

ATTACHMENT

HOW OURS IMPACTS THEIRS

Robyn Gobbel, LCSW- Shoulder to Shoulder Conference
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John Bowlby, Father of Attachment Theory



“ The Attachment System promotes emotional security and ensures survival. ”

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Three Attachment Behaviors

1. Seeking, Monitoring, and Attempting to Maintain Proximity



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Three Attachment Behaviors

2. Using the Attachment Figure as a Secure Base



Explore and return

Three Attachment Behaviors

3. Fleeing to the Attachment Figure as a "Safe Haven" when in danger or afraid

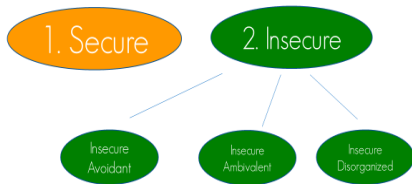


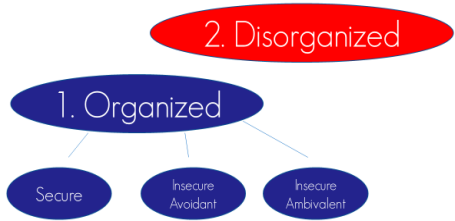
*The best predictor of a child's attachment style is the **parent's attachment style.***

Categories of Attachment

- Secure
 - Insecure
 - Avoidant
 - Ambivalent/Anxious
 - Disorganized
- Organized

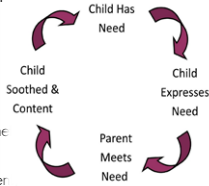
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Development of Attachment

- Through repeated and consistent interactions between the parent and caregiver.
- If this cycle is repeatedly (not perfectly) met a child will develop a **secure attachment**.
- "Good Enough Mother" is 33% Attunement, 33% Rupture, 33% Repair



(Winnicott, 1957; Tronick, 2003, as cited in Badenoch, 2008)

Our attachment experiences lay the foundation for our mental models about relationships- the unconscious beliefs we have about the way the world works.

Attachment Theory IS a Regulation Theory

Allan Schore, PhD

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Regulation

Keeping the accelerator and the brakes *(of emotion)* in balance.

Dan Siegel, *Parenting from the Inside Out*.

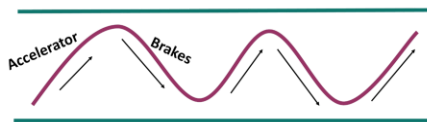
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Autonomic Nervous System

- Sympathetic- accelerator takes us **up**
 - Stress (positive or negative)
 - Surprise
 - Excitement
 - Helps us get things done
 - Fight/Flight/Freeze (if in danger)
- Parasympathetic- brakes bring us **down**
 - Brings the sympathetic down
 - Helps us calm and relax
 - Collapse (if in danger)

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Open & Receptive Nervous System



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Closed & Reactive



Yes!
No!

Contagious Nervous Systems

We borrow from and match each other's nervous systems.



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Window of Tolerance



relationship

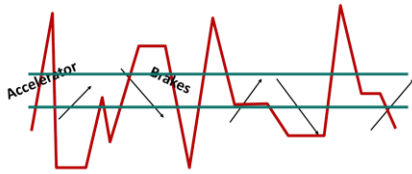
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Impact of Trauma



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Undischarged Trauma

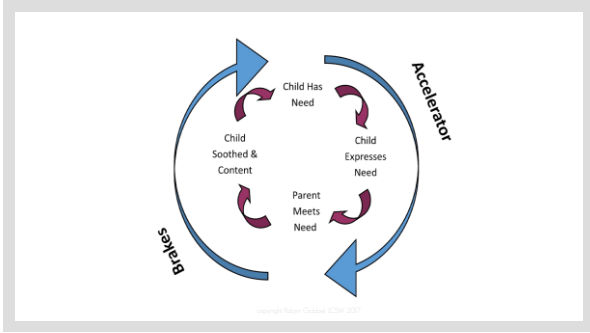


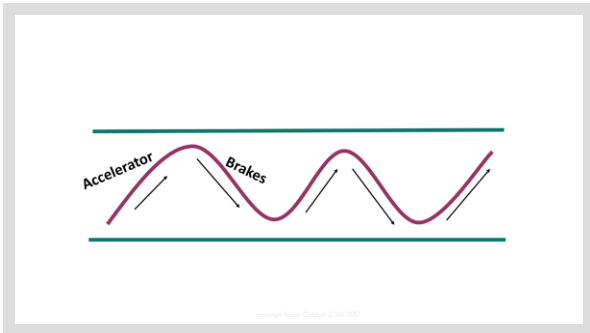
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Attachment Theory IS a Regulation Theory

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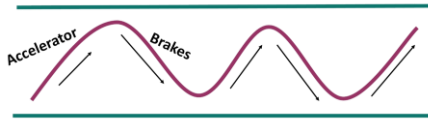




Development of Emotion Regulation

- Infants are largely right-brained- emotional not cognitive
- When the parent soothes the upset baby, the baby's brain harmonizes with the calm, regulated parent's brain. The infant relies on the parent's right-brained (non-verbal) communication
- Emotion Regulation develops from this "right-brain to right-brain attunement"

Secure Attachment



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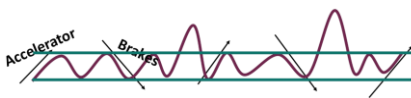
Insecure Avoidant Attachment

- Cycle is broken and infant is NOT soothed
- Infant shuts down relationship circuits because relationship and vulnerability are not safe
- Window of tolerance is smaller
- Tolerance for feelings is smaller
- Largely stays within their window of tolerance except for the sporadic episodes of rage

The solution: Limited dependence on relationships. Take care of self. Avoidance or denial of feelings or emotions.

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Insecure Avoidant Attachment



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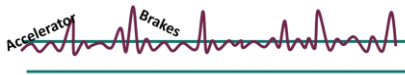
Insecure Anxious Attachment

- Attachment cycle is unpredictably met
- Parent is anxious and/or intrusive
- Infant/child is chronically anxious due to the uncertainty and high arousal
- Behaves in a way that is designed to keep caregiver close and predictable
- High levels of arousal- stays near the top edge of window of tolerance
- Easily overwhelmed and pushed out of their window of tolerance
- Child may be described as "clingy" or "a bottom-less" pit

The Solution: Child's distress keeps the parent predictable and in constant proximity

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Insecure Anxious Attachment



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Disorganized Attachment

- Unresolved or undischarged trauma remains in the nervous system
- Attachment system and alarm system are activated at the same time
- The child is simultaneously drawn toward and away from their attachment figure
- This unsolvable dilemma leads to the disorganization in the nervous system
- Significant challenges with behavior, relationships, and regulation
- Dissociation
- 80% of children who have been abused/neglect demonstrate a disorganized attachment pattern

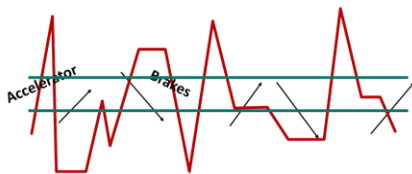
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The attachment system-
come close - is activated by
the same person who activates
their fear system - *go away*.



There is no solution

Disorganized

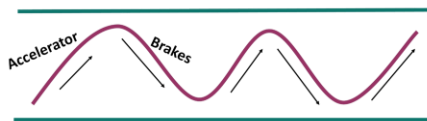


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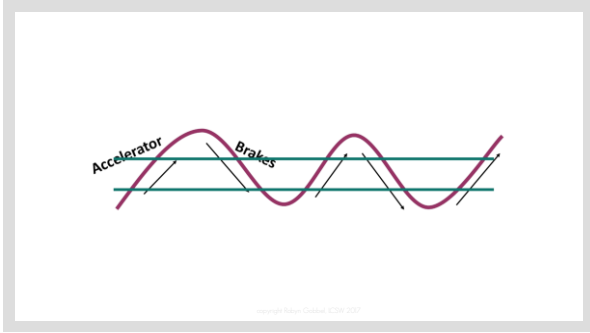
Attachment Patterns
Remain Stable
Throughout Our Lives

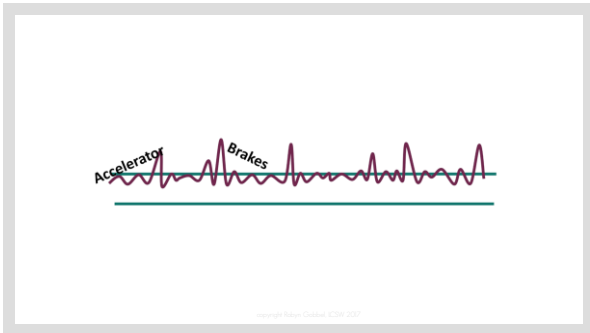
What is the flow of
energy in YOUR body?

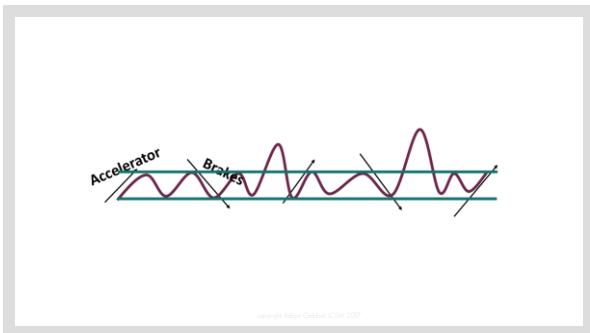
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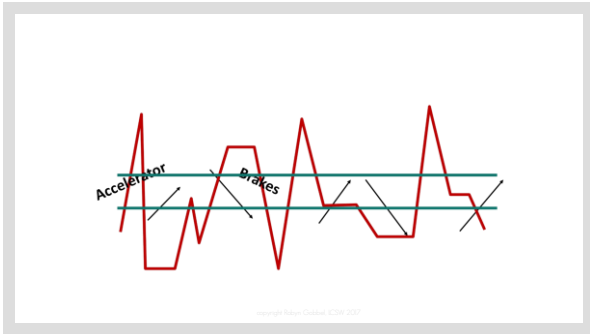


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Adult Attachment Styles

- Secure.....Approximately 60%
- Dismissive (*Avoidant*).....Approximately 20%
- Preoccupied (*Anxious/Ambivalent*)...Approximately 15%
- Unresolved (*Disorganized*)...Approximately 5%

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Adult Attachment Style - Foster/Adopt Parents

- Secure.....Approximately 15% **60%**
- Dismissive.....Approximately 40% **20%**
- Preoccupied...Approximately 15% **15%**
- Unresolved...Approximately 30% **5%**

Sales from Empowered to Connect Conference, Houston, 2019

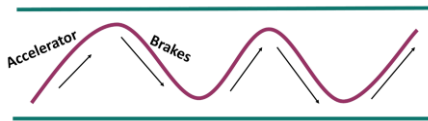
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Secure Adults

- Can regulate their emotions
- Value and feel comfortable in relationships
- Able to identify and articulate feelings
- Able to stay present and grounded during times of stress
- Can acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses as a parent
- Have a cohesive life narrative- how was I impacted by the past?

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Secure Attachment



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Dismissive (Avoidant) Adults

- Were children with avoidant attachment
- May be excellent at functional parenting
- Diminished capacity for relationship because window of tolerance is smaller
- Often are left-brained dominant- logical, linear; less emphasis on emotion
- Difficulty providing the child with right-brain to right-brain attunement because it is safer to live in the left brain

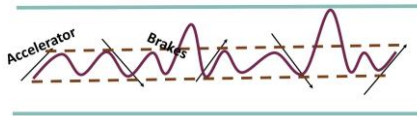
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Dismissive (Avoidant) Adults

- Difficulty reading non-verbal cues
- May be dismissing of importance of relationship
- May be dismissive of the impact of the child's trauma history
- The internal experience of the parent may be:
 - Logic driven
 - Emotional Dessert Bonnie Bodenoch, *Being a Brain-Wise Therapist (2011)*

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Insecure Avoidant Attachment



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Preoccupied (Anxious) Adults

- Were children with anxious attachment
- At times available, at times too overwhelmed to be attuned and available
- May be controlling, anxious, or reactive
- Feels unpredictable to the child
- May be intrusive or enmeshed- prevents the child from developing a solid sense of self

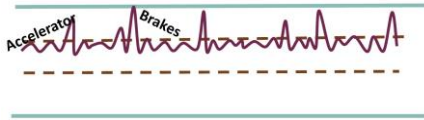
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Preoccupied (Anxious) Adults

- This nervous system is a barrier to a child developing a sense of safety and predictability in their caregiver
- The internal experience of the parent may be:
 - Emotional Jungle Bonnie Badenoch, *Being a Brain-Wise Therapist (2011)*
 - Anxious or Chaotic
 - OR Rigid and Controlling to cope with the anxiety

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Insecure Anxious



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Unresolved (Disorganized) Adults

- Were children with disorganized attachment
- Adults with their own unresolved trauma struggle to be physically and emotionally present for a child who has experienced trauma.
- Oftentimes, these are excellent caregivers when their own trauma isn't being triggered.
- When triggered, parents may dissociate or become emotionally or behaviorally unpredictable or scary to the child.

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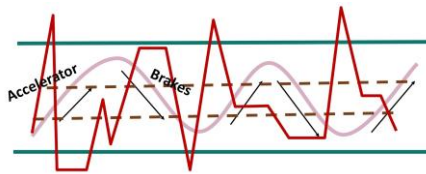
Unresolved (Disorganized) Adults

- Struggle to be in relationship because their nervous system attachment = danger
- Two traumatized nervous system do not allow the child's attachment to move toward secure
- The internal experience of the parent may be
 - Fright/Terror; outer state is frightening/terrifying
- Dissociated/Gone

Bonnie Badenoch, *Being a Brain-Wise Therapist* (2011)

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Disorganized



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Trauma Is Contagious

Even if we began this journey with an open and receptive nervous system, the parenting challenging or traumatized children has impacted us.

The best predictor of a child's attachment style is the **parent's attachment style**. (Benoit & Parker, (1994). *Stability and Transmission of Attachment Across the Generations*, *Child Development* Vol. 65 No. 5, pp. 1444-1456)

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If your attachment history is not secure

- There is no shame in having a childhood that did not lead to the development of secure attachment

The Good News!

- Researchers and clinicians agree that it is possible for adults to develop "earned" secure attachment.
- It's not what happened to you as a child that matters, it's how you make sense of what happened to you.

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How do I even begin?

Making sense of your own story...

- The strongest characteristic of adult secure attachment is having a 'cohesive life narrative.'
 - Acknowledges the positive and negative aspects of childhood
 - Understands the impact of childhood experiences
 - Able to reflect on childhood experiences without becoming overcome with emotion, flooded with the past, and preoccupied with the present

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How do I even begin?

Experience a reparative relationship

- Counseling
- Partnerships- marriage, close intimate friendships
- Support groups

Learn ways to calm your nervous system

- Mindfulness practices
- Yoga
- Self-Compassion
- Any mindful and embodied experience you enjoy

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Resources & Recommended Reading

- Parenting from the Inside Out by Daniel Siegel, MD
- Raising a Secure Child by Kent Hoffman et al
- Anatomy of the Soul by Curt Thompson
- Attached: The New Science of Adult Relationships by Amar Levine
- Wired for Love by Stan Tatkin (adult romantic relationships)
- Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff, PhD

“

We cannot bring a child to a place
where we haven't gone ourselves.
-Karyn Purvis, PhD

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