

KEY RELATIONAL NEEDS FOR SECURE ATTACHMENT



Attunement

Meeting the child's emotional intensity (positive or negative) on an energetic level, so as to connect with the child in their pain or their joy. Riding the same emotional energy contour (Moments of meeting). The child will experience this as a deep enlivening connection with the other. At best, with joy states, it is a dance of flow and engagement, and a key time where the brain starts to habituate to optimal levels of opioids, oxytocin and dopamine (Panksepp 1998)



Empathic listening

Validating how the child is experiencing an event they find painful, even if it's very different to how you are experiencing it. Not trying to persuade the child out of having the feeling they are having. Rather affirming, understanding and recognising that s/he is feeling what s/he is feeling. Not just empathy, but finding the right words/ language of feeling/tone of voice/timing to convey that empathy



Containment

Being able to reflect on and feel a child's intense feelings (e.g. rage, power plays, terror, distress) without deflecting into action, distraction, getting angry etc. So in short reflection rather than reaction. At times this will mean having the courage to be able to bear their emotional pain. Also in terms of discipline, containment means using clear structures, boundaries and socialising corrections never conveyed through anger.



Soothing (emotional regulation)

Soothing and calming the child's emotionally dysregulated states. Use of soothing voice nearly as effective in activating oxytocin as touch. (Seltzer LJ, Ziegler TE, Pollak SD 2010) Along with attunement, empathic listening, and containment, soothing develops stress regulatory systems in the brain and good vagal tone in the body. These systems are still forming after birth and adversely impacted by relational stress and relational poverty. When the child is not soothed and calmed during intense dysregulated states, they may fail to develop effective stress regulating systems in brain and body, leaving them vulnerable to developing depression, anxiety or problems with aggression in the teenage years or in later life. Children are also far more likely to grow up needing alcohol, smoking, drugs, to calm down

Restack, R. (2001) *The Secret Life of the Brain* New York: Joseph Henry Press