

Understanding Attachment Theory in the Context of Restorative Practices with Children & Youth

*Presented at the Nova Scotia School Counsellors
Association B.R.E.A.T.H.E Conference*

October 26, 2012

Presented by

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Who Is Robert Wright?

A registered SW Private Practitioner

Former Student Support Worker with HRSB

Former Correctional Mental Health Worker Washington State
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Former Social Worker/Researcher Youth Pathways Programme

Former Executive Director of Family & Children's Services of
Cumberland County

Former Executive Director of the Child and Youth Strategy

PhD Student in Sociology – Race, Identity, Power

The Link Between Attachment and Restorative Practice

Restorative Practice is designed to bring together persons in conflict in an attempt to heal the rift between the two and re-establish them within community

Restorative Practice presumes that the people in conflict exist within a community.

Restorative Practice presumes that persons want to, and are able to live “in community”.

The capacity to form connections with people, attachment, is essential if Restorative Practice is to be successful.

“Mal-attached” youth will have greater challenges in school and challenges being engaged in restorative practices.

Robert's Hypotheses

The children and youth who experience and cause the most difficulties in schools and communities suffer from some form of mal-attachment.

Restorative practices are being introduced in schools to improve school community and draw the most challenged students "back into the fold".

Restorative practice will be ineffective in reaching the very students who are most in need of healing if practitioners do not understand the link between mal-attachment and "delinquency".

What is Attachment?

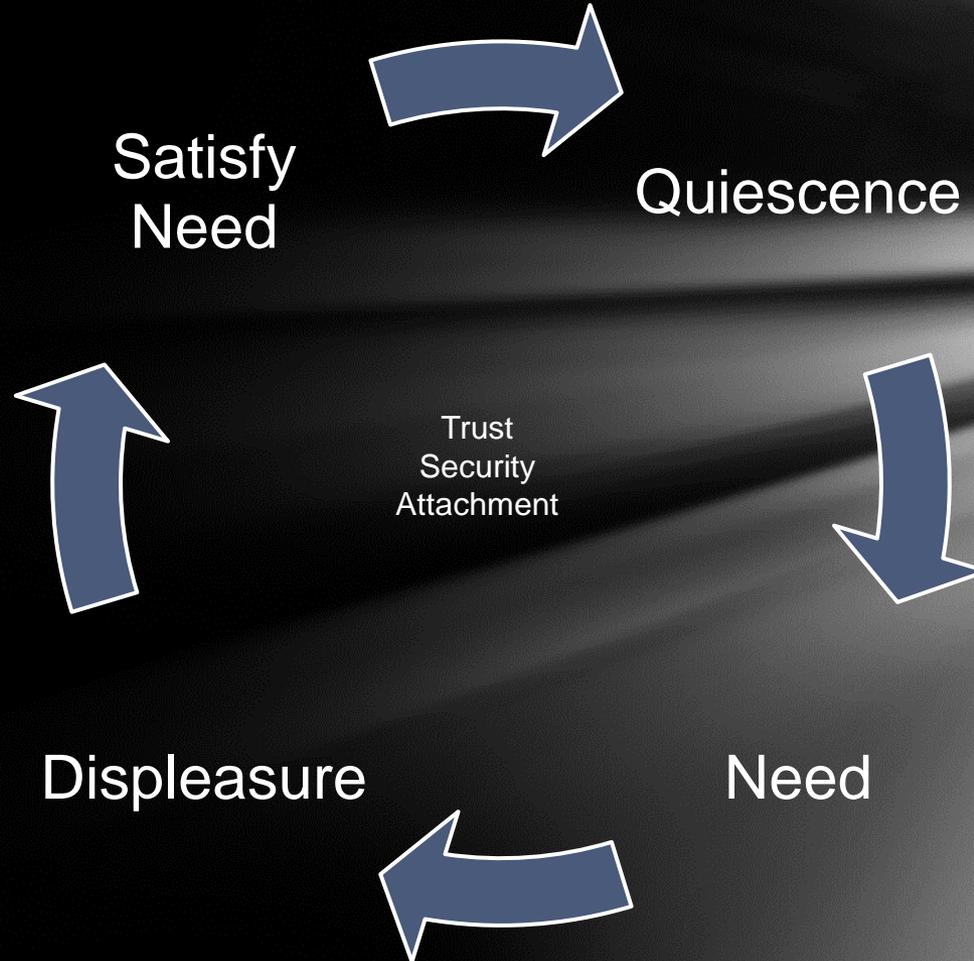
Attachment is “an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally (Kennell 1976).”

Attachment is an emotional phenomenon rooted in our neurobiology.

Early abuse, neglect, abandonment, unrelieved pain, or other traumatic events can create neural pathways that interfere with attachment and have life-long consequences for a child

- <http://www.attachmentcenter.org>
- <http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/ewaters>

How Attachment Develops



Instructions:

Bonding with Baby



YES



NO

Attachment & Psychosocial Theory

Approximate Age	Virtues	Psycho Social Crisis	Significant Relationship	Existential Question	Examples
0–2 years	Hopes	Basic Trust vs. Mistrust	Mother	Can I Trust the World?	Feeding, Abandonment
2–4 years	Will	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Parents	Is It Ok To Be Me?	Toilet Training, Clothing Themselves
4–5 years	Purpose	Initiative vs. Guilt	Family	Is It Ok For Me To Do, Move and Act?	Exploring, Using Tools or Making Art
5–12 years	Competence	Industry vs. Inferiority	Neighbors, School	Can I Make It In The World Of People And Things?	School, Sports
13–19 years	Fidelity	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Peers, Role Model	Who Am I? What Can I Be?	Social Relationships

Katz's Hypotheses

1. Youth who have been arrested or confined will experience more shame [than others].
2. Youth with poorer attachments to their parents will also experience higher levels of shame.
3. Youth with higher levels of shame will be more likely to engage in violent behavior and substance abuse.
4. Youth with secure attachments . . . , and those experiencing reintegrative shaming through progressive social welfare programming will exhibit less shame and aggressive behavior. . . .
5. Youth who run away from home . . . will exhibit higher levels of shame and will be more likely to engage in violence and substance abuse.
6. Poor youth are more likely to experience higher levels of shame.

Rebecca S. Katz & The Link

Critiquing and expanding on the work of earlier practitioners, Katz suggests that punitive, shame-producing criminal justice strategies will only serve to deepen the shame of mal-attached youth leading to more criminal behaviour.

She suggests proactive strategies to youth crime, which may involve reintegrative shaming, designed to decrease shame, heal early disruptions in attachment formation and draw youth into a sense of community.

Katz, R. S. (2002). Re-examining the integrative social capital theory of crime. *Western Criminology Review*, 4 (1), 30-54.

What Does It Mean?

Educators and restorative practitioners need to be aware that the attachment health of youth is critical to engaging them.

Though punitive and shaming practices should be avoided generally, they are specifically contraindicated in working with mal-attached youth.

Creating reparative school communities and key adult care leaders are essential to creating environments that can be conducive to repairing early attachment harm.

Mal-attached youth need to be in genuine attachment relationships with educators and adult care leaders in order for them to heal their attachment capacity and develop their desire and capacity to live within the school community.

Questions?

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