Secure Attachment eReport

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Secure Attachment is one of the most powerful types of relationship experiences that a person can have. Secure attachment means that you feel you have someone you can turn to and lean on when you feel sad, scared, or distressed. It also means that you can trust this person to be there for you when you need them in a way that allows you to take the attachment for granted enough to do things on your own and separately when the waters are calm. Secure attachment means seeking closeness to the person we trust when we need them while still being able to separate from that person when we're not in a state of acute need. It's about a healthy balance between dependence and independence and the ability to exercise both depending on the circumstances. In the general population, about 2/3 of people are securely attached in a significant relationship.

Being comforted by an attachment figure feels much more powerful than simply being comforted by a friend or acquaintance. The attachment bond fills us with feel-good chemicals that make us less sensitive to pain and more emotionally regulated. Children and adults who are securely attached do better at thinking tasks and at forming healthy relationships.

So there are many reasons why I think secure attachment in adults and in children is an extremely important thing to write about and to educate people about. There is so much literature on this topic and we are also learning that the way people talk about emotional events in their life has a very big connection to their attachment styles. We also know that people can earn a secure attachment even if they grew up in a dysfunctional family system or in a trauma-filled environment, with the help of new attachment figures such as a trusted therapist or partner. This can help people form new types of attachments that were not available to them as children, rather than repeating the past. It can also help parents act in ways that stop unhealthy attachment behaviors from being repeated inter-generationally.

Here is a compilation of some blog posts I have written about this important topic. Some of this is for parents and children, and some of this relates to attachment patterns in adults as well. I encourage you to read through this carefully until you have a good sense of some of the dynamics involved. And, of course I would encourage you to seek therapy if you recognize unhealthy attachment patterns in your relationships and you want some specialized help to move past this.

For Parents

Helping Your Child Develop a Secure Attachment

It is well-known that children who are comfortably and securely attached to their parents do much better at growing up and thriving than children who are not secure. According to Psychiatrist John Bowlby and a large body of research on children, children with a secure attachment style easily go back and forth

between turning to their parents for emotional support and expressing their independence.

In more recent years, Psychologist Peter Fonagy and his colleagues have highlighted some of the things that parents can do to help their children become secure. Here are some tips from this body of research on *mentalization* and *marked contingent mirroring*:

- **Try to see your child as a separate person from you**. When you imagine how your child feels in a particular situation, try to ask yourself: Is my child showing me that this is how he or she feels, or am I simply assuming that my child feels the way I would feel in this situation? Or, ask yourself "How do I know that my child is feeling the way I think he is?"

- **Whenever reasonable, respond to what your child is asking for**. Children who ask for things and get them learn that they can go after their goals in an assertive way and that the world will respond to them. It is important for children to learn that they can play an active role in getting things they need in life; this encourages an active instead of passive way of interacting with the world. (This is especially true for babies who cannot use words; as children develop language, you can say "no" to them some of the time and still convey that their desires are valid through your words).

- **Find words for strong emotions**. Parents who are good at talking about feelings (especially strong ones) instead of acting on their feelings or ignoring them, tend to have children who are more secure.

- **Don't confuse intentions and effects**. When a two year old bites someone and it hurts him, this does not mean that the two year old intended to cause pain. He may just be frustrated and not know how else to express his frustration. Or, if your toddler is throwing a tantrum in the supermarket and you feel embarrassed, this does not mean that your toddler is intending to embarrass you. He or she may simply be tired, hungry, or bored and not know how to cope with those feelings. Similarly, if your child doesn't listen when you ask him to do something and you feel frustrated, this does not necessarily mean that your child is trying to frustrate you. He may be busy with something else and preoccupied, upset about something, or simply not understanding what you are wanting, etc. It is important to

try to separate what is going on in your child's mind from how his actions affect you.

- **Separate between actions and feelings or wishes**. Understand and validate feelings even when they cannot be acted on. If you're the kind of person who only cares about what you should do about things (not how you feel or what you think) then this will be challenging for you. In attachment relationships, understanding what a person wants, feels, or thinks is just as important as focusing on actions or outward behaviors. If your child wants a toy and he cannot have it, it's still important to understand that he wants it and to communicate this understanding.

- **Reflect the Same and The Opposite Feeling at the Same Time**. When you reflect your child's feelings, it's important to convey both your understanding of how he or she feels, and a different feeling at the same time. This is called "marked contingent mirroring" and it lets your child know that you are showing him how he seems to be feeling, and not expressing a feeling of your own. It also shows him that his feelings are not contagious and that they can be coped with.

For example, if a toddler falls down and is about to cry and looks over at his mother, it is not helpful for the mother to become hysterical or anxious. This will increase the child's feelings of fear, and he also won't know whether the feelings of fear belong to him or to his mother. At the same time, it is not helpful to dismiss the child's feelings, because then he doesn't learn to stop and pay attention to them. A potentially helpful response is to say to the child something like, "Oh, no, you fell down!" and pick the child up, with a smile on your face. This shows that you realize that the child is scared, but also that you are not scared yourself and believe that everything will be okay.

Similarly, if your child comes home and says dejectedly "I didn't get picked for the team again, nobody likes me!", it is not helpful to feel rejected for your child- this will increase his feelings of rejection or distract him from his own feelings and focus him on yours! A helpful response might be, "Hmm, it sounds like not getting picked for the team today has you pretty upset" in a calm and relaxed tone of voice, showing understanding and keeping things in perspective for him at the same time.

These techniques work best when parents can manage their own emotions effectively, without getting overwhelmed by their own or their child's emotions. Practice makes perfect so make sure you practice this regularly!

"Looks Can be Deceiving": Mentalization Skills in Relationships, Part I

So I'm going to talk about some ideas that come from something called "mentalization based therapy". Some of you may have heard of that but probably most of you have not. I'm going to start with some basic explanations and then we'll look at some examples of how these ideas can actually help you with your parenting. What this is really about are some common types of misunderstandings that can happen in attachment relationships. Relationships that feel important to us are more likely to push our buttons than relationships that we don't really care too much about. For example, we're much more likely to have strong emotional responses with our own children than with someone else's children. If our child gets hurt, our instinct is to protect them- moreso than if we're walking in the street and see some random person get hurt. If our spouse criticizes us, it's more likely to hurt than if some random person in the bank

makes a critical comment. The more important the relationship, the more emotional power it has.

So why does this even matter?

Emotional Reactivity

Well, one important reason that it matters is that when we have strong emotional responses, there are several automatic reactions that are likely to happen. Something happens to our ability to think when there are strong emotions around, and it becomes much more likely for us to "do something". For example, suppose you see a fire in your house. You feel a rush of fear. The instinct would be to get out, escape, or call for help. You don't stop to think about why the fire is there or whose fault it is or how interesting the sight of fire is, or the science behind the event. You simply don't think about all of those things when there's an emergency going on. Your emotional response in your brain prepares you to take some sort of immediate action. And this is really a great thing, because if every time there was a dangerous situation, we took the time to think about the situation, we'd lose a lot of time that was needed for getting to safety. If you see your child running out into the street, you really don't want to start analyzing what it was that he was running after, or empathizing with how interesting the ball that he was chasing must have seemed to him. You want to simply react- take the child away from the danger. So the body's emergency response system is certainly helpful to us.

But what happens when people start to react to mental states with the emergency response? I will explain what I mean by mental states in a minute, but this is the question I'd really like us to deal with today. Because when we react to mental states in the same way that we react to physical dangers or information, then some really interesting things start to happen to our minds. Either the mind turns off, or else it starts to do something interesting with the information it's getting from the environment. So that is what I'd really like to talk about, because this happens with parents and children all the time. It's sort of the way that we're wired. But we can change those responses. The techniques for doing so are simple, but they aren't easy. And I'd like to show you some of those techniques so you can use them.

What are Mental States?

So I promised I would explain what I mean when I say "mental states". Okay, so mental states are the hidden things that go on inside of us- like feelings, thoughts, beliefs. No one can see our mental states. Actually, mental states can't be directly observed through any of the five senses. If I were to ask you what the feeling "caring" looks like, you couldn't really answer, because it doesn't have a "look". It's something invisible that goes on *inside* of a person.

However, there might be certain things on the *outside* of a person that can give us hints about what's going on inside. We have certain expressions on our faces when we feel different emotions. Our body language tells a lot. And so people make guesses about what's going on inside of us based on the objective things they can see, hear, etc. If my voice is really loud and my face is very red, someone might assume that I'm angry. They can't really see the "anger" if I am, because it's invisible and it's inside of me. But they can see certain external things, like my facial expression or the color of my face, and make guesses based on that.

Many of our guesses about mental states are quick and automatic. We don't even think about them. For example, you call someone on the phone and her voice sounds really distant and cold. You immediately feel hurt and assume she doesn't want to talk to you, so you hang up. It could be a million things though- maybe you caught her in the middle of an upsetting conversation with someone else. Maybe she's distracted by something. Maybe she's tired and doesn't realize how distant she sounds, but would love to talk to you. We don't really know. We guess all the time. And usually that works well. The problem is when we believe that we know for sure what's going on inside of the person. The problem is when we react based on our interpretation, without stopping to gather more information or to check if we are making the right guesses.

So this is the first thing that can happen when our emotional buttons are pushed in relationships. We might react before we have enough information, or we might believe that we absolutely know what the other person is thinking or feeling or meaning, without checking it out.

An Example

So, here's an example of what can happen. You go to the store with your two year old and she throws a major, embarrassing tantrum in front of everyone. You

already feel like a failure as a mother because all of your sisters always seem to have it together and your house is always a mess and your children don't just listen to you the way theirs' do. So now your child is throwing this major tantrum in public, and, already self-conscious, you feel like the entire world is staring at you and seeing the real truth- that you're a failure as a parent and you can't even control your own two year old. You tell your child to be quiet. You bribe her. You threaten. You try holding her down. Nothing helps. So now your emotional response system is turned on very high. You feel shame, embarrassment, and anger. You feel that your child is trying to expose your flaws to the entire world. You can't really think too much about what's going on, and you especially can't think about what's going on for your child. You're fully in reactive mode because you feel that your very own child is out of control and purposely trying to embarrass you in public. So it's hard for you to slow down and think about how your child missed her nap today, or might not be feeling well, or maybe just needs a little snack. It's hard for you to think about what her behavior means for her…because you're so worked up about what's going on for you. This happens all the time, at any age and any stage. We either lose track of what's going on for the other person, or we lose the ability to think.

Emotional Contagion

Now, the other thing that happens when we're in reactive mode, is that emotions can get to be contagious. This is especially true if you're the kind of person who picks up easily on other people's emotions. So, for example, say your child is running around, then falls down and gets hurt, and starts to scream in fear- well, you might then feel a rush of fear too. So you start to scream, or maybe even yell at your child for not being careful enough. Really, you are having a reaction to the fear that your child's fear caused in *you*. The other situation where this happens is when we give advice or solutions because our child's experience brings up uncomfortable feelings in us. So, for example, say your daughter comes home and says that all the other girls were invited to someone's house and that she was left out. She starts to cry and you start to feel rejected for her. It hurts you so much, now her pain is your pain. So you start to give her all sorts of solutions about how she can change situation, or maybe you rush in to fix it, and call the other mothers in the class to complain about the situation. What happens here is that because emotions are so catchy and contagious, everyone has a lot of emotional problems to deal with. Because when one person is hurting, everyone is hurting. So you don't just have to deal with your own aches and pains, but you have to

deal with everyone else's too. And they have to deal with yours'. That's a lot of feelings for everyone to be dealing with!

But you don't want to be uncaring either. You do want to be able to empathize with your child's experiences. We all know that empathy is very important.

A Healthy Balance

The issue is really being able to empathize while also staying outside of the feelings, being able to step back. You want to be able to show your child that you care about his/her feelings- but you don't want to feel *exactly* the same thing your child feels. That wouldn't be healthy. After all, you're an adult and you're also your own person. When your child gets a shot at the doctor, it's okay to feel bad for your child that it hurts, but you don't want to feel as if you're the child getting the shot. Then you'd have to go through the experience of feeling like you're being pricked by a needle every time any of your children go through this! And that's too much painful experience for one person. So it's important to learn how to care but detach at the same time, how to see the whole picture- after all, you know that a needle prick just lasts for a moment and that it's important to keep your child healthy. You want to be aware of that too, even as you care about your child's pain.

Families that can do this- stay out of other peoples' emotional experiences even as they react to them in their own muted/less intense way- have less of the emergency response when emotions happen, and less of the reactivity that goes along with the emergency response. So step one is to try not to react to other people's mental states as if they are exactly the same as your own.

Okay, so suppose you're in the park and you see a mother who is holding a baby and smiling, while talking to another mother who is pushing a young boy on a swing. There is also a little girl a few feet away in a sandbox, who calls out to her mother with the baby every few minutes, with some sort of question or just saying "Look over here! Look what I did!" Each time she does this, the woman with the baby turns around to look at her and says "I see, I can see the big castle you are building with the sand. You're doing great."

So anyone watching this scene would notice a lot of objective things about it. These are the things that are really facts about the situation, things that just about anybody would agree about. For example, if 10 people were watching this

same scenario, they would all notice that there is an adult woman who is holding a young child. And that there is another adult woman who is pushing a young boy on a swing. And, if they were to pay attention to things like the colors of the clothing these people are wearing or the color of the baby carriage, everyone would agree about what they are seeing. Some of the people might pay more attention to certain details than others, but essentially, everyone who looks can agree on the sights they are seeing as facts. The same would be for the sounds they hear. All 10 people would be able to agree that the two adult woman are talking to each other, and that there is a little girl in a sandbox who keeps calling out “Look, see what I did”.

So, physical things that we can experience with our senses- such as things that we see or hear, well, we all mostly agree on things like that. There are exceptions, like if someone cannot hear or see too well, if someone’s imagination is very vivid and they get mixed up between what’s in their head and what’s in their mind, or if there’s an optical illusion, for example. But in normal situations, we don’t have arguments with people about things that we can observe directly. If our child has a fever, we don’t say “The thermometer is making it up, you’re just faking”. We believe the thermometer and we believe the facts about the fever. If we go on a scale that we know is pretty accurate, we don’t say to ourselves “Oh, the scale must be in a bad mood today, it’s making up a really high weight for me”. We accepts the facts. If we take something out of the oven and say out loud, “Wow, this is hot!”, it’s not likely that someone will say “What are you talking about? It looks cold to me”. We agree about facts pretty easily.

It’s the subjective stuff that’s a little harder though. And that’s the part that gets us into misunderstandings and conflicts in relationships. And to understand that, we need to go back and review the difference between objective facts and subjective mental experiences and how this difference impacts relationships.

“Looks can Be Deceiving”: Mentalization Skills in Relationships, Part 2

So let’s review about mental states again.

What are the differences between the private mental experiences that happen *inside* of us, such as feelings, thoughts, or beliefs, and the objective, concrete behaviors or actions that happen *outside* of us?

One of the main differences is that we can experience things that happen outside of our minds by using our senses.

For example, when people smile, we can *see* their lips turned up in the familiar expression (this is an *outside* behavior). When someone *looks away* in embarrassment, it’s easy to see the eyes looking off to the side (another *outside* behavior). When someone yells in anger, we can similarly *hear* the loudness of their voice or *see* the red in their face.

But looks can be deceiving!

Have you been at a social event and put a big smile on your face, even though you were feeling terrible *inside?* Have you ever sounded really angry, when you were really *feeling scared inside* (such as when your child falls down and you yell "Be more careful!") Have you ever looked really composed while speaking in public, when *inside* you were shaking? Have you ever told someone that you were really happy to see them, when *inside* you really didn't want to be around anyone at all?

Most likely you can relate to at least one of the above scenarios. There are many times when our insides don't match our outsides. Yet, most of how we read other people is based on what we observe: their body language, expressions, tone of voice, and the words they say. And this is what makes relationships so confusing at times! We think we are reading other people accurately- and many times we are. But how many other times are we making guesses about what people mean or feel, when we don't really know what's going on inside their minds at all?

This gets even more complicated when people tell us stories about things that have happened to them. Suppose your son comes home from school and says, "My class is so mean. No one likes me. We were at recess and one boy started a ballgame. All the boys got to join in, but they wouldn't let me play. I had to just watch all recess long! Everyone gets included for everything except for me!"

What would your automatic response be?

Many parents would immediately have some reaction.

Some parents might be dismissive, and tell their child to "get over it". Others might be sympathetic and say, "I'm so sorry, that must have felt so bad." Others might run interference, perhaps by calling the child's teacher. Yet another parent might give advice, such as "Maybe you can befriend the boy who usually starts the game and ask him to include you next time." There are so many possible responses!

Well, the tricky part is that this story (like every story) has two different types of information in it. Some of the information is about *objective, observable* things, such as the things that actually happened in the scene; things that your son heard, observed, did, or had others do to him. But there are also subjective parts to this story, such as your son's interpretations of what people *felt* or *meant*- and

those are always guesses, because we can never see other people's private intentions or reactions. We can only assume them.

Can you tell which parts of your child's story were about mental states, and which were about behaviors? If you can, then you already possess a very powerful tool for helping your child to develop a sense of security and good social development. Yet, even if you can tell the difference between mental states and actions, it's still hard to remember to pay attention to those differences when we're emotionally activated! That's why it's good to practice with low-key scenarios.

So, let's break down this example.

"My class is so mean", and "Everyone hates me" are both referring to mental states. "Mean" and "hating someone" are not things we can see, feel, taste, or hear. We can describe and observe behaviors, but whether they are intended to be mean, or to represent feelings of hate, is something that goes on inside a person's head and heart. How often do we think someone is being "mean", only to find out later that we've misunderstood the situation?

So, your son's classmates may have been "mean". Or, they may not have been "mean". And even if someone's behavior seems unkind, there are so many feelings and thoughts that go on in other peoples' minds that affect their behaviors too. Knowing some of those private experiences might change how we see the situation. For example, if a child recently lost a parent and started acting "mean" at school, we might feel sorry for him, rather than angry. Context matters so much. What goes on inside of people makes a big difference.

Perhaps your son came late to the game, and the teams were already picked by that point. Perhaps the boy said your son could play, but your son couldn't hear because the game was so loud. Perhaps your son was a "sore loser" in the last game, and the class was frustrated about that. Perhaps the boy in charge of the game was jealous of your son because your son does better than him in school. Perhaps the boy's father had just bullied him that morning on the way out the door, and your son caught the brunt of it. Any information about the context is going to change how he feels about the situation, and how your son interprets it- even if the scenario was the same. But unless we ask questions, we'll never have the chance to wonder about any of those things!

Now, back to the behaviors and *outside* details in the story: Watching his friend play ball, asking to join and being told the word "no", etc. are not mental states. These are behaviors that your son experienced directly. These are things that "happened". He then interpreted their "meanings" in a specific way.

Many times, our interpretations are correct. But what happens when they're not? This can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and emotional upset. When a person thinks that being left out of a game means that other people hate him, he is going to feel a lot worse than just disappointed about not getting to play. So our attributions and explanations of things we experience directly, in terms of what we think they mean, have a lot to do with our emotional reactions to them.

And we often react based on false assumptions!

So, how to slow this down? First of all, before reacting and doing something of your own, such as giving advice, sympathizing, telling your child to "get over it", distracting him, trying to make him feel better, etc. , explore the context. Ask questions. Go over the story piece by piece, from start to finish, and try to find out as much as you can about what actually happened, and how he interpreted the situation. For example, you might say to your son: "Please tell me the whole story. Start from the beginning of recess. Tell me what you said, what you thought, what you did to try to join the game, and what they said to you or did." Then, talk with your child about how he interpreted the situation, and ask him what clues he used to come up with those thoughts. Perhaps you can offer some other possible interpretations at that point, or ask your son if he can come up with any others on his own. Or, after hearing more details, it might seem that his interpretation was accurate based on the whole context, in which case, you can offer advice, some sympathy, or encourage resilience at that point. But at least you will *understand* the situation before *reacting* to it!

Taking time to reflect before reacting is absolutely key to healthy relationships…so, how good are *you* at this?

When parents hit: Does it work?

Why not use hitting when so many parents say that it “works”?

Even though it is true that hitting may seem effective sometimes in the short run in terms of getting a child to obey, in the long run, it interferes with a child’s development of a sense of ownership and boundary over his physical body. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that any method of discipline that shuts

down a child's ability to think will be counter-productive in the long-run. I base this on my experience as a clinician and also on my understanding of recent research (such as that of Peter Fonagy and colleagues) in the areas of child development, attachment, affect regulation (how to manage one's feelings effectively) and mentalization (the ability to accurately understand what people are trying to communicate through their actions, as well as how to reflect on what is going on in a person's mind).

One of the biggest failures in development that we see in adults who have extreme difficulties with relationships (for example, those with Borderline Personality Disorder or Narcissistic Personality Disorder) is in the area of knowing how to manage one's emotional and mental experience reflectively as opposed to impulsively. Those who react impulsively to their feelings often use reactions such as exploding at someone else, hurting the other person, or shutting down completely to communicate and to manage their emotions.

The ability to reflect on feelings rather than impulsively reacting to them (or defensively shutting them out) is dependent on a number of cognitive capacities, including the following: knowing how to distract oneself from upsetting thoughts and feelings by diverting attention away from them, being able to step back from a situation long enough to get a new perspective on it, feeling comfortable to use other people to help oneself calm down, and having a good sense of the emotional boundaries between oneself and another (for example, knowing the difference between how I feel versus how someone else feels in a given situation). Such capacities develop best in a child who learns from adults who themselves are skilled at knowing how to take a step back from intense situations and how to think of flexible, helpful responses even while embroiled in the "heat" of an emotional moment. As we all know, figuring out something helpful to do or say when emotions are running high is no easy task, and takes a lot of skill and practice.

When parents communicate with their children primarily through reactive or coercive action (hitting the child, threatening, yelling, embarrassing), this effectively shuts down the child's mind as he defends against the overwhelming experience (he goes into survival mode). The child who is being hit or embarrassed may think about fighting back or running away (essentially the way that anyone responds to an "emergency"), or he may simply freeze and dissociate during the experience (space out or become numb). None of these responses

helps the child to think about his actions and learn from the experience by reflecting on what exactly his behavior meant and whether there are more effective ways to communicate, get what he wants, accept what he cannot have, manage intense feelings, etc. in the future. New learning does not take place under conditions of being afraid, physically hurt, or intensely embarrassed. Rather, the best way to help a child learn is to try to understand what the child is trying to say and to help the child communicate his message increasingly through symbolic means such as thinking, feeling, playing, or talking, as opposed to reactive/enactive means. Kids get better at this with time if development is going smoothly.

Many parents say that they were hit as children and it didn't do them any harm. It is hard for me to imagine that these parents were actually present emotionally and mindfully while being hit and were reflecting on their actions as they were being hit (and feeling loved). It is also hard for me to imagine such a person using the experience afterwards for learning- a much more likely scenario is the child fantasizing revenge against the parent, figuring out how not to get caught the next time, or simply not thinking about the incident at all (effectively leaving it dissociated from his thinking/learning mind). One cannot learn from that which cannot be thought.

There are also some children whose temperaments make it especially difficult for them to manage their feelings in a healthy way. A healthy way to deal with feelings is to become aware of them, put the feelings into words (either to someone else or in one's own mind), and to reflect on how best to handle the emotional situation. For children who become intensely emotional very quickly and don't know how to manage their feelings using cognitive processes, there might be a diffuse sense of anger, anxiety, or frustration inside. The child does not know what his feelings mean, where they came from, or how to tame them. All the child knows is that he needs to get these uncomfortable feelings out of himself quickly so that he can feel some relief. He may then push his parent's limits until it feels as if the parent has no choice but to either explode or be bullied by the child (give in). This child is attempting to get a reactive response from the parent.

Such children are often prone to projective mechanisms- dealing with their own feelings by provoking reactions in other people. For example, this kind of child might push his parent's buttons relentlessly until the parent actually hits the child

or explodes- the child then seems to calm down, and the parent then assumes that the only method of discipline that works for such a child is to hit the child and that this is helpful. (These are often the kids who get more and more oppositional as the parent acts “nice”, “empathetic”, or “calm”). I’d like to suggest that rather than being helpful, all this does is reinforce for the child that the only way he can get any relief from his intense and diffuse feelings is to get someone else to explode – and this pattern usually follows all the way into adulthood, where he now may be a very difficult spouse or parent because he has no awareness of his own feelings and where they are coming from and how to manage them. This adult becomes dependent on having someone else around at all times who can be manipulated into expressing whatever emotional response he/she needs them to in any given moment in order to feel relief. For example, a diffusely angry spouse may withdraw calmly and coldly until his/her partner explodes in frustration; he is then relieved of his own anger and distracted from it as he criticizes his partner’s angry outburst.

Of course, I present no easy answers about how to discipline in a way that opens up a child’s ability to reflect, because there are no easy answers in this area. Rather, what is required is a general, “one day at a time” attitude of trying to understand what the child means and helping the child learn how to be straightforward in his communications and strivings. Additionally, in situations where a child is completely out of control and requires his parent to contain him through some action (for example, by holding the child or giving a time-out), the thinking/reflective part of disciplining should not be left out, at least in the back of the parent’s mind. And, as a useful first step for parents who want to become more reflective in their parenting, I recommend taking a step back from your own attitude towards your child and trying to become curious in a new way about what is going on your child’s mind.

I hope you found these articles helpful and that they gave you some food for thought about your parenting behaviors and relationship interactions. Please feel free to email me any comments you have at mirelgoldstein@gmail.com

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Hope to hear from you!