



## Understanding Attachment in Synergetic Play Therapy

### Learning Objectives:

1. Discuss Synergetic Play Therapy's definition and perspective on attachment
2. Describe the link between a child's attachment styles and their nervous system states
3. Explore how to use the self-object to help develop a secure attachment style within the child

### What Is Attachment?

#### What We Were Taught:

*Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969)*

*Attachment does not have to be reciprocal. One person may have an attachment with an individual, which is not shared. Attachment is characterized by specific behaviors in children, such as proximity seeking with the attachment figure when upset or threatened (Bowlby, 1969)*

*Bowlby defined attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (1969, p. 194).*

#### New Addition to Attachment Theory:

*"Remember always that whatsoever is happening around you is rooted in the mind. Mind is always the cause. It is the projector, and outside there are only screens- you project yourself." – Osho*

- We are not attaching to individuals but rather to our perception of individuals
- Research now demonstrates that we can have many attachment styles and attachment styles change
- Attachment styles match up with states of the nervous system
  - Hyper-aroused looks like anxious ambivalent
  - Hypo-aroused looks like avoidant
  - Fluctuating between hyper and hypo looks like disorganized
  - Regulated looks like secure

#### Attachment from a Synergetic Play Therapy Perspective:

- There is influence from the other individuals! Of course another person influences our perceptions, but there is more going on. It is the person's perception of the individual they are in relationship with that is ultimately determining their attachment style with that person.
- When we learn to attach to self we can be in relationship with anyone. Goal in all therapy is to help children learn how to have a secure attachment to themselves.
- Resiliency is the speed at which you reattach to yourself after you detach/become dysregulated

#### Notes:

## **How Does An Attachment to Self Develop? Rocking the Baby!**

Review Chapters 4 and 5 to review what regulation really is and how to become the external regulator in Aggression in Play Therapy: A Neurobiological Approach for Integrating Intensity

- Babies know how to get dysregulated. The ability to self-regulate is a learned response and thus needs an external regulator.
- In SPT, the role of the therapist is to become the external regulator.
- The attuned caregiver picks up the baby, manually becomes the external regulator, and supports the child through breath, movement, rhythm, sound, naming things, and physical contact (same things we do in the playroom).
- The caregiver/therapist helps the baby move from a dysregulated state back to a regulated state... over and over and over and over again. This imprints the nervous system so that the baby internalizes the external regulator and then is able call upon this within themselves when needed (an internal working model).
- Reminder: Don't flood the baby! We only regulate when regulation is needed. "The baby isn't always crying."

*"Attachment to self is the cornerstone for all healing." – Lisa Dion*

### **Self-Object**

The toy that gets the largest projected energy of self is referred to as the self-object; however, all toys ultimately are self-objects.

Special attention is given to:

1. Items brought from home
2. Babies
3. Toys that appear vulnerable

With the self-object as a representation of the vulnerable self in the playroom, we have an agenda to model and encourage a secure attachment with the self-object. In doing so, we help the child learn how to develop a secure attachment style with themselves.

It's important to:

1. Acknowledge the self-object
2. Treat the Self-Object as if it was a special young person
3. Help the child attach through their self-object

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### **To Work On:**

1. Go back and look through my notes to see if I need to modify my client's goals in any way .
2. Continue to practice talking with parents in terms of the goals when I meet with them and notice whether or not I am imposing expectations on them.
3. Continue to work on modeling regulation and naming my experience in my sessions.

## Quiz Review:

1. While in relationship, if I'm perceiving that I can do something about the challenge and presenting as anxious, aggressive, overwhelming, or irritable, someone observing would say that I have an avoidant attachment style.
2. The attachment styles match perfectly to the dysregulated states and regulated state of the nervous system.
3. Synergetic Play Therapists understand that the attachment process is to our perception of others and ultimately to ourselves.
4. An "attachment disorder" reframed is a child that hasn't figured out how to connect to self.
5. It is important and possible for the nervous system to always be in a state of regulation.
6. The speed at which you come back to regulation after becoming dysregulated, or re-attaching to self after disconnecting from self, is your resiliency level.
7. The nervous system has a desire to return to a regulated state- it wants to come home.
8. If you are in an extended experience of one dysregulated state of the nervous system, it might be because you are not giving yourself permission to name what is really happening inside (e.g., the other side of the dysregulation.)
9. The therapist's experience (dysregulated state) will always look like how the child presents on the outside.
10. A child needs another nervous system to pattern their nervous system off of.
11. An attuned caregiver does not need to regulate themselves while they attempt to help regulate their infant.
12. Through our repeated attempts to move from dysregulation to regulation, we support the child's re-patterning of their nervous system.
13. It isn't important to help parents learn how to attach to themselves. We only need to help the child do this.
14. A breath is a moment of attachment to self.

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## References

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