

“Since entering the wood they had been in severe anxiety. Several were almost tharn – that is, in that state of staring, glazed paralysis that comes over terrified or exhausted rabbits, so that they sit and watch their enemies – weasels or humans – approach to take their lives.”

Richard Adams, Watership Down

1

“I’m afraid I just lost my head, Hazel,” replied Bigwig. “I’ve been strung up all day, thinking about this business at Efrafa – got me really on edge. When I feel like that I have to do something – you know, fight or run a risk. I thought if I could make that fox look like a fool I wouldn’t feel so worried about the other thing. What’s more, it worked – I feel a lot better now.”

Richard Adams, Watership Down

2

Children in Washburn’s DT program are very young (age 3 – grade 3), and most have experienced Chronic, Complex Trauma and profound disruptions in early caregiving/attachment relationships (about ½ of preschoolers are in out-of-home placements usually due to abuse/neglect)

Immediate States (Dissociation/Hyperarousal) become Traits (Perry) – responses get stuck & ingrained (frightened/frightening).

“Procedural memories” that are deeply felt, powerful, but unconscious are created.

3

Global Perceptions

Unspoken assumptions about how the world works, how relationships work:

“Adults are scary & dangerous.”
“If they get close they will hurt you.”
“I have to get away & protect myself.”
“I have to get it before they take it.”

4

Movements

- State ↔ Trait (an entrenched pattern)
- External ↔ Internal
- Relationship ↔ Self
- Conscious Narrative & New Memories

↕
Unconscious Pattern (Think, Feel, Behave, Relate)

5

Bigwig or Tharn?

- Shift in focus on treating “serious emotional and behavioral problems” to treating children who have experienced profound early attachment disruptions and early complex trauma.
- Fear and anxiety are core formative emotional experiences in the relationships of most children in DT, and treatment must address how the fear/anxiety connect to current perceptions, behavior and relationships. Regulation of anxiety/arousal is a primary goal.

6

Therapeutic Process

“He was simply the one... through whom a strong feeling, latent throughout the warren, had come to the surface.”

Richard Adams, Watership Down

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- 🗨️ Find the pattern (Think, Feel, Behave, Relate)
- 🗨️ Create a simple narrative of what happened – a shared story – with the child
- 🗨️ Practice the new story, new pattern
- 🗨️ Observe and narrate, “read” the situation, “join” with the child in their experience while keeping objective stance and supporting developmental progression (not just empathy)
- 🗨️ “Remember” with the child when they learn. This creates new memories that hard situations can be resolved safely, that adults can be helpful, etc...

8

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Case: Attachment Anxiety

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Practical Sources

- NCTSN.org – Complex Trauma document
- Childtrauma.org
- ChildTraumaAcademy.com
- zerotothree.org – Hope and Healing
- Unsmiling Faces: How Preschools can Heal - Lesley Koplow - (tccpress.com)
- Mnasap.org – Child Trauma newsletter Fall 2006

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