KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN A WOUNDING WORLD



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

Preserving and restoring our children's emotional health and well-being

OUR CHILDREN'S WORLD IS MORE WOUNDING

- less empathy today's youth are 40% less likely to show empathy than the youth of previous generations
- more peer interaction with peer interaction being the main source of wounding for children
- more bullying with bullying now becoming a common dynamic that the majority of children actually identify with (ie, the bystander effect)
- more exposed social networking now means that children are increasingly interacting in environments where meanness is pervasive and adults have little control

OUR CHILDREN ARE MORE WOUNDED

- more alarmed children's general anxiety is five to eight times more than in the 1950's and more than London children in the second world war
- more depressed with similar increase to anxiety over the last 70 years
- more suicidal with the suicide rate for children under age 15 having quadrupled since the 1950's

SESSION ONE

THE POWER TO WOUND



IS A MATTER OF ATTACHMENT

WHAT HURTS OUR FEELINGS
IS SENSING THAT WE
MATTER LESS TO ANOTHER
THAN THEY DO TO US

disowned unloved not attended to NEGLECTED not attended to NEGLECTED not listened to ANY.
IF not not important to
not a the Size according by
replaced by
not special to not special to not special to
NOT HELD ON TO BY BETRAYED too much

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- vulnerability increases with attachment -

THUS BACKING OUT of ATTACHMENT can REDUCE VULNERABILITY

eg, brain's defensive detachment, resistance to attaching, etc

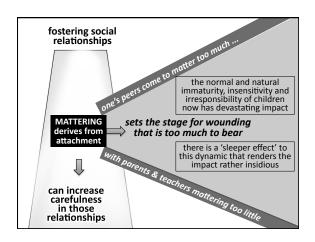
BUT attachment is our preeminent need

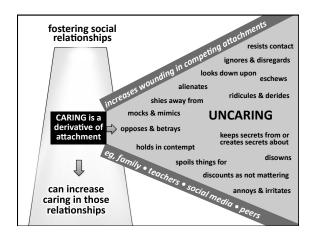
about ATTACHMENT

- is the term for the quest for **TOGETHERNESS**, our hunger for contact and connection, the drive for proximity, our need for love
- replaces **SURVIVAL NEEDS** in mammals, as attachment is the natural context in which **CARE** is provided and received
- is meant to be **HIERARCHICAL** in nature in order to facilitate caretaking, as opposed to social or horizontal as is typically assumed
- the capacity for **RELATIONSHIP** as the ability to 'hold on when apart' is **DEVELOPED** over stages if conditions are conducive (ie, warm invitation & unbroken connection), optimally in the first six years of life (being with -> being like -> belonging & loyalty -> significance -> emotional intimacy -> psychological intimacy) and later sexualized
- creates the EXTERNAL WOMB in which spontaneous development continues if conditions are conducive (maturation, not learning, is the key factor in the unfolding of human potential)

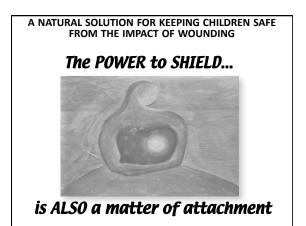
THE POWER TO WOUND IS A MATTER OF ATTACHMENT - vulnerability increases with attachment -	
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BUT attachment is our preeminent need	
EXPLAINS WHY PEER ORIENTATION creates a vulnerability	
too much to bear	
about peer orientation	
•	
 a phenomenon of attachment 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) 	
the problem with peer orientation	
the problem with peer orientation	
does not serve survival as children were not meant to take care of each other or be responsible for each other	
• pulls children out of orbit from around adults, destroying the context in which they were meant to be raised and educated	
,	
 renders adults increasingly ineffective and even powerless with regards to their responsibilities of parenting and teaching, as an adult's power comes from the attachments of their charges 	
leads to escalating polarization and tribalization, resulting in	
more children getting wounded and adults powerless to stop the wounding or protect from wounding	

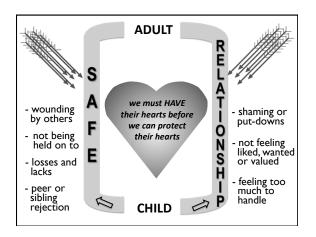
positive polarity	negative polarity
seeks to be with	shies away from
makes contact	resists contact
endears	alienates
looks up to	looks down upon
attends & listens to	ignores & disregards
imitates & emulates	mocks & mimics
possesses	disowns
is loyal to	opposes & betrays
holds dear	holds in contempt
attempts 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

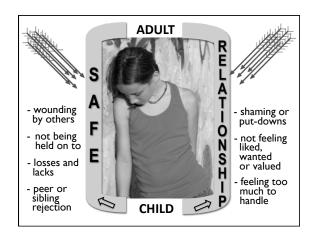


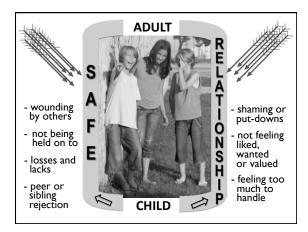


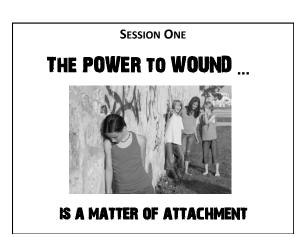
THE POWER TO WOUND IS A MATTER OF ATTACHMENT - vulnerability increases with attachment THUS BACKING OUT of ATTACHMENT can REDUCE VULNERABILITY eg, brain's defensive detachment, resistance to attaching, etc BUT attachment is our preeminent need EXPLAINS WHY PEER ORIENTATION creates a vulnerability too much to bear AND fostering social relationships can backfire over time SOLUTION cultivating SAFE attachments to caring adults which can then serve as SHIELDS to the wounding world











SESSION TWO

THE PAIN OF A WOUND ...



IS A MATTER OF FEELING

about FEELING

- feelings are best thought of as **FEEDBACK** coming back into the brain as to our inner state of being or as to how we are affected
- feelings are OPTIONAL we may or may not feel our hunger, pain, tiredness, hurt, aches, needs, lacks, motives, instincts or emotions at any given time, despite the fact that these states or dynamics may indeed exist (eg, feelings ≠ emotions)
- although feelings are essential to optimal functioning and the realization of potential, this feedback is the first to be BLOCKED when the brain is overwhelmed or having to perform in stressful or wounding situations
- when feelings are blocked or numbed, our inner state has not changed, only our **AWARENESS** of it
- it is the ACCESS to feelings in general, not the content of feeling, that is key to emotional health and well-being

THE PAIN OF A WOUND IS A MATTER OF FEELING

THUS BACKING OUT of FEELING can REDUCE FELT VULNERABILITY

eg, brain's inhibition of feelings, one's own flight from feeling, drugs and distractions, triggering the brain's defenses against feeling, not slowing down enough for feelings to catch up

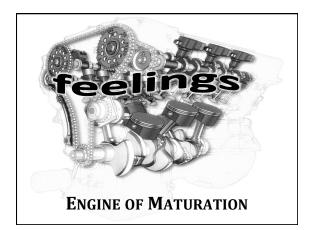
BUT feeling makes us fully human and humane

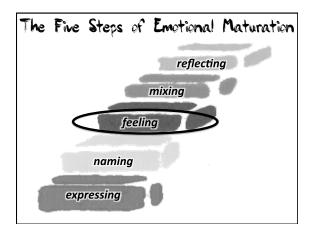
ie, drives maturation, optimizes functioning, fosters healing, builds resilience, drives adaptation, resolves impulsiveness

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For OPTIMAL functioning, we need to FEEL when

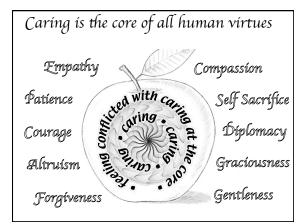
- feel hurt when wounded
- · feel tired when needing rest
- feel sorry when bad things happen
- feel hopeful when looking forward
- feel alarmed when facing separation
- feel caring when attached • feel shy when not attached
- feel rejected when not invited
- feel frustrated when thwarted
- feel angry when facing injustice
- feel desire when hungry for closeness | feel hungry when needing food
 - feel futility when it is encountered
 - feel conflicted when mixed emotions exist
 - feel satiated when attachment hunger is fulfilled
 - feel empty / lonely when apart from attachments
 - feel embarrassed when exposed in a negative light
 - feel shame when sensing something is wrong with self
 - feel cautious when sensing that something could go wrong





about Caring

- is the basic FEELING of attachment
- is the primary **PURPOSE** of attachment ie, to care for and to care about
- provides our primary MOTIVATION once attached to care for and to care about OR to be cared for and to be cared about
- provides the primary core CONTENT for feeling CONFLICTED and thus forwards the unfolding of true human potential



about Sadness

- is the basic **FEELING** of futility that if intense enough, can bring tears to the eyes
- is derived from the Latin word meaning 'turning point', signifying its PIVOTAL role in emotion and human suffering
- drives the emotional process of **ADAPTATION** to the circumstances and situations beyond our control
- is typically **CONFUSED** with emotional states (ie, despair depression, despondency) that are characterized by its lack
- has suffered a near total ECLIPSE in today's society by the prevailing paradigms and so remains the most maligned and MISUNDERSTOOD of all the feelings

The Singular Work of Sadness • RELIEF from the • RECOVERY of the capacity for fulfillment pressure of stuck emotion and happiness as well Encounters as the spontaneous with futility realization of potential • emotional RESET and **RENEWAL** as primal separation emotions • develops **RESILIENCE** are **RESOLVED** 0 as strength results 1 h from facing and feeling futility emotional REST from of futility futile work, rendering discipline effective, • RESTORES hope and enabling healing and perspective letting go drives the emotional process of ADAPTATION

emotional health = adapting to life circumstances • fails to transcend · fails to recover from Encounters loss and lack earning disabilities and handicaps with futility • fails to develop the ability to deal with · fails to realize limitations and restrictions, the futility of including not getting one's way controlling others • frustration turns fails to learn from foul and seeks to consequences or erupt in aggression the failures in life or self-attack · fails to adapt to • fails to develop the separation faced. the resilience to including mortality handle adversity

It is not how wounded We are that matters in the end, but how much we have been able to access the sadness that is responsible for our recovery.

THE PAIN OF A WOUND IS A MATTER OF FEELING

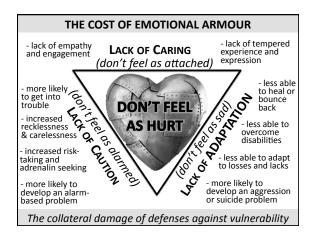
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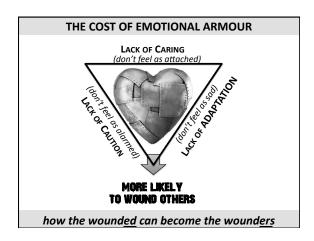
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BUT feeling makes us fully human and humane

ie, drives maturation, optimizes functioning, fosters healing, builds resilience, drives adaptation, resolves impulsiveness

EXPLAINS WHY the flight from feeling gets us into trouble





THE PAIN OF A WOUND IS A MATTER OF FEELING **THUS** BACKING OUT of FEELING can REDUCE FELT VULNERABILITY eg, brain's inhibition of feelings, one's own flight from feeling, drugs and distractions, triggering the brain's defenses against feeling, not slowing down enough for feelings to catch up **BUT** feeling makes us fully human and humane ie, drives maturation, optimizes functioning, fosters healing, builds resilience, drives adaptation, resolves impulsiveness **EXPLAINS WHY** the flight from feeling gets us into trouble **AND** countering feelings is a step in the wrong direction eg, medications that numb feelings, cut-it-out approaches, rational approaches, calm down approaches, self-regulation approaches, defining certain feelings as negative INSIDIOUS IMPACT OF WOUNDING more predisposed to more likely to ALARM problems ESS FEELIN **WOUND others** of all kinds more likely more likely to to have manifest an SUICIDAL AGGRESSION Egg. Ostress • hur inclinations problem more IMPULSIVE more DRUG and emotionally and addiction immature increased problems **BOREDOM EARLY WARNING SIGNS** OF WOUNDING TOO MUCH TO BEAR no longer talks about what distresses or hurt feelings no longer feels unsafe or alarmed no longer reads rejection or feels its sting no longer given to sadness and disappointment no longer feels as needy, empty, lonely or dependent no longer is as visibly affected by loss and lack better able to function or perform under duress

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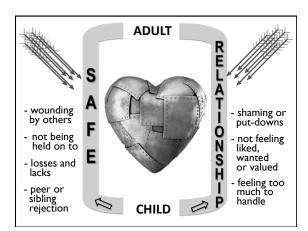
SOLUTION SAVE the FEELINGS by providing SAFE SANCTUARY

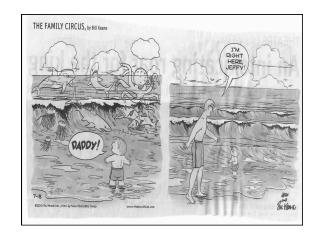
A NATURAL SOLUTION FOR KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE FROM THE IMPACT OF WOUNDING

Providing SANCTUARY for FEELINGS

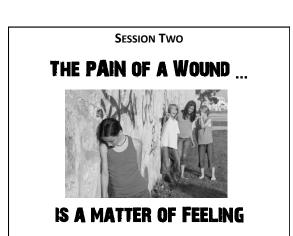


through SAFE RELATIONSHIPS and EMOTIONAL PLAYGROUNDS









SESSION THREE

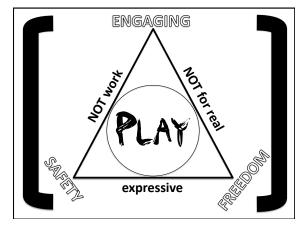
more on the Shielding & Sanctuary Approach



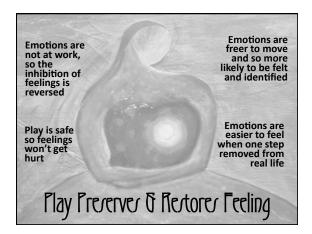
to keeping children safe from (the impact of) wounding

Two natural and powerful solutions to preserving and restoring a child's feelings when wounding circumstances cannot easily be altered:

- SAFE RELATIONSHIPS with caring adults
- access to EMOTIONAL PLAYGROUNDS







about EMOTIONAL PLAYGROUNDS

- any activity social or solitary in which emotions are at play or can be played out safely, without repercussion for relationships
- where play is expressive instead of stimulating in nature. Most screen play is emotionally evocative, not emotionally expressive.
- where play is freely entered and thus does not evoke any resistance or counterwill. One can never be forced to play.
- where one is free of the concept of performance or working towards an outcome
- emotional playgrounds can be anything in the imagination or in real life where emotions are at play and can be felt



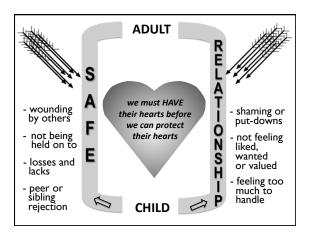


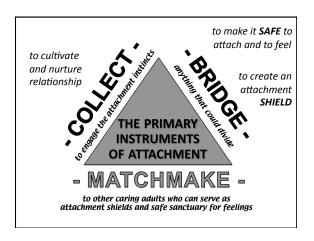
The HEALING POWER of EMOTIONAL PLAY

- $\boldsymbol{\cdot}$ brings much needed REST to the emotional system
- $\boldsymbol{\cdot}$ provides a chance for feelings to $\boldsymbol{\mathsf{BOUNCE}}$ $\boldsymbol{\mathsf{BACK}}$ or catch up
- $\boldsymbol{\cdot}$ can SOFTEN the defenses and help get TEARS unstuck
- allows for unresolved emotions to be expressed, greatly **RELIEVING** emotional pressure, OR to be finally **RESOLVED** through feeling the sadness more easily accessed in play
- does NOT require expertise or any knowledge about how play works or the awareness of the inner dynamics of the child.
 PLAY DOES ALL THE WORK.

Matchmake the wounded and the vulnerable to emotional playgrounds that can work for them

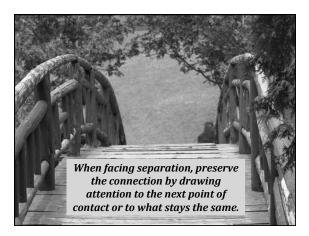
- help to find their **BENT** for safe emotional expression poetry, art, singing, drama, choir, story-telling, music-making, dance, movement, composition, writing, drawing, painting, etc
- explore their **PLAY HISTORY** to find playgrounds where their emotions used to come out to play
- the best emotional playground is one that is not dependent upon the cooperation of others - including teachers - and so should be somewhat SOLITARY in nature as well as easily accessed
- create GENERAL EMOTIONAL PLAYGROUNDS where possible out of the performing and expressive arts that can be easily accessed through school, both on and off schedule

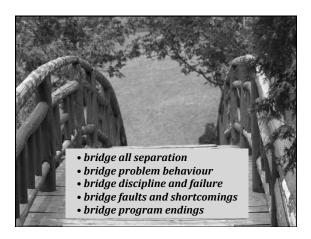




Cultivating a SAFE RELATIONSHIP:

- COLLECT the child or student at the beginning of each day and at least a few times throughout the day, where there is no apparent reason to engage other than to affirm the relationship
- use the engaging power of **PLAY** if necessary to jump-start a relationship (especially if there is reticence to attach)
- position oneself as an **ANSWER** by orienting the child or student and providing a 'touch of proximity' to hold on to
- find some way of conveying the **INVITATION** to exist in one's presence very few will turn this invitation down
- take care to **BRIDGE** anything that would threaten the union or togetherness of the relationship





In BRIDGING
what could divide,
we not only address the
vulnerability of attachment
thus making it safer to attach,
but also turn a potential sword into
a SHIELD against the wounding world.

MATCHMAKE with sh	ielding &	sanctuary i	in mind
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- to a caring adult in their existing village of attachment who may need to be reminded of the critical role they can serve in a relative's life
- to a willing colleague or staff member who has a heart for the child and would be willing to put some effort into cultivating a relationship
- to colleagues and coaches in the expressive and performing arts who can use their medium for cultivating relationships and creating emotional playgrounds
- to caring 'alpha' coaches and tutors in sports as well as academics who can take them under their wings
- to caring adults who are responsible for them so that they are able to deliver their care
- to surrogate 'grandparent' types who can come in to play games, do jig-saw puzzles, teach knitting or crafts, play music together, etc

Creating spaces for feelings to bounce back

- for 'end-of-the-day' or 'après wounding' experiences -
- will often happen quite spontaneously if there is space in the context of a trusted caring relationship that is warm, inviting and distraction free
- it is more difficult to create these spaces in a world of non-stop activity and accessible distractions via digital devices
- the experience of feelings catching up or bouncing back can be quite noisy, unsettling and emotionally messy
- it is important that all problem-solving be suspended as this will interfere with what needs to happen
- should follow regular stressful times like school and work, as well as stressful interactions, performances, and times of separation
- it is best to create regular 'landing' or 'reconnection' rituals
- we cannot make this happen in ourselves or in others, only provide a warm and inviting space for it

Review: the POWER of SAFE RELATIONSHIP

- attachment is the most powerful force in the universe, and its the child's or student's attachment to the adult that does all the work
- one doesn't have to actually DO anything to serve this role it is who we ARE to the child or student that does the work
- the more we matter to them, the less their peers will matter in general, and the less their wounders will matter in particular, thus diluting the emotional impact of wounding
- their attachment to us not only SHIELDS their heart but will enable feelings to BOUNCE BACK, even if the feelings are not shared with us. It is not what necessarily happens IN the relationship with the adult but BECAUSE of the relationship that is important.
- SAFE RELATIONSHIP serves as a **SANCTUARY of SAFETY** in a wounding world, providing much rest and relief and even a reason for living when required

SESSION THREE

more on the Shielding & Sanctuary Approach



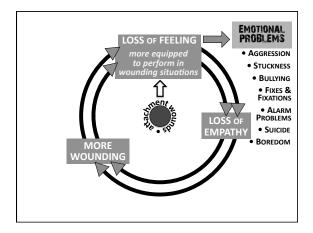
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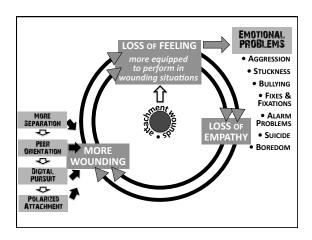
SESSION FOUR

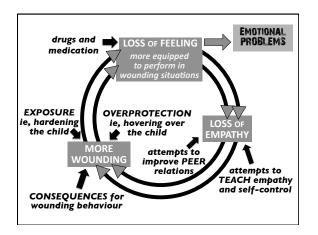
COMPARING APPROACHES

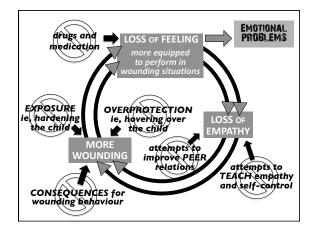


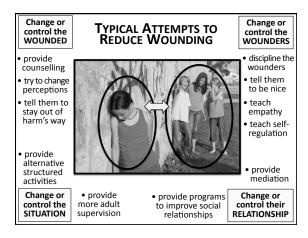
TO KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

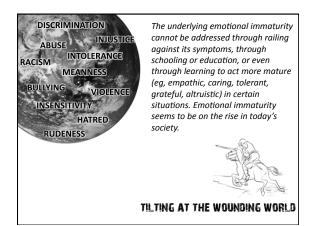














Discrimination is deeply rooted in the polarization of attachment in the immature. Attempting to alter the targets of discrimination (no matter how well-meaning) does not address the underlying cause and so it keeps on surfacing in different forms. It is ironic that in this age of globalization, tribalization and polarization are on the rise among children and in society at large.

TILTING AT THE WOUNDING WORLD



The increasing mean streak (exploiting the vulnerable and taking advantage of the weak) in today's society is rooted in deep defenses against caring and depending, which culonnot be addressed by anti-bullying programs or empathy training programs. Empathy training can actually backfire once the child becomes defended against depending and caring.





The increasing aggression and violence (including suicide) in today's society is rooted in escalating attachment frustration and the failure to adapt to life's circumstances. These problems cannot be addressed without reducing attachment frustration and increasing access to the feelings of sadness that would foster the adaptation required.

TILTING AT THE WOUNDING WORLD



The lack of kindness in today's society can also result from the loss of our $\'{collecting'}$ $\it{rituals}$, $\it{where interaction}$ could not proceed unless the attachment instincts were first engaged (thus predisposing the other to care). This attachment etiquette is increasingly rare in today's role-based society and almost non-existent in the digital world.



TILTING AT THE WOUNDING WORLD

providing SHIELDING & SANCTUARY



- SHIELDING with safe attachments to caring adults
- providing safe SANCTUARY for feelings

TILTING AT A WOUNDING WORLD

providing VS

- **crusades** against bullying, meanness, discrimination, violence, insensitivity, injustice, intolerance
- prosocial programs aimed at children being nice and kind
- discipline approaches aimed at teaching a lesson, socialization approaches aimed at declaring hurtful interaction unacceptable, and legal approaches punishing the violators
- skill-based programs attempting to teach empathy, self-control, emotional literacy, gratitude, etc
- **value-based** programs aiming at instilling prosocial values

SHIELDING & SANCTUARY

via RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS

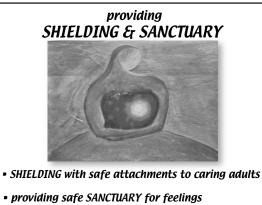
.. cultivating safe relationships between children and caring adults where emotional armour is not required

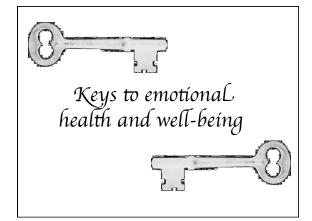
via EMOTIONAL **PLAYGROUNDS**

.. setting the stage for engaging in emotional playgrounds so that feelings can bounce back

TILTING AT A	providing
WOUNDING WORLD	SHIELDING & SANCTUARY
tends to be more DIRECT and SYMPTOM -focused	INDIRECT and DEVELOPMENTAL in nature
focused on BEHAVIOUR	focused on FEELINGS as key to
as the derivative of learning,	emotional health & well-being and
thinking, skills or values	driving maturation & behaviour
PROGRAM or ROLE based as the context for involvement	RELATIONAL-BASED as the context for involvement
primarily SOCIAL in nature,	HIERARCHICAL in nature with
focusing on the interaction	adults bearing responsibility for
BETWEEN children	the children in their care
employs the WORK drive	engages the PLAY drive to effect
to get desired outcomes	deep transformative change
STRATEGY & SCRIPT based, assuming transferability	INSIGHT-based until supporting rituals and routines are established







REVIEW: the role of ATTACHMENT in WOUNDING

- 1. Attachment renders us VULNERABLE to getting hurt.
- 2. The **NATURE** of attachment determines what can wound as well as the depth of a wound
- 3. Backing out of attachment at least when exclusively dependent upon those attachments comes at a great **COST** as attachment is our preeminent need.
- 4. Forming competing working attachments with those not responsible for one's care (ie, one's peers when a child) **SETS THE STAGE** for a vulnerability too much to bear.
- 5. Wounding in working attachments can paradoxically **INCREASE** the intensity of attachment, especially if it is fairly **EXCLUSIVE** in nature, thus setting the stage for a 'perfect storm'.
- 6. Our best hope for shielding children and for saving their feelings is SAFE ATTACHMENTS WITH CARING ADULTS.

REVIEW: the role of FEELING in WOUNDING

- 1. The pain and **SUFFERING** of wound is a matter of feeling.
- Backing out of feeling at least more than temporarily comes at a great COST to optimal functioning and human potential.
- The FLIGHT FROM FEELING including triggering the brain's defenses against feeling – is epidemic among children, and accounts for the lasting impact from wounding, including the possibility of turning into one who wounds.
- 4. The learning & medical approaches that **COUNTER OR NUMB** feelings, are taking a step in the wrong direction.
- FEELINGS NEED TO BE SAVED in order to prevent wounding from taking a dreadful toll. The loss of sadness is especially tragic as it is responsible for healing and recovery.
- Our best hope for saving their feelings is indirectly through the two natural sanctuaries for feelings - SAFE ATTACHMENTS WITH CARING ADULTS and EMOTIONAL PLAYGROUNDS.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN A WOUNDING WORLD



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A PRIMER FOR PROGRAMS WITH A SHIELDING & SANCTUARY APPROACH

BASIC LEVEL - GRASS ROOTS INITIATIVES

STEP 1 - GATHER YOUR PEOPLE

You only need 3-4 like-minded people who share a common vision to get a 'program' started. No funding or permissions should be required at this level. When scouting for your team, you may want to consider non-teaching staff, as well as parents who are willing to be involved.

STEP 2 – ORGANIZE YOUR MISSION

You will probably want to meet at least once a month to support each other as well as share stories and challenges.

STEP 3 – MAKE YOUR LIST

.. of students most in need of shielding and sanctuary. Don't forget to include the 'enigmas', the emotionally armored, the most peer oriented, and those who seem to have fallen through the attachment cracks.

STEP 4 – 'ADOPT' A STUDENT

... or two or three. Remember, one doesn't have to take on the responsibility of shielding personally, but of matchmaking to caring adults who can serve this function. Parents can create music ensembles, drama and theatre clubs, expressive art clubs, poetry and story clubs, etc.

A PRIMER FOR PROGRAMS WITH A SHIELDING & SANCTUARY APPROACH

ADVANCED LEVELS THROUGH THE NEUFELD INSTITUTE

• PROGRAM SUPPORT – Professional Development &/or Consults

- as funding, interest and resources permit, we can help organizers to create a custom program of studies (online courses, seminars and webinars) for staff, supporting professionals, and parents to provide the insight needed to properly support the *Keeping Our Children Safe* initiatives and projects. We can also provide consultations aimed at making sense of individual students as a basis for supporting them.

• <u>SCHOOL CULTURE</u> – Creating Supporting Rituals & Emotional Playgrounds

The focus of this level is the formation of a school-based focus group with the mission of creating a school culture of:

a) supporting rituals of connection (collecting, bridging & matchmaking) to foster student-teacher relationships as well as childparent and school-family relationships b) supporting emotional playgrounds. If the Neufeld Institute is

b) supporting emotional playgrounds. If the Neufeld Institute is involved, we can share our resources as well as our awareness of what other schools are doing in this regard.