

Parenting Mindfulness Moment 6

Mindful Pressure Points.

Pressure points around the body have a long tradition dating back centuries to eastern medicinal practices. The idea of mindfully applying pressure on these points in the body gives you something to physically do in order to disrupt moments of stress or emotional dysregulation. Giving yourself something physical to do can disrupt the negative loops and mental patterns and allow for more regulated thoughts and actions.

Pressure Point 1: The Magic mustache

When noticing stress, frustration or anger, gently apply pressure to the divot just above your top lip. This placement works well as it is discreet and often mimics a “thinking” posture which can be perceived by others as you taking a moment to thoughtfully consider what is occurring (which hopefully you are).

Pressure point 2: Slow, steady, forehead tapping.

When noticing a need for focused attention or relaxation during moments of stress consider tapping the forehead, in between the eyes, just above the brow line. A slow, but steady pace generally works best. This positioning is also a discreet and simple technique that also mimics a thinking posture. Some people find this tapping extremely relaxing to the body and a big help in regain regulation. For others, it is a good way to remind yourself to take stock of your thinking, Do you notice any shark music? Any thoughts or feelings related to your dominant attachment style? Any automatic negative thoughts that need to be disrupted or disputed.



CONCEPT 6

Building Attachment Through Play and Meaningful Togetherness

Creating connection through planned and intentional times with your child.

MEETING A BASIC NEED

Of Course They Are Seeking Attention

So far we have established that attachment is one of the most important and impactful parts of development. Healthy attachment leads us down the path of positive relationships, helps stimulate necessary brain growth, and even impacts long-lasting health outcomes. When children have experienced attachment wounds the capacity for reaching out to connect to others is either severely limited, highly exaggerated, or even radically confused. Traumatic memories often lead children into dysfunctional methods for seeking the basic human interaction of relational closeness. Many of the behaviors parents find so difficult to handle are often the very best

effort a child may have to get these needs met. Manipulation, tantrums, lying, property destruction, and the like are very often the only reasonable means for connection coming from a child who has experienced unreasonable traumatic life circumstances. What's a parent to do?

Meeting the needs

Many traditional discipline practices based in consequences and rewards fall flat when seeking to intervene with a child who has been traumatized. These tools often send unintended messages and may even accidentally reinforce negative attachment patterns a child has developed. The answer may be found in the long and persistent process of rewiring the brain's understanding of attachment and felt needs. Creating a process for regular, routine attachment experiences may actually serve to rewrite the relationship pathways for a child.

The Paradigm of Filial Play Therapy.

Dr. Gary Landreth outlines a very specific style of Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) in his landmark book on the subject of filial play therapy (Landreth, 2006). In his book he describes how parents of children ages 3-11 can establish 30 minute special play times between one parent and one child once per week. There are specific mindsets and techniques used to help children feel understood, heard, and cared for in a unique and powerful way. This practice could be significantly healing for the attachment wounds of traumatized children. It would also serve as a safe, healthy, and nonthreatening way for children to make sense of trauma and work out many memories and recollections that may be beyond words.

This is a paradigm of creating regular, consistent moments of 100% attention for children of any age. Getting into the practice of spending time focusing on your 0-2 year-olds will help promote the serve and return process and generate a lot of great time for eye-contact and positive touch. Taking your tweens and teens out for special time with just mom or dad where they get to call the shots and make a lot of choices may also be extremely beneficial for their version of serve and return.

Earned Security

What we now know about brain plasticity and attachment theory suggest that regardless of age and life experience secure attachment can be attained. When an attachment cycle is completed it helps lay down

new neural pathways and even releases certain key neurotransmitters and hormones promoting the biochemical basis for attachment. Creating regular connection opportunities promotes trust and predictability that was lost due to the traumatic experiences. With each positive experience a child moves closer to earned security.

Theoretical Basis for the Model

Play therapy was developed by Bernard and Louise Gurney in the 1960's as a means to instruct parents in many practical skills used by play therapists. The concept was intended to help parents develop regular, intentional moments of connection with their children. The current model includes weekly, 30 minute "special play times" with children that are solely led by the child. Adults use observation, description, and attunement to promote independence, self-esteem, emotional exploration, and relationship building.

TOOLS AND SKILLS

Practical Ways to Promote Connection

The "Being With Attitudes":

The emotional and physical posture suggested by Dr. Gary Landreth (2006) when having times of connection with your child. The attitudes include

I'm Here: Promoting physical and emotional presence with your child. Remaining close in proximity and attending to the child's every action.

I Hear You: Listening and attending to the child's comments is demonstrated through thoughtful comments and paraphrasing.

I Understand: Use of tracking, reflection of feeling, and observations about the child's play demonstrates that you understand their play, their story direction, and their underlying feelings related to what they are playing out.

I Care: Use of encouragement, empowerment, emotional warmth, and empathy communicate a deep sense of valuing and connection towards the child.

Tools to use during times of intentional connection

Listening: Use active listening skills to help draw out

any communication your child is willing to give. Active listening includes using empathy, eye contact, paraphrasing, and reflection of feeling. You will know you are listening well when your child continues talking to you.

Observe: Keep your eyes on your child to help them feel attended to and understood. During times of connection with your child do all you can to give your undivided attention.

Describe: Use words to narrate what you see happening. Encourage effort rather than praise (nice effort on that drawing vs. you're such a good artist). Describe feeling and actions that you notice.

Tracking: Use of strategic statements, observations, and reflections as a play-by-play verbal commentary when the child is playing. Tracking is always in the form of comments rather than questions in order to preserve the emphasis on child-directed play.

LIMIT SETTING

Only Use If Needed

Limit setting is not used unless a need arises during special play times. The process of limit setting is in itself empowering and promotes making independent choices and exercising autonomy even within the limits. Reasons for setting limits include hurting self or others, breaking the special playtime toys, or leaving the designated area. The process of setting limits promotes care for the child, exploration of the situation, and identifying positive alternatives as outlined by Dr. Gary Landreth (2006) in the ACT model:

Acknowledge the Intent: Promotes that you are present, see, understand, and care. "I can see you would like to throw that toy at me."

Communicate the Limit: Calmly but matter-of-fact explanation of the limit with a connection to the logic and reasoning behind the limit. Toys are for playing with and people are for valuing and loving. Being hit by a toy would hurt and thus undermine the purpose of the toy and the value of loving and respecting people. The communication would be much simpler: "I am not for hurting."

Target an Alternative: Promote positive alternative ways to satisfy the intent. If a child needs to throw something to express a feeling or need within the play you could target positive ways to play this out by targeting other things to throw the toy at that would not hurt another person or break the toy. "You could throw that toy at that soft pillow there (pointing to the target helps direct the attention)."

Giving Choices: Allowing the child to remain in control and exercise appropriate authority by logically following through with choices laid out by the adult. Based on "if-then" logic statements. Giving choices may be useful if the ACT model of limit setting has been attempted 3 times. Instead of taking away the toy they are throwing at you, offer a choice instead. "If you choose to throw the toy again, then you are choosing not to get to play with the toy for the rest of our play time today." Consequences should offer an near opportunity to repair the event and experience success. "We can try again with this toy next time!" This form of limit setting is not intended to be punitive or as a means to exert adult control. Instead, it is a means of helping children make logical connections and anticipate consequences of actions.

STEPS FOR CONNECTION TIME

Plan, Prepare, then Implement

1. Review your skills: The most important techniques involve keeping yourself present. Use active listening, eye contact, and body language to communicate your presence. Use tracking skills. Let the child take the lead for the next half hour.

2. Gather your tools (play kit): For children ages 3-11 gather your selected playtime toys in a bag, box, or other container. These are only to be used during the once a week special play time to help create expectation and a positive ritual. Use the list of toys to gather enough to help your child express feelings and complex thoughts. Children who have experienced trauma will need enough symbolic toys to help them work through the themes of trauma they may have experienced. For teens and tweens consider gathering art supplies, board games, sports supplies, or even a list of possible activities to do together. Let your child choose.

3. Make a plan (Set Date): Block it out on your sched-

ule and make sure you keep your commitments.

4. Remove Distractions: All electronic devices must be put away for the next half hour. Don't answer the door or the phone. Any crisis or emergency can wait at least a half hour until you are done with your special play time.

5. Invite (set the stage): Set the mood and open the time together with positive expectation. Keep it simple and open. Don't tell them they can do whatever they want, but instead that they can do a lot of things that they would like. Let them know that what happens in the next half hour is up them.

6. Set Limits only when needed : Don't start off your time by listing all of the do's and don'ts of the time together. Simply give the guidelines such as "this is the place where we do our special play time," or "for the next half hour we get to do a lot of things you would like to do." only set limits when a child may be leaving the area, attempting to hurt someone (including himself). Remember to acknowledge the intent (you want to _____), then communicate the limit, then target an alternative appropriate action.

7. End the time well: Give appropriate warnings and reminders depending on the needs of the child. You are helping build time management and awareness skills. If it is difficult for the child, this is a great time to practice empathy and reflection of feeling skills. Reflect to the children/ teens how important they are to you, how much you enjoyed your time together and remind that you are looking forward to the time together again next week.

During Connection Time:

Use phrases that communicate that you are connected, curious, and attentive such as:

"You're wondering..."

"In here you can decide."

"It can be whatever you want it to be."

"That's up to you."

"Hmm -- I wonder if..."

"Show me what you want to do"

"What should I say/ do?" (said in stage whisper)

"You know just what you want to do."

"You decided to..."

"You're working hard to figure that out."

(Sue Bratton, 2017)



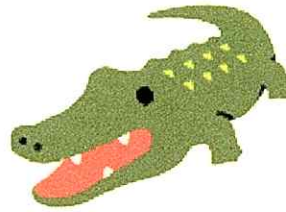
Real Life Toys

Toys that can represent people , places, things crucial for the child to tell their stories.

small baby doll
functioning baby bottle
doctor kit
toy phone
small doll house
doll family
play money
animals

cars/ trucks
kitchen dishes

Optional
puppets (gentle and aggressive)
doll furniture
dress up clothes
mirror

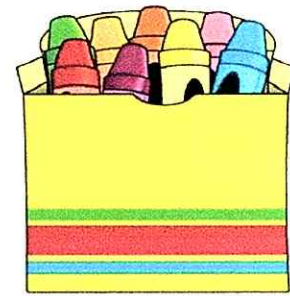


Aggressive Toys

Toys that allow for expression of aggression, violence, anxiety, fears, and traumatic themes.

Dart gun with a couple of darts
rubber knife
rope
aggressive animals
toy soldiers
inflatable bop bag
mask

Optional
toy handcuffs with a key



Creative Expression

Items for expressing feelings, thoughts, and or personal stories creatively.

playdough & cookie sheet
crayons
plain paper
scissors
tape
egg carton
plastic cups
deck of cards

soft foam ball
two balloons per session

Optional
art supplies
building blocks
binoculars
tambourine
magic wand

DO'S AND DON'TS

(Bratton, Taylor, Kellam, Blackard) , 2006)

Do

Set the stage
Let the child lead
Join the child's play as an active follower
Verbally track the play
Verbally reflect feeling
Set firm and consistent limits
Salute the child's power
Encourage effort
Be verbally active

Don't

Criticize any behavior
Praise the child
(eg. you are such a good boy/ girl)
Ask leading questions
allow interruptions of the session
give information or teach
preach
initiate new activities
be passive or quiet

ACTIVITIES



Play Therapy Practice

Choose a toy above that reflects how you are feeling right now. Take a moment to describe this to a person close by or just do some personal reflection about this experience.

What toy did you choose and why? What about the toy connected with your current emotional state or situation?

What insight does this give you about what is going on in your life right now?

What did you notice about how having a toy to represent your feelings or current state worked for you? Do you think it would have been easier or more difficult to share a meaningful part of your life with someone if there was not a playful element?

Which toy do you feel like your child would choose right now to represent his or her current feelings or situation?

ACTION STEPS

You may already be spending regularly scheduled connection time with your child. If this is the case, just carry on and no extra work for you this week. If you are like most parents, the myriad of scheduled appointments and obligations tend to crowd out even the best of intentions. When your child has experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect he or she is likely used to seeking connection in less than helpful ways or not at all. You may also experience the tricky combo of your child coming close then lashing out. Take this week to start scheduling some new patterns and re-writing attachment narratives with your child. Take a few moments to pull out your schedule for the next week. Find a time that you can schedule 30 minutes for you and your child. If you don't see a free time, consider which items you could cancel or reschedule to make 30 minutes of uninterrupted time free for you and your child.

Set a date:

Day of the week and time for special time of connection with my child (30 min one-on-one if possible)

Preparation

Prior to your special connection time review the sections: "Steps for effective Connection time," "Phrases that communicate connection," and the do's and don'ts.

0-2:

- ◇ Make sure to free yourself from distractions.
- ◇ Have plenty of sensory toys and stimulating items.
- ◇ Try to get as much eye-gaze as possible.

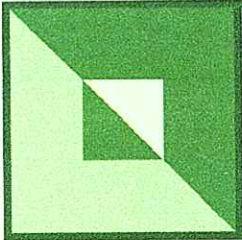
3-11:

- ◇ Use the list of items to create your play kit and make sure you have them in a bag or a container.
- ◇ Find a nice, contained place for the play time to occur. A single non-distracting room with a table, a large spread out blanket, or natural borders with furniture may create a good space.
- ◇ Have a non-distracting timer set, or clock visible to end the session on time. Give warnings as needed.
- ◇ Free Yourself from all distractions.

12& Up

- ◇ Have some creative arts, or craft ideas as possibilities. Gather materials as needed.
- ◇ Board games, sport items, or other physical activities may make good choices.
- ◇ Allow your teens and tweens to make the choice for the activity and follow the lead.
- ◇ Show 100% interest (or as much as possible) in their world for the next half hour.

Reflection on your connection time:



Positive TIPS

Connection

Concept 6:

Building attachment through togetherness

Children who have experienced life disruptions have learned to expect unpredictability and have often missed needed moments of connection. You can rewrite these narratives through regular, intentional times together.

Practice mindful attentiveness to your child through scheduling one 30 minute session per week that belongs to him or her. Free yourself from any distractions. Adjust time as needed for your child.

Keep playtimes special. Creating a positive attachment ritual that remains unique from daily life and the other routines of the week. For younger children keep playtime toys separate. For older, consider special activities just for that time. Never take this time away as a consequence.

Be realistic about your time. 30 minutes per week is actually a fairly long time when you are engaging in a therapeutic way. Schedule in such a way that you do not have to break your appointment with your child.

