

## Helping Parents Understand Behaviour

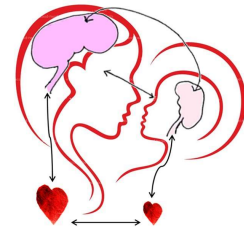
- When parents feel understood, they become open to trying to understand others
- Always consider the underlying function of parents' behaviours and reactions
- Help parents to wonder about their child's inner world
- Develop openness and curiosity about behaviour
- If we can understand what drives a behaviour, we can work out how to respond to it
- If we can meet the need that is driving a behaviour, the behaviour can start to reduce
- **Some clues:** *is the behaviour a fight/flight/freeze/withdraw response? Is it related to hunger/tiredness? Is it a bid for connection or space?*



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## Parental Reflective Function

**What is it:** the parent's capacity to ascribe meaning to emotions and behaviours – linked to positive outcomes across multiple developmental domains.  
RF has explicit and implicit components, as well as self/other aspects



**The impact of stress and trauma:** as stress increases, child-reading system gives way to hypervigilance for signs of distress, anger or rejection – which trigger defensive reactions and bias the child-reading system toward negative perceptions (Hughes & Baylin).

**How do we develop it:** Research demonstrates that reflective capacity can be increased through targeted intervention that focuses on the inner world and intentionality of the child (e.g. Bringing up Great Kids, Circle of Security, Tuned-In Parenting, Lighthouse Parenting).

Promoted through active, facilitated **wondering** about mental states. Support curiosity and 'wondering'. Listen to parents' speech about their child – does it contain any 'mental state' talk? Watch parents interact with their child – look for instances of 'mind-mindedness' and highlight these to the parent.

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## Relationship-based strategies

- **For school age children:**
- Increase understanding of developmental needs and expectations
- Explore what's under the behaviour
- Notice what the child does well and offer praise
- Set boundaries and have good routines
- View discipline as a learning not a punishment
- Use 'time-in' rather than time-out
- Support families learning how to have fun together

## Establishing parent-child boundaries

- 'Parentification' can be instrumental or emotional
- Help parents to establish their role as the parent – identify appropriate alternatives for emotional and practical support
- Help parents to develop appropriate expectations for: behaviours, emotional capacities, household contributions, relational repair

## Connection through Movement & Play

- Incorporate interventions that involve the body
- Explore opportunities for families to engage in movement-based activities together
- Support families to establish a culture of play and fun (not all parents know how to “play”)

Family yoga?  
 Family walks  
 Loungeroom dance party  
 Infant massage  
 Hammock/swings

Connected play – blowing bubbles together  
 Cotton ball hockey  
 Feather tennis



*Support parents to engage in their children’s play in a child-led way – let the child direct and script*



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## Managing parents/caregiver responses

- Parents need assistance to make sense of their life experience through a supportive, empathic emotional relationship which encourages authenticity, nurturing and direct communication
- Often, accessing internal recollections can enable a parent to become part of a larger narrative of their life. This is not always comfortable but can assist in discovering new possibilities.....



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