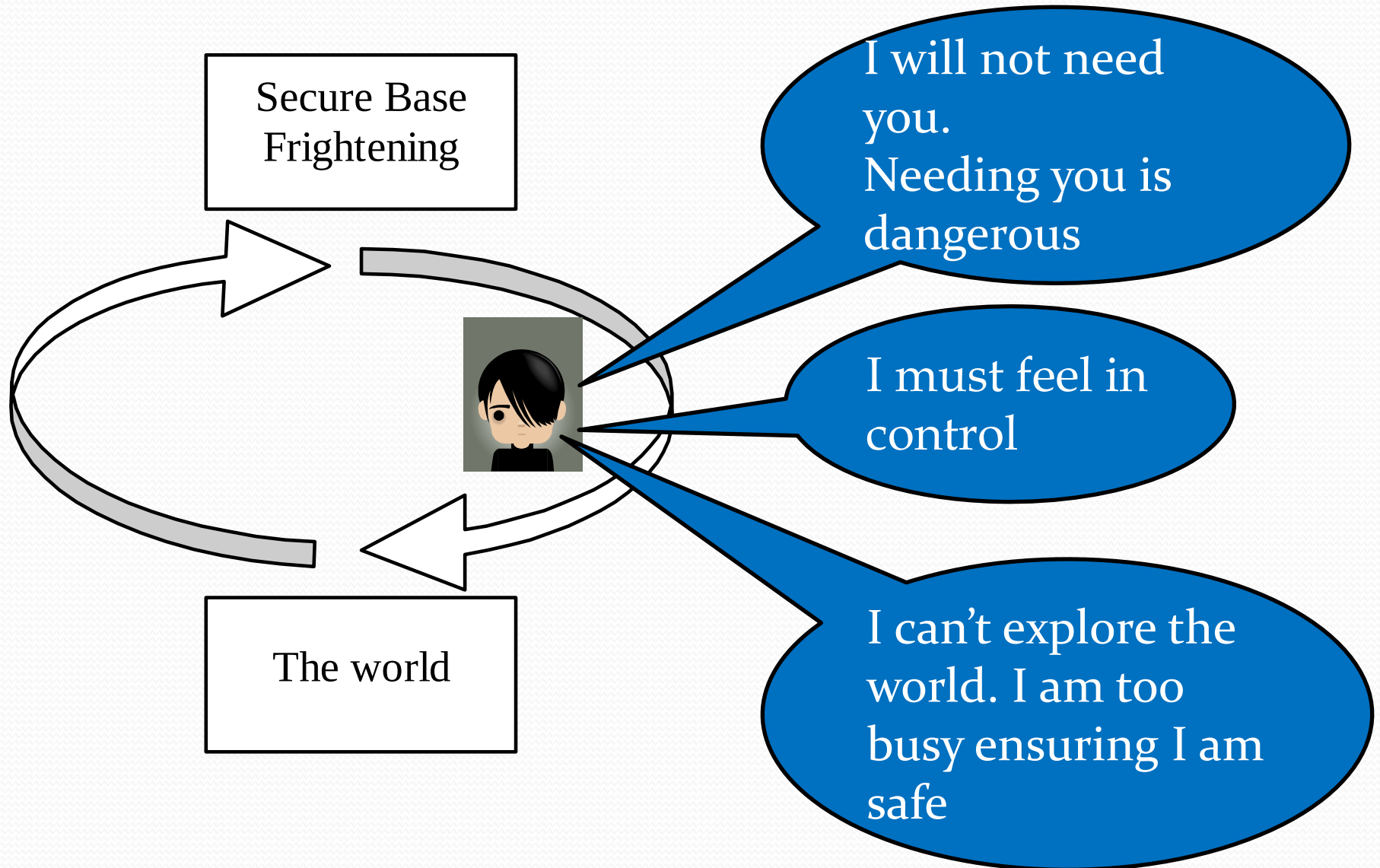
Secure Base

Exploration

The world



Disorganized/Controlling Pattern



When attachment and connection feel dangerous

- Prior experience influences how child responds.
- Needs can be presented in a distorted or hidden way.
- Need to be available & responsive and gently challenging.
- Challenge beliefs –
 - Parents can't keep you safe/parents are dangerous.
 - I am so bad nothing you can do or say will change this.
 - I should take care of you, not expect you to take care of me.

Therapeutic Parenting

Mind-minded parenting and PACE

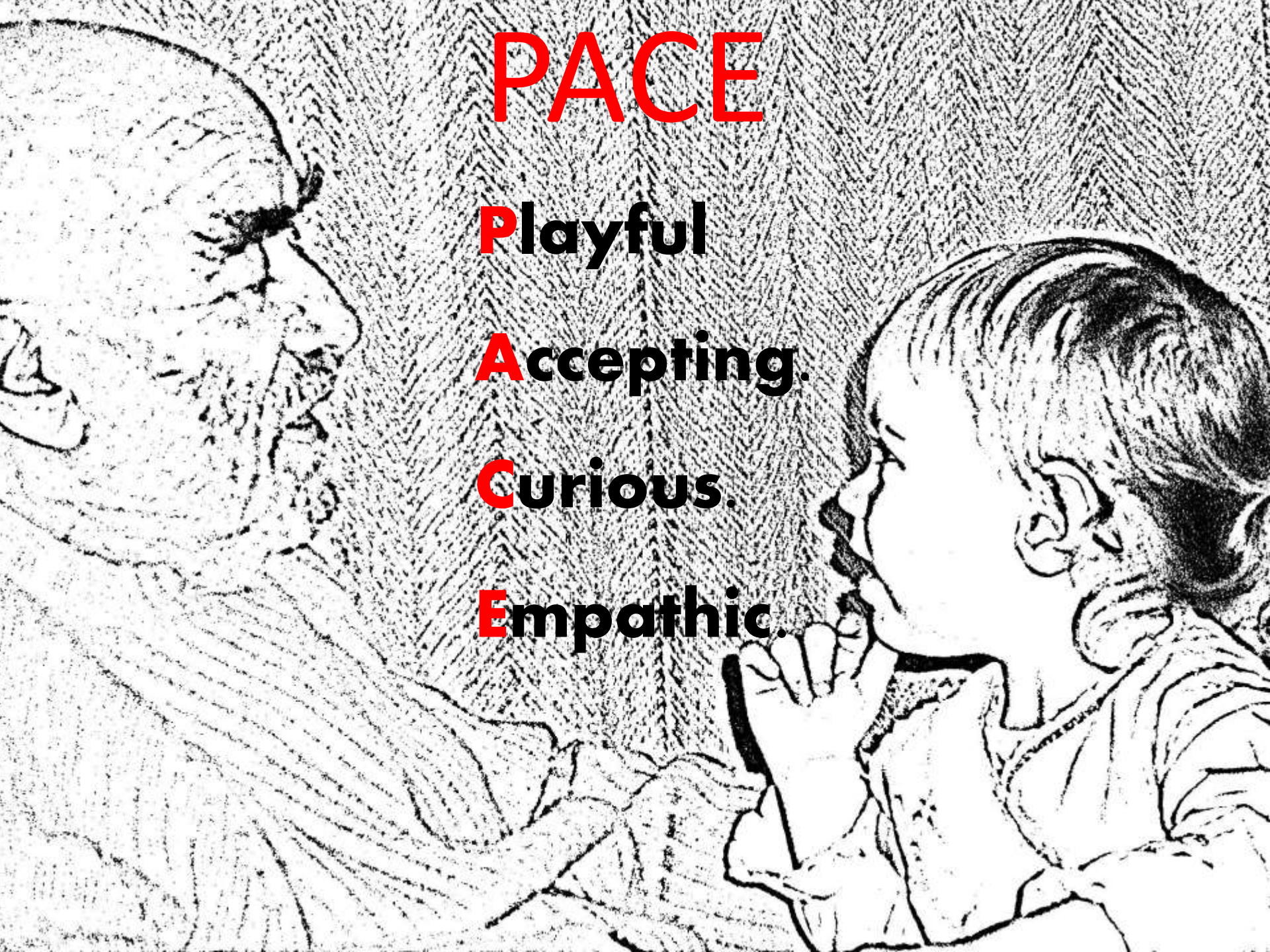


Two Central Qualities Parents will Need

- Good reflective functioning which leads to a capacity to mentalize and be mind-minded in parenting. - so can understand the internal emotional experience of the child.
- Ability to Parent with what Dan Hughes has called PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) – so can connect with the emotional experience of the child.

Mind-Minded Parenting

- The ability a parent has to treat their children as individuals with their own mind – need high reflective function and capacity to be metacognitive (think about thinking).
- The parents use their own theory of mind, the understanding that their child has thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires which might be different to their own.
- With this understanding the parent can help the child discover his own mind, to organize his experience and eventually to help him put into words what he is experiencing.
- This in turn increases the capacity for regulation that has begun to develop within the relationship with an attuned, sensitive parent.



PACE

Playful

Accepting.

Curious.

Empathic.

Play

- A playful attitude conveys optimism, that things can change.
- Demonstrates that the child is experienced positively as the parent experiences a joyful fascination with the child.
- The parent notices the strengths and uniqueness of the child and takes pleasure in these.
- The child experiences the relationship as unlike past experiences, with unconditional acceptance.
- The child experiences having a positive impact on the parent.
- Builds to provide experience of reciprocal enjoyment within the family.

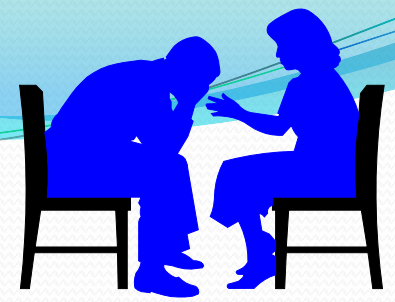
Acceptance

- Accept and don't evaluate wishes, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires.
- Acceptance means becoming aware of and understanding the inner life of another without trying to change it.
- Demonstrate that child's inner life is safe with the parent. The parent is not judging, nor trying to change this inner experience.
- Reduce shame through acceptance of person, and difference from behaviour.

Curiosity

- An attitude of not knowing.
- Tentative wondering coming out of experience of child.
- Curiosity is the search for alternative stories about events, conversations and actions.
- If we are not curious we make rapid judgements leading to non-reflective action.
- This can shut down our relationship with another.

Empathy



- The ability to feel with someone.
- Show child that whatever emotion they experience the parent is sharing it.
- Experience emotion whilst staying regulated ie experience anger without getting angry.
- Through empathy we build relationships and make connections.
- When we express empathy, we are expressing our understanding of the other.

Playfulness, Acceptance Curiosity, and Empathy

- A parent cannot directly change a child's experience, or the way it is communicated through language or behaviour.
- But a parent can change his or her response to it.
- If a parent responds differently, over time he will notice the child change the way she behaves or communicates.

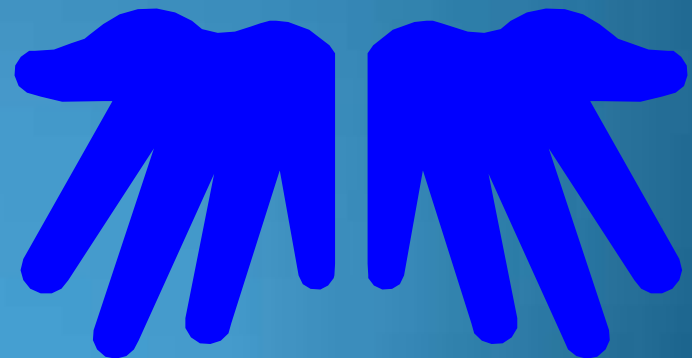
PACE

- Play brings pleasure and joy, a fun connection to our child.
- Curiosity, the search for knowing when you do not know.
- Curiosity leads to different understanding. You come to know the other's story more fully.
- With different understanding can come a deeper acceptance of the child and his experience.
- The child experiences this increased understanding and acceptance through empathy.
- Empathy builds attachment. The child feels more secure in being deeply understood.
- P, the playful approach, brings ACE alive.

‘Unconditional love is expressed through playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. This does not change what we want, or even expect, of our children, but it does suggest a different way of conveying this.....our parenting still provides appropriate boundaries and limits, together with warmth and nurture. The connection that pace creates with our children mean that this parenting is received as fully unconditional. The children feel loved and trusted. They in turn can love and trust us.’
(Golding & Hughes, 2012)

Connection with Correction

Managing behaviour
whilst building security



PACE & Behaviour Management

- PACE empowers discipline and behaviour management.
- Discipline is provided with understanding.
- It guides and teaches the child.
- Child experiences discipline in a more open and trusting manner.
- PACE expresses unconditional love.
- Child is confident of parent's good intentions and belief in him.
- PACE brings you back to the relationship.

Parenting to connect and correct

Two hands for parenting:

Hand One: provides warmth and nurture, and allows children appropriate autonomy matched to their developmental age.

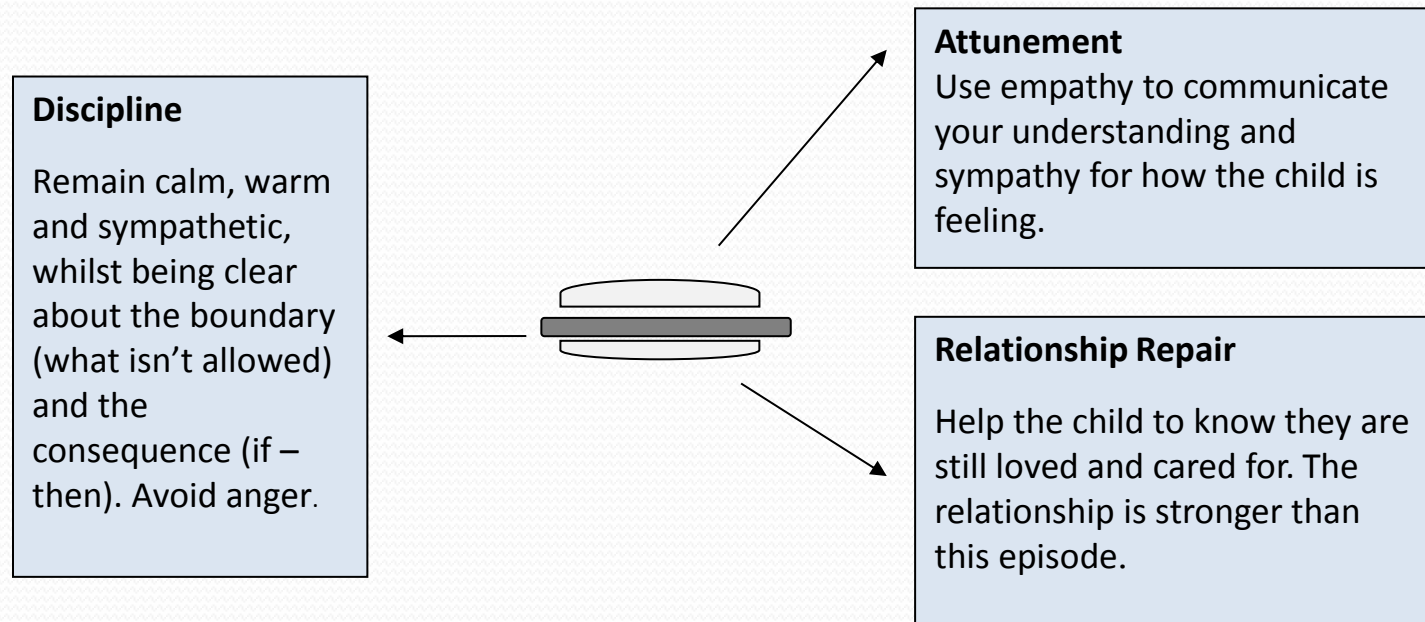
Hand Two: provides structure, and boundaries.

- Connection before correction
- No correction without understanding
- Avoid lectures and delay problem solving
- Avoid punishing with the relationship
- Adult takes responsibility for relationship repair

Parenting to Connect and Correct

Discipline in the form of boundaries and consequences is important, but it needs to be sandwiched between lots of attunement and relationship repair.

Parenting sandwich



Connection with Correction

7 steps in parenting



Parenting in the Moment

Connection with Correction

- Steps to take when parenting a child.
- By keeping these steps in mind it is easier to stay open and engaged with the child rather than becoming defensive within parenting.
- This in turn helps to make an emotional connection with the child whilst also providing some behavioural management.
- When a parent connects before correcting the child will experience unconditional love and acceptance alongside the safety which empathic boundaries and discipline can provide.

Step One

1. Notice

What is happening?

Do I need to step in?

What immediate steps do

I need to take to ensure

everyone's safety?

Step Two

2. Impact

What impact is this having on me?

-Am I regulated and can I stay open and engaged?

-Am I becoming defensive?

-Do I need a break or can I get back to being open and engaged?

-Can I be compassionate to myself?

Step Three

3. Regulation or Reflection?

What part of the child's brain is activated?

Do I need to provide:

- *Sensory regulation*
- *Emotional regulation*

Or can I help the child to reflect?

Step Four

4. Curiosity and Understanding

Reflect with the child or on behalf of the child:

What is the child's internal emotional experience that led to this behaviour?

(Remember - Internal experience is neither right nor wrong it just is)

Step Five

5. Acceptance and empathy: Connection

*How can I help the child
to know that I get it?*

Step Six

6. Correction

Do I need to do anything further?

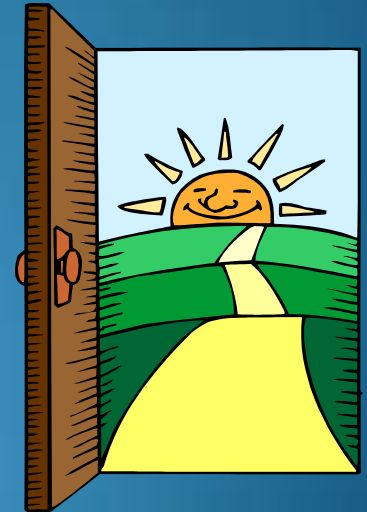
- Increase structure and supervision*
- Provide a consequence*
- Problem-solving*

Step Seven

7. Relationship Repair

*Do I need to repair the
relationship so that
the child knows he is
loved unconditionally*

In Conclusion



In Conclusion

When child-caregiver relationship is source of insecurity and even more so when it is traumatic for child:

- Interferes with development of trust, attachment formation and capacity to enter into an intersubjective relationship.
- Child feels helpless, abandoned and lost in shame.
- Parent may also withdraw from the intersubjective relationship as they experience rejection, hostility or clinginess.
- Child develops a pattern of expressing and hiding needs to maintain some fragile feeling of security with parent.
- Meeting expressed needs maintains insecurity.
- Parent has to also gently challenge to meet hidden needs.

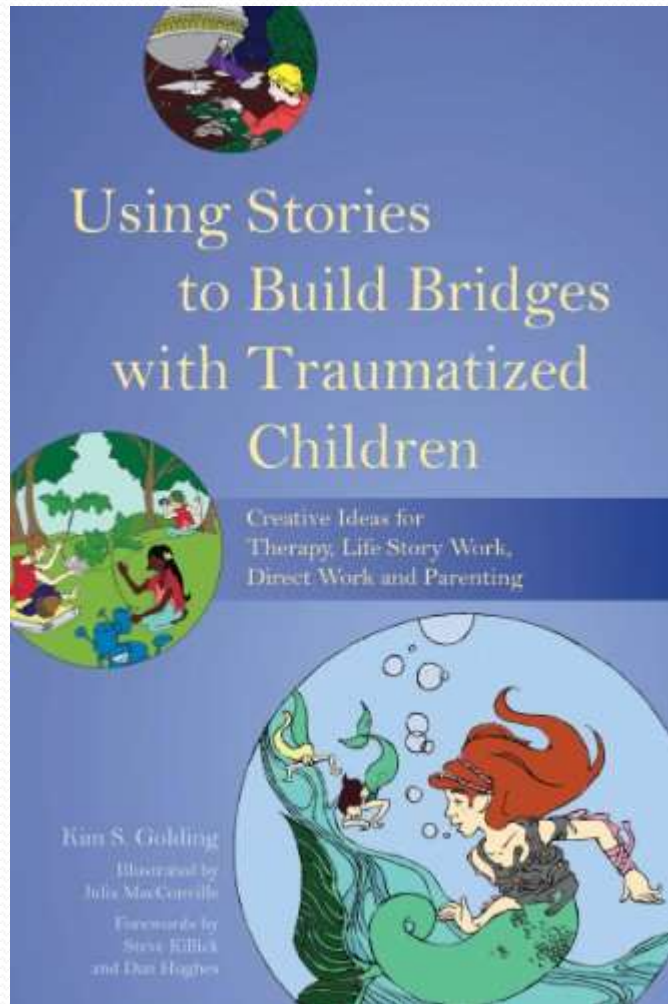
In Conclusion

- Therapeutic parenting builds in more connection whilst continuing to provide correction.
- This increases safety, builds trust, increases reciprocity.
- Child experiences emotional co-regulation.
- Reduces traumatization.
- Child experiences healthy dependency through intersubjective and attachment relationship.
- Therapeutic parenting contains and manages behaviour whilst maintaining the emotional connection.
- Healthy dependency provides the foundation for successful independence. A healthy future is open to the child.

“When a clinician meets with an individual who is responding to separation or loss with various mixtures of protest, anger, anxiety or despair, he is likely to recognise the behaviour as made up of the natural, even if perhaps inconvenient, responses that any human being would be expected to show in the type of situation that the individual concerned is in. The clinician is likely then to take relevant action of whatever kind lies within his power.”

When, however, attachment behaviour and responses to separation and loss are viewed in terms of one or another of the learning theories, the scene looks very different. When a baby has been recently fed, crying is seen as merely demanding attention and picking him up as likely to lead to his crying more. When a child is protesting loss of his principal attachment figure and is demanding her return, he is regarded as having been spoilt. An adolescent or adult who is apprehensive lest he be deserted by his attachment figure is regarded as over-dependent, hysterical or phobic. The clinician's actions are likely then to be as disapproving as they are irrelevant."

John Bowlby, 1969/1997



Edward and William

