

ENGAGING PARENTS:

Supporting The Parent-child Relationship To
Promote Emotion Regulation And School Readiness

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Outline

- Research on the importance of early attachment
- Research on what matters *MOST* in building attachment
- Research on a specific parenting intervention that provides a user-friendly roadmap for parents
- What we know about how to best intervene:
 - ▣ Research on what matters most in supporting parents

Attachment

- Secure attachment relationships characterized by **secure base** (Ainsworth, 1987; Bowlby, 1988)
 - ▣ From which to explore
 - ▣ To which to return for comfort
- Working Models of Attachment
 - ▣ Experiences internalized as cognitive representations
 - ▣ Models of self as worthy of care and models of others as trustworthy to provide needed care
 - ▣ Models theorized to be carried into adulthood
 - ▣ Influence how we feel, interpret interactions, & behave



Importance of Attachment

□ **Mental health**

▣ Longitudinal data: insecure attachment linked to later psychopathology

- in both childhood (Burgess, Marshall, Rubin, & Fox, 2003; Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985)
- and adulthood (Dutra & Lyons-Ruth, 2005; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005)

▣ Particularly in the context of other risk factors

- Difficult temperament
- Family ecology (e.g., SES, family life stress, trauma)
 - (DeKlyen & Greenberg, 2008)

Importance of Attachment

□ **School readiness**

- ▣ Insecure attachment and contextual risk interact to predict some aspects of school readiness (Belsky & Fearon, 2002)
 - Attachment security buffers children from contextual risk

Emotion Regulation

- Emotion regulation: theorized to be mechanism for the links between attachment and...
 - ▣ later psychopathology (Cassidy, 1994) and
 - ▣ school readiness (Blair, 2002)
- Why would that be?
- Emotion Regulation (Calkins & Hill, 2007):
 - ▣ conscious and unconscious processes
 - ▣ including physiological processes
 - ▣ modulate emotional experiences and expression

Emotion Regulation: Evidence

- **Physiological regulatory processes: emerge in infancy** (Kopp, 1982)
- **Relationship with parents: plays key role in infant behavioral and physiological regulation** (Calkins, et al, 1998; Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2004; Rosenblum et al., 2002)
- **Physiological processes of interest**
 - ▣ HPA (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal) Axis: stress reactivity (cortisol)—response to stressor & recovery
 - ▣ Parasympathetic nervous system activation: vagal tone

HPA Axis: Cortisol

- **Maternal caregiving affects stress reactivity** (Caldji et al., 1998; Francis et al., 1999; Liu et al., 1997)

- **Meaney (2001)**
 - ▣ Early, severe stressors dysregulate the HPA axis
 - ▣ Poor coping with stress
 - ▣ Risk for behavioral and health problems

- **Security of attachment buffer against stress in temperamentally vulnerable children** (Kiel & Buss, under review; Nachmias et al., 1996; Schieche & Spangler, 2005)

Attachment and Cortisol

Are there attachment-related effects for stress reactivity (cortisol) in infants?

□ **Yes**

□ At 6m insecure infants had significantly higher elevations of cortisol 40 minutes post-stressor than did secure infants

- Cortisol change scores 40 minutes after the stress task differed for secure infants vs. insecure infants ($F = 8.35, p = .02$)

□ **Attachment relationship that leads to security may serve to promote recovery from stressors.**

Parasympathetic Nervous System: Vagal Tone

- Parasympathetic (PNS) activation: relaxation
- PNS activation can be measured through vagal tone/RSA
- If few demands—RSA goes up--metabolic output can be decreased
 - “Put on the vagal brake”
 - Vagal augmentation
- Withdrawal of PNS (RSA goes down): attending to challenge (Berntson et al., 1993; Bosch et al., 2003; Huffman et al., 1998; Porges, 1992)
 - “Let off vagal brake”
 - Vagal withdrawal
- Porges (1991): process mediates emotion regulation.
- Research on infants: vagal withdrawal to cognitive challenge—adaptive regulation (Calkins, 1997; Huffman et al., 1998; Porges et al., 1994; Stifter & Corey, 2001)

Attachment and Vagal Tone

Are there attachment-related effects for parasympathetic nervous system activation (vagal tone) in infants?

□ Yes

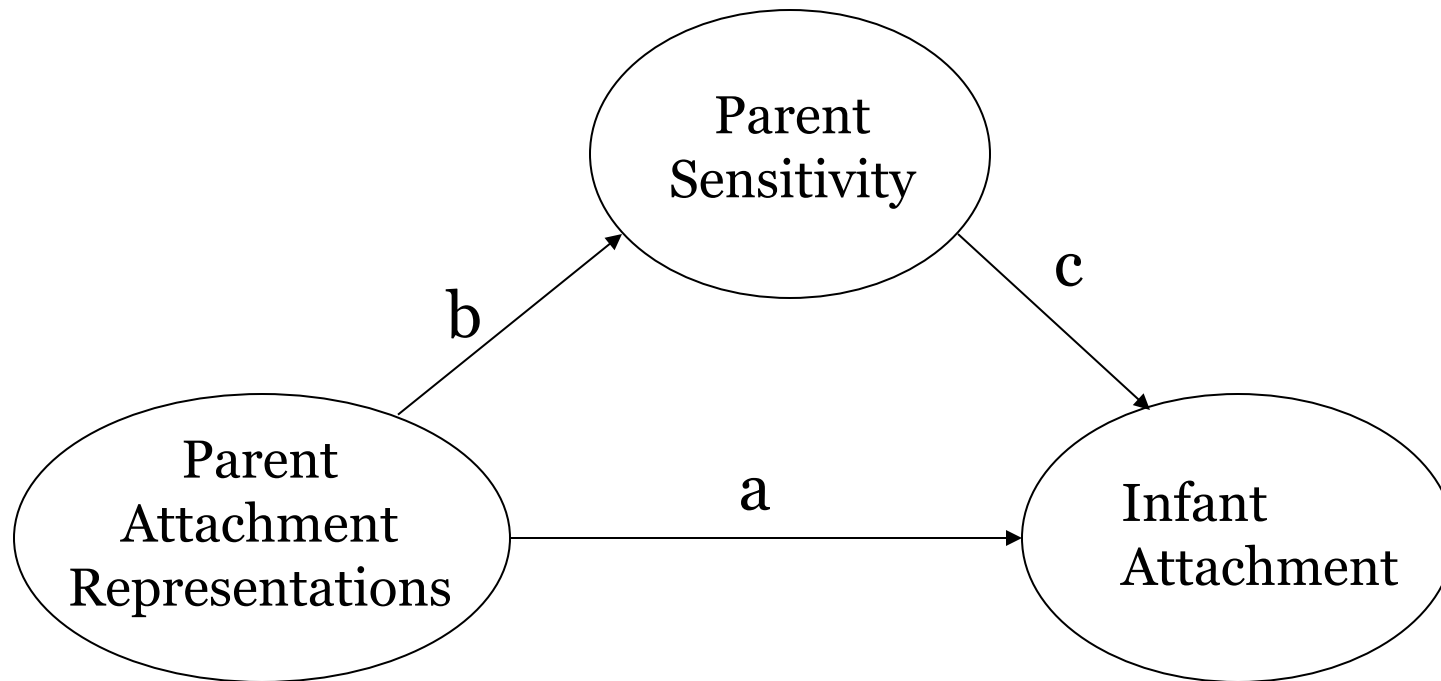
□ Insecure infants found play with their mothers a challenge requiring attention, whereas secure infants tended to relax during mother-infant play.

- Significant difference in RSA change scores for infants during the freeplay session ($F = 4.92, p = .047$)
- Secure infants: vagal activation during free play (PNS activation; $M_{\Delta\text{secure}} = .22, SD = .50$) RELAXING
- insecure infants showed vagal suppression ($M_{\Delta\text{insecure}} = -.38, SD = .24$). ATTENDING

What does this mean for intervention?

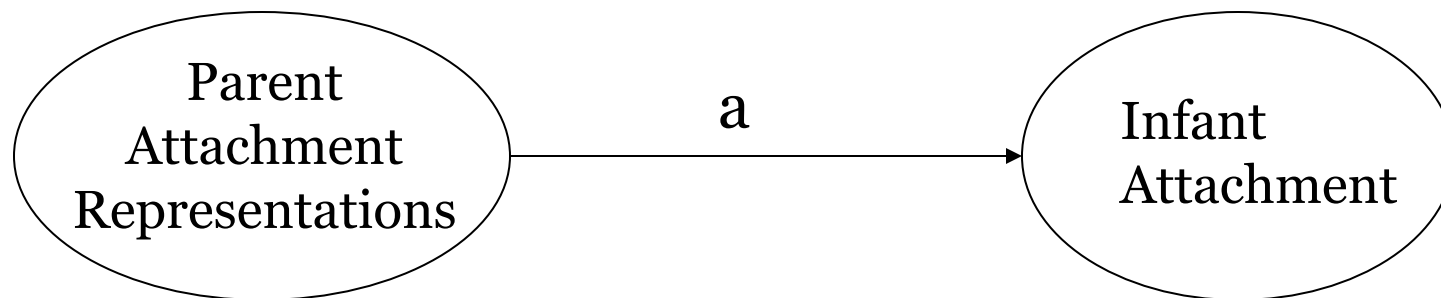
- The quality of the relationship really matters
 - ▣ On a physiological level
- Not just about upping interactions
 - ▣ Brain games
 - ▣ Book reading tasks
 - ▣ Peek-a-boo
 - ▣ Exercises
 - ▣ Toys
- We really need to understand what it takes for parents to provide a secure base
 - ▣ So babies can be secure

Background: Attachment Theory

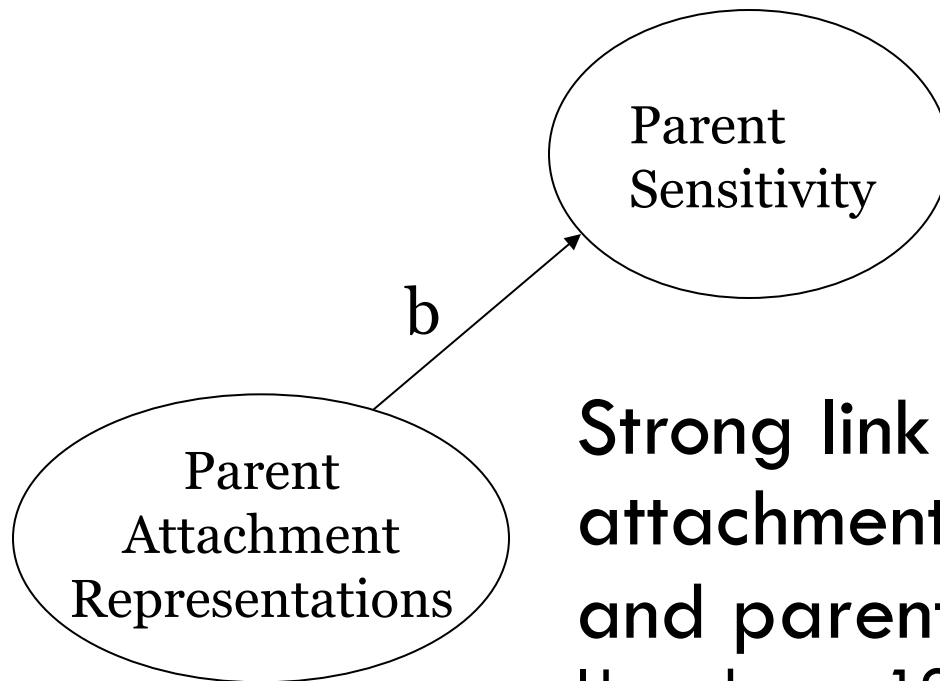


Background: Meta-Analytic Evidence

Robust link between parent attachment representations and infant attachment (van IJzendoorn, 1995)



Background: Meta-Analytic Evidence



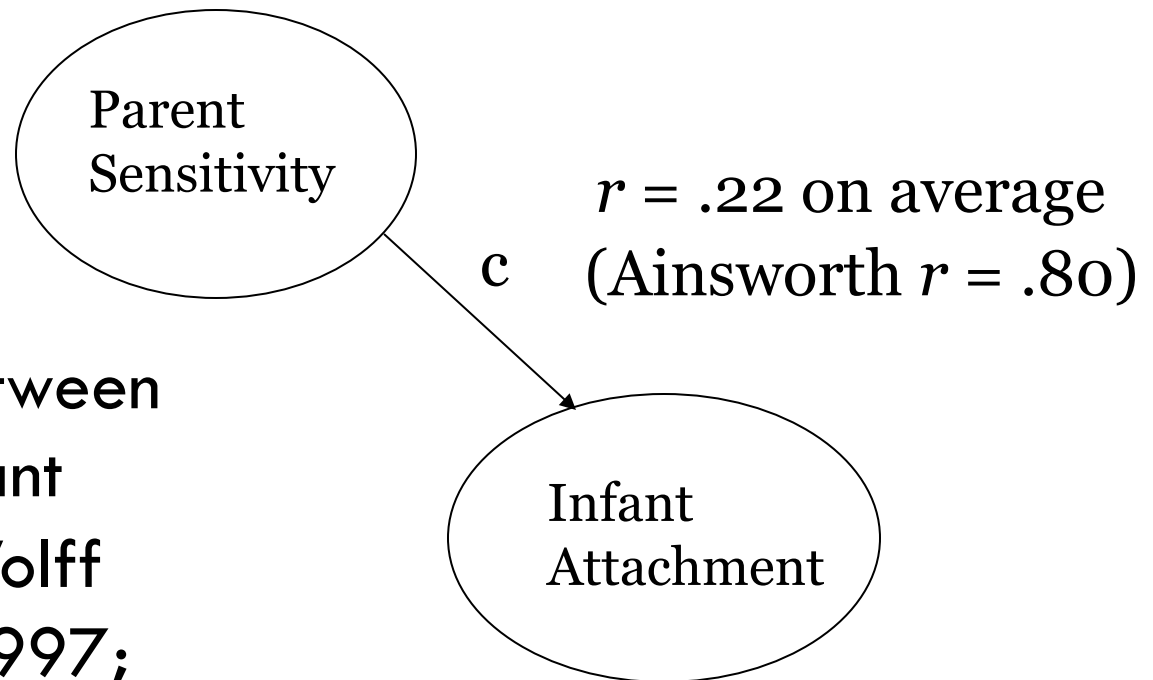
Strong link between parent attachment representations and parent sensitivity (van IJzendoorn, 1995)

Sensitivity

- Caregiver's ability to
 - ▣ Accurately perceive
 - ▣ Accurately interpret infant cues
 - ▣ Respond promptly and appropriately to those infant cues.

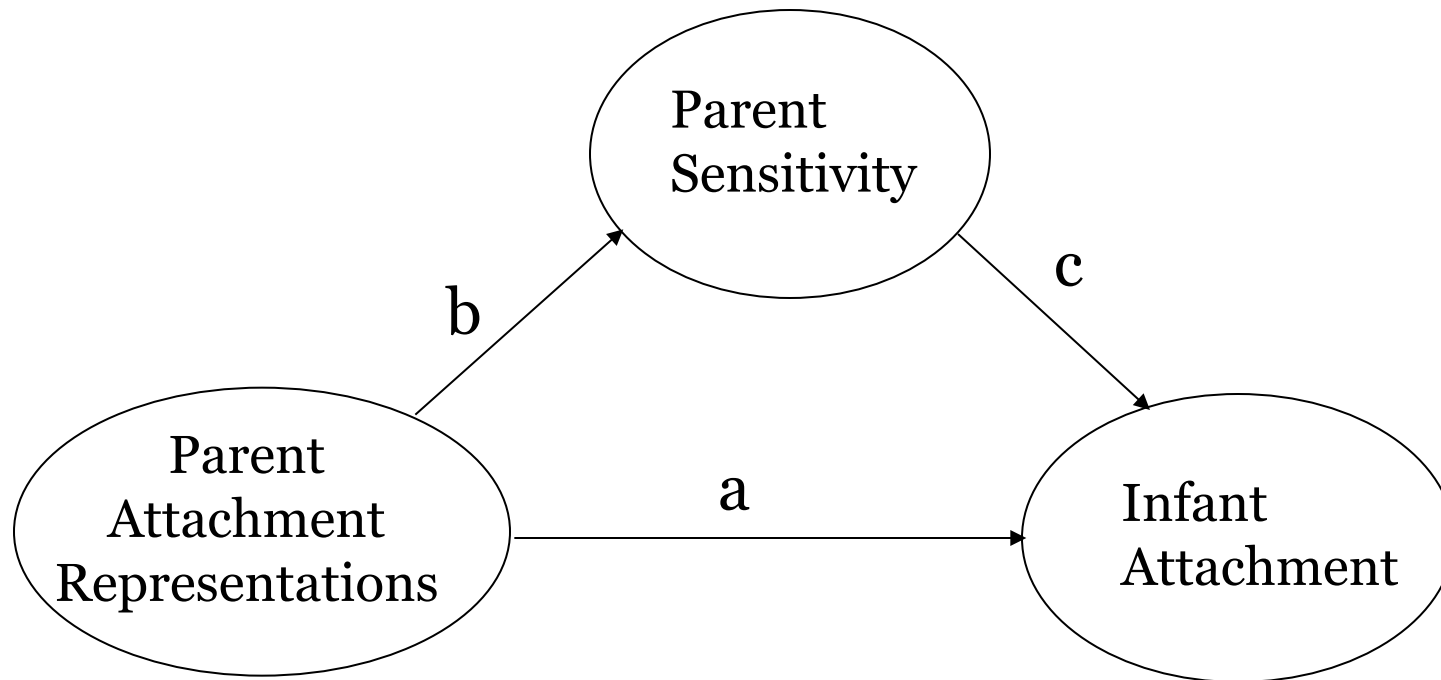
Ainsworth et al. (1978)

Background: Meta-Analytic Evidence



Significant link between sensitivity and infant attachment (De Wolff van IJzendoorn, 1997; Lucassen et al., 2011)

Background: Meta-Analytic Evidence



(van IJzendoorn, 1995)

Improving sensitivity matters

- A meta-analysis of intervention studies showed
 - ▣ interventions that improved parental sensitivity were more effective
 - ▣ than other interventions in terms of attachment outcomes (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003).

Sensitivity to Distress is Central

- Sensitivity to infant distress predicts infant attachment
 - ▣ and other key child outcomes (e.g., social competence, adjustment, affect regulation)
- better than caregiver sensitivity in response to infant non-distress
 - ▣ (e.g., Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Leerkes, 2011; Leerkes, Blankson, & O'Brien, 2009)
- Research suggests this is where we should focus with younger infants
- Data suggest autonomy support important after the first year (15 months; Bernier, Matte-Gagne, Belanger, & Whipple, 2014)

New data on what is MOST important

- Secure base provision
 - ▣ Developed based on qualitative study of low-income mother of irritable infants
 - Cassidy, Woodhouse, et al. (2005)
- Even in the face of much insensitivity, getting the job done in the end
- Chest-to-chest soothing of crying infant, distress ends with infant on the chest
- Comfortable enough with exploration to not terminate it
- Avoid certain highly toxic behaviors → Disorganized attachment
 - ▣ Frightening
 - ▣ Extremely harsh response to distress

Data supporting Secure Base Provision

- Secure base provision at 6 months predicted later infant attachment at 12 months, whereas sensitivity did not.
 - ▣ Avoids emphasizing culturally bound aspects of sensitivity (e.g., sweet tone of voice)
 - ▣ Allows for “no-nonsense” parenting
- Woodhouse, Beeney, Doub, and Cassidy (2015)

What does this mean for intervention?

- Parents don't have to be perfect
- Parents don't have to get it right all the time
- Just need to be “comfortable enough”
 - ▣ Soothe crying infant chest-to-chest (at least half the time)
 - ▣ Allow the infant to explore without activating the attachment system
- How to communicate all this in a user-friendly way to parents?

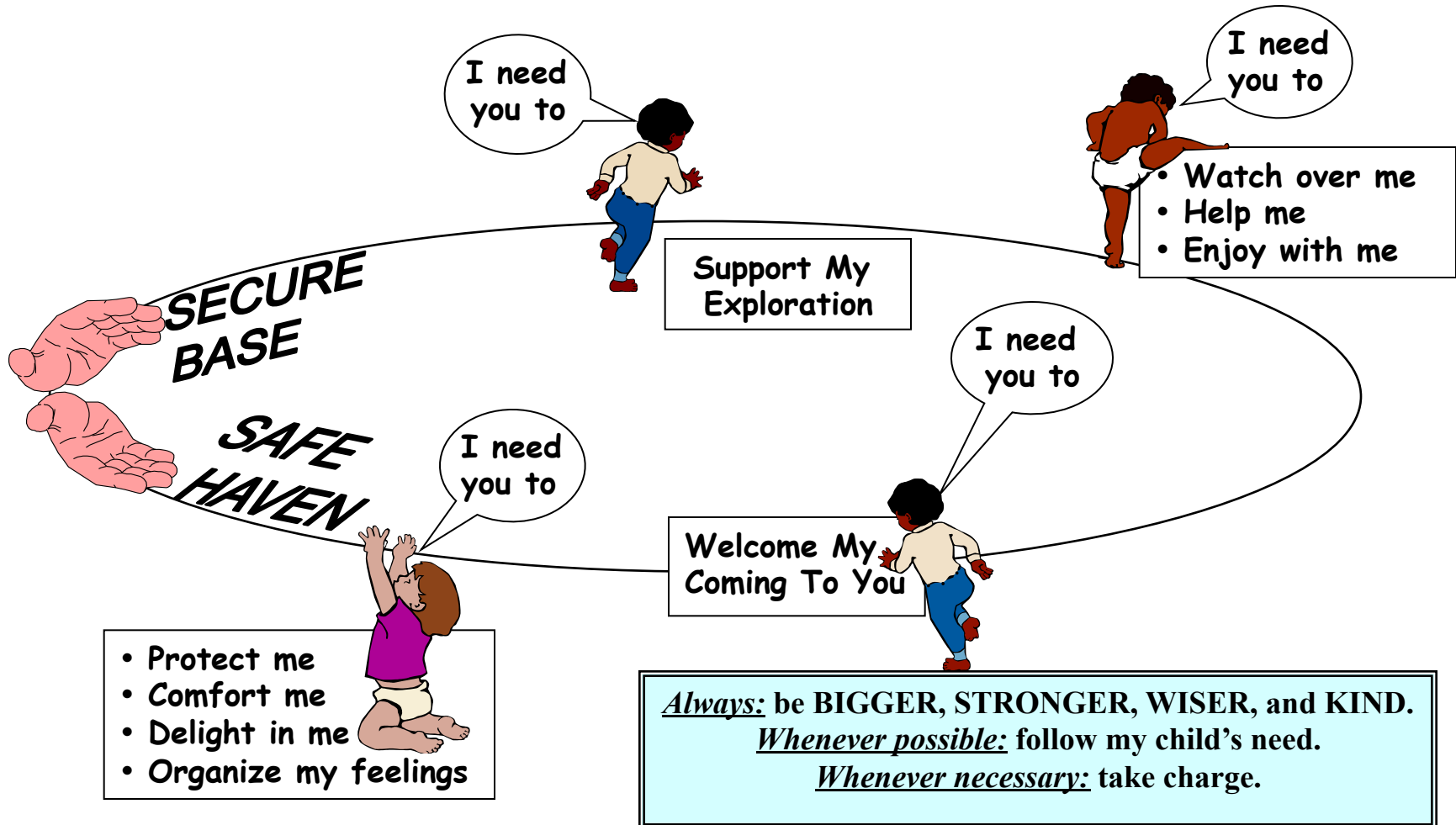
Circle of Security Intervention

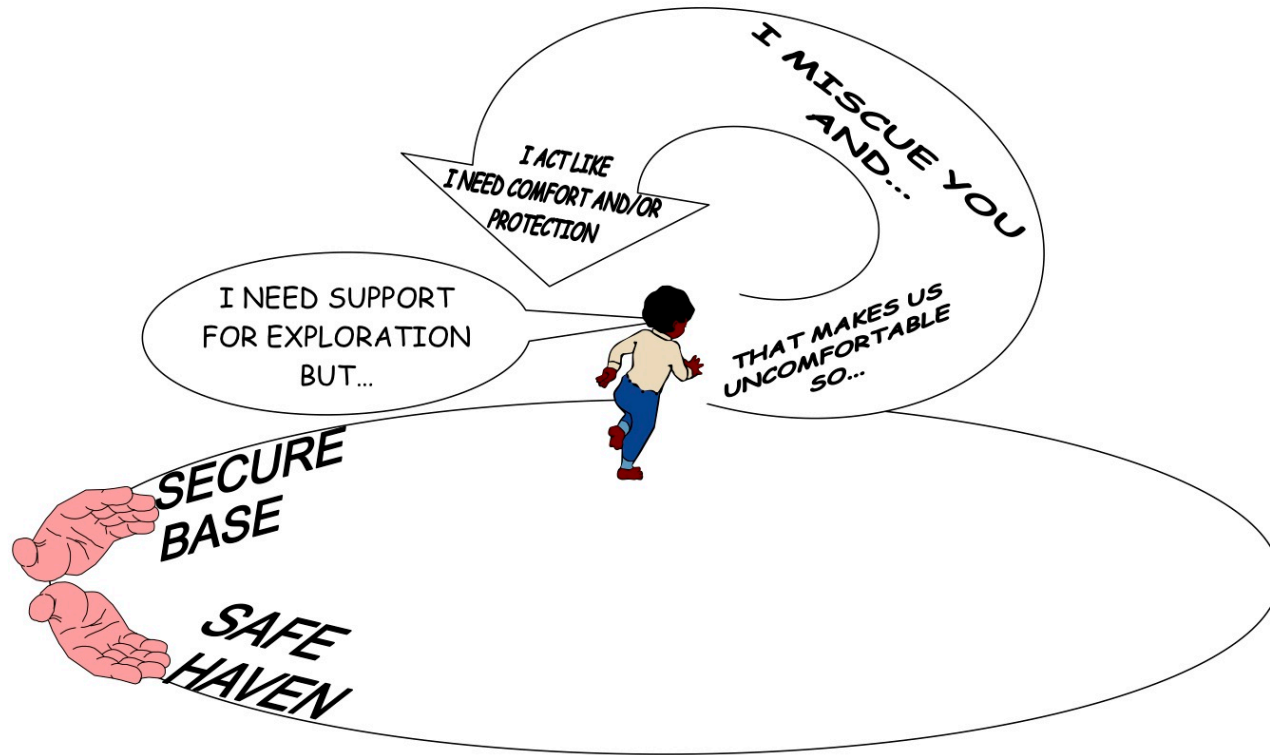
- Preschoolers in Head Start → more secure (Hoffman, Marvin, Cooper, & Powell, 2006)
- Randomized controlled trial: Highly irritable infants in a home visiting version → more secure (Cassidy, Woodhouse, Sherman, Stupica, & Lejuez, 2011)
- Mothers in a Jail Diversion program → more secure (Cassidy, Ziv, Stupica, Sherman, Butler, Karfgin, Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2010)
- Circle of Security—Parenting
 - ▣ Uses standardize video
 - ▣ To enhance wide implementation
 - ▣ Currently being tested in Baltimore

Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin (2014). *The Circle of Security Intervention: Enhancing attachment in early parent-child relationships*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

CIRCLE OF SECURITY[®]

PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS



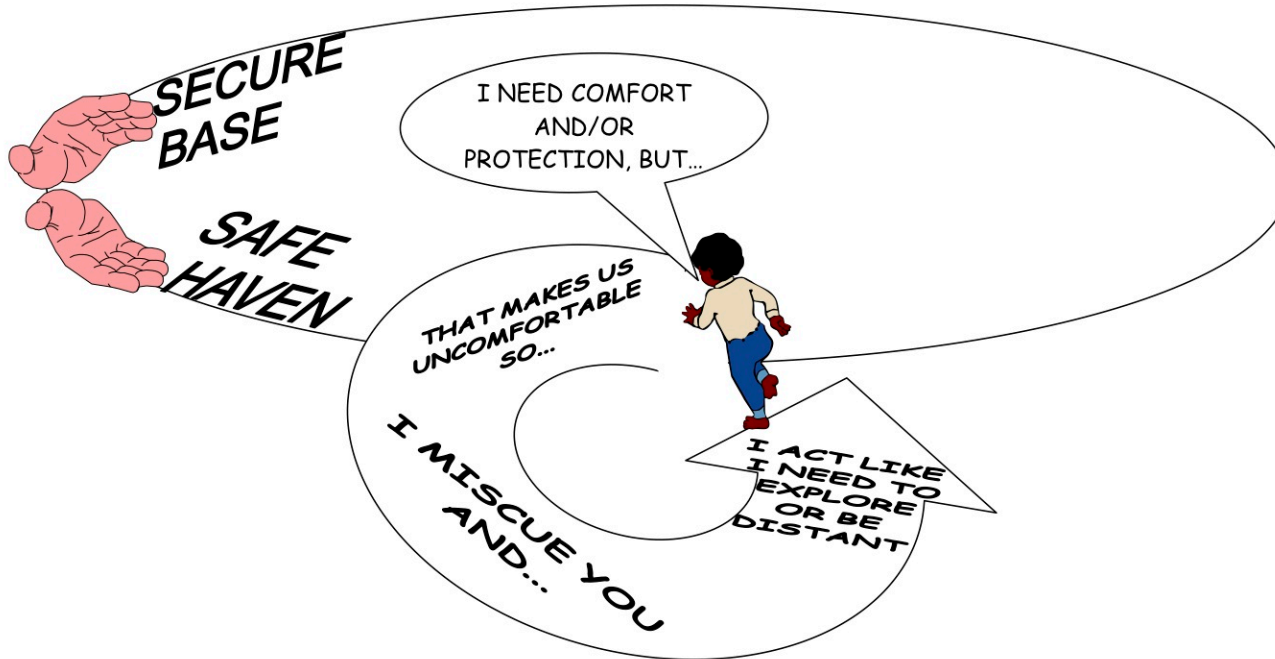


CIRCLE OF LIMITED SECURITY I

CHILD RESPONDING TO PARENT'S NEEDS

CIRCLE OF LIMITED SECURITY II

CHILD RESPONDING TO PARENT'S NEEDS



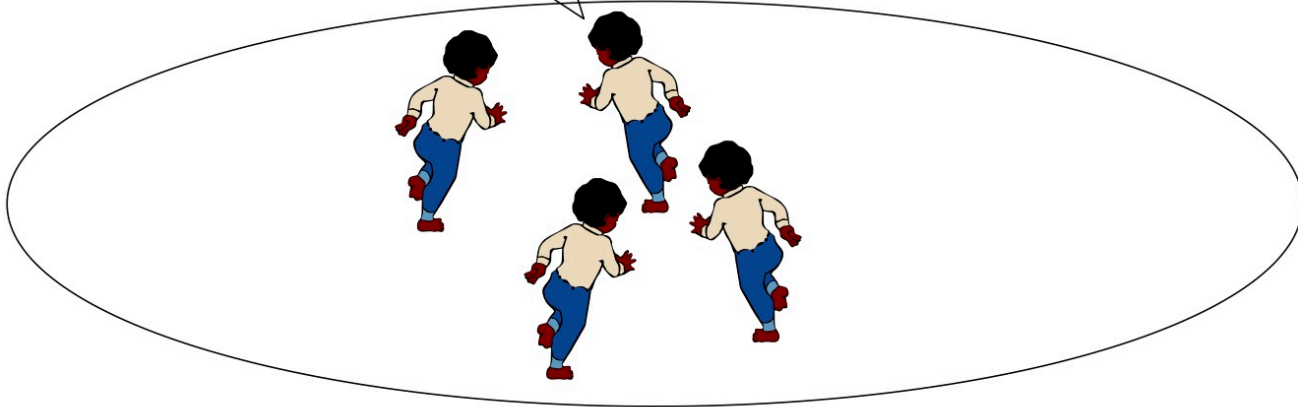
Limited Hands

Losing the Wisdom to Stay in Balance



Limited Hands

I need you, but when you are Mean, Weak, or Gone so I have no one to turn to and I don't know what to do.



When we are “Mean, Weak, or Gone” our children feel afraid of the person they most need to turn to. When this happens repeatedly, our children learn to not turn to us, teachers, and other safe adults for help.

So why don't we stay on the Circle?

- Thought experiment...imagine yourself walking down a beautiful path down to the ocean....



Shark Music

Feelings that come up guide our perceptions and reactions

The key is to become aware of shark music.

Image courtesy of pixbox77 at FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Research on what matters most in Intervention: Focus on Intervener

- We could distinguish those with secure vs. insecure outcomes
- Wilks' lambda significant
 - ▣ $\lambda = .66, \chi^2 = 22.67, p = .004, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .13$
- Therapist behavior that contribute most to distinguishing secure vs. insecure outcomes
 - ▣ Therapist Warmth
- Model correctly predicts
 - ▣ 77.8% of those with secure infant outcomes and
 - ▣ 83.3% of those with insecure infant outcomes

Research on what matters most in intervention: Focus on Mothers

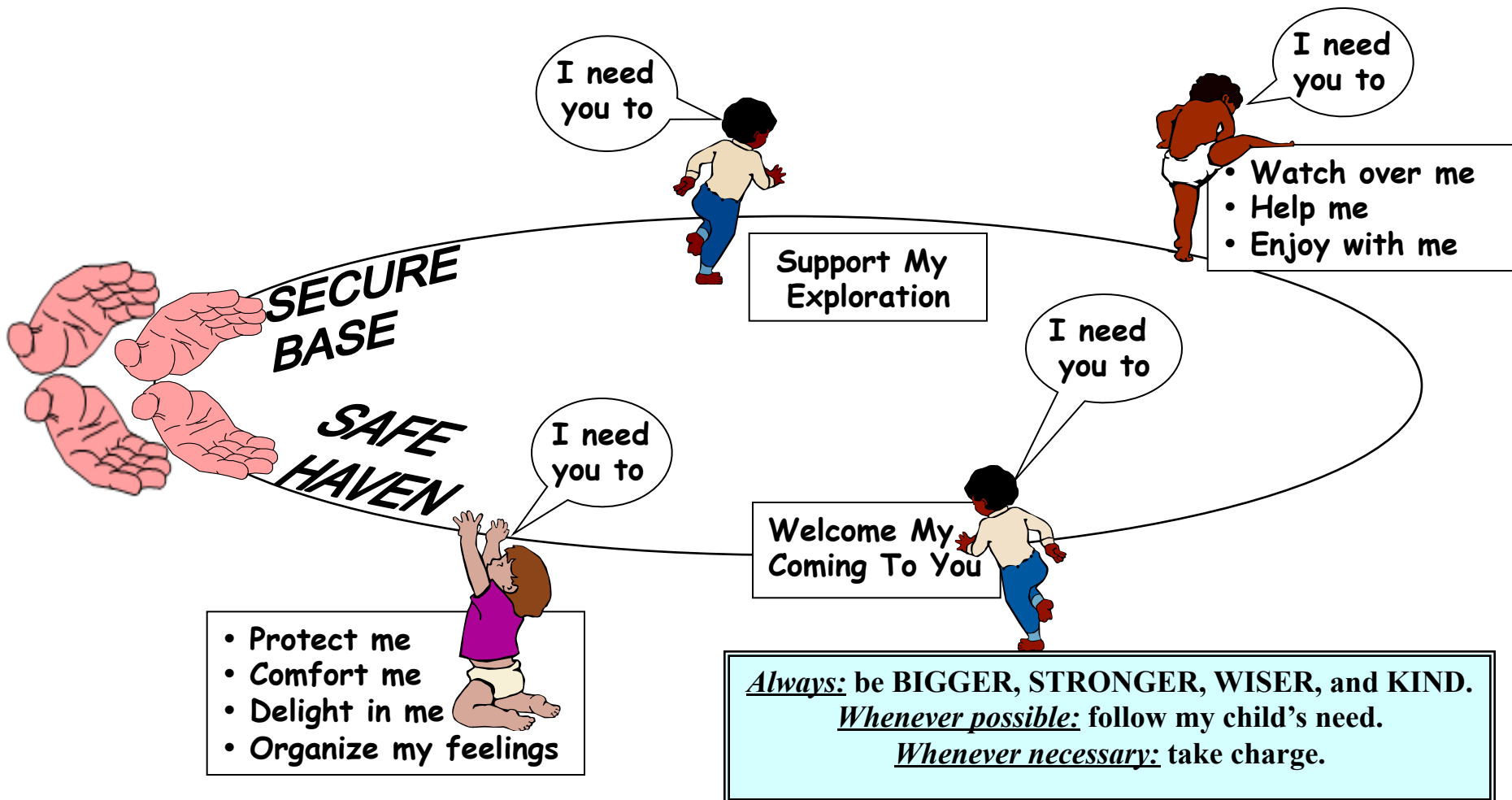
- We could distinguish those with secure vs. insecure outcomes
- Wilks' lambda significant
 - ▣ $\lambda = .61, \chi^2 = 26.91, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .11$
- Mother behavior that contribute most to distinguishing secure vs. insecure outcomes
 - ▣ Mother participation
- Model correctly predicts
 - ▣ 83.3% of those with secure infant outcomes and
 - ▣ 79.2% of those with insecure infant outcomes

Research on Successful vs. Unsuccessful Cases

- Importance of emotion regulation during session
- In the moment examples of secure base provision by the therapist (e.g., eye contact, regulation during exploration)
- The importance of the group process
 - ▣ Strong cohesion
 - ▣ Non-disruptive
- Undoing in the end--unsuccessful
 - ▣ Loss of belief in ability to respond to child's need despite her defensive processes
 - ▣ Unable to cognitively hold at once both defensive process & understand child need

CIRCLE OF SECURITY[®]

PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS



What about “Dealing with Difficult Parents”?

- Dealing with difficult people
 - ▣ What to do
 - ▣ What to say
- Not about what to do....but...
- **A way of being**
- **“Don’t just do something, sit there.”**

What makes relationships with parents difficult

- Trust
- Quality of our relationships with them
- Struggles with cultural differences
- Mental health issues

Trust

- "Distrust is really yet another form of inequality. Those who are better off have more reason to trust those around them. And that trust brings benefits."
 - *Ain't No Trust: How Bosses, Boyfriends and Bureaucrats Fail Low-Income Mothers and Why it Matters*
 - by Judith A. Levine
- We need to surround out families with trustworthy people
- How can we be trustworthy
 - ▣ and communicate our trustworthiness?
 - ▣ You can be secure with us

Attachment Theory and Research

- All about how we develop trust that we can be secure
- All about what adults can do to provide a relationship that is trustworthy
- Circle of Security graphic summarizes what we know...
 - ▣ What we know about security in children
 - ▣ Applies just as well to what makes us feel secure
 - ▣ And what makes those we care about feel secure with us
 - ▣ And helps us understand parents' perceptions of us as a staff—are we safe? Can they feel secure with us?

Being With

- Greatest gift: simply to be there
- Staying in emotional contact
- But not reacting on the basis of emotion alone
- “Do unto others as you would have others do unto others.” (Jeree Pawl, quoted in Shamoon et al., 1995)
- Requires
 - ▣ Self-awareness
 - ▣ Ability to experience feelings
 - ▣ Ability to choose whether, when, how to respond

Simple ways of Being There from Research on Marriage

- Dr. John Gottman
 - 5:1 ratio for happy marriages
 - Positive override
- How can we get that happening in our classrooms and home visits?
 - Saying hello, saying goodbye: warm, not “bright”
 - Eye contact
 - Sharing a story/listening—asking questions
 - Creating events to come together, share information when coming and going
 - Telling something positive about their child

Simple Ways of Being There: Attending to Structure

- Are there formal and informal opportunities for two-way communication?
- Are there regular meetings to sit back, share, and reflect on best course of action?
- Do we need to go where the parents are?
- How do we communicate information with parents? Notes? Newsletters?
- How do we communicate respect for diversity in big ways and small ways?

Being With: In Those Less Simple *Emotional Times*

- We tend to be give what we've been given
- If others have been with us during emotional times, it's easier for us to be with strong feelings
- If others struggled in being with us...then we may struggle too
 - ▣ Relevant to navigating diversity and cultural differences as well—as these can be very emotional, gut experiences
- Self-awareness: Helpful to explore

Circle of Security Website

- For more information about the Circle of Security, see <http://circleofsecurity.net/>



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