

East Sussex Foster Care Association Conference 2014
Therapeutic Communication to Improve Behaviours
of Challenging Children and Teenagers'
Presentation Notes Dr Margot Sunderland

THE NEUROSCIENCE OF ATTACHMENT

What is secure attachment

Secure attachment means feeling secure in the emotional responsiveness of the other... You can deeply love a child and they may still be insecurely attached

It's a relationship that is internalised which then informs a person's internal working model of self, others and feelings of being in the world...

I am a person worthy of love and concern

Others are willing and able to provide comfort and support

Life even with its ups and downs is a privileged adventure

Attachment: huge hormonal force deeply affecting brain, mind, physiology and even how we lay calcium down in our bones

Secure attachment

The emotional brain

(limbic/subcortical area)

CARE system –Attachment

Secure Attachment

- **Impact on brain structure**
- **Impact on brain and body stress response systems**
- **Impact on brain biochemical systems**

Attachment : Impact on brain structure.

Human higher functions (executive functions)

in the frontal lobes (pre- frontal cortex)

Ability to learn, concentrate

Emotional and social intelligence.

Impulse control

Empathy

Ability to reflect

Stable under stress

Problem solving

The genetically ingrained

emotional systems in old mammalian part of the brain

RAGE

FEAR

LOSS

SEEKING
ATTACHMENT
PLAY
LUST

Instead with people who have suffered chronic relational stress or relational poverty the reptilian brain can be in the driving seat for much of the time

Secure attachment

When we are consistently and repeatedly emotionally responsive to children then top- down brain pathways...calm the primitive impulses of flight and fight

Parents who have securely attached children are able to think about behaviour in terms of underlying mental states.

SECURE ATTACHMENT: parents/ carers have been consistently response to the child's emotional needs for amplification of positive affect of moderation of negative affect

Under fours can have a need every 20 seconds- Lots of these are important emotional regulatory or explorative events *Lieberman, A (1995) The Emotional Life of a Toddler New York: Simon and Schuster*

To show you her plastic dinosaur for the fifth time

To soothe her when she cries because her fairy doll has broken

To say wow ! again when she shows you how she can hop like a frog

To pick her up and give her a cuddle when she hurts her knee on the toy car

To help her be the one who switches off the cold tap when you brush your teeth

To get your help in trying to turn a key in the front door lock

To get you to be delighted for the sixth time on the spider crawling up the bathroom wall.

To listen to her story for the umpteenth time about how the naughty puddle made her slip that morning

Bruce Perry (2002) Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential, *Brain and Mind* 3: 93 (undeveloped pre- frontal cortex)

Insecure attachment

"In the deepest reaching out to others, the child has not been heard, and her voice has turned tragically inward" (Hycner 1996: 94)

Infants are often hugely emotionally dysregulating for their parents

Insecure attachment: Effective stress regulatory systems and top- down brain pathways are not established in the brain

Tremblay's graph – showing lack of effective regulatory systems set up in the brain continuing right into the teenager years – Can Child Adolesc Psychiatr Rev. 2005 Feb;14(1):3-9. Physical aggression during early childhood: trajectories and predictors. Tremblay RE et al

UNDER STRESS

Brain scans of impulsive murderers- showing the poor impulse control in the frontal lobes similar to that of a toddler

Raine et al 'Selective reductions in prefrontal glucose metabolism in murderers' Biological Psychiatry Vol 36 September 1 1994

Insecure attachment - Parents who have moved into emotional withdrawal or their own intense emotions when the child is having their intense emotions.

Parents not enough space in their minds to feel and think about the mind of their child

- Depression
- Lack of support
- Too many people's needs of them
- Anxiety
- Unprocessed trauma /loss
- Alcohol/substance abuse

DISAPPROVING

“STOP have that feeling you are having.”

DISMISSIVE

“Don't have that feeling you are having. Have a nice one instead”

The mistaking of an attachment need for a discipline issue

David Howe

University of East Anglia

Relational Poverty

Some children have so few[positive] relational experiences that they [don't] develop the capacity to be socially appropriate, empathic, self- regulating and humane. By the time they reach age 10, they have only had the number and quality of positive social interactions that a typical 5 year old gets. (Perry 2006)

Child psychiatrists often don't know how to diagnose underdeveloped or shrunken brains resulting from relational stress and relational poverty

One 8 year old girl diagnosed as having:

ADHD, Asperger's, mood disorder, ODD, soiling, dyspraxia,, bedwetting, bipolar, PTSD:

All dysregulated/ underdeveloped brain and body systems. The child probably has the frontal lobe functions of a toddler

How to help children with developmental delay in the frontal lobes' executive functions

- Repeated positive relational experiences from parents and school staff. Perry (2008) suggests that school staff record number of positive interactions with relationally deprived children, to ensure no child who needs this is being overlooked
- Example: The little boy who could not sit still on the mat and could do so after a month of repeated positive relational experiences from several staff members.
- Example: Wild three year old girl in the Children's Centre. Calmed by 1 to 1 painting with soothing adult

Relational play and theraplay

- BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor)
- Interactive play turns on the genetic expression of a very important brain fertiliser in the higher brain. As effective as low doses of Ritalin. Helps with the development of the dopamine and noradrenaline systems and the establishing of stress regulatory systems in the frontal lobes

See Theraplay Activities Demonstrated, a 2 DVD set

<http://www.theraplay.org/index.php/theraplay/books-and-videos/books-media/theraplay-activities-demo-detail>

Research showing that the best outcomes in play therapy are when the parents are doing the play therapy! Meta- analysis of 93 studies (Bratton et al 2005 *The Efficacy of Play Therapy With Children: A Meta-Analytic Review of Treatment Outcomes Professional Psychology: Research and Practice American Psychological Association 2005, Vol. 36, No. 4, 376–390*

Filial therapy, parents are taught basic child-centered play therapy principles and skills and then required to practice these skills under the close supervision of a trained play therapist, in weekly videotaped or live-supervised play sessions with their child

Cognitive tasks with sensory emotion regulatory breaks (Louise Bomber)

Stressed out children/teenagers functioning like threatened animals - unable to learn, attend, concentrate, enjoy friendships, play, problem solve.
(Scan - Damasio 2001 in Restak The Secret Life of the Brain)

At school -and at home use of Feeling weather Maps

Model with the child how to think psychologically in order to develop the capacity to reflect on feelings rather than discharge or defend

Hauser et al (2006) - Resilient Teenager studies (Book :Out of the Woods)
Capacity for mentalisation (Fonagy 2008)

“The resilient kids observe other people very carefully, and think of relationships — as if they were greatly important. They pay attention to how they act in relationships, and to the effects of their actions on other people.

“They were interested in psychological experience, and their ideas about themselves and other people were discerning and thoughtful”

The contrast-group kids never accord relationships the scrutiny the resilient kids do. They seldom recognise themselves as the common denominator in all of their connections; and the *process* of relationships the way they work — seems not to interest them at all. (2006: 17)

Use of sandplay - show me is far easier for children than tell me

Use of Draw on Your Emotions by Margot Sunderland (emotion worksheets) to help children think psychologically

Use of therapeutic story to convey empathy and help them make the connection between their troubled behaviour now and what happened to them in the past

Therapeutic story develops capacity for psychological thinking

Annu Rev Psychol. 2011;62:103-34. 145406. *The neural bases of social cognition and story comprehension.* [Mar RA](#). (mentalizing network composed of the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate, and bilateral temporal parietal junction

Secure Attachment

- **Impact on brain structure**
- **Impact on brain and body stress response systems**
Impact on brain biochemical systems

Attachment: Impact on brain and body stress response systems

Secure Attachment Well -balanced autonomic nervous system (parasympathetic and sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system) — so CALM and ALERT

SECURE ATTACHMENT

Good vagal tone

Empathic listening leads to good vagal tone

Children/ Teenagers, better able:

To learn

To use life well

To concentrate

To enjoy relationships

To be kind to others

Empathic listening leads to good vagal tone ...leads to better academic attainment at age eight .*Gottman, J, Katz, L, Hoover, C (1996) Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy and the Emotional Life of Families: Theoretical Models and Preliminary Data. Journal of Family Psychology* 1996, Vol. 10, No. 3, 243-268

.... If my Mummy or Daddy is consistently emotionally responsive to my distress, I will feel safe in the world, because I know I will NEVER have to have a horrid feeling on my own for very long. I can always seek out someone who I trust to help me with my feelings...

Key capacity in attachment —capacity for help seeking...because you know how good it feels.

Examples of empathic listening

Emma screams because Sophie has taken her Peppa pig toy

Teacher — “*Now come on, you need to learn to share*”

Teacher — “*Sometimes it’s hard to share something that really matters to you. Let’s put Peppa somewhere safe for the moment and bring out the toys you are Ok taking turns with*”

Empathy for the pain of broken attachments from the start

It needs to be talked about/Help the child to make sense of what has happened/is happening to him

- “It must feel strange being in this new house with me and perhaps scary when you don’t know us very well. And you don’t know for how long — and maybe you are missing some people in your life really badly and that can really hurt a lot”
- Fine to ask whatever you need to ask
- “You might have to go into care”
“Your mum is finding it difficult to do all the things a mum needs to do...”
- “Sometimes your Mum is so full of her own worries that she doesn’t have enough space in her head to think about all that you need.”
- “Because of what happened to them in their childhood not all parents are good at looking after children but this doesn’t mean your mum doesn’t love you”

- Your mum's dad wasn't good at looking after her and that's why she didn't learn enough about how to look after you in the way you needed her
- And none of this is your fault
- It's grown-ups who are supposed to be looking after children not the other way round

(Adapted from Joanne Alper Foster Plus Bedfordshire)

"But I don't feel competent to do this"

The Centre for Child Mental Health

www.childmentalhealthcentre.org

(One day trainings therapeutic conversations)

Also when a child is moved to another home/family the use of photos

and talking photo books - to activate safety signally in the brain

Photos of attachment figures reduces your experience of emotional/physical pain – (activation of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex – safety signalling

Attachment figures activate a safety signal-related neural region and reduce pain experience

[Naomi I. Eisenberger,a,1 Sarah L. Master,a Tristen K. Inagaki,a Shelley E.](#)

[Taylor,a,1 David Shirinyan,b Matthew D. Lieberman,a,b and Bruce D. Naliboffc](#)Proc

Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2011 July 12; 108(28): 11721–11726.

Insecure attachment -insecurely attached adults (both anxious and avoidant) have higher sympathetic activity in response to both stressors and lower resting parasympathetic activity (calm) compared to their secure counterparts. They have a pattern of autonomic activity that is consistent with alterations in inflammation.

Diamond LM, Hicks AM. Attachment style, current relationship security, and negative emotions: The mediating role of physiological regulation. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships. 2005; 22:499–518.

Leaving children in high levels of stress for a duration, can programme the brain's alarm systems as hypersensitive

So strong risk of

Depression

Anxiety

Aggression

now, in teenage years or adulthood

The brain is then set to sweat the small stuff

Alarm systems in the brain are activated not the calm systems

Minor stressors can elicit full- blown emergency reactions

Thinking narrowed down to matters of defence or attack

Emergency reactions not assessed reactions to stress

Mental ill- health -

" *Over- arousal or under- arousal inappropriate to the situation*" (Allan Schore- University of California)

- Insecurely attached children without effective stress regulatory systems in the brain often cannot manage the stress of playgrounds- need schools to provide alternative soothing break times
-
- Mental ill- health -
- " *Over- arousal or under- arousal inappropriate to the situation*" (Allan Schore- University of California)
-
- **Hyper-inhibition and Hyperarousal both atypical patterns in brain's stress response system - bot risk of psychiatric vulnerability**
-
- **Hyper-arousal---** A state of alarm that you can't switch off inside your body and your mind
-
- **Hyper-inhibition**
- Shut down the capacity to feel,
- Bottling up feelings from the age of one
- Weak firings in the amygdala (alarm system)
- Low bodily arousal
- Low level of cortisol
-

How to help children with poorly functioning stress response systems in the brain and body

As 80 percent of the fibers of the vagal nerve are afferent – we can calm the brain by breathing, moving, touching (Bessel Van der Kolk 2014)

CALMING THE BODY DOWN

Tai Chi, Drumming, Meditation, "Massage in Schools" at the beginning of the school day (Perry, Van der Kolk, also see www.pubmed.com)

PLoS One. 2011;6(11):

Synchronized drumming enhances activity in the caudate and facilitates prosocial commitment--

Calm Boxes

Sensory Integration Therapy

Finding their own safe place

Neurofeedback

EMDR (eye movement desensitization reprogramming)

Touch - Jim Coan neuroscience of hand holding
Psychol Sci. 2006 Dec;17(12):1032-9 **Lending a hand: social regulation of the neural response to threat.** Coan JA1, Schaefer HS, Davidson RJ.

Attachment affects physical growth, growth hormones

The case of the little boy suffering from stress dwarfism
Little boy - Strong attachment to a nurse in hospital
Little boy extremely low growth hormone levels and a low rate of growth on entering hospital . After a few months with the lovely nurse, growth hormone levels have more than doubled/ growth rate more than tripled
The nurse went on a three-week vacation. Despite the same food intake being the same, growth hormone levels and growth plummeted. The nurse returned from vacation. Growth and growth hormone dramatically increases again. Source: From Saenger et al 1977

‘The rate at which this child was depositing calcium in his long bones could be successfully predicted by his proximity to a loved one.’ (Sapolsky 1998)

Secure Attachment

- **Impact on brain structure**
- **Impact on brain and body stress response systems**
Impact on brain biochemical systems

Attachment: Impact on brain biochemistry

Why the brain chemistry activated in secure attachment is so key to good learning

“[In our brain] ,each of us has his or her own...finest drugstore available at the cheapest cost- to produce all the drugs we ever need to run our body- mind ‘...(*Pert - Molecules of Emotion 1997 :271*)

Brain chemicals systems

(the optimal emotion chemical activation you need to live a deeply fulfilling life.)

Oxytocin

Opioids

Prolactin

GABA

Benzodiazepines

(brain's natural valium)

(plus others)

Key emotion chemicals of secure attachment

The whole feel of the world changes when the emotion chemicals :opioids, oxytocin, prolactin are in dominance in the brain . *Brain oxytocin, opioids and prolactin systems appear to be the key participants in these subtle feelings that we humans call acceptance, nurturance and love ..warmth’ (Panksepp, 1998 p249*
When opioids and oxytocin are optimally activated in the child’s brain we do not want to fight (*Anti- anxiety/ anti- aggression molecules*)

Secure attachment is resilience

Key for:

Self- esteem

Capacity to ask for help when troubled

Development of effective stress regulatory systems in brain and body

Capacity for deeply fulfilling relationships in later life

Capacity for empathy

Longevity

What’s going so wrong ? In 2011 there were over 46 million prescriptions for anti-depressants (Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community: England, -Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), July 31, 2012
There are only 63 million people in the country

THE BRAIN CHEMICALS OF INSECURE ATTACHMENT

When cortisol and CRF (cortico- releasing factor) is injected into animals :
depression, anxiety, aggression
increases in heart rate,
disrupted digestion, decreased appetite,
disruption of sleep, suppression of exploratory activity, startle responses, freezing and fighting behavior

Playful parenting brings about far better behaviour in children than punishing parenting (the former activates opioids the latter stress hormones)

How to help children whose brains have habituated to too high levels of stress hormones blocking the pro- social chemical systems in the brain

Engendering secure attachment through psychological safety

The biochemistry of un mourned loss to violence

Why attachment loss to violence is so common

The neurochemistry of the pain of loss

opioids are naturally addictive. ...

The chemistries of pain in the brain are linked to the chemistries of separation distress

“The language of loss is the language of pain “
(Panksepp1998)

Animals who are accustomed to high level of opioids then withdrawal of those opioids become very nasty with each other.

.When there is a withdrawal of opioids in the brain (when you are coming off a person or heroin- it has the same effect) then what are known as opponent forces are released in the brain. These opponent forces involve the release of a chemical called acetylcholine. Too high levels of acetylcholine wash over the brain, flooding the frontal lobes. It can make people very angry, hostile, irritated – unless they get help with their grief, from a person who is good at comforting and from whom they accept comfort.

The comforting of grief, will release opioids and oxytocin in the brain – these block this toxic chemistry of acetylcholine. This is why it is vital for children who are suffering from loss to receive comfort

See *Does rejection hurt?*

Eisenberger N et al Science 2003 Oct 10:302(5643) 237-9

Zubieta J et al General Psychiatry 2003 Vol 60

Sustained sadness is associated with deactivation of mu-opioid neurotransmission in the anterior cingulate and the amygdala. This correlated to increases in negative feeling and reductions in positive feelings

No contact with deeply loved people foster carers with adoption transition can be so painful

- Cardiovascular risk in adulthood
- Decreased levels of BDNF in the hippocampus
- Disturbs the serotonergic system key to brain development. The alterations returned to control levels after renunion
- Hyperaroused stress response systems
- Adverse epigenetic changes – turning off genes that activate well- being chemicals
- Turning off tumour suppressant genes
- Pro- inflammatory effects leading to disease and early death

Acta Physiol (Oxf). 2013 Oct 29

A mechanistic look at the effects of adversity early in life on cardiovascular disease risk during adulthood. [Loria AS](#), [Ho DH](#), [Pollock JS](#).

The Minnesota study of Risk and Adaptation (Sroufe et al 2005) Followed 180 infants born in poverty from age 0 to 30, focusing on risk factors for abuse and neglect. The key factor for non- perpetuation of maltreatment was relationship. - an alternative, nonabusive adult during childhood or the teenage years, and/or to have participated in a therapy experience for at least 6 months during some period, Virtually none of the parents who perpetuated the cycle of abuse had experienced any of these forms of relationship

SCIENCE BASED TOOLS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

ATTUNEMENT

Misattunement and still face research (Ed Tronick Harvard University)

Still face research (Ed Tronick Harvard University) versus the 2 – 6 months old window of opportunity in terms of face processing neurons never being as sensitive again *Ham, J., Tronick, E. (2006) 'Infant resilience to the stress of the still-face: infant and maternal psychophysiology are related', Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences Dec;1094:297-302.*

Post- natal depression

Parents not knowing that infants are wired up for dialogue from day one

Parents not having the mental space in their minds to think of the mind of their infant

Interventions

Video Interaction Guidance (Hilary Kennedy)

Circle of Security

The Incredible years

Family Nurse Partnership

Minding the Baby

OXPIP

Using child led play and the five finger rule to enrich attunement

EMPATHY

Parents often get empathy/emotional regulation right in the beginning

Phase one – Babies

Physiological level - cradling, soothing tone of voice, etc.)

Phase two- Just verbal stage

(“Mummy’s here ” “Mummy knows ,” etc.).

Phase three –Verbal stage. Many parents struggle here with what to say

The capacity for help seeking...because you know how good it feels.
The importance of empathising with our empathic failures

CONTAINMENT

We can feel 'communication by impact' (Patrick Casement- psychoanalyst) but stay thinking and hold in mind the child's life story – " how are they making us feel what they have felt '

Projective Identification

You end up feeling what the child cannot bear to feel or to feel fully...

At school we need a quick reference one page cover story for each child in their file
History of trauma, loss and attachment- so we can think and process communication by impact – how they are making us feel what it was like for them (transference and projection)

Discipline with empathy never with anger

Choices and consequences

Parenting through Love and Logic

(Foster Cline)

Building the Bonds of Attachment

(Dan Hughes)

[How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk](#) (Adele Faber; Elaine Mazlish)

[How to Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk](#))Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish)

Choices and consequences

Child refuses to help tidy their bedroom

Adult: Ok you have a choice here, you can tidy your bedroom and then go to play in the park, or we can stay at home until you tidy your bedroom. Can you let me know when you have decided?

Child: I'm not tidying my room

Adult :Shame you made a bad choice this time because it means that you will have to miss going to the park and stay in. Hope you make a better choice next time.

Child: I hate you

Adult: I can understand that. You would far rather just go out and play and not do the tidying. But that's not how things go in life. You hate me when I need to get you to learn something like this.

The toxic biochemistry of parental commands

The Parent Child Game

A culture of fighting not play (changed family culture from stress hormone dominated to anti- aggression/anti-anxiety chemicals

Child - Led Play

Attends

Ask to Play

Attune

Warm touches

Parent - Led Play

Commands

Teaches

Criticism

Parallel play

Don't

Do not use isolation as a discipline technique with the under- fives

Nature. 2005 Feb 24;433(7028):807.

Elephant breakdown. [Bradshaw GA1](#), [Schore AN](#), [Brown JL](#), [Poole JH](#), [Moss CJ](#).

SOOTHING - THE POWER OF OXYTOCIN

Holding is not restraint, (See Education Act Section 550A

it is a gentle calming. It's purpose is to bring down the child's stress response

systems back to base rate, - and to change the chemicals

in his brain from high levels of stress chemicals to calming oxytocin and opioids

Whilst she holding him, she speaks to him, as her calm tone will calm him.

She uses more empathy of how he got to this:

It's really hard for you sometimes when I tell you things.. I know you are mad at me.

You hate me for making me stop doing those things..I can see that...

"When I can't manage the volcano in my tummy it's wonderful to know that my mum can, and that she manages it with kindness not crossness.

Green space lowers cortisol levels

Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2013 Sep 2;10(9):4086-103.

Green space and stress: evidence from cortisol measures in deprived urban communities. [Roe JJ](#), [Thompson CW](#), [Aspinall PA](#), [Brewer MJ](#), [Duff EI](#), [Miller D](#), [Mitchell R](#), [Clow A](#).

Benefits of emotional recovery from stress offered by green space and 'soft fascination' in such things as butterflies, bugs and long grasses

Br J Sports Med. 2013 Mar 6

The urban brain: analysing outdoor physical activity with mobile EEG.

[Aspinall P](#), [Mavros P](#), [Coyne R](#), [Roe J](#).

Green play settings: as good as medication for ADHD children

Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings,” by Andrea Faber Taylor; Frances E. Kuo; and William C. Sullivan
Environment and Behavior, Vol. 33, No. 1, January 2001

Children with attention deficits concentrate better after walk in the park.

[Taylor AF](#), [Kuo FE](#).

[J Atten Disord](#). 2009 Mar;12(5):402-9.

THE ATTACHMENTS CHILDREN BRING WITH THEM INTO FOSTERING

Secure attachment - I have hope in a warm caring world (Grows up to love in peace)

Ambivalent attached: (on - off parent) I need repeated assurance that the other will provide comfort and support. (Needy, clingy, loving in torment)

Avoidant attached: (mainly off parent) I don't seek comfort and support because people won't be able to give it to me, so I'll do self- help and keep painful feelings to myself

Disorganised attached- (frightening or frightened parent) If I seek comfort, it makes me feel worse not better, so I'll do self- help. I can grow up to frighten others as I have been frightened. Dissociation common

Secure attached

Because I have a secure base I am safe to explore, and I feel confident and competent

Avoidant attached

The child's feelings/emotional needs have been minimised, dismissed or punished and/or met with misattunement. So the child shuts down on their feelings to avoid upsetting the parent or provoking rejection or intrusion.... The child is not avoiding relationship but avoiding showing feelings, .. in order to maintain the relationship (Schofield and Beek 2014)

Ambivalent attached

On off parent so the child becomes needy, clingy, angry mistrustful

Disorganised attached

Parents a place of alarm/anxiety not a place of comfort for the child. Often parents unprocessed trauma or loss. Parents often not parenting so the child takes control/develops controlling behavior just to establish some feeling of safety. Sometimes this comes out as them acting like a parent- a punitive one. As no comforting parenting child has difficulty managing emotions, relationships, their behavior

Internal working models – Set of expectations and beliefs about self others and life
Secure attachment – “People will help me and respond to my needs. I expect people to be warm and friendly. I am worthy of care and concern” For the most part the world is a friendly interesting place

Insecure attachment “People won't help me with my needs and feelings. I expect people to be angry, shaming, frightening in some way. I am not worthy of care and concern' The world, for much of the time is unfriendly

A child's behavior is heavily influenced by internal working models

Secure “You can trust me I will be a good friend.”. Don't come close to me” (The child expects rejection and often gets it) (Schofield and Beek 2014)

Good adult child relationships can change a child's internal working models

Avoidant attached

The rupture, the hurt, and then the defence against the hurt”

“I don't need.”

“ I don't feel anger/sadness/emotional pain.” Etc.

It's as if these children turned way way down the volume on the distress that might prompt them to seek the comfort of connection, so they turn off the attachment system”

(David Wallin 2007)

Ambivalent attached to birth mother

:The child locked in a life of yearning for a rejecting or abusive parent (The power of intermittent reinforcement in terms of opioid addiction)

Idealising the birth mother (ambivalent attached)

THE LITTLE BOY WHO WOULDN'T UNPACK HIS SUITCASE

Ambivalent attached to the foster parent/ adoptive parent

So the child carries intense unmet attachment needs into their relationships
NEEDY, DESPERATE LOVE/MAJOR MISTRUST (**ambivalent attached**)

Attachment as opioid addiction (Panksepp 1998)

Disorganised attached

Frightening or frightened parent

They can grow up to frighten others as they have been frightened. Dissociation common. "Their parents had histories of trauma in childhood which are often triggered as they relate to their infant. The parent might become withdrawn or dissociated. That, too, is scary for infants "(David Wallin 2007)

WORKING WITH TRAUMA, DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Children who are taken into care have often sustained appalling levels of abuse and neglect connected with addiction, poverty and domestic violence. Then a string of broken attachments from birth parent and other family members, foster parents, social workers, friends (from being moved from one school to the next)

We can't just say "good", we have now removed the child from the parent. What about the mess that is left - the yearning for the birth parent, often despite gross abuse or neglect, the string of broken attachments (largely or entirely ungrieved) the PTSD, the often desperately low self- esteem, the self- blame, the mind in turmoil ?

"Developmental Trauma Disorder" is predicated on the notion that multiple exposures in childhood to interpersonal trauma, such as abandonment, emotional abuse, neglect, betrayal, physical or sexual assaults, lengthy separations from parents, or witnessing violence have consistent and predictable consequences that affect many areas of functioning. (Bessel Van der Kolk)

Trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering." (Levine and Kline 2007:3)

"Trauma is anything that has a long lasting effect on the psyche or self" (Shapiro 2005)

"No one totally escapes the long reach of trauma's shadow to some degree, at some time or another, during their lifespan." (Levine and Kline 2007:3)

Trauma they go immediately from stressful stimuli to fight/flight responses without being able to learn from the experience (Streeck - Fischer, Van der Kolk, 2000) Unfortunately, in the traumatised person, [frontal lobes are] unable to allay the fear response. [This means] we cannot reason away the fear and are left either to act it out on others with extreme emotion, suffer silently from overwhelming feelings [e.g. PTSD, phobias, obsessions, ruminations] , or blank out from the distressing fear-response signals." (Levine/Kline 2007:11)

From Trauma through a child's eyes (Levine/Kline 2007: 28)

To avoid being traumatised, the excess energy evoked in our defence must be used up. When the energy is not fully discharged, it does not simply go away; instead it stays trapped, creating the potential for traumatic symptoms. The likelihood of developing traumatic symptoms is related to the level of undischarged survival energy that was originally mobilized to fight or flee. Children need support to release this highly charged state..(Levine/Kline 2007: 28)

FREUD

It is of great consequence whether there was an energetic reaction to the [emotional] experience. By reaction we here understand a whole series of voluntary or involuntary [responses e.g. crying/shaking] through which according to experience [emotions] are discharged. If the success of the reaction is of sufficient strength it results in the disappearance of a great part of the affect. Language attests to this fact of daily observation in such expressions as ' to give vent to one's feelings' to be 'relieved by weeping' etc. If the reaction is suppressed, the affect remains united with the memory. (*Freud Selected Papers in Hysteria and Other Psychoneurosis 1909 No 4 of the Neurosis and Mental disease Monograph series New York*)

If they don't talk about their traumatic experiences they will simply repeat them (as victim or persecutor)

PTSD is the re-living of a past event (De Zulueta 2003).

The traumatic past won't go into the past until it is remembered in the present

Trauma as re- victimisation

This is why children being cruel is so often trauma based

A thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unlaidd ghost it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell is broken (Freud 1909)

Re-living of the past as victim or perpetrator but some children/teenagers swing from one to the other

The trauma keeps them rigidly fixated on the past, making them fight the last battle over and over again (Van der Kolk 1996)

But isn't talking about it, opening up a can of worms?

The can is already open and usually spilling out all over the place

Affect Labelling studies: Using language to regulate emotion

Kircanski, K., Lieberman, M. D., & Craske, M. G. (2012). Feelings into words: Contributions of language to exposure therapy. *Psychological Science*, 23, 1086-1091.

Participants were then randomly assigned to four groups (affect labelling, reappraisal, distraction, exposure alone) from which they were instructed to approach a live Chilean rose-haired tarantula and then touch it

Omnipotence defence- particularly teenagers
All that is small /vulnerable/helpless is not who I am
I am immortal – even if knifed I would survive

Dan Hughes : *I have to go into the event of loss or trauma with the child by being regulated myself – so that the child realises that they don't have to deal with the feelings and thoughts about it by themselves. This is because now someone is there talking about the trauma/ loss who is regulated, and they can piggy back on my regulation. And then together we can make new meaning of the event. I can reflect on the event in a new way so the child has new thoughts and feelings about it, very different from the ones they had before our therapeutic conversation. The new thoughts and feelings are a result of my empathy and my reflection. They make the pain far more bearable and the memories can be integrated at last (CCMH May 2012)*

The importance of Life story work as a vital grieving process

•I am really thinking about what you said about...

Lying and stealing:

They may have lived in a world where right and wrong were a crazy muddle

- Lying and stealing may have been the norm in their birth family.
- Empathy centres not lighting up in the brain. If they were the child would feel – I don't want to steal from you because I would feel pain at your loss of (e.g. of your lovely bracelet)
- Often delayed moral and emotional development.
- Abused children can have a distorted view of the world, distorted view of morality.
- Abuse and trauma can delay moral development so the child might have the moral development of a two year old.

Looking after you

- Keep in mind how her behaviour is totally understandable, in light of her traumatic past.
 - Don't leave things around e.g. cash, jewellery, your purse – keep in your pocket
 - Do leave other things around – little gifts/notes under their plates/pillows
 - Keep other adults informed when appropriate
 - Does she come home with other children's things in their pocket
 - Teachers/other parents
 - Sleep over – (other parents to put things away)
- Allow yourself your feelings with another adult, not the child, so when you see the child, they get the calm, reflective part of you

•Therapist in the cupboard! betrayed, used, abused -

- I feel distressed
- I feel betrayed
- Is this how she repays us for all our kindness?
- I feel so angry she didn't even say sorry
- I hate it that she is denying it – it makes me dislike her

Never assume you can trust the child before the child trusts you

- So build up their trust in you first before expecting the behaviour to change
- Show that you can be trusted to deal with the issue fairly and with reflection
- This is a very different world you are introducing them to
- In their head they are often still in dog eat dog world where stealing and lying were vital for survival

How to have a healing conversations about stealing and lying

- Plan the conversation before going into it
- Aim** – To help the child to make sense of her own behaviours, (lying and stealing) give her the psychology.
- Don't enter debates of whether they did or didn't do it = like a mini court room
- Messages:**
- We all make mistakes
- We are sad you took this
- We are sad you felt you needed to lie to us
- If that were true it would be very hurtful, painful/ shocking/ like a horror movie
- If you are sure and the child flatly denies it – use empathy – e.g. "I can understand that it might feel like you didn't do it"
- Give the child the facts about the effects of stealing and lying on the other person
- (just as you would with a two year old who hits another child and makes them cry)
- Example, "*It hurts people a lot in their hearts when someone takes something of theirs that matters to them a lot.*"
- Calm discussion will develop frontal lobes

Big empathy drawing: stealing

- Sometimes children take things that don't belong to them because:
- They feel stolen from or taken from – like people stole them from their tummy mummy
- Like people took their mummy away from them
- When they were with their tummy mummy – they had to steal things to survive
- Their tummy mummy got them to steal things like food and cigarettes so it can be hard to get it that you don't need to do that here
- Like other children have so much (they still have their mummies) and they feel they have so little – so they take things to make things feel fairer
- They feel empty inside so stealing things makes them feel less empty inside

- Stealing makes them feel powerful when they know what its like to have no power at all
- Stealing means they feel they can do things rather than be done to
- Stealing is just something they do and they don't know why

Big empathy drawing: Lying

Sometimes children lie because:

- They have lived in a world where right and wrong were a crazy muddle
- Lying was what happened in their tummy mummy family
- Too many people have lied to them
- In the past if they had told the truth something awful happened – so its become like a habit to lie
- They lie because they are frightened of grown-ups when they are angry, or disapproving
- Because they think grownups will hurt them if they tell the truth
- Because they think grownups will make them feel really really bad if they tell the truth
- They lie to make friends like them
- They lie to make people think they are pretty cool
- It makes them feel safe

Consequences and making amends:

Don't be a lie-invitee be a truth teller.

- Harsh punishment will alienate the child further / encourage them to be more devious and clever next time
- Harsh punishment will just trigger hatred and bitterness not engender morals
- Not taking away pocket money
- Not grounded for the week

Children Looked After Support Service. Lying and Stealing Information pack (2008). Barbara Jones

<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/Content/Internet/327/946/3993310500.pdf>

Consequences and making amends:

Model good problem solving skills:

- The child needs to learn to trust that the adults' limit-setting will be out of consideration for the needs of the child, not because the adult needs to be in control of everything. (Vera Fahlberg)
- I feel really sad that you took that money
- So we are going to ask you to xxxx
- We are going to ask you to make good the loss by xxxx
- Need to be consequences otherwise don't learn that there are rules in society
- Need to be consequences otherwise yet another experience of abuser/abused
- (with them as the abuser and you as the powerless abused)

- Use chores - Keep a list of jobs the child can do to make amends.

Stealing - common reasons

- Stolen childhood/stolen mother. Feels she has been stolen from her mother/father by social services
- Feel other children have so much (they still have their mummies), and they feel they have so little
- Made to steal to get food/drugs etc. by parents
- Neglected children can panic about food. Some have stolen food to survive
- To make up for the emptiness they feel inside
- Stealing makes her feel potent, in charge, gives an adrenaline buzz

Lying: Common reasons

- It's a habit they have formed. Hard to break.
- It worked really well in their birth family
- to protect them from being hit with words or fists.
- There is a truth inside the lie
- To protect their self-esteem
- To impress peers
- Fear of shame – an assault on the self
- They will hurt me if I tell what I did
- They will stop loving me if I tell what I did
- 'I don't remember' (dissociation can be real)
- They have been lied to
- Children have learnt at an early age the benefits of not telling the truth.

For references and a far fuller account: see

- **[What Every Parent Needs to Know Margot Sunderland \(Dorling Kindersley\)](#)**
- **[Training days and training courses in child counseling skills, life story work, sandplay therapy and lots more run over weekend days \[www.childmentalhealthcentre.org\]\(http://www.childmentalhealthcentre.org\)](#)**
- **www.margotsunderland.org**