Infant Mental Health Fundamentals

Concepts that Will Enhance the Telehealth Experience for Clients and Clinicians

Brooke E. Harris, MA, LPC, RPT, ACS, PMH-C

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to name and identify 5 fundamental concepts in Infant Mental Health.

2. Participants will be able to successfully explain how to use these concepts in work with clients.

3. Participants will be able to understand how to use these concepts as a way to remain grounded and centered during Telehealth sessions.

2020

Therapist in 2020 starterpack
@psychotherapymemes

Have you felt lost as a therapist? Questioned your career? Questioned your effectiveness? Have you felt helpless to help certain families during Covid? Has it seemed especially difficult to reach certain families over Telehealth?

Definition of Infant Mental Health

The young child's capacity to experience, regulate and express emotions, form close and secure relationships, and explore the environment and learn. All of these capacities will be best accomplished within the context of the caregiving environment that includes family, community and cultural expectations of young children. Developing these capacities is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.
--Zero to Three

This definition complements the field of play therapy and what play therapists want for their clients, too.

Concept 1: And

"There is no such thing as a baby, there is a baby and someone."
--Donald Winnicott

Telehealth is a perfect opportunity to get more comfortable with dyadic work. It's the perfect time to work with *and*!

And: Focusing on the Relationship

You think because you understand 'one'
you must understand 'two,' because one
and one make two.
But you must also understand 'and.'
--Rumi

And: Tools for Insight

Working Model of the Child Interview

Marshak Intervention Method (MIM)

Early Relational Assessment (ERA)

Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

Circle of Security

Concept 2: Ghosts in the Nursery

"When this own mother's cries are heard, she will hear her child's cries."

-Selma Fraiburg, Ghosts in the Nursery

Angels in the Nursery

"Feeling lovingly protected is the cornerstone of early mental health."
--Lieberman & VanHorn

Keep protective factors, strengths, counter ACES in mind.

How This Concept May Help Therapists:

- **Case Conceptualization/perspective shift: identify ghosts and angels present in parents. Increase compassion.**
- **Recognize our own ghosts and angels that may be activated during this unprecedented time and give them care.**

Concept 3: Keeping the Baby/Child in Mind

Reflective Capacity
AKA Mentalization
"Follow the Need"

Reflective Capacity

When, Then

Iceberg Art Activity

**Mask or Gingerbread Person Activity**

Circle of Security

Taping and Reviewing Sessions

Parent Reflective Functioning Questionnaire

How This Concept May Help Therapists:

Parallel Process: We can adjust our expectations of parents, similar to asking parents to do this with their children. We can develop our reflective capacities for parents, so they may do so for their child.

Kingston's conversation with Me over next season

Watch later   Share
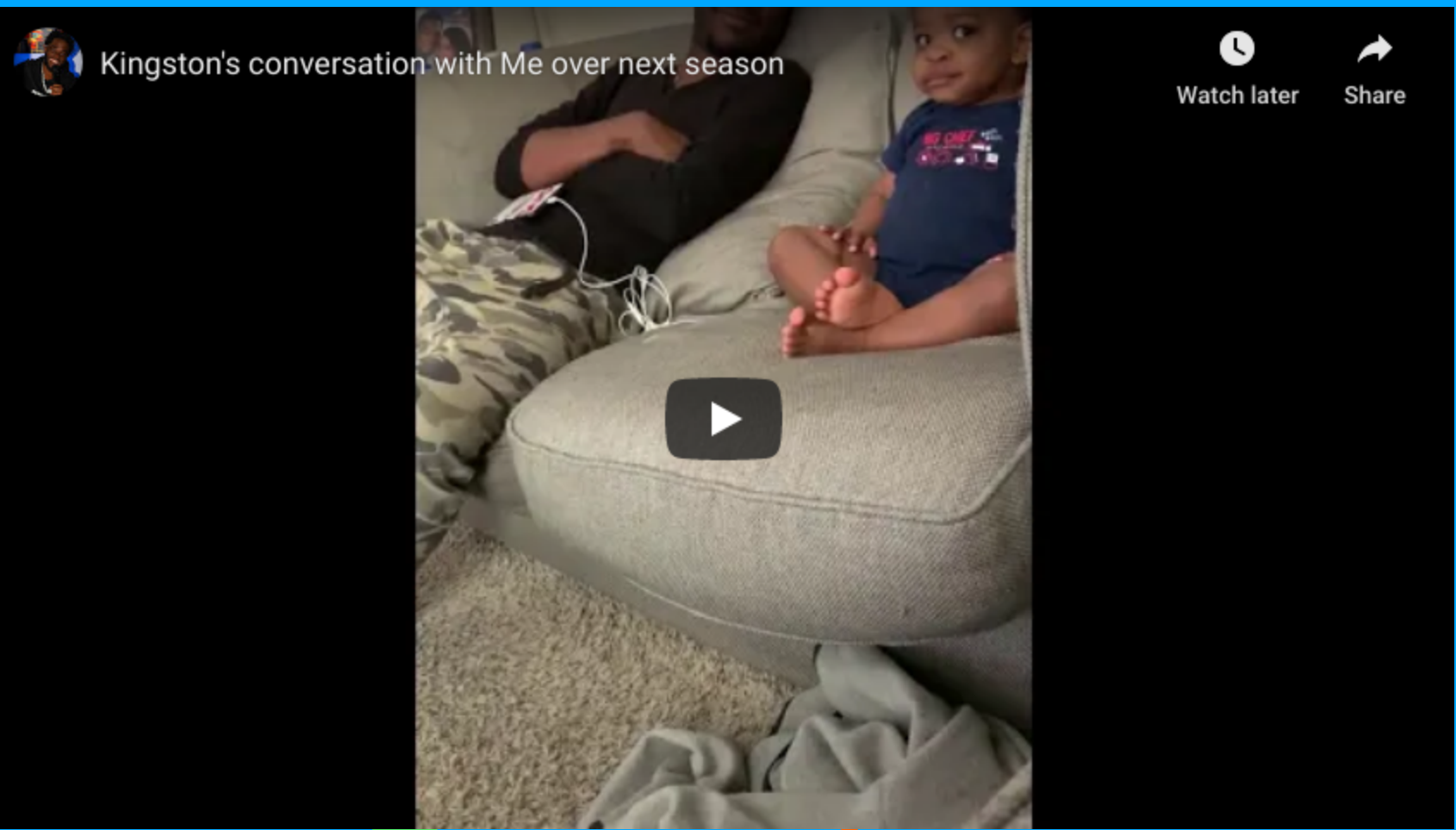
Concept 4: Serve and Return

Serve and return interactions shape brain architecture. When an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries, and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug, neural connections are built and strengthened in the child's brain that support the development of communication and social skills. Much like a lively game of tennis, volleyball, or Ping-Pong, this back-and-forth is both fun and capacity-building.
--Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

Serve and Return with Client and Parents

Pacing

Validation

Being With

Model for Parents

Snacks or Tea
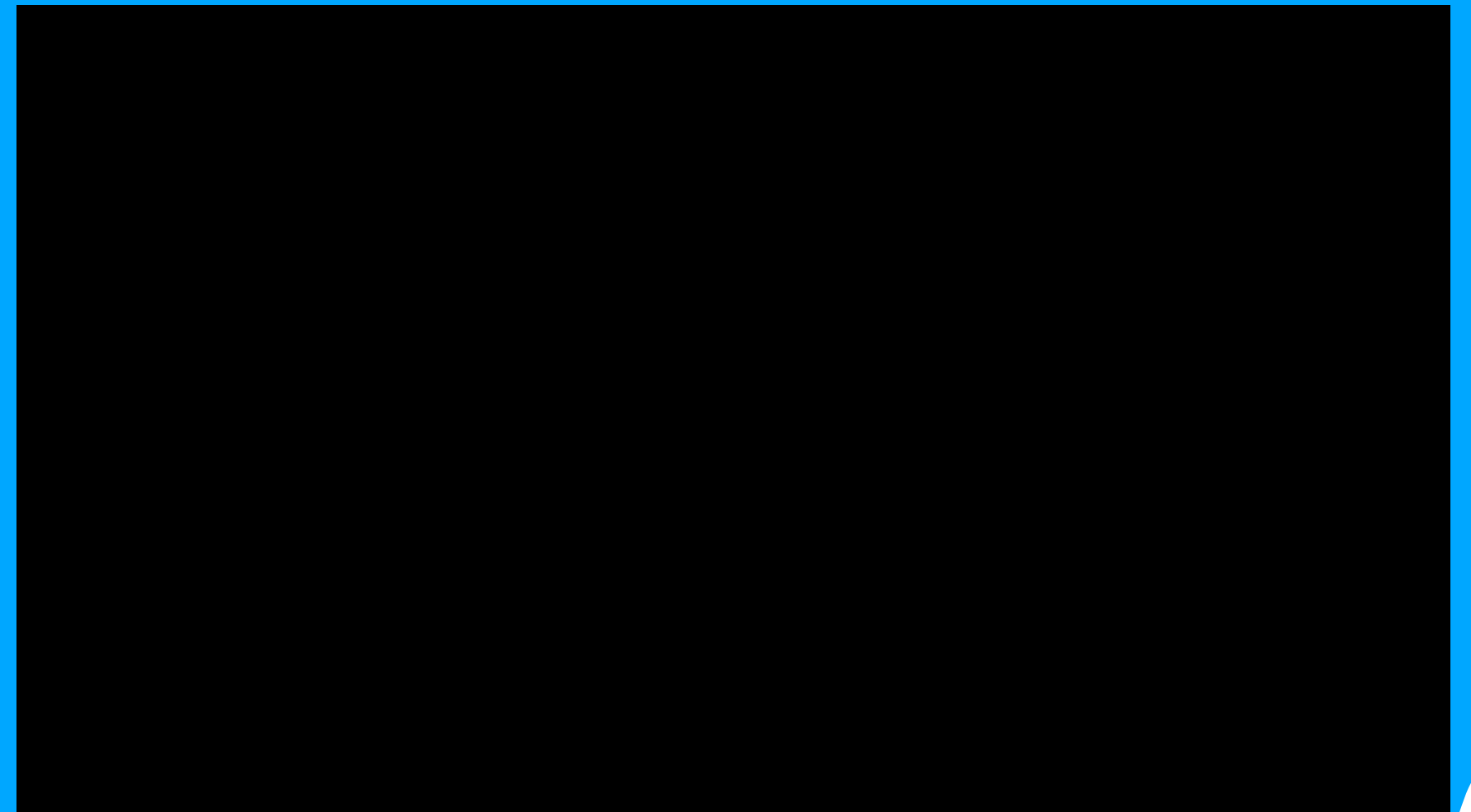
How Can This Help Us to Stay Grounded?

Going Back to Basics:

Focus on the rhythm.

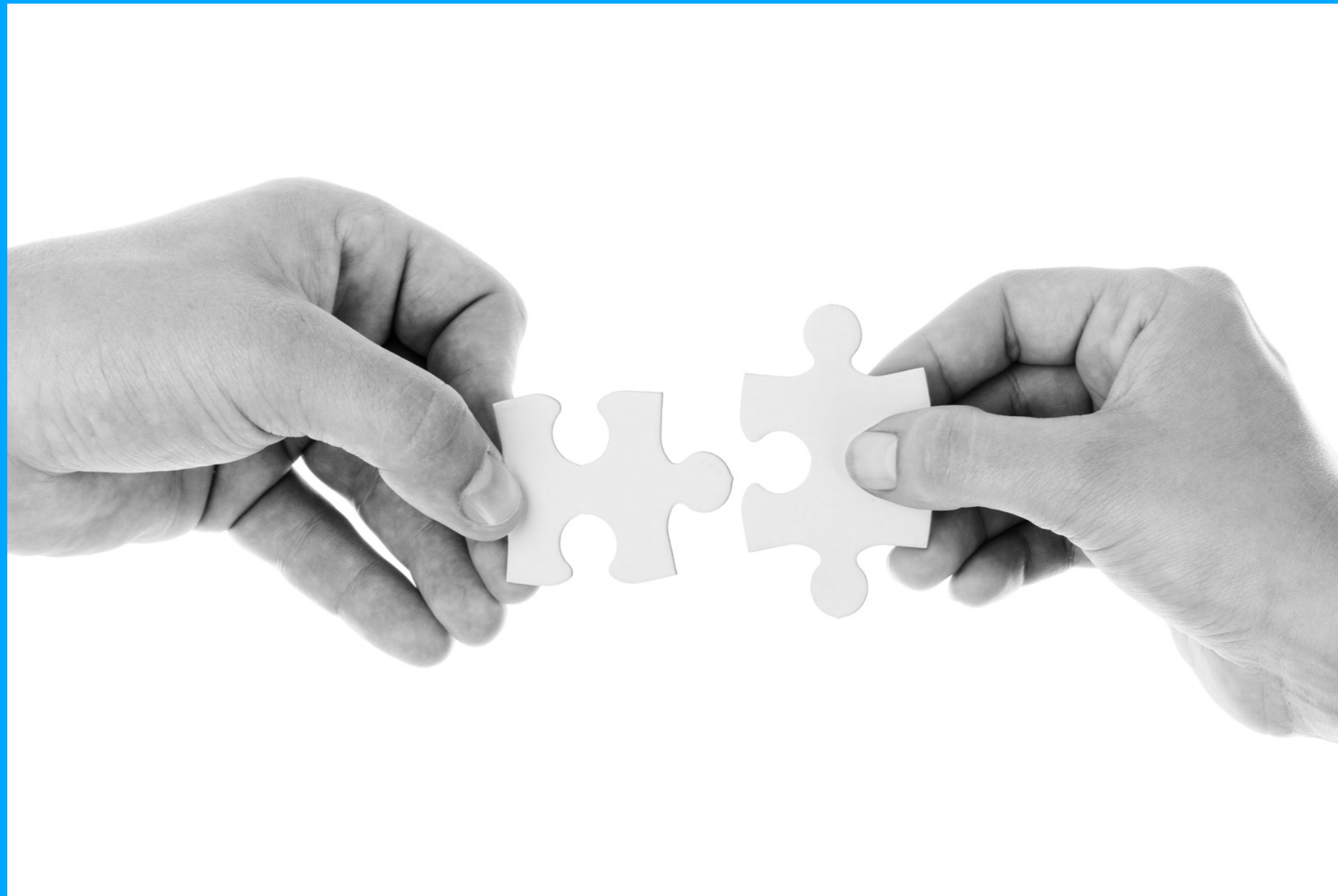Focus on the relationship.

Connection is everything.

Concept 5: Rupture and Repair

Mismatch

Rupture and Repair as Therapists:

There are likely more ruptures now. But there are also more opportunities for repair! Hooray! Maybe repair IS the therapy...

What Can We Do?

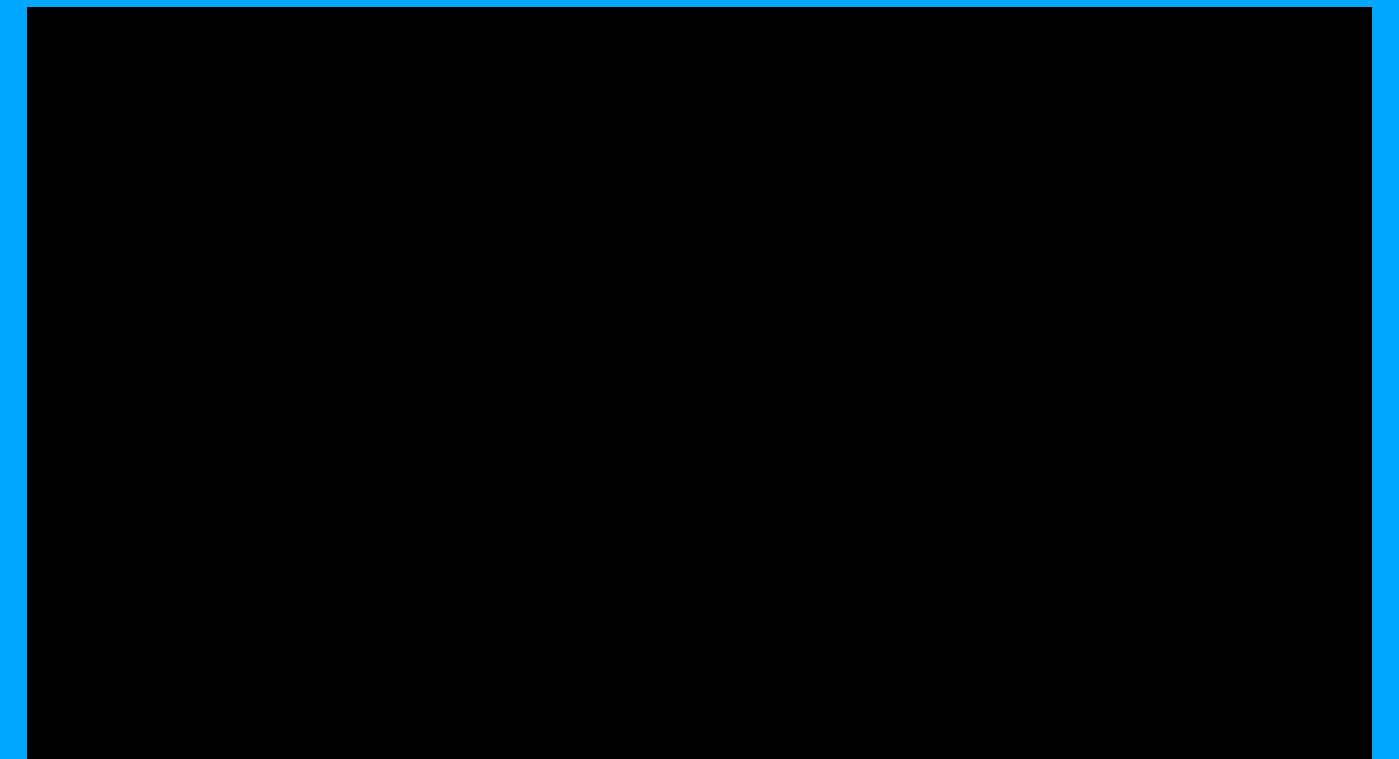
Invisible String "Test"
Hide and Seek
Sit with clients' frustration
Find ways to join: soft blanket,
fuzzy slippers, tea, etc.

Hope for Therapists

"We came to recognize that repair is the crux of human interactions. Repair leads to a feeling of pleasure, trust and security, the implicit knowledge that I can overcome problems."
--Tronick and Gold, The Power of Discord

Rupture is a powerful therapeutic opportunity.

References and Recommendations

Clark, R., Tluczek, A., and Gallagher, K. (2004). Assessment of parent-child early relationship disturbances. In R. Del Carmen and A. Carter (Eds.), Handbook of Infant and Young Child Mental Health Assessment (pp. 25-59). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Courtney, J.A. (Ed.) (2020). Infant Play Therapy: Foundations, Models, Programs, and Practice. New York: Routledge.

Fraiberg, S., Adelson, E., and Shapiro, V. (1982). Ghosts in the Nursery: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Problems of Impaired Infant-Mother Relationships. In Clinical Studies in Mental Health (pp. 164-196).

Hoffman, K., Cooper, G., Powell, B., and Benton, C. (2017). Raising a Secure Child: How Circle of Security Parenting Can Help You Nurture Your Child's Attachment, Emotional Resilience, and Freedom to Explore. New York: Guilford Press.

Lieberman, A.F. and Van Horn, P. (2008). Psychotherapy with Infants and Young Children: Repairing the Effects of Stress and Trauma on Early Attachment. New York: The Guilford Press.

Lieberman, A.F., Diaz, M.A., Castro, G., and Bucio, G.O. (2020). Make Room for Baby: Perinatal Child-Parent Psychotherapy to Repair Trauma and Promote Attachment. New York: The Guilford Press.

Lieberman, A.F., Padron, E., Van Horn, P., and Harris, W.W. (2005). Angels in the Nursery: The Intergenerational Transmission of Benevolent Parental Influences. Infant Mental Health Journal, 26(6), 504-520.

Oppenheim, D. and Goldsmith, D.F. (Eds.) (2007). Attachment Theory in Clinical Work with Children: Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice. New York: Guilford Press.

Siegel, D.J. (2001). Toward and Interpersonal Neurobiology of the Developing Mind: Attachment, Relationships, "Mindsight", and Neural Integration. Infant Mental Health Journal 22(1-2), 67-94.

Tronick, E. and Gold, C.M. (2020). The Power of Discord: Why the Ups and Downs of Relationships are the Secret to Building Intimacy, Resilience and Trust. New York: Little Brown Spark.

Zeanah, C.H. and Zeanah, P.D. (2018). Infant Mental Health: The Clinical Science of Early Experience. In Zeanah, C.H. (Ed.), Handbook of Infant Mental Health, 4th ed., pp. 5-24. New York: Guilford Press.

Zeanah, C.H., & Benoit, D. (1995). Clinical Applications of a Parent Perception Interview. In Infant Mental Health. Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 4, 539-554.