

Reflective Parenting with Young Children

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Reflective Parenting is informed by:

- Interpersonal Neurobiology
- Attachment theory & research
- Contemporary psychodynamic theory
- Parent-Infant studies
- Studies on reflective capacity

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Experience profoundly shapes and organizes the
neural architecture of the emotional and social
regions of the brain



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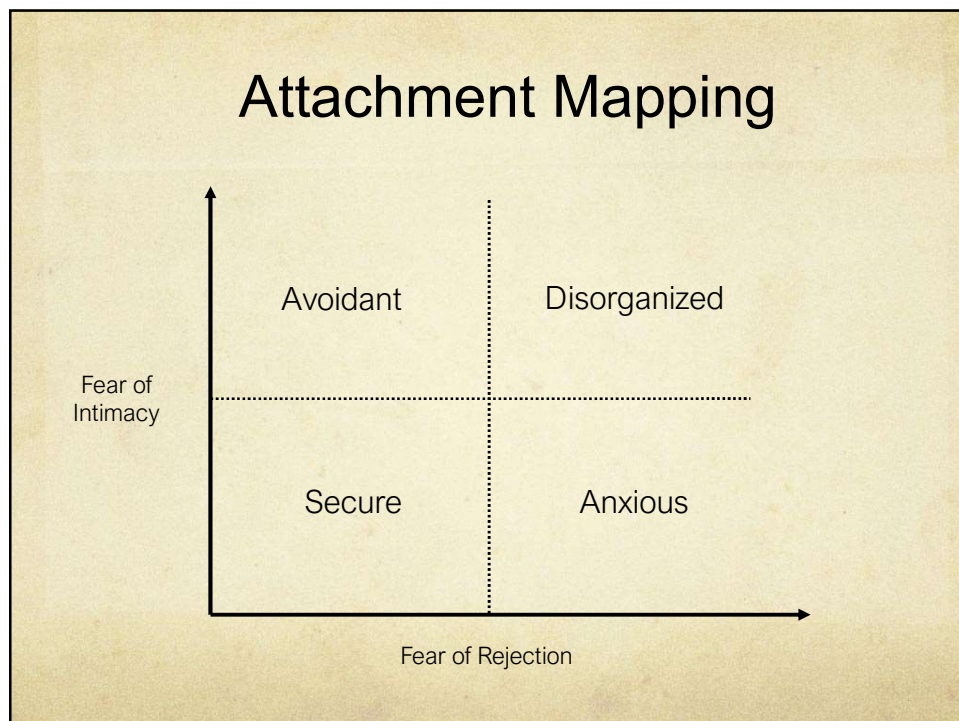
Beyond the provision of safety, protection and a felt sense of security,
the attachment relationship provides the *requisite social context* for the
implicit entrainment of foundational neurobiological and psychological
systems and structures of the right brain during infancy and early
childhood



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Ainsworth	Main
Secure - explores if parent is nearby, is quickly soothed after separation; returns to play	Secure /Autonomous -values attachment, is reflective about relationship
Avoidant - appears not to respond to either the parent's leaving or subsequent return; dismissive	Dismissing - dismissing of attachment needs, tend to idealize or normalize past
Ambivalent - May be distressed even prior to separation; little exploration. Preoccupied with parent; fails to settle	Preoccupied -Preoccupied with past attachment relationships. Appears angry, passive or fearful. Inconsistently available
Disorganized - Displays disorganized, disoriented behavior suggesting a collapse in strategy (freeze at reunion, falls prone; clinging and crying but leaning away from parent)	Disorganized - unresolved issues. Parent shows lapse in monitoring of reasoning or discourse. May lapse into silence.

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Attachment

- Secure children have learned to expect that attachment needs will be provided when distressed. They are free to focus on getting their needs met directly by the parent without hesitation.
- In contrast, insecure and disorganized children have to focus on their attachment needs while simultaneously considering and/or evaluating their parent's reaction when seeking to their get their attachment needs met.

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Attachment

There are two important components supported by the secure attachment relationship:

Safe Haven: provides comfort, soothing, protection, and regulation when needed, helps organize and understand feelings; supports connection

Secure Base: encourages exploration, discovery, agency, self-efficacy, willful effort, supports self-identity and self-expression

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Psychodynamic Theory

“As interpreters of implicit social memory, psychotherapists attempt to reconstruct a past that is simultaneously known and unremembered.

Attempting to uncover implicit memory and integrating it into conscious experience is one of the central tenets of the therapeutic process.”

Cozolino

Louis

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Psychodynamic Theory

“The body is clearly an instrument of physical processes, an instrument that can hear, see, touch, and smell the world around us. This sensitive instrument also has the ability to tune in to the psyche: to listen to its subtle voice, hear its silent music and search into its darkness for meaning.”

1998, p. 17)

(Mathew,

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Use of Self

“(A)ffective communication occurs beneath the words, at implicit levels of the therapeutic relationship; and it represents an interaction between the patient’s emotional vulnerability and the therapist’s emotional availability”

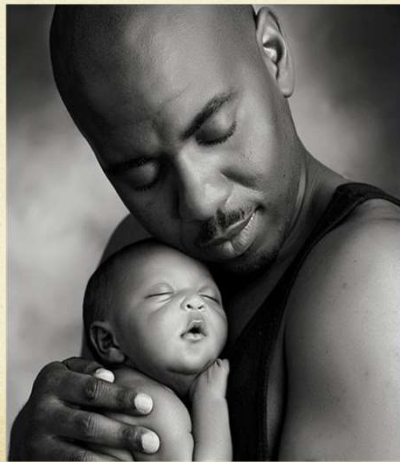
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Reflective Stance

- A deliberate pause to recognize what is going on inside of us and inside the minds of the child in our care
- This helps to understand the child’s intentions, feelings, thoughts, hopes, beliefs, and make sense of their inner world and what might be driving their behavior
- This allows us to more accurately attune and sensitively respond in flexible, empathic and supportive ways
- And identify how our behavior may be impacting others

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Reflective Parenting



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Treatment Considerations

- Remember – patterns feel natural to parent, i.e., the right way to be
- Pattern is outside of conscious awareness (implicitly entrained)
- Provides an automatic internal (intuitive) guide to interact with others
- We don't get to choose our style; does not represent capacity to attach
- Pattern can change – it is not destiny (earned secure)
- Internal drive toward security can aid treatment efforts
- ~~Reflective capacity can aid treatment efforts~~

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Treatment Considerations

- Importance of holding dyad in regulated state in support of learning
- Monitor shifts in state (arousal level) and respond accordingly
- Support developmental guidance (not just a focus on behavior)
- Use of self in support of corrective emotional experiences
- Use of self in support of corrective attachment experiences
- Use of self as an instrument to understand implicit/unconscious patterns (resonance loop; access residue after session)

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Three Relational Elements – the lens for treatment

1. Regulation
 - How is emotion expressed, received, regulated
2. Representation
 - How does parent hold child in mind
 - Shaping of the child's IWM
3. Reflective capacity
 - Level of reflection brought into relationship

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Regulation

- Elements to consider:
 - Attunement, sensitive responsiveness (mirroring)
 - Ability to synchronize (good enough parenting)
 - Emotional availability of parent/caregiver
 - Window of affect tolerance / resilience
 - Level of differentiation
 - Ability to regulate and co-regulate

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Representation

- Elements to consider:
 - How parent “holds child in mind”
 - Attitude toward attachment needs
 - Transmission of Implicit relational schemas
 - Provision of Safe Haven/Secure base needs
 - Transmission of Ghosts & Angels

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Reflection

- Elements to consider:
 - Reflective capacity of parent/caregiver
 - Qualitative difference in interactions
 - An element of secure attachments
 - Support for child's developing capacity
 - Significance for treatment

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Reflective Capacity

- Reflective capacity supports flexible and adaptive responses and supports secure attachments
- Provides opportunities to consider options rather than being locked into an automatic way of seeing and reacting
- Supports empathic connection with others
- Helps us remain "tuned in" to a child's emotional state
- Lessens the tendency to personalize events

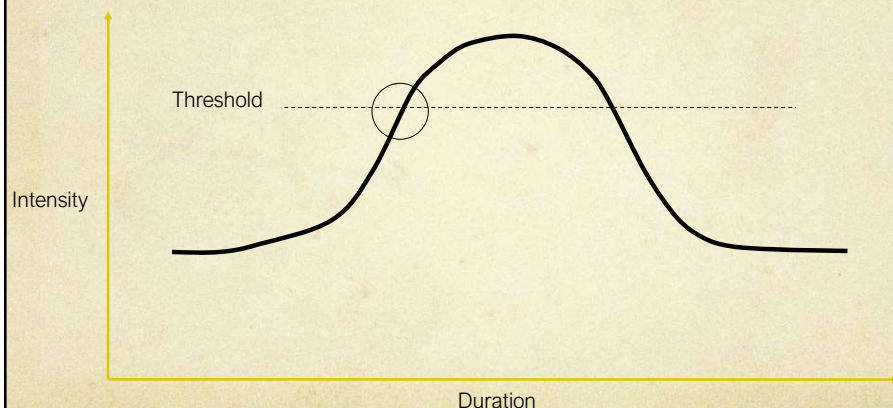
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Reflective Capacity

- Helps to make sense of a child's thoughts and emotions
- Makes connections between feelings and behaviors
- Enables parent to "ride the storm" of reactive behavior
- Provides the emotional anchor a child needs
- Supports expanded states of consciousness

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Emotional Mapping



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Bruce Perry, M.D.

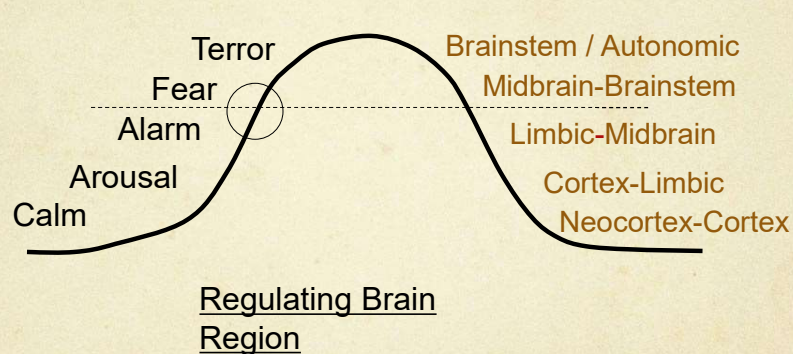
Sense of Time	Extended Future	Days Hours	Hours Minutes	Minutes Seconds	No Sense Of Time
Arousal Continuum	REST	VIGILANCE	RESISTANCE Crying	DEFIANCE Tantrums	AGGRESSION
Dissociative Continuum	REST	AVOIDANCE	COMPLIANCE Robotic	DISSOCIATION Fetal Rocking	FAINTING
Regulating Brain Region	NEOCORTEX Cortex	CORTEX Limbic	LIMBIC Midbrain	MIDBRAIN Brainstem	BRAINSTEM Autonomic
Cognitive Style	ABSTRACT	CONCRETE	EMOTIONAL	REACTIVE	REFLEXIVE
Internal State	CALM	AROUSAL	ALARM	FEAR	TERROR

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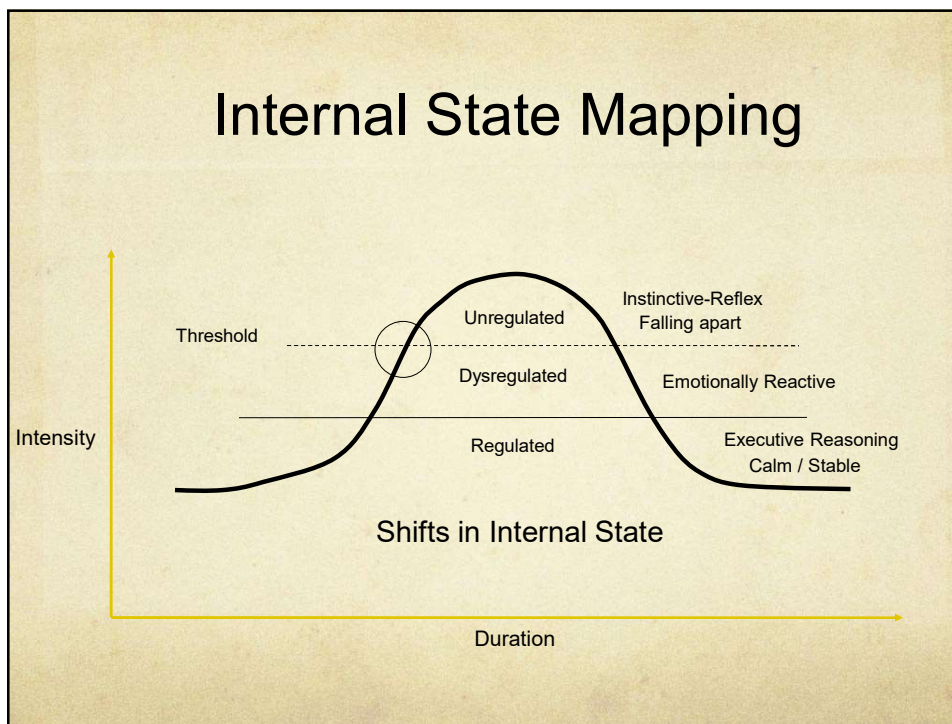
Table 1. The continuum of adaptive responses to threat. Different children have different styles of adaptation to threat. Some children use a primary hyperarousal response, others a primary dissociative response. Most use some combination of these two adaptive styles. In the fearful child, a defiant stance is often seen. This is typically interpreted as a willful and controlling child. Rather than understanding the behavior as related to fear, adults often respond to the 'oppositional' behavior by becoming angry and more demanding. The child, over-reading the non-verbal cues of the frustrated and angry adult, feels more threatened and moves from alarm to fear to terror.

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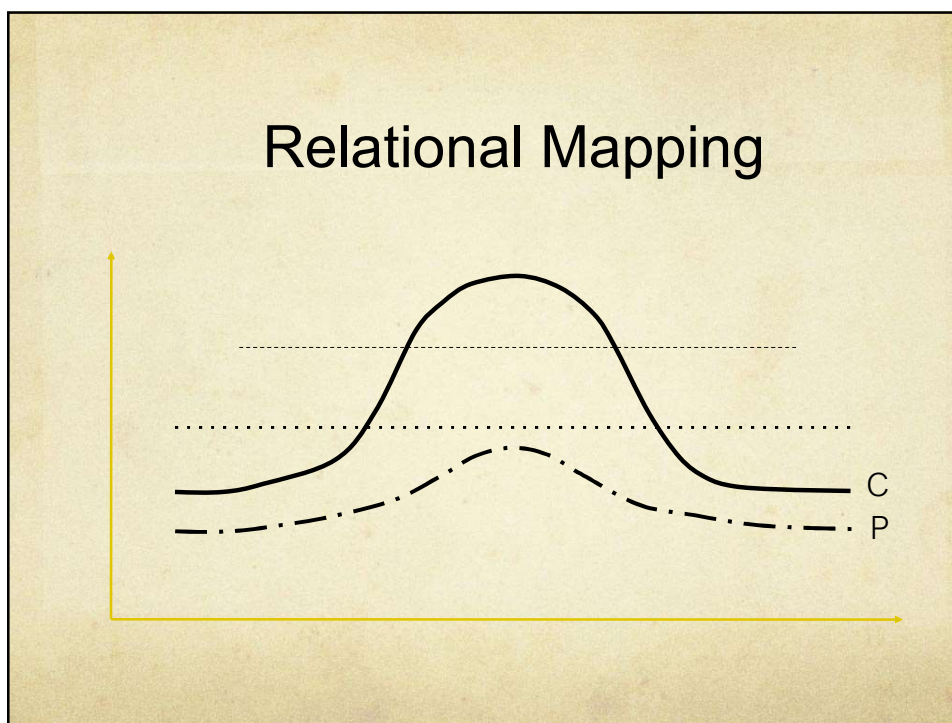
Internal State Mapping



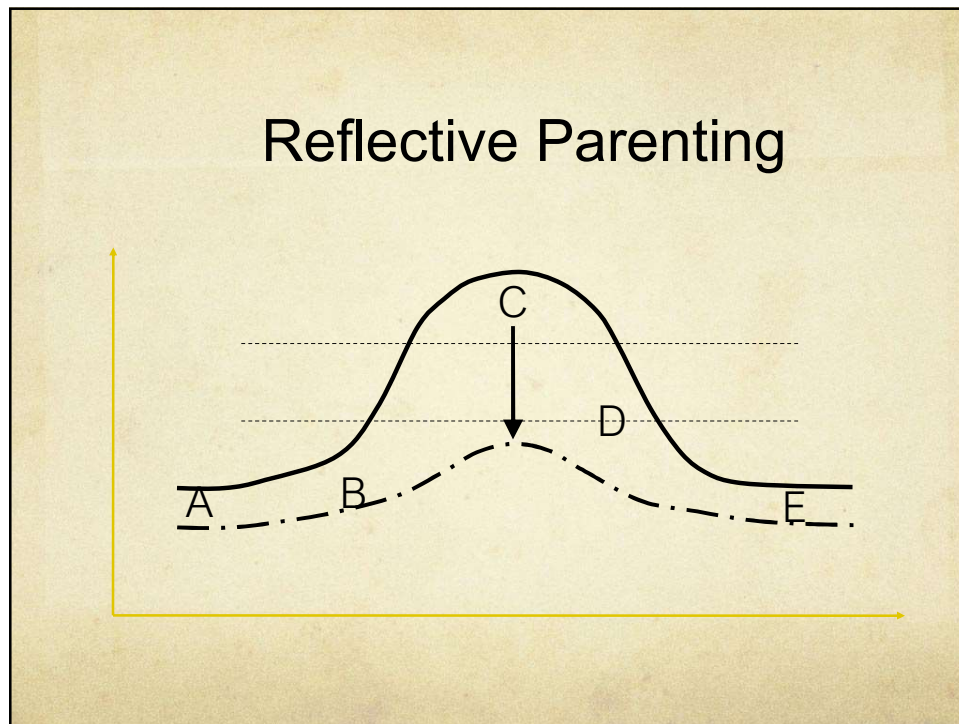
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Reflective Parenting

- A - Attune & Attend
- B - Be Aware of Yourself
- C - Calm & Contain
- D - Describe & Repair
- E - Explore options

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Reflective Parenting - A

- Attune to the emotional “waves” impacting your child
- As his internal state becomes activated, adjust your stance
- Balance nurturance and structure. Shift according to need
- His brain is developing, you are building the emotional and social “muscle” memory.
- He will use you as a guide for his developing system
- Support Safe haven and Secure base attachment needs

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Reflective Parenting– A

- As emotions intensify, notice shifts in activity level/behavior
- Help manage emotions when they are too intense (regulate)
- Scaffold to expand (strengthen) tolerance of feelings
- Remember he is learning and has to practice many times
- Name feelings (connect words to inner state)
- Demonstrate resilience (feelings come and go, but you remain)

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Reflective Parenting– A

- Provide corrective emotional experience
 - Enhance ability to attune and sensitively respond
 - Build emotional literacy
 - Support marked/congruent mirroring
- Scaffold regulation to expand window of tolerance
- Support emotional connection & differentiation

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Reflective Parenting - A

Treatment focus:

- Lack of ability to attune
- Aberrant mirroring
 - Intolerant of child's emotions
 - Lack of differentiation
- Poor ability to regulate self/co-regulate

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Reflective Parenting– A

- Provide corrective attachment experience
 - Address safe haven deficits (avoidant)
 - Support emotional connection
 - Build sense of protection
 - Address secure base deficits (anxious)
 - Support agency and self-efficacy
 - Enhance differentiation
- Disorganized dyads – address both SH/SB deficits

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Reflective Caregiving - B Be Aware of Yourself - Reflect

- Invite reflection (parallel process)
- Separate parent's experience from child's
- Wonder about the meaning of behavior
- Clarify child's attempt to communicate
- Gently wonder about the influence of parent's behavior on their child

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Nonreflective Parents

- Focus on child's personality and behavior
- Misbehavior (tantrum) = child is mean, bad, or selfish
- Try to control behavior, may manipulate with emotion
- Not focused on child's internal experience; often misinterpret their child's intentions.
- Struggle to accurately attune and 'hold child in mind'
- Do not understand development or impact of trauma
- Treatment focus: address distorted representations and build reflective capacity

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Reflective Caregiving - C Calm and Contain

- At the peak of the emotional wave, children are operating from their survival brain (brainstem), which controls all of their reactive behaviors (they are in a threat response)
- Children need help calming down and being soothed when they are not able to do so themselves
- Remember they are learning how to do this through the interactions with others, progressively learning to manage greater intensity without falling apart (or being triggered)
- If we are reactive when upset, then our children can't use us as an anchor and will not learn how to manage intense emotion

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Reflective Caregiving - C Calm and Contain

- It's a time for de-escalation and the establishment of safety through emotional containment
- Not a time for discipline, punishment, or threats
- He needs to know that his behaviors or emotional reactions will not be our undoing as his parent, that we will not withdraw our love or support
- This is really when a child needs us to "Be Bigger, Stronger, Wiser, and Kind (COS)

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Reflective Caregiving - C Calm and Contain

- Treatment focus:
 - Address overly controlling reactivity
 - Mitigate threats of harsh consequences or punishment
 - Scaffold parent's own dysregulation
 - Expand window of affect tolerance
 - Managing enactments (state dependent memories)

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Reflective Caregiving - D Describe & Repair

- A window of opportunity opens following the highly charged, emotional experience. Actively initiate repair
- Child's IWM is closest to the surface and accessible to the loving influence of the parent
- Child's ability to understand what has transpired is limited
- The critical issue is that he feels loved despite the behavioral acting-out, that the behavior hasn't threatened the safety and security of the attachment-bond

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Reflective Caregiving - D Describe & Repair

- Provide an emotional narrative including antecedents, behavioral reactions and outcome/consequences (A-B-C's)
- Use empathy to guide process. Practice reflection and non-judgmental awareness of what just happened
- Remember that most younger children do not easily separate behavior from their sense of self. If they do something "bad" they believe they are bad
- Address parent's ineffective or unwillingness to repair

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Reflective Caregiving - E Explore Options (3 and up)

- Now that child has calmed down, he will be more open to learning and hearing feedback about behavior
- Explore options or solutions to everyday problems, but with the wisdom and experience of the parent working in concert with the child (provide developmental guidance)
- Wonder about the situation, about what might be going on and possible ways to resolve
- Scaffold and expand your child's critical thinking and problem solving skills. Promote executive function

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Reflective Caregiving - E Explore Options (3 and up)

- Practice strategies about what to do differently
- Strengthen the sense of mastery and confidence in regulating behavior and making positive choices
- It is an opportunity to solidify family values and expectations regarding behavior
- What is established in E is then brought into A so that the process develops continuity

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