

Making Sense of Resistance and Opposition in Children and Teens

Deborah MacNamara, PhD
Clinical Counsellor. Educator. Author

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CounterWill

why kids resist and how to deal with it

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Every child possesses the instincts to ...

CounterWILL

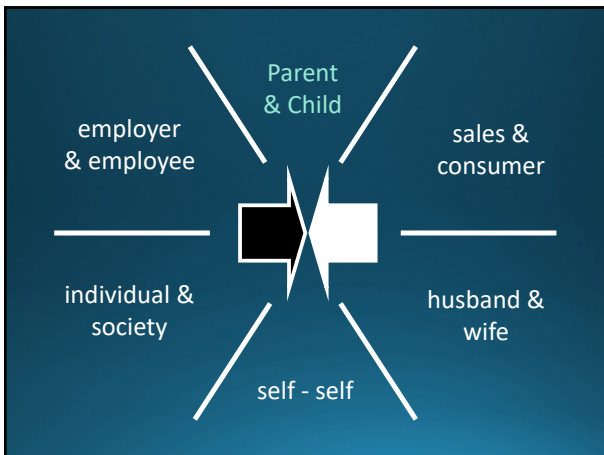
- ... do the opposite of what is expected
- ... break the rules
- ... work to rule
- ... disobey & defy
- ... resist & counter
- ... balk and talk back
- ... become preoccupied with taboos
- ... be obstinate & stubborn
- ... be quarrelsome & argumentative
- ... be belligerent
- ... be incorrigible
- ... be obstreperous
- ... be noncompliant and defiant

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the CounterWill instinct

... is a defensive reaction to perceived control and coercion

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By WILL is meant:

- intentions & initiative
- wants and wishes
- preferences & priorities
- judgements and opinions
- values and goals
- plans and decisions
- meanings and motives
- designs and purposes

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The *CounterWill* instinct

... is a defensive reaction to perceived coercion

- physical
- behavioural
- emotional
- cognitive
- psychological

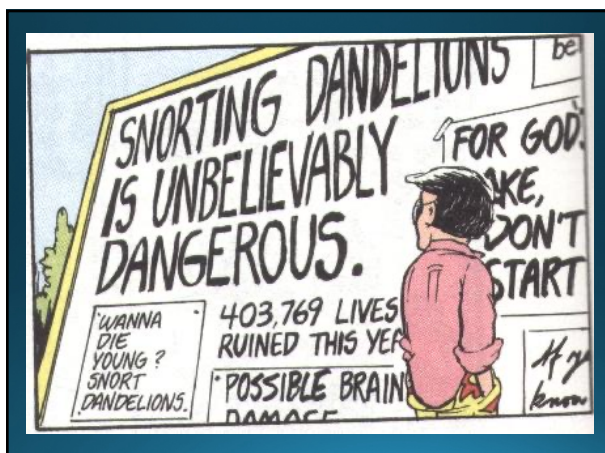
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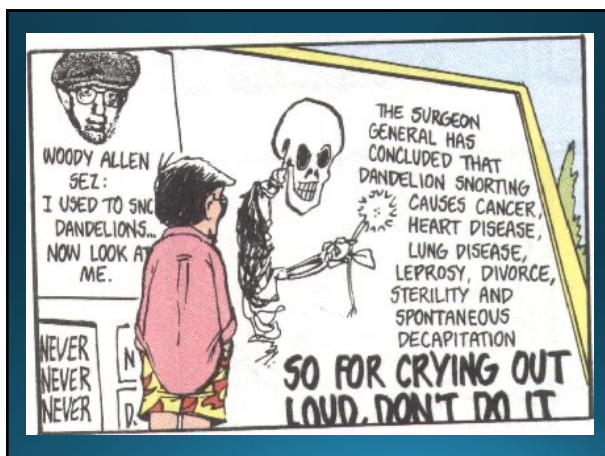
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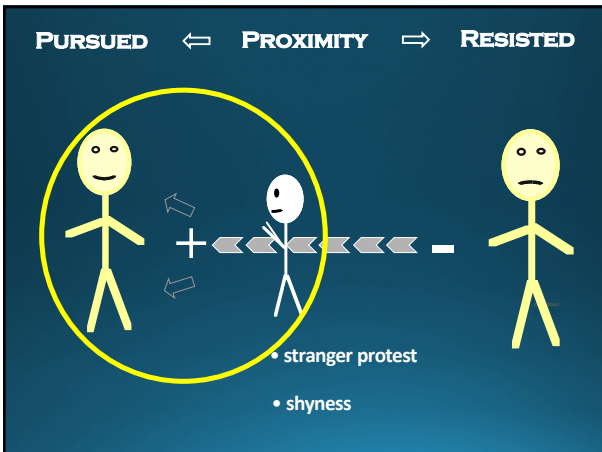


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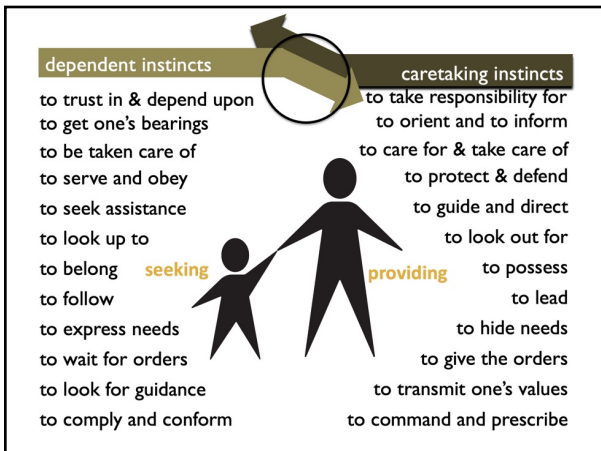
the CounterWill instinct

- 1) is a defensive reaction to perceived control and coercion
- 2) serves attachment by protecting against outside influence and direction

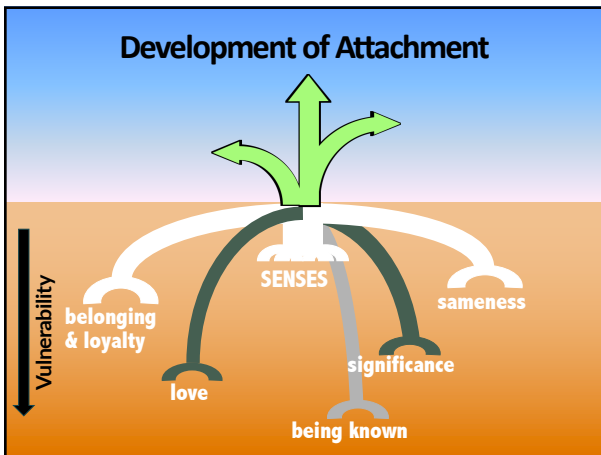
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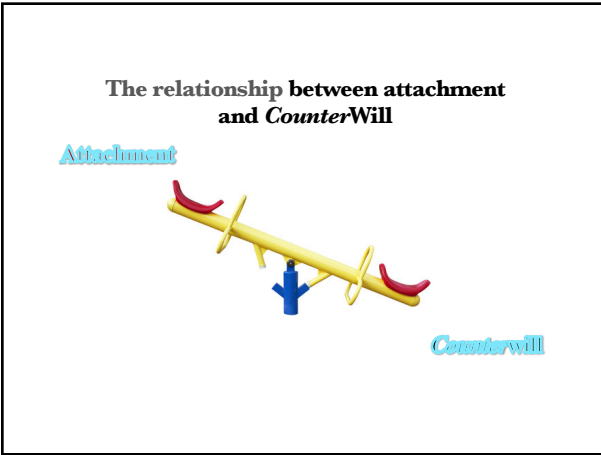
"Sorry, one doesn't high-five with commoners," wrote one British media outlet after Prince George did not accept Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's gesture.



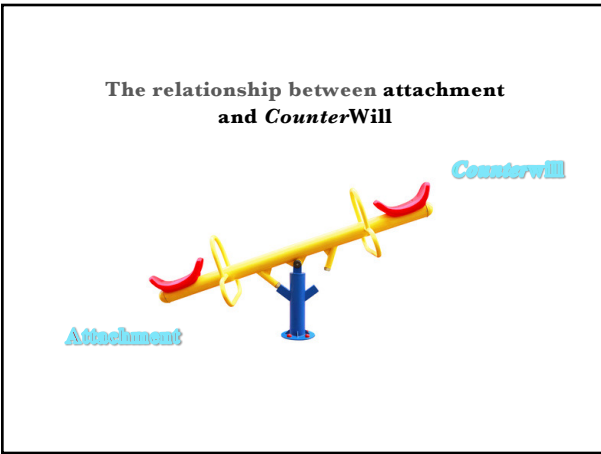
The 3-year-old wasn't having it when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tried to give him a high-five.

Prince George snubs Trudeau's high-five, leaves British media frenzy

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Counterwill problems will exist wherever there are attachment problems

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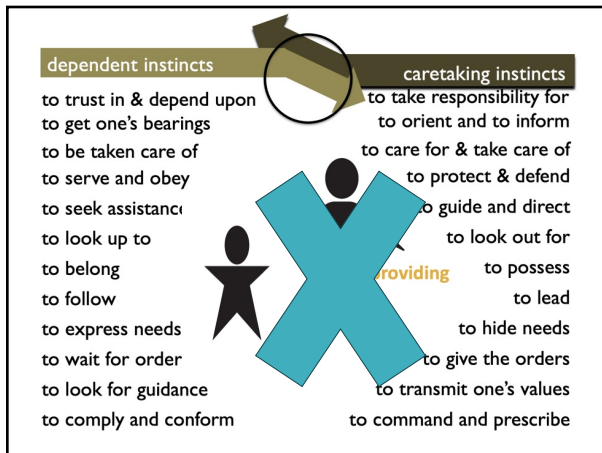
Attachment problems that render a child prone to counterwill:

- not being attached to the adults in charge
- attaching too superficially
- attaching in the dominant mode

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Signs of a dominance problem



- tends towards bossy, controlling and demanding, even when with one's equals or with those one should be depending upon
- seeks to be on top or take centre stage all the time, even when with one's equals or with those one should be depending upon
- can be driven to show superiority with one's equals

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Signs of a dominance problem



- compelled to take over or to take charge in situations where this is not called for (displace others)
- often has difficulty taking direction or asking for assistance
- must be in the know all the time / can act as a know-it-all

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*** Challenges that result from dominance problems ***



- unable to direct them and influence values
- resistance, frustration, food, and alarm problems
- paves the way for the transference of attachment to peers
- loss in vulnerability and ability to shield their heart

No matter how well attached, the alpha child is highly resistant to taking direction, often rendering them a nightmare to manage by the adult they are the closest to.

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*** Reasons for rising dominance ***

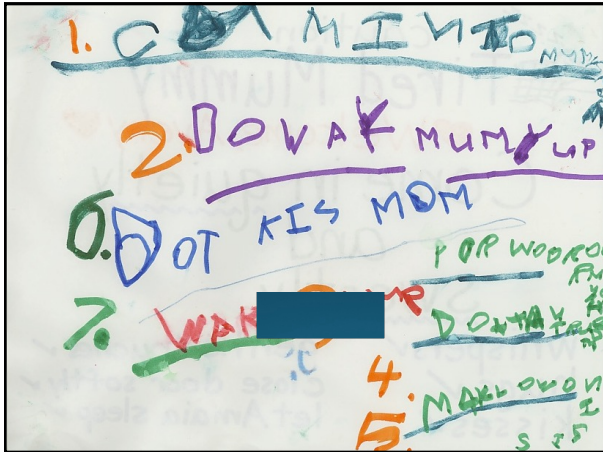
- adults reacting to their own backgrounds
- failure of today's culture to script provider posturing
- weak or inadequate parenting
- adults looking to child to fill needs
- parenting on demand
- egalitarian parenting
- child-led parenting
- parents looking for answers rather than being their child's answer
- extreme vulnerability or overwhelming sensitivity
- inherited parenting practices that exploit a child's state of dependency
- experiencing alarming situations or circumstances

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caution:
Tired Mummy
 Welcome, [redacted]
 Come in quietly and sweetly
 whispers ✓ gentle touches ✓
 hugs ✓ close door softly ✓
 kisses ✓ let [redacted] sleep ✓

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Attachment problems that render a child prone to counterwill:

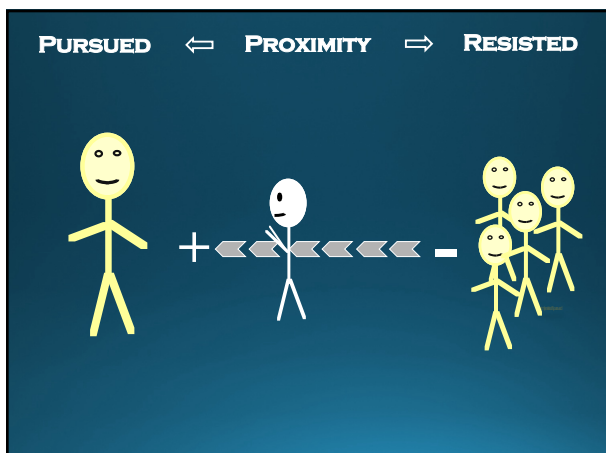
- not being attached to the adults in charge
- attaching too superficially
- attaching in the dominant mode
- defensive detachment

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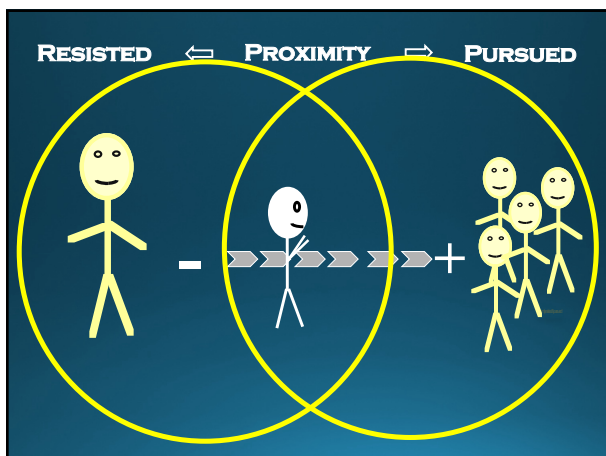
Attachment problems that render a child prone to counterwill:

- not being attached to the adults in charge
- attaching too superficially
- attaching in the dominant mode
- defensive detachment
- involved in competing attachments

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What is peer orientation?
When kids orient around their peers instead of the adults who are responsible for them.

Take their cues from peers
Play close attention to what matters, how to act, talk, dress, and act in accordance to peers you want to belong too, favouring them over adults

Prefer company of friends
Would rather spend time and be with their friends over the adults in their life, even when offered a warm invitation from caring adults



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What does it look like in the classroom?

- **Preoccupation with peers**, hard to get their attention
- **Plagiarized personalities** and adoption of other's interests
- **Incessant talking** to friends, digitally preoccupied
- When frustrated with friends - **replace and rotate**
- **Lack of interest** / motivation in learning & homework
- Bright but bored, intelligent but **underachieving**
- **Lack of engagement** in vulnerable conversations
- Class clown, **insolence and backtalk** to adults

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Attachment problems turn the desire to be GOOD into the impulse to be BAD

look up to & defer to	to look down upon and resist
attend to & listen to	to ignore & disregard
take the cues from	orient negatively
model after & conform to	be different than
avoid alienating	get a charge out of alienating

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Attachment problems turn the desire to be GOOD into the impulse to be BAD

be loyal to	counter and oppose
find favour with	annoy and irritate
measure up to	foil expectations of
make things work for	spoil things for
avoid secrets	be sneaky or create secrets about

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How can we *reclaim* our kids?

Ten ways to restore connection and leadership.

- 1 **Believe You Are the Answer**
Trust that your relationship is what your child needs most — not more strategies or skills.
- 2 **Invite Dependence**
Welcome their need for you. Feed their hunger for closeness and belonging.
- 3 **Collect and Bridge**
Rebuild connection before directing. Bridge every separation so attachment stays intact.
- 4 **Choose Battles Wisely**
Avoid power struggles you can't win. Hold your ground only where it truly matters.
- 5 **Build a Village**
Surround your child — and yourself — with caring adults who share your values.

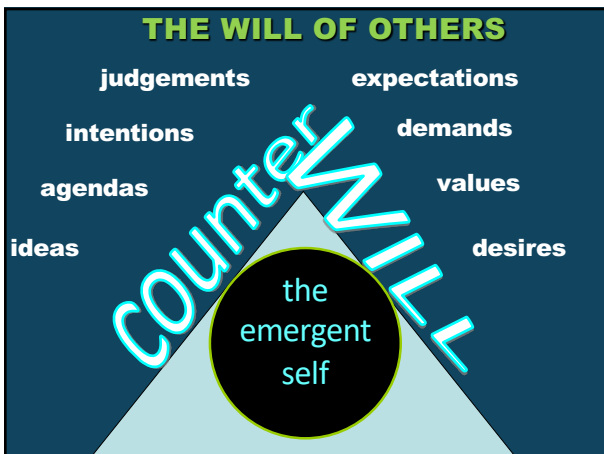
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the CounterWill instinct

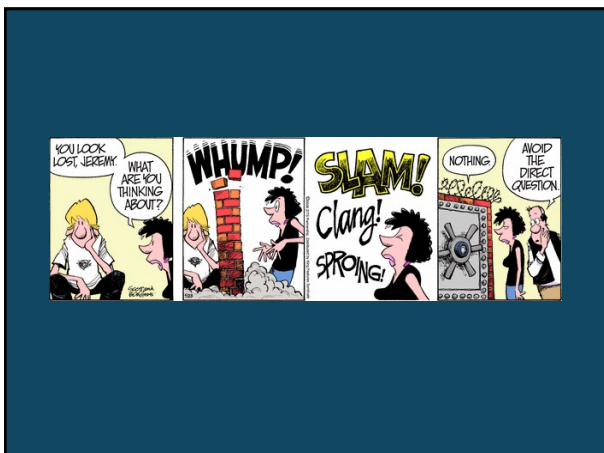
- 1) is a defensive reaction to perceived control and coercion
- 2) serves attachment by protecting against outside influence & direction
- 3) serves development by preparing the way for separate functioning

The first step in finding one's own WILL is to resist and counter the WILL of others.

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The **CounterWill** reaction is often mistaken for a show of *WILL*:

- of having a strong will, being strong minded or stubborn
- as being on purpose
- as intentionally meant to push buttons, test limits, challenge authority, seek power

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Understanding the counterwill of ...

- toddlers and preschoolers
- peer-oriented kids
- teenagers
- stuck kids

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The DRAMA of the STUCK CHILD

a tragedy in three acts

ACT I

When kids get stuck, adults start pushing.

ACT II

When kids feel pushed, they put on the brakes.

ACT III

When kids get stuck in their resistance, adults tend to get stuck in their persistence.

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STUCK KIDS who are unattached to those in charge of them can become characterized by their counterwill.

- **oppositional**
- **defiant**
- **belligerent**
- **noncompliant**

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handling *CounterWill*

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DON'T let counterwill break the connection.

- don't use separation as a consequence
- don't take counterwill personally
- anticipate and expect counterwill
- don't make behaviour the bottom line
- keep reactions to counterwill in check
- repair damage done by counterwill fallout

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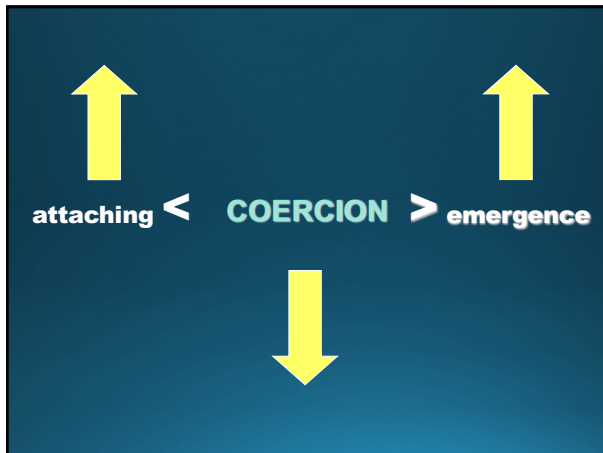
Maintain the lead role without forcing your will on the child

- Lead the way out of the impasse (e.g., change the subject, postpone the discussion)
- Acknowledge the resistance and convey that it was expected or anticipated
- Give some time and space for counterwill to dissipate and to find another approach

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a Three-Pronged Approach to handling CounterWill

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ENHANCE ATTACHMENT

- collect before directing
- strengthen the relationship
- deepen the attachment

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REDUCE COERCION

- refrain from using a commanding or prescriptive manner
- make agendas less explicit
- refrain from focusing on the SHOULDs, the MUSTs & the HAVE TOs
- use as little force and leverage as possible

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REDUCE COERCION

- **back off until you get a better attachment hold**
- **use structures and routines to orchestrate behaviour**
- **draw attention AWAY from the coercive elements of the situation**

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ENHANCE EMERGENCE

- **provide for some sense of choice**
- **put the focus on the child's *will***
- **make room for the child's initiative and involvement**
- **solicit good intentions where possible**
- **place in charge where appropriate and possible**

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Grab the free guide:

SIX ATTACHMENT RITUALS:
Staying close through the years




www.macnamara.ca

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