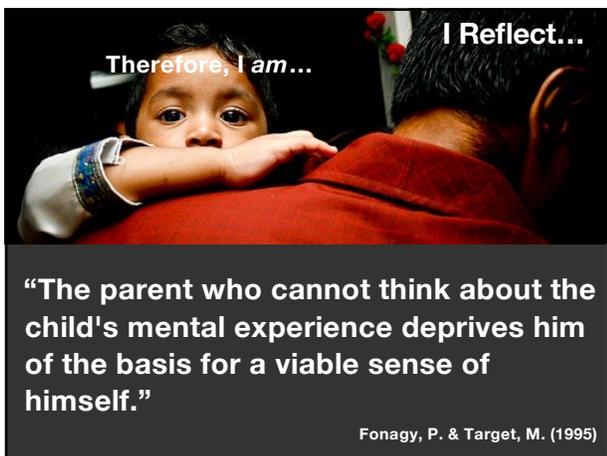


LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Describe the concept of parental **Reflective Functioning (RF)**, and its relationship to enhancing secure attachment and preventing negative caregiving behaviors.
- Distinguish **high, medium, and low Reflective Functioning** in parent communications.
- Identify the **three pillars of a mindful and reflective approach** to working with at-risk parent-infant dyads



Targeting Families in Need

- Families with Child Welfare Involvement
- Foster to Adoptive Families
- Teen Parents
- Substance Abusing Mothers / Dual Diagnosis
- Mothers with Perinatal Anxiety / Depression
- Non-English Speaking Immigrant Families
- Head Start / Early Head Start Families

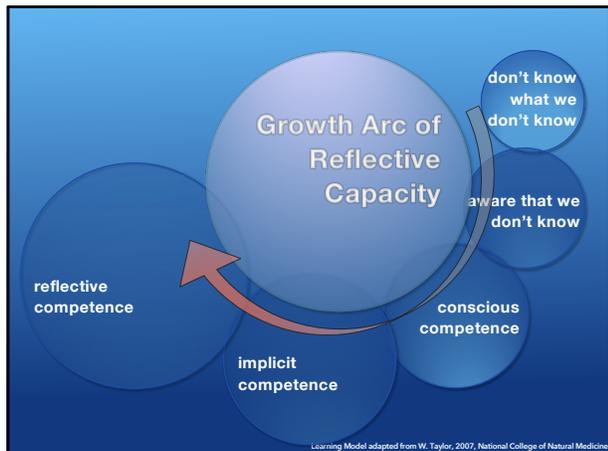
What is “_____”?

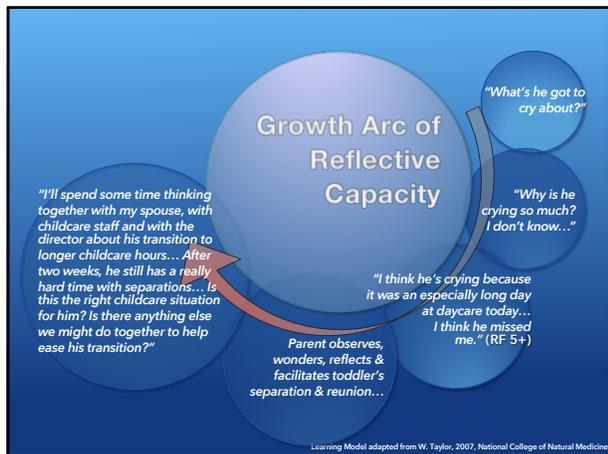
An essential human capacity to interpret behavior in light of the underlying thoughts, feelings, intentions, beliefs, desires & plans

Why is RF important to relationships?

- **Crucial to development** of infant attachment security (Slade, 2005)
- **Protective factor against hostile and intrusive caregiving behavior** (Grienenberger & Slade, 2005)
- Intrinsic to **emotional regulation** (Slade, 2005)
- **Protective factor against development of personality psychopathology** (Fonagy & Target, 2002)

Research demonstrates that the ability to reflect is an ordinary human capacity, not limited by education, socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity





Building Blocks of Reflective Process

- ✓ Recognize & label basic mental states
- ✓ Understand that behavior is motivated by underlying mental states
- ✓ Foster links between mental states
- ✓ Awareness of the interconnectedness of minds

A mindful and reflective stance is...



A mindful and reflective stance includes three pillars:

- Mindful Observation
- Flexible Response
- Reflection

These pillars serve as **primary pathways for enhancing reflective capacity** of parents, providers, groups, organizations, communities!

MINDFUL PARENTING GROUPS

Hands-on, Relationship-Focused Groups for Parents and Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers

- Groups consist of 4 to 6 parent-child dyads plus at least 2 group facilitators
- One or both parents/caregivers may attend
- Children are grouped developmentally, from 3 months to 3.5 years of age
- 1½ hour weekly meetings, 6 to 12 months' participation recommended

MINDFUL PARENTING GROUP STRUCTURE

- Parent Check-In & Mindfulness Exercise (10 mins)
- Mindful Observation (15-20 mins)
- Flexible Response modeled in Facilitation of Social Interactions (concurrent)
- Reflection: (20-30 mins)
 - > *“What are the children working on today?”*
 - > *“What are the children inviting us to think about today?”*
 - > *“What’s the feeling in the room right now?”*

MINDFUL PARENTING GROUP STRUCTURE

- For older toddlers (14+ mos), a Facilitator-led Snack Time (10+ mins)
- Questions & Concerns re: development (10-15 mins)
- For older infants (10-12+ mos) a Circle Time & Closing Song (5+ mins)

Note: Mindful Observation, Flexible Response and Reflection continue throughout balance of meeting.

PRACTICING MINDFUL OBSERVATION

- Collect observational data
- Avoid premature conclusions & judgment
- Mindful attention to minute details of experience
- Bear witness to emotion



Mindful Parenting Pillar: Observation
'Bowl Exchange'

Reflective minds are:

- ✓ *curious about what underlies behavior*
- ✓ *see all behavior as meaningful*
- ✓ *willing to tolerate uncertainty*

Reflective minds understand:

- ✓ *other minds are separate & connected*
- ✓ *ruptures are part of relationships*
- ✓ *repair is how we make things right again*

Potential for Breakdown in RF

in Parents, Caregivers, or Providers

- Escalation of stress ➔ Breakdown in RF
- Temperament and/or fit between Parent and Child ➔ Breakdown in RF
- Hx of unresolved loss or trauma may lead to difficulty processing their own, child's or family's experiences ➔ Breakdown in RF
- Child's developmental age or family situation coincides with adult's trauma ➔ Breakdown in RF

EXAMPLES OF BREAKDOWNS IN REFLECTION:

- Feeling certain about another's motives
- Blame & fault finding
- Overlooking the role we play
- Black & white thinking
- Name calling & labeling
- A primary cause of poor reflection is strong emotion &/or nervous system activation

Reflective Capacity

DOES THE PARENT HOLD THE CHILD'S MIND IN MIND?

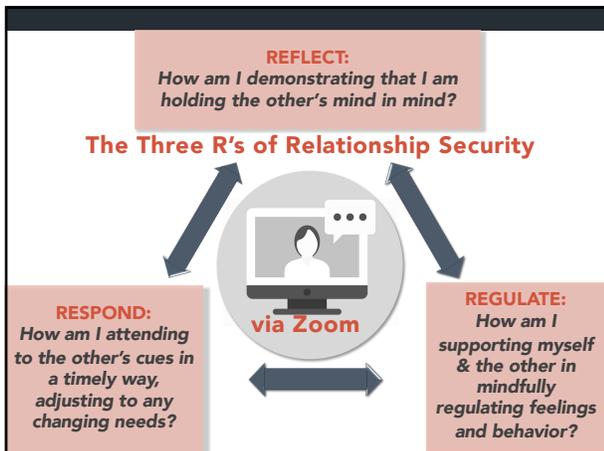
- **HIGH?**
 - *Is the parent's understanding of her child's internal states particularly complex or nuanced – especially related to a difficult incident?*
- **MEDIUM?**
 - *Can the parent identify the child's internal states? Can she link thoughts, feelings and behavior in causal sequences? Does she link her own with her child's internal states?*
- **LOW?**
 - *Are the parent's comments cliché or generic? Is there a lack of detail? Is it hard to get a sense of the specific child?*

Parent of toddler girl: “She was a little pushy broad today... She just went over and just, ‘I want that... Take it.’ That’s the first time I’ve ever seen her be that aggressive. I think it’s her kind of testing the limits or boundaries where she can get away with murder... She can’t get away with something like that at home...”

*Pillar of Mindful Parenting: **Reflection**
‘Bowl Exchange’*

Parent of toddler boy: “I’m not sure that they understand that it’s aggressive... I think they just want that toy, and they don’t understand the whole social, emotional... So, if they want a toy, then they’re going to take it...and if they don’t get a reaction from the other child, then they probably won’t have a problem with it. But let’s say that she takes the toy, and he cries, then that probably will...I don’t know...make her think about, well, ‘What’s going on? What did I do?’”

*Pillar of Mindful Parenting: **Reflection**
‘Bowl Exchange’*



TRANSFORMING
Parental States of Mind

Unresolved / Hostile States of Mind in Pre-Intervention PDI

Can you tell me about a time in the last week when you felt really angry as a parent?

“She started screaming hysterically when I told her to go potty and I got angry and, and... I, I, I, (*long pause*) snatched her up a little (*pause*) roughly (*laughs*) [*uncontained hostility*] ...and then I was like, okay, just go put her in bed. But I calmed down right away. I am a completely even-tempered person [*incongruent*]. Sometimes I just snatch her up. We decided not to yell at her, so I snatch her up. You know, I wasn’t angry, I was frustrated [*incongruent*]. I tell people when I don’t like it, it’s just how I am [*self-serving*]...”

Unresolved / Hostile States of Mind in Pre-Intervention PDI

“Sometimes I grab her with real force, although usually she’s crying about as hard as she ever could cry so I don’t think it gets worse for her whatever I do really [*minimizing*].”

The interviewer then asked a follow-up question about the impact of her anger on her daughter and Mom S responded:

“She tries to find the best in everything, I was expressing my frustration but in a nice way [*incongruent*] and she was happy about it [*self-serving, minimizing impact on child*].”



Mindful Parenting Pillar: Flexible Response
'Can't Stand It'



Mindful Parenting Pillar: Reflection
'I Think I Grabbed Her Aggressively'



Mindful Parenting Pillar: Flexible Response
'Toddler Gets Hurt'



Mindful Parenting Pillar: Flexible Response
'Made it to Mommy's Lap'

Secure States of Mind in Post-Intervention PDI

Can you tell me about a time in the last week when you felt really guilty as a parent?

“Yeah, it was in the potty training, she went in her pants for the third time. Then I got her to sit on the potty and I said ‘B., I want you to go on the potty’. I felt that I was being negative, and I don’t think that is a good way of doing it. So I felt guilty about that, I felt my tone of voice was saying, ‘I don’t like you.’ I was using that tone of voice you save for people you don’t like, and I felt pretty guilty about that.”

Post-Intervention PDI— continued

What kind of effect did these feelings have on your daughter?

“Well, the guilty feelings I don’t think she is aware of, but the anger she is pretty sensitive to. When I first got her, I wasn’t handling my anger very well. Sometimes I would get too rough with her, like I said, I would grab her. She is very responsive, and I remember a turning point for me was when she saw my face one time and I could see that she was scared.

Post-Intervention PDI—continued

“It diffused me just like that, the idea that she was afraid of me. Now I am working on my tone of voice, but sometimes I am not so successful. I wasn’t sure about the potty incident, but I did feel guilty about it. I think she may have looked a little hurt. I imagine she probably was hurt by it. So I think that my guilty feelings have helped me to work on managing my anger, because I see the impact of my angry feelings on her. ”