Attuned Interactions and Healthy Relationships Support Early Development

MIKE SHERMAN, PSY.D.

Training Agenda

1) Welcome and introduction to concepts
   - Attunement
   - Underlying needs
2) How attuned relationships support child development
3) Strategies to support learning and enhance emotional growth
4) Q&A
5) Resources

Defining Critical Concepts

Attunement – Caregivers’ ability to accurately read cues and respond to underlying needs rather than overt behavior
   - Behavior guides us to unmet underlying needs that children struggle to express more effectively
Underlying needs – The varying causes of overt behavior
   - Trauma-based needs
   - Physiological needs
   - Emotional needs
   - Regulatory needs
   - Developmental needs
   - Relational needs
   - Etc.
The Process of Brain Development

Brains are built over time, shaped by the interaction between genetics and experience.

- Epigenetics: Our genes are expressed differentially based on our experiences.

Brain plasticity decreases over time.

- Because of this, “dosage” requirements for positive change increases over time.
- The answer is not “more therapy” or “more teaching,” but “more attuned and therapeutic interaction.”

Birth  2 Years  14 Years

The Process of Brain Development (cont.)
Relationship is the Blueprint for Building Brains

Nurturing and responsive relationships build healthy brain architecture that provides a strong foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health.

When protective relationships are not provided, elevated levels of stress hormones (e.g., cortisol) disrupt brain architecture by impairing cell growth and interfering with the formation of healthy neural circuits.

In the context of secure and nurturing relationships, the brain organizes around exploration of the environment.

In the context of neglect and volatile, disorganized relationships, the brain organizes around self-preservation.

Healthy attachment sequences promote development and learning.

Healthy Attachment Sequence

- Attachment formation
- Attachment relationships
- Attachment adaptation
- Attachment security
- Attachment differentiation
- Attachment identity
- Attachment loss
- Attachment reattachment
- Attachment healing
Unhealthy attachment sequences can lead to regression and impair development and learning.

Strategies to Support Learning and Enhance Emotional Growth:

The Importance of Resiliency

Resilience factors have been shown to offset the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, and trauma. Some factors to consider include:

- Parental resilience & reflective capacity
- Social connection
- Concrete support in times of need
- Healthy social and emotional development
- Close relationships with competent caregivers or other caring adults
The Regulatory Power of Routines

For children struggling with global dysregulation
Consider integrating short, predictable, repetitive patterned interactions throughout the day.
Examples:
- Touch
- Eye Contact
- Drumming

Use observations of child’s behavior for clues to what strategies work best.

The Regulatory Power of Routines (cont.)

For children struggling with hyperactivity and inattention
Consider beginning the day with predictable, structured, patterned, rhythmic music and movement activities. Studies indicate that children have increased self-regulation throughout the day when sensory integration occurs early.
Examples:
- Gross Motor and Fine Motor Activities
- Music and Movement

The Regulatory Power of Routines (cont.)

For children struggling with emotional dysregulation
Consider that social development requires scaffolding and for some children we may need to back up and purposefully create opportunities for parallel play or learning in a dyad with an adult and then a dyad with a peer before finding success in group activities.
Examples of targeted socio-emotional growth activities:
- Team play
- Win & Lose
- Sharing
The Regulatory Power of Routines (cont.)

For children struggling with dysregulated thinking

Children who have foundational skills will be able to plan and adapt successfully. However, for children with disrupted or traumatic early experiences, adults will need to provide scaffolding and support age-appropriate skill development. Focus on stage, not age.

Encourage abstract thought and perspective taking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Problem solving</th>
<th>Conflict resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Resources

Neurosequential Model of Education; Dr. Bruce Perry
neurosequential.com/nme

Harvard Center on the Developing Child
developingchild.harvard.edu

Zero to Three
zerotothree.org

Not Forever But For Now: A Story for Children About Feelings During the Pandemic
Ebook and Paperback available on Amazon

We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.
- John Dewey