

CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH SUPPORT NEEDS: AM I DOING TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE?

Eva de Gosztanyi, psychologist
Faculty, NEUFELD INSTITUTE

Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D.

edegosztanyi@gmail.com
www.degosztanyi.org
www.neufeldinstitute.org

1

WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT IS BEHIND THE BEHAVIOUR?

What we see on the outside is telling us something about what is happening on the inside.



What we see influences what we do.

When we understand what is behind the behaviour we can then:

- choose interventions that will make a difference
- avoid interventions that risk making things worse

2

Using a Developmental and Trauma-Informed Lens

1. Attachment-based developmental paradigm of Dr. Gordon Neufeld
2. Research on the development of the human brain – Jay Giedd, Laurence Steinberg, Iain McGilchrist, etc.
3. Trauma research – Reggie Melrose, Bruce Perry, Bessel Van der Kolk

3

NEUFELD DEVELOPMENTAL PARADIGM

Maturation
Vulnerability
Attachment
Emotions

Understanding how humans achieve their full potential

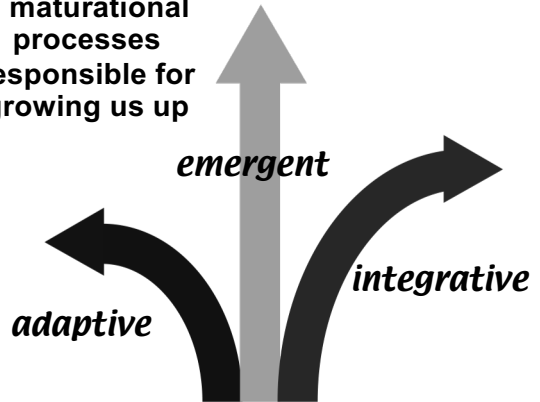
4

Maturation - Principles

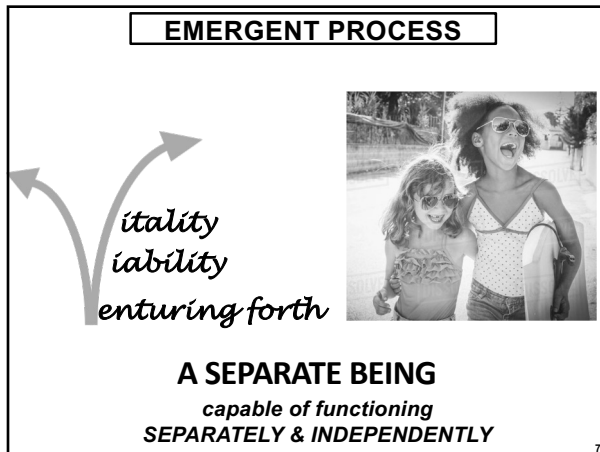
1. Natural Process that unfolds according to a plan
2. Cannot be rushed
3. Can become stuck
4. Potential - continues throughout the life span
5. There is a price to pay if one aspect is promoted over the whole

5

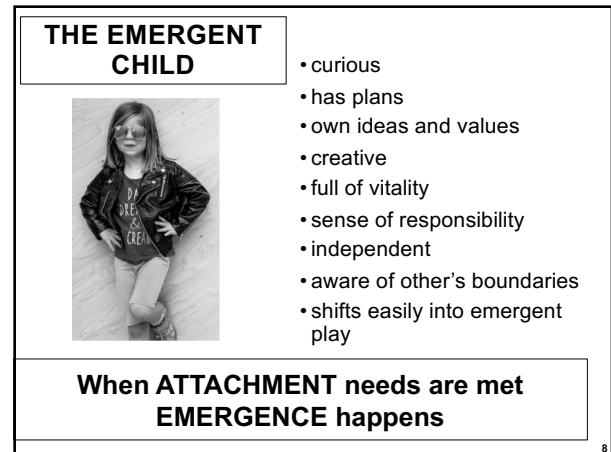
3 maturational processes responsible for growing us up



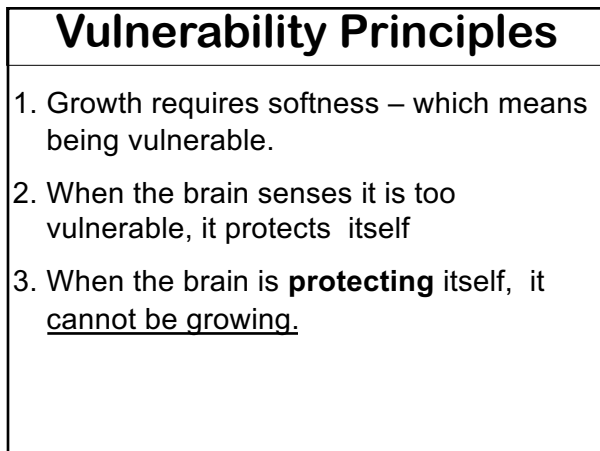
6



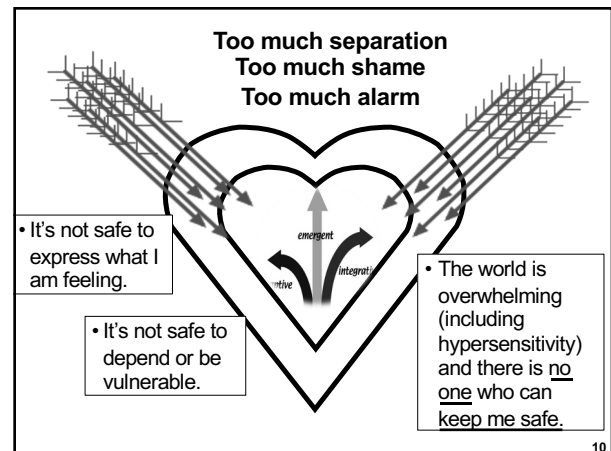
7



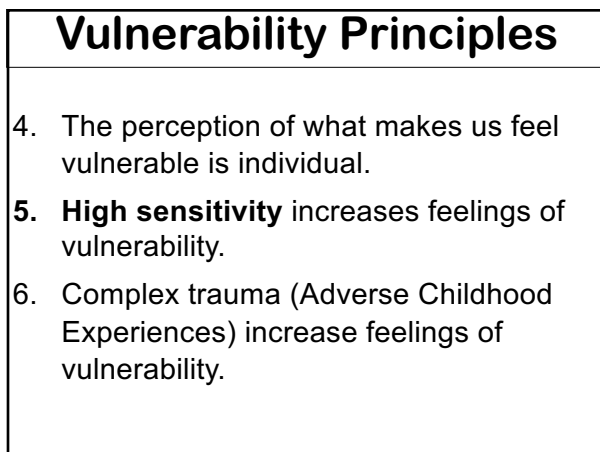
8



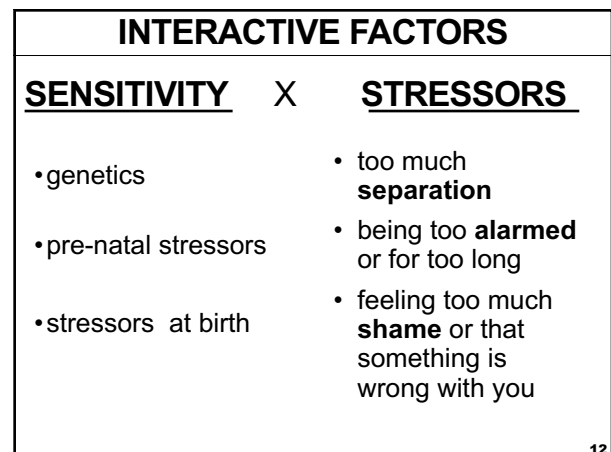
9



10



11



12

ATTACHMENT



Every day our children wonder:

Who is taking care of me?

13

13

Attachment Principles

1. Attachment is the primary need of a developing being.
2. Growth takes place in the context of a safe Attachment.
3. A “safe” Attachment figure both cares about and cares for (takes charge of) the dependent being.
4. Being dependent requires the ability to tolerate vulnerability.

14

14

ATTACHMENT

What attachment does ...	enables adults to...
Arranges hierarchically	take charge of them, take care of them
Renders endearing and tolerant	like them and endure them
Creates a sense of home	provide comfort, rest and retreat
Creates a compass point	guide & direct them and transmit our culture



15

15

HOW DOES ATTACHMENT WORK?

Attachment is organized hierarchically
its primary purpose is to **facilitate**
both the **giving** and **receiving** of **CARE** (educating)

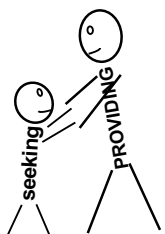
There are two sets of complementary **INSTINCTS**
DEPENDENT & **ALPHA** (to GUIDE),
and two sets of **DRIVES**
SEEKING and **PROVIDING**.

ALPHA INSTINCTS are wired into our brain

16

16

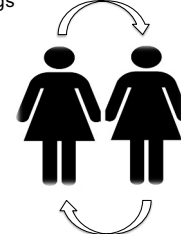
SEEKING instincts to depend	PROVIDING instincts to guide (ALPHA instincts)
to get one's bearings	to orient and inform
to seek assistance	to protect & defend
to look up to	to guide and direct
to belong	to look out for
to follow	to possess
to look for guidance	to lead and guide



17

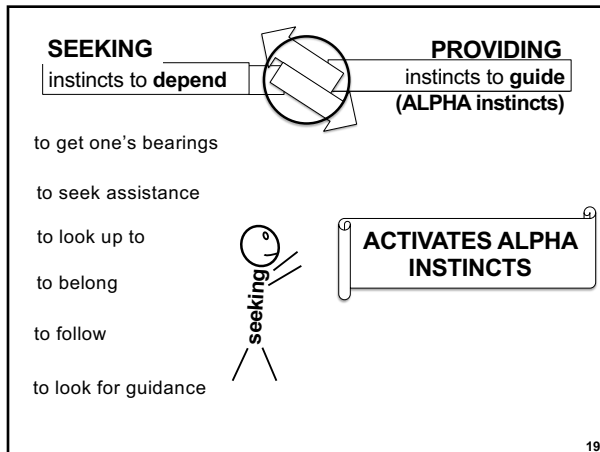
17

SEEKING instincts to depend	PROVIDING instincts to guide (ALPHA instincts)
to get one's bearings	to orient and inform
to seek assistance	to protect & defend
to look up to	to guide and direct
to belong	to look out for
to follow	to possess
to look for guidance	to lead

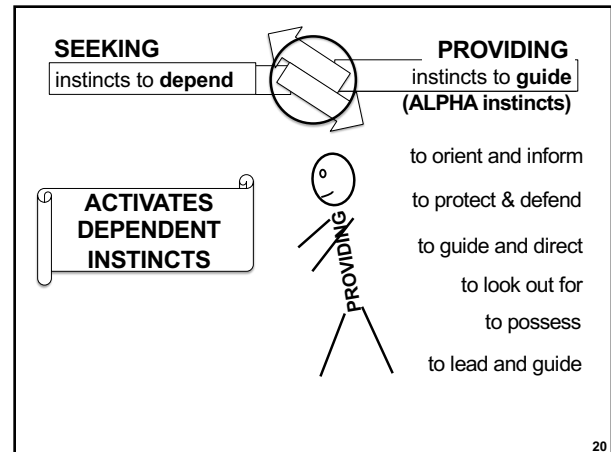


18

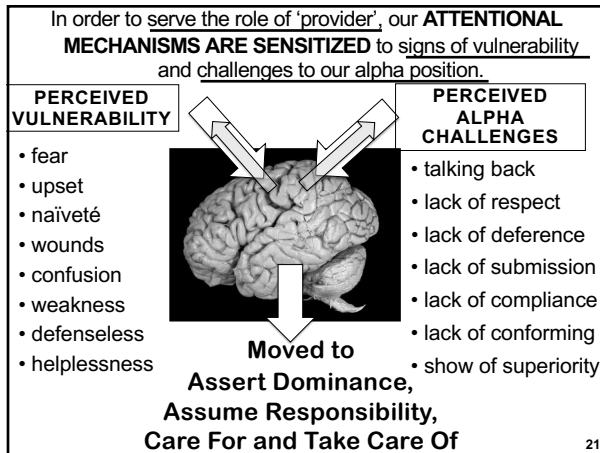
18



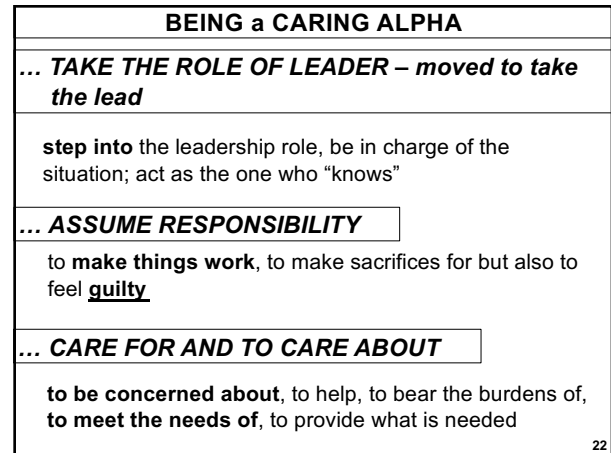
19



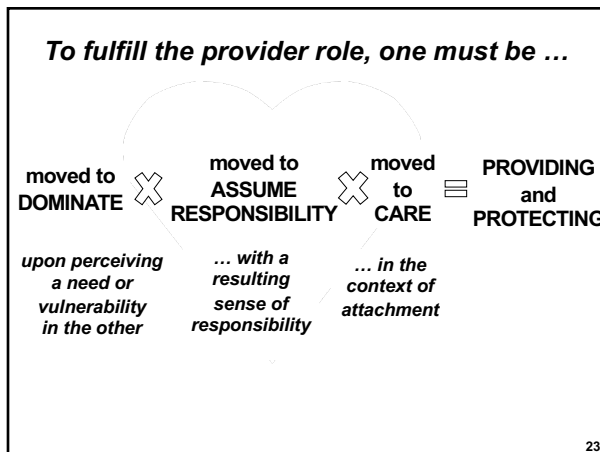
20



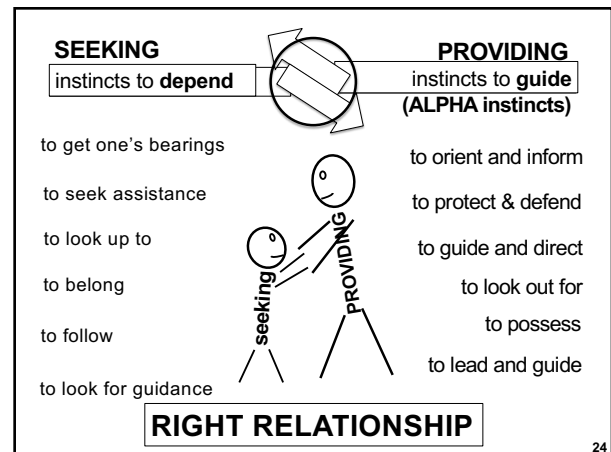
21



22



23



24

CONDITIONS FOR RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

- sense of safety to depend
- trust that the adult is able to provide and keep safe
 - ▷ kindness
 - ▷ firmness
- The ability to say, "No" or to set boundaries
- Not explaining too much.
- Remaining kind – but firm

So that the child feels safe "leaning" on us.

So that the child knows the ADULT is ultimately the one who will make the final decision.

25

25

WHY DO CHILDREN HAVE TO LEAN ON ADULTS?

- If children won't or can't lean on the adults who are there for them, then they have to find someone else to take care of them.
- Many children then start to take care of themselves.
- Their Alpha Instincts become dominant and "stuck", making these children very hard to teach and guide.
- Instead of allowing adults to guide and help them, they start telling adults what to do.

26

26

WHY DO WE HAVE TO BE AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTACHMENT?

Attachment is the natural context in which children are meant to be raised and educated.

To enable attachment to do its work, we need to ensure that children are actively attaching to the adults responsible for them.

When children are attached to us, they will follow our lead and learn from us.

27

27

THE EDUCATOR'S DILEMMA
WHEN DO I PUSH AND WHEN DO I HELP?
HOW DO I BLEND:

1. MY MANDATE
2. MY INSTINCTS
3. THE CHILD'S NEEDS

28

28

GOAL: THE STUDENT WILL DRESS INDEPENDENTLY

MANDATE: To teach the child self-dressing skills and have him/her carry them out consistently

SITUATION THE CHILD :

1. constantly asks for help before trying
2. sits helplessly
3. fools around
4. starts crying
5. refuses to dress
6. has a "fit"

WHAT DO I DO?

29

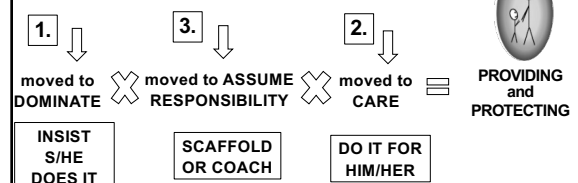
29

GOAL: THE STUDENT WILL DRESS INDEPENDENTLY

MANDATE: Teach the child self-dressing skills and have him/her carry them out consistently

SITUATION: THE CHILD DOESN'T OR WON'T

Possible Responses



WHICH ONE IS RIGHT?

30

30

THERE IS NO RIGHT ANSWER!

As a caring ALPHA our role is to:

READ THE NEED AND TAKE THE LEAD

- A. be the 'expert' regarding the child
- B. read the cues
- C. find the dance and take the lead
- D. meet needs and not demands – stay in charge
- E. provide more attachment than is being pursued



31

31

Being a caring ALPHA**A. be the 'expert' regarding your child**

1. Where is the child at developmentally?

- The younger and more immature the child the more we need to respect their dependency needs.
- The desire to become **INDEPENDENT** is "wired" into us and manifests itself when DEPENDENCY needs are met.
- Have faith in the Developmental Process – patience if you want a "good one".



32

32

Being a caring ALPHA**A. be the 'expert' regarding your child**

2. Where is the child at in terms of vulnerability?

- What is going on in the child's life?
- In his/her day?
- What is his/her fatigue level?
- Anything else that needs to be taken into consideration?

**** When a child refuses to engage in a behaviour, or use a skill that they generally can do, we need to read this as a sign that something is going on.**



33

33

Being a caring ALPHA**B. read the cues**

1. Can the child handle more **FRUSTRATION** or **ALARM**?

- Is this the moment to "INSIST"?
- Would scaffolding or coaching be a better choice?
- Is today one of "those" days when I need to back off?
 - Going to music class
 - Attending an assembly
 - Completely finishing all their work before moving on
 - Dressing completely on their own
 -



34

34

Being a caring ALPHA**B. read the cues**

2. Am I willing to take responsibility for pushing the child into a possible "crisis" or shut down?

- Is this the space or place?
- Is this the right time?
- Is it worth the fall out? Time, effort, resources, effect on the other students?
- Do I have the psychological energy to stay "tempered" in the midst of a meltdown or a stand off?



35

35

Being a caring ALPHA**C. find the dance and take the lead**

1. Is this the time to **INSIST**?

- The child is functioning well and just needs a little encouragement
- The child is ready and able to find his sadness
- It is time for **ADAPTATION** to occur



36

36

ADAPTATION

The **PROCESS** whereby we are changed by
that which we cannot change

**Adaptation requires
a soft heart and
a safe place to cry**

a soft heart = able to tolerate
feelings of vulnerability

a safe place to cry = someone
who will keep you safe while
you are vulnerable



37

37

Being a caring ALPHA

PRIMING ADAPTATION

Being an AGENT OF FUTILITY

- Saying "No" firmly but kindly
- Allowing for a response – pouting, groaning, even some "name calling" (if it doesn't cause problems with the other students)
- Being comfortable with tears and upset

Being an ANGEL of COMFORT for the feelings of futility and SADNESS

- Being comfortable with tears and upset
- Coming along-side the emotions: frustration, alarm
- Not changing your mind **UNLESS** the situation has spiraled out of control and you need to back away



38

38

HELPING THE TEARS TO FLOW

1. Start by talking about and reflecting back the Emotion
 - i. Frustration: "That didn't work for you." "That was not what you had in mind."
 - ii. Alarm: "That was scary." "You weren't sure what was going to happen".
2. MATCH THE EMOTION.
3. THEN: Move subtly towards SADNESS by allowing a tinge of sadness in your voice.
4. USE SILENCE

39

39

HELPING THE TEARS TO FLOW

5. When the child starts to cry:
 - DON'T ASK WHY
 - If the child gives a reason, don't MINIMIZE. If it seems trivial, it is usually because the child has an ocean of tears within them and can't give all the reasons.
6. When the tears start: SIT QUIETLY with compassion
 - Trust in the "bounce back"
 - Resist the natural alpha instinct to make things better or to problem solve
7. Give **lots of space** to SADNESS and TEARS.
8. Problem solve well after the tears (if needed)

40

40

SENSING ADAPTATION

When a child MOVES INTO in the ADAPTIVE mode an internal shift occurs which can be noted:

the child may quiver, sigh, deep breaths and allow tears to go deeper

In that moment they come back into relationship with us

Our role is to be the midwives to an adaptive process –

Adults are meant to keep this natural process on track

41

41

HELPING THE TEARS TO FLOW

AN OLDER CHILD

1. Sad movies, YouTube, sad story...
2. In a dark room – in a dark car
3. Shoulder to shoulder
4. Slight tinge of sadness in voice
5. Normalize sadness and tears
6. Once tears appear, if resistant, **CHANGE THE TOPIC BUT REJOICE IN THE SADNESS**

42

42

Being a caring ALPHA

**D. MEET NEEDS AND NOT DEMANDS
STAY IN CHARGE**

How else can we push or nudge besides insisting?

1. "BENIGN NEGLECT"
 - Finding something else to do
 - Not interacting with the upset but not "ignoring" either
 - Rejoicing in the tears
 - Not over-reacting to the "success"
2. SCAFFOLDING AND COACHING
 - Start the process
 - Give a suggestion or choice
 - **Don't over-react to the "success"**
 - Keep your reaction low-key

43

43

Being a caring ALPHA

**HOW TO INVITE THE INEVITABLE
while staying ALPHA**

- *I know you are not going to like this.*
- *Go ahead and have the last word... have a fit...*

**HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND
while staying ALPHA**

- *I was just thinking ...*
- *You may ...*
- *You don't have to...*
- *It's better that you don't...*

**STAY IN CHARGE,
EVEN IF YOU
CAN'T BE IN
CONTROL**

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO, BUT HOW YOU DO IT.

44

44

Being a caring ALPHA

E. provide more attachment than is being pursued

1. To fulfill the child's ATTACHMENT HUNGER
2. To EVOKE the "dependent" instincts
3. To allow the child to "rest" in the relationship
4. COLLECT BEFORE YOU DIRECT
5. Be sensitive to the "FACE" that the child sees when you are Directing them
6. Try to stay aware of how desperately children need us and make sure they "see" how you care for them
7. Remember that growth happens when the brain is at rest – a child can only rest when they feel cared for

45

45

MAXIMIZE ATTACHMENT

COLLECT BEFORE YOU DIRECT

1. **Get in their face or space in a friendly way**
 - Collect the **eyes** – *wait for the child to show you that he or she has seen you.*
 - Try to get a **smile** – *make a comment about what the child is doing.*
 - Try to get a **nod** – *say something to get the child to agree with you.*

THEN, in that moment, **make your request.**

ENGAGE THE ATTACHMENT INSTINCTS

46

46

COLLECT BEFORE YOU DIRECT

space, eyes, nod, smile

When you find that a student is no longer following your lead – go back to the beginning – **use a collecting ritual**

- Use an attachable tone
- Find a way to catch the student's eyes, nod and smile – playful mode
- If you have to raise your voice to get the student's attention, when s/he looks at you, **have a smile in your eyes.**

WORK AT ATTACHMENT AND ATTACHMENT WILL WORK FOR YOU

47

47

WHAT ARE WE AFRAID OF?

1. What if he never learns this skill?
2. Won't she just end up being a "spoiled brat"?
3. He's just "manipulating us".
4. But if we don't push, she'll never improve.

48

48

A DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSE

1. Behaviours and skills are more a result of GROWTH and DEVELOPMENT than they are of teaching and learning. We need to find the "sweet spot".
 - o If the child is NOT ready, the learning won't "stick" or generalize. The child performs the behaviour in the moment for the "reward" or to please us.
2. Spoiling comes about when we:
 - do not allow experiences with **futility**
 - if we try to take away the natural reactions to futility i.e. emotional expression - attack/tantrums and tears.
3. Of course, he's trying to manipulate us – good for him! But WE DECIDE what is in the child's best interest in that moment.
4. Yes, we need to YEARN, GIVE IT A TRY, HAVE EXPECTATIONS but also respect the developmental rhythm.

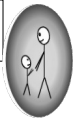


49

49

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PUSHING TOO HARD?

1. Pushing too hard causes stress.
2. Too much pressure and stress is NOT good for the developing being.
3. All living beings, especially those who are still growing and developing need LOTS OF REST and DOWN TIME. It is only in REST that the brain and body grow and develop.

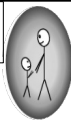


50

50

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PUSHING TOO HARD?

4. The Attachment relationship can become disrupted, even if we are very positive
 - Children are very sensitive to what we expect of them
 - They go into Attachment Alarm if they are worried that they won't be able to meet our expectations and lose our love – their anxiety increases
 - Or they start tuning out everything we ask, because they think it is going to be TOO MUCH and they don't want to disappoint us
5. Children start to PERFORM, instead of change coming from growth.

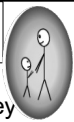


51

51

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PUSHING TOO HARD?

6. When children start resisting or "acting out" they are trying to tell us that they are feeling pressured.



Meet the Counterwill Instinct

- a defensive reaction to perceived control and coercion
- to being told what to do



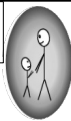
COUNTERWILL is NOT a learned response, but an EMOTIONAL REACTION based in INSTINCT

52

52

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PUSHING TOO HARD?

7. Children lose their Emergence (the natural desire to do more) and become passive and dependent on our reactions.
 - The agenda is ours and not theirs.
 - This includes when we use positive reinforcement or constant praise.
 - Research has shown that rewards diminish natural impulse such as empathy. Warneken and Tomasello (2014) ***Extrinsic Rewards Undermine Altruistic Tendencies in 20-Month-Olds***

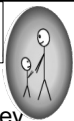


53

53

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PUSHING TOO HARD?

8. When children are constantly being taught, they lose out on valuable PLAY TIME which is where a lot of development actually takes place.
9. When we take away "free play" or child-initiated play, we make it much harder for children to develop emotionally and intellectually.



54

54

ENCOURAGE PLAY

Create time for play

Escalating diagnoses of childhood anxiety, depression and ADHD has paralleled the loss of Play - Peter Gray, American Journal of Play 2011



PLAY TIME SHOULD NOT BE EARNED— it should be scheduled and protected. The more the child is IN TROUBLE, THE MORE HE/SHE NEEDS PLAY TIME.

55

55

HAVE FUN WITH THEM

Playing and having fun with **children and youth increases attachment** -

eyes, smiles, nods, bring a child into our orbit.

The mutual joy and shared communication and attunement that adults and children can experience during **play and fun regulate the body's stress response.**



56

56

COUNTERING COUNTERWILL

Being playful allows a way back into relationship and melts resistance without losing face.

Increasing connection increases instinct to follow.

- Make routines fun:
 - Going to the next class: Hop like a bunny
 - Brushing teeth: Catching the green gremlins
 - Washing hands: Using bubbles of different colours
 - Listening to their music while cleaning up



57

57

PROTECT VULNERABILITY

BRIDGE ALL THAT CAN DIVIDE

❖ PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR

- "I am looking forward to seeing you tomorrow."
- "We'll find a way to make things better."



The message we want to give our students is that we, the adults, will always find a way to care for them.

BRIDGING gives the child HOPE.

58

58

THE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

- We are gardeners, not sculptors
- Growth happens in rest, make sure the child has "down time"
- Rest happens when the child has "faith in the provision"
- When we give more than what is requested, our children lean into us, that allows them to rest, then they can grow
- Growth and development take time.
- Children are complex and full of many conflicting and challenging emotions: Frustration and Alarm which move them to Attack and Avoid. These cannot be eliminated.
- In fact, without Emotions, development is stunted
- Therefore, no ONE intervention will change a child's behaviour – there is always Ebb and Flow
- The CONSISTENCY that children need is the knowledge that they can CONSISTENTLY **count on us**



59

HOW BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

Maturation

Behaviour changes as the brain matures

Vulnerability

Behaviour changes when vulnerability is protected

Attachment

Behaviour changes when students are attached to adults

Emotions

Behaviour changes when emotions are felt

60

60