

Supporting and nurturing parents and carers in the care of their children (0-11years)

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Themes to be covered

- Understanding what babies and children need to thrive (drawing on neuroscience, developmental psychology, and attachment theory)
- Understanding the barriers facing parents in recognizing and attending to the needs of their children (trauma and adversity), current and historic (support healing of past harm/adversity). Support safety (using screening tools).
- How can parents be supported to understand their difficulties, both historic and current in relation to the needs of their children? (with support of screening tools)
- How can we support parents to understand and meet the needs of their infants and children and support their emotional and social development? (Power/threat/ meaning framework); Reflective Parenting; PACE; VIG; Solihull; SPACE). Importance of ***mentalization***.
- How can we support parents/carers to reduce family conflict & enjoy more healthy and joyful relationships (e.g. PACE; Reflective Parenting; Solihull)



There are many parenting programmes: Key themes

- Understanding parental attachment history and experiences (including trauma & adversity; AAI; meaningful narrative)
- Supporting parental understanding of the impact of their developmental history/trauma and making peace with the past. Help parents voice their needs (Power/threat/ meaning).
- Understanding the impact of cycles of harm.
- Understanding the needs of babies and children.
- Understanding the minds, thoughts, feelings and intentions of children (attunement and empathy).
- Supporting parental capacity for emotion regulation, calm, and reflection (this is a Therapeutic task).
- Reducing conflict in family relationships; connect with partner and children in loving, sensitive and attuned ways.
- Understand better child's emotions; see the difficulties from child's point of view (***Mentalization***; PACE; SPACE; Reflective parenting)
- Help parent to convey to infant/child that they are understood and valued (Reflective parenting; For baby's sake; PACE)
- Connect with baby/child in attuned, empathic and loving ways - Solihull; PACE; Reflective Parenting; VIG; SPACE



Key tasks in supporting parents to attend to the needs of their children

- To be trusted, emotionally available adult to parents to have difficult conversations, which increase confidence and competence among parents to support needs of children
- To have sensitive and sometimes difficult conversations which explore with parents their own histories and the relationship and the link between those and their parenting styles and capacity to understanding needs of their children.
- To support parents/carers to grasp that things that have happened in their past that influence in the here and now – in relationships and parenting.
- It is a strengths-based approach (*‘Angels in the nursery’*)
- We may need to help parents get ready for parenting programmes.
- Our tasks include stabilization; engagement and relationship building; recognising and mobilising parental strengths

“making sense of the past in order to be more loving and healthier in the future” (from Dan Siegel)



Engage with parents: understand their needs

- Strength based approach, which supports reflective functioning (Power/threat/ meaning framework)
- Connect with parental needs; understand their current challenges
- Seek to understand their own attachment and developmental history
- Screen for past adversity and trauma (***using evidence-based tools***)
- Tools (e.g. ‘for baby’s sake’; PTSD screen; ACEs questionnaire; Impact of events scale)
- Help parents tell their stories ***in their own way***
- Seek to understand from their point of view the impact of growing up with adversity. Support reflection.
- Understand current challenges (e.g. conflicted relationships; housing; work based; health)



Recognising the impact of experiences by screening for trauma symptoms & adversity (e.g. of 6 clients not known to MH services*)

- ACES [Adverse Childhood Experiences Revised Questionnaire \(acesaware.org\)](https://www.acesaware.org/)
- PTSD [*PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 \(PCL-5\) - Fillable Form \(va.gov\)](https://www.va.gov/opa/whatsnew/PTSD-checklist-for-dsm-5.pdf)
- Angels / strengths
- Impact of events in adulthood [IES-R: Impact of Events Scale-Revised \(onlinecbtresources.co.uk\)](https://www.onlinecbtresources.co.uk/ies-r/)

*** NB the scores of the 6 clients cited indicate high levels of PTSD symptoms and adversity in childhood)**

	PCL-5 (PTSD)	ACES
1.	55	9
2.	52	7
3.	57	6
4.	64	9
5.	68	10
6.	53	7

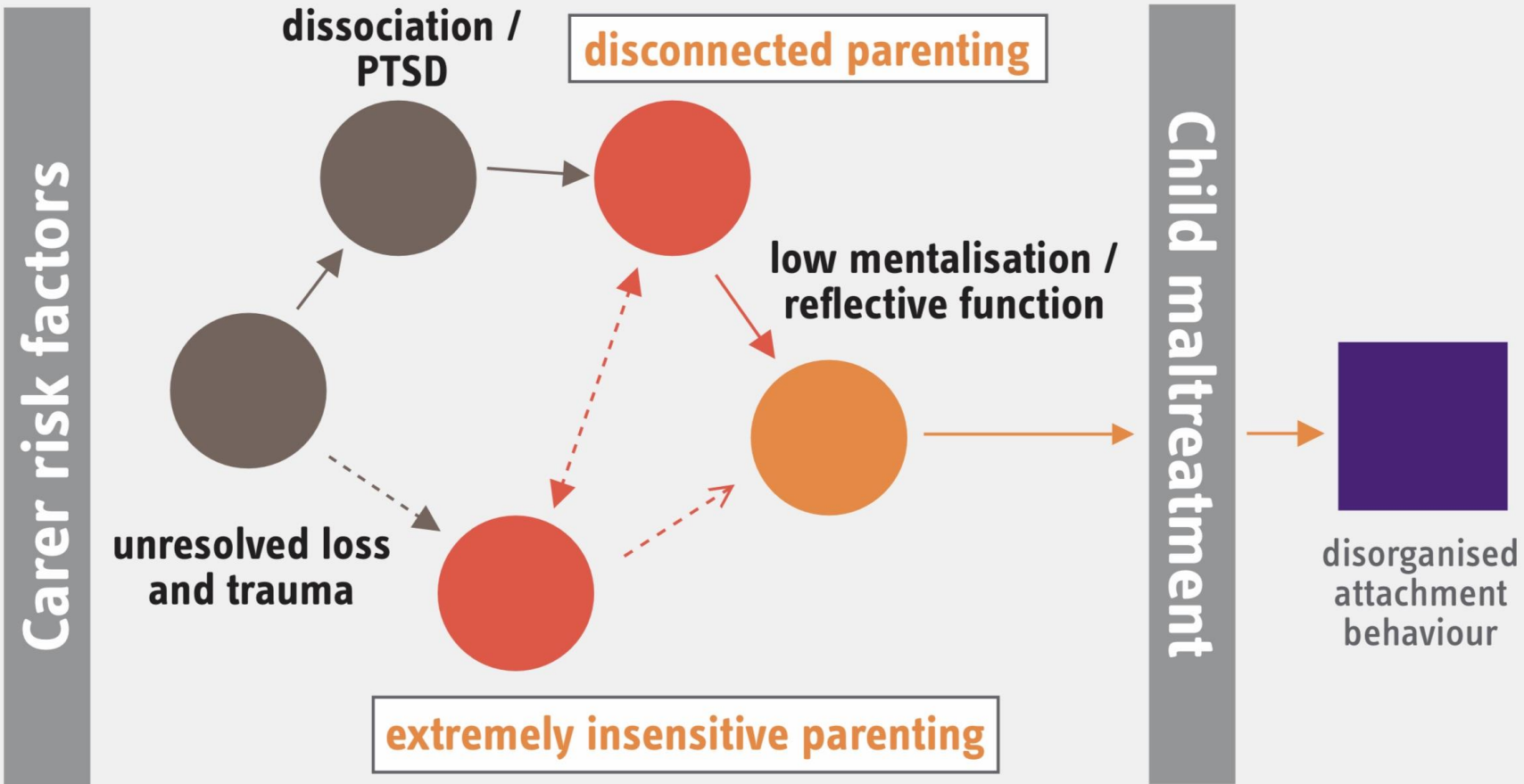
Impact of growing up with adversity: Explore impact of adversity with parents

- How you feel about yourself?
- Fear of being shamed or judged
- Development of unhelpful coping strategies
- Reliance on drugs or alcohol to bear painful feelings
- Fear of close relationships; or volatile and chaotic relationships; or fear of abandonment and rejection.
- Experience of domestic violence and its impact.
- Lack of capacity to regulate emotions, to stay calm and thoughtful
- Difficulty in deferring gratification; managing frustration.
- Hard to see things from others' point of view
- Difficulty in making sense of early experiences (a coherent narrative about childhood), e.g. Parent's difficulties; and in processing harmful experiences. Poor mentalization.



Shemmings & Shemmings 2011
Evidence informed risk assessment and interventions to break the cycle of abuse

Maltreatment Pathway Model



Mentalisation

Mentalization is a form of imaginative mental activity that enables us to perceive and interpret behaviour in terms of intentional mental states (needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes, reasons). Mentalizing is imaginative because we need to imagine what other people might be thinking or feeling as we can never know for sure what is in someone else's mind. We may also need a kind of imaginative leap to understand our own mental experience, particularly in relation to emotionally charged issues. (Fonagy, P)

Ability to understand thoughts, feelings, desires of others helps behaviour to become meaningful. It also determines our attitudes to others (how we ascribe meaning to behaviour on basis of imagined intentions and feelings and thoughts).

Some parents have real difficulty in seeing their infants and children as they genuinely are. They put in their own thoughts and feelings –they jump to conclusions and thus misunderstand. This affects the attitude to the child. **Examples:**

- The mother who didn't see why, on a cold morning, she needed to put her one-year-old son's shoes and socks on because "my feet are like toast".
- The adult cannot make much sense of what happened to them as children; often, in addition, they show no interest or curiosity. - 'Why do you think your parents behaved as they did when you were a child?' A: 'How should I know; you are the social worker!'
- 'Do you think your childhood experiences have influenced you in any way?' A. 'I can't think of anything ...(no curiosity)'

Low mentalisation:

- 'He's stupid', 'She's cute' (but no elaboration) 'She's clingy, but there's nothing wrong with her.' 'She's horrible and that's the way she is'

Big warning signs (misattributions or persecutory attributions) "The baby did it on purpose". "The child hates me"

Disconnected Parenting

Sudden and unpredictable changes in behaviour with no explanation and not alongside affection or playfulness

Frightened parent

Frightening parent

Parent suddenly retreats or startles

Parent appears frightened (facial expression) Might make comments to or about the child

Voice alteration, trance-like expression

Parent may appear timid, submissive, or overly responsive to child's anger/displeasure

Parent might not stop parent-directed aggression

Extremely Insensitive Parenting

When child is distressed; parent does not respond, or response is minimal

Parent does not intervene when child engages in potentially dangerous behaviour

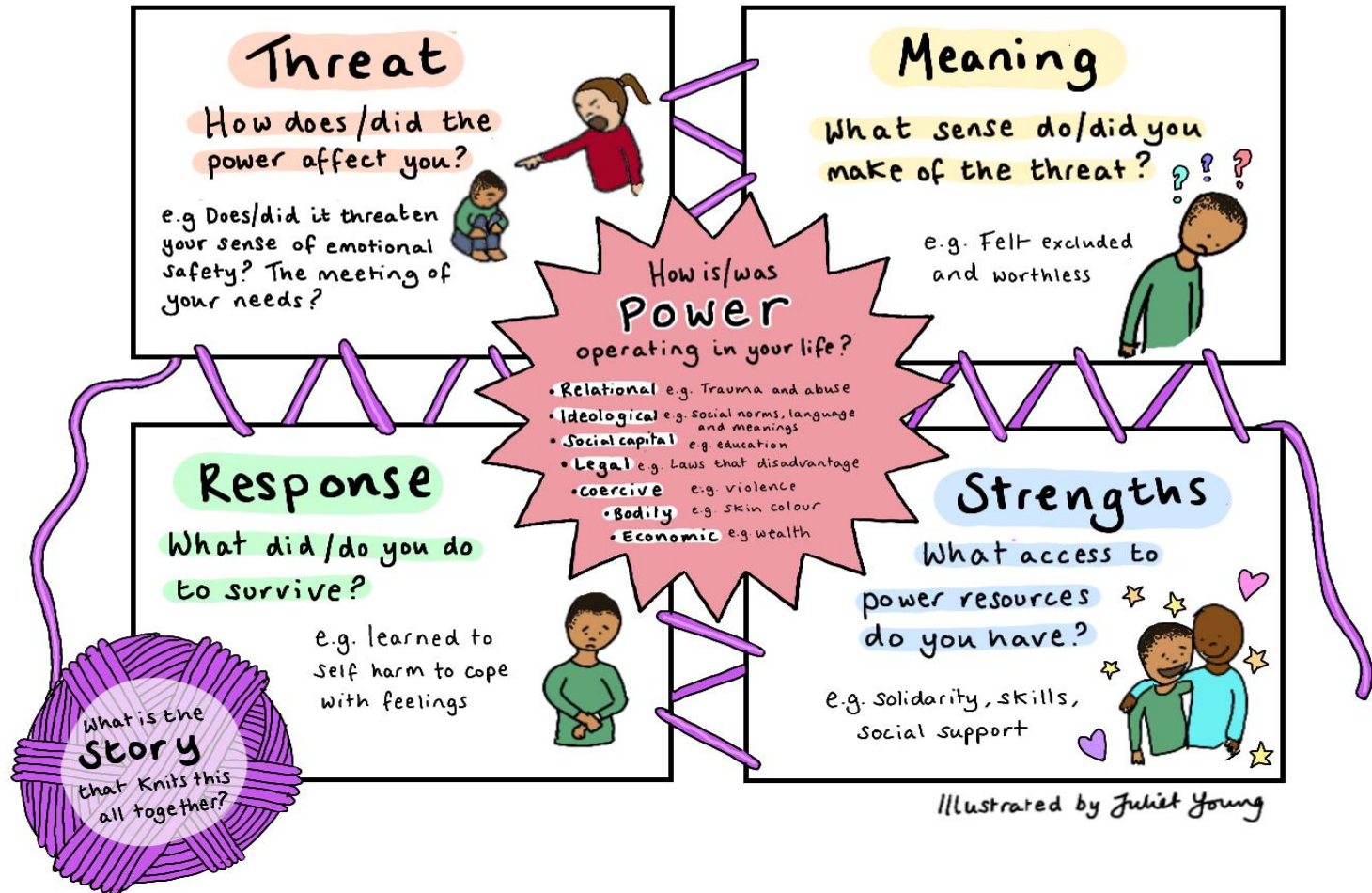
Parent does not respond to repeated vocalisations and cues

Creates physical distance from the child

Physical intrusiveness; over-tickling etc..

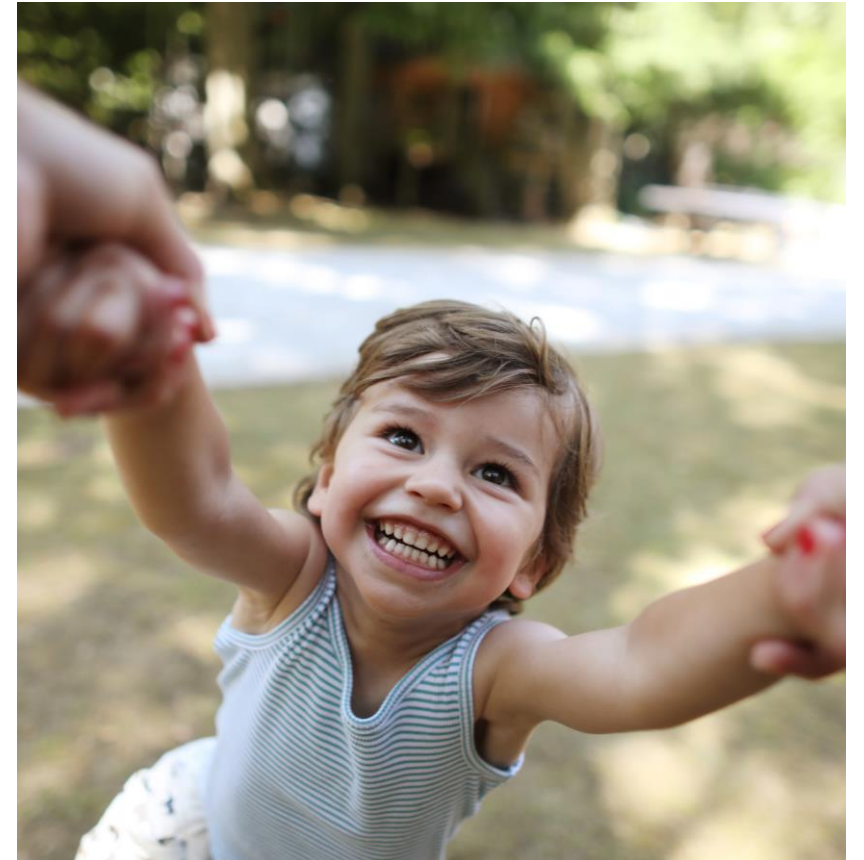
Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018)

Support parents to understand impact of past experiences



Strength based approach working with parents: never too late to change

- What do you need? What do you really want?
- Magical wish question ‘if I were your fairy godmother and could make your wish come true, what would it be?’
- What do your children need? **Reflective parenting.**
- How can you see and understand what they need?
- How can we help you to meet those needs in new and loving ways?
- How can we support you to reduce family conflict?
- How can we support more loving family relationships? Less erratic, and calmer.
- Support parents to access therapeutic help to process past trauma or get support for drugs or alcohol misuse.



Reflective parenting (Cooper & Redfern) supports loving connections

- Refers to interest in and understanding of what is going on in the minds of children, and how this relates to behaviour.
- It also includes being aware of what is going on in one's own mind, and an understanding of one's own thoughts and feelings.
- It emphasises the importance of seeking to understand intention
- It supports regulating own emotions and remain more calm
- It supports efforts to be curious and think about the situation
- Try to see the situation from the point of view of others
- It supports seeking to understand better child's emotions
- Understand better the child's intentions (including attachment seeking intentions)
- Helps child to feel understood and valued and attended to
- It supports de-escalation of difficult situations and outbursts

“Reflective parenting sees that the child has their own mind that is a rich tapestry of interwoven thoughts, ideas and motivations, and they wish to understand the workings of this mind”. (Cooper and Redfern, 2016)



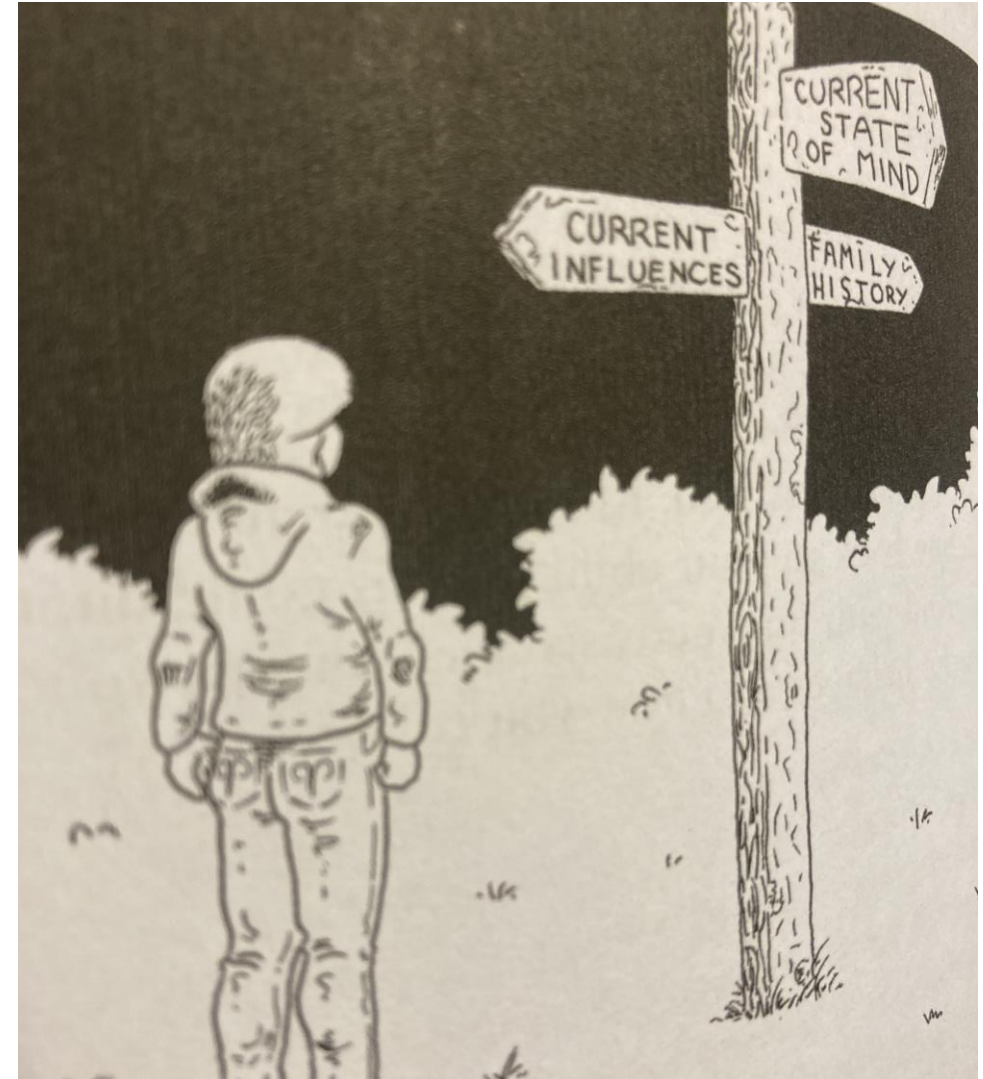
Reflective parenting (Cooper & Redfern 2016): key themes

- Strong links to attachment theory (Bowlby and Main); Reflective Functioning (Fonagy); PACE approach to parenting; Mentalizing (curious about and attuned to the minds and intentions of others and self).
- **The Parent Map:** (to support parental understanding of their own mind). What am I feeling? Why am I feeling like this? How can I handle my feelings? What impact do my feelings have on my child?
- How do my past experiences (including childhood experiences) and relationships impact on my care of my child and reflective parenting?
- How do my current and experiences impact upon me and my care of my child and reflective parenting?
- Difficulties: drugs and alcohol; physical health; mental health; life events.
- Managing one's own feelings (staying calm and thoughtful; tuning into the child; prioritizing the thoughts, feelings and intentions of child)
- **The parent APP** (Attention; Perspective taking; Providing empathy)
- Helping children with their feelings
- Discipline: understating misunderstandings (authoritative versus authoritarian approaches; things to avoid and things to choose when supporting children).



Parent Map: 3 reference points (Cooper & Redfern 2016)

- Parents/carers construct a Parent Map to support understanding of the influences on interactions with infant/child
- Reference point 1: **current state of mind** (be aware of yourself and be curious about state of mind). How do I feel? What am I thinking? What makes me feel like this?
- Reference point 2: **past experiences** and relationships; tuning into the ways in which past experiences (including being parented) affect your interactions with infant/child.
- Reference point 3: **current influences**: extent to which our relationships with friends, relatives and partner are supportive (or critical/ blaming/ undermining). Message is get current relationships right and you are more able to help your child.



Helping Parents understand what babies/children need to flourish

“The way we communicate with children has a profound impact on how they develop. Our ability to have sensitive, reciprocal communication nurtures a child’s sense of security, and these trusting relationships help children do well in many areas of their lives... Children who have positive connections in life have a source of resilience for dealing with life’s challenges.” (Siegel, D)

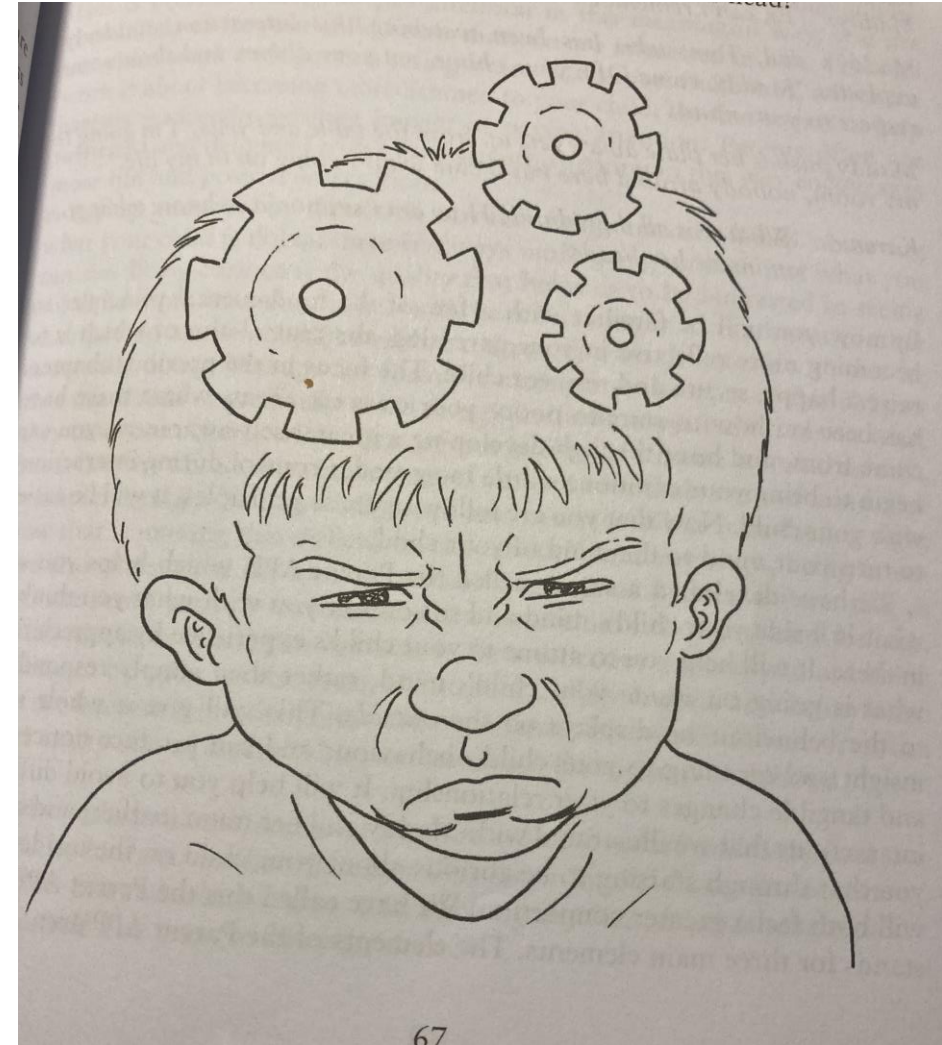
“It is the need for empathy, the need to be seen, understood and attended to that drives loving connections, which in turn support concern for others and the development of prosocial understanding and skills”. (Fonagy, P)



The Parent APP: wondering what goes on in the child's mind (from Cooper & Redfern 2016, Reflective Parenting)

- Pay **Attention** to the infant/child (what the child says; does; expressions; feels). Animated facial expression; eye contact; friendly posture; actively listening and encouraging tone of voice. Notice the impact of paying attention!
- **Perspective Taking:** infant /child can't see point of others well until 3-4 years, Recognize infant /child may see things very differently from you. When you don't know admit that and show curiosity and interest. Impact of perspective taking.
- **Provide Empathy:** with full range of emotions, when infant/ child is distressed, sad, angry, confused. When child feels understood they are more able to discover other people's perspective and feelings. If child feels understood more likely to be interested in others and caring of them. Helps regulate their emotions.

“When you feel empathy for your child you experience his experience, and imagine how he feels and walk in his shoes”



What are prosocial skills, which underpin social & emotional resilience? Vital role for parents.

- Skills which promote healthy, playful & positive connections
- They are the basis of the willingness & capacity to trust, share, help, comfort, & support others (& support communication with others)
- They help us to *understand & regulate our emotions & support our capacity for thinking and reflection; support secure attachments &*
- connect to our inner world of thoughts and feelings (our minds); connect with the thoughts and feelings of others (minds of others). Role of parental support
- ***They include:***
 - Seeing others' point of view; Trust others;
 - Tuning into feelings of others; ***All support reflection & problem solving skills***
 - Listening and taking turns;
 - Sharing and helping others;
 - Showing concern for others; follow instructions
 - Putting needs of others above our own when needed;
 - Managing frustration & disappointment; delaying gratification;

Children from all cultures have same forms of prosocial behaviours

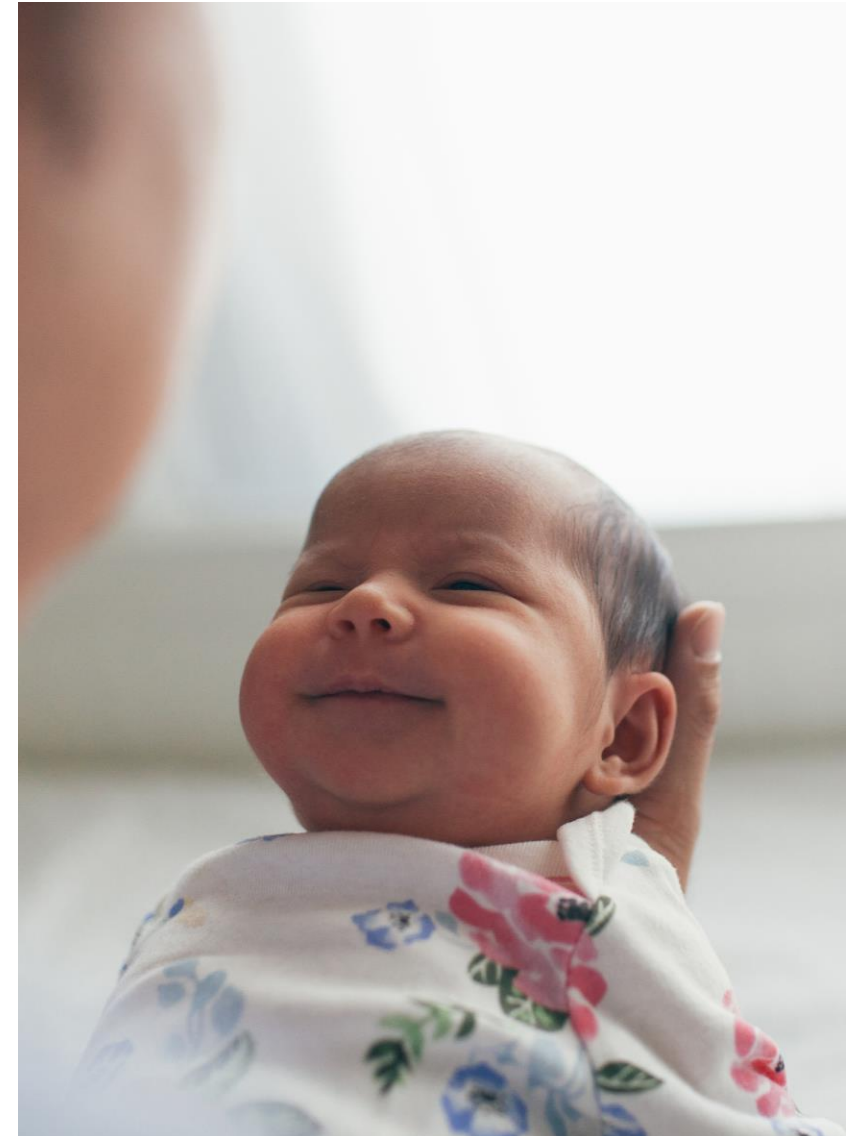


What children need: How do prosocial skills develop?

Foundations laid in early years supported by vital brain development. ***Understanding social processes informs our strategies for providing reparative interventions.*** *The PACE approach mirrors healthy early interactions that support wellbeing.* Infants need responsive carer to support all aspects of development; ***reparative care draws upon this principle.***

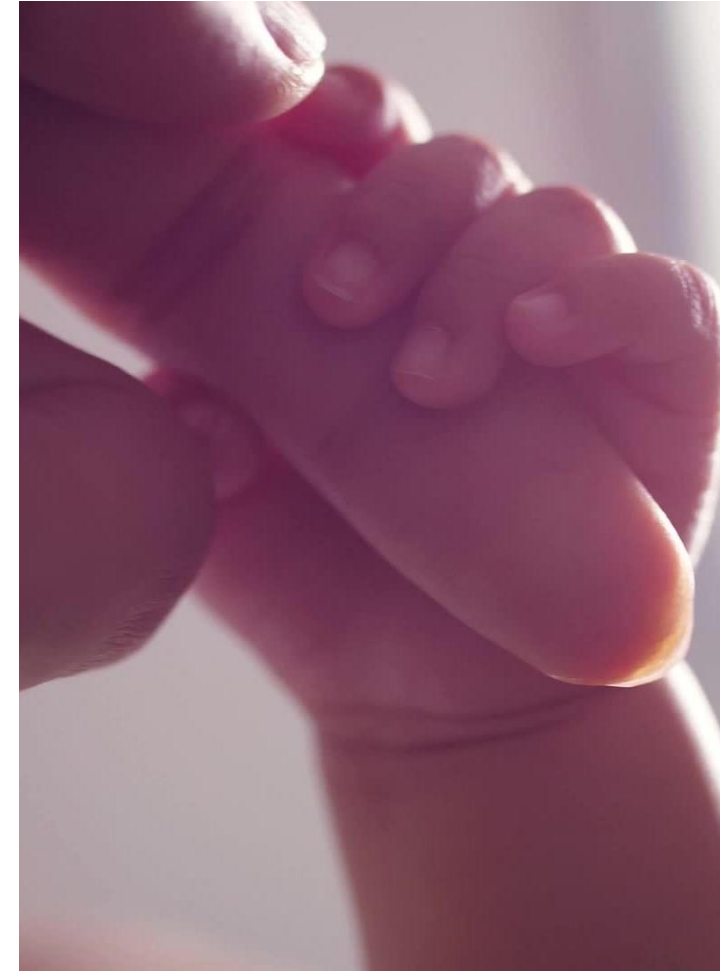
- ***Humans are social beings (predisposed to connect with others)***
 - Infants predisposed to connect in loving and playful ways
 - Also need sensitive & attuned interactions for healthy social & emotional development – ***'serve and return' interactions.***
 - ***Vital for emotional regulation is carer who calms & soothes***
 - Roots of prosocial development lie in ***'being understood'***, calmed, nurtured & attended to with attunement & empathy not formal teaching. These experiences drive interest in & concern for others

Secure Base is vital aspect; who we turn to when distressed -a safe haven to re-experience calm. ***Revolution in past 30 years in the neuroscience of social & emotional development***



Regulation of emotions

- When baby distressed and cries cannot regulate the feelings – it is a signal to the caregiver to respond to the baby ***and do the thinking for the baby by taking action*** and attend to needs.
- ***Co-regulation***. Together the infant and caregiver regulate the emotion –in response the baby is soothed and calmed and stops crying because the problem is solved, (supported by oxytocin). Supports development of vital resources.
- This process is internalized through mirror neurons and so infants gradually can do more themselves –soothing and calming. Supports exploration and learning.
- By time gets to school children can do a lot of self regulating and calming
- If child has not developed regulation skills, they can be supported to do so (Reflective parenting; PACE) by parents/carers and other trusted adults.
- The move from co-regulation to self regulation is mediated by attachment, which is described as the ***'the hidden regulator'***. ***Trusted adults are vital.***



Supporting parents to understand the needs of their children

- Engage with parents
- Convey understanding and interest in their challenges
- Use screening tools to understand parental attachment history, experience of trauma and adversity;
- Help parents understand links between past experiences and current challenges. (Use Parent Map)
- Help parents manage their feelings
- Help them understand the minds, intentions and needs of children (support mentalization).
- Help parents find helpful ways to attend to the minds, intentions and feelings of their children (using PACE; Reflective Parenting)
- Help parents hold boundaries and discipline in helpful and thoughtful ways
- Help parents manage conflict and deescalate distressing situations.



Managing conflict with your child

- Remain calm and thoughtful; Try to put emotions aside.
- Connection and active listening. The first step is taking the time to listen to what the other has to say and try to understand what they mean and convey to them you want to understand them.
- Try to understand what is going on in the child's mind, pay attention and listen to your child
- Understand the perspective of your child; try to see things from their point of view as well as your own.
- Communication: Don't interrupt your child while they are speaking; check that you understand them by asking questions; Communicate your side of the story clearly and honestly
- Don't place blame
- Collaboration; try to find common ground
- Compromise with your child.
- Recognise and apologise for the things you got wrong.
- Repair the ruptures in understanding and relationships
- Offer solutions and choices



Getting parents the help and therapeutic support they need

- Ensure parent is safe
- Help processing past trauma and adversity (including therapy)
- Help with current challenges such as drugs and alcohol, or domestic violence
- Help with conflict and challenging relationships in the family
- Access to trusted adults
- Access to therapeutic and enjoyable activities (rambling; yoga; swimming; community groups)



Concluding comments: helping parents in the care of their children

- Connect with them and understand their challenges from their point of view
- Help them make sense of their past experiences and find some peace with the past. Help them tell their own story.
- Help them make sense of the impact past experiences have on current relationships, including with their children.
- Help them understand what children need to flourish
- Support mentalization in parents and carers.
- Help them find reflective ways of connecting with their children
- Convey a sense that they are not alone in facing challenges in attending to the needs of their children.
- Help them attend to current challenges in their life that impede their health and wellbeing and their connections with their children.
- Do so with humility and when appropriate playfulness and joy.

