

Lessons from the Field: Family Attachment Narrative Therapy

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Attachment and Regulation

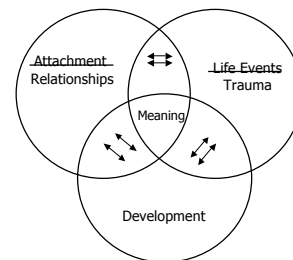
Attunement
Synchronicity
Interactive repair

Leads to
Empathy
Social emotional development
Self regulation

Formation of the Model

- Attachment experiences
- Exposure to complex relational trauma
- Developmental issues

Model and Meaning



Attachment Experiences Disorders of Nonattachment

- Nonattachment with emotional withdrawal
 - "I don't need anyone, I can take care of myself"
- Nonattachment with indiscriminate sociability
 - "Don't rely on anyone, I'll do whatever it takes to get what I want"

Attachment Experiences Secure Base Distortions

- Attachment disorder with self endangerment
 - "I have to make sure you're paying attention to me all the time"
- Attachment disorder with clingy/inhibited exploration
 - "You can't keep me safe"
- Attachment disorder with vigilance/hyper compliance
 - "If I can make you happy, I'm safe"
- Attachment disorder with role reversal
 - "I need to be in control to survive"

Complex Trauma Impairs...

- Attachment
- Regulation
 - Affect: handling stress, describing internal states (feelings, needs, desires)
 - Behavioral: impulsivity, aggression, eating disorders, sleep disorders, substance use, defiance, traumatic reenactment
- Cognition: attention, executive functions, lack of exploration, information processing, object constancy, cause and effect, learning and memory problems

Complex Trauma Impairs...(cont.)

- Body
 - Biology: sensory sensitivity/defensiveness, motor coordination, somatization, increased medical problems
 - Dissociation
 - Self concept: low self esteem, guilt and shame, disturbed body image, poorly developed sense of self

Treatment Model Parameters

- Children and adolescents ages 3 to 21 with history of maltreatment
- Central role of caregivers
- Family Attachment Narrative Therapy
 - Intensive therapy program

Other Treatment Options

- Individual therapy
- Family therapy
- Reflective play therapy
- Attachment play training for parents
- Parenting techniques that connect and regulate
- Social skills groups

Assessing the Model

- What the caregivers know
- Assessments
 - Observational techniques
 - Objective testing
 - Projective testing
 - Collateral information

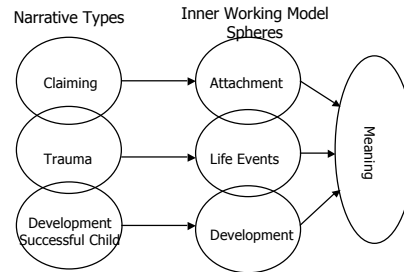
Role of Parents/Caregivers

- Experts in their child
- Primary agents of change

Role of Professional

- Support
 - Hearing the parent's stories
- Facilitating attunement through empathetic inquiry
 - What is their child's unique working model?
 - What is their child thinking and feeling when they behave that way?
- Education
 - Normal child development
 - Factors affecting attunement (temperament, sensory issues, parents' attachment style)
 - Deficits in brain functions that affect mood, activity level, and social development

Shifting Model with Narratives



Claiming Narratives

- Conveys the responsive care and protection the child deserves
- Strengthens emotional connections
- Establishes family structures (birth order, extended family)
- Describes family history, traditions, rituals, daily life

Trauma Narratives

- Helps child to process and understand past life events
- Challenges mistaken beliefs and attributions
- Develops narrative coherence
- Creates empathy for the child

Developmental Narratives

- Teaches emotional regulation
- Supports cognitive skills
- Builds relationships (attachment narratives)
- Remedial skill building (empathy, reciprocity, social)

Successful Child Narratives

- Teach values, moral, supports conscience development
- Reinforces cause and effect thinking
- Presents alternative adaptive behaviors
- Explains the basics of "how to do life"

Effectiveness: Outcomes and Challenges

- Pre-post Child Behavior Checklist
 - Pretreatment scores borderline clinical or above for Externalizing Problems and Internalizing Problems
 - Statistically significant reduction
 - Externalizing 72.5 pre, 63.5 post (T-8.3, $p < .0005$, one-tailed)
 - Internalizing 66.7 pre, 57.7 post (T-7.0, $p < .0005$, one-tailed)
 - Clinically Reliable Improvement (as measured by Reliable Change Index) in ...
 - 59.6% of clients borderline clinical or above Externalizing Problems
 - 51.5% of clients borderline clinical or above Internalizing Problems
- Challenges
 - Measure change in attachment rating, use control group

Additional Resources

- Publications (available at website)
 - *Parenting with Stories: Creating a foundation of attachment for parenting your child*
 - *Connecting with Kids through Stories: Using narratives to facilitate attachment in adopted children*
- DVD-*First Steps for Strengthening Adoptive Families: Tools and techniques for meeting the needs of your adopted child*
- Speaking and training
- Website: www.familyattachment.com