



How to Grow Happy Kids: *Understanding the Importance of Connection*

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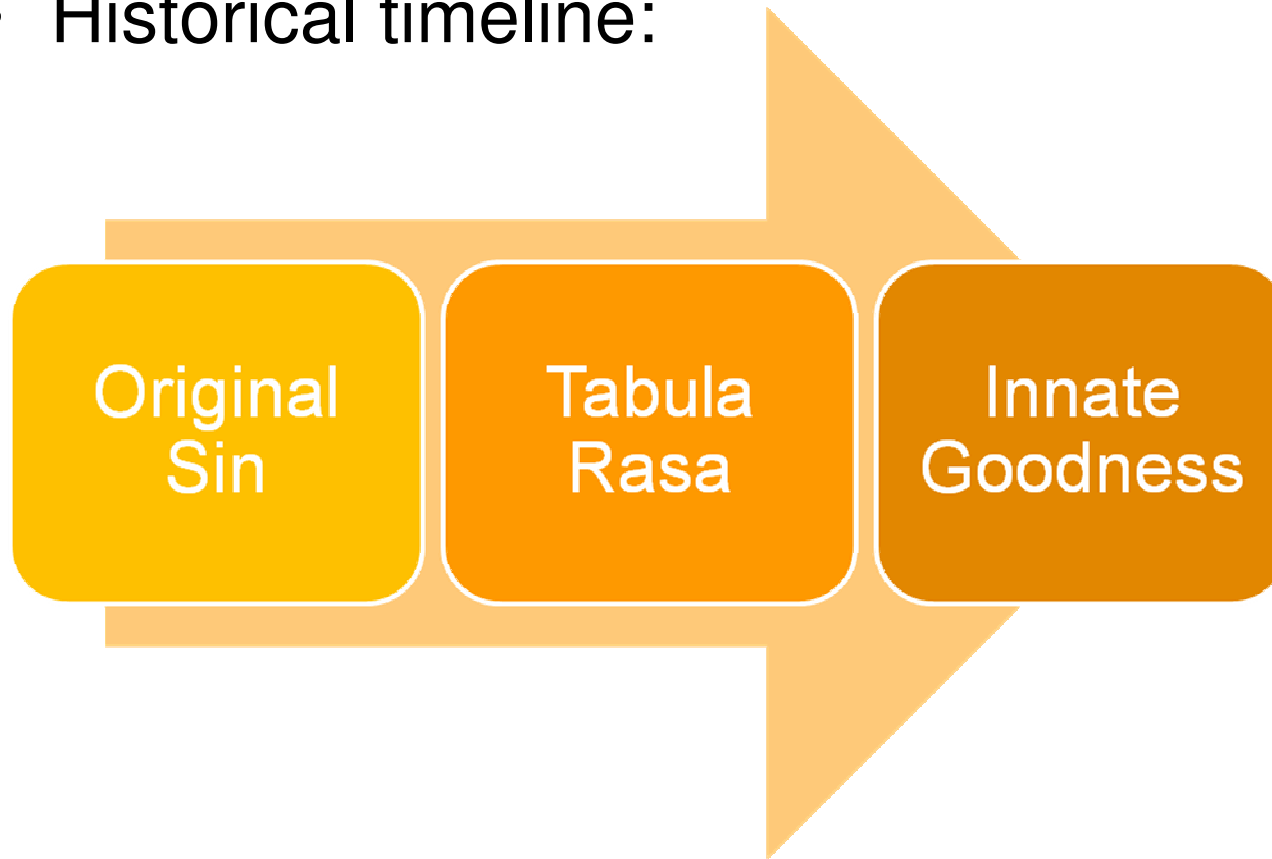
Plan

- Setting the stage
- The cup and other foundational topics
- Understand the “magic” of the relationship between parent and child in the early years –
ATTACHMENT
 - When and how does this relationship develop
 - What does it “look” like
 - Why is it important
 - What are some signs of when help might be needed
- What is attachment-safe “discipline”
- Attachment for children in foster care and/or children who have been adopted



Our Understanding of “The Child”

- Your views about who children are really matter
- Historical timeline:



Our Understanding of “The Child”

- Your views about who children are really matter
- Historical timeline:

Childhood is a highly eventful
and unique period of life



Our Understanding of the Child

- “Childhood is not just an inconvenient “waiting” period during which adults must suffer the incompetence of the young”
 - **Children are valued**
 - **Children are invested in**
 - **Children are protected**



Take home points of the day

1. A “connected” child is a resilient child
2. Behavior does not need to be “managed”...it needs to be understood
3. Every child needs a soft place to land
4. What you do matters...immensely!!
5. We all have a cup...



Cup Emptiers

- What empties your cup?
- How would you translate this into 2-year-old or 4-year-old terms?
- What strategies do you have to cope?
- What strategies does a 2-year-old or a 4-year-old have to cope?



Attachment?

- To think about:
 - **Why is it important to comfort a baby or child?**
 - **What do babies/children feel when their cries for help are ignored?**
 - **What do babies/children feel when their parents get angry or annoyed at their cries for help?**
 - **How do babies/children feel when their parents distract them when they are distressed?**
 - **How does a baby's cry for help differ from a child's or adolescent's cry for help?**



What is attachment?

- 5 main roles of parents:
 - **Caregiver**
 - **Teacher**
 - **Playmate**
 - **Disciplinarian**
 - **Attachment figure**



The magic...

- Attachment is NOT the same as bonding
- Bonding = Parent to child or child to parent
- ***Attachment = the relationship between the child and parent***



The magic...

- We are all born with brain pathways that are specifically designed to respond when our “attachment systems” are activated
- Attachment system is activated in times of stress (upset, hurt, ill)
- Attachment behaviors initiated by child
 - **Crying, proximity seeking, clinging**
 - **No exploration**



The magic...

- Purpose of attachment is to keep the child safe AND make the child feel safe/secure
- The “dance” that **regulates** the child
- Attachment is as important to healthy child development as eating or sleeping



The magic...

- The magical process that is attachment actually takes hold at the neurological and physiological level
- Even really young children are aware enough to be negatively affected when their attachment systems are activated and they are not appropriately responded to
- Still face procedure
- The daily drip, drip, drip...



A developing connection...

1. The beginning

- Birth to 12 weeks
- Babies “attract” adults and elicit positive reactions
- Attachment not discriminatory

2. Attachment in the making

- 8-12 weeks to 6 months
- Infant differentiates caregiver and others
- Actively seeks intervention rather than responds to it

3. Clear-Cut Attachment

- 6-9 months to 18 months
- More discriminating
- Protest when separated from specific people
- Onset delayed if no consistent adult

4. Formation of reciprocal relationship

- 18 months +
- Forms other attachment relationships beyond family



The face of attachment: What it looks like

The child's experience of caregiving

- Loving
- Rejecting
- Inconsistent
- “Atypical”



Type of Attachment

- Secure (55%)
- Avoidant (23%)
- Resistant (5-15%)
- Disorganized (5-15%)



Attachment Type

Secure Attachment

- Caregiver
 - **is consistently available, responds sensitively, and affectively receptive and accepting**
- Child
 - **values the relationship and believes is worthy of love/affection**



What to watch for...

- A child in a secure attachment relationship
 - **Seeks proximity**
 - **Physical contact**
 - **Little/no avoidance of caregiver**
 - **Can do from a distance**
 - **Not necessarily distressed at separation**
 - **Settles quickly**
 - **Sets out to explore again (secure base)**



Outcomes

- Secure – most positive outcomes
- In general:
 - **Ability to control impulses and emotions**
 - **Develop positive social values, morals, and empathy**
 - **Build a solid sense of self**
 - **Able to manage stress and challenges**
 - **Establish satisfying relationships**
 - **Adequate school performance**



Other Attachment Relationships

Avoidant Attachment

- Caregiver
 - **Psychologically unavailable**
 - **Insensitive responses**
 - **Ignores distress or responds inappropriately, e.g. distract child instead of affirming need**
- Child
 - **believes not worthy of love/affection**



Other Attachment Relationships

Resistant Attachment

- Caregiver
 - **Inconsistently available**
 - **Insensitive responses**
- Child
 - **Believes is worthy of love/affection**
 - **Believes is incapable of pleasing caregiver..wants to but can't**



Other Attachment Relationships

Disorganized Attachment

- Caregiver
 - **Frightening, frightened...”atypical”**
- Child
 - **Disorganized and confused**
 - **Has no idea what to expect in response from parent**
- More likely to be the case for children who have been maltreated
- Is NOT related to child temperament



When help might be needed: what to watch for

- An overall pattern of the following kinds of reactions when a young child is emotionally upset, physically hurt, or ill, *might* suggest that some support would be important.
- *Remember, the key is that these reactions are indicative of an overall pattern – every child will exhibit some of these signs every now and then!*



When help might be needed: what to watch for

- Avoid caregiver in stressful situations
- May not be distressed by separations
- Avoid seeking proximity/maintain physical contact
- Very high levels of distress
- Not easily calmed or soothed
- May try to maintain proximity even though not being soothed
- Look frightened or confused
- No coherent strategies for dealing with stressful situation
- Behaviors that seem to not make sense when attachment system activated



When help might be needed: Parent behaviors

- Voices
 - **Loud/angry; whispers; high-pitched; growling**
- Not comforting an upset child
 - **Ignoring; laughing; teasing or mocking; hushing in anger**
- Being “In a child’s face”
 - **Talking over; interrupting play; intrusive games**



When help might be needed: Parent behaviors

- Not being “there” for child
 - **“Too much on mind”; prevents the parent from responding to the child**
- Making child worry about you (parent)
 - **Asking a child for affection, attention, advice, or reassurance**

Remember:

- **It is a pattern of these behaviors that is concerning...everyone exhibits some of these behaviors once in a while**



Nurturing strength in your magical relationship

** Adapted from IMP "A Simple Gift: Comforting Your Baby"*

- Always respond to a young child's cries – you cannot spoil a child by soothing them when their attachment system has been activated (emotionally upset, physically hurt, ill)
 - Exceptions: caregiving routines; sleep training; medical procedures
- **DO NOT RESPOND** if you feel like you might lose control – instead, make sure your child is safe, and take a moment for yourself to breathe deeply and to be reminded that you will be okay



Nurturing strength in your magical relationship

- When thinking about your child, try to wonder about the following things:
 - How does child or baby “talk” to you?
 - How does your child or baby tell you he needs your help?
 - What makes your child or baby upset?
 - When your child or baby is crying, having a meltdown, etc., what is s/he thinking/feeling?

** Adapted from IMP "A Simple Gift: Comforting Your Baby"*



Nurturing strength in your magical relationship

- Focus on trying to understand your child's "cues"
 - **Facial expressions; body language; tone of voice; other cues?**
- Watch your child's face and eyes, try to imagine what they are thinking and feeling...watch, wait, wonder*
 - **Remember ...WWW!**

** Adapted from IMP "A Simple Gift: Comforting Your Baby"*



Nurturing strength in your magical relationship

- Be encouraged...
 - The first 2 years of life are very important...*BUT* there is a lot of room for life-changing growth even long after a child's 2nd birthday!
 - It does not matter if your child doesn't calm down right away, what matters is that you are there for them
 - When you are there for your child, you help them feel valued and respected – how powerful!

** Adapted from IMP "A Simple Gift: Comforting Your Baby"*



Discipline with attachment in mind...

- How do you think popular forms of behaviour management line-up with the concept of attachment?



Discipline with attachment in mind...

- ...they don't!
- When a child is misbehaving, they are communicating an unmet need.
- What do you need when you are having a rough go?
- We all need a soft place to land
- Naughty mats, the corner, the time-out stair, and other “discipline” strategies that isolate children do not provide a soft landing



Discipline with attachment in mind...

- Remember...emotionally upset, physically hurt or ill
- Misbehaviour is classified as “emotionally upset”
- So what a child needs at this point is connection....not disconnection!!



Discipline with attachment in mind...

- This does not mean Disneyland party-time-no-rules-and-no-expectations!
- Children thrive in ordered environments with consistent expectations
- Consistent does not equal rigid!
- Use your connection with your child to calm their attachment system
- Once calmed, revisit the expectation and re-establish your belief in their ability



Discipline with attachment in mind...

- What if you have more than one child?
 - **An activated attachment system can be calmed in a variety of ways**
 - Voice
 - Touch
 - Eye contact
 - Smell
 - A physical or visual reminder
- When meeting the needs of one child, you can simultaneously meet the needs of one or more other children



Children who have been Adopted & Attachment

- Babies older than 6 months will be distressed upon placement due to grief process
 - **Energy, illness, sleep, eating habits, weight loss, general sadness**
 - **May appear clingy, “searching”, withdrawal**
 - **Deprived infants – sensory overload**
 - **Foreign adoption: new language, new environment**



Children who have been Adopted & Attachment

- With sensitive, responsive caregiving most children are resilient and will form secure attachment relationships
- Re-emergence with developmental stages
 - **School-age: understanding of adoption and impact on sense of self; can re-experience feelings of loss and grief**
 - **Adolescence: “unknowns” add to the usual complexities**



If you want some support...

- It is important to always follow up even if you are just wondering whether or not your relationship with your child might need a boost
- You can find this type of support with a professional who has very specific training in the area of early childhood attachment development and intervention
 - Psychologist or mental health clinician
 - Infant Development Program
 - Supported Child Development Program
 - Other community level programs



Resources

- Chilliwack Community Services
 - www.comserv.bc.ca
- Infant Mental Health Promotion Project
 - www.sickkids.ca/imp
- Odin Books
 - www.odinbooks.ca
- Visual Schedules
 - www.easydaysies.com



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