

Slide 1

Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma

Class 3 (of 5)
Solutions to Challenging Behaviors



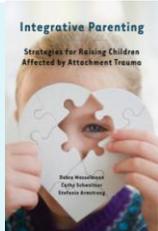
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THE ATTACHMENT AND TRAUMA CENTER OF NEBRASKA

Slide 2

This powerpoint is based on the following parent guide:

“Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma”
by Debra Wesselmann, Cathy Schweitzer, & Stefanie Armstrong
(W.W. Norton, New York, 2014)



Slide 3

Accompanying Treatment Manual for Therapists:

Integrative Team Treatment for Attachment Trauma in Children: Family Therapy and EMDR”
by Debra Wesselmann, Cathy Schweitzer, & Stefanie Armstrong (W.W. Norton, New York, 2014)



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At the end of this class, you will be able to:

- Identify situations that trigger your child.
- Identify situations that increase your child's vulnerability.
- Identify negative thoughts and feelings associated with your child's behaviors.
- Find attuned responses to your child's concerning behaviors.

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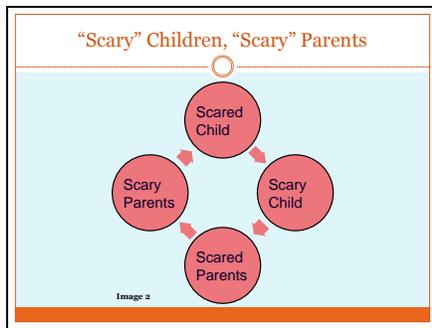
Have You Found Yourself Saying...?

- She keeps doing the same things over and over.
- He'll never learn.
- I should know how to handle this.
- I don't like my child anymore.
- I feel guilty.
- I've told him 1000 times.

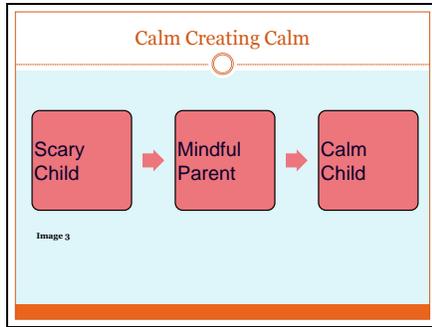


Image 1

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- ### Helpful Thoughts for Parents
- “Trauma changed my child’s brain.”
 - “My child has a hole inside he needs to fill some way.”
 - “Wants are needs to my child.”
 - “My child developed these behaviors as a way to self-comfort and feel good.”
 - “My child is scared to be vulnerable.”
 - “My child is not evil or bad, he’s scared.”
 - “My child needs to feel in control in order to feel safe.”

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- ### Two Types of Meltdowns (Reference: Daniel Siegel)
- 1. Upstairs Meltdown: “My wants are the same as my needs. I’m going to get what I need.” Child is in control of her meltdown.
 - 2. Downstairs Meltdown: The child has lost all control.
-
- Image 4

Slide 10

How to Help Upstairs Meltdowns

- 1. Constantly pre-teach.
- 2. Have a plan for specific challenging situations (e.g., be ready to leave.)
- 3. Empower the child with choices whenever you can – before the child gets into a meltdown.
- 4. Make sure you do not reward the meltdown.

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Anatomy of a Downstairs Meltdown

Reference: Ann Potter, Ph.D.

There are three specific phases in a child's downstairs meltdown:

- Phase 1: Acting Out (Panic)
- Phase 2: Acting In (Shame)
- Phase 3: Repair and Reconnection (Emotional Pain)



Image 5

Slide 12

Phase 1: Acting Out (Panic)

- Child's brain is stuck.
- Can't tell difference between past and present
- Survival brain is activated
- Verbally and physically out of control-or completely shut down
- Can't tolerate touch



Image 6

Slide 13

Managing Phase 1

Calm and attune to your child.

- Create a wider boundary (give the child some space).
- Tag team with partner for calm, consistent presence.
- Stay nearby and continually check in.
- Use calm tone e.g. "I am here, I love you."
- Remind yourself that his out-of-control emotions are a reaction to his past.
- Focus on one moment at a time.
- Prevent injuries & property destruction.

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Phase 2: Acting In (Shame)

- Child's brain is still stuck.
- Negative beliefs
- Overwhelming emotions are still present
- Pushing away or reaching toward parent
- Coming back to present
- Fear of rejection or abandonment
- May or may not tolerate touch



Image 7

Slide 15

Managing Phase 2

Attuned containment and grounding

- Move closer. The child may/may not allow physical touch.
- Give reassuring messages of love and safety.
- Verbal grounding to help child return to present moment e.g. "Can you feel your feet on the floor?"
- One parent is primary unless overwhelmed.

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Phase 3: Emotional Pain (Repair and Reconnection)

- Child's brain is unstuck.
- Child is back in present time
- Feelings of shame and anxiety about meltdown
- Can tolerate physical touch
- Needs to connect both physically and emotionally



Image 8

Slide 17

Managing Phase 3

Attuned Restoration of Relationship Bond

- Increase physical touch, e.g. rubbing back or arm, holding hand, etc...
- Continued reassuring messages and affectionate touch

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The Domino Effect

Have you ever stood dominoes end-to-end and watched how quickly one domino knocks over the next?



Image 9

Slide 19

The Domino Effect

- Situations, events, emotions, thoughts, and body sensations are dominoes for your child.
- There may be just a few or a great many dominoes.
- Each can knock over the next very quickly, leading to the final domino—the meltdown or other acting out behavior.

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Falling Dominoes Lead to Meltdowns or Other Behaviors



Image 10

Slide 21

Vulnerability Dominoes

Think of situations in your child's recent past that increase her likelihood of being triggered.

- Sleep issues
- Physical illness
- Parental mood and behaviors
- Recent misbehavior and consequences
- School related stress



Image 11

Encourage class identification of their own vulnerability

Slide 22

Triggering Events Become Dominoes

Think about immediate situations/events that trigger your child.

- Teacher yelling at child at school
- Child caught in misbehavior
- Asked to do a chore
- Homework
- Parent's angry face



Image 12

Slide 23

Your Child's Negative Thought Dominoes



- "My parent/teacher is mean."
- "I am not safe."
- "I am a bad kid."
- "I am not good enough."
- "I don't do anything right."
- "I don't belong."
- "I am stupid."

Image 13

Slide 24

Emotions Become Dominoes

- Shame and guilt
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Frustration
- Powerlessness
- Hurt
- Grief
- Embarrassed



Image 14

Slide 25

Body Sensations Become Dominoes

- Heavy chest
- Headache
- Tension in neck and back
- Sick feeling in stomach
- Trembling



Image 15

Slide 26

Stay Attuned to Your Child's Triggers

- Address the vulnerability factors – hunger, loneliness, fatigue, illness, stress
- Connecting with your child when he gets dysregulated will help prevent a meltdown (affection, affirmations of love).
- Your calm voice and calm body will help de-escalate your child.

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Understanding and Responding to Other Common "Scary" Behaviors

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Children Who Miss the Window of Opportunity for Regulation (Birth to Age 2)

- Poor sleep
- Food issues
- Bathroom issues
- Poor emotion regulation



Image 16

Slide 29

Survival Mode

Basic mistrust leads to a need for self comfort through:

- Stealing
- Sexualized behaviors
- Lying
- Food issues



Image 17

Slide 30

The Littler Hurt Child Inside Your Child's Heart

- There is a "smaller hurt child within" who may have had to cope by developing anger, mistrust, and defiance.
- It is important to appreciate what the younger child had to do to emotionally survive.



Image 18

Slide 31

Unresolved Grief Leads to Big Feelings and Behaviors

Grief issues may include:

- Loss of birth parent, even in infancy
- Loss of siblings
- Loss of grandparents
- Loss of belongings
- Loss of pets
- Loss of schoolmates, house, bedroom, etc.



Image 19

Slide 32

Triggers for Grief

- Observing intact families
- Visits with biological parent
- Siblings
- Holidays
- Birthdays
- Random thoughts or reminders



Image 20

Slide 33

Attune to Your Child's Feelings of Grief

- Touch, hold, stay "present."
- Verbalize: "I'm so sorry..."
- Attune to the grief beneath the behavior.
- Remember the stages of grief:
 - Denial and bargaining
 - Anger
 - Despair



Image 21

Slide 34

Lying

Child's NCs: "I have to protect myself." "I can't trust. I am not good enough as I am."

Calming Thought:
"The child is in survival brain instinctually lies."
"My child gets truth and fiction mixed up in his brain."

Attuned Response:
"I know this is hard for you, but we need to work on being accurate with your words."

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Defiance

Child's NCs:
"I can't trust my parent. I have to be in control to be safe."

Calming Thought:
"My child thinks I am against him. I need to help him know that I am on his side."

Attuned Response:
"I love you. It's my job to keep you safe. It's my job to guide you. I am on your side."

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Stealing

Child's NCs: "I can't trust you to take care of me. I have to take what I need."

Calming Thought:
"My child believes he has to be in charge of getting what he needs for himself."

Attuned Response:
"I know it feels to you like this thing will make you happy. And it's hard for you to trust that I will give you what you need."



Image 22

Slide 37

Bathroom Issues

Child's NCs: "I can't do it. I'm bad."

Calming Thought:
"My child missed this window of opportunity to learn these skills."
"My child is dysregulated."

Attuned Response:
"Let's figure out how to solve this problem. Let's clean this up together."
"Let me show you how to use the bathroom."



Image 23

Slide 38

Aggression

Child's NCs: "I have to get this anger out."
"It's not OK to be sad, scared, or hurt."

Calming thoughts:
"My child is afraid of his more vulnerable feelings."
"My child feels he must be in control to be safe."
"My child doesn't know what to do with the mad feelings."

Attuned responses: "I want to help you, not fight. I'm on your side. It's safe to just feel your feelings. Let's make a plan to help you calm down."

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Food Issues

Child NCs: "I won't get enough. I can't trust others to take care of me. I have to be in charge of getting what I need to survive."

Calming Thought:
"My child has a hole he needs to fill in some way."
"Food equals love for my child."

Attuned Response:
"I know you feel like you want to eat."
"It's hard for you to trust me. You can come to me."



Image 24

Slide 40

Sexualized Behaviors

Child's NCs: "I have to act on this urge."

Calming Thought:
"This may have been the only kind of touch he knew."
"My child's brain has been wired this way."
"This is comfort for my child."

Attuned Response:
"We will work with the therapist on this. We love you no matter what."

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Concerning Words

This is what they say:	This is what they mean:
"I hate you!"	"I hate the way I'm feeling."
"I wish I was dead!"	"I want to escape from these feelings."
"I wish you were dead!" "I will kill you."	"I'm hurt and I blame you."

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(Continued)

This is what they say:	This is what they mean:
"I wish you had never adopted me!"	"I feel I don't belong."
"I would be happier with my first parent."	"I am grieving the loss of my first parent..."
"You're stupid!"	"I'm upset and I don't know how to talk about it."

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Understanding the Feelings and Beliefs Driving the Behaviors Can Help You Become...

- Mindful
- Aware
- Insightful
- Pro-active
- Flexible
- Empathic
- Connected



Image 25

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Integrative Parenting

- Over time, your mindful, attuned approach will help your child develop integration between the emotional and logical regions of his brain. (Reference: Siegel & Bryson, 2011).
- With assistance from you, your child can learn to think about his thinking, and to think about his feelings.
- Self-reflection = sensible decisions.

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It's Your Turn...

- List situations that you think make your child more vulnerable to her emotions.
- Think about how you have been responding to each of your child's behaviors. Write down some attuned responses you would like to implement to help calm your child's brain.

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and visit us at
www.atcnebraska.com

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