

**A Disorganized Toddler in Foster Care:
Healing and Change from an Attachment Theory Perspective**

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I. Overview of Presentation

- Introduction of The Children's Ark & Rachel
- Attachment Theory
 - Focus: Disorganized Attachment
- Rachel and Six Principles of Care
- Summary: What to Remember
- Reflection, Discussion, and Q&A

II. Learning Outcomes: By the end of this session, you should be able to

- describe the basic principles of attachment theory and more fully understand disorganized attachment;
- articulate several principles that provide a framework for providing care for a disorganized child;
- reflect on your own experience as care-providers/professionals and on how the principles of care can be incorporated into your work.

III. The Children's Ark

- Vision: Keep parents and children together during evaluation and treatment.
- Mission: Protect children while also supporting their parents. Do for parents what we wanted them to do for their children.

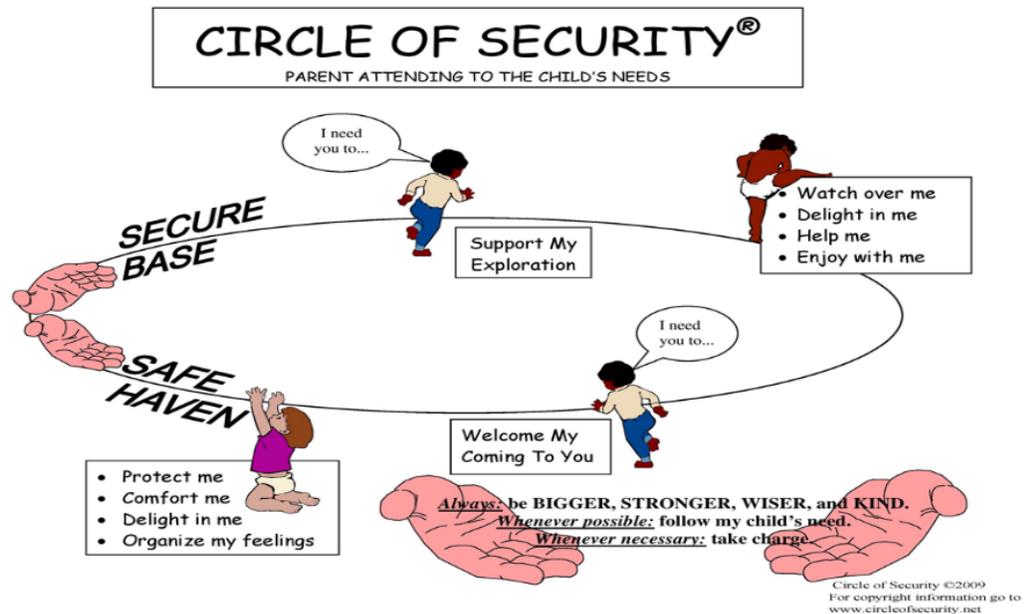
IV. Introduction of Rachel

V. Attachment Theory

- What do you know about attachment theory and/or Circle of Security and how does this perspective inform your work with vulnerable children and families?

V. Attachment Theory (continued)

- Attachment Theory: Basic Principles
 - It's about survival.
 - It's about relationship.
 - Circle of Security (Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin, 2014; circleofsecurityinternational.com)



- Attachment Theory: Common Misconceptions
 - Security liberates; it does not create dependency (developmental)
 - Informs discipline:
 - Children need grown-ups to be in charge
 - COS: Always be bigger, stronger, wiser and kind. Whenever possible: Follow my child's need. Whenever necessary: Take charge. (Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin, 2014)

VI. The Story of Rachel

- Background
- Rachel's Picture of the World (Internal Working Model)
 - "She would not expect me to meet even her most basic needs. She would expect me and her life to be unpredictable and chaotic. She would anticipate that I would be emotionally, and often physically, unavailable to her..." (Mann & Kretchmar, 2017, p. 48).
- Do you have children in your caseload or in your home who sound like Rachel? Do you ask yourself, as did I, how can I help them?

VII. Attachment Theory: Disorganized Attachment

- "Fear without solution": The attachment figure is both the source of comfort and the source of fear.
- Children in foster care are likely to have disorganized attachment strategies.
- Repeated separation and loss, minimal visitation are further disorganizing.
- Note on Reactive Attachment Disorder

VIII. Disorganized Attachment, Trauma, and Brain Development

- Myths:
 - Children are naturally resilient
 - The early years must not be that important since we can't remember them
- Brain development in the context of early caregiving

IX. The Principles

- Frame everything I say and everything I do with the message: "I am here. You are worth it."
- View problem behavior as the expression of a genuine need.
- Be willing to override and say aloud "miscues."
- Be willing to "be with" a child in intense emotion rather than trying to make it stop.
- Whenever possible manage/contain my own negative emotional state and when not possible work with the child to repair.
- When struggles persist, reflect on my own experience with a trusted other, particularly with regard to my own state of mind as it impacts the relationship.

X. What We Need to Remember

- Understand child's attachment world and what we bring to the relationship.
- Enter into genuine relationship with children and families in crisis.
- Know that what children seek is connection.
- Children need to be seen, heard, understood and delighted in; need at least one adult who "gets it" more often than not.
- Children also need an adult who stays in charge of the relationship.
- The more vulnerable a child feels, the more clearly and tenaciously will she play out her learned strategy of survival.
- Child's relational strategy reflects most closely the caregiver's state of mind regarding attachment.
- All parents want what is best for their children but can only operate out of their own experiences, their own picture of the world....and so will you!

XI. Questions for Reflection, Discussion, & Q&A

- Has this presentation invited you to think differently about the work you do with vulnerable families? If so, how?
- Are there specific ideas that you can put into immediate practice?
- What does "doing your own work" mean to you? (Circle exercise, see attached template)
- What questions do you have for us?

XII. Our Thanks!

- Our thanks to all of the families and children from whom we have learned so much and who have allowed us to share in their lives.
- Our thanks to you for attending. We hope this information has been valuable and please feel free to contact us:
 - Janet Mann: 509-710-8090; janet.c.mann@comcast.net
 - Molly Kretchmar-Hendricks: 509-313-3600; kretchmar@gonzaga.edu

**Limited discounted copies of book available (\$15.00; 25% discount): See us following presentation.
Book also available through Amazon or publisher (take bookmarks!).**

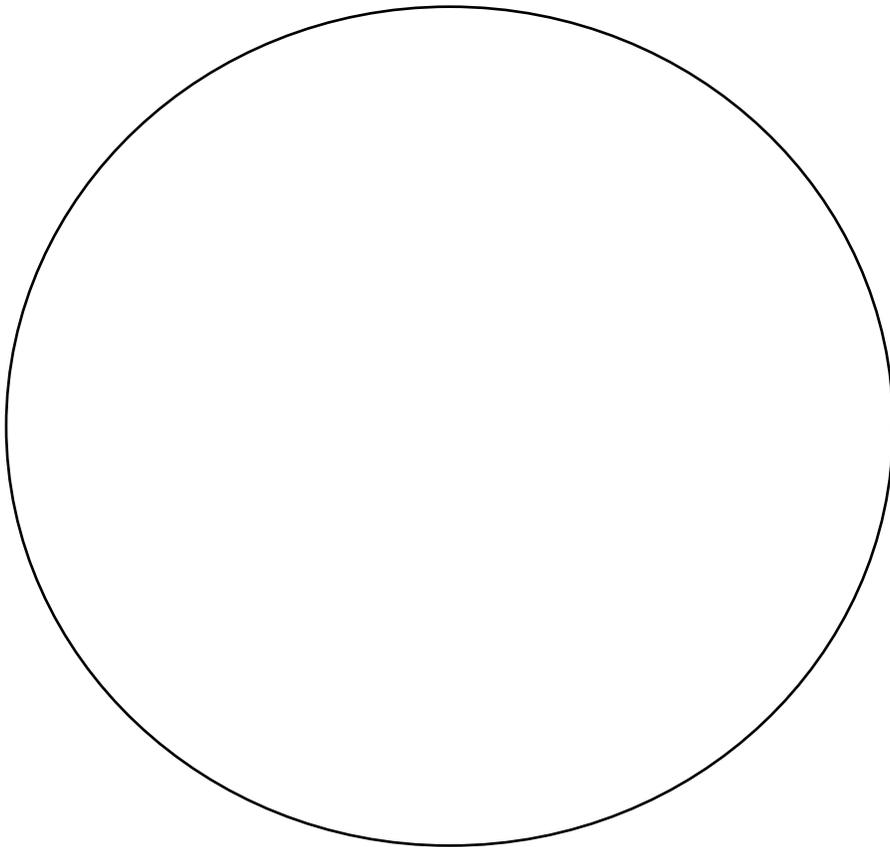
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Circle Exercise

To gain some personal insight around how you experience emotions and, thus, may react to the emotions of others (including children), draw small circles representing each of the emotions below and then place the emotion-circles in relationship to the larger circle, if the circle represents your early family environment. Some emotions might be inside the circle if your significant caregivers supported them; some emotions might be outside the circle if your caregivers could not tolerate them; some emotions may be on the edge of the circle, if they were partially tolerated; etc.

Emotions: Anger, Sadness, Joy, Curiosity, Shame, Fear.



Credit to: Glen Cooper, Kent Hoffman, Bert Powell, *Circle of Security*.