

# EARNED SECURE ATTACHMENT

Security can be earned and it can be learned.

The way you were parented significantly influences the way you view the world and parent your children, but what's even more crucial is how you've made sense of your own childhood experiences and how your mind shapes your memories to explain who you are in the present.

Your childhood can leave gaps in your emotional fluency.

Your interactions with your children can be a key element in the process of making sense of your own attachment history.

## HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF YOUR LIFE STORY

One of the factors that gets in the way of how your child becomes attached to you, is your own childhood experiences. It isn't what happened to you in your childhood by itself, but rather how you've made sense of your experiences and how they influenced you.

While you can't change the past, you can change how you make sense of it.

If you can reflect and make sense of how your development was impacted and affect your current parenting that's what matters the most.

It is never too late to make sense of your life and learn to enhance your connections with those you love.

## COHERENT NARRATIVE

The key is to develop a coherent narrative. You need to reflect on and acknowledge both positive and negative aspects of your family experiences and how you feel about them. Then you can learn how these experiences impacted your body and your model for relationships.

Example: The mom was always mad. She loved her kids, there was never any doubt about that. But growing up her dad worked all the time and her mom was an alcoholic. She was the oldest of 6 kids so she always felt she had to be perfect. As a parent, she kept everything in trying to be in control and her emotions would erupt when it became too much. She worries that she lets her kids get away with too much, because she doesn't want them to feel that pressure to be perfect.

This was what she took from her childhood. This is how she adapted to her environment and care. She can talk clearly about it and can even find compassion for her parents and reflect on what it all means for herself and her children. She can offer specific details about her experience, moving easily from memory to understanding. She's not dismissing the past or becoming preoccupied with it. That's a coherent narrative.

It is empowering to realize that you're not to blame for your parents' mistakes. You have the power to liberate yourself now from a past you did not create.

You're not to blame for what happened to you.  
You are responsible for what you do now!

You've become who you are and developed behavioral patterns to adapt. It's what you did to survive as a child.

As adults these patterns may be so far from what you need now and are not helpful. Your coping strategies may have deeply affected your reward system for attachment and how your nervous system is wired.

When you start to make sense of your childhood, it's not just an intellectual exercise. It actually reorganizes your sense of reward and nervous system regulation.

This is how you become the parent you want to be.

When you make sense of your experiences and work to understand your parent's experiences, you can break the cycle and avoid passing on insecure attachment.

Acceptance and forgiveness is giving up on a different past. You forgive not to say it was ok, but to let go of false illusions that you can change the past.

When you have a secure attachment with your child, you'll have a strong, true connection that you wouldn't have otherwise.

And your grandchildren. And their children. By doing your own personal work, you break the cycle of insecure attachment and better the lives of every generation.

Regardless of your childhood and whatever happened in it, you can be the exact parent you want to be.

## **YOUR PAST INFLUENCES YOUR CAPACITY**

Life gets in the way of being all the good things for them. What can get in a way more than any of this is what was given to us when we ourselves were children.

So much of what you have inherited sits just outside of our awareness. That makes it hard sometimes to know whether you're reacting now to your child's behavior or whether your responses are more rooted in your past.

When you describe your baby as manipulating, the emotional memory for you has been triggered by their demands and they get the blame.

If you feel overwhelmed and you notice yourself disliking them or even becoming mad, it's likely that the emotional memory of some unresolved issue is being stimulated. This is an opportunity for healing.

EXAMPLE:

Her son shouted that he was stuck on the playground and needed help to get off. The mom told him to get down and when he said he couldn't, she felt furious.

It happened again. This time she helped him.

When he got down he asked, why didn't you help me last time?

When I was little my mom treated me like a princess and carried me everywhere, she told me to be careful all the time. It made me feel incapable of doing anything for myself and I ended up with no confidence. I don't want that to happen to you which is why I didn't want to help when you asked. It reminded me of being your age when I wasn't allowed to get down by myself. I was overcome with anger and it took it out on you and that wasn't fair. I didn't know that I was angry at my mom and not at you. And I'm sorry.

The pattern works like this, when you react with anger or another overly charged emotion around your child it's because it's a way you have learned to defend yourself from feeling what you felt at their age.

Outside of your awareness, their behavior is triggering your own past feelings. And so you unknowingly take the easier option, rather than empathize with what your child's feeling, you default to be angry or frustrated.

You want to name your feelings and find an alternative narrative for them. One where you don't hold your child responsible. You don't judge them as being somehow at fault for having triggered you.

If you can do this, it makes you less likely to act out on that feeling at the expense of your child. You'll not always be able to trace a story that makes sense of how you feel, but that doesn't mean there isn't one and it can be helpful to stay aware of this.

Spend some time contemplating what it may have felt like for you as a baby or child around the same age as your own. This will help you develop empathy for them.

## **TRIGGERS COME UP AT THE SAME AGES AS YOUR CHILD**

It's coming up in the present and now you have the chance to heal what you couldn't as a child. But it takes awareness!

Whatever age your child is, they're liable to remind you, on a bodily level, of the emotions you went through when you were at a similar age or stage.

It is common for a parent to withdraw from their child at a very similar age to when their parent became unavailable to them.

You could start pulling away emotionally when your child is the same age as you were when you felt alone.

You might want to run away from these feelings and maybe literally not show up for yours. This could happen unconsciously and unintentionally. But if you do you will pass down what was done to you.

You need to really start noticing your feelings. Reflect on them. Especially try not reacting when you're having feelings you don't really understand.

## **IT'S NOT YOUR KID. IT'S THE EMOTION**

If you can find each emotion that was never handled within you and be with it specifically. You open up space and so much capacity within your system so you're able to stay regulated and also don't have the residue of old emotions. You transmute the old meaning. You don't have the build up of your past or the meanings those emotions hold and you're able to fully be in the present with you and your child.

If you feel yourself wanting a break from your child every hour of every day, what you probably need is a break from the feelings they trigger in you.

## THE DOWNSIDE OF JUDGMENT

You want to be the best parent you can. One thing that stops this is judgment.

Because you don't want to be a bad parent, when you make mistakes, you avoid the feeling of guilt or shame. You get defensive about anything you may be doing wrong. That means you don't look at the ways you're mis-attuning to your child or neglecting their emotional needs.

You also aren't going to try to find ways to improve your relationships if you're essentially ignoring it. You hide the things you may be doing wrong behind the things you do right, so you can cling to the identity of a good mom.

How you feel about yourself and how much responsibility you take for how you react to them are key aspects of parenting. They are often overlooked because it's much easier to focus on them and their behaviors rather than seeing how they affect you and then how you in turn affect them.

## FEELINGS

There is nothing like becoming a parent to teach us that human beings feel before they can think and that children are more about their feelings than anything else.

Learning how to contain feelings.

When your child is unhappy, denying their hard feelings can be your default option.

Because it's how you experienced it, it can feel like the right thing to do. You might think it's ok to belittle, advise, distract or even punish the feelings away.

It's not easy to not become fully affected by their emotions. Their big emotions can feel like a threat and unsettling for you.

You can even feel as if you are encouraging these feelings in some way. But just because you don't want to allow them, doesn't make them disappear.

Maybe for now and maybe for you. But for your child, they just hide. In their bodies. They find a place to stay. Energy that just needed a healthy release, is now stored in their body. And eventually they will come out later in life and cause the same problems or more with all the other stored ones.

When do you feel the need to shout louder? When you are not heard. Feelings need to be heard.

The most common cause of adult depression is not what's happening to the adult in the present, but because, as a child, they didn't receive co-regulation from their parents, which is the only way their bodies learn emotional regulation.

If instead of being understood and comforted, you were told not to feel, or cry or were left by yourself, your capacity to tolerate unpleasant emotions becomes less and less possible as the number of mis-attunements add up. Your capacity to tolerate them diminished and you adapted. You now handle their emotions with coping mechanisms.

Validating feelings is important. How you manage your feelings will impact how your child learns to manage theirs. Feelings and instincts are closely linked and if you deny how they feel, you are dulling their intuition. Their intuition keeps them safe.

If you were brought up being disapproved of for having inconvenient feelings, it is all too easy to revert to that same model with your own child.

It can be hard to accept your child's feelings if your feelings were denied by your parents. It can feel like taking a leap into the unknown and you are. You are breaking the links in your ancestral emotional chain. You are laying the foundation for your child's mental and overall well being.