

# MAKING SENSE OF AGGRESSION

Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D.  
*Clinical & Developmental Psychologist*  
Vancouver, Canada

***Jack Hirose Seminars***  
Spring 2020  
Winnipeg, Oakville and Ottawa

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**MAKING SENSE OF  
AGGRESSION**

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**REFRAMING  
AGGRESSION  
AS AN  
EMOTIONAL  
PROBLEM**

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**THREE HISTORICAL & PIVOTAL INSIGHTS REGARDING  
THE EMOTIONAL ROOTS OF AGGRESSION**

**Walter Cannon (1915)** – *the FLIGHT versus FIGHT response to threat - attacking impulses are wired-in; they are not learned*

**Dollard & Miller (1939)** – *the FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION hypothesis - what moves us to attack is frustration but other more civilized outcomes to frustration are potentially possible*

**John Bowlby (1950's)** – *ATTACHMENT THEORY - the preeminent need is for togetherness and so **thwarted togetherness** is the primary source of frustration (if survival = attachment, then stress = facing separation)*

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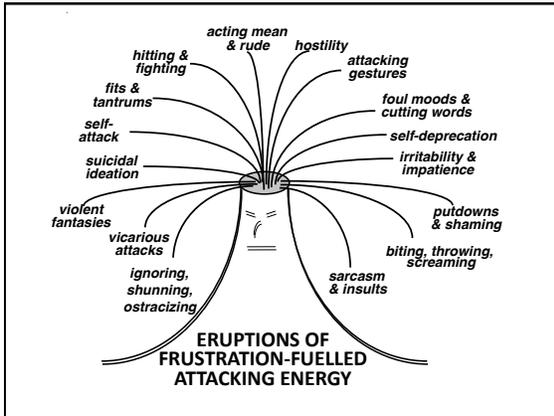
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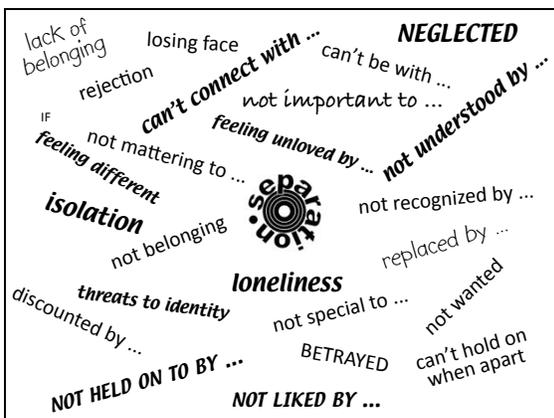
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**FRESH INSIGHTS FROM NEUROSCIENCE**

1. Emotion has purpose, serving attachment first and foremost. The three primal separation emotions are ALARM, FRUSTRATION and separation-triggered PURSUIT. All three emotions are evoked simultaneously with the most intense emotion temporarily DISPLACING the less intense.

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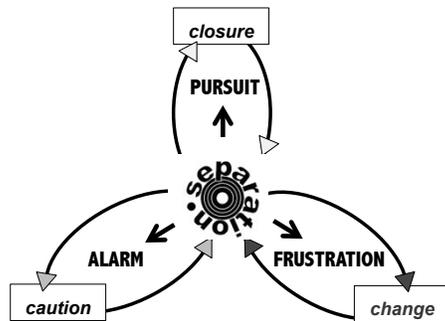
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**ARCHETYPAL SOLUTIONS TO FACING SEPARATION**



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1. Emotion has purpose, serving attachment first and foremost. The three primal separation emotions are ALARM, FRUSTRATION and separation-triggered PURSUIT. All three emotions are evoked simultaneously with the most intense emotion temporarily displacing the less intense.

2. PRIMAL emotion is deeply INSTINCTIVE and to be differentiated from secondary emotion where cognition is involved.

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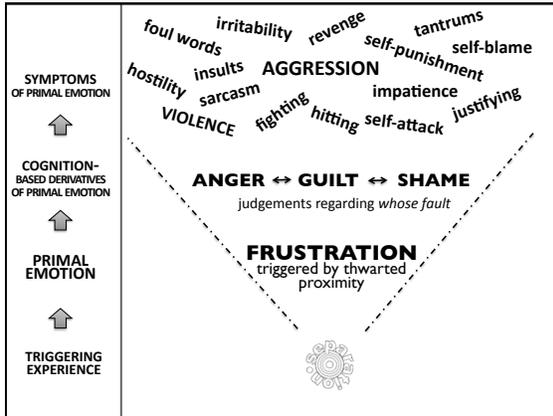
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**FRESH INSIGHTS FROM NEUROSCIENCE**

1. Emotion has purpose, serving attachment first and foremost. The three primal separation emotions are ALARM, FRUSTRATION and separation-triggered PURSUIT. All three emotions are evoked simultaneously with the most intense emotion temporarily displacing the less intense.
2. PRIMAL emotion is deeply INSTINCTIVE and to be differentiated from secondary emotion where cognition is involved.
3. The essence of the situational stress response is *MORE EMOTION AND LESS FEELING*. If conditions are not conducive for the feelings to bounce back in a timely manner, the stress response can become stuck.

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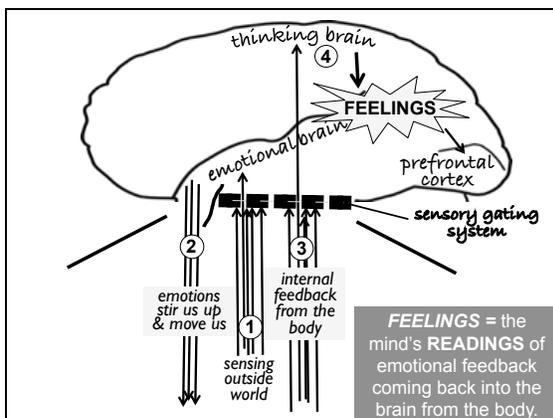
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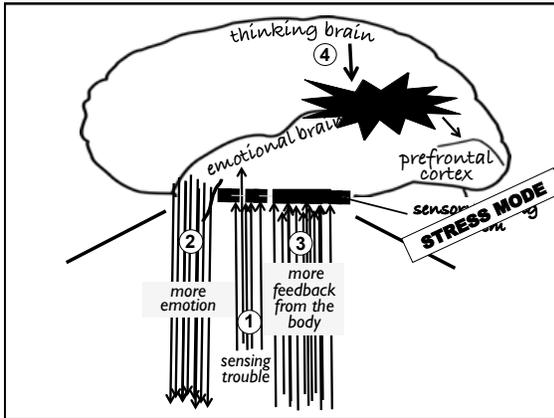
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- Vulnerable feelings more likely to be defensively inhibited**
- feelings of **woundedness** (hurt feelings, anguish, pain)
  - feelings of **dependence** (emptiness, neediness, missing, loneliness, insecurity)
  - feelings of **embarrassment** including blushing
  - feelings of **shame** (that something is wrong with me)
  - feelings of **futility** (sadness, disappointment, grief, sorrow)
  - feelings of **alarm** (apprehension, unsafe, anxiety and fear)
  - feelings of **caring** (attachment, concern, empathy, devotion, investment, compassion, sympathy, love)
  - feelings of **responsibility** (feel badly, guilty, sorry... feel like making things better or making things work for)

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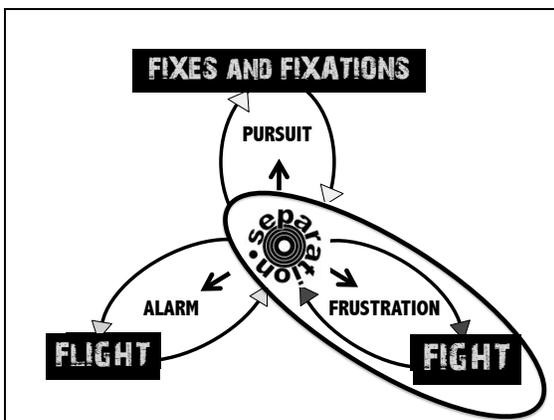
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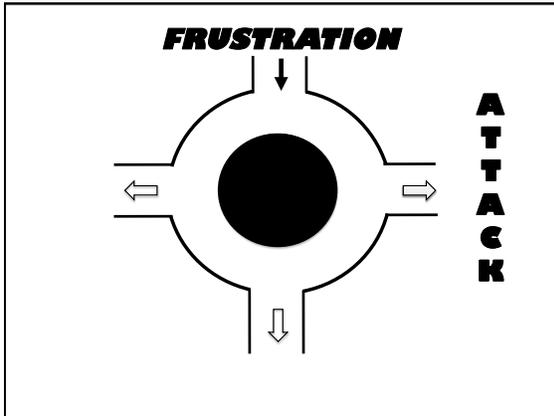
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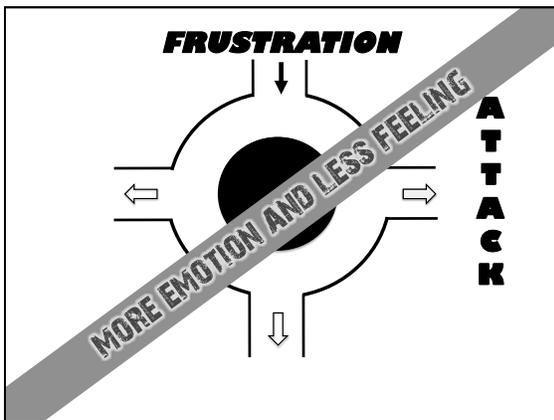
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**AGGRESSION IS AN EMOTIONAL PROBLEM**

- *aggression is a natural (although not the only possible) outcome of frustration that is evoked primarily by thwarted togetherness*
  - explains the higher incidence of aggression in populations facing more separation and why most aggression occurs in the context of attachment
- *persistent aggression is the probable outcome of a stuck stress response where the emotion of frustration is elevated but the feelings necessary to resolve and manage the frustration are missing*

The increasing aggression among today's children would suggest that:

  - their attachment needs are more frustrated*
  - they are less likely to feel the pivotal emotions*

or both

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**Primary Challenge: to read aggression correctly ...**

- as **emotionally-driven** behaviour rather than as intended or instrumental behaviour (ie, done on purpose to get a result)
- as an **emotional reaction** rather than as a value failure (not knowing right from wrong), as a learning failure (not learning one's lesson), as a sensitivity failure (not considering impact), or as a socialization failure (not knowing what is unacceptable)
- as rooted in **natural frustration** that happens to one, rather than as caused by ANGER which involves blame, is a secondary emotion, and as such, is a product of the mind

**... and to come alongside the underlying frustration**

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<b>ANGER</b>	<b>FRUSTRATION</b>
- experienced only by humans	- experienced by all creatures of emotion
- evoked by perceived injustice	- evoked by something not working
- a secondary emotion which involves the cerebral cortex and consciousness	- a primal emotion that can exist without being felt and without cognitive involvement
- triggers impulses to seek justice (eg, get even, exact revenge, seek an apology)	- can trigger impulses to attack

**Aggression is NOT an anger problem**

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SESSION TWO

Neufeld's Traffic Circle Model

**AGGRESSION**

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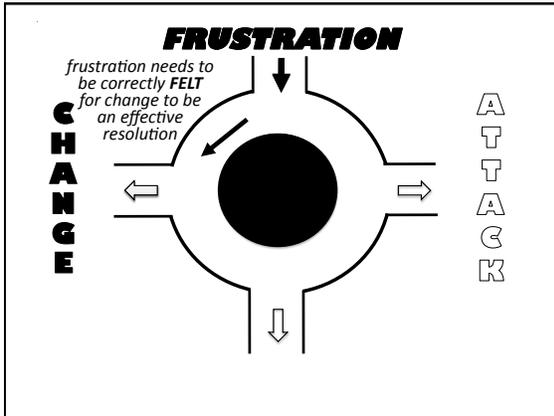
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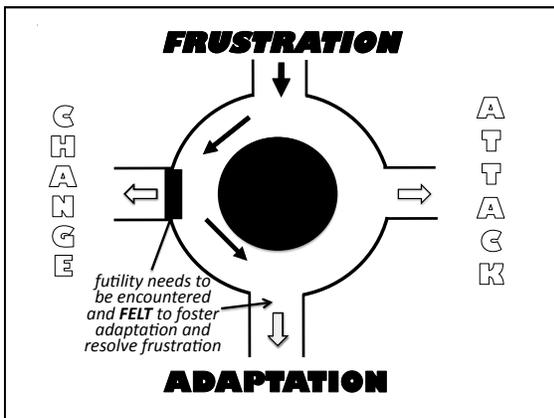
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Some common childhood futilities

- holding on to good experiences
- making something work that doesn't
- possessing mummy (or anyone for that matter)
- sending the sibling back from whence he came
- being smarter than one is
- being perfect or avoiding failure
- controlling circumstances or knowing the future
- turning back time or undoing what's been done
- making magic work or defying the laws of nature

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Some common childhood futilities

- winning all the time
- being bigger than one is
- being best at everything
- being wanted where one isn't
- controlling another's decisions
- doing anything one wants
- getting one's way all the time
- knowing what's going to happen
- avoiding upset

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***Adaptation requires  
a soft heart and  
a safe place to cry***

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**OTHER SIGNS OF AN ADAPTATION PROBLEM**

- lack of learning from mistakes or failure
- lack of recovery from loss or trauma
- fails to transcend disabilities or handicaps
- adversity does not change for the better
- stuck in behaviours that are ineffective
- cannot handle not getting one's way

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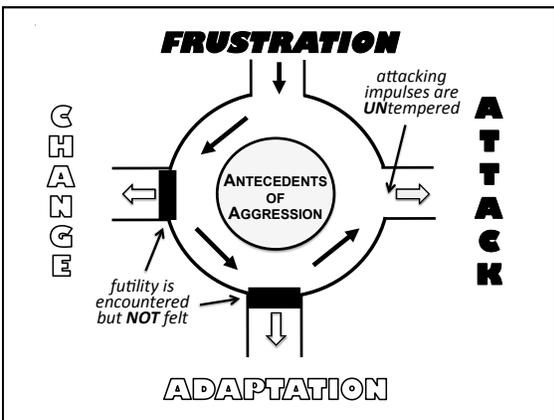
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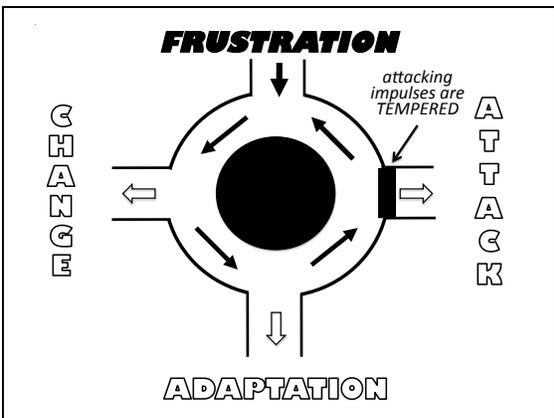
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**Prefrontal Cortex**

-  The capacity for registering more than one feeling at a time develops between 5 to 7 years of age.
-  The prefrontal cortex requires exercise to grow.
-  The more intense the feelings, the more difficult they are to mix. Intense children will take longer to develop a working prefrontal cortex.

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*- all emotions & instincts must be FELT to mix -*

<i>frustrated</i>	<b>&amp;</b>	<i>alarmed</i>
<i>inclined to attack</i>	<b>&amp;</b>	<i>inclined to attach</i>
<i>driven by impulses</i>	<b>&amp;</b>	<i>concerned about consequences</i>
<i>violent urges</i>	<b>&amp;</b>	<i>nonviolent intentions</i>
<i>impulse to hurt</i>	<b>&amp;</b>	<i>caring impulses</i>

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<b>to ATTACH</b>	<b>to ATTACK</b>
to keep close .....	to strike or bite .....
to take care of .....	to insult or criticize .....
to care for .....	to put down .....
to protect from hurt .....	to hurt or wound .....
to be loyal to .....	to yell at .....
to not push away .....	to be sarcastic to .....
to avoid upsetting .....	to hate or loathe .....
to not disappoint .....	to ignore or discount .....
to measure up .....	to tantrum .....
feelings of affection .....	to take one's own life .....



**Patience**

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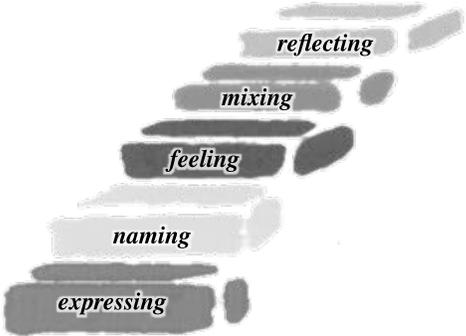
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**Five Steps of Emotional Maturation**



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**OTHER SIGNS OF BEING UNTEMPERED**

- untempered in experience & expression generally
- doesn't consider context or others
- tends to black and white thinking
- lacking inner reflection
- knowledge does not translate into action
- difficulties with metaphor, paradox and irony

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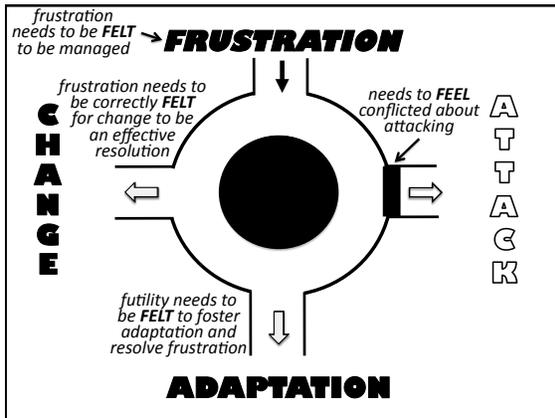
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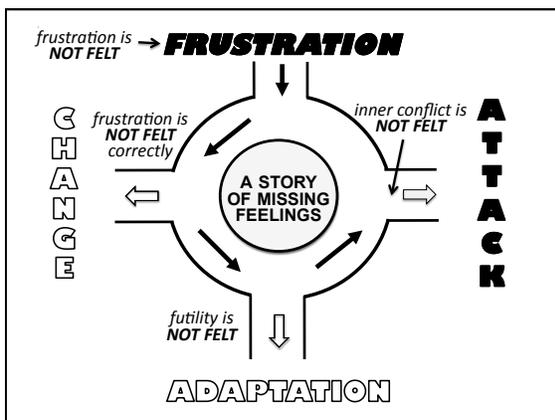
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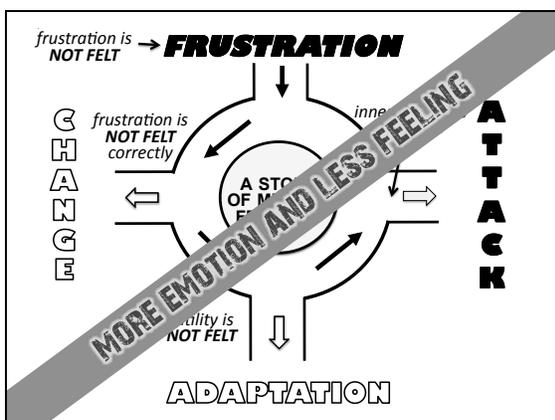
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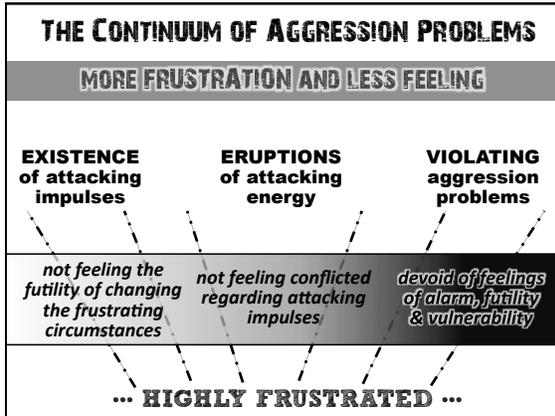
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**Primary Challenge: to read aggression correctly ...**

An **eruption of attacking energy** informs us that:

- a) something is NOT working for them
- b) they have NOT yet felt the futility that they have encountered
- c) the attacking impulses were untempered, at least at the moment the eruption occurred

A **persistent aggression problem** informs us that:

- a) they are full of unresolved frustration
- b) they have not yet adapted to their life circumstances
- c) they lack integrative functioning, and if over age 7 or 8, they are stuck in emotional immaturity
- d) they are likely facing more separation than they can bear

**... and to come alongside the underlying frustration**

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SESSIONS THREE & FOUR

**ADDRESSING  
AGGRESSION  
PROBLEMS**

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**THE AGGRESSION PROBLEM**

**Aggression happens when ...**

... a frustrated child **does not feel the futility encountered** AND the resulting **attacking impulses are untempered**, at least at that moment

... when highly frustrated yet missing the feelings that are necessary to resolve and manage this frustration

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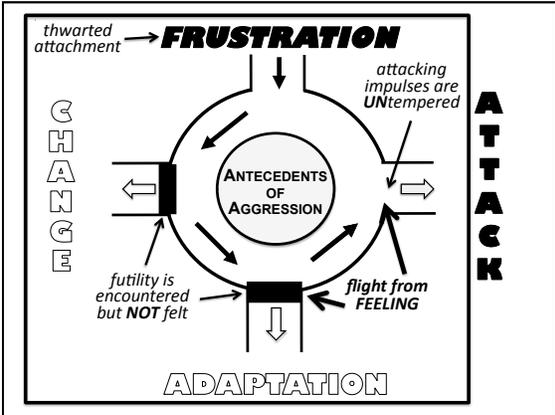
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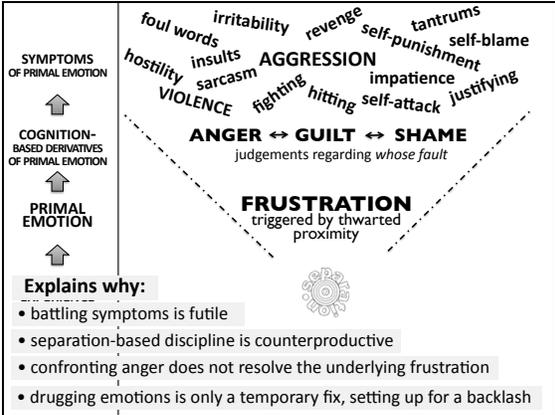
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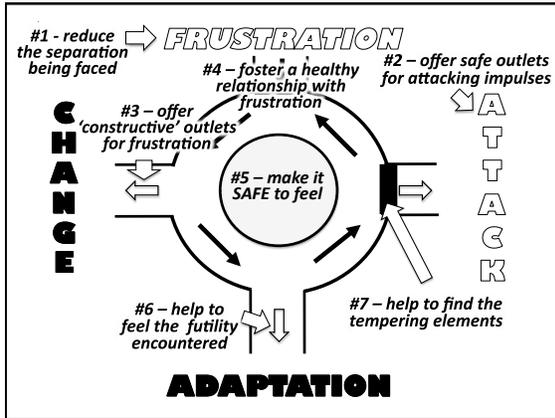
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**INTERVENTION #1**

***Reduce the separation being faced***

- help to preserve a sense of connection, closeness, or togetherness with the adults responsible

**GUIDING INSIGHT** – aggression problems typically result from facing separation that is too much to bear

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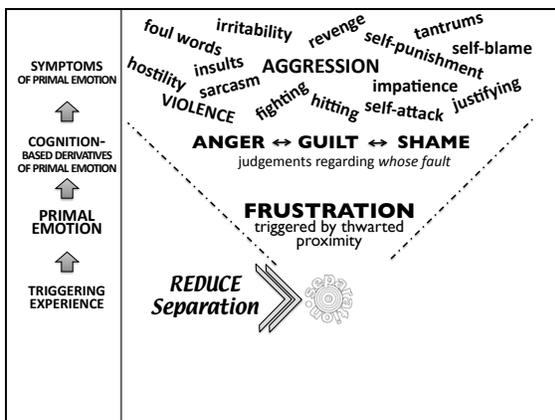
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***AVOID unnecessary separation***

- get adults in the child's life to assume more responsibility for providing proximity generously
- refrain, if possible, from all separation-based discipline and reactions as well as from fuelling frustration with consequences
- reduce separation experiences wherever possible; help a child hold on when apart
- reverse peer orientation if possible
- try to keep the eruptions of foul frustration from causing more separation and thus fuelling the aggression problem

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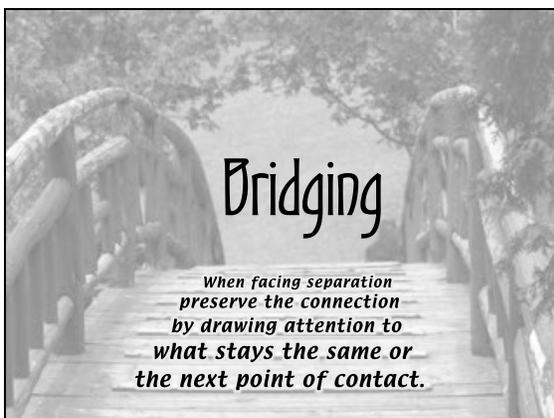
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***BRIDGE all separation and aggression***

- by NOT IDENTIFYING the child with his attacking instincts, attacking behaviour, or violating impact
- by treating the incident as an ACCIDENT
- by drawing attention to the ongoing CONNECTION and the next point of CONTACT
- by DEPERSONALIZING the attack and not letting oneself be alienated
- by ANTICIPATING aggression so as not to be taken off guard or thrown off balance
- by CONVEYING that the relationship can take the weight
- by bridging PROACTIVELY where needed

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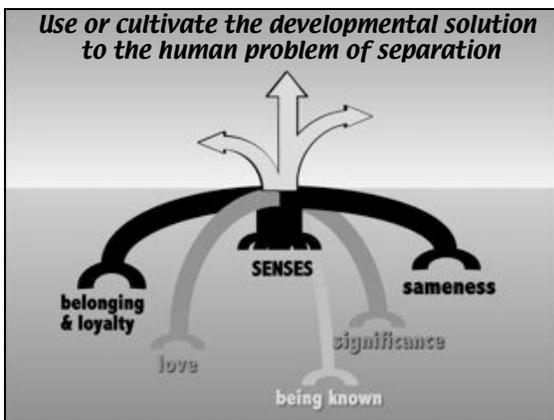
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**INTERVENTION #2**

***Offer safe outlets for attacking impulses***

- thus safeguarding relationships, keeping the child out of trouble, and buying time for the aggression problem to be grown out of, or effectively addressed
- facilitate safe eruptions instead of attempting to stop violent eruptions

**GUIDING INSIGHT** – attacking impulses that must not be **acted out** should be **PLAYED OUT**, until such a time as they can be successfully **talked out**.

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***PLAY and the Displacement Principle***

***Play should be  
the lightning rod for  
the thunderbolts of aggression.***

eg, play fighting, mock aggression, war games, attack games, sword play, attack sports, attacking in fantasy, insult games, as well as attacking energy in art, music, wit, writing and stories

PLAY, if given the opportunity, should naturally and automatically attract any stuck or residual attacking energy

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***Some tips for bringing aggression into PLAY***

- assume **RESPONSIBILITY** for helping the child get the foul frustration out safely
- find first the child's natural **BENT** for relieving foul frustration
- come alongside when the child's frustration is **MILD** and suggest playful nonviolent ways of relieving the frustration
- use times of strong connection to **LEAD** the child to ideas and good intentions regarding playful nonviolent eruptions
- find ways of playfully relieving some foul frustration **TOGETHER**
- model or **SCRIPT** nonviolent ways of safely and playfully venting foul frustration

**Caution:** do NOT attempt to do this during an eruption of attacking energy

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**INTERVENTION #3**

***Offer 'constructive' outlets for unresolved frustration***

- opportunities and help for effecting change, for creating and constructing, and for solving problems

**GUIDING INSIGHT** – aggression happens because unresolved frustration has not found 'constructive' expression (eg, making things & making things work)

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***Frustration expressed through play***

the impulses to effect change & make things [work] (ie, to solve problems)



- constructing and crafts
- organizing and orchestrating
- making things work
- designing perfection

- reduces levels of frustration
- develops ability to solve problems
- enhances constructive outcomes

the impulses to attack or destroy (ie, to relieve oneself of foul frustration)



- destroying and demolishing
- hitting and throwing
- kicking and screaming
- war games, attacking games

- reduces levels of frustration
- safely vents foul frustration
- renders more civilized in real life

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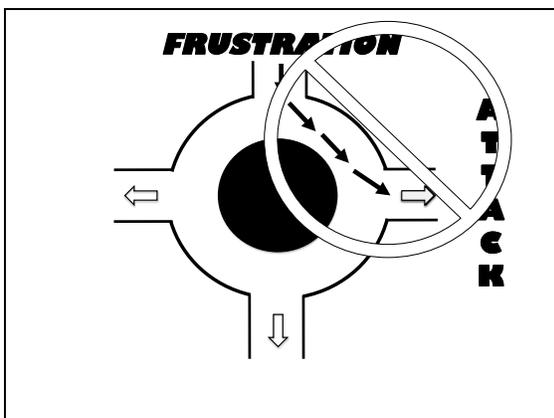
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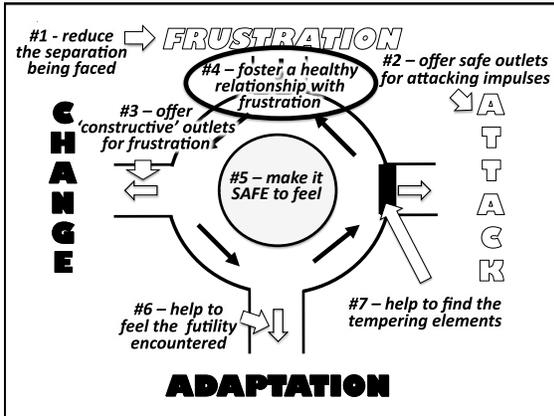
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**INTERVENTION #4**

***Foster a healthy relationship with frustration***

- to accept, recognize, acknowledge, name, embrace, and talk about – the experience of frustration

**GUIDING INSIGHT** – one cannot possibly manage an emotion that is not felt, nor truly handle an experience that is not yet accepted as inevitable

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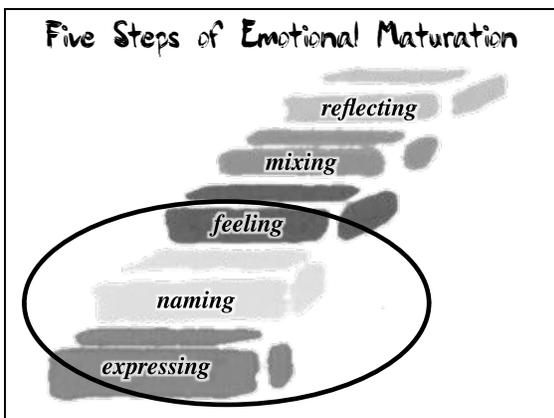
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***Foster a healthy relationship with frustration***

- 1) Shift the **focus** from aggression to frustration.
- 2) **Normalize** frustration as well as the resulting impulses to attack.
- 3) **Come alongside** frustration, including the need to be relieved of it.
- 4) **Encourage reflection** and expression regarding frustration.
- 5) Help them first **find** their **frustration** and reflect it in a language that they can use (the language of frustration needs to be 'caught' instead of 'taught').

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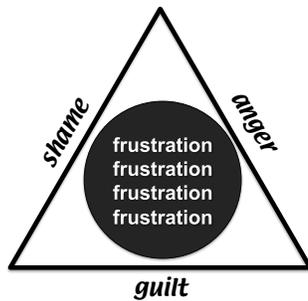
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***Subtract the blame to get to the frustration***




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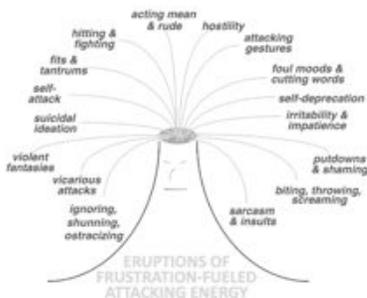
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***Reflect the frustration, not one's character or the behaviour, including the impact of the behaviour or how it violates.***




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**Foster a healthy relationship with frustration**

- 6) **Reframe** the problem as one of handling frustration and solicit good intentions in this regard.
- 7) Make it **easy to admit** a problem in handling frustration (eg, sharing one's own struggles with the challenge).
- 8) **Model** one's own relationship with frustration (excluding one's frustration with them).
- 9) Introduce **rituals** involving frustration so that the language and alternate outcomes can be highlighted.
- 10) **Coach** and support the handling of frustration, providing encouragement and reflecting progress.

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**INTERVENTION #5**

**Make it safe to feel**

ie, reverse the defensive inhibition of feelings, especially regarding sadness, caring, alarm and even frustration itself

**GUIDING INSIGHT** – aggression happens because certain pivotal emotions are not being sufficiently felt

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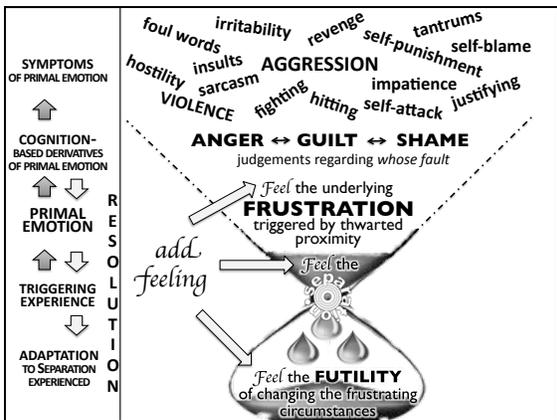
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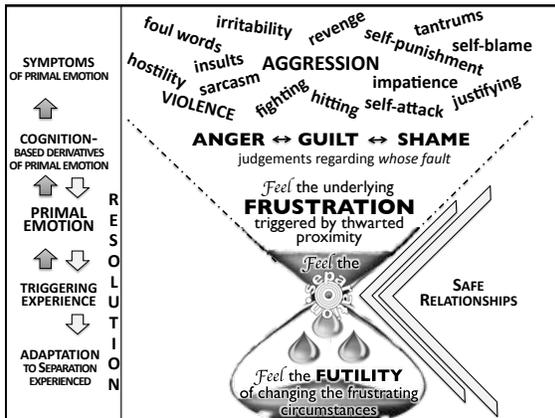
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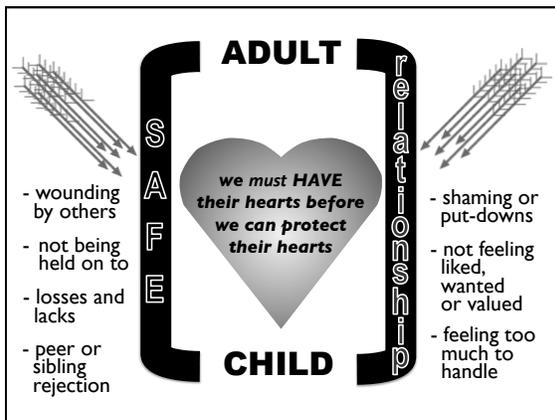
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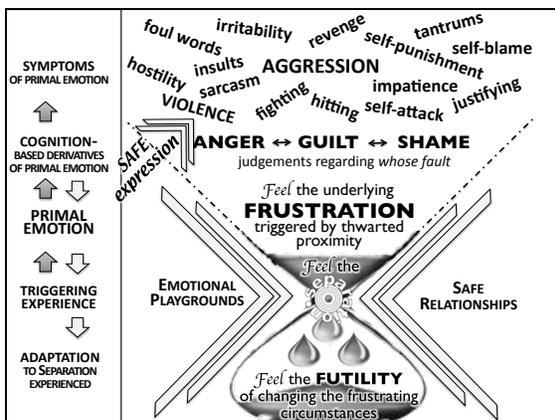
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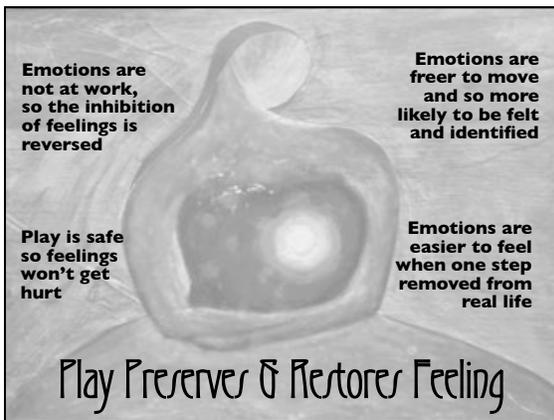
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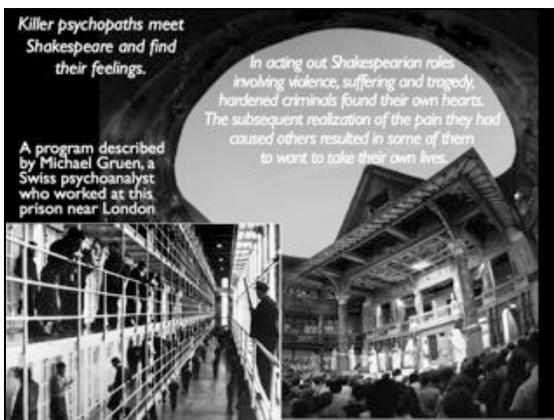
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**INTERVENTION #6**

***Help to feel the futility that is encountered***

- to find one's sadness and disappointment when up against that which one cannot change or that is outside of one's control

**GUIDING INSIGHT** – aggression happens because adaptation hasn't

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***How to prime adaptation situationally where aggression is NOT a problem***

Step One involves arranging an encounter with futility. (eg, decision, limit, rule, restriction, consequence, reality)

Step Two involves gently but firmly 'holding' in the experience of futility until there is nothing left to do but 'cry'.

Step Three involves drawing out the sadness and disappointment in the context of warm comfort..

*When 'tears' are stuck, steps should be reversed in order to avoid provoking aggression. When not able to do this work, we should find an adult to whom the child is attached to serve this function.*

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***How to prime adaptation when tears are STUCK***

SAFE

1. Start with becoming accepted as an agent of comfort. Come alongside but 'go slow'. If you touch a wound, do so ever so gently and indirectly and do not linger.
2. Once comfort is accepted, proceed to act as an agent of futility, but only indirectly, not with futilities that are of your making. Stay primarily in the role of comforter.
3. Only once tears of sadness occur spontaneously is it safe to take a stronger stance as a direct agent of futility. Always make sure there is a safe place for tears and prepare to take a tactical retreat if the process is leading to hardening instead of softening.

P-R-E-S-O-F-T

***- use play as a softening agent if possible -***

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### How play can move us to tears

- by rendering defenses unnecessary and thus making it easier to feel
- by giving something to cry about that is one step removed and thus not too much to bear
- by shifting the locus from the HEAD to the HEART, from thinking to feeling, from secondary to primary emotion



*futility*

- by playing directly to our emotions as in melancholy music, poetry, or a sad story
- by removing the self-consciousness, shame, fear, and social sanctions around tears
- by providing safe release for stuck emotion, thus making it easier to fall into our tears in the wake of intense expression

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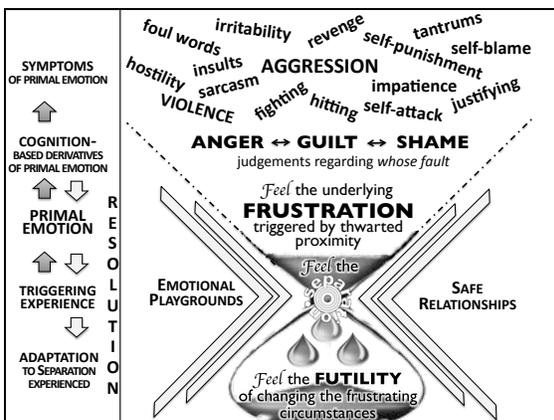
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**INTERVENTION #7**

***Help to find the tempering elements***

- the on-the-other-hand thoughts and feelings that would keep the attacking impulses in check

**GUIDING INSIGHTS** – aggression happens because attacking impulses are untempered / emotions must be felt before they can mix / self-control and patience result spontaneously from the capacity to feel conflicted

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***Foster tempered experience & expression***

- the ability to FEEL the typical 'emotional mixers' (alarm, futility and caring) must exist before one can foster integrative capacity
- developing integrative or prefrontal cortex CAPACITY does not have to be restricted to issues regarding aggression
- work in the CONTEXT of a good attachment lead and when the emotional intensity has subsided
- utilize MEMORY to foster inner conflict (cognitive dissonance is usually easier to achieve than emotional discord)
- NORMALIZE the experience of inner conflict and make it easy to admit to
- set the stage for inner dissonance by bringing on side with GOOD INTENTIONS (including the nonviolent expression of frustration)

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***Developing PATIENCE through Play***  
ie, tolerating frustration without erupting in attack

- mastering frustration is NOT about finding a way to avoid frustration in life but about developing the capacity to embrace more frustration
- it is easier to access feelings in play and thus easier to find one's mixed feelings regarding frustration

- we are more likely to encounter frustration in the context of engagement
- since one is free not to play, frustration is optional and thus more likely to be embraced or steered into

*Integrative functioning is first accessed and practiced in the play mode*

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**Reviewing PLAY as a treatment for aggression**

1. Providing opportunities for construction and engineering play can improve problem solving and thus reduce foul frustration.
2. Making room for aggression-infused play can reduce frustration, make it easier to manage, and render more civilized in real life.
3. Allowing or enabling REPLAY of frustrating scenarios can discharge foul frustration and lead to eventual resolution.
4. Reflecting frustration in play can improve access to the feelings and words of frustration, helping to build a relationship with frustration.
5. Play makes it easier to cry. Getting things moving in play can access feelings of futility that have been trapped in the stuckness.
6. Play is the perfect setting for accessing MIXED FEELINGS regarding frustration and thus developing patience when frustrated.

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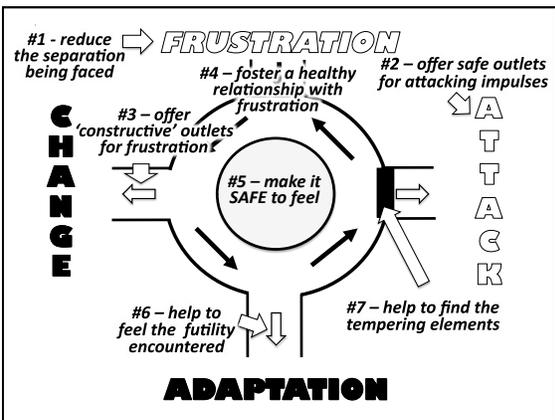
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**MAKING SENSE OF  
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# HANDLING INCIDENTS OF **AGGRESSION**

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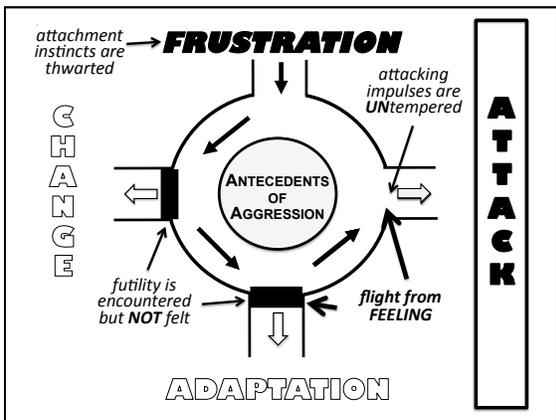
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## *Six Common Pitfalls to Avoid*

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**PITFALLS TO AVOID #1**

***Avoid getting entrenched in a futile battle against symptoms***

eg, railing against violence, taking a 'cut it out' approach to aggression, commenting endlessly on the unacceptability of behaviour, asking why, trying to shape behaviour directly

- results in an adversarial approach, reveals one's impotence in the face of primal separation emotion, and sets the stage for failure on all sides

**CHALLENGE** is to be **proactive**, taking a tactical retreat from reacting to intervene where one is more likely to make a difference

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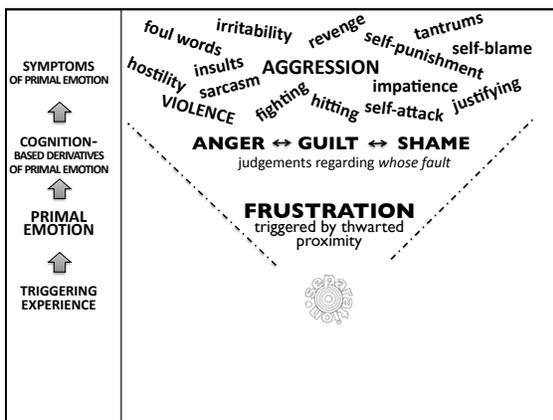
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**PITFALLS TO AVOID #2**

***Avoid getting distracted by the eruptions of attacking energy***

**FOCUSING on FRUSTRATION** enables one to: come alongside, to support the child, to bridge the aggression, to empathize with the child, to build relationship, to normalize the dynamics, to get into the same boat, to set the stage for feeling, to prepare the way for feeling the futility encountered, to prime an accepting relationship with frustration, to model a relationship with frustration, to walk the traffic circle with the child, etc

**CHALLENGE – INSIGHT** – to see past the distracting behaviour to the emotions, dynamics and dysfunction that lie beneath

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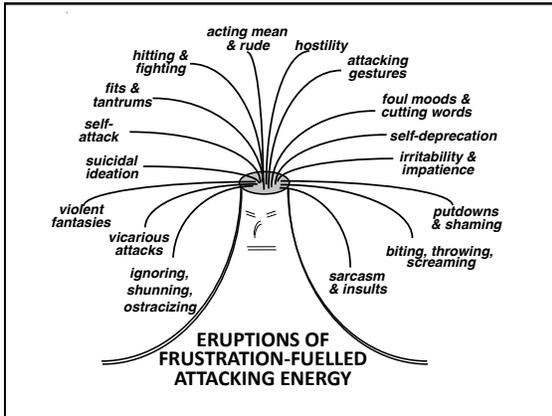
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**PITFALLS TO AVOID #3**

***Don't forget to take the child's aggression problem into consideration***

eg, not able to handle their frustration, carrying a load of unresolved frustration, not able to feel the futility encountered, lacking the capacity to feel conflicted (eg, think twice, control impulses, realize intentions, conform to values), lacking tempering feelings, unable to express foul frustration without getting into trouble, etc

**CHALLENGE** – to **compensate** for the child's aggression problem instead of assuming the child has control

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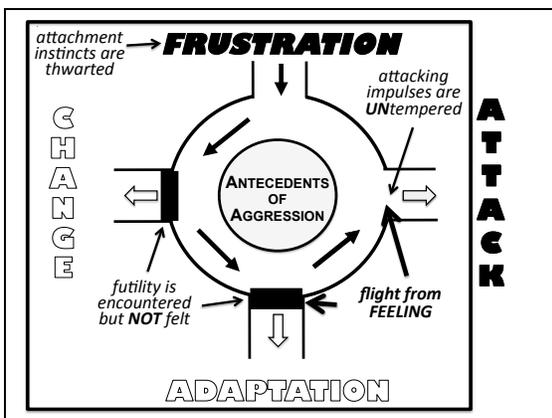
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**Compensate for an aggression problem**

1. **ACCEPT** the existence of an aggression problem, **ANTICIPATE** the symptoms, and **ADJUST** accordingly (eg, adjust perceptions, assumptions, expectations and situations).
2. Attempt to **WORK AROUND** the aggression problem where possible; do not make impossible demands that set the stage for failure.
3. **ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY** for keeping them out of trouble, for keeping others out of harm's way, for keeping them out of situations where the frustration is more than they can handle.
4. Assume responsibility to **REDUCE FRUSTRATION**, including helping to solve problems that otherwise would frustrate them.
5. Solicit requests to ask for **ASSISTANCE** if the frustration is mounting.

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**PITFALLS TO AVOID #4**

**Avoid aggravating the antecedents of aggression**

eg, increasing the level of frustration, confronting with futility that they do not feel, triggering further defenses against caring, pushing frustration underground

**CHALLENGE** – to handle incidents in a way that does not make matters worse

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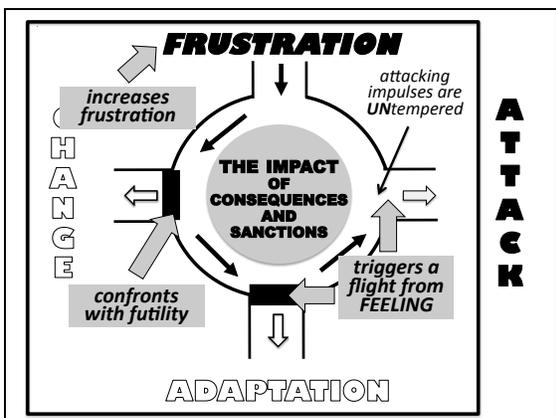
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**Guidelines for using sanctions & consequences**

**The dilemma** - not imposing sanctions in an aggressive incident can sabotage social justice, set the stage for acts of revenge, undermine one's alpha role, erode social values, and convey a lack of support for the targets or victims of the attack (making everyone feel unsafe), whereas imposing sanctions can further fuel the aggression problem.

1. Use discipline only when necessary and for the right reasons, not to address the aggression problem. Since this is a sacrifice play with the attacker being sacrificed, don't discipline any more severely than needed.
2. Take care to preserve the ability to access key intervention points at a later time. It is best to **depersonalize** the discipline process and to **bridge** all discipline used.
3. Take care to preserve the **dignity** of all in the discipline process, depersonalizing any attacks for the sake of everyone involved.

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**PITFALLS TO AVOID #5**

**Avoid displacing aggression to another person (including themselves) or to another place and time**

- reacting to aggression in ways that evoke more separation-triggered **PURSUIT** or evoke more **ALARM**, thus displacing the aggression elsewhere

**CHALLENGE** – to draw the heat away from the more vulnerable and to help find a safe avenue of expression that would reduce or prevent scapegoating

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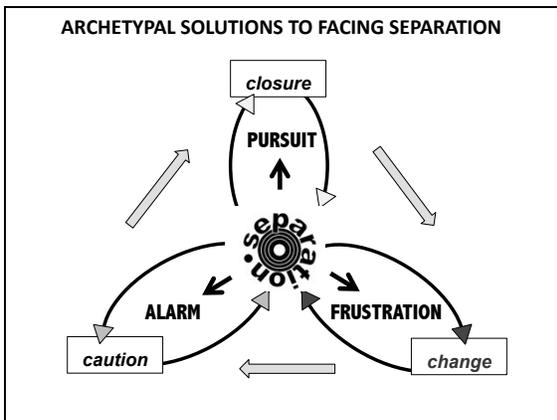
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**DISPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE**

The more intense emotion will displace the less intense emotions. All things being equal, *pursuit* typically trumps *alarm* which typically trumps *frustration* (notable exceptions are when defended against alarming feelings or in defensive detachment).

- another time
- another place
- another person
  - mother vs father
  - siblings vs parents
  - siblings vs peers
  - pets vs people
  - self vs others

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**PITFALLS TO AVOID #6**

***Avoid trying to make headway in the incident***

eg, teach a lesson, change their behaviour, address the aggression problem, instill a value, create an attitude change, have an impact, make a difference

**CHALLENGE** – to use a harm-reduction approach for managing incidents, and to address the aggression problem in the context of relationship rather than the incident

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***Guidelines for handling incidents***

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- Guidelines for Handling Incidents of Aggression & Violence***
1. Instead of trying to make headway, aim to do **NO HARM**.
  2. Maintain an **ALPHA** posture as much as possible.
  3. Address the violation simply (if necessary) and **REFRAME** it as a problem with handling or managing frustration.
  4. **BRIDGE** the problem behaviour as well as any discipline used.
  5. **SET THE STAGE** for future intervention (to give a chance for feelings to calm down and to collect the child before going to work on the aggression problem).
  6. **EXIT** sooner rather than later. Don't try to teach a lesson.

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**ATTACHMENT AND  
AGGRESSION**

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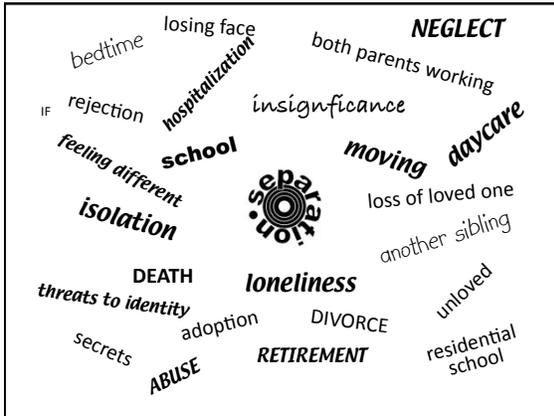
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**Typical Sources of Attachment Frustration**

- experiences of **lack and loss**
- the **inability to hold on when apart**, resulting from premature separation or undeveloped capacity for relationship
- **facing separation** in any form: being different if attached through being like, rejection if seeking to belong, not mattering if seeking to be significant, etc
- **alpha problems** – deep systemic frustration from not feeling taken care of, and situational frustration when control is thwarted
- **defensive detachment** – the reversal of attachment from those attached to, leading to extreme frustration
- **peer orientation** – children revolving around their peers

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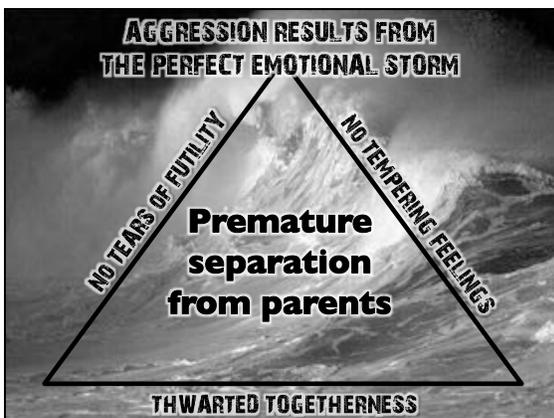
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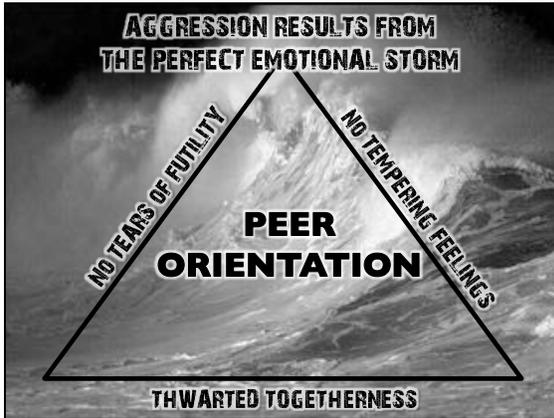
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**about peer orientation**

- a phenomenon of attachment where peers **DISPLACE** the adults in a child's life, resulting in the child revolving around other children or the peer group instead of the adults responsible
- using one's peers to get one's bearings and for the cues as to what matters most as well as how to act, talk and dress
- for peers to matter more; to prefer the company of one's peers over that of the adults in one's life
- where attachments to peers **COMPETE** with the attachments to adults (eg, the child does not seek for his peers and adults to be together)

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**the problem with peer orientation**

- does not serve survival as children were not meant to take care of each other
- pulls children out of orbit from around adults, destroying the context in which they were meant to be raised and educated
- leads to an escalating flight from vulnerability as the more peers matter, the more capable of being wounded. In addition, invulnerability is venerated in the peer culture. The loss of feeling leads to arrested development and untempered interaction.
- leads to escalating alarm, frustration and fragmented pursuit (and the resulting problems) as peer oriented children face more separation by default
- leads to escalating polarization and tribalization, resulting in more children getting wounded

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positive polarity	negative polarity
seeks to be with	shies away from
makes contact	resists contact
endears	alienates
looks up to	looks down upon
attends & listens to	ignores & disregards
imitates & emulates	mocks & mimics
possesses	disowns
is loyal to	opposes & betrays
holds dear	holds in contempt
attempts to find favour	ridicules and derides
makes things work for	spoils things for
seeks to matter to	discounts as not mattering
seeks to please	annoys and irritates
befriends	eschews
loves	loathes
shares secrets with or keeps the secrets of	keeps secrets from or creates secrets about

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***How peer orientation leads to aggression***

1. Peer orientation sets the stage for thwarted togetherness as proximity is very difficult to preserve (hence the social media). Therefore peer-oriented kids have **MORE FRUSTRATION**.
2. Peer interaction is the major source of wounding for children – a vulnerability greatly enhanced by peer orientation. To function in this wounding context, feelings are inhibited, resulting in **LESS FEELING**.
3. The loss of feeling leaves the attacking impulses **UNTEMPERED**.
4. Peer-oriented children take their cues from each other regarding the expression of attacking impulses, resulting in more **VIOLENCE**.
5. The tribalization caused by peer orientation renders those outside their tribe (parents, teachers, siblings, other kids) much more likely to become targets of attack as their aggression is **DISPLACED**.

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**PROBLEMS RELATED TO  
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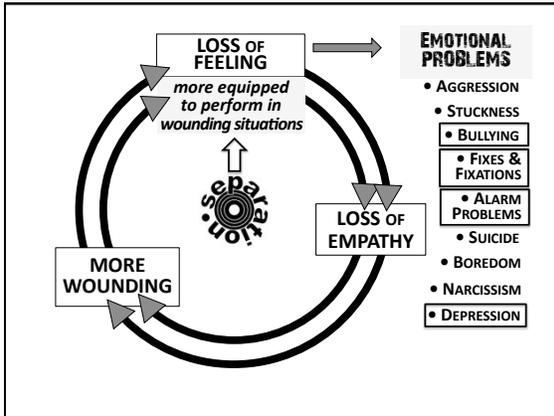
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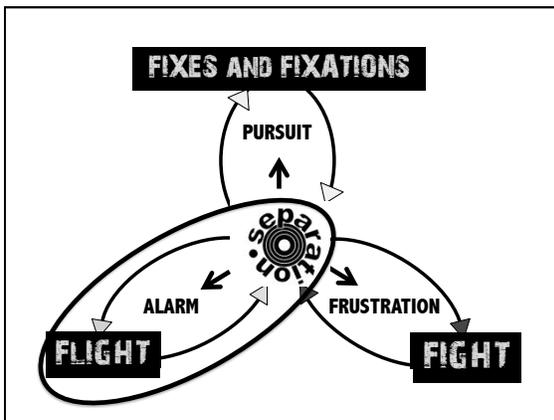
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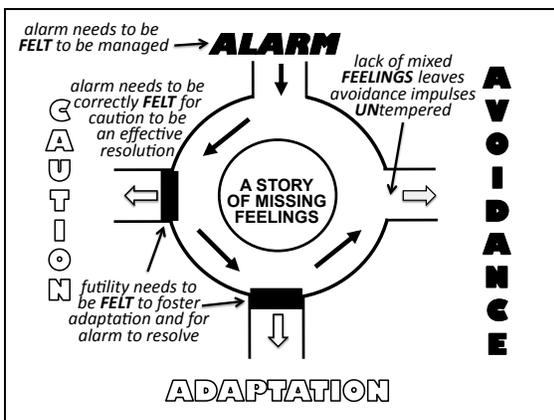
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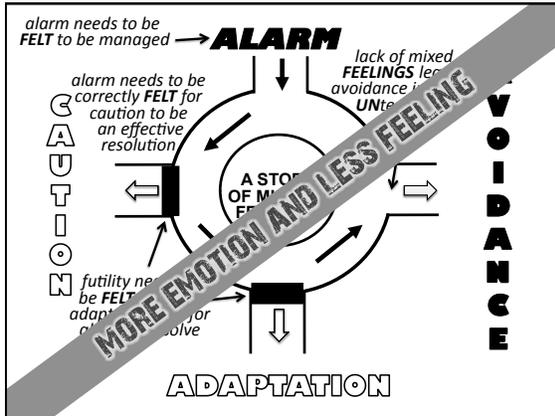
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**ALARM - BASED AVOIDANCE**

**LEVEL 1 – ANXIETY PROBLEMS**  
 - *avoiding alarming things and situations* – results in obsessions and compulsions, including phobias and paranoia, as well as a preoccupation with staying out of trouble

**LEVEL 2 – AGITATION & ATTENTION PROBLEMS**  
 - *avoiding attending to what alarms* - results in significant attention deficits, not being able to stay out of trouble, not being moved to caution, recklessness and carelessness

**LEVEL 3 – ADRENALIN SEEKING PROBLEMS**  
 - *avoiding any sense of vulnerability* – the adrenalin rush involved in doing alarming things when devoid of a sense of vulnerability results in being attracted to what alarms and a predisposition for being a trouble-maker

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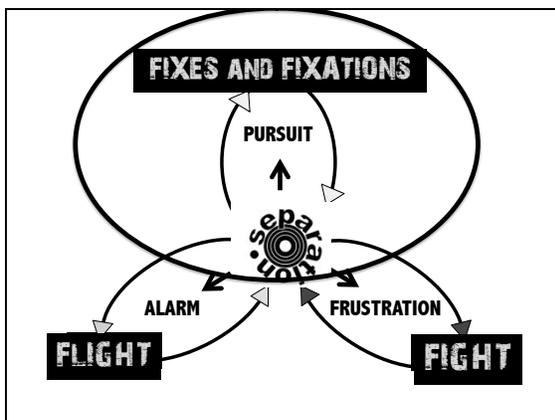
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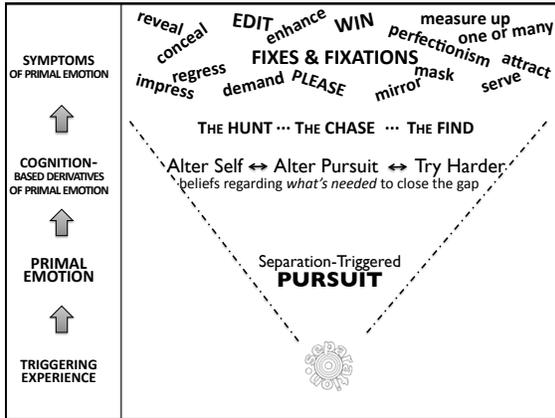
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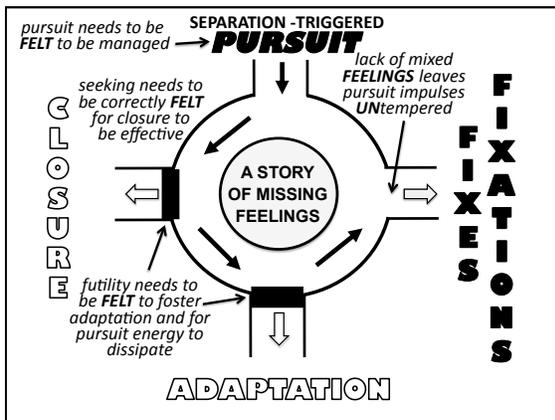
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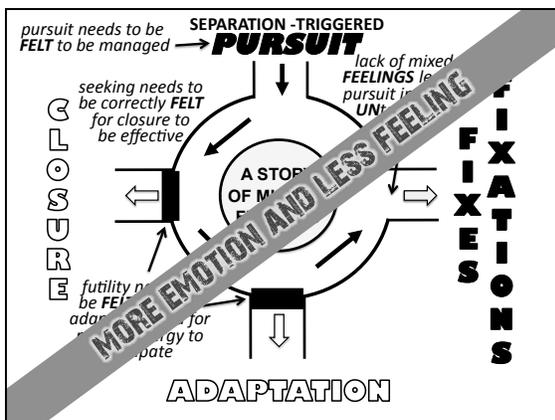
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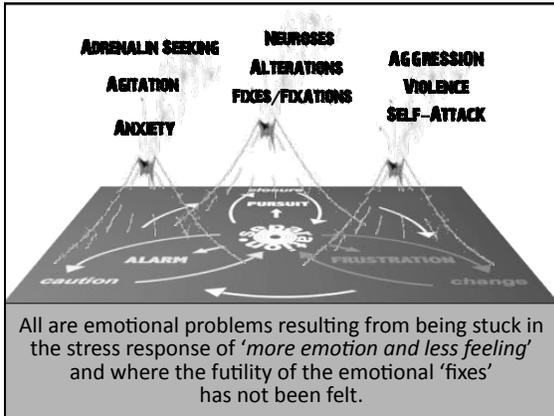
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# BULLYING AND AGGRESSION

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**the making of a bully**  
*- a perversion of alpha -*

**highly moved + Lacking feelings of caring & responsibility = the BULLY response**  
**to displace**

*- to assert dominance by exploiting vulnerability -*

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*Typical manifestations of elevated displacement instincts*

- bossy, controlling or demanding
- seeks to be on top or take front stage
- compelled to take over or to take charge
- obsessed with winning or being seen as the best
- can be driven to dominate or show superiority
- often has difficulty taking direction or asking for assistance
- driven to trump interaction, to have the last word
- may need to be in the know / can act as a know-it-all

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**The Making of the Caring Alpha Response**  
*"neurons that FIRE together WIRE together"*

*In primates, this is found to take place primarily in the play mode where the feelings of attachment are less likely to be inhibited. This kind of play is notably missing in the play histories of bullies.*

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**THE CONTINUUM OF TROUBLING ALPHA BEHAVIOUR**

*... HIGHLY MOVED TO DISPLACE ...*

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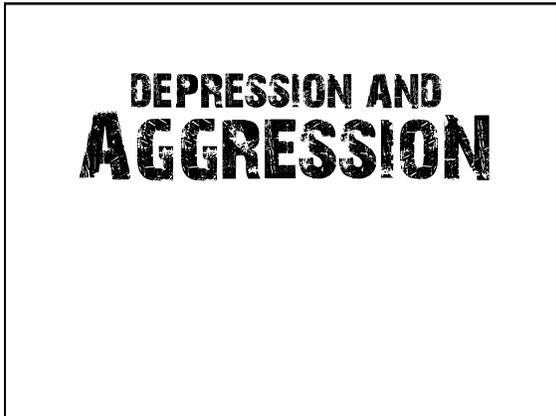
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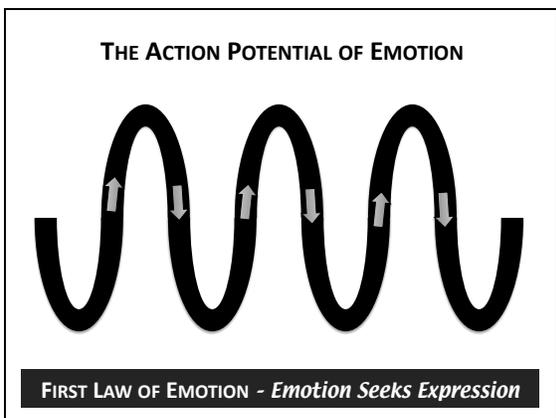
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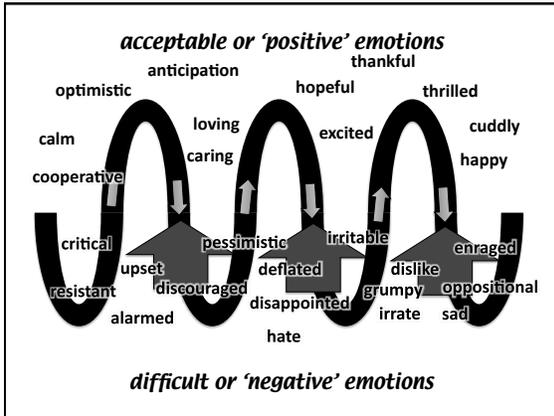
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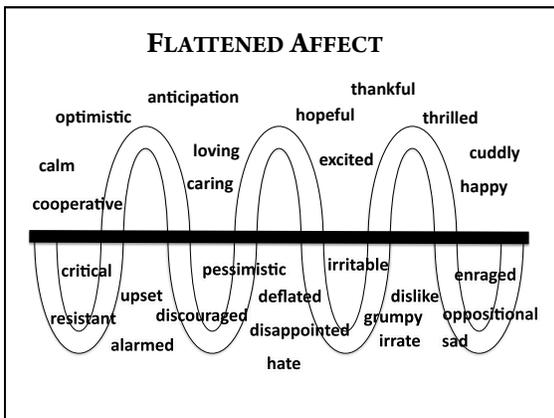
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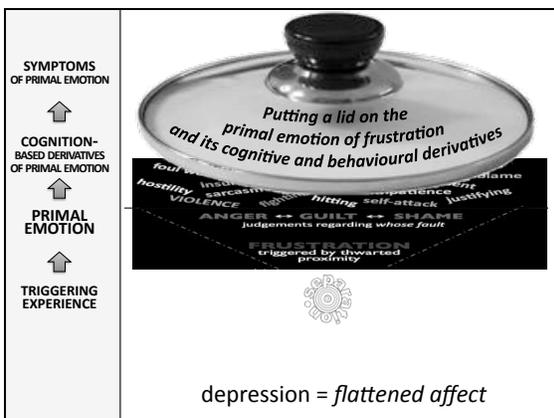
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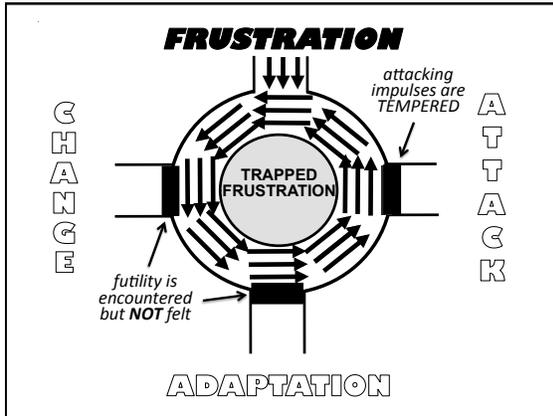
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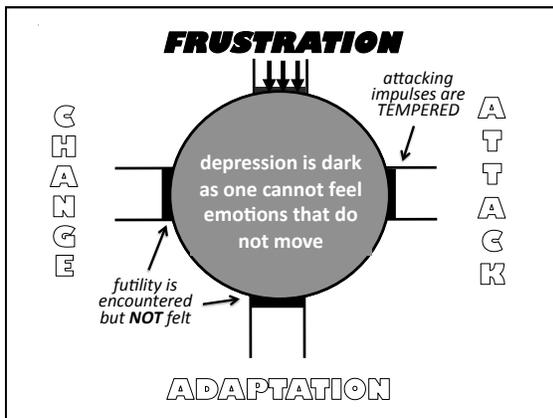
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**PROBLEMS RELATED TO AGGRESSION**

**alarm problems • fixes & fixations • bullying • depression**

- ALL are emotional problems at their core
- ALL are stress-related problems where the stress response is stuck in the 'more emotion & less feeling' mode
- ALL are syndromes of non-adaptation where the futility encountered has not been felt (ie, tearless or dry-eyed syndromes)
- ALL are best addressed through REDUCING the separation faced and RESTORING lost feeling

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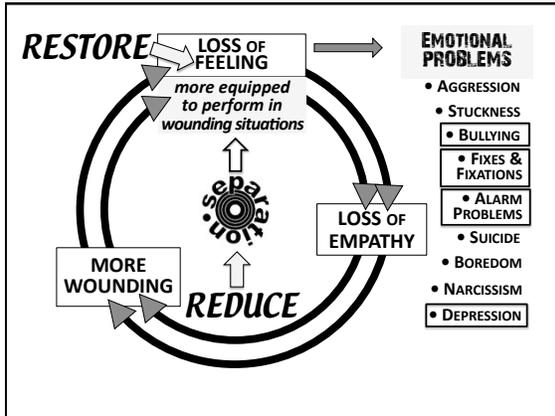
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## CASE STUDIES OF AGGRESSION

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Given your knowledge of the *Neufeld's Traffic Circle Model of Aggression*, can you now make sense of these cases?

1. Remembering that an aggression problem is rooted primarily in the unresolved frustration evoked by thwarted togetherness where the resulting attacking impulses are untempered, can you see ...

- a) signs of thwarted togetherness or frustrated attachment
- b) a lack of evidence of the process or fruit of adaptation (feeling the futility encountered)
- c) a lack of evidence of the capacity for tempered experience or expression (feeling conflicted)
- d) signs of other unresolved primal separation emotions (alarm and separation-triggered pursuit) and their derivative problems

2. Given your knowledge of the seven basic intervention points for an aggression problem, devise a treatment plan for each of these cases.

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Nala – age 8

Presenting Concern: resistant and oppositional, preoccupied with taboos, a nightmare to parent

Nala was adopted when she was 2 years old. She is indiscriminately affectionate with strangers and will talk with most anyone that comes along. She seeks control in all her relationships. She is extremely impulsive, losing her temper repeatedly. She seems to know much better than she behaves. She presented as fearless and tearless. When parents say ‘no’, she becomes very demanding and hostile. She never talks about what bothers her. She tends to be quite compulsive, insisting that things be done in a certain order, for example.

Her parents have been to expert after expert and nothing seems to work. Using consequences and isolation just seemed to make it worse. They came wanting solutions for how to deal with her behaviour.

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Benji – age 4

Benji was kicked out of several preschools for violent behaviour and sent to a non-residential treatment program. He urgently pursued contact with peers and teachers, and when thwarted, attacked by biting and hitting and throwing. He was an only child of two well-spoken university professors who acknowledged that Benji was an unwelcome surprise and an interruption to their career plans. They dealt with this through hiring nannies – Benji was on his fourth. Benji had been attached to his nannies but to his parents’ knowledge, never asked about them after they left nor grieved their absence. He was impossible to manage by his parents but they attributed that to the fact that they were not caring professionals. When asked about Benji’s fears and tears, they represented him as fearless and tearless. When observing Benji, I had the opportunity to witness a spontaneous and intense attachment form to a new 4 year old girl in the treatment centre – he was decidedly alpha.

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Harley– age 17

Harley was kicked out of school for destroying a computer lab. He had subsequently become involved with leading a gang and was preoccupied with violence and weapons. He claimed to have ‘high self-esteem’ as nothing bothered him and his friends idolized him because he was so cool. Danger excited him. When rapport was established, he revealed that he destroyed the computer lab when his girlfriend broke up with him in the hall outside of the lab. He didn’t harm the girl. When asked how important she was to him, he replied that she was ‘everything’ since his grandmother had died a couple of years ago. His parents were not in the picture. He didn’t remember the last time he had cried and he hadn’t grieved either his grandmother or his girlfriend. He said he hadn’t always been the way he was now as he used to be ‘one nervous, freaked out dude’.

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Liam, age 7 – page 1

Liam moved in and out of doors in a ritualistic fashion, counting steps back and forth, not moving forward, for example, until he had done the required steps backwards. Liam also clicked his teeth a certain number of times and banged his elbow on a hard surface repeatedly. These signs first occurred after mother had been very ill for three weeks while also pregnant with another child. Previous to this and becoming worse, were problems with aggression. He was hitting, biting, throwing objects, spitting and turning over furniture. He couldn't be left with his 4 year old sister for even 10 seconds without hurting her. He insulted and assaulted his mother continually: "you're a stupid idiot", "let's kill mommie".

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Liam, age 7 – page 2

Mother would respond by saying that she couldn't handle his behaviour and would warn him that she would send him to his grandmother's if he didn't smarten up. She tried to teach him a lesson by taking away things that were important to him.

He had begun to become very possessive of his sister and imitated her continually. At one point after both grandfather and aunt had been sick and hospitalized, Liam became obsessed with a small red ball that kept coming towards him and he felt like he had to keep it away. According to Liam, it would come towards him at night when he was in bed or when he was in the car and he was in charge of making sure it didn't hit him. It was quite disturbing for him as he had no control of it coming towards him and it was up to him to "hit" it away over and over.

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Lucy, age 8

Presenting Problem: attacks her mom viciously and repeatedly

She prays every morning that she won't hurt her mother. She feels terrible remorse once the attack is over and the frustration subsides. The triggering events for the aggression seem to be physical separation. After the attack, she is full of "I love you's" to her mom, "sorrys" and "I don't know why I do these things". She is full of affection towards her mother and seeks closeness continually. She is extremely afraid of throwing up and will ask if her colour is okay from 50-60 times a day. Lucy will talk about frustration after she has attacked her mother, but not before, as she is desperately trying to not get upset for fear of pushing her mother away.

**About the mother:**  
Presents as weak, inadequate and overwhelmed. Lives in fear of upsetting Lucy and the next attack.

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Calum, age 8 – page 1

Calum is extremely well-behaved and 'no trouble' to his parents and teachers, although it is very difficult to command his attention at times. He appears 'tuned out', as if he is in his own world, talking to no one in particular. He rarely expresses emotion of any kind but is restless and fidgety and finds it difficult to get to sleep. He wets himself, both at night and day, but doesn't seem to notice. His mother was not interested in parenting him and he suffered significant neglect and suspected physical abuse. When his parents first separated and custody was initially shared, the mother threatened him with not being able to see her anymore if he was any trouble. Ultimately she rejected him and he now lives with his father and his new wife. He doesn't talk about his mother, shows no desire to see her, nor any distress at being apart. He often professes his love profusely for his dad, step-mom and siblings. He is extremely attached to his toys. There is no evidence of mixed feelings of any kind, nor any indication of disappointment or feelings of sadness, although he often appears rather dejected.

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Calum, age 8 – page 2

Calum has a younger sister who often attacks him "kicking, biting and hitting". His stepmother claims that Calum is very gentle and never hits back. Occasionally, some attacking impulses will emerge, but only in the context of gaming or super-hero play. At one point – at age 2 – Calum was diagnosed with autism, primarily because of concerns expressed by a daycare supervisor of severe anxiety-reducing behaviours and 'self-stimulating behaviours'. The diagnosis was later rescinded and replaced with an attentional deficit diagnosis. Calum does very poorly in school but doesn't make any trouble. He refuses to go into the playground at school because of the monsters there.

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Cherise, age 11

Cherise's mother was tired of being hit by her daughter and made an appointment to consult with me about Cherise. It was a month before I was able to see the mother. She started the consult with informing me that she had almost cancelled the appointment because the aggression had suddenly stopped. She decided to keep the appointment however, because Cherise was now suffering from low self-esteem. When I asked the mother as to what gave her that impression, she indicated that Cherise was stating that she wished she was never born, that she wanted to die, that she hated herself. What emerged was that the attacks on the mother stopped quite abruptly after warning Cherise that if she ever hit her again, she wouldn't be able to stay with her anymore. It was at this point that she developed a supposed case of 'low self-esteem'.

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Cynthia, age 12-13

Cynthia was exclusively attached to her mother, whom she would attack severely from time to time. Her mother was very fearful of these attacks, having been injured so significantly that she needed to be hospitalized on more than one occasion. Cynthia could not handle being away from her mother, being completely obsessed with reconnecting to her when she was at school. She was basically dysfunctional at school, being too alarmed to focus on anything. When her mother moved in with her boyfriend, he stipulated that he would not tolerate any aggression in the house. Her mother reinforced this by warning her that she would call the social workers to have her apprehended if she wouldn't behave. The mother made it clear that she would choose her boyfriend over Cynthia. Upon the next attack Cynthia was apprehended and placed in a group home, with the condition that she would not be allowed to see her mother unless she promised not to hit her. She ran away from the group home, and upon reconnecting with her mother, attacked her. She was put in a group home a significant distance away from her home, and the same scenario repeated itself. She was put in a group home even further away, and the same scenario repeated itself again. She was then charged with assault and entered the criminal justice system.

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Corey, age 13

Corey's life was filled with losses – his parents first and foremost. There was no indication that any of his losses had been grieved. In fact, there wasn't much evidence that he could feel much of anything at all. He never talked about missing his parents and certainly not his frustration. He was placed in foster home after foster home, but his aggression proved too much for anyone to handle. An uncle – a bit of a tyrant but the only relative Corey had – stepped forward to offer to take Corey into his home, but only under the condition that there would be no aggressive behaviour. He was convinced that someone had to take a firm hand with Corey. Miraculously Corey's aggression disappeared. The uncle was convinced that his approach to the problem had been the answer. He was sure that others had been too soft on him.

Shortly after his aggression problem disappeared, Corey began to have hallucinations of a dog trying to attack him. He became quite dysfunctional with the alarm evoked by this violent 'shadow dog' that stalked him.

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## **Information regarding the NEUFELD INSTITUTE, including our VIRTUAL CAMPUS and ONLINE COURSES**

The *Neufeld Institute* is a world-wide nonprofit organization created for the purpose of putting developmental science into the hands of those responsible for our children. Our way of doing this is through disseminating the more than twenty-five courses that have been developed by Dr. Gordon Neufeld that articulate the attachment-based developmental approach. We have about 25 faculty and over 200 course facilitators delivering our courses in more than 10 languages to parents, teachers and helping professionals.

Our online courses can be taken at anytime and from anywhere. Individuals can take these courses through scheduled online classes or through individual self-paced study. Groups of ten or more can arrange for their own customized support. The online courses consist of much more than the video-material: study guides, discussion forums, supplemental material, as well as access to all the resources on campus.

Our online courses are housed on a virtual campus that is filled with resources, support materials and discussion forums. The online campus is open to anyone who has taken one of our courses, whether it has been delivered live by Dr. Neufeld or a faculty member, as a video-course by a Neufeld Course Facilitator, or as an online campus course. Watching the DVDs alone does not count as a course. Campus membership is \$150 for the initial year and \$120 for renewal. Benefits of course membership include product discounts, access to the campus library, discussion forums, periodic Q&A classes with faculty, and much more. The most significant benefit for many campus members is having continued access to the particular course materials that correspond to the course or courses they have taken. Our campus typically is home to about 2500 subscribers and students on study-passes at any given time.

Our courses are aimed for parents, teachers and helping professionals. The *Power to Parent* series is typically the best way for parents to get immersed in the attachment-based developmental approach. This can be augmented by other courses such as *Discipline, Counterwill, Alpha Children, Anxiety, Aggression* or *Adolescence*, depending upon the particular problems they may be experiencing. Educators are more likely to start with the *Aggression* course or the *Teachability Factor* as well as the *Preschoolers* course or *Adolescence* course, depending upon the age of their students. This too can be augmented by the problem-centred courses.

Helping professionals will definitely want to take the *Attachment Puzzle, Transplanting Children, Science of Emotion*, and *Resilience* courses.

Serious students who want to master the attachment-based developmental paradigm in order for it to become their way of thinking as well as their modus operandi will want to take the three Neufeld Intensives: *Making Sense of Kids, The Separation Complex* and *Becoming Attached*. These Intensives lay the conceptual foundations of this approach in such a way that the application becomes universal.

Our Intensives open the door to further study and support for sharing the material. We also have a support program for fully credentialed helping professionals, as well as further training in implementing the attachment-based developmental paradigm in therapeutic practice.

**NOTE re Campus Membership Qualification:** This course qualifies you to register for campus membership. An annual subscription fee applies (see above). Please indicate that you have taken this course when you go to register for campus membership at our campus portal page - [campus.neufeldinstitute.org](http://campus.neufeldinstitute.org). You will be given access to the corresponding course on our campus (*Aggression* and/or *Bullying*), including recordings and support materials.

For further information about the Neufeld Institute, including its courses and programs,  
please consult our website - [NeufeldInstitute.org](http://NeufeldInstitute.org).