

# Adlerian Play Therapy

*Healing through Belonging*



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# Post-traumatic reaction

- **Somatic:** sleep problems, hyperarousal (may look like restlessness, hyperactivity); some body regulation functions
- **Cognitive:** problems with memory, attention, and concentration; nightmares, flashbacks triggering somatic and affective reactions; intrusive memories, traumatic preoccupation – may show in child's repetitive play; dissociation
- **Affective and Mood:** Helplessness, emotional withdrawal, powerlessness, loss of control, fear of separation, self-blame, guilt, frustration and harder to comfort, sense of isolation; hopelessness; affect regulation
- **Behavioral:** aggressiveness, crying, whining, clinginess, defiance, regressed behaviors, such as thumb sucking; behavioral control



# Other Factors in Traumatic Responses

- **Gender** – female children are five times more likely than male children to develop active symptoms (Jordan, Perryman, & Anderson, 2013)
- **Cultural differences** - varying expectations re: open expression of feelings (Bal, 2008)
- **Age and developmental level** (Ohnogi & Drewes, 2016)



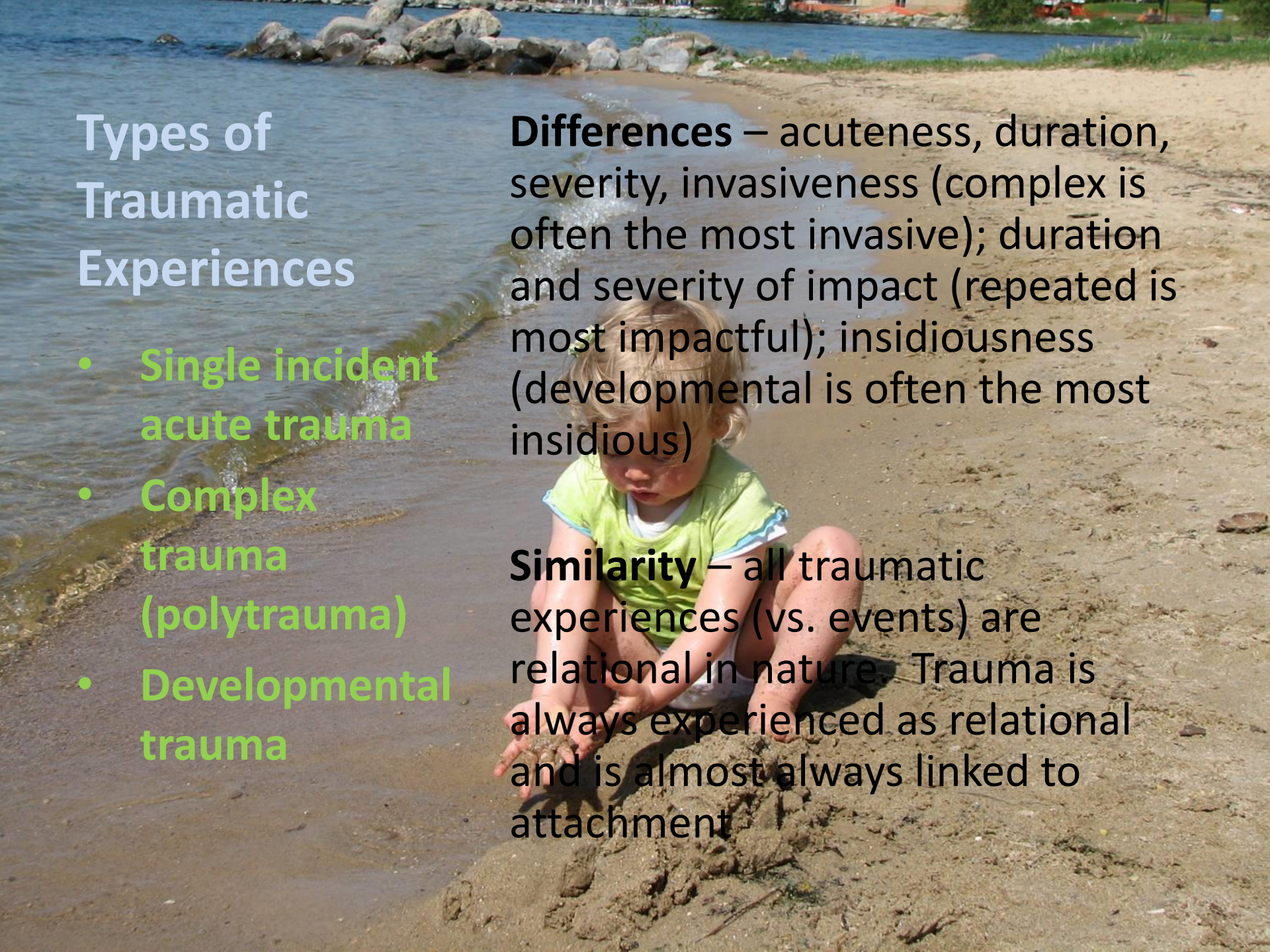


# Types of Traumatic Experiences

- **Single incident acute trauma**
- **Complex trauma (polytrauma)**
- **Developmental trauma**

**Differences** – acuteness, duration, severity, invasiveness (complex is often the most invasive); duration and severity of impact (repeated is most impactful); insidiousness (developmental is often the most insidious)

**Similarity** – all traumatic experiences (vs. events) are relational in nature. Trauma is always experienced as relational and is almost always linked to attachment





# Benefits of Play in Trauma Response

- Gives **voice to the body** and allows to reconstruct an event holistically – and all three levels affected by trauma, thus enhancing a sense of intact self that is always affected by trauma
- **Empowering**
- **Mastery** over their life
- Communicate and **create connections** with others (social nature of play)
- Promote **strength and resilience** by providing sensory input, giving sense of control, reinforcing safety through involving multi-sensory experience





# Benefits of Play in Trauma Response

- **Safe symbolic** space for the expression of feelings that may be too overwhelming to express directly and verbally
- Play is **ambiguous** and this gives children more control in what, how much, and at what pace is revealed
- Play is **fluid and moldable**
- Shift from *freeze* -> *fight or flights* -> *fright* -> *flag* -> *faint* into developmentally healthier **flow response**





# Developmental perspective

- Children under 11 lack abstract reasoning
- Older children, with intact abstract reasoning, may still be lacking vocabulary that would match richness of their emotional life
- Even children of all ages, cognitive, and specifically expressive verbal abilities, may regress following trauma leading to long-term debilitating psychological consequences in children because of lack of coping skills
- The latter is argued in some research stating that trauma in children is healing faster and that children are more resilient than adults, because of still fluid stages of their development



# Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler

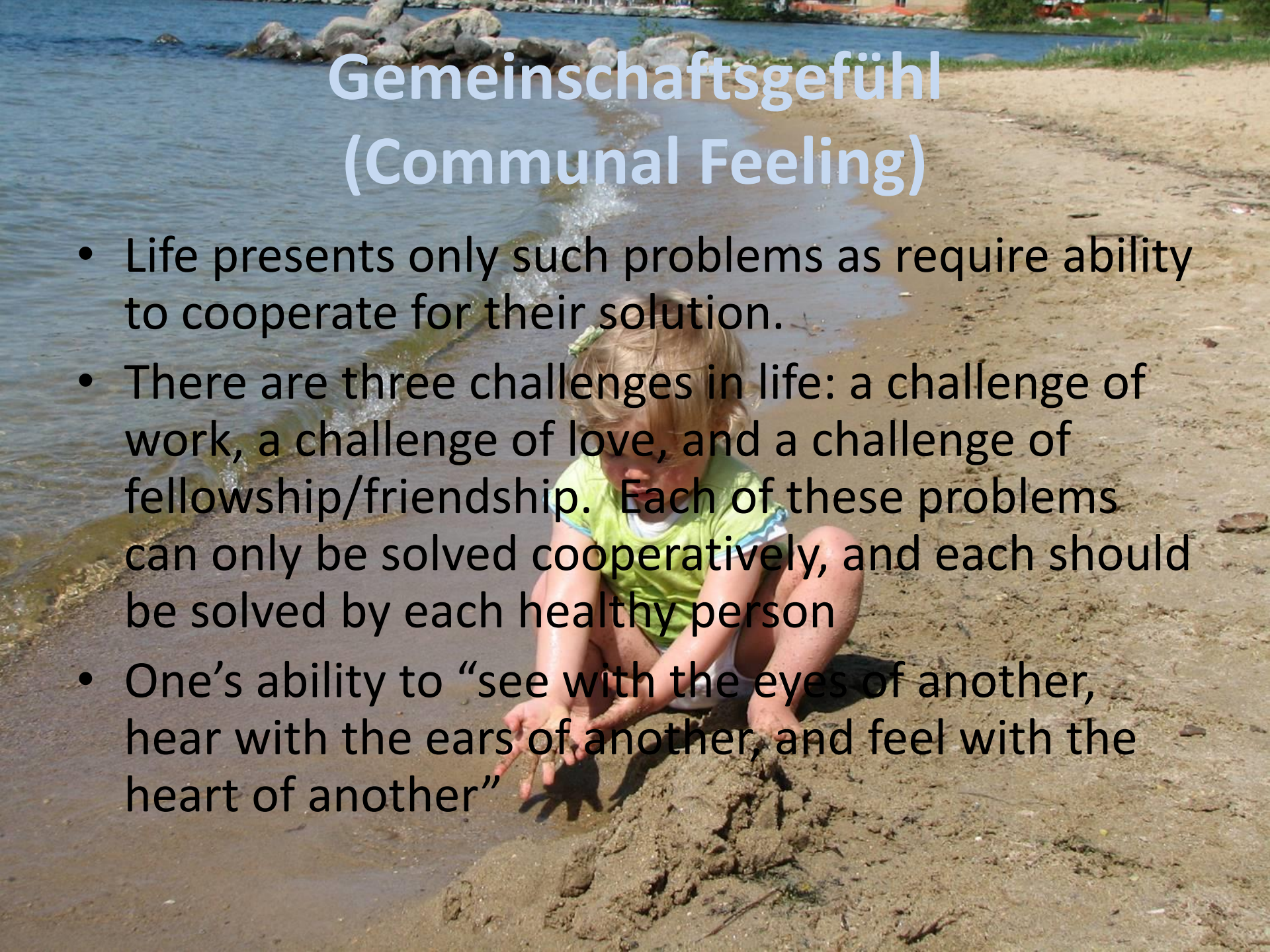
## Major assumptions

- We are socially embedded
- We are goal-oriented
- All behavior is purposeful and occur in social context
- We are guided by a central theme
- In our goal-oriented movement, we seek sense of completeness
- We are subjective and live in a subjective reality built by fictions that we create and maintain
- We are guided in life by soft determinism
- We all have creative power



# Gemeinschaftsgefühl (Communal Feeling)

- Life presents only such problems as require ability to cooperate for their solution.
- There are three challenges in life: a challenge of work, a challenge of love, and a challenge of fellowship/friendship. Each of these problems can only be solved cooperatively, and each should be solved by each healthy person
- One's ability to "see with the eyes of another, hear with the ears of another, and feel with the heart of another"





# A Core of Adlerian Exploration

## Lifestyle (a Pattern of Life)

The totality of beliefs, behaviors, themes, strategies of dealing with life challenges and meaning reflected in one's movement through life toward an anticipated future place of significance and belonging

Even & Armstrong, 2011



# Lifestyle Observations

**Life Style is not a behavior.** It is a set of convictions about oneself and one's world, a biased apperception, a subjective interpretation of oneself in relation to life, and is the framework within which we:

- a) interpret experience (life is as we see it)
- b) control experience
- c) predict experience (move in line with our expectations)

In this way, Life Style is really  
**a unifying aspect of one's personality**



# Lifestyle Observations

- I am..... (self-image; self-concept)
- Life is ..... The world is ..... People are ..... World expects.... (environmental evaluation, environmental scan)
- I should be ..... I should not be ..... (self-ideal)
- I should ..... (ethical convictions)
- Therefore, I ..... (my method of operations, based on my conclusions)

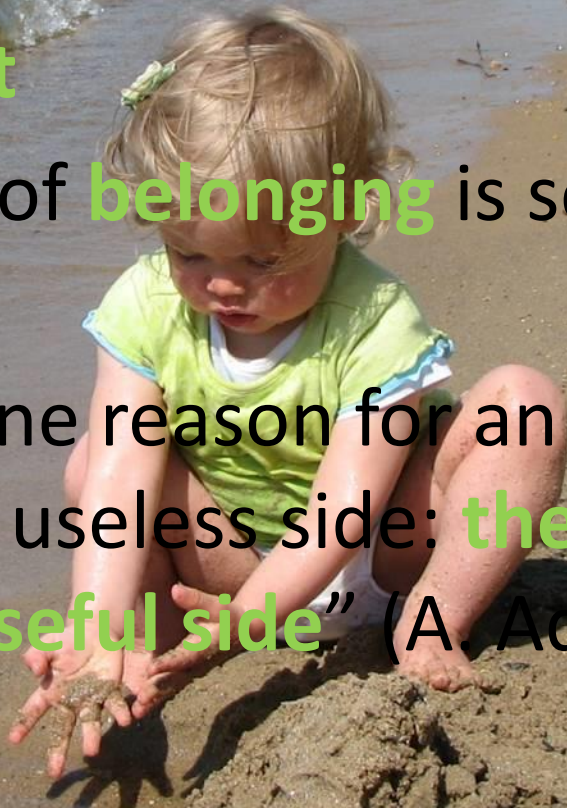
Another way of stating the above:

**How do I, seeing myself as I do, in a world such as I view it and people being what I see them to be, deal with life?**



# Adler about Maladjustment

- Misbehavior occurs from a sense of **discouragement**
- Impaired sense of **belonging** is seen in every pathology
- “There is only one reason for an individual to side-step to the useless side: **the fear of the defeat on the useful side**” (A. Adler)





# Impact of Trauma: an Adlerian View

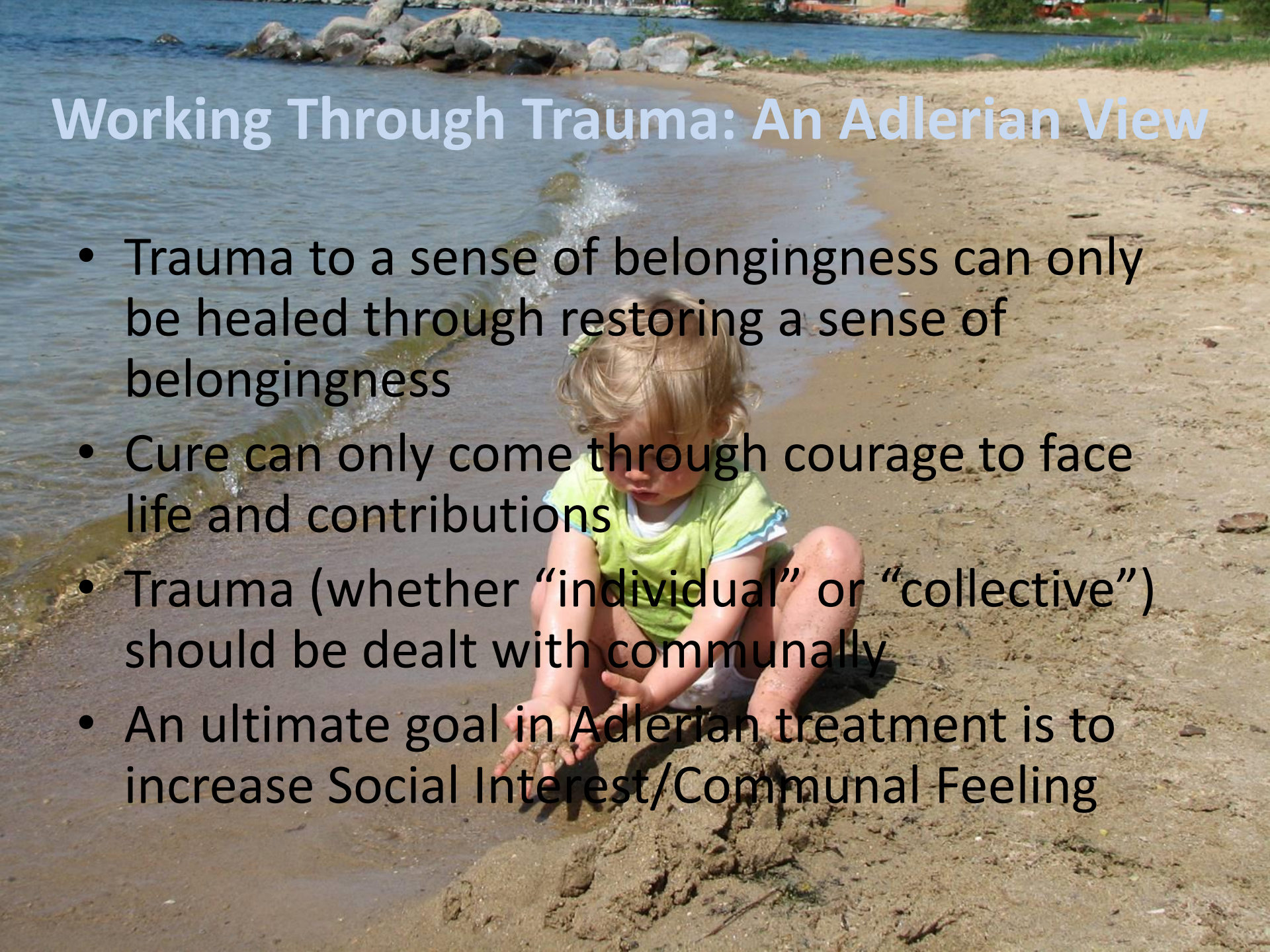
- A sense of belonging (whether with a nuclear family unit or with humankind) is often shattered
- Hope is damaged
- Old skills are no longer working and their socially sanctioned worth is compromised
- Discouragement is increased
- Skills are paralyzed
- More distress is triggered by a moment of a decline in self-worth
- Movement toward a sense of completeness is arrested





# Working Through Trauma: An Adlerian View

- Trauma to a sense of belongingness can only be healed through restoring a sense of belongingness
- Cure can only come through courage to face life and contributions
- Trauma (whether “individual” or “collective”) should be dealt with communally
- An ultimate goal in Adlerian treatment is to increase Social Interest/Communal Feeling





# The Crucial Cs

- **Connect (I believe I belong)**

I feel secure, I can make friends  $\leftrightarrow$  I feel insecure, isolated)

- **Capable (I believe I can do it)**

I feel competent and self-reliant  $\leftrightarrow$  I feel inadequate and dependent

- **Count (I believe I matter)**

I feel valuable and contributing  $\leftrightarrow$  I feel worthless and insignificant

- **Courage (I believe I can handle what comes)**

I feel hopeful and resilient  $\leftrightarrow$  I feel inferior and giving up

*Amy Lew, PhD and Betty Lou Bettner, PhD*



# The Crucial Cs and Rudolf Dreikurs' Short-Range Goals of Misbehavior

Amy Lew and Betty Lou Bettner

Child's belief	Child feels	Child's negative goal	Adult feels	Adult's impulse	Child's response to correction
I only count when I'm being noticed	insecure alienated	<b>ATTENTION</b>	irritated annoyed	<b>REMIND</b> What, again?	"temporarily" stops
My strength is in showing you that you can't make me and you can't stop me.	inadequate, dependent others are in control	<b>POWER</b>	angry challenged	<b>FIGHT</b> I insist that you do as I say.	misbehavior intensifies
I knew you were against me. No one really likes me. I'll show you how it feels.	insignificant	<b>REVENGE</b> get back get even	hurt or wants to punish	<b>PUNISH</b> How could you do this to me? us? them? I'll teach you a lesson.	wants to get even, makes self disliked
I can't do anything right so I won't try. If I don't try, my failures won't be so obvious.	inferior useless hopeless	<b>AVOIDANCE</b>  <b>display of inadequacy</b>	despair I give up. hopeless	<b>GIVE UP</b>  It's no use.	passive, no change, more hopeless, displays inadequacy



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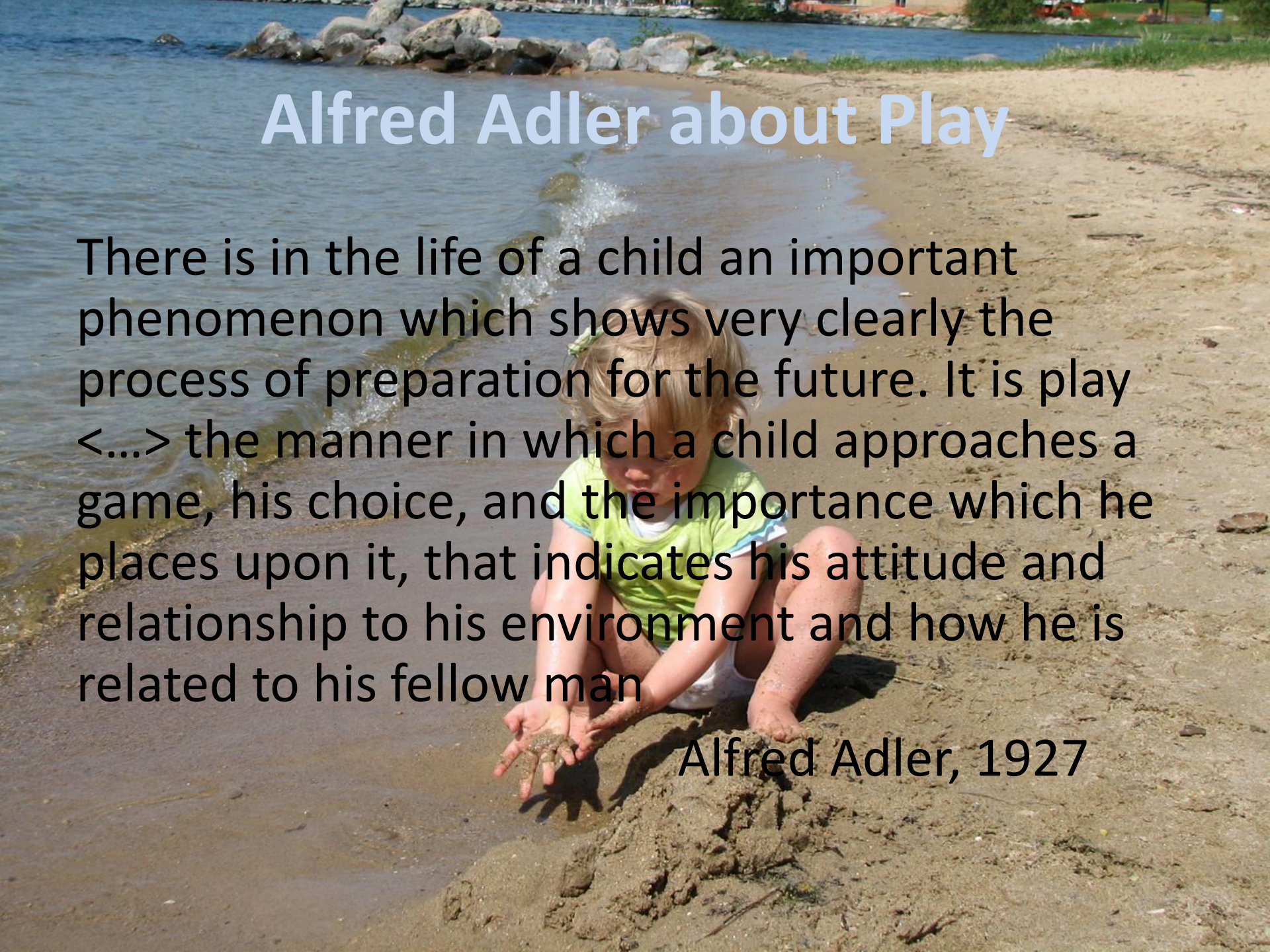
Crucial Cs	Constructive Alternatives	Child's belief	Child feels	Child's positive goal
<b>CONNECT</b>	Replace negative attention with positive attention. Plan activities together. Don't ignore the child; ignore the misbehavior. Teach self-sufficiency.	I belong.	secure	<b>COOPERATION</b>
<b>CAPABLE</b>	Don't try to win. Give opportunity and choices so child can display power constructively. Maintain friendly attitude.	I can do it.	competent self-control	<b>SELF-RELIANCE</b>
<b>COUNT</b>	Avoid anger and hurt feelings. Maintain, appreciation in relationship. Offer chances to help. Seek support and help in identifying positives. (Don't give up.)	I matter. I can make a difference.	significant valuable	<b>CONTRIBUTION</b>
<b>COURAGE</b>	Notice only strengths and ignore the negative. Set up steady exposure to manageable tasks that have a guarantee of success. No criticism.	I can handle what comes.	hopeful willing to try	<b>RESILIENCY</b>



# Alfred Adler about Play

There is in the life of a child an important phenomenon which shows very clearly the process of preparation for the future. It is play <...> the manner in which a child approaches a game, his choice, and the importance which he places upon it, that indicates his attitude and relationship to his environment and how he is related to his fellow man

Alfred Adler, 1927





# Ultimate Human Striving for Completion

as manifested in most plays (either how things should be or how things should not be)

- Sorting
- Fixing (doctor's office play)
- Broken play
- Instability play
- Nurturing play





# Optimism as a core of Adlerian Ethics

Acting as If (based on “as if” quality of human experience)

- If you were acting as if you were the person you’d like to be – how would you be acting differently?
- What might be some initial indications that you are headed in the right direction?

Encourage.... Encourage .... Encourage .....

(Encouragement as a state of being and therapeutic modeling of communal feelings,  
*R.Watts, 2015*)



# Phases in Adlerian Therapy

1. Building the relationships
2. Exploring child's Lifestyle
3. Helping a child to gain insight into Lifestyle
4. Reorienting/reeducating the child (gain mastery)

All these phases take place as horizontal, egalitarian, and relational processes





# How these phases work in play therapy (Kottman, T., 1999)

## Phase One - building the relationships

- Tracking, restating content, reflecting feelings, making tentative hypotheses, encouraging, actively and usefully interacting (cleaning room together), setting limits
  - Choice of toys will reflect the need to have an effective and plentiful media for children to communicate their goals, priorities, worries, histories, and dynamics of the process
  - Egalitarian relationships with a parent is as important
- \*\*\*
- Result – stabilization, safety, alliance,



# How these phases work in play therapy (Kottman, T., 1999)

## Phase Two – Exploring child's Lifestyle

- using toys and active play to examine family atmosphere, family constellation, goals of child's behavior, child's Early Recollections.
- Focus on what is in there (content) and what is not there (context). Primacy of a context.
- This will result in basic hypotheses about child's Lifestyle (convictions about self, others, world, *shoulds* and *should nots*, and what child's strategies are in dealing with the world.

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Following parent/caregiver consultations, this will initiate trauma processing and result in treatment plan



# How these phases work in play therapy (cont.)

## Phase Three – Helping a child to gain insight into Lifestyle

- child is gaining insight through Socratic suggestions, metacommunication, use of metaphors.
- Parents are gaining insight into child's Lifestyle, their own Lifestyle, and how these might interact. Parents are learning about parenting strategies, including recognition of goals of behavior, logical consequences, and encouragement





# How these phases work in play therapy (cont.)

## Phase Four – Reorientation and reeducation

- Through play and active use of metaphors, child is practicing new behavior to solidify cognitive, attitudinal, and perceptual changes that would allow for generalization of the skills.
- Parents learn new skills, focusing on ability to encourage and maintain change in child's behavior and child's growth. Parents actively work on their own change-interfering beliefs.



# Crucial Cs and Possible Play Themes

Child's belief	Child feels	Child's useless/misdirected goal	Play themes and patterns	Corrective play to increase useful behavior
I only count when I'm being noticed	insecure alienated	<b>ATTENTION</b>	Play activities to assure others' attention (playing a movie star)	Create a play in which a child would receive attention for doing something useful , or would be assigned a role that is fulfilled without getting personal attention at all
My strength is in showing you that you can't make me and you can't stop me.	inadequate, dependent others are in control	<b>POWER</b>	Role of a commander of an army or boss or a school principal	Reframe this as a preparation for success for the betterment of the others; create a task for a cooperation; create opportunity for nurturing roles in play
I knew you were against me. No one really likes me. I'll show you how it feels.	insignificant	<b>REVENGE</b> get back get even	Breaking toys, beating dolls	Reframe this as one's curiosity about how things are made. Give a task aimed at attaining significance by successful and useful assembling/disassembling
I can't do anything right so I won't try. If I don't try, my failures won't be so obvious.	inferior useless hopeless	<b>AVOIDANCE</b>  display of inadequacy, defeat	May not risk joining in play , appears evading group games	Giving a task of being in charge; plan small tasks – setup for success



# Self of a Therapist

- **Confidence**
- High degree of **congruency**
- **Stability**
- Ability and availability for a **consistent empathic** response
- Willingness to **tolerate ambiguity** and not to expect an immediate “success”
- Willingness to **give up own need for control** and be non-directive if needed
- Ability to **self-care** and knowledge when to consult (vicarious trauma, boundaries, other sources of impairment)





# Therapist's Lifestyle and Child's Lifestyle

- We are always a part of a process - partners in healing, encouraging through difficulties and celebrating successes
- We can get traumatized and discouraged through the process
- When a therapy does not work, it is never because a client does not work, but because a therapist is discouraged (R. Shifron)
- Our goals for a client and client's goals can be aligned or collided
- Know thyself before knowing the other



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