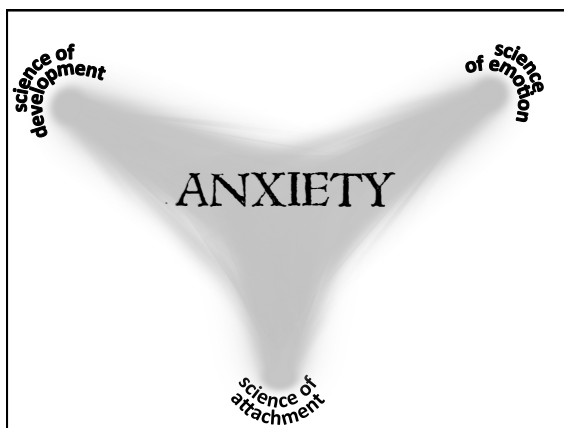


**Addressing the emotional roots of
ANXIETY & AGITATION**

- an attachment-based developmental approach -

The material for this seminar is excerpted from the Neufeld Institute
courses on *Making Sense of Anxiety* and the *Alarm Spectrum*

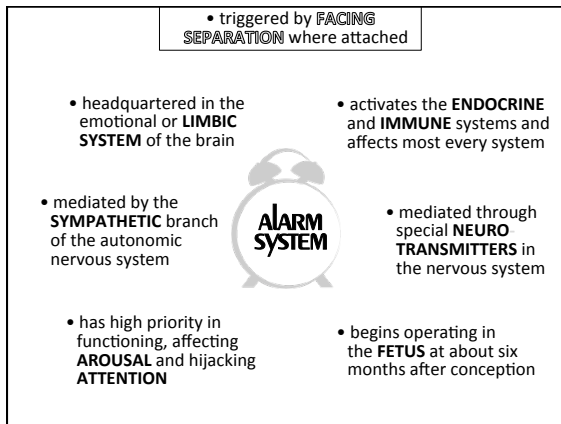
Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D.
Developmental & Clinical Psychologist
Vancouver, Canada

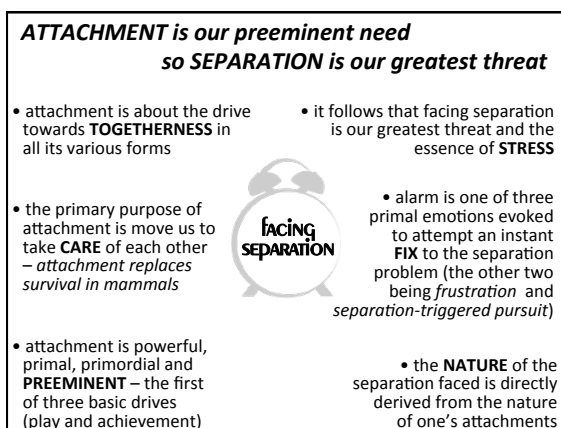


What is anxiety?

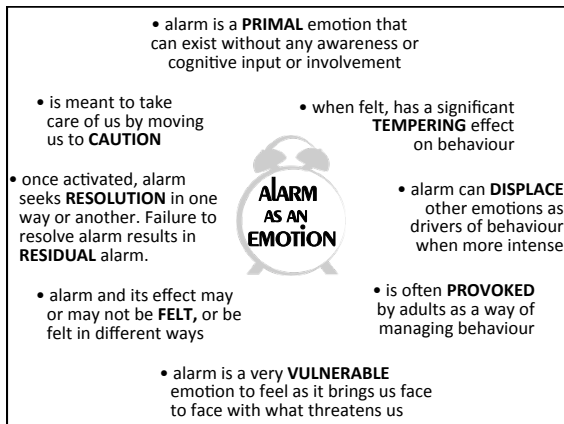
*... a vague sense of unsafety and unease,
characterized by apprehension and restlessness*

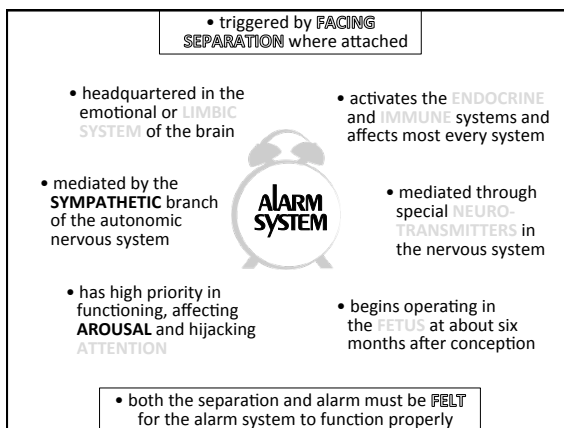
*... one's subjective experience of an activated ALARM
system*

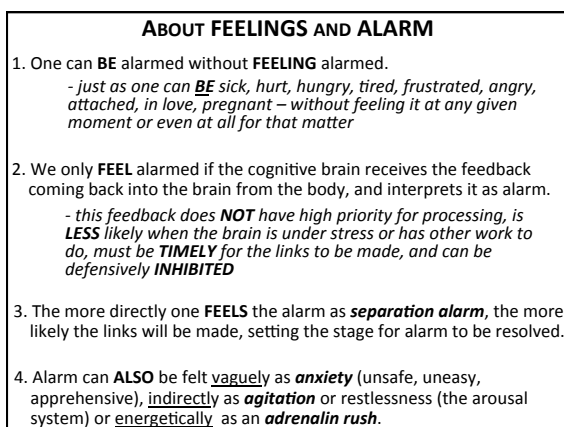


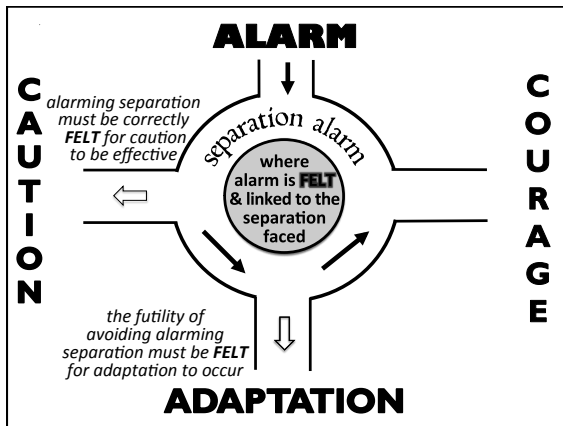












ALARMING SEPARATION WHERE AVOIDANCE IS FUTILE

- bedtime, loss and mortality
- separation resulting from going to school, moving, divorce of parents, parents working, hospitalization, etc, etc
- the dawning realization of the inevitability of loss and losing
- always being wanted, chosen and preferred by those whom we want, choose or prefer
- being liked by everyone or avoiding rejection
- the lack of invitation to exist in another's presence
- the loss of affection or significance to another
- securing the contact and closeness in an attachment

facing SEPARATION

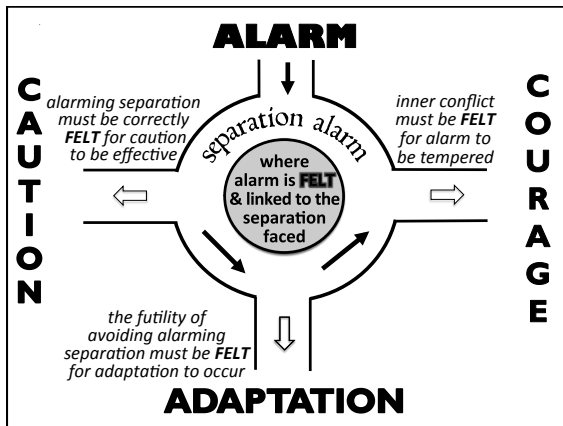
To attach is to face separation, but we must attach and so facing separation cannot ever be truly avoided.

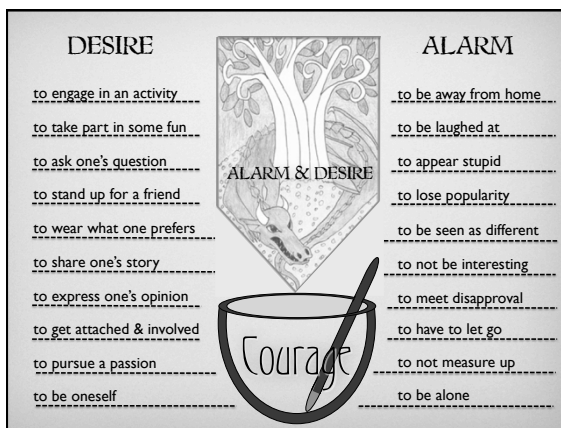
Adapting to Alarming Separation that Cannot be Avoided

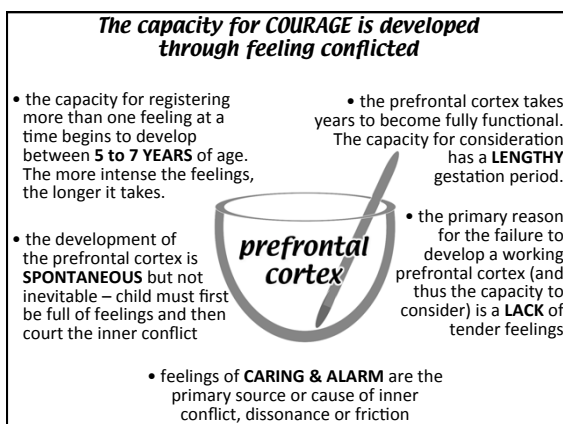
- **RESOLVES** alarm, providing some **REST** and **RELIEF** from the primal emotion
- develops the **RESILIENCE** to handle a world full of separation alarm
- enables **RECOVERY** from alarming events and alarming attachments

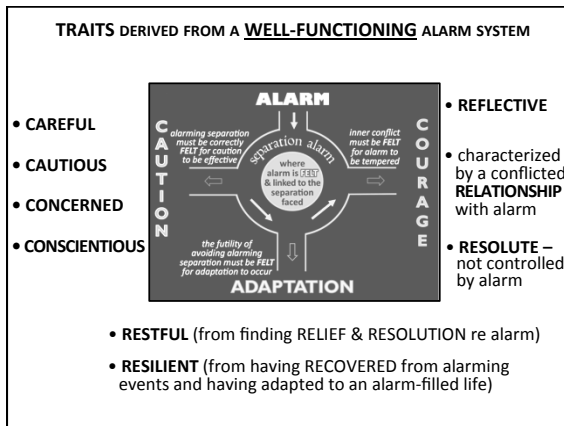
Encounters with futility

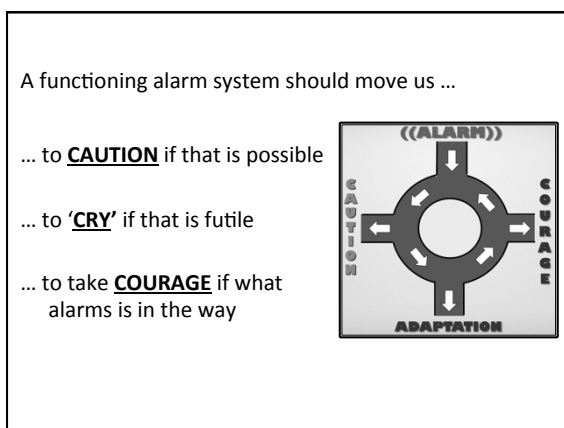
feelings of futility

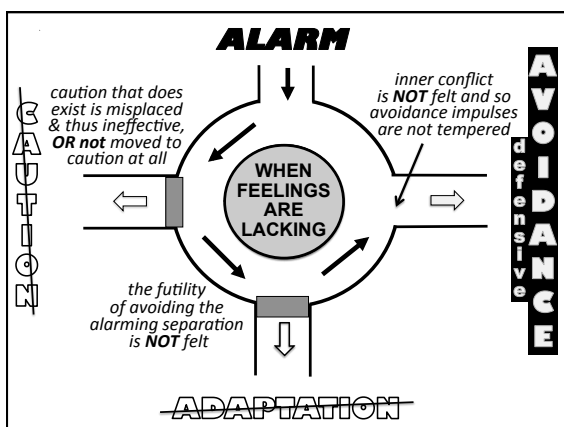












ALARM-BASED DEFENSIVE AVOIDANCE**LEVEL 1 – ANXIETY PROBLEMS**

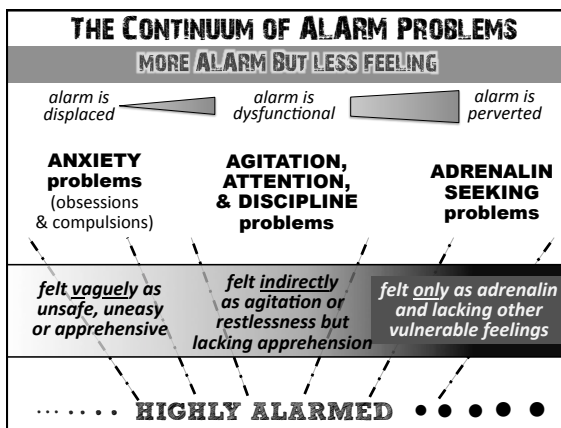
- *FLIGHT from alarming things and situations* – involves obsessions and compulsions, which can include phobias and paranoia, as well as a preoccupation with staying out of trouble

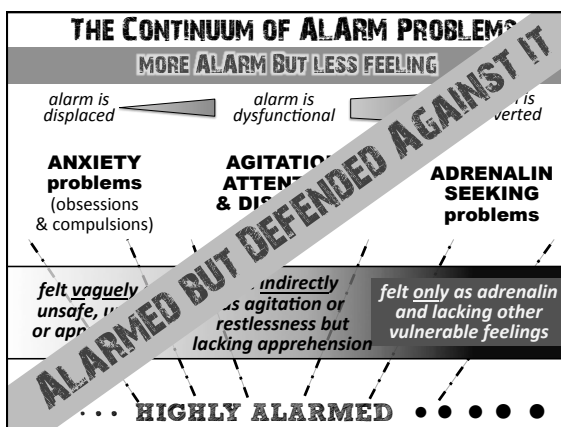
LEVEL 2 – AGITATION & ATTENTION PROBLEMS

- *FLIGHT from apprehension and 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

- *FLIGHT from any sense of vulnerability whatsoever* – the adrenaline 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





A CONTINUUM OF DEFENDEDNESS	
ANXIETY - based	The defensive inhibition of feelings is sufficient enough to interfere with linking the feelings of alarm to the separation faced, but NOT enough to keep from feeling nervous. The result is anxiety .
AGITATION - based	The defensive inhibition of feelings is significant enough to keep from feeling nervous but NOT enough to keep from feeling agitated or restless. In addition, defensiveness in attention results in a blindness to that which truly alarms. The result is agitation without apprehension plus significant deficits in attention .
ADRENALIN -based	The defensive inhibition of feelings is severe enough to keep from feeling nervous, agitated or vulnerable, resulting in feeling ONLY the chemistry of alarm. The result is being attracted to what alarms .

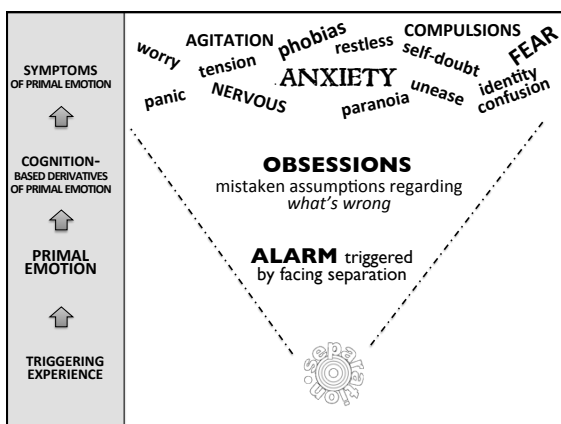
What is anxiety?

... a vague sense of unsafety and unease, characterized by apprehension and restlessness

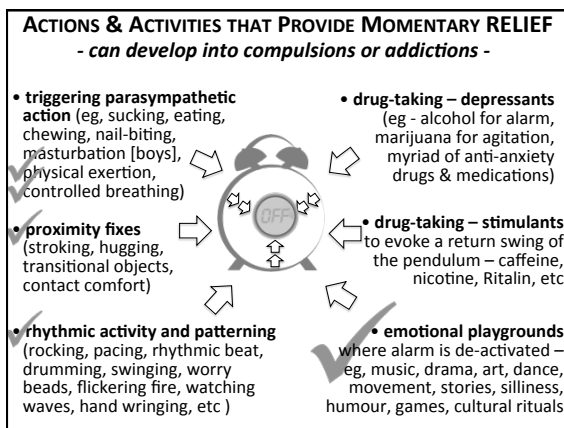
... one's subjective experience of an activated ALARM system

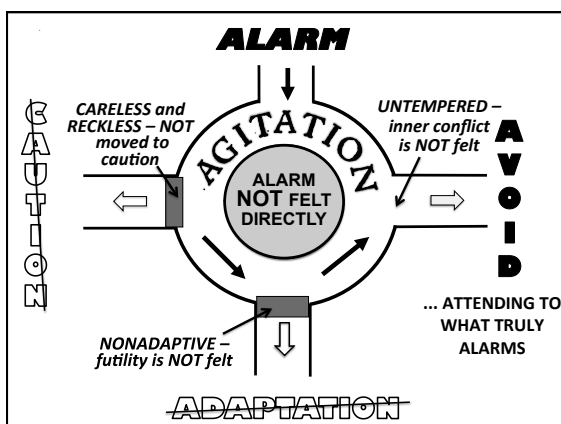
... a response to facing separation where the FEELINGS that link the alarm with the separation faced are missing

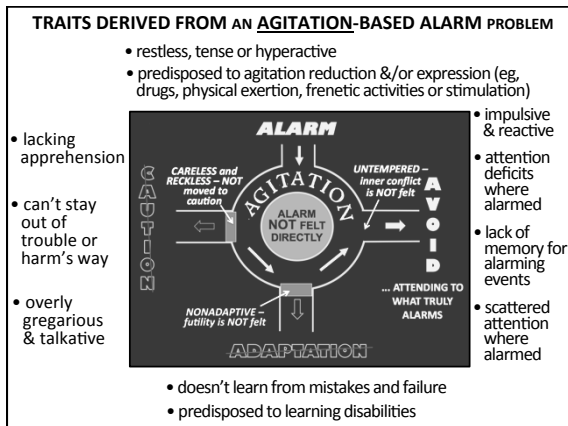
... a state of alarm-driven AVOIDANCE characterized by a FLIGHT from what our thinking brain has mistakenly assumed is the reason for alarm

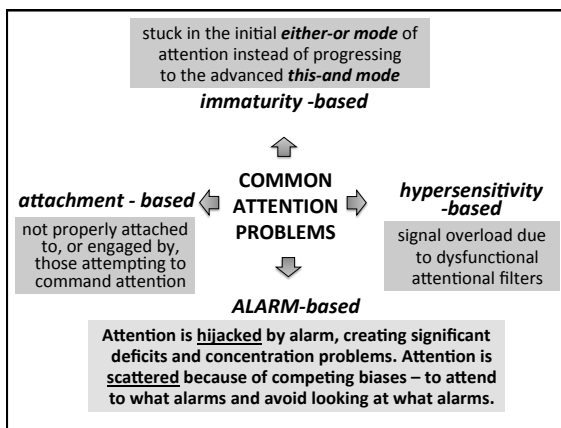


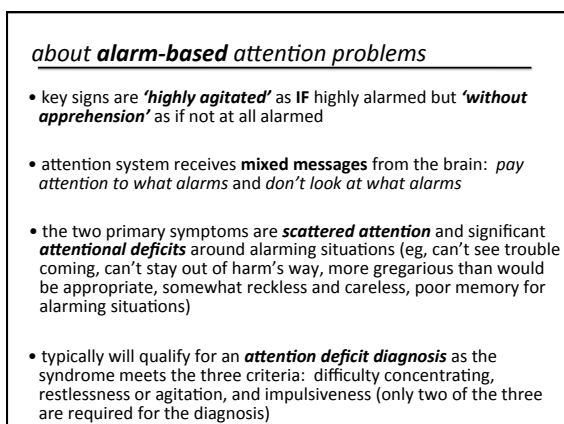
IRRATIONAL OBSESSIONS <i>(mistakes regarding 'what's wrong')</i>	RESULTING COMPULSIONS <i>(to avoid or reduce alarm)</i>
• someone or something is out to hurt me or to get me	⇒ work at avoiding the monsters and scary creatures, avoid getting conned, uncover people's plots
• something is wrong with my health or my functioning or is going to make me sick	⇒ work at keeping things clean, at not getting sick, at avoiding germs, at avoiding contamination
• something is out of order or out of place	⇒ work at putting things in order and their place
• something is wrong with my body or with how I look	⇒ work at improving one's appearance or at changing one's shape
• some places or situations are dangerous or unsafe	⇒ work at avoiding that which makes one feel unsafe (ie, phobias)
• something has been left undone	⇒ work at remembering to complete one's tasks
• one is 'too much' or 'not enough'	⇒ work at editing or enhancing, diminishing or improving oneself

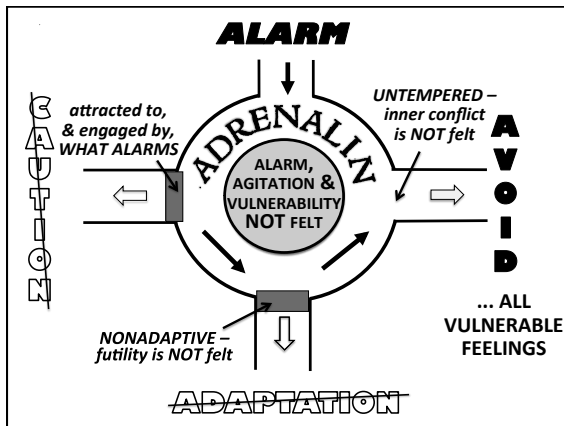












TRAITS DERIVED FROM AN ADRENALIN-BASED ALARM PROBLEM

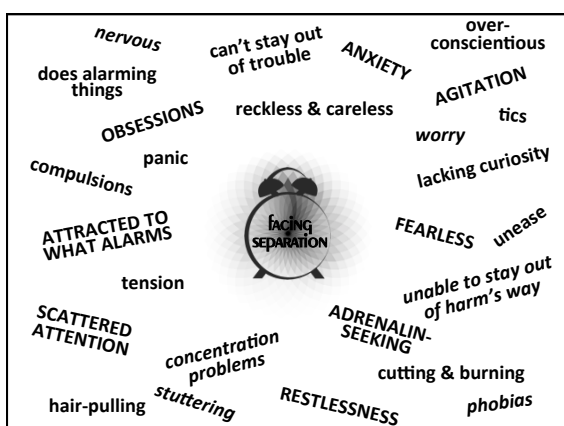
- does alarming things (eg, risk-taking, cutting, burning)
- seems relatively unaffected by what should alarm

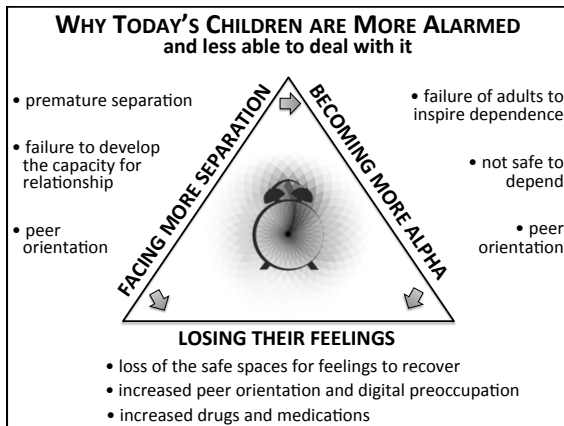
- **FEARLESS**
- risk-taking
- can become a trouble-maker
- can lack a conscience
- more able to engage in 'cold' caution

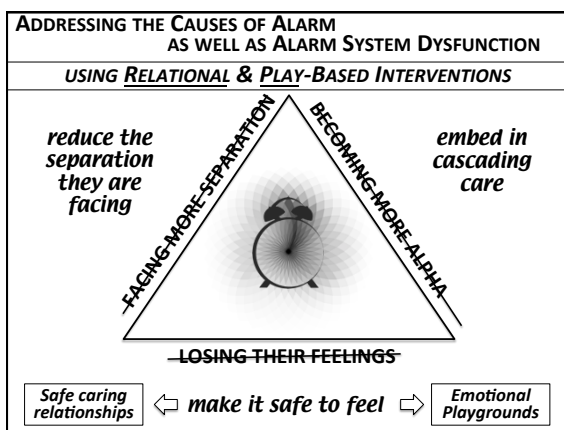
- **unreflective**
- **unconflicted**
- **inconsiderate**
- **unfeeling**

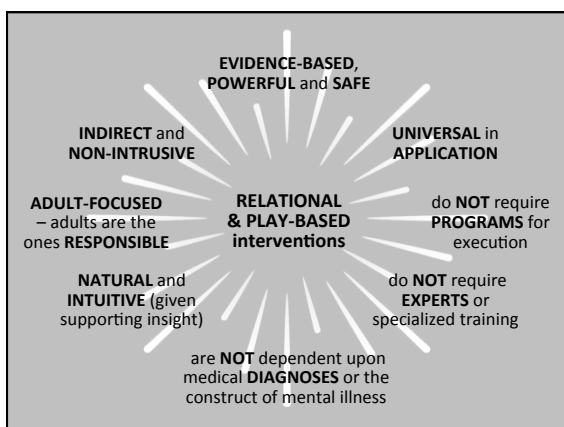
• **TEARLESS** – lacking in sadness and devoid of grief

• adversity hardens rather than softens







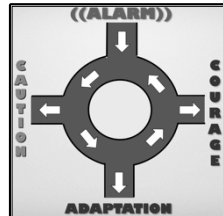


The ultimate challenge in addressing alarm problems is to **reduce the separation** being faced and **restore the feelings** of separation and alarm, to the point where the alarm system can more easily move the child ...

... to **CAUTION** if that is possible

... to **'CRY'** if that is futile

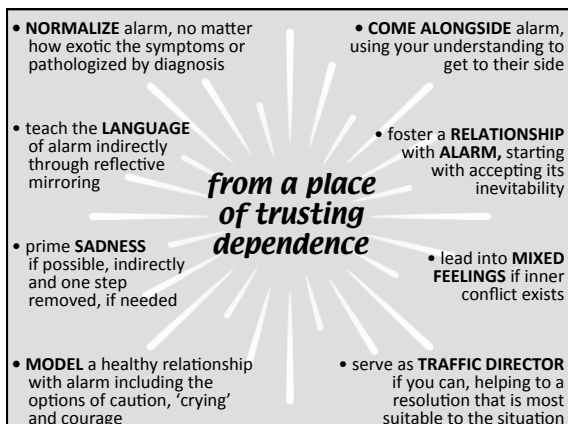
... to take **COURAGE** if what alarms is in the way



Embed in Cascading Care

- to **ADDRESS** peer orientation and alpha stuckness in order to reverse their impact on alarm
 - to create a **REFUGE** as well as a safe place for feelings to **BOUNCE BACK**
 - to **EMPOWER** adults to help cultivate a child's relationship with alarm and resolve it via caution or sadness or courage
 - to give adults more **CONTROL** over the wounding and alarming social interaction between children
 - to **SHIELD** a child against the impact of alarming interaction
 - taking care of younger children provides a suitable & non-alarming **OUTLET** for children's own ALPHA instincts
- hierarchical relationships with caring adults as well as younger children in need of their care and protection -*






Addressing ALARM through PLAY



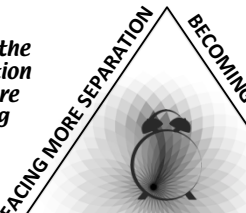
- playfully alarming DEVELOPS the alarm system and BUILDS tolerance of alarm
- play provides temporary REST and RELIEF from alarm
- RE-PLAY of alarming scenarios can lead to eventual resolution
- alarm can be MASTERED in play
- play can provide SAFE DISCHARGE for alarm-fueled compulsions, agitation and adrenalin-seeking
- SADNESS is much easier accessed in the play mode
- play is the perfect scenario for the 'DRAGON & TREASURE' experience
- obsessions and compulsions can be DEFUSED in play
- ATTENTION problems are best addressed through play

Play Holds the Most Promise



- PLAY is the best CONTEXT for the attention system to develop, repair, or find 'work-arounds'
- attachment and alarm are at REST, allowing attention some free time to play
- defensive filters are SUSPENDED in the play mode, stopping the mixed messages in alarm-based attention problems
- CURIOUSITY is the best ANTIDOTE to any attention problem, as it can pull the child through in their area of interest
- attention is DRAWN rather than driven in play, allowing for optimal functioning
- play facilitates prefrontal cortex development, resolving impulsiveness and MATURING the attention system

**ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF ALARM
AS WELL AS ALARM SYSTEM DYSFUNCTION
USING RELATIONAL & PLAY-BASED INTERVENTIONS**



reduce the separation they are facing

FACING MORE SEPARATION

BECOMING MORE ALPHA

embed in cascading care

LOSING THEIR FEELINGS

make it safe for children to feel

**Troubled & disordered attachments
and the current
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**

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

THE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS
- some facts and figures -

- school-aged children suffered an approximate 40% increase in depression, anxiety, irritability and attention problems over the span of the pandemic
- during the pandemic, adolescent psych wards were filled, children's help lines were overwhelmed, and self-reports of anxiety and depression were unprecedented
- suicides and cutting was increasing before the pandemic and continued to do so through the pandemic
- some studies reported that up to 70% of children experienced harm to their mental health when isolated from their peers (in contrast to about 20% who thrived when sent home from school)
- most experts assumed that being socially isolated from peers must be bad for the mental health of children and so prescribed more peer interaction as the antidote

science of development

science of emotion

making sense of the

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

science of attachment

**ARGUMENT for MENTAL HEALTH
being ROOTED in ATTACHMENT**

THEORY:

- togetherness is our preeminent drive and as such, has the most profound and widespread impact on emotional, mental and developmental processes and dynamics
- togetherness replaces survival as a drive in evolution, as survival becomes a natural outcome of togetherness
- the 'trouble spots' in our brain have evolved from emotion extending the reach of instinct - attachment being our primary drive

EVIDENCE:

- the most consistent and widespread finding is that those embedded in a context of caring attachments are found to be less at risk for mental health issues and problems



NATURE'S TEMPLATE FOR GIVING AND RECEIVING ...

... signals ... care

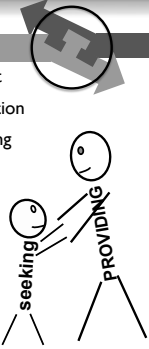
The diagram shows a central box with two stick figures. The figure on the left is labeled "dependent" and the figure on the right is labeled "ALPHA". To the left of the box is a tree, and to the right is a fetus. Above the box, the text "... signals" is on the left and "... care" is on the right. Below the box, the text "Attachments are specifically structured for giving & receiving CARE" is written.

Attachments are specifically structured for giving & receiving CARE

SEEKING CARE
dependent instincts


- for an invitation to exist
- for contact and connection
- for sameness & belonging
- for safety and comfort
- to get one's bearings
- for warmth & love
- for recognition
- for significance
- for understanding
- for a relational 'home'
- for a sense of togetherness

PROVIDING CARE
alpha instincts




We are meant to fit together in hierarchical attachment arrangements of CASCADING CARE

a **NATURAL** arrangement in harmony with the dynamics of attachment and the principles of development

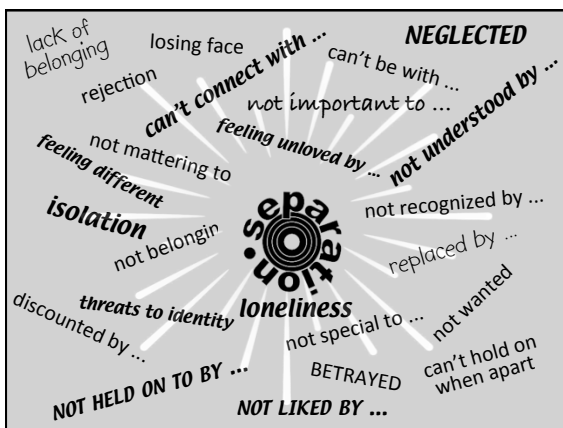


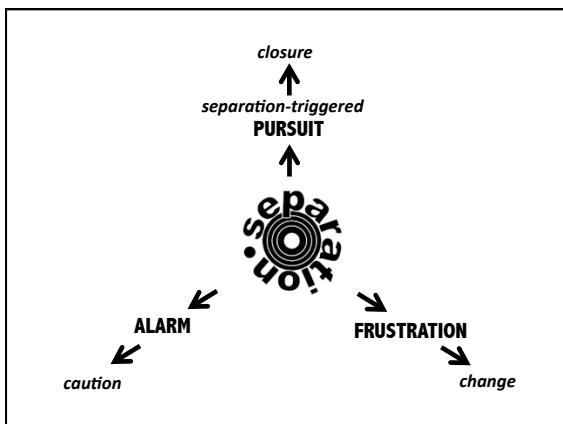
as opposed to contrived arrangements based on social roles, gender stereotypes, prevailing assumptions of equality, or particular dynamics between parents and children or between partners of a couple or in friendship

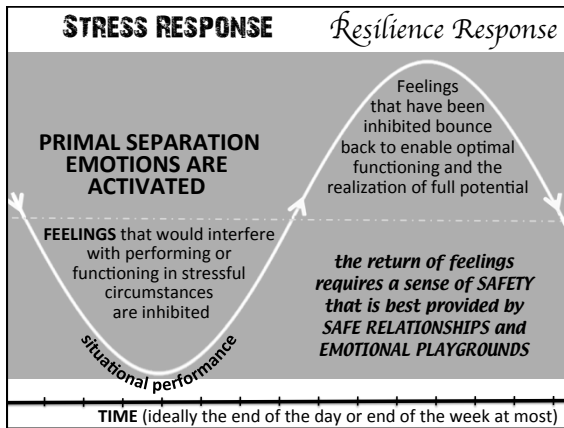
Our objective should be to embed in CASCADING CARE
as opposed to pushing for independence or promoting self-care



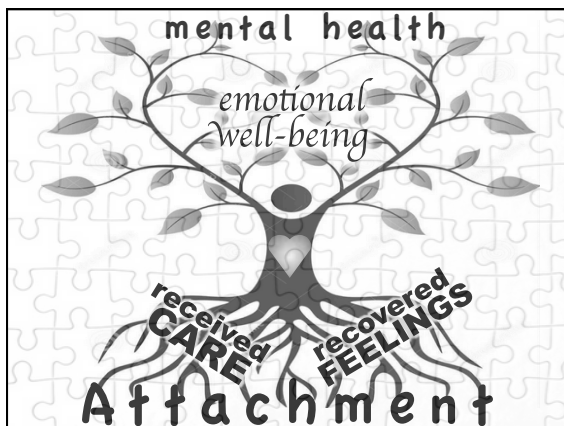












EMOTION IS AT THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- emotion is in charge of managing the brain, including development, priorities, attention, and memory
- the stress response is emotional in nature
- emotional processes precede and undergird mental processes – in evolution, in development, and in everyday functioning
- almost all troubled thinking and behaviour (including diagnoses) are found to have roots in emotion
- most problems in learning, attention, and maturation are rooted in emotion
- adaptation (including healing & recovery) is an emotional process
- mental processes are primarily derivatives of emotion, rather than the other way around
- emotions need to be resolved to reduce symptoms as well as to effect deep and lasting change

EMOTION NEEDS TO MATTER TO US

EMOTION IS STILL DISCOUNTED & ECLIPSED

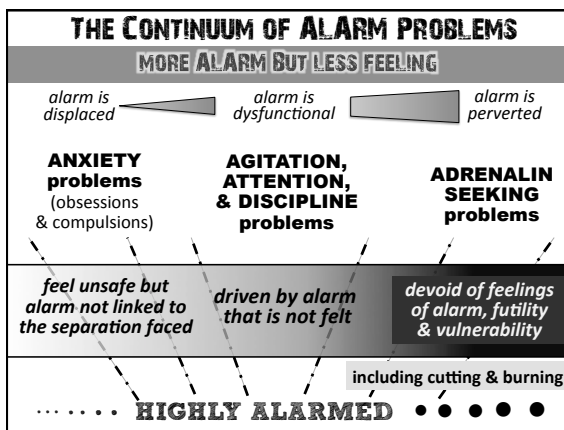
- STILL MISREAD & MISINTERPRETED
- STILL CONSIDERED INFERIOR TO REASON
- MOST MEDICATIONS NUMB EMOTION WITH LITTLE PROTEST FROM SO-CALLED EXPERTS
- MORE CONCERNED WITH MANAGING EMOTIONS THAN UNDERSTANDING THEM
- MEDICAL DIAGNOSES STILL ECLIPSE THE ROLE OF EMOTION
- WOMEN & CHILDREN STILL BLAMED FOR BEING TOO EMOTIONAL
- MORE CONCERNED WITH 'CALMING DOWN' THAN MAKING ROOM TO BE 'STIRRED UP'
- STILL ECLIPSED BY THEIR EFFECTS ON COGNITION & BEHAVIOUR

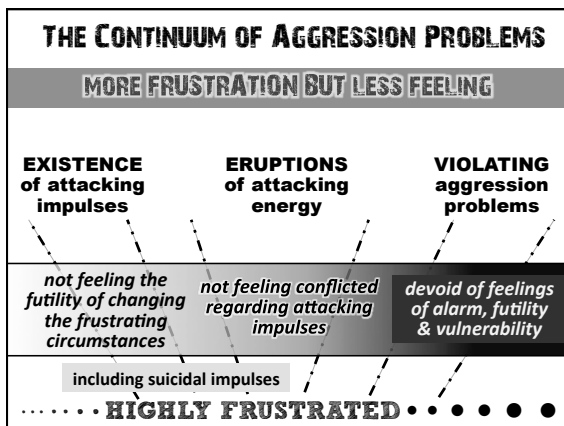
KEY INSIGHTS REGARDING EMOTION

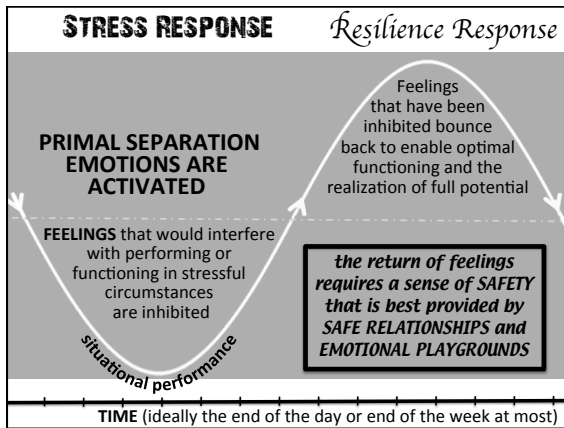
- there is **PURPOSE** to emotion - it is Nature's way of moving us and taking care of us
- each emotion has specific **WORK** to do (ie, emotions are Nature's workforce)
- emotions need sufficient **REST** in order to do be effective in their work
- emotions seek **RELIEF** through expression but this will be thwarted if working attachments are threatened
- emotions need to be **RESOLVED** in some way or another or they will get stuck
- the emotional system needs to **DEVELOP** for optimal functioning but can only do so if conditions are conducive
- the emotional system begins in the '**EITHER OR**' mode and is meant to mature into '**THIS AND**' functioning where inner conflict is felt
- emotions need to be **FELT** for optimal functioning and for children to flourish

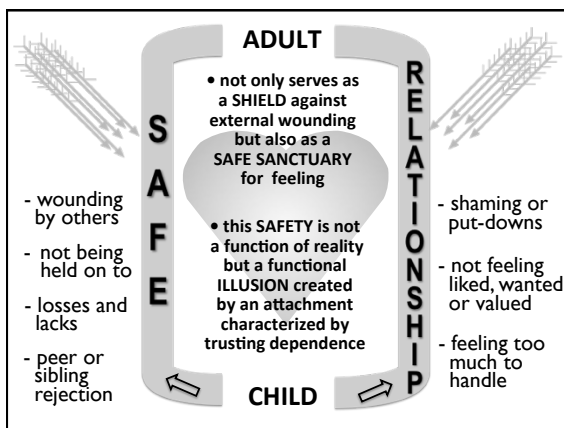
EMOTION NEEDS TO MATTER TO US

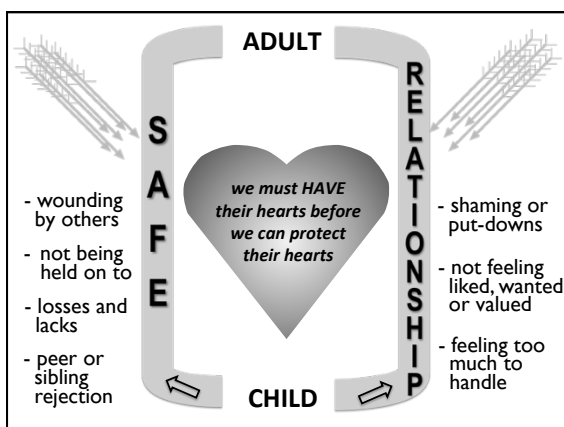


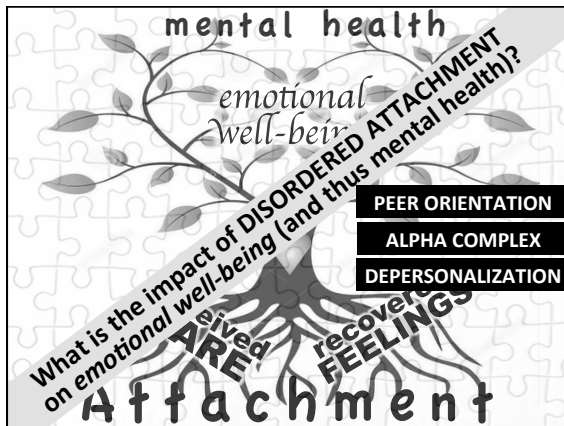


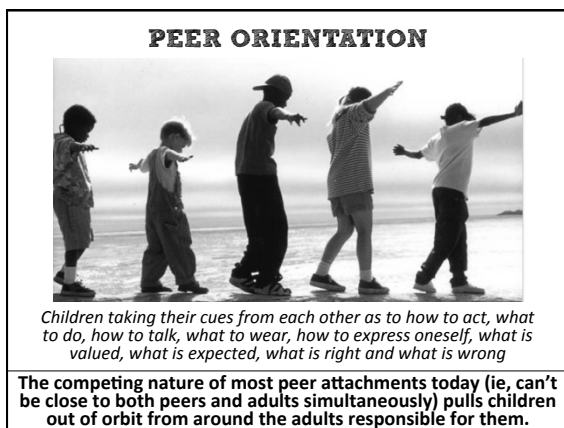










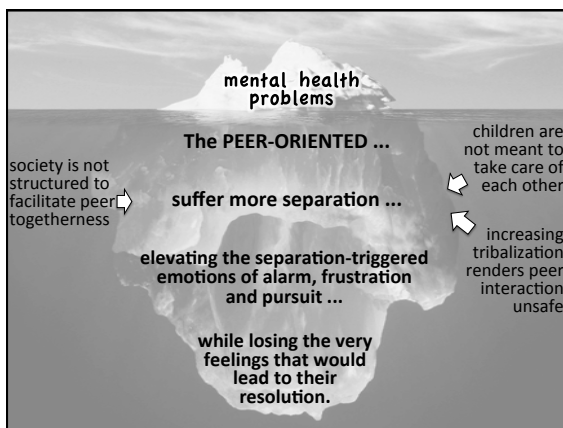


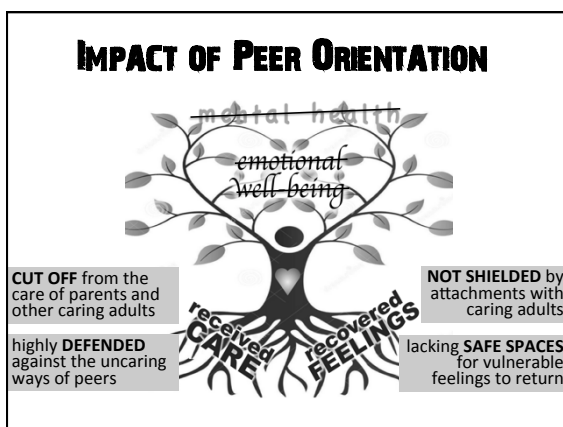
THE PROBLEMS WITH PEER ORIENTATION

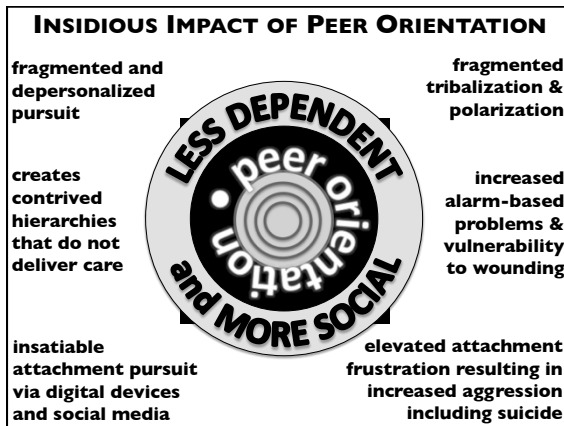
- does **NOT** serve survival as children were not meant to take care of each other
- **destroys** the natural context for raising & educating children
- robs adults of the **power** they need to parent, teach and treat
- the more peers matter, the more separation to be faced, resulting in escalating **emotional distress**
- **robs** children of the shielding and protection they need to live in an wounding world

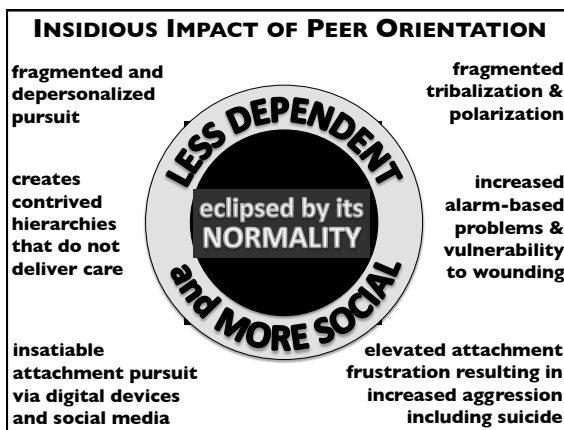
- breeds **ALPHA** children, with all the problems that ensue
- fuels a preoccupation with digital devices and **social media**, which further compete with family
- is not conducive to **feeling**, as the vulnerability is too much to bear
- can result in chaotic polarization & **tribalization** which in turn can create a 'lord of the flies' scenario

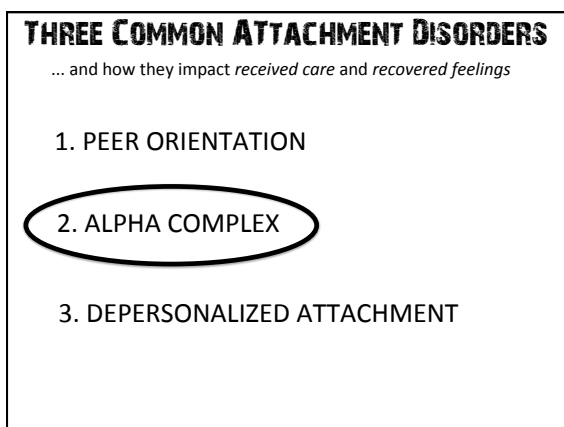
positive polarity	negative polarity
seeks to be with	shies away from
makes contact	resists contact
endears	alienates
looks up to	looks down upon
attends & listens to	ignores & disregards
imitates & emulates	mocks & mimics
possesses	disowns
is loyal to	opposes & betrays
holds dear	holds in contempt
attempts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











Common manifestations of the DISPLACEMENT instinct

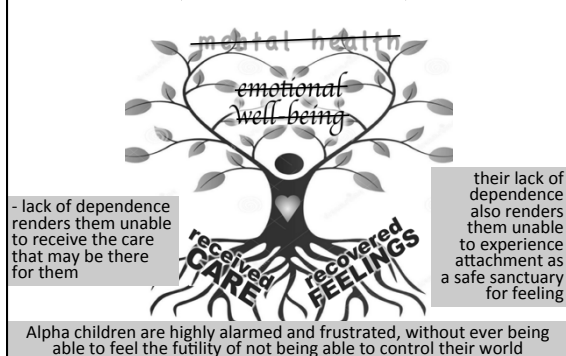
- to take charge, to take over, to take the lead
- to command attention, to take centre stage
- to talk louder, to talk over, to talk for another
- to be first, to be the best, to be on the top
- to demand deference, to give the orders, to take command
- to give the directions, to provide the meanings
- to trump interaction, to have the last word
- to be in the know / to be the most knowledgeable

Common manifestations of the DISPLACEMENT instinct

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an alpha complex has formed when these attributes characterize their personality or their relationships with adults who care for them

IMPACT OF AN ALPHA COMPLEX

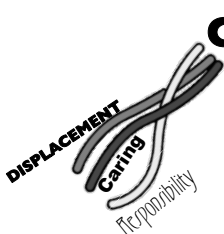


ALPHA CHILDREN ARE MORE PRONE TO ...

<p>ALARM-BASED PROBLEMS - anxiety, agitation, & adrenalin seeking (cannot make oneself feel safe)</p> <p>ATTENTION ISSUES - cannot command their attention / elevated alarm scatters attention / must be the centre of attention</p> <p>FRUSTRATION ISSUES - aggression, violence and self-attack including suicide</p> <p>EATING ISSUES - anorexia & food issues of all kinds</p>	<p>The alpha problem has been totally ECLIPSED by misinterpreting alpha as 'independence', by our aversion to the construct of 'hierarchy', by our lack of understanding of the nature & purpose of attachment, and by the lack of any supporting language – rendering the symptoms unexplained and resulting in a futile battle against them</p>	<p>LEARNING PROBLEMS - literacy problems, dysfunction due to learning disabilities, difficulties with seeking assistance</p> <p>COMPLIANCE ISSUES - resistance & oppositionality</p> <p>ENTITLEMENT ISSUES - self-evident to them that they are most important</p> <p>PEER ISSUES - conflict, bullying, dominance, and supremacy issues</p>
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How **FEELINGS** develop the *Alpha Caring Response*

"neurons that FIRE together WIRE together"



CARING ALPHA

when devoid of feelings of caring and responsibility as well as mixed feelings, alpha can evolve into alpha perversions including bullying

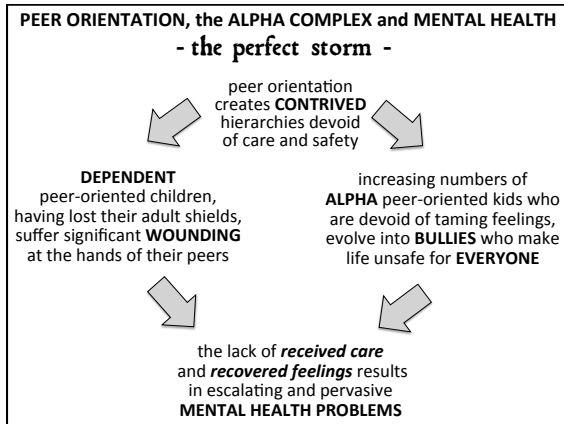
the making of the bully response

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

to perceived vulnerability, neediness, threat or weakness

- to assert dominance by exploiting vulnerability -

Renders today's children increasingly **UNSAFE** and highly **ALARMED**, whether peer-oriented or not



- THREE COMMON ATTACHMENT DISORDERS**
... and how they impact *received care* and *recovered feelings*
1. PEER ORIENTATION
 2. ALPHA COMPLEX
 3. DEPERSONALIZED ATTACHMENT

The Depersonalization & Fragmentation of Pursuit
the **DEPERSONALIZATION** of attachment

the PURSUIT	of	PROXIMITY	with a	PERSON
ATTRACTING	the	ATTENTION	of	<u>Sarah</u>
WINNING	the	APPROVAL	of	<u>Matthew</u>
MEASURING UP	to be	VALUED	by	<u>Genevieve</u>
DEMANDING	to be	SPECIAL	to	<u>Rorie</u>
IMPRESSING	to be	ESTEEMED	by	<u>Scott</u>
HELPING	to be	IMPORTANT	to	<u>Ms. Korn</u>
BEING NICE	to be	LIKED	by	<u>Kendall</u>
BEING CHARMING	to be	LOVED	by	<u>Sherry</u>
SEEKING STATUS	to be	RECOGNIZED	by	<u>Uncle Jack</u>

The Depersonalization & Fragmentation of Pursuit the DEPERS

the PURSUIT

ATTRACTING
WINNING
MEASURING UP
DEMANDING
IMPRESSING
HELPING
BEING NICE
BEING CHARMING
SEEKING STATUS

Depersonalized attachment is not able to deliver care nor serve to recover feelings and so, like peer orientation and an alpha complex, is dysfunctional and disordered.

Not only is depersonalized attachment fundamentally disordered, but it competes with existing and potential attachments that could actually deliver care as well as provide safe sanctuary for feelings




THE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

- some facts and figures -

- school-aged children suffered an approximate 40% increase in depression, anxiety, irritability and attention problems over the span of the pandemic
- during the pandemic, adolescent psych wards were filled, children's help lines were overwhelmed, and self-reports of anxiety and depression were unprecedented
- suicides and cutting was increasing before the pandemic and continued to do so through the pandemic
- some studies reported that up to 70% of children experienced harm to their mental health when isolated from their peers (in contrast to about 20% who thrived when sent home from school)
- most experts assumed that being socially isolated from peers must be bad for the mental health of children and so prescribed more peer interaction as the antidote

Allowing the popular construct of 'mental health',
thrice removed from a working reality
- a euphemised spin on mental illness which is
itself an instrumental analogy vs evidence-based reality,
and an indirect 'fruit' versus useful point of intervention -
to thus **ECLIPSE** its developmental **ROOTS**
in **ATTACHMENT** and **EMOTION**



MISDIRECTING and thus **EXHAUSTING** our
valuable resources and energy with regards to the
emotional well-being of our beloved children and youth.

DIAGNOSING SYNDROMES AND BATTLING AGAINST SYMPTOMS	vs <i>Cultivating the Conditions for Emotional Well-Being</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 - mental health advocacy and literacy programs as well as self-care programs 	<p>RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS WITH CARING ADULTS</p> <p><i>... that can deliver CARE and provide safe sanctuary for FEELING</i></p> <p>PLAYGROUNDS for EMOTION</p> <p><i>... so that emotion can find REST, working attachments can be PROTECTED, vulnerable feelings can be RECOVERED, and the CARE that has been delivered via safe attachments to caring adults can be FELT</i></p>
