

TOWARD AN INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY OF THE DEVELOPING MIND: ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIPS, “MINDSIGHT,” AND NEURAL INTEGRATION

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<http://controlmastery.org/docs/Siegel.pdf>

*** *The following section is a subset of the entire paper by Dan Siegel.*

The following are five basic elements of how caregivers can foster a secure attachment in the children under their care.

1. *Collaboration.* Secure relationships are based on collaborative, contingent communication.

- The signals sent by each member of an attuned dyad (a pair of individuals) are directly responsive in quality and timing with each other.
- These attuned communications often have their foundation in the nonverbal signals that are shared between two individuals. Eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, bodily gestures and timing and intensity of response are all fundamental aspects of nonverbal signals.
- These primary emotions can be seen as the “music of the mind”
- Each person may come to “feel felt” by the other.

2. *Reflective Dialogue.* Secure attachment relationships may involve the verbal sharing of a focus on the internal experience of each member of the dyad.

- Attachment figures recognize the signals sent by the child, attempt to make sense of them in their own minds, and then communicate to the child in such a manner that creates “meaning” for the child in the shared dialogue about the mental states of the child and of the caregiver.
- Internal experience, or “states of mind,” can involve emotions, perceptions, thoughts, intentions, memories, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes.
- By directly focusing on these aspects of mental life, the adult can create a sense that subjective experience is both important and can be communicated and shared.

- In this manner, the “mind” itself becomes a central focus of sharing in the discussions between two minds.
- Such a meaning-making process coupled with collaborative, reciprocal communication allows the child to develop “mindsight”: the capacity of the mind to create the representation of the mind of others, and of the self (Siegel, 1999).

3. Repair. When attuned communication is disrupted, as it inevitably will be, repair of the rupture is an important part of reestablishing the connection within the dyad.

- Repair is healing. Repair is also important in helping to teach the child that life is filled with inevitable moments of misunderstandings and missed connections that can be identified and connection created again.
- Such interactive repair allows the child to make sense of periods of painful disconnection and create a sense of meaning out of the understanding of one’s own and another’s mind.
- An adult’s pride may at times inhibit repair and leave the child isolated in what may be a shameful state of disconnection. Intense uncomfortable emotional states in the child or parent may lead to a disconnection in collaborative communication.

4. Coherent Narratives. The connection of the past, present, and future is one of the central processes of the mind in the creation of the autobiographical form of self-awareness.

- An adult without a coherent auto-noetic process may be at risk of providing interactive experiences for a child that produce various forms of insecure attachment.
- Adults with a flexible capacity to integrate their experiences across time appear to also be able to provide integrating interpersonal communication with their children.
- Adults can teach children about the world of the self and of others by joining with them in the co-construction of stories about life events.

5. Emotional Communication. Attachment figures can amplify and share in the positive, joyful experience of living. Equally important is the attachment figure’s ability to remain connected to the child during moments of uncomfortable emotion.

- These heightened moments of sharing a sense of vitality are important in creating the foundation for a positive attitude toward the self and others.
- Negative emotional states can be shared as the adult then helps the child to reduce these states and soothe his distress. Helping a child learn that he will not be emotionally abandoned during these moments and that he can learn to understand and soothe his painful emotional state is an important role for the attachment figure to play.
- Adults also need to be sensitive to a child’s cycling needs for direct connection and for solitude. Awareness and respect for these changing needs for connection are a part of emotionally attuned communication.