


HELPING TEENS NAVIGATE EMOTIONAL TIMES

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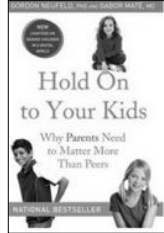
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Based on the work of Dr. Gordon Neufeld



Hold on to your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers




Canadian developmental psychologist, Vancouver, B.C.

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Helping you to SEE in a world that has changed dramatically.



The way you SEE will help you to know what to do, even in uncertain times.

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BEHAVIOUR (above water)

EMOTIONAL WORLD (below water)

Terms in the Emotional World: FEAR, ANXIETY, AGGRESSION, OBSESSIONS, COMPULSIONS, RESISTANT, WORRIES, self-blame, OPPOSITIONAL, irritability, lethargic, tension, revenge, hitting, phobias, TANTRUMS, AGITATION, self-doubt, hostility, ANXIETY, fighting, justifying, self-attack, self-defense, self-blame, self-doubt, self-defense, self-blame, self-doubt.

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What is it that makes us most vulnerable?

facing separation

EXPERIENCING OR FACING THE LACK OF OR THE LOSS OF CLOSENESS WITH THOSE TO WHOM WE ARE ATTACHED

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What happens when we are **facing separation?**

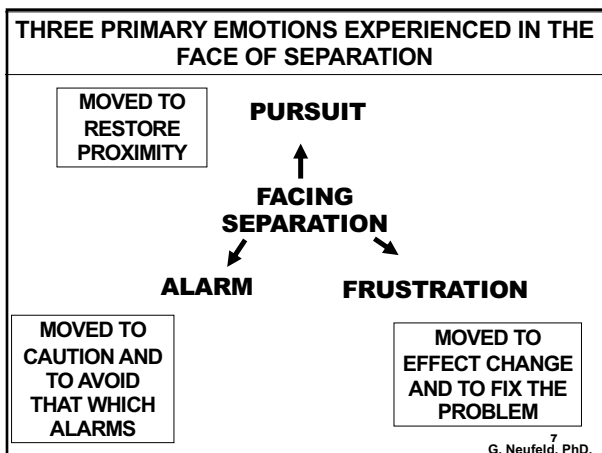
THE BRAIN IS MOVED TO FIX THE PROBLEM

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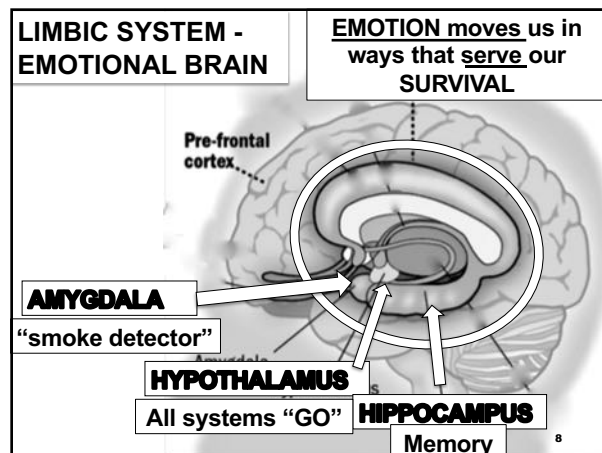
EMOTION

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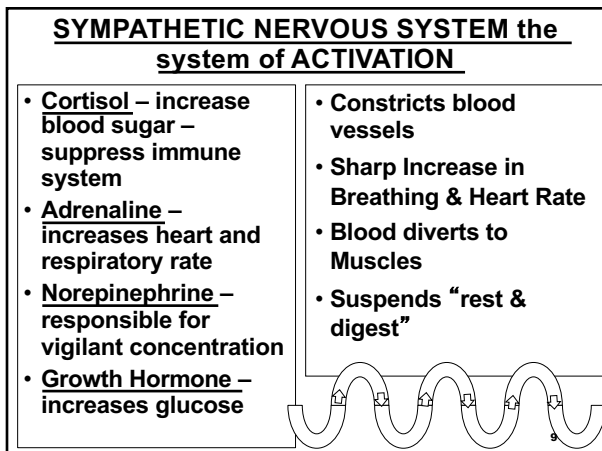
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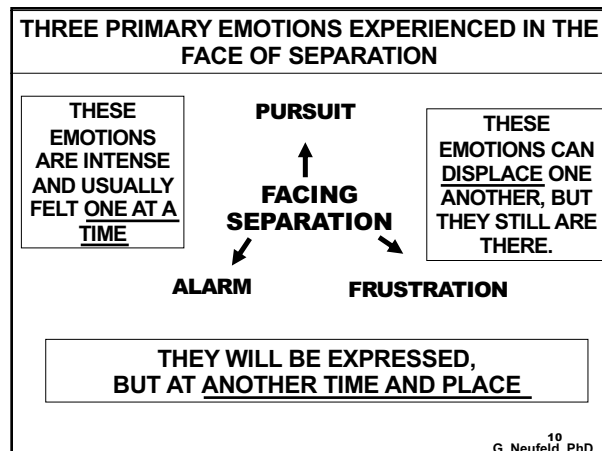
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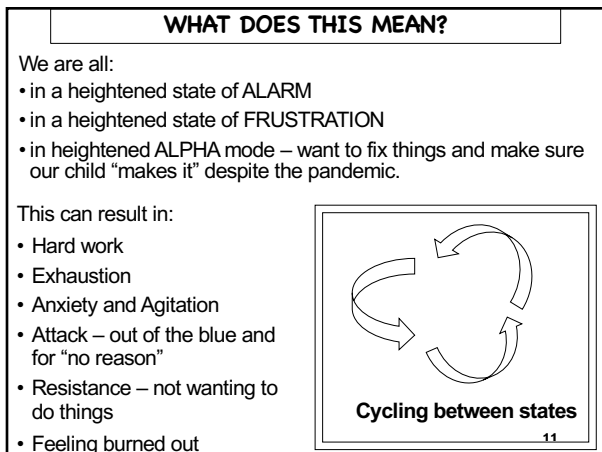
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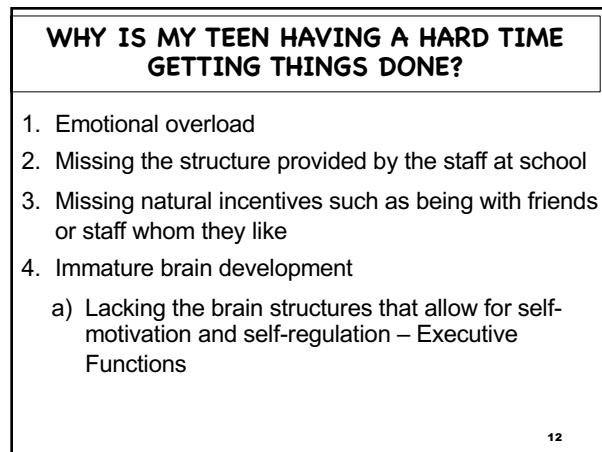
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Jay Giedd – National Institute of Mental Health

- Since 1991 - watching healthy teen brains grow up using MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)
- Wondered - 16 or 18 as an age to stop?

CONCLUSION:
The human brain continues to change significantly until about age



Brain development - from back to front (primitive to sophisticated)
PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX – CEREBELLUM - CORPUS CALLOSUM

TEEN BRAIN, PBS FRONTLINE

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PRE FRONTAL-CORTEX

Conflicting:

- THOUGHTS
- FEELINGS

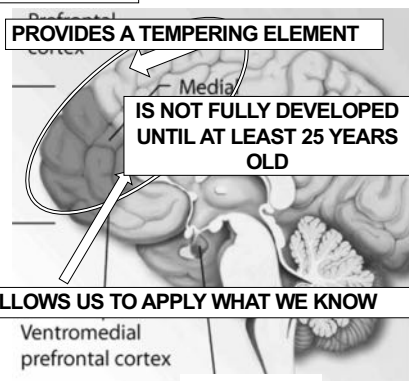
EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS:

- Tempering Impulses
- Response flexibility
- Delay of gratification
- TIME MANAGEMENT
- ABILITY to WORK

PROVIDES A TEMPERING ELEMENT

IS NOT FULLY DEVELOPED UNTIL AT LEAST 25 YEARS OLD

ALLOWS US TO APPLY WHAT WE KNOW

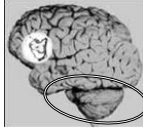


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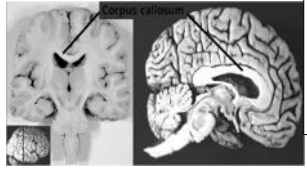
CEREBELLUM

- Motor Co-ordination
- Cognitive organization & co-ordination
- **accessing** many different parts of the brain **smoothly and quickly**
- “filing system”




CORPUS CALLOSUM

- Communication between LEFT Brain & RIGHT Brain
- Transfers information **BETWEEN** THE BRAIN HEMISPHERES.
- INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION



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LEFT HEMISPHERE	NEO-CORTEX	RIGHT HEMISPHERE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detail-oriented • decontextualizes • finds facts • wants the rule • looks for THE answer 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole-oriented • contextualizes • makes vivid and concrete, • takes in the whole picture
<p>RIGHT HEMISPHERE REQUIRES EXPERIENCES NOT INFORMATION TO DEVELOP</p>		
<p>IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AND FREE TIME</p>		

The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain Iain McGilchrist 16

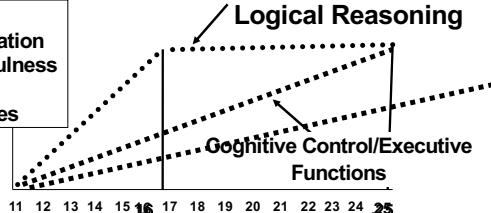
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Laurence Steinberg – TEEN BRAIN

LOGICAL REASONING ABILITY PEAKS AT AROUND 16 YEARS OF AGE

LIMBIC SYSTEM IS MORE HIGHLY ACTIVATED IN TEENS

COGNITIVE CONTROL AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING TAKE UNTIL AGE 25 TO FULLY DEVELOP



❖ Self-Regulation
 ❖ Mindfulness
 ❖ Good Choices


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AS EMOTION INCREASES, PREFRONTAL CORTEX FUNCTIONING DIMINISHES.

REASON

EMOTION



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Michael Bradley, adolescent psychologist, says:

“North American culture tends to view teens as small **adults** when neurologically,

they are LARGE CHILDREN

They are missing the neurological brakes that adults have.”

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HOW CAN I HELP MY TEEN STAY MOTIVATED?

1. Keep providing as much structure as possible
 - a) Breakfast
 - b) Meals together
 - c) Breaks
 - d) Work time
2. Patient reminders – over and over and over again
3. Empathy for it being hard to be motivated to get to a Zoom class
4. Plan a time together at the end of the school day
5. Try not to increase alarm

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WHY IS MY TEEN SLEEPING SO MUCH?

1. Emotional overload
2. Lots of adjustments due to the pandemic
3. Being a night owl
4. Intense time of brain development

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Jay Giedd – The Teen Brain

- The brain is still being built – like highways
- Grey matter thickest - girls (11) and boys (12.5)
- Then it starts **pruning** - what doesn't get used a lot gets pruned
- Myelin sheath (white matter) increases
- Teen brain is **very active** - INCONSISTENCY is a hallmark
- Lots of trial and error as brain pathways are being built
- Brain receives a burst of “energy” to start this pruning process (Steinberg)
- This process takes a LOT of energy and it happens best when the brain is resting – sleeping or just daydreaming
- Lots of FATIGUE!


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WHAT SHOULD I DO ABOUT MY SLEEPY TEEN?

1. Recognize why there is a the need for extra sleep
2. Rejoice that development is probably taking place
3. Wait patiently for the results of maturation

Maturation cannot be rushed



Takes 90 days, “If you want a GOOD one!”

4. Provide some coaching on good sleep hygiene – turn off screens – if you can.
5. Create a “good night” ritual – quiet time to talk

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WHY IS MY TEEN SO MOODY?

1. These are emotional times
2. Miss their friends
3. Feel like they are “missing out”
4. Discovering themselves and as a result more sensitive to everyone around them – critical
5. Feel like no one can understand them
6. Worried about not being able to “do it” – meet expectations
7. Afraid of the future
8. ETC. ETC.

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EMOTIONS
 need to be **EXPRESSED**
 to preserve
 healthy functioning and well-being

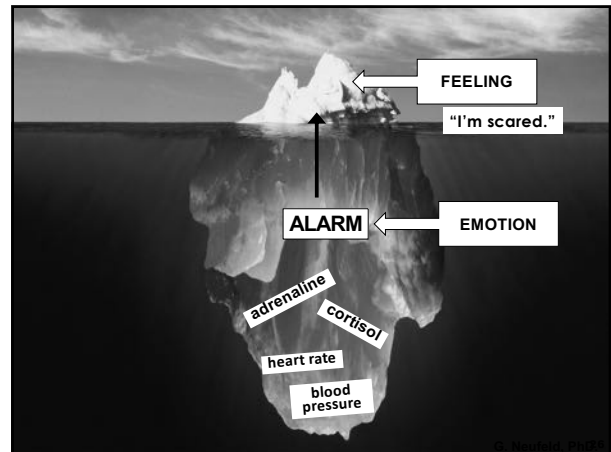
Emotions are supposed to rise up and flow through our children.

Their existence is not a problem, although the way they are expressed may be the cause of problems.

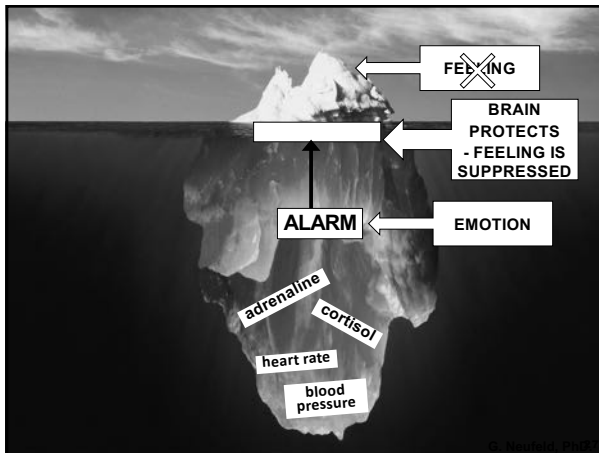
Emotions need to flow, for children to grow.

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Why does our brain protect us?

It protects us from being overwhelmed by that which makes us feel

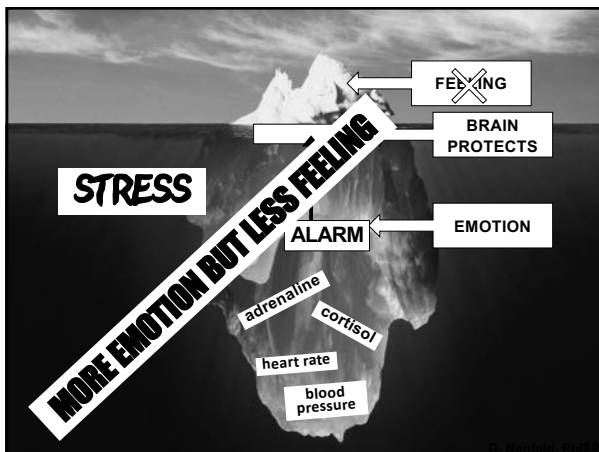
TOO VULNERABLE

or

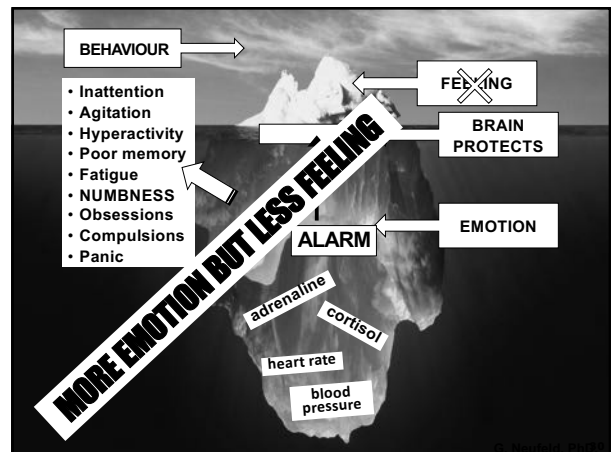
TOO WOUNDED.

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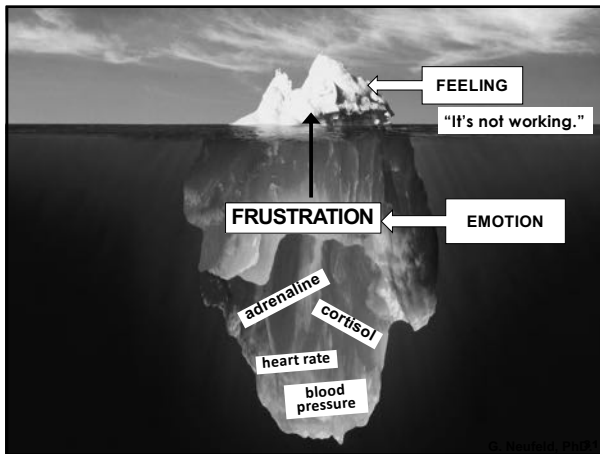
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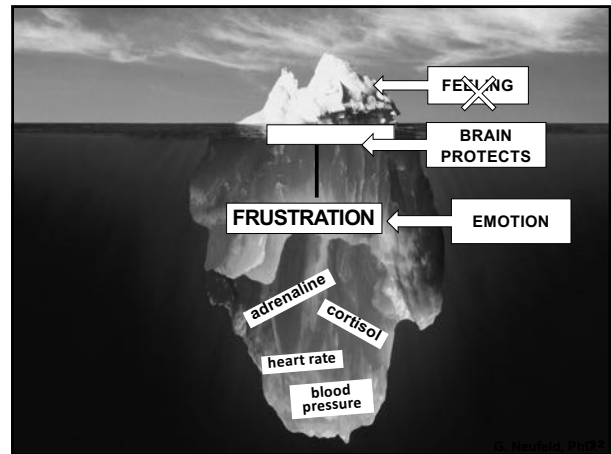
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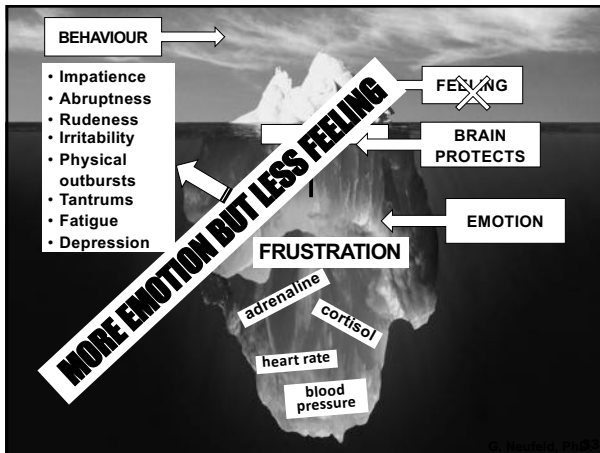
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Emotions need to be expressed BUT...

1. **Expression** is often MESSY & NOISY, CHAOTIC & UNACCEPTABLE, ALIENATING & WOUNDING
2. It can **threaten** a child's RELATIONSHIPS.
3. So, the **brain** can suppress or depress emotion to protect its attachments especially if emotional expression is considered to be "unacceptable".

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HOW DO WE INADVERTENTLY PUT JUDGEMENT ON EMOTION and SUPPRESS IT?

When we say to our child:

- Stop ... yelling, crying, whining
- Calm down
- Don't be silly, there is nothing to be afraid of
- WHY...
 - are you so moody?
 - are you so angry?
- BE...
 - happy – think positive thoughts
 - good

THIS CAN CAUSE EMOTIONS TO BE SUPPRESSED BECAUSE THEIR EXPRESSION COULD CAUSE SEPARATION

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WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO HELP THEIR TEEN TO EXPRESS EMOTION?

PROVIDE

Emotional PLAYgrounds


- laughter and humour
- drama and theatre
- drawing and painting
- irony and wordplay
- dance and movement
- stories and writing
- singing and music
- teasing and silliness

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Taking FRUSTRATION into PLAY

Playing out the impulses to MAKE THINGS WORK

- *making things perfect – puzzles*
- *constructing and crafts*
- *building – robots, Lego, blocks*
- *building models*



When teens can't make their world work, let's give them a chance to make other things "work".

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Taking FRUSTRATION into play

PLAYING OUT the impulses to ATTACK or DESTROY

- destroying & demolishing
- hitting & throwing
- kicking & screaming
- war games
- attacking games
- play fighting



- reduces levels of frustration
- decreases aggression and violence in real life

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IDEAS FOR PLAYFUL RELEASE

- Write out Frustrations and make into paper balls or paper planes to throw
- Dance party
- Table top "expressive art" (banner paper on a table with crayons)
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Bubble-wrap stomping
- Egg carton crushing
- Pool noodle sword fighting
- Drumming party with pool noodles

BE CREATIVE!

EMOTIONAL RELEASE THROUGH PLAY WITH YOUR TEEN CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE


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EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION WITHOUT WORDS

Drawing **Painting**

Dance



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PLAY WITH THEM

Playing with teens increases attachment - eyes, smiles, nods, bring a teen into our orbit. When they are attached to us, it is easier to guide them.

The mutual joy and shared communication and attunement that adults and teens can experience during play regulate the body's stress response.



➤ **The more difficult the week has been the more IMPORTANT it is to have a time to "play".**


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Stories as a playground for emotion

Especially if tears are needed

- It is easier to cry for someone else in a story or a movie.
- Hence the importance of reading sad stories and watching sad movies to help the tears to flow.
- BUT must be safe from judgement.
- When we cry we DON'T HAVE TO KNOW WHY WE ARE CRYING.
- When the tears come – rejoice and see them as a sign of EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.



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In a child, TEARS are the best indicator of an emotional system that is functioning well.

When we communicate to our children that there is something wrong with them for being sad, we stop both their tears and the opportunity to become resilient.


One of the best gifts we can give our children is to value their sad tears and make room for them to flow.

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ADAPTATION

The **EMOTIONAL PROCESS** whereby we are changed by that which we cannot change.

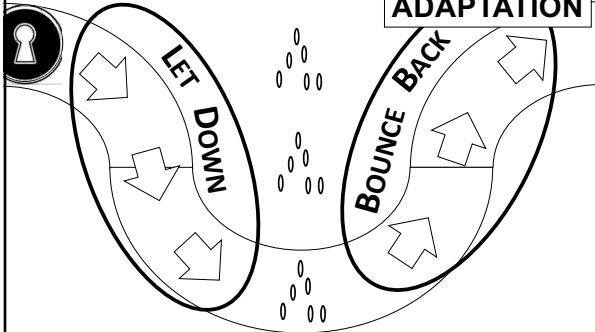
TRANSFORMATION



The journey of adaptation is a journey of **SADNESS** and **TEARS**

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The Healing Power of SADNESS



ADAPTATION

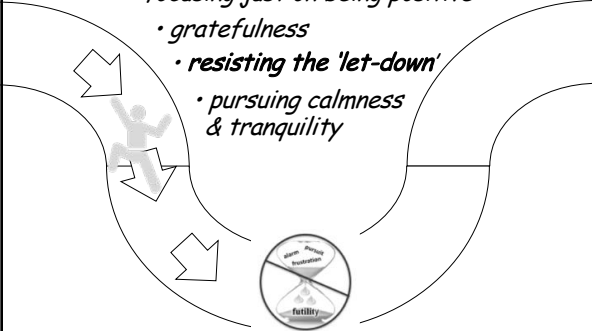
Gordon Neufeld, PhD

GRIEVING

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THE PROBLEM WITH "RIGHT" THINKING ALL THE TIME

- focusing just on being positive
- gratefulness
- resisting the 'let-down'
- pursuing calmness & tranquility




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ADAPTATION

requires a soft heart and a safe place to cry

A soft heart means being able to tolerate feelings of vulnerability

A safe place to cry means there is someone who will keep you safe while you are vulnerable



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HELPING THE TEARS TO FLOW

1. Start by talking about and reflecting back the Emotion
 - i. Frustration: "That didn't work for you." "That was not what you had in mind."
 - ii. Alarm: "That was scary." "You weren't sure what was going to happen".
 - iii. Seeking: "You really wanted them to like you."
2. MATCH THE EMOTION.
3. THEN: Move subtly towards SADNESS by allowing a tinge of sadness in your voice.
4. USE SILENCE

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HELPING THE TEARS TO FLOW

5. If your teen starts to cry:
 - DON'T ASK WHY
 - If your teen does give a reason, don't MINIMIZE. If it seems trivial, it is usually because the teen can't name the true reason for the deep sea of sadness.
6. When the tears start: SIT QUIETLY with compassion
 - Resist the Alpha instincts to make things better or to problem solve
 - Trust in the "bounce back"
 - Give lots of space to SADNESS and TEARS.
7. Problem solve well after the tears (if needed)

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HELP TEENS FIND THEIR TEARS

Create opportunities for feeling sadness

- Watch sad movies
- Read sad stories
- Make the time to SIT with tears no matter how "silly" or "insignificant" the reason. There are many "big" reasons to cry at this time but sometimes it starts with the little things.

I can help my teen to grieve for how scary the world is so s/he can find the courage to keep on.

I can help my teen to grieve for all the things s/he CANNOT change so s/he can adapt and become resilient.

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WHEN THE WORLD FEELS UNSAFE WHAT DO OUR CHILDREN AND TEENS NEED FROM US?

THEY NEED THE ADULTS IN THEIR LIVES

"The most important message our kids need to hear right now is not more about Covid but about WHO THEIR ADULTS ARE – the people who will care for them and carry them through this storm."

Dr. Deborah MacNamara



Attachment keeps children safe

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Attachment

What attachment does ...	enables adults to...
Arranges hierarchically	⇒ Take charge of them, take care of them
Creates a sense of home	⇒ Provide comfort, rest and a place of retreat
Creates a compass point	⇒ guide & direct them and transmit our culture
Make relationship the priority	

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GET INTO THE LEAD

CONVEY A STRONG AND SAFE ALPHA PRESENCE

It is very important our children see adults as being able to handle them and their world:

- present yourself as the ANSWER to what your child truly needs – ACT CONFIDENT (even if you don't feel so)
- give the impression that you can and will take care of your teen – "We'll figure something out." "We'll find a way through."
- When you must impose a "limit" or say a "no", invite the inevitable and convey that you can handle it. "This is going to upset you, but it is OK."
- invite dependence rather than resisting it.
- if you truly feel at an impasse, try to "give permission" rather than just backing off. "It's probably better if you don't." –Keep being the one in the lead.

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GET INTO THE LEAD

PRIORITIZE ATTACHMENT

Make attachment UNCONDITIONAL

Children are not meant to have to WORK for attachment. When they are working, they are not growing.

- a) avoid making relationship dependent on rewards.
- b) provide MORE attachment when behaviour is at its worst.

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GET INTO THE LEAD	
PRIORITIZE ATTACHMENT	
Treat the <u>need</u> for Attachment like the need for food	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) provide MORE than what is asked for b) provide it GENEROUSLY 	
PROVIDING and/preparing FOOD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Making food available o Making "comfort" foods o Preparing treats 	CREATING opportunities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Play o Games Night o Family movie night o Puzzle corner o Music / dance o Getting outside
Do things for your teen "just because"	
SO THAT ATTACHMENT NEEDS ARE FULFILLED <small>55</small>	

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GET INTO THE LEAD	
CONVEY A STRONG AND SAFE ALPHA PRESENCE	
COMMUNICATE OFTEN and PROVIDE REASSURANCE	
This will get better	
Solutions are being found	
We are all working together	
TALK ABOUT EMOTION: <u>ALARM</u> and/or <u>FRUSTRATION</u>	
Yes, this is scary , and it is normal to be worried	
Yes, it is frustrating not to be able to do things we want to do – this is normal	
It's OK to feel upset and angry	
WHEN TEENS DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, WE WANT THEM TO FEEL SAFE ENOUGH COME TO US <small>56</small>	

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WHAT ABOUT ME? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify your own support system, your "village" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o your family o your partner o your friends • Give yourself permission to vent • Find your own sadness, and tears (watch sad movies– TV shows) • Nurture your passions – have some "PLAY TIME" 	
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FINAL THOUGHTS
It is only in the context of a safe Attachment that children can grow and develop.
PROVIDE GENEROUSLY
FORGIVE EASILY
FEEL YOUR SADNESS
HAVE FAITH IN NATURE'S PLAN
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