

# Therapeutic Parenting

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# What do we mean by ‘Therapeutic Parenting’ ?

To understand this we need to first understand what we mean by ‘Parenting’

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- Parenting is less about *what we do* and more about *how we are being within the caregiving relationship*
    - *“Being not Doing”*
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# How can parents 'Be' ?

## **Authoritative**

Child Centred /Demanding  
& High Communication

= good mental health, well engaged  
with a level of overall competence

## **Authoritarian**

Parent Centred / Demanding  
Controlling & Punitive

= poor mental health

## **Permissive-Indulgent**

Accepting / Undemanding

= good self esteem & poor  
behaviour

## **Rejecting-Neglecting**

Parent Centred  
Low Communication & Demands  
Rejecting, Ignoring, Uninvolved

= poor mental health and poor behaviour

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# The Objective of the Optimal Parenting Relationship:

- To meet a child's needs (Child Centred)
  - Through a **warm, consistent, and reliable** caregiving **relationship**
  - By providing attuned responses -  
**attunement** is the timely, sensitive response to whatever is going on, even if the child is expressing a need through dysregulated behaviour.
    - Co-regulating responses
    - High parent-child communication eg emotional literacy, boundaries
  - **WIGO+WIN**
  - **2GO+WIN**
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- Parenting is a **relational process - relational connection is central**
  - Connection builds our nervous system, brains and our minds (self-esteem, our sense of self etc)
    - The quality of the relational connection shapes social, emotional and cognitive development
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***“High quality social relationships correspond with longer, happier and healthier lives”***

Holt-Lundstat et Al

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# What is Therapeutic Parenting?

- A formal approach designed for foster carers, adoptive parents & kinship carers – It's particularly applicable to children who have experienced trauma  
It can inform the approach that a child needs by all professionals , including in schools
  - Focusses on a **nurturing environment**
  - There is an acceptance and **empathic understanding** of **behaviours** rather than traditional judgements and behavioural consequences .e.g., Time-out, grounding
  - Responses are empathic -empathic understanding of the behaviour and what drives the behaviour, even if the behaviour is dysregulated
  - **Reflective & Authoritative** not Authoritarian
  - **Consistency in connection** (parental availability) and **co-regulation** (soothing the dysregulated child)
  - There is a focus on repairing the attachment relationship
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# Why is Therapeutic Parenting needed?

- Childhood experiences of **loss, neglect** and **maltreatment** can have a profound effect upon a young child's cognitive, social and emotional developments.
- E.g., impacting their attachment and all other relationships affecting their nervous system (e.g., heightened sympathetic arousal) and also cognitive development (acquired neurodiversity)

“Trauma is a chronic disruption of connection” - Stephen Porges

- When a child has been consistently in receipt of an attuned and reparative relationship, they are more able to change their previous expectations of relationships. (University of East Anglia, Secure Base; Howe 1996, Wilson et al 2003, Cairns 2003, Beek and Schofield 2004).
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***“Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships: it cannot occur in isolation”***

Judith Herman

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Trauma is a chronic disruption of connection- Porges  
Reactivity is key to survival and happens at a  
subconscious level.



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# Therapeutic Effects:

- Lowers **cortisol** & Increases **immune function**
  - Increases **flexibility** in **heart rate**
  - **Optimises** the regulation in **gene expression**
  - **Slows the ageing process**
  - **Oxytocin** activates the parasympathetic nervous system towards **rest, calm** and sense of **safety** - **Repatterns the nervous system**
  - **Repatterns the attachment behaviours**
  - Promotes **wellbeing & healthy relationships**
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# What does Therapeutic Parenting look like? 1/2

- It's **child-centred** not adult/parent-centred
- It consists of **warmth** (e.g., a warm maternal gaze, not a critical gaze)

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# What does Therapeutic Parenting look like? 2/2

What Is Needed -parental/caregiver/professional resources:

- **Physical** / practical availability - presence, time, attention
  - **Emotional** availability – the intention to hear in a non-judgmental manner
  - **Emotional capacity** – capacity to accept whatever comes up, to accept the experience
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# Therapeutic Parenting Requires

Therapeutic Parenting requires noticing the way that a child has been shaped by their early relationships (e.g. the impact of relational trauma /the trauma in the caregiving relationship)

Reactivity is key to survival and happens at a subconscious level  
What is the reactive/dysregulated behaviour communicating?

Once we notice, then we reflect and hypothesise to decode the underlying need (e.g. the unmet need that drives the behaviour)

We *attune* (or attend) to the need by providing the warm, consistent and reliable caregiving that all children need  
Attending to both layers -the here and now & the historical

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## **A caring approach involving caring behaviours that create caring bonds.**

Applications of a therapeutic approach:

- An approach with all children
  - Trauma-informed approach for children who have experienced trauma
  - An approach for schools by teachers with all students
  - A professional approach with parents
  - An approach with colleagues and other professionals
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# Therapeutic Parenting - What gets in the way?

- Lack of Sleep & Stress - in general or being in a rush
  - Traditional parenting eg. Authoritarian approach  
e.g., punitive, scolding, shaming  
“its bad behaviour, they need to learn societies expectations”  
Demands and commands, “Should” and “Ought” “Do as I say” “Don’t do that”
  - Dismissing the feeling/the need/the child “You’ll be fine” “It’s just a scratch”  
Rational explanations -“You can’t keep it, it’s not yours” “It’s the school rules”
  - Expectations that are not age appropriate (emotional age)
  - Fear of being judged
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# What gets in the way of connection?

- Judgement
- Minimising
- Dismissing
- Reassurance
- Criticising
- Impatience
- Disconnection occurs at times of our own disconnection and/or dysregulation
- Multi-tasking
- Compassion fatigue
- Not listening but waiting to talk
- Problem-solving, fixing

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Disconnection occurs at times of our own disconnection  
and/or dysregulation

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Relational Trauma gets in the way

we need to consider the relational dyad

Reactivity is key to survival and happens at a subconscious level

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