

TAMING THE ANGRY BEAST: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO WORKING WITH TRAUMATISED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Combining Expressive Therapies with
Knowledge About Sequential Brain
Development, Through the Lens of
Experiential Avoidance.

Claire Edwards & Dianne Tucker

ANZACT Conference
Melbourne 2012



Silky Oaks Children's Haven



- Not-for-profit.
- Funded by Child Safety.

Brisbane's Bayside area.

- clairee@silkyoaks.org.au

- diannet@silkyoaks.org.au



Silky Oaks referrals:



- Child Safety (DoCs)
- CYMHS (Child & Youth Mental Health)

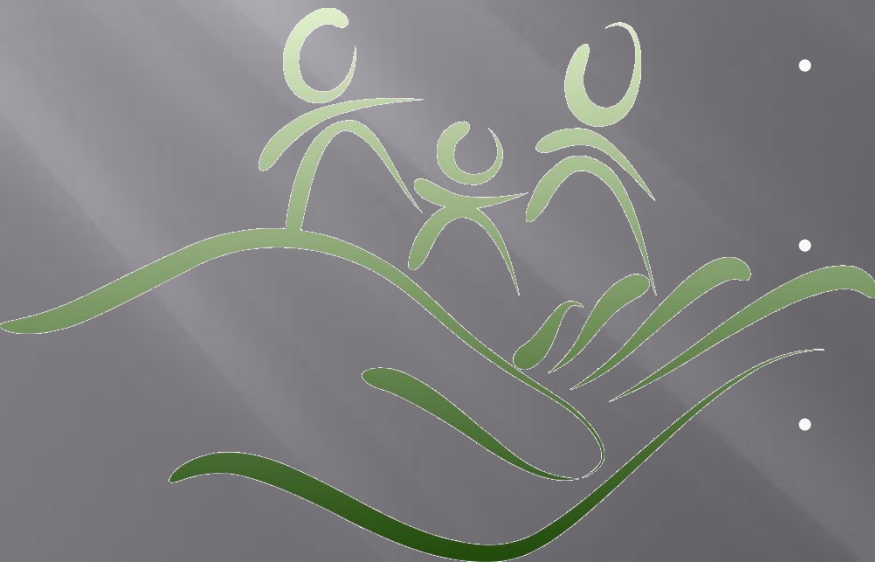
- Schools



- G.P.'s

- Community agencies

- Self referral





**SILKY OAKS CHILDREN'S
HAVEN**

Family Care & Support Program

Residential
Programs

Child & Family
Therapy Program

Temporary Accommodation

Skills Development

Support for Crisis and
Homelessness

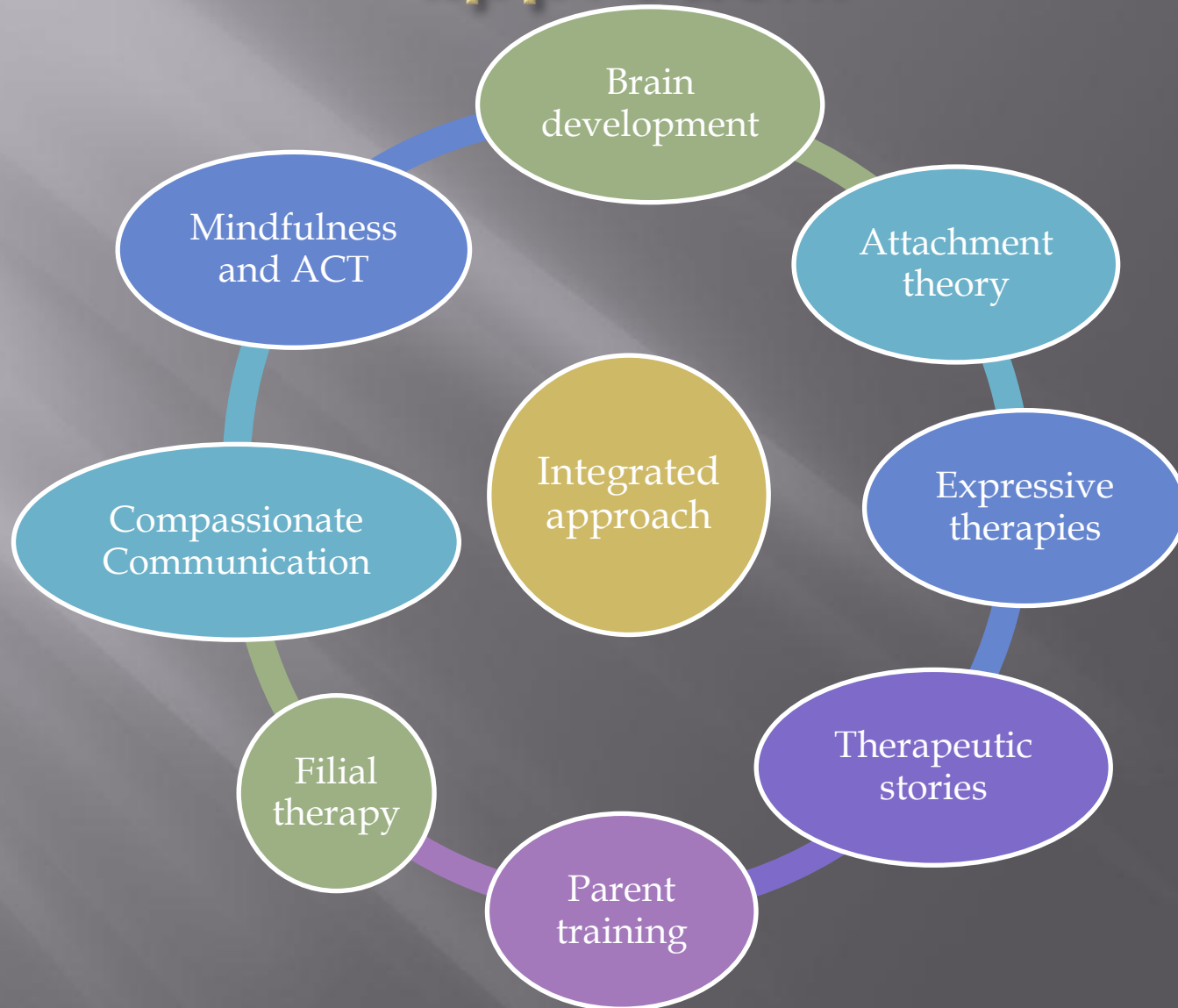
Out of Home Care

Residential &
Support Service
Parent & Youth Worker Models

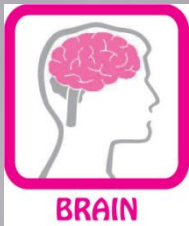
Multi-disciplinary
Team of Therapists

Child Focused
Counselling & Therapy

Overview of therapeutic approach:

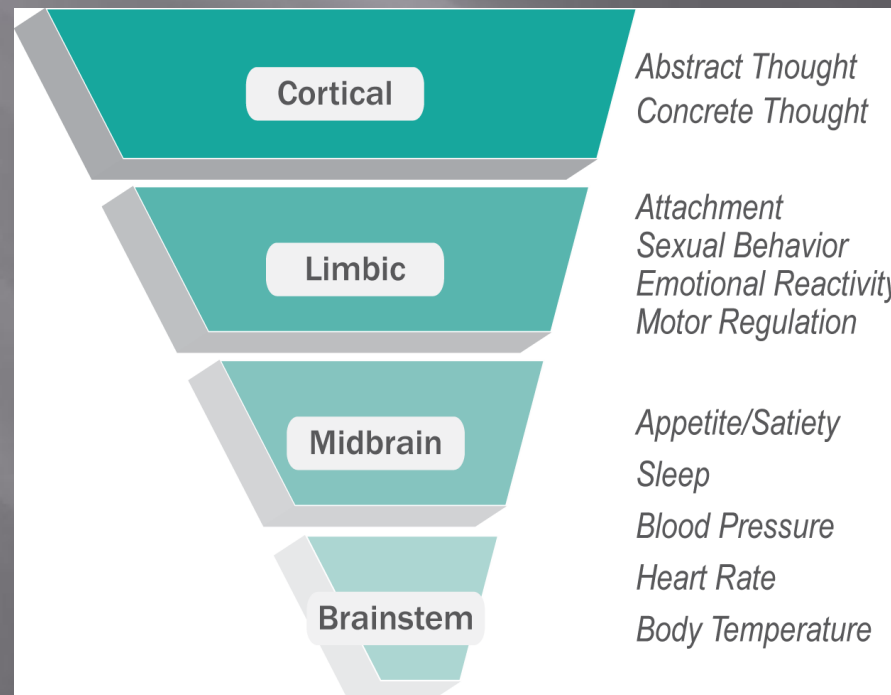
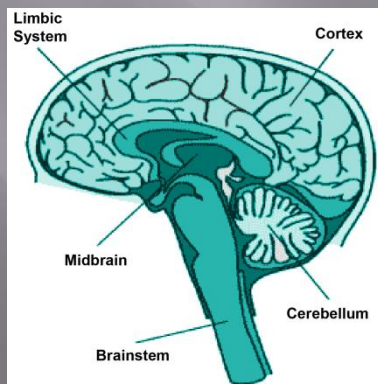


Bottom-up Brain Development: a work under construction



At birth a child's brain is still not completely developed.

From birth, development happens from the bottom up, with different parts of the brain being active "construction sites" at different times in the first years of life.



Attachment theory

- A special, enduring emotional relationship.
- With a specific person.
- Involves soothing, comfort & pleasure.
- Child finds security and safety within the relationship.
- Loss or threat of loss of attachment figure invokes intense distress
- Circle of security.



Child and caregiver behaviour patterns before 18 months

Attachment pattern	Child	Caregiver
Secure	Uses caregiver as a secure base for exploration. Protests caregiver's departure and seeks proximity and is comforted on return, returning to exploration. May be comforted by the stranger but shows preference for the caregiver	Responds appropriately, promptly and consistently to needs.
Avoidant	Little affective sharing in play. Little or no distress on departure, little or no visible response to return, ignoring or turning away with no effort to maintain contact if picked up. Treats the stranger similarly to the caregiver.	Little or no response to distressed child. Discourages crying and encourages independence.

Child and caregiver behaviour patterns before 18 months

Ambivalent	<p>Unable to use caregiver as a secure base, seeking proximity before separation occurs. Distressed on separation with ambivalence, anger, reluctance to warm to caregiver and return to play on return. Preoccupied with caregiver's availability, seeking contact but resisting angrily when it is achieved. Not easily calmed by stranger</p>	<p>Inconsistent – moves between appropriate and neglectful responses</p>
Disorganised	<p>When under stress (on caregiver return) such as freezing or rocking. Lack of coherent attachment strategy shown by contradictory, disoriented behaviours such as approaching but with the back turned.</p>	<p>Frightened or frightening behaviour, intrusiveness, withdrawal, negativity, role confusion, affective communication errors and maltreatment</p>

Expressive therapies: principles



- Expressive therapies offer clients the opportunity to use creative processes to develop self-awareness, self-expression and improve communication.
- Creative modalities include: art, music, drama, movement, stories, writing, and play.
- Enable clients to express their emotions safely, in a safe place, using metaphors and externalising processes.
- Encourage mindful activity.

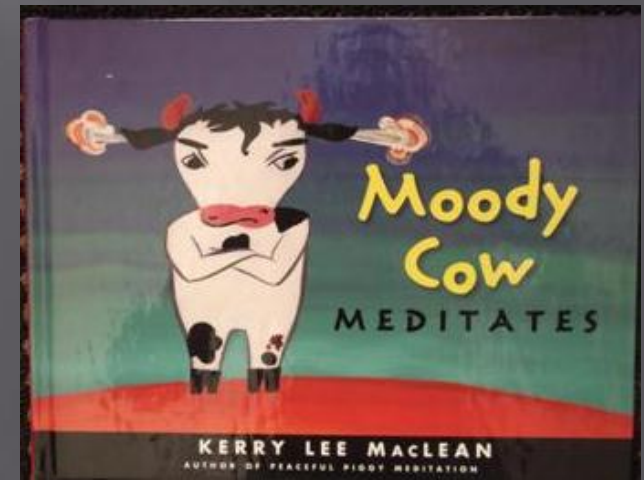
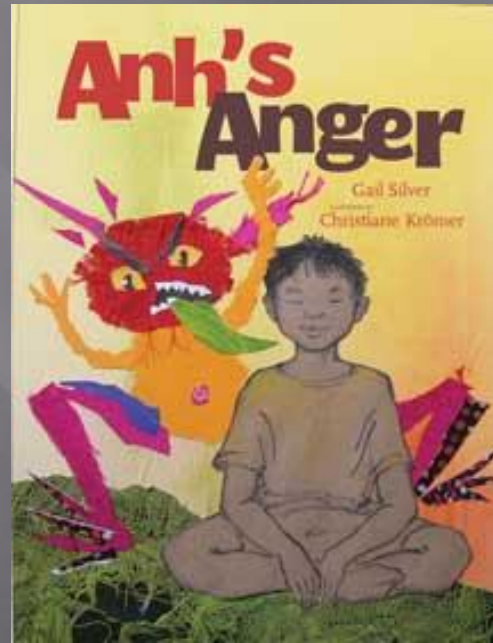
Expressive therapies: Background



- Expressive therapies developed in 1940's as response to need for trauma treatment post WW2.
- Symbolism, the unconscious, seen as important aspects of expressive therapies.
- Theoretical basis is psychoanalytic, utilising theories such as: 'containment', 'transitional space', early ego-development & 'active imagination'.

Therapeutic stories

- ▣ The red beast
- ▣ Anh's anger
- ▣ Moody cow meditates



The Doom Merchant by Colin McNaughton (from *Making friends with Frankenstein*)



THE DOOM MERCHANT

Down in the dumps,
At the end of the road to Rack and Ruin
And just beyond Hope,
Jeremiah, the Doom Merchant, has opened for business.
(And a sorry business it is too!)

He sits in his shop painting a gloomy picture of a sea of troubles.
He is wrapped in a wet blanket.
He has cold feet.
Perched on his shoulder is a Nagging Doubt.

He has Fate in store.

He has a shelf full of Bad Tidings.
He sells Dashed Hopes and Storm Warnings.
He sells Misfortunes (they come in threes).
He sells Umbrellas (to be put by for a rainy day).
He sells Hats (labelled: On your head be it).
He sells Traps (to keep the wolf from the door).
He sells Life Jackets and Safety Nets (without guarantees).
He sells Handkerchiefs (to wipe away the bitter tears).

On the Doom Merchant's shop window is a permanent sign:
"CLOSING DOWN SALE –
THE END OF THE WORLD IS NIGH."



Parent training



- Move towards seeing parent training as an integral part of child therapy.
- Models include: 'Getting to know you', 123-Magic, Filial therapy, 'HATS' (home brand, which combines attachment, filial, theraplay and neuroscience).
- Aim is to engage and educate parents in order to improve attachment and child behaviour outcomes from a non-stigmatising perspective.



Filial therapy



- Attachment-focused, humanistic therapeutic intervention for carers and parents.
- Principles include connecting with empathy, and being present
- Teaches parents/caregivers basic play therapy skills such as reflection of feeling, tracking, and limit setting.
- Strengthens relationships rather than aiming to reduce difficult behaviour
- Straightforward and simple to learn
- Reduces screaming and distress – reducing parental triggering
- Suits children 2 -10 years
- Few exclusions



Compassionate Communication (NVC)



- Founded on language and communication skills.
- Aims ‘to create a quality of connection where everyone’s needs can be met joyfully and naturally’ (Dr. Marshall Rosenberg).
- Conflict resolution. ‘Giraffe and jackal’ language.
- Improving the quality of all relationships through needs-based connection and communication.
- Values based framework.

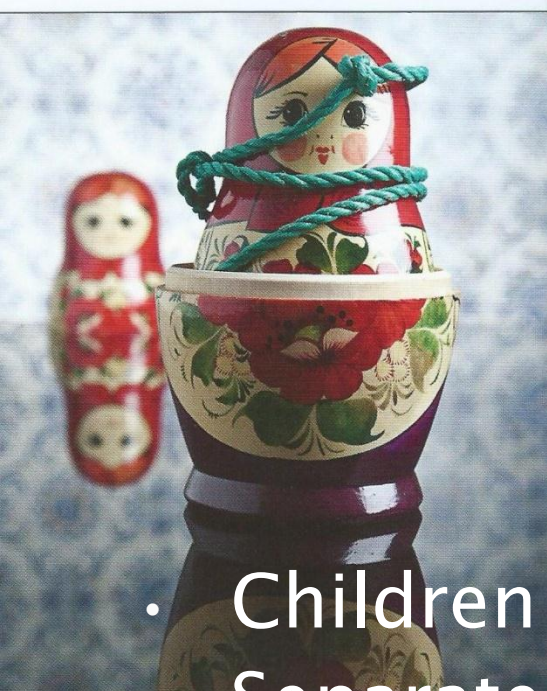
Mindfulness and ACT with children and families

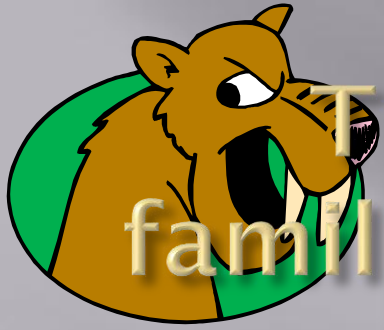
- Children and parents avoid uncomfortable feelings.
- Parents avoid acknowledging child's uncomfortable feelings.
- Avoidance leads to disconnection, more bad feelings, and more avoidance.
- Aim is to increase mindfulness and attunement between parents and children.



Clinical profile:

- Children in foster care with trauma history
- Separated families, shared care or single parent
- Domestic violence history
- Mental health issues
- Parenting difficulties (behaviour management, and emotional regulation)
- 'Life style syndrome' – parents stressed and 'unavailable'





Traumatised children and families: *Taming the angry beast*



Children

- Difficulties with emotional regulation.
- Experiential avoidance.
- Social and relational problems (misinterpreting others' behaviours).
- Attachment difficulties.
- Behavioural problems (need for autonomy conflicts with parent's need for control).
- Learning difficulties, risk of *mis-diagnosis* (ADHD, ASD, ODD, CD, etc.).
- Managing difficult emotions.

Parents and carers

- Difficulties with emotional regulation.
- Experiential avoidance.
- Social and relational problems (misinterpreting child's behaviours).
- Bonding difficulties.
- Behavioural problems (punitive or laissez-faire parenting).
- Intergenerational trauma – parents triggered by child behaviour.
- Managing difficult emotions.

Parent-child dyad 1: avoidant and disconnected

I THINK A LOT ABOUT THINGS THAT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO, OR DREAM ABOUT THE FUTURE.

I AVOID BEING PRESENT AS A PARENT.

PARENT:

I GET CONFUSED ABOUT WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO ME AS A PARENT (I.E. SHORT TERM PEACE VS LONG TERM GAIN).

I AVOID PAYING ATTENTION TO MUM IF I AM BUSY HAVING FUN.

CHILD:

I AM NOT SURE WHAT I CARE ABOUT.

I TRY TO AVOID BAD FEELINGS.

I DON'T ALWAYS BEHAVE WELL AND LATER I FEEL BAD ABOUT IT.

I FEEL UPSET/ANGRY/ASHAMED/GUILTY/HOPELESS IN MY ROLE AS A PARENT.

I HAVE UPSETTING THOUGHTS ABOUT MY CHILD/MYSELF AS A PARENT THAT I WOULD RATHER NOT HAVE, SUCH AS: 'I HATE HIM', 'HE IS A ROTTEN KID'; 'I AM A HOPELESS PARENT'. THESE THOUGHTS INFLUENCE MY FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOUR.

I TRY NOT TO THINK BAD THOUGHTS.

BEING A CHILD IS CONFUSING, I HAVE SO MANY DIFFICULT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

I FEEL DEFINED AND OVERWHELMED BY MY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

I DON'T FOLLOW THROUGH ON THINGS I CARE ABOUT (SUCH AS BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES).

avoidant

disconnected



Parent-child dyad 2: flexible and connected

I pay attention to what is happening between me and my child in the present moment.

PARENT:

I am aware that I have 'bad feelings' about my relationship with my child and I know this is normal.

I am clear about what is important to me, and the kind of parent I want to be.

CHILD:

I notice and enjoy what I am doing in the moment.

I am aware that I have bad thoughts and feelings and I don't try to avoid them.

I know what is important to me, including my family.

I accept my thoughts about my child, even when they seem 'wrong'.

I choose how to behave.

I know there is more to me than just my thoughts and feelings.

I identify the actions I need to take to put my parenting values into practice, and I see them through.

As a parent I am aware of myself as separate from my thoughts and feelings.

flexible
+
connected

Group work with children: *cars'r'us* group for 10 yr old boys

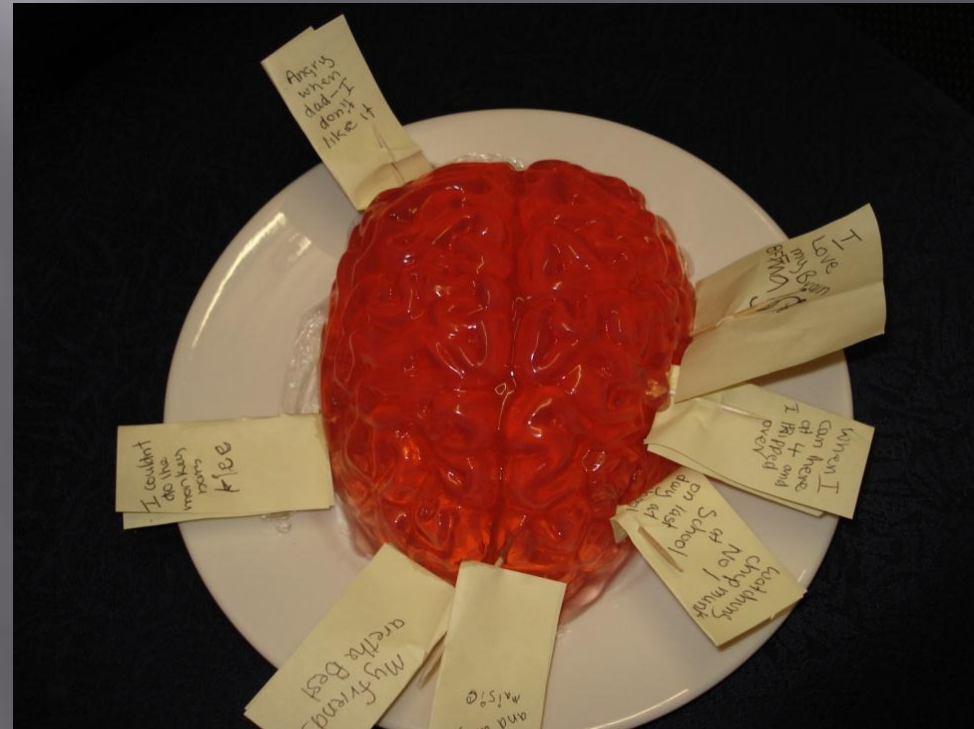
- Expressive therapies and ACT combined model
- Car game to explore themes of defusion, self-as-context, experiential avoidance.
- Mindful eating
- Car as metaphor, using *cars'r'us* cards (St Lukes)
- 3D car model, included sensory integration.
- Emotional literacy



Group work with children: *rainbow girls'* group for 10 yr old girls

- Expressive therapies and ACT model
- Theme of colours: rainbow check-in, trying different coloured foods,
- Mindfulness practice
- Developing emotional literacy (pizza)

Clinical example: biscuit brain & jelly brain



Kimochis



Emoticons and cookies



Mindfulness tools: finger labyrinth



Mind jar/sparkle pocket



references

Ainsworth, M., Blehar, M., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. 1978. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

• Bion, W., (1984) [Elements of Psychoanalysis](#)

• Booth, P. B., & Jenberg, A. N. (2010). *Theraplay: Helping Parents and Children Build Better Relationships Through Attachment-Based Play* (3rd ed.). CA: John Wiley & Sons.

• Gill, E. (2006). *Helping Abused and traumatised children: Integrating directive and nondirective approaches*. New York: The Guildford Press.

• Hoffman, K. T., Marvin, R. S., Cooper, G., & Powell, B. (2006). Changing toddlers' and preschoolers' attachment classifications: The circle of security intervention. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74(6), 1017-1026.

• Jung C., (1968) *Man and his symbols*.

• Landreth, G. (2012). *Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship* (3rd ed.). New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

• Landreth & Bratton, (2006). *Child-parent-relationship (CPRT): A 10-session Filial Therapy Model* . New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

• Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1986). Discovery of a new, insecure-disorganised disoriented attachment pattern. In T. Brazelton & M. Yogman (Eds.), *Affective development in infancy* (pp. 39-51). Norwood, NJ: Ablex

• Malchiodi, C. (2008). *Creative interventions with traumatized children*. New York: Guilford Press.

references (2)

- Perry, B. D. (2001) *Bonding and attachment in maltreated children: Consequences of emotional neglect in childhood*. Retrieved November 25, from The Child Trauma Academy Web site: http://childtrauma.org/images/stories/Articles/attcar4_03_v2_r.pdf
- Perry, B. D. (2009). Examining child maltreatment through a neurodevelopment lens: Clinical applications of the neurosequential model of therapeutics. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 14, 240-255.
- Phelan, T. W. (2010). *1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12 (4th ed.)*. Glen Ellyn Illinois: Parent Magic Inc
- Rosenberg, M. (2005). *Raising children compassionately: parenting the nonviolent communication way*. USA:PuddleDancer Press.
- Ryan, (2007). Filial therapy: Helping children and new carers to form secure attachment relationships. *British Journal of Social Work* 37, 643-657.
- Schechter D. S., & Willheim, E. (2009). Disturbances of attachment and parental psychopathology in early childhood. *Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health* 18(3), 665-687.
- Siegel, D., & Hartzell, M. (2005). *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Van Fleet, R. (2005). *Filial therapy: Strengthening parent-child relationships through play (2nd Ed.)*. Sarasota Florida:Professional Resource Press.
- Winnicott, D., (1971) *Playing and reality*