

Parenting from the Inside Out - Course for Mental Health Professionals
Outline & Course Notes

Introduction: Self Understanding & Relationships

An Approach to Parenting

- **Being Mindful** - children need *presence*, to be seen & share connection/enjoyment
 - *Mindful* = being fully present in the moment, aware of what's going on externally (physical world) & internally (in your body & mind)
- **Lifelong Learning** - it's never too late to make change
 - Children are responsive, parents can initiate change in relationship
- **Response Flexibility** - understanding how our brains work to increase self-compassion & compassion towards children
- **Mindsight** - the ability to connect to what's happening in another person
- **Joyful Living** - enjoying what we are doing

1 – How We Remember: Experience Shapes Who We Are

Memory - when something from the past shapes what you do in the present
Forms of Memory

- **Implicit memory** - aka *behavioral* or *procedural memory*
 - Present at birth
 - Includes behavioral, emotional, perceptual, & possibly bodily memory
 - Fear can get unconsciously associated with past experiences
 - Also includes mental modes or schema
 - Conscious focal attention is NOT required for encoding
 - Does NOT involve the hippocampus
- **Explicit memory**
 - Develops during the second year of life & beyond
 - Has a sense of recollection when recalled
 - Includes *semantic* (factual) & episodic (*autobiographical*) memory
 - If autobiographical: has a sense of self & time; involves the prefrontal cortex
 - Requires conscious focal attention
 - Involves the hippocampus

Learning about implicit & explicit memory helps parents to see how change is possible

- Parents don't have to continue to be unconsciously triggered by implicit memory
 - Journaling → the *narrative process* engages both right & left hemisphere processing & can help integrate the memory/experience

2 – How We Perceive Reality: Constructing the Story of Our Lives

Modes of Processing

- LEFT mode
 - Linear
 - Logical
 - Linguistic - digital
- RIGHT mode
 - Non-linear
 - Holistic
 - Visuo-spatial - analogical (nonverbal communication)

RIGHT Mode Specialties:

- Autobiographical information
- Sending & perceiving non-verbal signals
 - 1. Eye contact, 2. Facial expressions, 3. Tone of voice, 4. Posture, 5. Gestures, 6. Timing, 7. Intensity of response
- Intense & raw emotions
- Awareness, regulation, & integrated map of the body
- Social cognition & mindsight: understanding others
- May involve a predominance of the brain's right hemisphere in processing

It's important to know about the brain because a parent's role is to help its development

- When in a state of heightened emotions (positive or negative), that is a moment when connection is needed
- **Contingency** - when someone perceives the signals you're sending, makes sense of those signals, & responds to you in a timely & effective manner
 - When contingent response is given, it creates → (1) an integrated brain, (2) a coherent mind, (3) empathic, contingent relationships

3 – How We Feel: Looking at Emotions

The presenters proposed that the term *emotion* is really about neural integration

- **Integration** - differentiated, separate things coming together as a connected whole
 - *Emotional closeness* with your child → connecting two minds together
 - Primary emotion in the brain involves:
 1. Orienting attention
 2. Appraising that thing you're orientating attention to (as good or bad)
 3. Arousal

Aspects of Communication:

1. Communication as an opportunity to integrate two minds (joining with them)
2. Interoception (looking inward at how we feel)
3. Attunement (tuning one's own affective state to the resonance of another)
4. Empathy (imagining what might be going on with your child)
5. Expression (stating what we think is happening)
6. Joining (showing intention to connect with them around what's happening)

4 – How We Communicate: Making Connections

Collaborative Communication

- Process of Communication:
 - **Receive - Process - Respond**
 - Processing a message requires being aware of one's own experience
 - Response should match what the other's experience was
- Pathways to Collaboration:
 - **Explore - Understand - Join**
 - Exploring = asking the child what they think & what their ideas are
- Pathways to Disconnection:
 - **Interrogate - Judge - Fix**
 - Interrogating = asking a lot of questions when a child shares something with us
 - Trying to fix a situation because we think it's helpful tells the other that they are not competent

Important for parents to have self-reflection so that they're aware of their own emotions/reactions

- Role-plays allows parents to see things from another's (the child's) point of view
 - The more we learn to listen, the better we can communicate

5 – How We Attach: Relationships Between Children & Parents

The ABC's of Attachment

- *Attunement* - aligning your own internal state with those of your children
- *Balance* - children attain balance of their body expressions, emotions, & state of mind through attunement with you
- *Coherence* – a sense of integration (internally & interpersonally) that children acquire through your relationship with them

Categories of Attachment

- **Secure Attachment** → child has ability to balance their emotions, have good relationships with others, & meet their intellectual potential
 - Parental Interactive Pattern = Sensitive, attuned, available
- **Insecure-Avoidant** → emotionally barren relationship, child has feeling of disconnection (aloof, left-brain dominant, less well-liked)
 - Parental Interactive Pattern = Neglecting, rejecting
- **Insecure-Anxious/Ambivalent** → anxious emotionally, insecurity in relationships (confused core self)
 - Parental Interactive Pattern = Inconsistent, intrusive
- **Insecure-Disorganized** → fragmented self, difficult relationships with others
 - Parental Interactive Pattern = Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming

6 – How We Make Sense of Our Lives: Adult Attachment

Attachment Categories (Child ↔ Adult)

- Securely Attached ↔ **Free or Autonomous**
- Avoidantly Attached ↔ **Dismissing**
 - Generalizations about childhood with no autobiographical detail ("it was normal")
 - Difficulty picking up on nonverbal signals of their children/spouses
 - Growth edge = focus on developing right hemisphere awareness of integrated map of their body, aware of their affective sensations, improve access to imagery
- Ambivalently Attached ↔ **Preoccupied or Entangled**

- Flooded by leftover issues that can create a non-receptive state towards child
- Growth edge = disentangle right hemisphere flooding by bringing in left hemisphere – narrative, self-talk, understand practically why these feelings arise
- Disorganized Attached \leftrightarrow **Unresolved Trauma-Loss/Disorganized**
 - Growth edge = understand & process trauma - take implicit memories of traumatic experience & focus attention on the things that don't make sense in life

Questions for Parental Self-Reflection

1. What was it like growing up? Who was in your family?
2. How did you get along with your parents early in your childhood? How did the relationship evolve throughout your youth & up until the present time?
3. How did your relationships with your mother & father differ and how were they similar? Are there ways in which you try to be like, or try to not be like, each of your parents?

7 – How We Keep it Together & How We Fall Apart: The High Road & the Low Road

Hand Model of the Brain

- Brainstem (middle of palm) \rightarrow most primitive, fight-flight-freeze, eat/sleep patterns
- Limbic areas (thumb) \rightarrow generating emotion, attachment, motivational states, & memory
- Cortex (outer “bark”) \rightarrow perception, motor planning, planning
 - Middle prefrontal cortex functions:
 - (1) Keeping body regulated, (2) Attuned communication, (3) Emotional balance, (4) Response flexibility, (5) Empathy, (6) Self-understanding, (7) Freedom from fear, (8) Intuition, (9) Morality

Forms of Processing

- Higher Mode (the high road)
 - A form of processing information that involves the higher, rational, reflective thought processes of the mind
 - High road processing allows for mindfulness & response flexibility & an integrating sense of self-awareness
 - The high road involves the prefrontal cortex in its processes
- Lower Mode (the low road)
 - A form of processing that involves the shutting down of higher processes of the mind

- Leaves the individual in a state of intense emotions, impulsive reactions, rigid & repetitive responses, lacking in self-reflection & the consideration of another's point of view
- Involvement of the prefrontal cortex is shut-off on the low road
- **Triggers:** internal or external events that initiate the beginning of the low road process
- **Transition:** the movement from the integrated, higher mode of processing toward the depths of the low road
- **Immersion:** being on the low road. The higher road processes of self-reflection, attunement, & mindsight become suspended
- **Recovery:** the process of reactivating the integrative processes of the high road. High degree of vulnerability to re-entering the low road may be present during recovery

8 – How We Disconnect & Reconnect: Rupture & Repair

Types of Disconnection & Rupture:

- **Oscillating Disconnection** (normal & necessary part of relationships)
- **Benign Rupture** (unintentional, simple to identify & resolve)
- **Limit-Setting Rupture** (saying "no")
- **Toxic Rupture**
 - Involves low-road experience
 - One person is doing something toxic to the other

Levels of Reality

- 1) The here-and-now experience
- 2) The symbolic level (reflects the themes of our lives)
 - If we haven't made sense of the symbol/theme, we will respond unconsciously
 - Look at our triggers (know our sensitivities) & understand their meanings (understand our memory system)

9 – How We Develop Mindsight

Mindsight = the ability to envision the mind of oneself & others

- Developing mindsight → inspire to rewire (experience shapes the brain)
 - Raising awareness through self-reflection (making sense; journal writing)
 - Reflective dialogues (*mind* is focus of conversation)

- Mindsight includes: one's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, sensations, memories, intentions, hopes, dreams, needs
- It's about the process, not the product
 - Focus on positive aspects, rather than negative or mundane things
 - Say "yes" to children's invitation to slow down & engage in the present moment