

STABLE & RESILIENT CHILDREN

What's Outside Goes Inside

Children form their “sense of self ” based on their experiences and their perceptions of those experiences, with their primary caregivers.

The caregiver is the gatekeeper through which the infant/child experiences the world, experiences itself in the world. When a child experiences a stable relationship with the parent figures *outside of self*, especially but not only in the first 4 1/2 years of life, the stability, security, warmth, comfort, joy and value of the relationship *outside* goes *inside* and becomes the foundation of a stable sense of self.

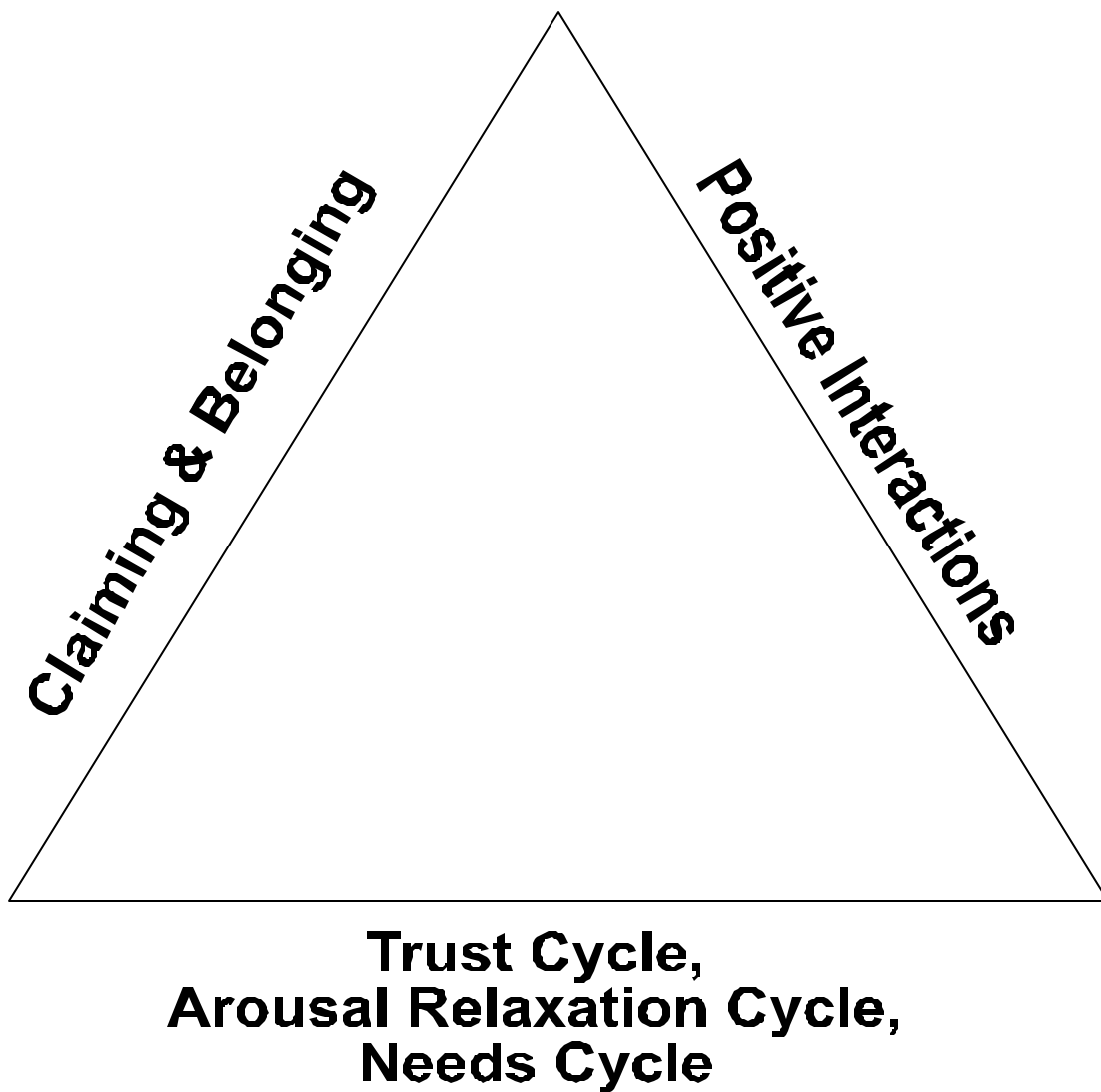
The building blocks of this internal sense of self are forming from ages 0 - 4. This is a developmental process. There are two core building blocks of self that develop in these early years: object/self permanence and object/self constancy.

Permanence refers to the child's awareness that the parent and therefore the self, exists and will continue to exist across space, time and emotions. The parent appears in response to the infant's signal, usually crying. After the infant's needs are met, the parent puts the infant down and moves out of visual and auditory range, disappears. Parents appear and disappear thousands of times in the first 12 months of life. The infant gradually comes to “know” that the parent continues to exist even when he/she can not see, hear, smell, taste or touch the parent. The parents' existence is permanent. What's outside goes inside: if the parents' existence is permanent, therefore available and secure, then the infant/child's existence is permanent, therefore secure.

Constancy refers to the ability to perceive the other, and therefore the self, as whole across space, time and emotion. As the child learns through experience that Mom is the same Mom whether she is nurturing or angry, so the child learns that self is the same self whether hot or cold, angry or affectionate. If the other is the same other in differing states than the other is still available to the self even when there is tension, anger, disagreement, disapproval and/or physical distance between the other(parent) and the self(child).

Adopted and foster children form their sense of themselves, of their value and worth based upon their experiences with and their perceptions of their experiences with all their “primary caregivers”: birth parents, foster parents, adoptive parents. All adoptive and foster children need to integrate their experiences/perceptions of their birthparents and previous caregivers with their experiences/perceptions with adoptive parents. Constancy can be tricky to achieve when the previous caregivers were not constant.

The Steps of the Dance



THE STAGES OF ATTACHMENT FORMATION

DEVELOPMENTAL	CHILD'S BEHAVIOR	PARENT'S BEHAVIOR
<p>FOG: First Month Establishing Trust/Safety. Infant's task is to establish physiological homeostasis, to adjust to the out of the womb world. Parents adjust to this new child, learn to read and respond to the child's signals. Safety, security and warmth are experienced in sensory connection with the parent(s). Parents 'make' the world, (existence), safe for the infant. . Infant's Body molds to the caregivers. The infant, in relaxed state, parallels the caregivers breathing.</p>	<p>Cries to signal needs Ceases crying and returns to relaxed state when need is met.</p> <p>Good sucking response. Accepts cuddling.</p>	<p>Responds to baby's signal and successfully identifies needs most of the time. Returns to relaxation along with baby; feels good about self. Child experiences care from one or two primary caregivers. Day care providers serve as tertiary caregivers who evoke the sensory memory of the two primary caregivers.</p>
<p>SYMBIOSIS: 2 to 5 months Positive Interactions Child experiences a sense of oneness with the parent. Parent and child 'fall in love' with each other. For the child this is falling in love with self. Representational OP is forming. Self comforting behaviors (e.g. finger or thumb sucking) begin to represent and recall, evoke, the sensory feeling of parents presence.</p>	<p>Smiles; makes eye contact; stares at mother's face for a few seconds at a time; makes happy sounds. Length of eye contact / loving exchanges with mother increases from seconds to minutes. If eye contact is interrupted by sudden noise or other distraction, child is increasingly able to return the gaze. Child appears responsive and exhibits full range of emotions.</p>	<p>Offers nurturing. Begins wooing child; initiates positive interactions; calls baby by name. Parent focuses much of her/his attention on the baby. Increasingly playful with the baby: chortles, grins, laughs, talks to, enjoys and engages the baby in one on one interactions. Continues to respond to the baby's signals and meet the baby's needs.</p>
<p>DIFFERENTIATION: 5 to 10 months: Begins to experience self as different from the parent. Recognizes strangers as not mother. Funneling is now complete.</p>	<p>Explores parents' faces visually and through touch. Enjoys and engages in peekaboo. Looks out at the other than mother world from safety of her lap. Pulls, pokes and grabs at parents.</p>	<p>Responds to child's full range of emotions. Guides the baby to "be gentle". Corrects and sets boundaries when child hurts others or self.</p>

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<p>5 to 7 months Representational OP developing. Child is experiencing safety as more and more tied to mother/father and is beginning to experience self as separate from mother/father. The need for transitional objects begins and grows to assist the baby to tolerate separation from the parent(s).</p>	<p>Differentiates between parents and strangers. Begins checking, looking back to parents for reassurance when strangers are present. Continues to pull, poke and grab at parents: discovering and exploring the boundary between self and other.</p> <p>Exhibits anxiety, anger or flattened affect when parents leave or are not present.</p>	<p>Gives child visual, verbal, and tactile reassurance when transferring child to safe other than mother/father caregiver. Continues to meet the child's needs, engage the child with play and comfort and begins to encourage safe exploration of the other than mother/father world. Provides stimulation according to the child's ability to tolerate input.</p>
<p>8 to 9 months Increasing stranger anxiety. Need for transitional objects increases.</p>	<p>Checking continues and is used to help the child feel safe when exploring. Shows glee at accomplishments. Returns to parents to refuel (get hug, kiss) during play.</p>	<p>Encourages safe exploration.</p>
<p>PRACTICING: Early, 9 to 12 months Crawls away.</p>	<p>Easily turns to parents for comfort when tired, hurt or anxious. Accepts comfort most of the time. Ability to delay gratification increases slightly. Self-comforting skills increase (transitional objects).</p>	<p>Exhibits joy at child's efforts and accomplishments Provides reassurance; encourages return to play.</p>
<p>PRACTICING: Late, 12 to 18 months Evocative OP. Child moves safely from the mothering function (inner safety) parent to the fathering function (safe exploration) parent.</p>	<p>Refuels more often as checking is not as secure for much of the exploration occurring. Joyous at accomplishments.</p>	<p>Responds to need and redirects; does not usually overreact Firmly, gently corrects force supports individuation and connectedness. Continued responsiveness to child's needs; encourages growing autonomy and praises accomplishments. Cheers effort.</p>

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<p>RAPPROCHEMENT: 15 to 22 months The child begins to experience anxiety from the experience of perceiving self as separate from the parent. The drive for individuation continues, peppered with moments of closeness and attempts to re-establish oneness.</p> <p>RAPPROCHEMENT CRISIS: As the movement towards psychological individuation proceeds, enhanced by increasing physical and verbal skills, the child's anxiety at separateness also increases. Attempts to return to oneness now include coercion. Negative behavior draws Mom's focus back to the child.</p> <p>CONSOLIDATION OF INDIVIDUATION: 21 to 36 months Dawning sense of separateness is almost complete. Child experiences self as separate from and yet safely connected to parents. OP in place. Representational OC usually in place. Evocative OC is just beginning to develop.</p>	<p>Attempts to woo the parent back into symbiosis. Shadowing and darting, child plays hide and seek, peek-a-boo and chase games, imitating the dance of closeness and separateness.</p> <p>Often, when Mom is busy focusing on other than infant and other parts of herself and her life child hits, kicks, gets attention from negative behavior.</p> <p>Previous behaviors continue: Full range of emotions; able to handle increasingly longer periods of separation (in hours) without anxiety; increasingly longer periods of independent play. Imitates parents in play.</p>	<p>Responds to the child's needs, provides connection and reassurance. Continues to stimulate child and encourage safe exploration. Offers comfort and warmth when child is anxious and/or over stimulated.</p> <p>Firmly and gently corrects child, containing the affective and behavioral aggression.</p> <p>Continued responsiveness to child's needs. Able to allow and encourage individuation and praise accomplishments.</p> <p>ADAPTED FROM: <u>REAL PARENTS, REAL CHILDREN: PARENTING THE ADOPTED CHILD</u>, H. VAN GULDEN & L. BARTELS-RABB, CROSSROADS, N.Y., N.Y., PG.162-163© ALL RIGHTS RESERVED 1998 HOLLY VAN GULDEN - ADOPTIVE FAMILY COUNSELING CENTER</p>

Tools for Enhancing Your Child's Sense of Value.

The many parts of self: Comment often on the child's different parts. Parts include: talents interests, hobbies, moods, mannerisms, traits, physical features, etc. e.g. "I like the polite part of you." "I can see Tonya is showing us her silly part."

Mastery/empowerment: Build the child's belief in his/her ability to learn and to master skills. Reminding children that they once could not do many of the things that now come easy, helps build this belief. e.g. "I remember when you couldn't ride a tricycle. Now you ride a two wheeler without training wheels."

Acknowledging loss issues:

Teach to recognize, label and safely express feelings.

Recognize the child's losses. Occasionally drop **Pebbles:** one or two sentence comments about the lost or missing people in the child's life. e.g. "I bet your birth mother thinks of you on your birthday." "I wonder if you inherited your musical talent, that you choose to work hard to develop, from your birth mother or your birth father."

Validation: "I can see (hear, tell, etc.) that you are angry (sad, confused, hurt, etc.)." Validation is recognizing and acknowledging that you recognize the child's feelings. You do not have to agree with or understand the feelings to validate your child.

Maintain constancy: "I love you **and** I am angry with you." Give the child nonverbal and/or verbal indications of your love during conflict or as soon as possible after conflict. This gives the child sensory evidence that your love endures, is constant.

Bridging the dichotomy of adoption: The sequence of events in the child's life creates a difficult dichotomy for children to process; birth parents chose not to parent him/her, adoptive parents chose to parent him/her. Let the child know that it hurt to lose him/her. Children need to know that birth parents and former foster parents miss them and were sad not to be able to continue to parent them. This helps the child find a '**constant**' message about him/herself in the opposing actions of the parent figures in his/her life.

Actively value, enjoy and delight in your child: random acts of shared joy, laughter, comfort.