

THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT SHAPE US – THE EFFECT OF INTERACTIONS ON DEVELOPMENT

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OBJECTIVES

Review basic information regarding the structure of brain.

Learn how the relationship with a parent shapes the brain.

Learn how people construct reality from this information.

Learn how relationships can help or hinder a person's ability to respond during a crisis or engage in growth after a crisis.

BRAIN BASICS

Why is it important to talk about what happens in the brain during a crisis?

Crises do not occur just in our minds.

Many parts of the brain help us to make sense of what is happening to us.

Sometimes it can be helpful to let our clients know that what is happening is not unusual.

HEAVY HITTERS

What parts of the brain are important?

- Five senses
- Thalamus
- Hypothalamus
- Amygdala
- Hippocampus

IN THE DEVELOPING MIND

Siegel studies the relationship between the mind and who and what shapes what we know.

In infancy, we get knowledge of the world from our parents/caregivers.

**The developing mind uses an attachment figure's states of mind to help organize the functioning of our [own] states.
(Siegel, 2012, p. 95)**

What does this look like? How does an infant do this?

ATTUNEMENT

Technically involves the alignment of states of mind.

In other words, reciprocal attention.

When two minds are brought into alignment this can lead to mental state resonance which leads to a reciprocal influence or attunement.

Think of the people you may be attuned to. What does this look like or feel like? Who are you attuned to?

In therapy, attunement is key.

ATTUNEMENT THROUGHOUT LIFE

In development, when an infant and parent are attuned both parties are receiving something.

The infant receives the basic needs and well as beginning to learn that the parent/caregiver will be present when he or she needs something.

The parent/caregiver, in turn, receives love and a sense of connection by nurturing and providing for the infant.

This is the ideal. Secure attachment.

WHEN AN ATTACHMENT IS NOT SECURE

We call it an insecure attachment.

There are many ideas and labels of insecure attachment.

Siegel astutely suggests that an insecure attachment can be categorized as organized or disorganized.

When the pattern is disorganized, the child is at risk of mental health issues or psychopathology.

Brain research is finally aligned with counseling research.

Suggests many things, but that therapy can provide a secure space for clients to become attuned.

Michael Meany (as reported in Siegel, 2012) writes that children who are exposed to maltreatment early in life have epigenetic regulatory changes in the areas of the brain responsible for the HPA axis.

What might this mean for a growing child? How does the parent/caregiver respond?

What about for the adult?

MAKING SENSE OF REALITY

Our relationships shape how we make sense of reality beginning at birth.

We attune to our parents' reactions and coping responses.

How they see the world is typical how we do.

The addition of other family and peers then either integrate or challenge with how we see or understand things.

Try to think of a memory that does not have a relational component. We do not create our reality without the influence of another person.

ENCODING INFORMATION = REALITY

The brain encodes meaning through A,B,C,D, & E of neural processing:

A – Make Associations (usually based on other’s perceptions early on or to either assimilate or accommodate later on)

B – Have Beliefs (based on experiences)

C – General Cognitions (based on what we’ve learned from others)

D – Influenced by Developmental Phases (where we are in our lives)

E – Evoke Emotions in Response to Experiences

Siegel, 2010, p. 91

CRISIS

During a crisis, so many things are happening.

When we are a child, we look to the person who is our attachment figure to help soothe and comfort us.

If our parent is not attuned, our response is different.

This translates loosely to how we respond or expect others to respond to us when we are adults.

For some, our attachment figures can help calm us in a crisis and for others, the presence of that person can negatively affect us and perpetuate a crisis.

FOR HELPERS

As professionals, we can help our clients to understand that there are people who can be trusted.

We can attune with our clients to understand his or her experiences to the best of our ability.

Attuning can aid in teaching the client how to respond to crises in the present and future.

Be present. Listen. Be aware. Disengage from the outside and focus on the client in session and what the experience is like for them while describing the crisis event/thought to you.

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU.

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REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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Siegel, D. (2010). The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration. W.W. Norton & Company. New York, NY.

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