

**The Difficult Connection**

Understanding How Abuse Impacts a Child's Ability to Develop Healthy Attachments

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www.kimberevensen.com

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**The Ethics of Self Care**

- You are your most important therapeutic tool

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**Attachment & Bonding**

The child attaches to the parent

- Instinctive
- Creates the foundation of trust, self concept and world view that will be called upon for all other relationships
- Facilitates the ability to feel, identify and express a variety of emotions (self regulation)
- Establishes ability to feel for others, empathy, morality, conscience, etc.

The parent bonds to the child

- Wants to be there for the child
- Responds to the child with mirroring
- Responds to the child by providing containment

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## Establishes

- Object Permanence
- Internal sense of parents

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## Family Risk Factors

- Confused, enmeshed or rigid boundaries
- Domestic violence
- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- Parental mental illness
- Parental substance abuse
- Parents deny or minimize abuse
- Parental criminal behavior
- Multigenerational trauma
- Neurological or organic problems

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## Creating...

- Difficulty with trust
- Difficulty with attachment
- Difficulty with self regulation
- Difficulty with self esteem

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"You see," Piglet explained in a very small voice,  
"I was so scared about being scared that I knew the only  
way Halloween was going to be a holiday for me was if I  
was the most frightening one of all!"

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**Signs & Symptoms of AD**

- Harm to self, pets, or other people
- Charming (superficial)
- Affectionate with strangers
- Discomfort with affection
- Lack of eye contact
- No cause and effect thinking
- Poor social skills
- stealing, lying
- Intense feelings expression
- "Manipulative"
- Entitled or demanding
- Lack of meaning, purpose, faith
- Identifies with "evil"
- Doesn't keep self safe
- Promiscuous
- Battling for power & control
- Little empathy or conscience
- Little sense of self
- Nonsense talk or chatter
- Impulsive
- Hoarding/gorging food
- Fascinated by fire, blood, violence
- Learning difficulties
- Parents feel like giving up
- Black and white thinking
- Sees self as a victim
- Lack of trust
- Tactile defensiveness
- Anxiety
- No ability to hold history, learn from experience (hippocampus damage)

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**Video**

Multiple Transitions:  
A Young Child's Point of View  
On Foster Care and Adoption

Written and Produced by Michael Trout, Director,  
The Infant-Parent Institute  
328 North Neil Street  
Champaign, Illinois  
217-352-4060

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"I try not to get too close..."

"I try not to get too close, he said. From a distance,  
almost everything looks real."

Brian Andreas

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Resiliencies and Risk Factors: Balancing the  
Scales

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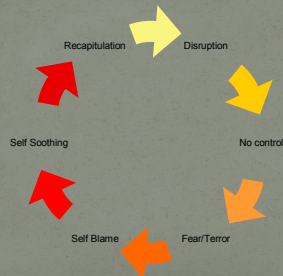
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The Internalization of Blame



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## Internalized Shame

Alan Jenkins, 2005

- *The experience of shame is a primary influence in the lives of people who abuse and have been abused.*
- *When a person feels shame they need psychological defences like avoidance, denial, addictions, aggression, justification, minimizing, self harm, emotional detachment, etc.*
- *Defences are just a way of protecting one's self.*

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## The Neurobiology of Fear

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A healthy,  
working brain

A brain that has  
experienced repeated  
trauma and abuse

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## Parts is parts

- Brain stem: arousal, visceral perceptions
- Amygdala: emotional processing (before adulthood) and emotional responses (warning system), generates emotions, behavioral responses, perception and probably the encoding of bodily sensation (Implicit memory)
- Prefrontal cortex: thinking, logic, planning, organizing, suppressing impulsivity, cause & effect, judgment, autobiographical memory, response flexibility, mindsight, regulation of emotions, the left frontal cortex is the language center (Explicit memory)
- Corpus callosum: problem solving, communication between left & right hemispheres

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## Brain Injury

- Childhood experiences create neuropathways
- Experiences shape the brain
- Stress-response system activated
- Altered levels of brain chemicals
- Unable to learn or process new information
- Trauma creates increased cortisol and a trigger system for anything that reminds the brain of the original trauma

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## PFC Functions

- attention span
- judgment
- impulse control
- organization
- forward thinking
- learning from mistakes
- internal supervision

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## PFC Problems

- short attn span
- impulsivity
- procrastination
- disorganization
- poor judgment
- negative seeking
- conflict seeking

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## The Basics

- "...early childhood experiences exert a dramatic and precise impact, physically determining how the intricate neural circuits of the brain are wired." (Newsweek, Feb 19, 1996)
- BIO-PHYSICAL Syndrome "Neurons that fire together wire together" (Dan Siegel)
- Numerous co-morbid diagnoses

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## Implicit & Explicit Memory

- Present at birth
- No sense of "remembering" or understanding of past influencing present
- Includes mental models
- Conscious attention not required for encoding
- Develops during the second year of life & keeps developing
- Sense of recollecting the past or "remembering"
- If autobiographical includes a sense of self and time
- Requires conscious attention to encode

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## Specific Brain Effects of Trauma and Abuse

(Wisconsin Council on Children & Families, Inc.)

- The brain experiences increased activity in the locus ceruleus (which regulates vigilance & arousal) because of high cortisol levels.
- The slightest stress reactivates the stress hormones, causing hyperactivity, anxiety, and hyperarousal.
- The corpus callosum (a fibrous tract between the hemispheres) is smaller, thus interfering with the development of logic and language.

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## Trauma, Stress, Neglect

- Stress hormones wash over the brain leaving areas of the cortex and limbic region 20 - 30% smaller.
- in adults, the memory-making hippocampus (limbic system) is smaller.
- in severely neglected children, regions of the cortex and subcortex associated with attachment never develop properly; the brains of these children look like those of Alzheimer victims.

Wisconsin Council on Children & Families, Inc.

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## Childhood Developmental Trauma

- Takes far less to traumatize a child
- PTSD may be an atypical adult response, but it a typical childhood response
- Sleepers
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- Working on new DSM categories (2010)
  - "Developmental Trauma Disorder"

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## Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD)

- One of more interpersonal traumas which affect development
- A triggered pattern of repeated dysregulation in response to trauma cues
- Changed understanding of and expectations for the self and the caregiving relationship and
- Impairment in functioning

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## Impact of Complex Trauma on the Seven Domains of Functioning

- Attachment – prevents the development of attachment security
- Biology – changes in the brain structure and function
- Affect regulation – do not/have not learned to regulate feelings
- Dissociation – splitting off overwhelming feelings
- Behavioral Dyscontrol – strong feelings that are difficult or impossible for the child to control
- Cognition – distorted thinking
- Self Concept – believe they are the cause of the trauma

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## Complex Developmental Trauma

Christine Coutu

- Neurobiology is effected in numerous ways
- Personality is effected
- Cannot regulate their affect
- Do not understand their emotions
- Can't feel without doing
- Profound shame
- Profound depression
- Profound loneliness
- All or nothing thinking
- Major trust issues
- Somatic complaints and medical complications

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## Disrupted Schemas

(Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)

- Safety
- Dependency
- Esteem
- Intimacy
- Control

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## How Children React to Trauma

- The most influential factor is how the significant adults respond to the situation
- Grief depends upon meaning given the loss
- Must feel safe and secure before grieving

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## Memory, Learning, Concentration

- Decreased ability to take in new information
- Learning disabilities
- Special education needs

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## Gender Response

(T. Berry Brazelton)

- Little girls often withdraw
- Boys become more violent as they attempt to re-engage with their mother

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## Understanding Treatment Options

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## Psychotherapy

Daniel Amen, MD

- When psychotherapy causes new learning:
- Enhances new neuronal pathways
- Encourages Long-term potentiation
- Calms kindling
- Changes, remodels the brain

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## Why not traditional talk therapy?

- Requires:
  - Trust in humans
  - Reciprocity
  - Ability to create relationship
- Misses:
  - Family involvement
  - Focus on primary relationship
  - The underlying causes of behaviors

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## Why else?

- They are at a heightened state of anxiety, cortisol levels, etc.
- Constant state of “fight, flight, or freeze”
- Can’t learn, engage, reciprocate, or relate when in this state
- Constantly angry

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## Sensory Based Trauma

- Brain scans of individuals experiencing flashbacks demonstrate that
  - The Amygdala, controlling emotion, perception, sensation & motor activity lights up
  - The prefrontal cortex, controlling language and logic, shuts down

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## Cognitive-Sensory Integration

- Help the client create new neuropathways, new neuron connections and new ways of thinking in order to create new feelings, expressions, and sensations that will integrate the mind-body connection and create meaning for the client.

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## Sensory Based Treatment

- Talking about it can trigger flashbacks
- Client may not be able to stop the flashbacks
- Trauma becomes more ingrained
- Instead, use imagery that is multisensory, evocative of emotion, symbol and metaphor, driving awareness into, not out of, the body (Naparstek, 2005)
- You'll get to the same place without the anxiety and panic
- Unless people remember and can put words to internal states, they will not heal-so don't stop the symptoms too soon (Van der Kolk)

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## Sensory Based Treatment

The person experiencing PTSD is good at using their senses. They visualize, hear, feel, smell, and taste the trauma.

Healing then, must include emotion, sensation, perception, and motor activity.

Behavior is more important than words. Your eyes can betray your words. An incongruence may result in their hyperactivity or hyperarousal without understanding of why.

Imaginal Rescripting & Reprocessing (Smuckers) and Rewriting Your Story (Hindman)

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## French Neurologist

"Information is integrated once all the senses have had their say"

- Guillemette Isnard

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## Trauma Treatment

Cook, Blaustein, Spinazzola & Van der Kolk, 2003

- Safety
- Emotional regulation
- Make meaning of the trauma
- Integrate trauma with other life experiences
- Improve social and familial connections
- Increase positive affect and emotions

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## Flashbacks, Dissociation & Denial

"The past is never dead. It's not even the past"

William Faulkner

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## Trauma reprograms your reactions very quickly

Recovery entails a longer process of deprogramming

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## Typical Responses

Shaming, Blaming, Projecting, Rejecting  
Anger, Resentment, Retaliation,  
Loosing Hope  
Protecting against discipline

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## Effects on Foster/Adopt Families

- Parent believed that if the child was loved enough he/she would be okay
- Child triggered parent's unresolved issues
- Child reminds the parent of someone
- Parent feels they are giving but not receiving
- Holidays, birthdays and special outings are sabotaged
- Normal parenting strategies do not work
- Child targets the mother with anger
- Child aligns with father
- Other children can be at risk
- Others blame parents
- Family becomes isolated the more the child's behavior controls them, reducing support system and increasing stress
- Parents appear to be threatened, threatening, hostile, etc
- More blame of the parents as the child is seen as charming, innocent, and believable

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We don't see things as they are, we see  
them as we are.

Anais Nin

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## Attachment Focused Treatment

- Must treat not only the symptoms,
  - But also the cause

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THIS IS A

LIFE AND DEATH SITUATION TO THE CHILD

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## Deadly mistakes

- Present as the expert
- Discount culture
- Use of familiar techniques
- Labeling
- Failure to view resistance as a natural part of the process
- Confrontation and correction
- Rescuing
- Offering advice
- Allowing isolation
- Unconditional love (without other strategies)
- Behavior modification
- Physical punishment
- Logic
- Emotional reactivity
- Accepting excuses (I forgot, I didn't realize...)
- Not touching
- Offering loving expressions when the child is unable to accept it (reinforces failure)
- Time limited consequences r/t based on trust (when I can trust you...)
- Allowing arguments or circular conversations or engaging in power struggles

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## More Deadly Mistakes

- Unconditional love (without other strategies)
- Behavior modification
- Physical punishment
- Logic
- Emotional reactivity
- Accepting excuses (I forgot, I didn't realize...)
- Not touching
- Offering loving expressions when the child is unable to accept it (reinforces failure)
- Time limited consequences r/t based on trust (when I can trust you...)
- Allowing arguments or circular conversations or engaging in power struggles

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People do not need to be  
listened to

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They need to be understood

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- Movement
- Music
- Food
- Reading
- Feelings identification
- Pretend/imagination
- Exaggerating
- Playful
- Safety & security
- Develop routines, rituals, traditions
- Supervision
- Discipline
- Calming & self-soothing activities
- Photographs of feelings, human interactions

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Slow down!  
Create a sense of safety  
Make meaning

Collaboration  
Be careful not to project  
your feelings  
Trust is an on-going issue

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## Therapy

- Contracted with and inclusive of the child
- Establish safety first
- Family involved....secure placement
- Experiential in nature; regressive
- Address trauma directly
- Sensory integration issues
- Past historical narrative

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## Create Family Codes

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## Helpful Strategies

- Keep them on their toes; but structured
- Have high (but not unreasonable) standards
- Be tough but fair
- Use emotion coaching
- Focus on cause & effect (I wonder how...)
- Explore choices
- Give appreciation, not praise
- Physical exercise (in general & for discipline)

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## More Helpful Strategies

- Give natural and logical consequences
- Don't allow splitting
- Be loving and empathic
- Use broken record/one liners
- Thank the child in advance
- Use behavioral language (clear, concise)
- Give the one minute lecture
- Play and have fun

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Don't take it personally

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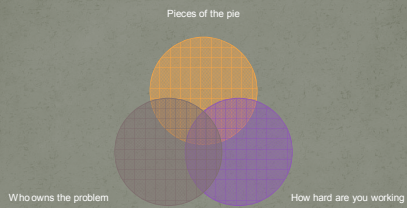
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Units of Concern



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It's not the disconnect

it's the reconnecting

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## The Rescuing Hug

You must learn to be  
still in the midst of  
activity and be vibrantly  
alive in repose.

Indira Gandhi

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## Great...so, now what?

Dan Hughes, others...

- Reparative (regressive) attachment
- Singing, rhyming, peek-a-boo, mirroring games, rocking, holding, bouncing, safe touch, eye contact, hide and seek
- Doing chores together
- Association between parent and food
- Parts language
- Double binding/paradoxical interventions
- "Are you tricking me?" vs. lying
- You must hold the HOPE
- Organization & consistency

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## Great...so, now what?

Dan Hughes, others...

- Brushing hair, washing face, rubbing lotion
- "pop" cheeks game
- Simon says games
- Finger plays
- Playing with shaving cream or whipped cream
- Play at least 30 min per day
- Humor
- Voice changes
- Guessing, or asking "I wonder what would happen if..."
- Look at body language, tone of voice, etc r/t scripted language
- Repayment & restitution

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### Increase the Pleasure

- UCLA Monkeys Study
- Taped thumbs down
- 35-40,000x before did on own
- Added pleasure stimulation
- Decreased learning/mimic behavior to 36

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### Quit Shaking your Coca-Cola

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### “Earned Secure” attachment Style

- You are repairing and re-wiring the child’s brain when you engage in a relationship with him/her.
- Neuro-plasticity: coherent narrative, reflective dialog, interactive relationships
- Neurogenesis

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## Neuroplasticity

- Your brain can change through repeated experience
- Develop a pathway that's stronger
- Change occurs in conjunction with strong emotion

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## Neurogenesis

- New brain cells can be created
- Novelty
- Enrichment
- Physical exercise
- With loved ones

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## Attachment Therapist

ATTACH Policy Manual

- Ongoing supervision and/or consultation
- Training
- Personal therapy
- Personal stress management/vicarious trauma work
- Personal support system
- Support the caregiver
  - **DO NOT BOND A CHILD TO:**
    - Active substance abusers
    - Diagnosed/suspected personality disordered parents
    - Parents with mental health problems who are not following the proscribed medications/treatment routines

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You are on the journey only a short  
time...families continue on

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## Important Resources

- APA Guidelines for the tx of PTSD
- Expert Consensus Guidelines (being developed)
- *Effective Treatment for PTSD*
- *I Can't Get Over It* Aphrodite Metsakis
- Journal of Traumatic Stress
- *Sexual Healing Journey* Wendy Maltz
- *Beyond Betrayal* Richard Gartner
- *Seeking Safety* Najatis
- *Allies in Healing* Laura Davis
- 2005 publication guidelines for dissociation (International Society for the Study of Dissociation)
- *Impact Techniques in the Classroom* Beaulieu
- [www.impacttherapies.com](http://www.impacttherapies.com)
- *The Psychobiology of Gene Expression*
- *Destructive Emotions* Daniel Goldman

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## Important Resources (RAD)

- Hughes, D.A. (2004). *Building the bonds of attachment. Awakening love in deeply troubled children.*
- Hughes, D.A. (1997). *Facilitating developmental attachment: The road to emotional recovery and behavior change in foster and adopted children.*
- Levy, T.M. (Ed.) (2000). *Handbook of attachment interventions.*
- Levy, T.M. & Orlans, M. (1998). *Attachment, trauma and healing: Understanding and treating attachment disorder in children and families.*
- McKelvey, C.A. (Ed.) (1995). *Give them roots, then let them fly: Understanding attachment therapy.*
- Siegel, D.J. & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out.*
- [www.ATTach.org](http://www.ATTach.org)

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