

**Mindful Parenting Groups:
EHS Socialization Groups that
Build Reflective Communities**



**18th Annual Birth to Three Institute—July 30, 2014
Diane Reynolds, MFT**

Training Objectives

- Describe two core components of Mindful Parenting Groups (MPGs) that serve to promote the security of parent-child relationships
- Research demonstrates that parental RF serves as a protective factor. Describe two ways that RF may serve as a protective factor for EHS families.
- Describe two interventions utilized in MPGs that support change in the parent-child relationship and/or build reflective community.

"I used to try and be both friend and disciplinarian, but that was not working. Now, I am more of a dad... Instead of just telling him things, now we converse. And now when I discipline, I don't have to be so heavy and strict about it... I can talk with him about what the consequences of his behavior are, and he is more likely to apologize and talk about different ways to handle the situation."

—CRP Parenting Group Participant



Center for Reflective Parenting

"Parents come wanting answers, wanting the group facilitators to 'fix' their child. They leave learning that they had the answers inside themselves all along... They just needed guidance to figure out what best works for their family."

"Facilitators feel enthusiastic about this program, and they enjoy facilitating group—it gives them the opportunity to slow down and help families get closer to root of the problem, in order to find real, lasting tools to cope and thrive."

—CRP Parenting Group Facilitator



Center for Reflective Parenting

"Talking to the group about my past has helped me let go...and let my son grow up."




Center for Reflective Parenting



"The parent [or care teacher] who cannot think about the child's mental experience deprives him of the basis for a viable sense of himself."

Fonagy, P. & Target, M. (1995)



Center for
Reflective
Parenting

"Building reflective minds today, for our children's tomorrow."

Through community partnerships, CRP provides comprehensive, advanced trainings in our mindful and reflective approach to culturally competent mental health and early childhood professionals, who then bring our innovative programs to the children, families, and communities most in need.

CRP Core Programs

- **Mindful Parenting Groups (MPG)**
 - Groups for Parents and Infants, Toddlers, or Preschoolers from 3 months to 3+ years
- **Reflective Parenting Program (RPP)**
 - Workshops for Parents only, Prenatal to Adolescence
- **Reflective Teacher Training (RTT)**
 - Workshops to enhance relationships between child-teacher, parent-teacher, and between staff, in support of optimal learning
- **Reflective Care Program (RCP)**
 - Workshops to enhance relationships between caregiver and child to support optimal developmental outcomes.

Targeting Families in Need

- Head Start / Early Head Start Families
- Families with Child Welfare Involvement
- Foster to Adoptive Families
- Teen Parents
- Mothers with Perinatal Anxiety / Depression
- Non-English Speaking Immigrant Families

An essential human capacity to interpret behavior in light of the underlying thoughts, feelings, intentions, beliefs, desires, and plans

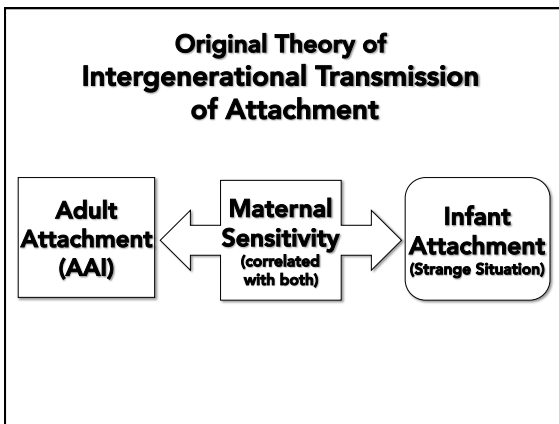
Why is RF important for parent-infant relationships?

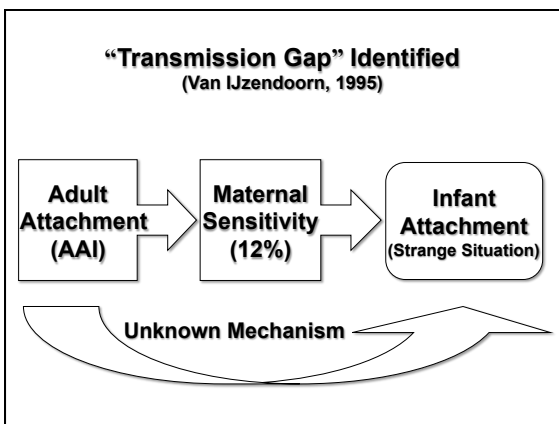
- Crucial to development of infant secure attachment (Slade, 2005)
- Protective factor against hostile and intrusive parental behavior (Grienenberger & Slade, 2005)
- Intrinsic to affect regulation (Slade, 2005)
- Protective factor against development of personality psychopathology (Fonagy & Target, 2002)

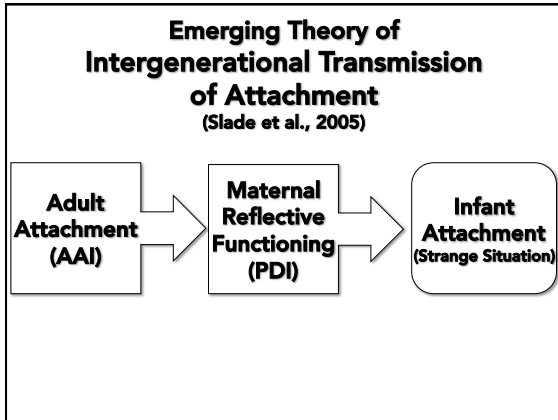
Reflective Functioning/Mentalization
(Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998)

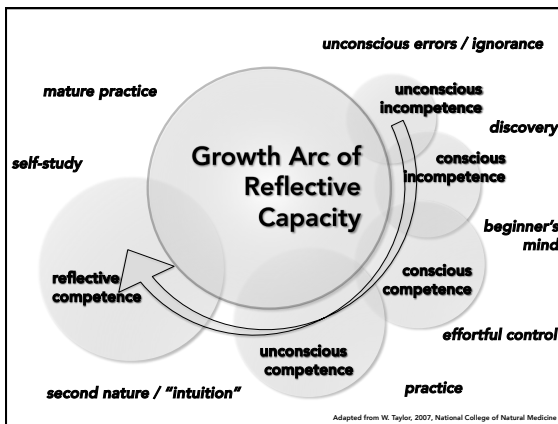
- **An essential human capacity to interpret one's own and others' behavior in light of the underlying thoughts, feelings, wishes, desires, beliefs, intentions, and plans**
- Helps make sense of, and anticipate, our own and others' behavior
- Provides the means to discover and voice our own (and others') experience

*Research demonstrates that the ability to reflect is an **ordinary human capacity**, not limited by education, socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity*









HOPE STREET
FAMILY CENTER

Hope Street Family Center's multidisciplinary team of teachers, home visitors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists strives to enhance children's development and quality of life for families, while ensuring access to a comprehensive network of services.

Early Head Start

HSFC Early Head Start Program Options

- 130 families served through home-based option
- 94 families served through full-day, center-based option
- **48 families receive hybrid option of half-day center-based (Family Literacy Program) and home-based services**

Implementing MPGs at Hope Street Family Center

- **February, 2014:** CRP, in partnership with HSFC, began implementation of MPGs. Three HSFC clinical supervisors and six home visiting staff completed MPG Level 1 two-day introduction to the practice.
- **March-June, 2014:** Three HSFC clinical supervisors began first phase of MPG Facilitator Training, offering 12-week group for four EHS / Family Literacy Program mothers and infants, 8-11 months.



Mindful Parenting Groups:
Hands-on, Relationship-Focused Groups for Parents and Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers

- Groups consist of 4 to 6 parent-child dyads plus at least 2 group facilitators
- One or both parents/caregivers may attend
- Children grouped developmentally, from 3 months to 3.5 years of age
- 1½ hour weekly meetings: 6-12 months' participation strongly recommended

A Mindful and Reflective Approach is...



slowed-down

hands-on, interactive

development-driven

relationship-focused

models respectful parenting practices

specifically promotes secure parent-child bonds

A mindful and reflective approach consists of three **Core Components**...

- **Mindful Observation**
- **Flexible Responsiveness in Facilitation of Social Interactions**
- **Group Reflection**

...each of which is a primary pathway for enhancing reflective capacity.

Mindful Parenting Group Facilitators...

- Help enhance parents' reflective capacity
- Facilitate children's exploration of their physical and social environment
- Model respectful use of language and respectful ways of being with children
- Model boundary and limit setting
- Help parents and children organize feelings and learn to tolerate anxiety, frustration, novelty and uncertainty
- Create a relaxed, safe, and relatively non-prohibitive environment within which to learn



**Cultivating an
Observational Stance**

- **Collect observational data**, paying mindful attention to detail
- **Avoid premature conclusions and judgment**
- **Bear witness** to (rather than react to) emotion



**MPG Core Component: Mindful Observation
'Bowl Exchange'**

**Core Component: Mindful Observation
Role of Facilitator**

- **Assist parent in developing mindful observation skills**
 - Practice patient, curious, active attention to both child and self
- **Strengthen parent's capacity to welcome children's emotions and experiences**
 - Reflect on child's fresh view of the world and those in it
- **Assist parent in learning to respect and follow child's lead**
 - Facilitate rather than direct child's behavior, feelings, play, and experiences

Mindful Parenting Group Structure

- Parent Check-In & Mindfulness Exercise (10-15 minutes)
- Mindful Observation Exercise (20 minutes)
- Facilitation of Social Interactions (concurrent)
- Group Reflection (30+ minutes)
 - "What are the children showing us today?"

Mindful Parenting Group Structure

- For older toddlers (14+ months), a Facilitator-led Snack Time (15 minutes)
- Questions & Concerns re: development (15 minutes)
- For older infants (10-12+ months), a Circle Time & Closing Song (5-10 minutes)

Note: Observation, Facilitation and Reflection continue throughout balance of meeting.



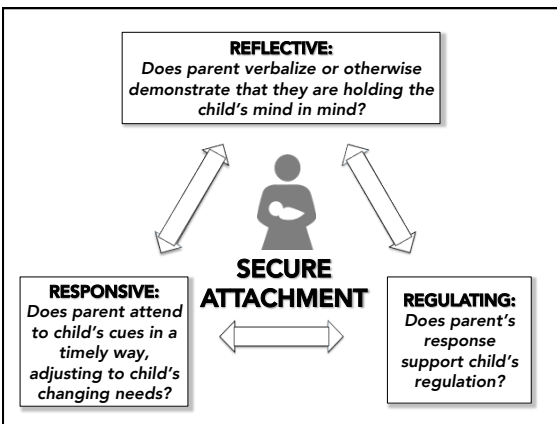
Demonstrate Flexible Responsiveness



**MPG Core Component: Facilitation
'Toddler at the Gate'**

**MPG Core Component: Facilitation
Role of Facilitator**

- **Assist parents with mutual regulation of child's emotional experience**
 - Support parent's tolerance of emotions—both their child's & their own
 - Encourage unhurried, reflective responses
- **Assist parents in allowing space for child to self-regulate**
 - Help parents to wait, observe, discover child's needs
 - Aid parent in identifying child's strengths & resilience
 - Support parent in responding with wonder & curiosity, rather than reactivity & alarm



**Reflective Minds, Reflective Children,
Reflective Communities**

- Reflective minds are **curious about what underlies behavior**, in oneself and others
- Reflective minds **see all behavior as meaningful**
- Reflective minds are willing to **tolerate the uncertainty and not-knowing** that comes along with trying to make sense of behavior
- Reflective minds understand that **ruptures are an inevitable part of relationships**

Become an Ambassador of Reflection



Integrating Mindful and Reflective Practices

- Establish use of curiosity, wonder and reflection as an expected part of the organizational culture —for children, parents, and staff alike
- Employ observational, reflective language:
- I wonder... I noticed... I was thinking about... I'm curious about... I'm really struck by...
- Make inquiries from a place of observational wonder
- "I was watching when [something occurred between two toddlers]... I didn't know what was going to happen; for a moment I thought someone might get hurt... And then, [an unexpected outcome occurred]... I noticed you smile just then...what was that like for you, watching them?"

"She was a little pushy broad today... She just went over and just, 'I want that... Take it.' That's the first time I've ever seen her be that aggressive. I think it's her kind of testing the limits or boundaries where she can get away with murder... She can't get away with something like that at home..."

**MPG Core Component: Reflection
'Bowl Exchange'**

Audience Response

does parent have the child in mind?

HIGH RF?

Is parent's understanding of the child's experience particularly complex or nuanced – especially related to a difficult incident?

MEDIUM RF?

Can parent identify the child's experience? Can she link thoughts, feelings and behavior?

LOW RF?

Are parent's comments cliché or generic? Is there a lack of detail? Is it hard to get a sense of the specific child?

"I'm not sure that they understand that it's aggressive... I think they just want it, and they don't understand the whole social... So if they want it, then they're going to take it, and if they don't get a reaction to it on the part of the other child, then they probably won't have a problem with it. So let's say that she takes it, and he cries, then that probably will...I don't know...make her think about, well, 'What's going on? What did I do?'"

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**MPG Core Component: Reflection
Role of Facilitator**

- **Host a 'Reflective Party'**—Invite group reflection on what informs behavior, in self & other (*thoughts, feelings, beliefs, intentions, desires, plans*)
- **Support a historical perspective**—Invite parents to reflect on what they know re: discipline, independence, parent-child relationships, etc., *from their own early childhood experiences*
- **Encourage tolerance of uncertainty**—*There is no one right way to raise a child!*
- **Welcome big feelings** that arise for children & parents, & *remember that developing skills to repair ruptures is more important than avoiding ruptures altogether*

**Building
Reflective Community
at Hope Street
Family Center**



**Integrating MPG Core Components
at Hope Street Family Center:
Next Steps**

- **July, 2014:** CRP and HSFC collaborate on next steps of integrating MPG core components into EHS socialization groups and home visits
- **August-November, 2014:** Two clinical supervisors complete 18-week second phase of MPG Facilitator training.

Pre-MPG PDI Interview

MPG Interventions—What Helped

- Support parent’s capacity to tolerate strong feelings
- Honor and respect parent’s strengths and vulnerabilities
- Give voice to infant’s experience
- Reflective inquiry about parent’s and infant’s experiences; support and hold multiple perspectives

12-week MPG PDI Interview

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Integrating MPG Core Components at Hope Street Family Center: Lessons Learned



Center for
Reflective
Parenting

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