

Repair Beyond Rupture

From Micro-Moments to Transformative Healing

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What the Literature Tells Us About Rupture and Repair

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Jeremy Safran & Christopher Muran

Rupture is Inevitable

- Ruptures are inevitable in psychotherapy and are a normal part of the therapeutic process
- A rupture is a strain or breakdown in the therapeutic alliance
- Therapy is not effective because ruptures never occur, it is effective because therapist and client learn to recognize and repair them
- Repair strengthens trust and creates opportunities for new relational experiences

Safran, J. D., & Muran, J. C. (2000). *Negotiating the Therapeutic Alliance: A Relational Treatment Guide*. Guilford Press.

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Ed Tronick

Misattunement is Normal

- Perfect attunement is impossible
- Parent and infant are mismatched much of the time
- Healthy development depends on repeatedly finding one another again
- Security develops through cycles of attunement, mis-attunement and repair

Tronick, E. Z. (2007). *The Neurobehavioral and Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Children*. W. W. Norton.

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Dan Siegel

Integration is the Goal

- Mental health reflects increasing integration
- Secure relationships help integrate emotion, body, cognition and relationship dynamics
- Healing comes through repeated integrative experiences rather than insight alone (Van der Kolk's *Body Keeps the Score*)

Siegel, D. J. (2020). *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

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Stephen Porges

Safety and Neuroception

- The nervous system is constantly evaluating cues of safety and danger (neuroception)
- Co-regulation through safe relationships support autonomic flexibility
- Healing occurs when the nervous system experiences enough safety to remain engaged during activation

Porges, S. W. (2011). The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation. W. W. Norton.

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Allan Schore

Repair Organizes the Nervous System

- Repeated experiences of co-regulation shape the developing brain
- The right hemisphere develops through emotionally attuned relationships
- Interactive regulation gradually increases emotional regulation
- Mutual regression to earlier attachment states is unavoidable

Schore, A. N. (2012). The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy. W. W. Norton.

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Rupture and Repair Examples

Rupture	Repair
Child breaks a toy in a moment of anger	Therapist acknowledges and doesn't shame the child
Therapist sets a firm limit that surprises or upsets the child	Therapist acknowledges the impact of their response
Therapist misunderstands the child's play while tracking	Therapist acknowledges and tries again
Child physically hurts the therapist	Therapist acknowledges and redirects without taking it personally
Therapist accidentally forgets a session or double-books an appointment	Therapist takes responsibility and works to rebuild trust
Therapist misses an important emotional cue and redirects the play	Therapist notices the miss and re-attunes
Therapist forgets to give a countdown creating an abrupt ending to the session	Therapist acknowledges impact
Therapist asks too many questions and the child shuts down	Therapist recognizes impact and re-attunes

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How to Handle Relational Ruptures

- Recognize the impact before trying to resolve it. The child or parent's experience matters more than your intention
- Don't defend, try to fix or over explain
- Make space for their experience and perspective. Acknowledging doesn't mean you have to agree.
- Take responsibility for your contribution without shifting focus to your guilt or need for them to like you/not be mad at you
- Use "I am sorry" consciously
- Reflect on what happened and commit to your own growth and behavior changes, if needed

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Rupture/Repair Expanded

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The existing literature has primarily focused on rupture as something that occurs between therapist and client—a disruption in the therapeutic alliance.

SPT expands this understanding by recognizing that rupture can occur **simultaneously in three places.**

Within the relationship, within the child and within the therapist.

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What is Rupture?

A rupture is any moment in which **connection to self and/or another** becomes interrupted

- Within the Relationship (As Explored)
- Within the Child
 - Moving away from feeling and sensation
 - Leaving the body
 - Withdrawing from relationship
 - Disconnecting from need
 - Masking, performing, people-pleasing
 - Emotional Flooding

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What is Rupture?

A rupture is any moment in which **connection to self and/or another** becomes interrupted

- Within the Therapist
 - Moving into fixing
 - Interpreting instead of sensing
 - Rescuing
 - Disconnecting from authenticity
 - Examples from within the child

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Why does Rupture Happen?

- The experience has activated something in our "historical filing cabinet" and our protective patterns emerge
- Expectations about how something should be
- Sensation is experienced as overwhelming or too big, too fast
- Sensation is experienced as underwhelming or not enough
- Hard to stay present with sensation, feelings and thoughts
- Other?

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Instead of asking,
"Did we lose connection?"
ask,
"Where did the child leave themselves?"
"Where did I leave myself?"

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What is Repair?

- Repair is the process through which experiences of disconnection become opportunities for deeper connection with self and relationship
- Repair occurs in large macro-moments and micro-moments.
- Micro-repairs repeated over time, become the foundation for transformation
- "Attachment to Self" is the cornerstone of all healing

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Micro Repairs

"Attachment to Self"

- Reconnecting to sensation
- Reconnecting to needs
- Reconnecting to authentic expression

Repair isn't simply relational. It is intrapsychic and relational simultaneously. It is an on-going process, not something that happens every once in awhile such as in a Macro-rupture.

Repair expands capacity

Note: Creating a neuroception of safety when emotional flooding occurs is part of the repair

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Put it all together...

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Repair isn't something we do to children. It is something we become willing to experience with them. Every rupture invites us into our own inner world as much as it invites us into theirs. As we increase our own capacity to stay connected to ourselves in the midst of activation, we become capable of offering children a different relational experience—one in which disconnection no longer has to mean abandonment, shame, or the end of relationship. Instead, it becomes an opportunity for greater connection, greater integration, and greater capacity.

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FREE handouts/resources under "Free Resources" at synergeticplaytherapy.com

Aggression in Play Therapy: A Neurobiological Approach for Integrating Intensity in Play Therapy book

Online 1-3 hour courses at learn.synergeticplaytherapy.com

In person or online Introduction to Synergetic Play Therapy Training program

Synergetic Play Therapy Certification Program

Business of Therapy 2.5 Day course

synergeticplaytherapy.com

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