

# *working with* **STUCK KIDS**

Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D.

*Clinical & Developmental Psychologist*  
Vancouver, Canada

## **A JACK HIROSE SEMINAR**

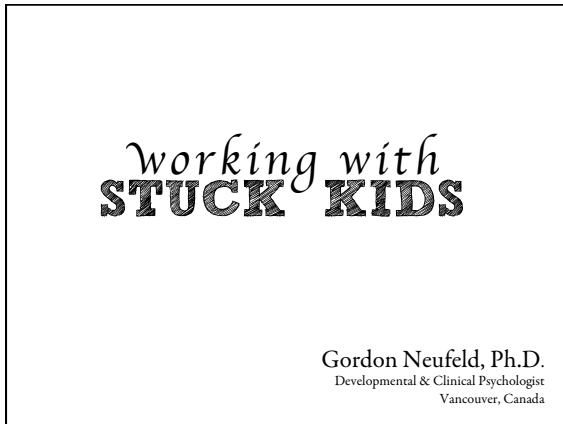
Calgary, Alberta

May 10, 2024

Copyright 2024 Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D. All rights reserved.

The handout is intended for registered participants of this seminar only.  
Please do not duplicate this document without permission. For more  
information regarding the Neufeld Institute or Dr. Neufeld and his work,  
please consult the website.

**[www.neufeldinstitute.org](http://www.neufeldinstitute.org)**



---

---

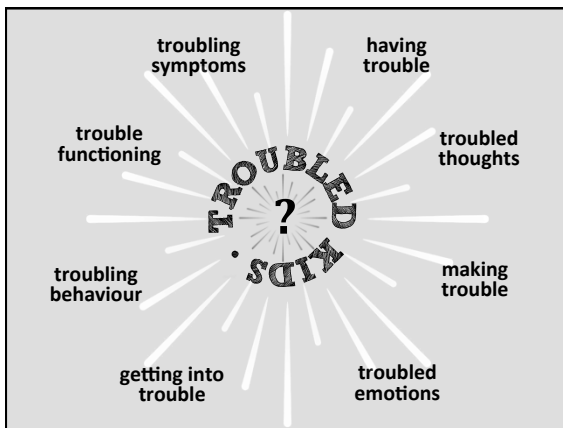
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---



---

---

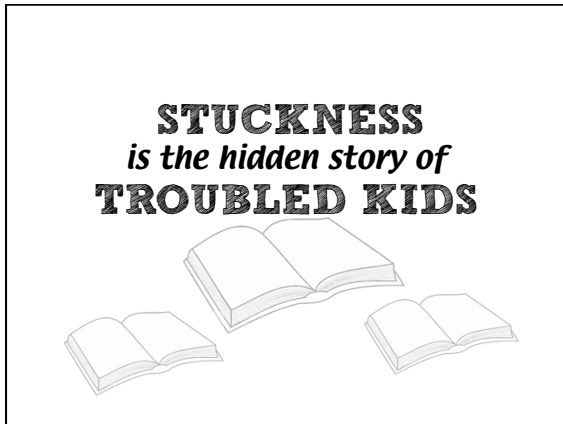
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

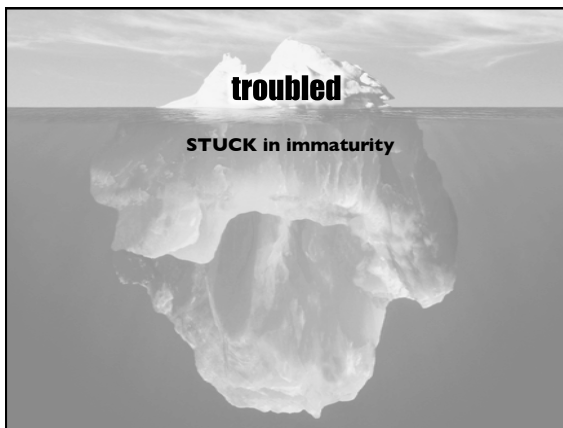
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

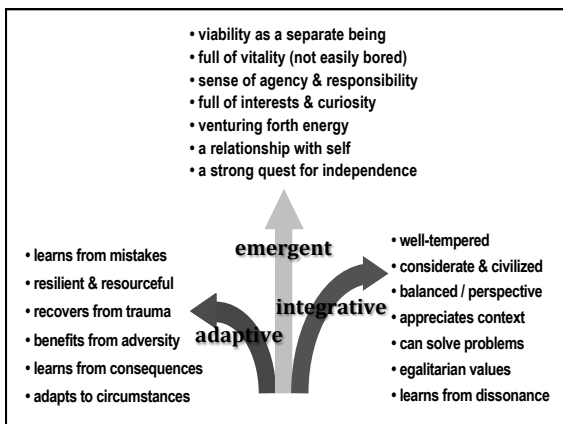
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

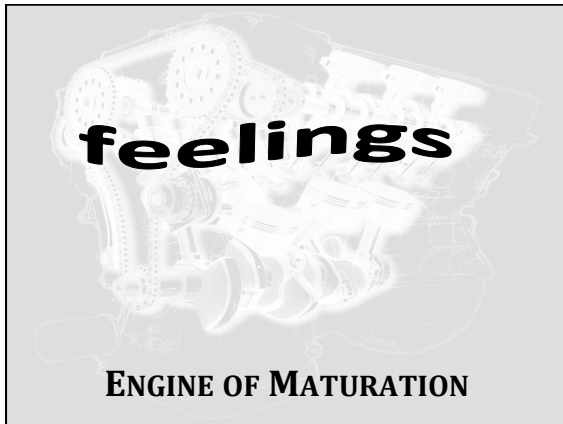
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

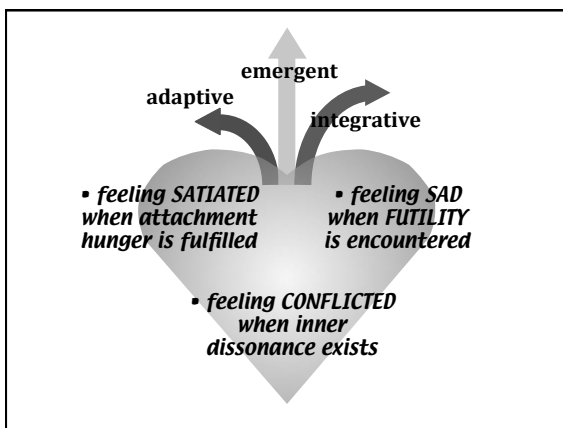
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

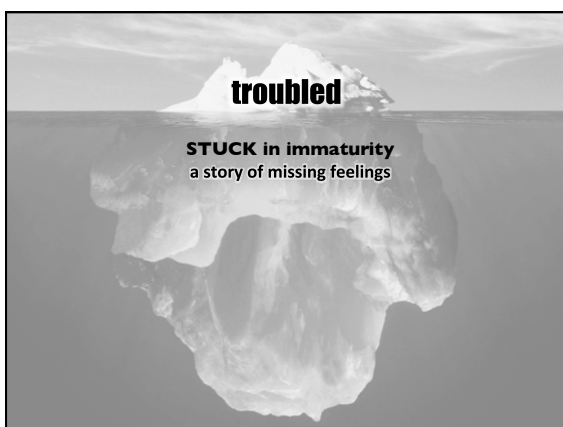
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

---

---

---

---

---



*Why would feelings  
be missing?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**STRESS RESPONSE**

Feelings that would interfere  
with performing or  
functioning in stressful  
circumstances  
are inhibited

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

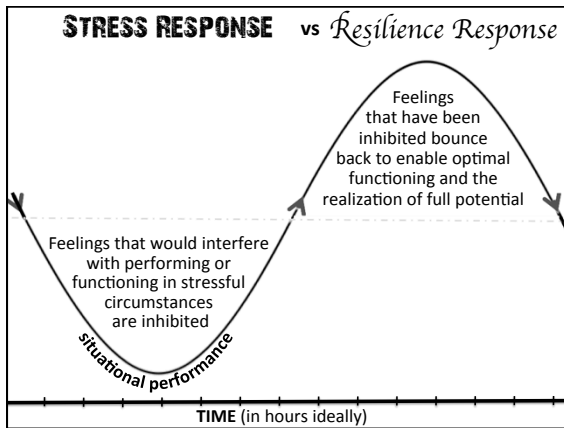
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

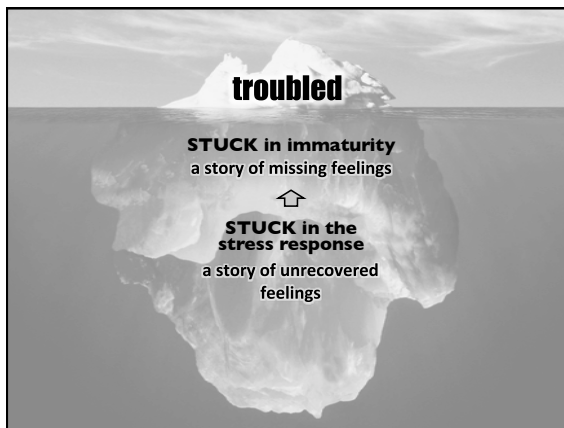
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***What causes stress?***

---

---

---

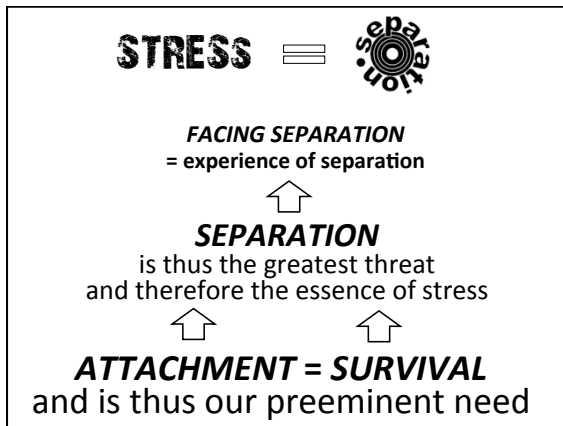
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

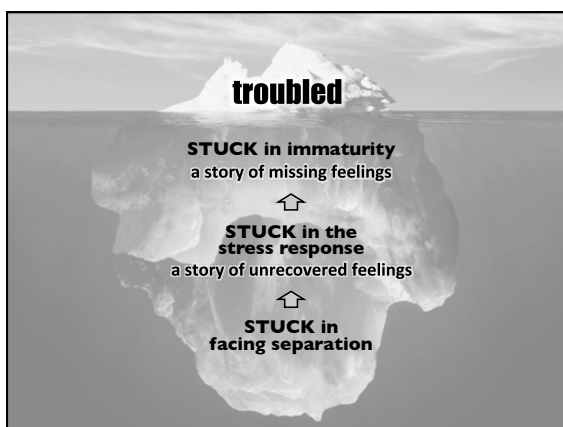
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***What happens  
when facing  
separation?***

---

---

---

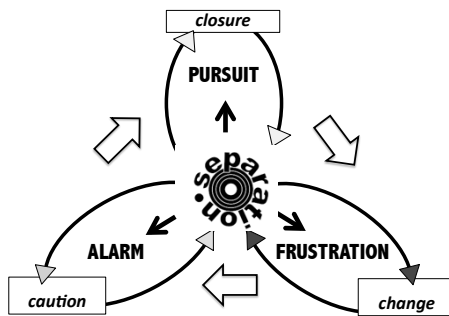
---

---

---

---

**EMOTIONAL SOLUTIONS TO FACING SEPARATION**




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**troubled**

**STUCK in immaturity**  
a story of missing feelings



**STUCK in the  
stress response**  
a story of unrecovered feelings



**STUCK in  
facing separation**  
a story of  
elevated emotion

---

---

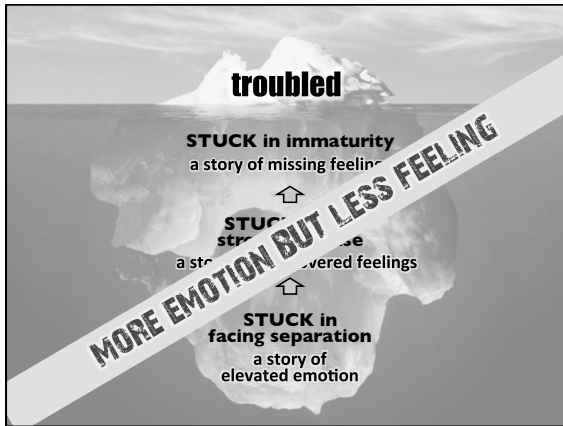
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

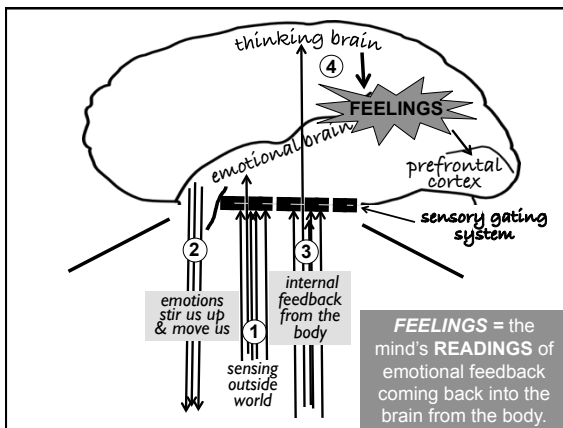
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

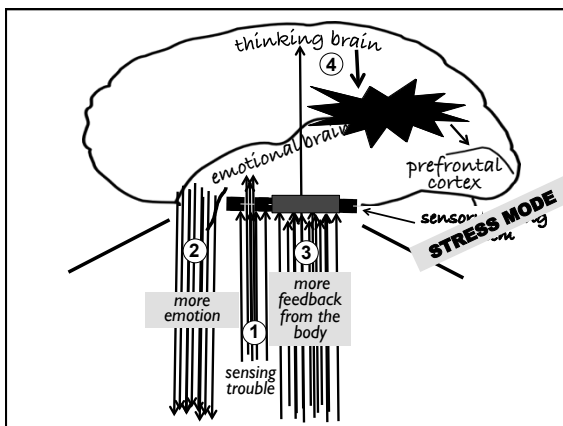
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

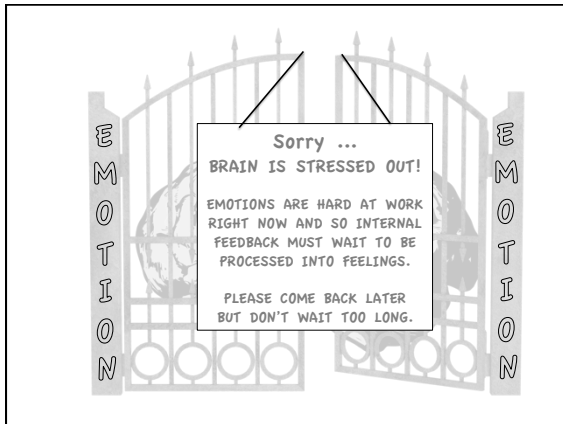
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

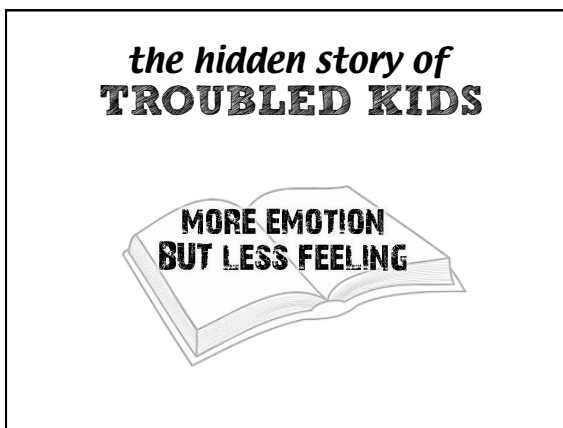
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

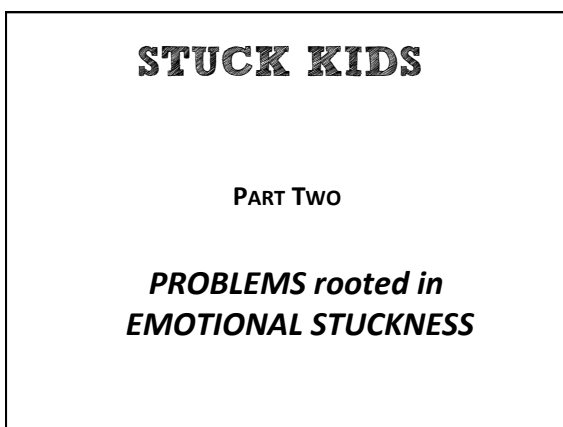
---

---

---

---

---



---

---

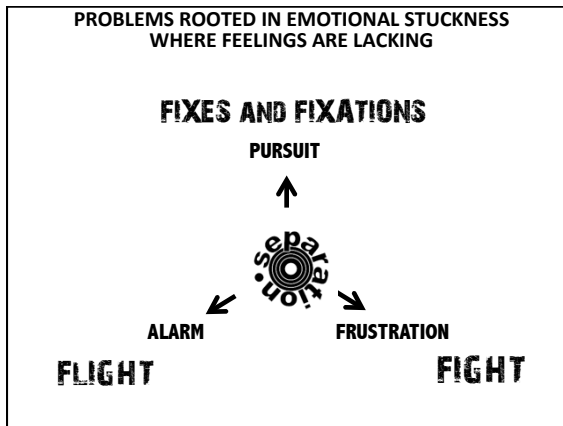
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

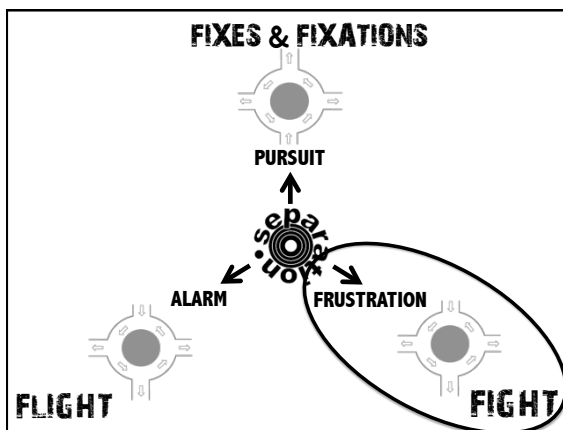
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

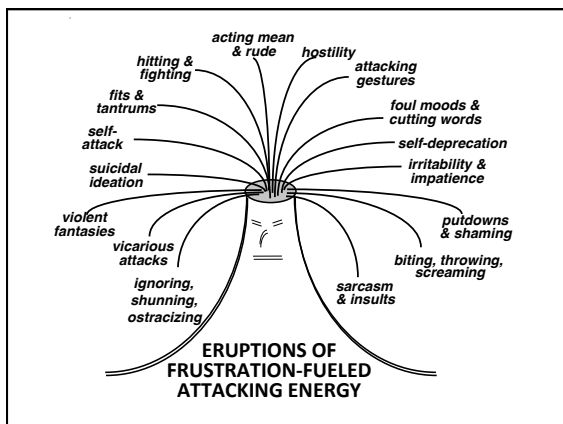
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

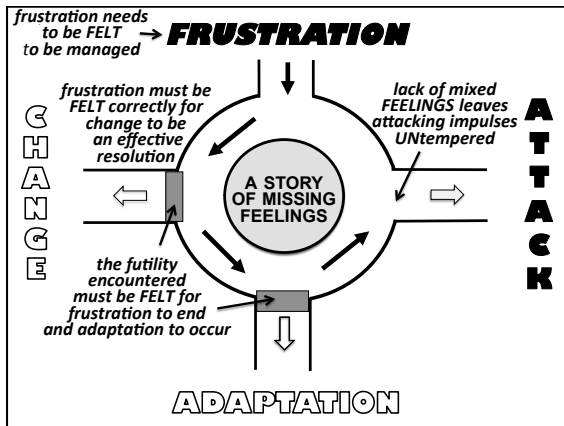
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

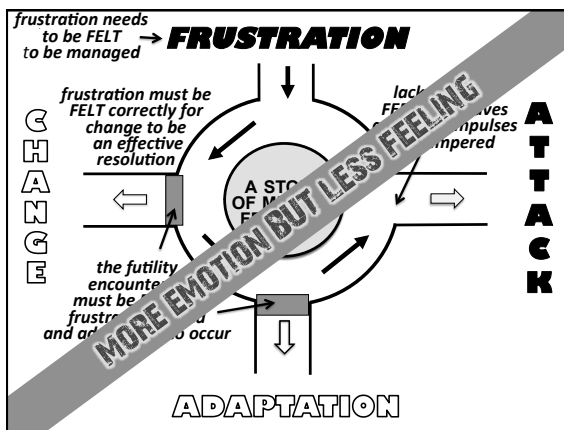
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

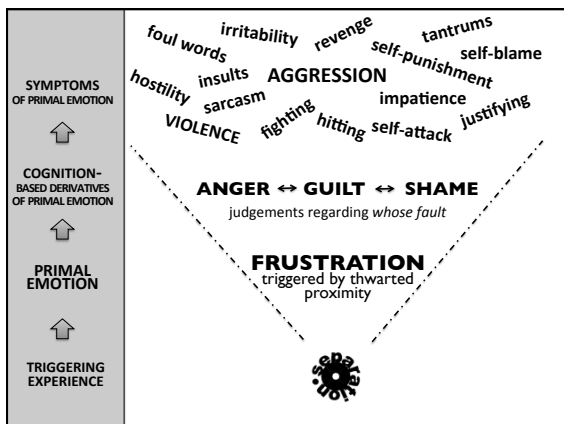
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

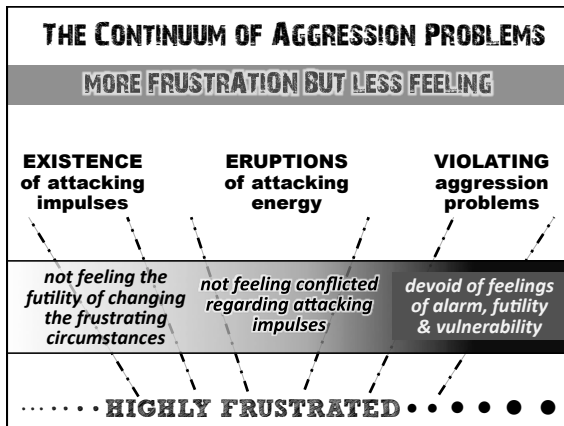
---

---

---

---






---

---

---

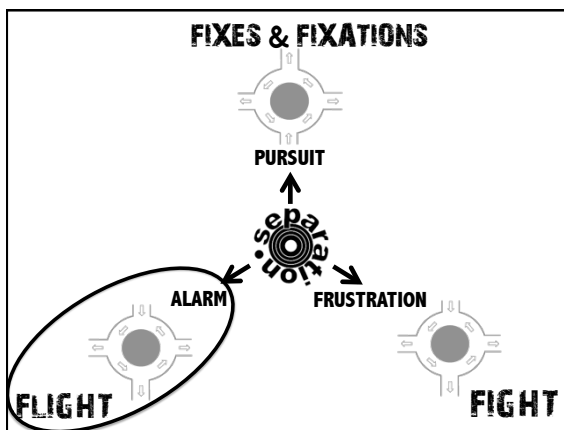
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

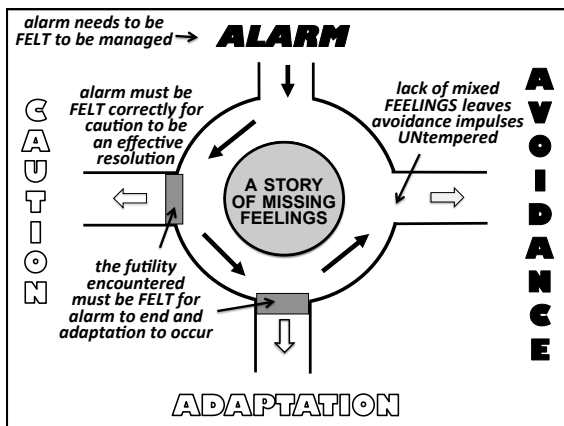
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

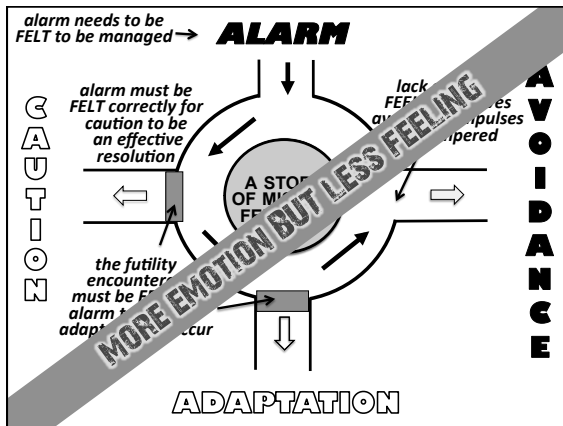
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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

---

---

---

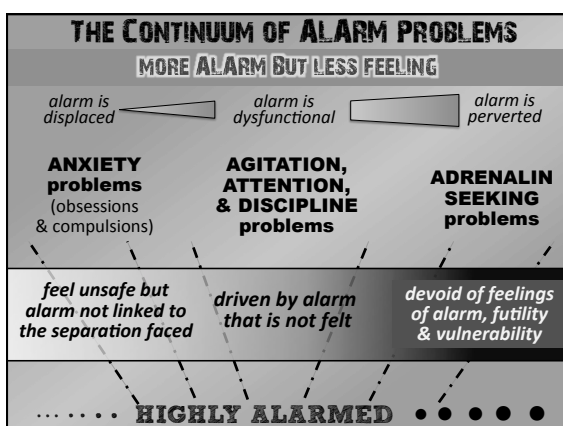
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

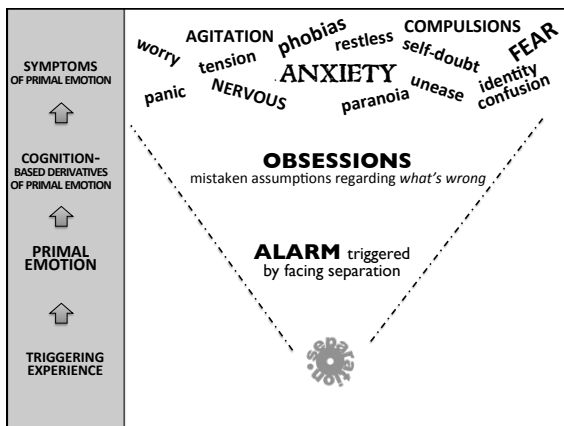
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

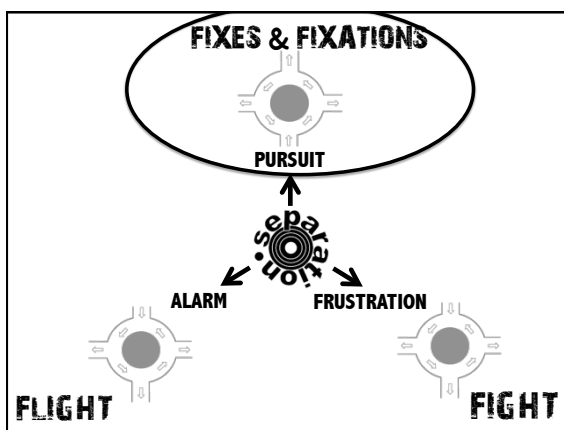
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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. Lem</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

The absence of timely feelings results in losing the connection between the separation faced and the triggered pursuit that was meant to fix this.

The result is fragmented and depersonalized 'fixes' that are divorced from their original purpose. These 'fixes' often develop into obsessive 'fixations' that can permeate our personalities.

---

---

---

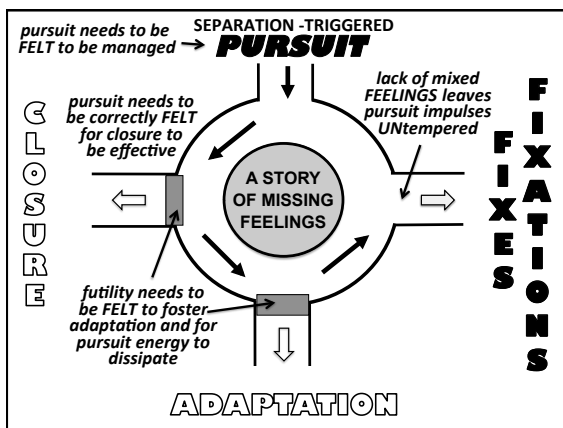
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

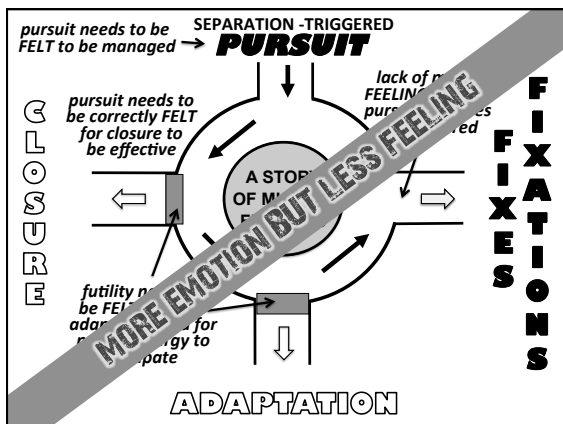
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

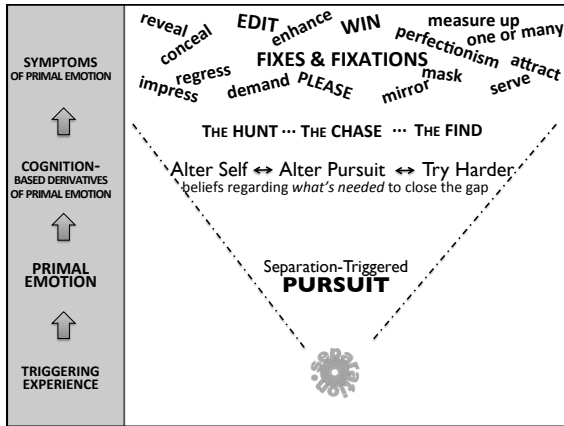
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

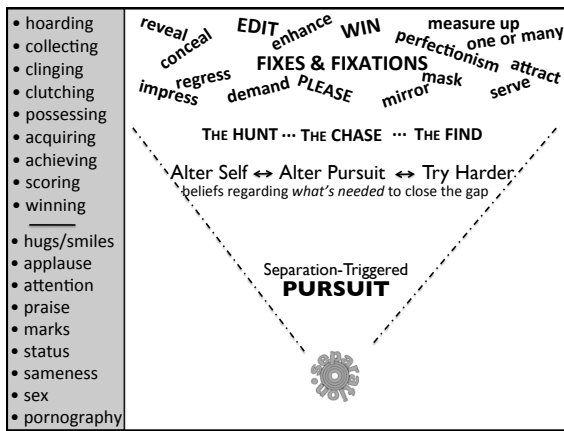
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

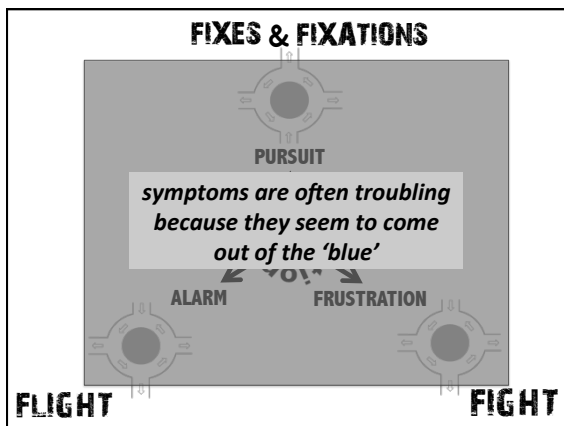
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# STUCK KIDS

## PART THREE

### *PROBLEMS when stuck in BASIC ATTACHMENT INSTINCTS*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### *PROBLEMS rooted in BASIC ATTACHMENT INSTINCTS when feelings are lacking*

- counterwill instinct
- alpha or displacement instinct
- shyness & tribalizing instincts

---

---

---

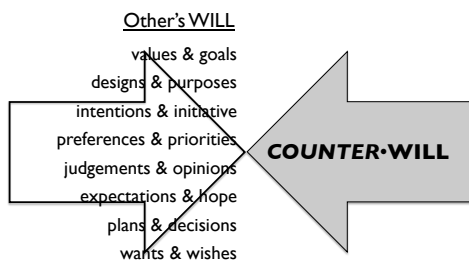
---

---

---

---

**CounterWill** refers to the instinct to resist or oppose the will of others when the attachment instincts are not engaged.



**CounterWill** serves attachment by protecting against 'outside' control and influence

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**CounterWill is triggered when...**

*the pressure experienced > the pursuit of proximity*

commands	> impulse to comply
obligations	> urge to make it work
expectations	> desire to please
demands	> inclination to defer
pressure	> desire to measure up
forcefulness	> desire to be good

---

---

---

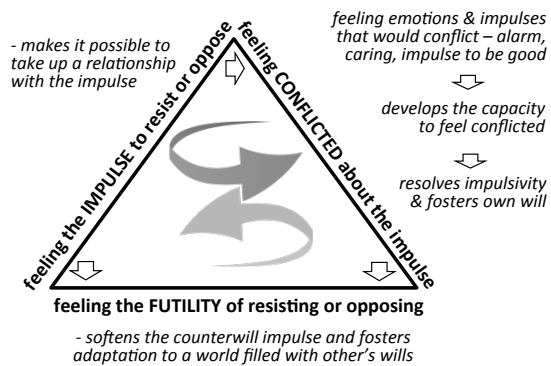
---

---

---

---

**FEELINGS civilize the CounterWill impulse**




---

---

---

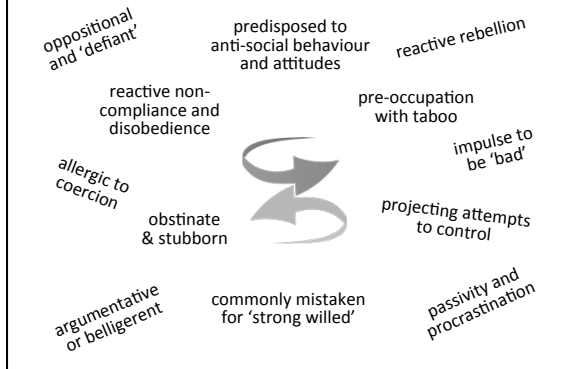
---

---

---

---

**CounterWill UNTAMED by FEELINGS**




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**PROBLEMS rooted in BASIC ATTACHMENT  
INSTINCTS when feelings are lacking**

- counterwill instinct
- alpha or displacement instinct
- shyness & tribalizing instincts

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

- is part of the **ATTACHMENT** drive which is Nature's answer to **SURVIVAL** for birds and mammals

- it's ultimate purpose is to take **CHARGE** of the **CARE** of one's dependents

- is meant to create a **LEAD** in the *attachment dance*, inspiring trust and dependence in response

- should never be characteristic of an individual, only an attachment **DANCE** with a 'dependent' in need



- requires extensive taming and development to turn the raw displacement instincts into an effective **ALPHA CARING RESPONSE**

- successful development requires ample **PRACTICE** in a context rich with **FEELING**, yet preserved primarily for adulthood for the purpose of taking care of one's offspring and one's mate

- if characteristic of a child, can seriously **INTERFERE** with development and being taken care of, including being parented or taught

---

---

---

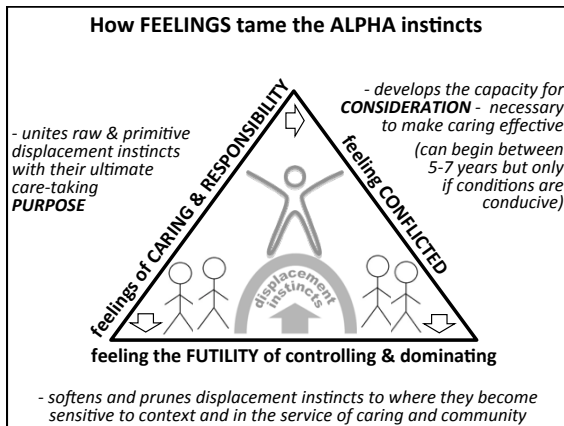
---

---

---

---






---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

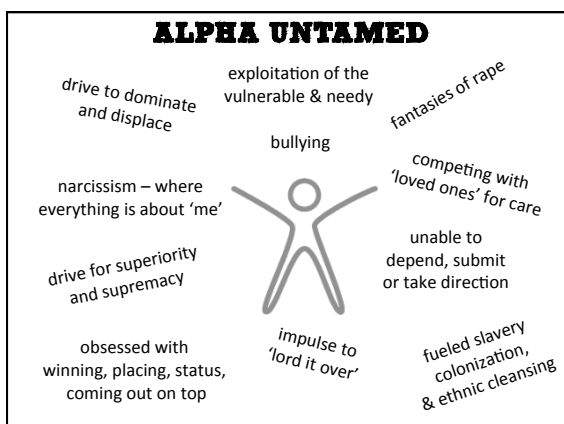
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

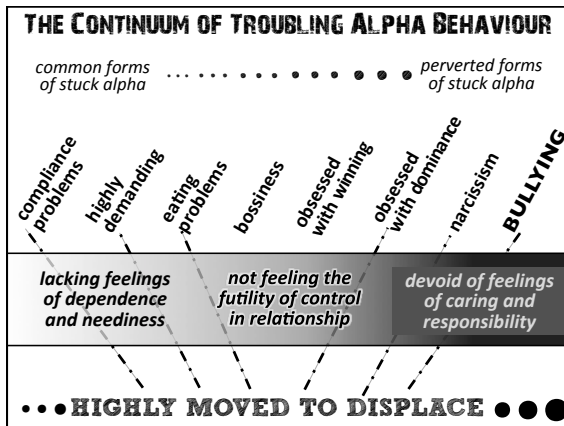
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**PROBLEMS rooted in BASIC INSTINCTS when feelings are lacking**

- counterwill instincts
- alpha or displacement instincts

- shyness and tribalizing instincts

---

---

---

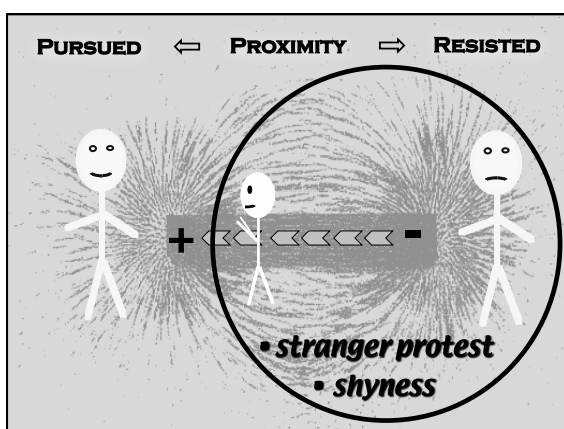
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

**PEER ORIENTATION**



*Children taking their cues from each other as to how to act, what to do, how to talk, what to wear, how to express oneself, what is valued, what is expected, what is right and what is wrong*

**The competing nature of most peer attachments today (ie, can't be close to both peers and adults simultaneously) pulls children out of orbit from around the adults responsible for them.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

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

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

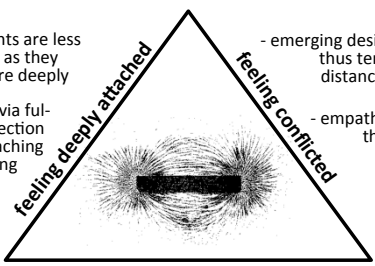
**How FEELINGS soften SHYNESS and tame TRIBALIZATION**

- attachments are less threatened as they are felt more deeply

- attaching via fulfilling connection trumps attaching via distancing

- emerging desires conflict, thus tempering the distancing instincts

- empathy confronts the defensive distancing instincts



**feelings of futility re tribalization**

- feeling the futility of avoiding strangers renders more adaptive

- increased resilience reduces the sense of vulnerability in being exposed or outside of one's tribe or village

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Some common SYNDROMES of stuck kids**

**ALPHA** problems including bossiness, bullying, eating problems, and narcissism

**AGGRESSION** problems including self-attack, violence and suicidal impulses

**ALARM** problems including anxiety, obsessions, compulsions, agitation, attention problems, adrenalin-seeking, cutting & burning

**ADDICTION** problems including to drugs, food, digital connection, pornography, video games, etc

**ATTENTION** problems stemming from immaturity, alarm, peer orientation and lack of playfulness

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**PART FOUR**

**WORKING WITH STUCK KIDS**

- a three-pronged approach derived from **INSIGHTS** regarding stuckness

---

---

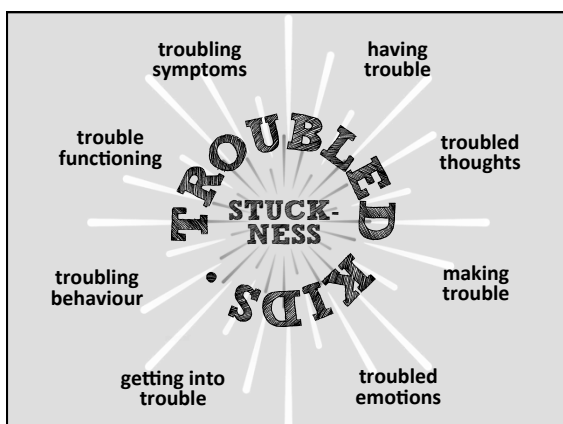
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

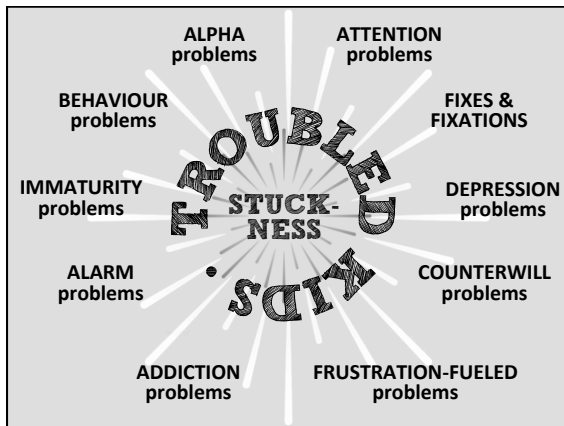
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

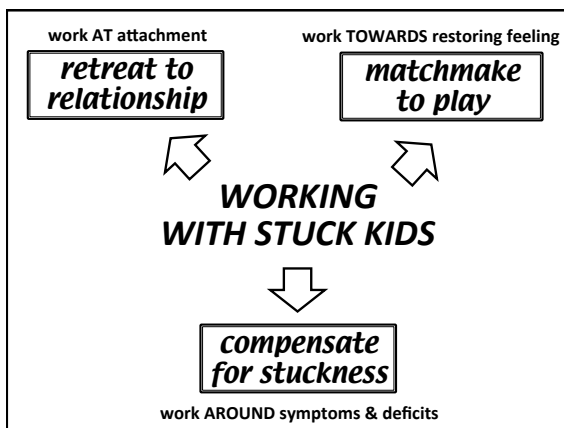
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Back away from using conventional discipline to treat the problem**

- from trying to teach a lesson
- from attempting to make accountable
- from using separation punitively
- from applying sanctions or withdrawing privileges
- from shaming or attempting to alarm
- from lecturing or admonishing

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### ***COMPENSATE for STUCKNESS***

- employ structure, routine and ritual
- collect before directing
- script behaviour that would be spontaneous if more mature
- point out what works instead of what doesn't
- cultivate a leading edge of success

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### ***RETREAT to RELATIONSHIP***

- to **REDUCE** the separation being faced – the root cause of almost all emotional and behavioural problems
  - deprives problems of their emotional fuel and reduces the load on the emotional brain
- to **cultivate the relational CONTEXT** needed for dealing with the immature, the stuck, and the troubled
  - reverses shyness and tribalization, renders receptive, trumps counterwill, reverses peer orientation
- to **enable us to COMPENSATE** for the immaturity, dysfunction and developmental deficits that are rooted in stuckness
  - harnesses the power of attachment, evokes the desire to be good for us, enables us to script appropriate behaviour
- to **create the sense of SAFETY** needed to recover feelings

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***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
- reduce separation experiences wherever possible; help a child to hold on when apart
- reverse peer orientation if possible
- try to keep the troubling symptoms from causing more separation

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

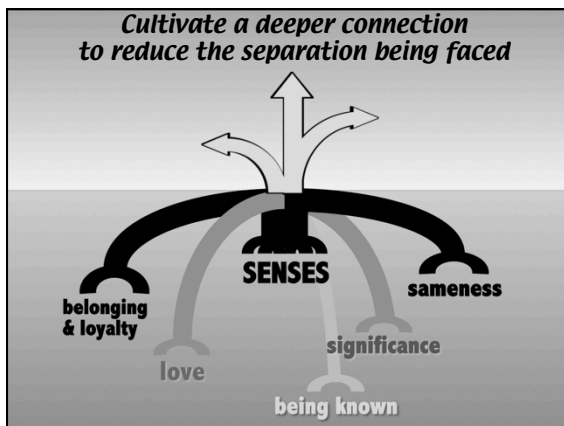
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

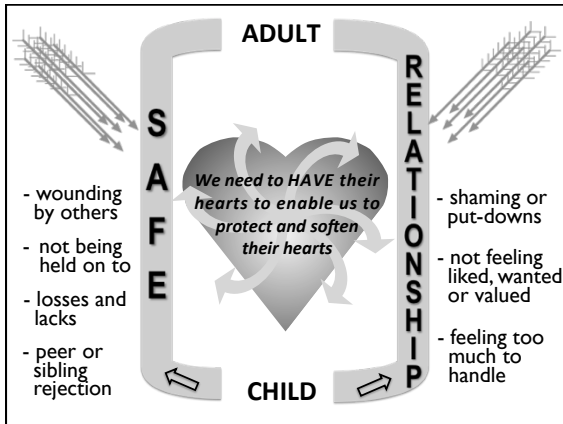
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Create timely spaces for feelings to bounce back**

- **AFTER** times of stress including separation, school, strained interactions, discipline, special performances, wounding, loss, etc
- ideally **BEFORE** sleep or the passing of time interferes with the ability of the thinking brain to interpret emotional feedback and link to the situations that stirred one up
- **FREE** of digital pursuit (social or videogames) and other competing activities
- **FREE** of problem solving, judgment, correction or teaching
- through **RITUALS** involving safe relationships and/or emotional playgrounds

---

---

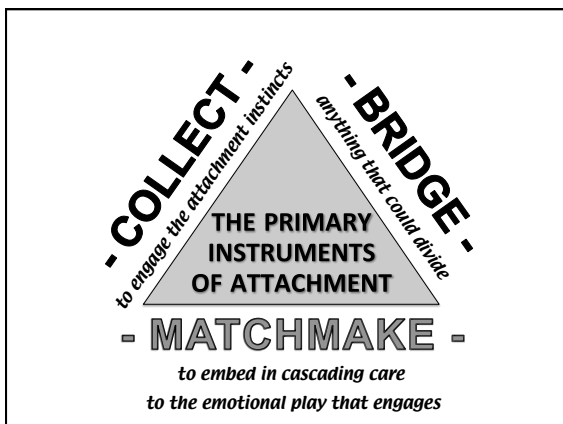
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---



***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

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***Matchmake to Play***

- engage in play to **PRIME** the relationships they need
- take emotions to play to **REDUCE** breakthrough expression that is harming the relationships they need or getting them into trouble
- use play to provide them some safety and **RELIEF** from distressing situations
- employ play to **ENGAGE** in learning
- use play to reduce and **COMPENSATE** for attention problems
- take emotions to play to **RECOVER** lost feelings

---

---

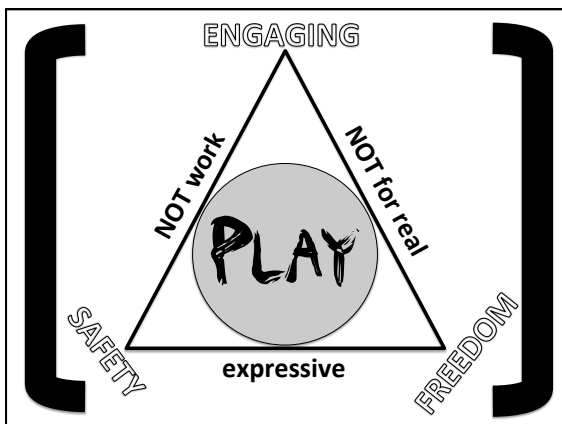
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

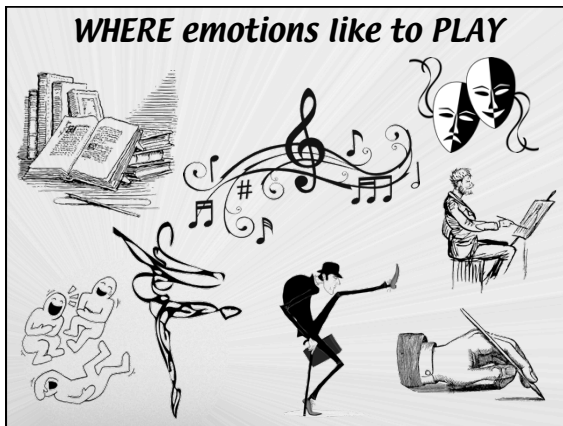
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***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 so can be felt

---

---

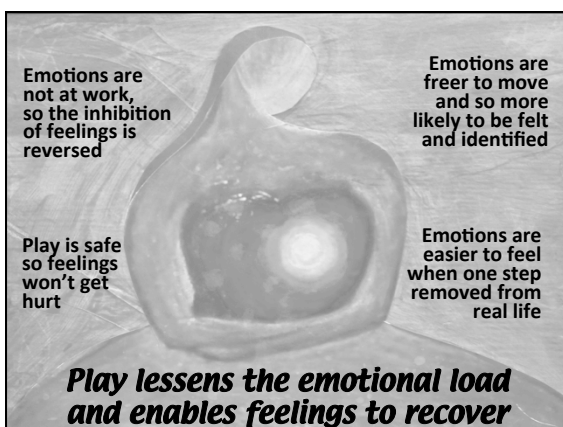
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---


---

---

---

***Sadness is easier to access when emotions are at play***

- the engagement of play is usually greater than the aversion to sadness, setting the stage for what needs to happen
- shifts the locus from the 'head' to the 'heart'
- removes the impediments to 'tears', including shame and self-consciousness
- gives us something to 'cry' about that is one step removed and thus not too much to bear
- suffering is contained and so much easier to bear in the play mode, and sadness feels 'sweeter'
- finds & releases stuck or orphaned sadness, making it easier to access wordless tears




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***Summary & Review:***

- underlying a diverse manifestation of troubling symptoms is a condition of emotional and developmental **STUCKNESS**
- underlying stuckness is a **LOSS OF FEELING** that is critical for optimal functioning, for healthy development, for adaptation, and for rendering fully human and humane
- underlying the loss of feeling is the experience of **FACING SEPARATION** that has been too much to bear
- to prevent things from getting worse, we must first **COMPENSATE** for the symptoms and problems that are rooted in stuckness
- we must **RETREAT to RELATIONSHIP** to reduce the separation faced and the resulting emotional load, and to create a context for
- our best bet for the **RECOVERY OF FEELINGS** is to cultivate safe relationships and engage in emotional playgrounds

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*working with*  
**STUCK KIDS**

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

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---