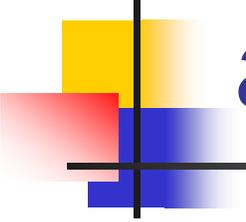


Strengthening the Adoptive Family: An Attachment-Based Family Therapy Approach

Reena Bernards, LCMFT

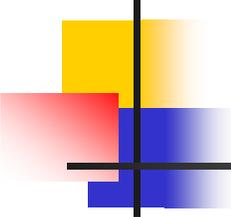
January 31, 2014

Jonah Green and Associates, LLC



Initial Thoughts about Adoption

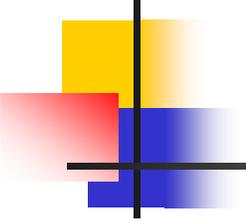
- Adoption has both losses and gains for all members of the adoption triangle (birthparents, adoptive parents, and adopted child). Losses need to be grieved.
- Gratifying, close bonds and attachments between adoptive parents and child can be achieved
- Adoption is a lifelong journey into self, affecting all members of the adoptive triangle
- Adopted children are over-represented in mental health clinical settings, given therapists an opportunity to assist families in the journey.



Agenda

- Attachment-Based Family Therapy: Attachment Theory
- Awareness about adoption at each stage of life
- Adoption Timeline -- a hands-on tool for telling the story
- Children with complex attachment trauma
- Healing from trauma: Discussing emotions within the family (video clip)
- How to address “horizontal parenting” – dealing with issues of difference in culture, race, abilities or temperament.
- Reunion with birth parents – when and how to make the connection

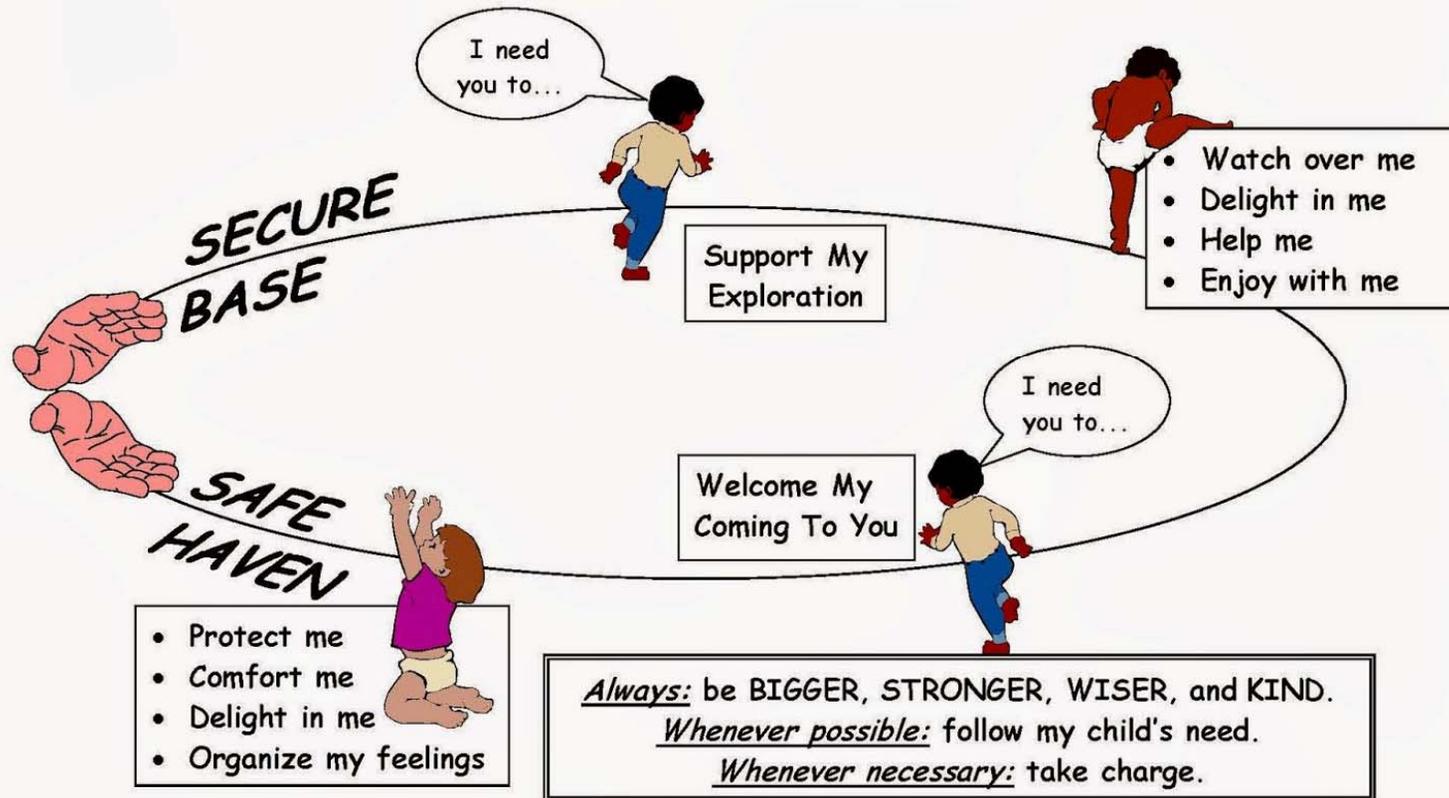
Attachment Theory

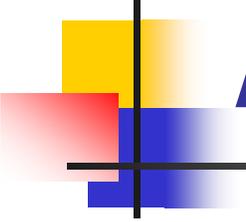


- Early Developers: Dr. John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth
- Application to Adoptive and Foster Families: Dr. Daniel Hughes, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (aka Attachment-Focused Family Therapy)
- Application to Families: Dr. Sue Johnson, Gail Palmer, George Faller, Emotionally Focused Family Therapy (EFFT)

CIRCLE OF SECURITY

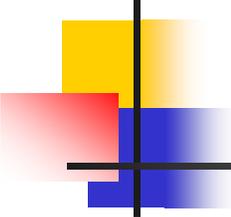
PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS





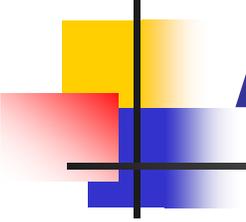
Four Types of Attachment Styles

1. Secure – comfortable with comings and goings, able to rely on self and others
2. Anxious – trouble relying on self
3. Avoidant – trouble relying on others
4. Disorganized (complex attachment trauma) – anxious and avoidant



Goals of Attachment Based-Family Therapy with Adoptive Families

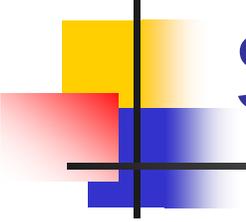
- Help parents access caretaking response appropriate to their child
- Help child create successful bonds with adoptive parents and siblings
- Experience the emotions of adoption story and past trauma and create new meanings
- Integrate adoption story and past trauma into life story, and create new story of safety and success
- Change child's attachment style towards security



Hurdles Faced by Adopted Children*

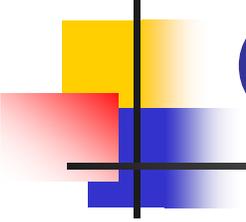
- Reason for relinquishment
- Missing or difficult information
- Permanence
- Difference
- Identity
- Loyalty

*Debbie Riley, The Center for Adoption Support and Education
(Case)



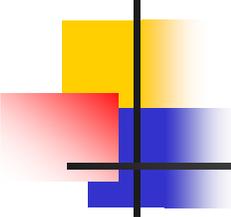
Awareness about Adoption Stages and Developmental Tasks

- Infancy to Two Years
 - Erik Erikson's Identity Stage: Trust vs. Mistrust
 - Child recovers from separation trauma
 - Bonding and attachment to adoptive parents
 - Parents resolve grief over infertility
 - Extended family adjusts to new baby



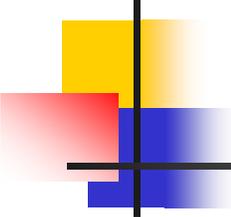
Developmental Stages Continued

- Ages 3-5
 - Erikson's Identity Stage: Initiative vs. Guilt
 - Child learns their adoption story from parents
 - Adoption is seen by child as normal and positive
 - Child notices differences in the family (skin tones, hair color, etc.)
 - Family deals with attitudes about adoption in community



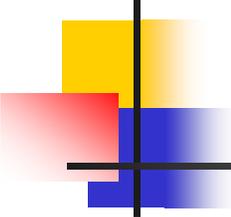
Developmental Stages Continued

- Ages 6-12
 - Erikson's Identity Stage: Industry vs. Inferiority
 - Child grieves the losses of adoption (loss of connection to birth family, birth culture, differences with adoptive family)
 - Child understands that they were "given away"
 - If traumatic past – issues of abandonment and difficulties with attachment become salient
 - Family finds ways to connect child with birth culture



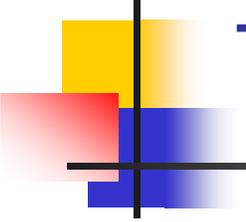
Developmental Stages Continued

- 12-18 years
 - Erikson's Identity Stage: Identity Formation vs. Identity Confusion
 - Separation from parents brings up adoption issues (i.e. rejection of adoptive parents, fear of another abandonment)
 - Chooses piece of identity from adoptive family and birth family
 - Search for identity includes ethnic and racial components
 - Reunion with birth family becomes a possibility



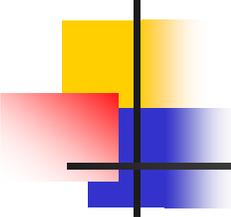
Telling the Adoption Story

- Creating a timeline with child and parents (demonstrate tool)
- Using child's imagination about things that are unknown
- Not avoiding painful realities (but being age appropriate)
- Asking about feelings throughout



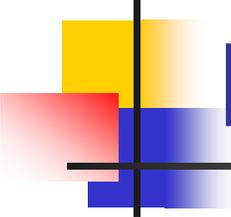
Healing Attitude for Therapist and Parents

- PACE – The “Attitude” necessary for Healing
 - Playfulness: humor, gently move to positive emotions
 - Acceptance:
 - No Evaluation: criticism or praise
 - Accept all feelings (not the behaviors)
 - Curiosity: “What’s it like to feel that way? When did it start?” “Was this because your first mother hurt you?”
 - Empathy: Empathize with the child’s inner life, Help regulate emotion by feeling it, Help facilitate dialogue



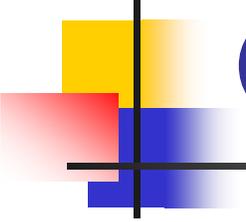
Children with Complex Attachment Trauma

- Repeated abuse and/or neglect
- Traumatic loss of attachment figures
- Disorganized relationship with others
- Can “attach” too easily to strangers, not distinguish who is close and who is not
- Feels scared of losing relationships, and so likes to be in control
- At risk for externalizing behaviors as adult
- 70% of children in foster care system at risk



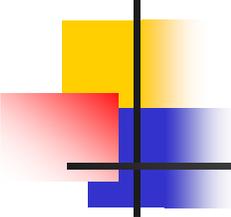
Relevant DSM V Diagnoses

- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – 309.81
 - Includes PTSD for Children 6 years and Younger
 - Features: Includes learning that a traumatic event occurred
 - Symptoms: re-enactment in play, dreams, internalizing or externalizing behaviors
 - Could include delayed onset



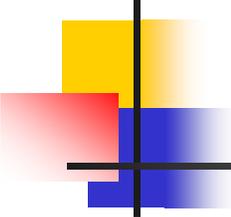
Relevant DSM V Diagnoses Continued

- Reactive Attachment Disorder – 313.89
 - Pattern of inhibited, emotionally withdrawn behavior toward adult caregivers
 - Experienced insufficient care due to neglect, repeated changes in primary caregivers, or reared in institutional setting
 - Note: Majority of severely neglected children do not develop RAD.



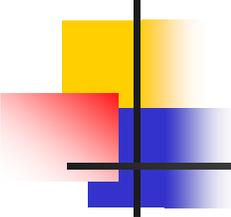
Working through Trauma

- Dialogue between parents and child
- Connect current problems to past trauma
- Allow for emotional expression
- Create new meaning about child's relationship with adoptive parents
- Video Clip of Dr. Dan Hughes
(17:52-25:21)



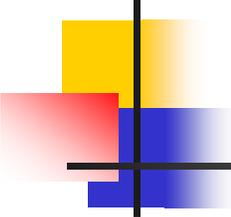
Horizontal Parenting

- “Far from the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity” by Andrew Solomon
 - Parenting children who are different than the parents due to differences in appearance, abilities, sexual orientation, temperament, race or culture
 - Parents are profoundly changed by horizontal parenting
- “The Good Enough Child: How to Have a Imperfect Family and be Perfectly Satisfied” by Brad Sachs
 - Grieving the child you imagined, loving the child you have.



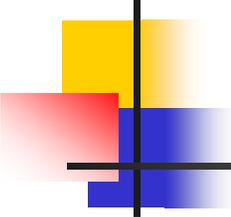
Reunion with Birthparents

- Positive value to open adoption (from birth when possible)
- Ability to reunite with birthparents, even when adopted internationally
- Role of the internet – need for adoptive parents to be involved
- What to consider:
 - Secure bond with adoptive parents
 - How well child has integrated their story



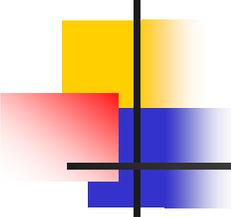
Resources: Websites

- The Center for Adoption Support and Education(CASE)
www.adoptionsupport.com
- PACT: An Adoption Alliance
Supporting transracially adoptive families
www.pactadopt.org
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy
Attachment focused treatment for childhood trauma
www.danielhuges.org
- International Centre for Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy
(EFT)
www.iceeft.com



Bibliography

- Daniel Hughes, Attachment-Focused Family Therapy Workbook
- Kim Golding and Daniel Hughes, Creating Loving Attachments: Parenting with PACE to Nurture Confidence and Security in the Troubled Child
- Deborah Gray, Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents
- Joyce Maguire Pavao, The Family of Adoption



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