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 @Neurosequential

# Early attachment trauma and the impact on child's development.

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# “I want to be a normal girl”

hello doris,

I just came from my grandma. We step into the car. I start to blame again.

I have had it in my mind to commit suicide.

I don't want that anymore I want to be a normal girl help me I want to be like the others.

I don't feel so well lately they don't do anything about it...

My mom is being annoying why “I don't know why.”

Will you make an appointment with my mom because I would like if you had the time you would talk to my mom. I don't want my mom to be annoying to me anymore...

HELP I DON'T WANT THIS ANYMORE I WANT TO BE A NORMAL GIRL. THIS HAD TO STOP!!!!!!!!!!

Kind regards



# Content

- Broadening the vision on attachment trauma
- Quality of the attachment relationship
- Early attachment trauma
- Dissociation :
  - Attachment and dissociation
  - Affectregulation and dissociation
  - Stressregulation and dissociation



# Why broadening our vision on the definition of EAT ?

- Because of the definition of trauma
- Because of the importance of the attachment relationship on child's development
- Our knowledge about neurobiology
- Because of the importance of quality of parenting



# Trauma definition

## – PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder)

- Criterion A: (traumatic event)

“exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence”

## – Leonore Terr

“a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside”

# Trauma

## – Van der Kolk: Developmental trauma disorder

- “Significant disruptions of protective caregiving as the result of repeated changes in primary caregiver repeated separation from the primary caregiver or exposure to severe and persistent emotional abuse”

## – Bowlby

- “any event that seriously threatens the attachment relationship”

# Attachment relationship



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# The attachment relationship

- Bowlby:
  - ‘reciprocal interchange’
  - Access
- Schore: 1994
  - co-regulation





# Importance of the Attachment relationship

- Importance of the relationship on the development of the child
  - The dynamic interaction → internal world
  - Relational experiences → the mind
  - The dyadic relationship → affective themes
  - The shared experience → “selve” and the relationship
- Interplay with nature and nurture
- Continious relationship
- Availability and accessibility



# Importance of the relationship

- The dynamic interaction between caregiver and child is necessary for:
  - Survival
  - Affect/ stressregulation
  - Development of the internal world
  - Experiencing a wide range of affective themes
  - Organization of self
  - Organization of relationship





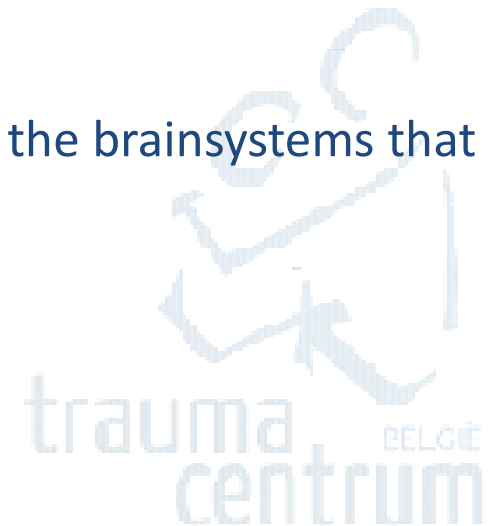
# Neurobiology

- Developmental psychoneurobiological model
  - secure attachment → development right brain
  - adaptive infant mental health
- Experience dependent
- Growth spurt
- Critical period concept
- Plasticity



# Neurobiology

- Attachment relationship and the brain
  - early relational experiences
  - the attachment relationship
  - The nurturing interaction
    - » normal maturation of the brain and the brainsystems that mediate the coping capacity
    - » nervous system
    - » child's sense of self
- Regulatory theory



# Quality of the attachment relationship



# The quality of the attachment relationship

- Internal working model (IWM)
  - Memories of attachment interactions → accessibility
  - Mental representations of self/others
  - Cognitive structure
  - Typical emotions
  - Implicit memory
  - Open to modification





# Quality of the attachment relationship

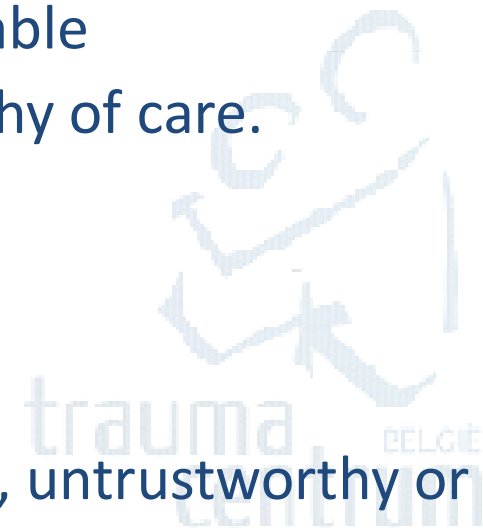
- Attachment style of the parent
- How do parents mentally process attachment-related information
- Quality of parenting





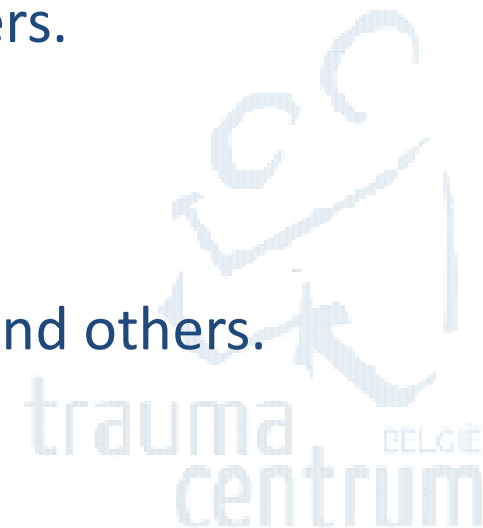
# Attachment style of the parent

- “From the cradle to the grave”
- Adult attachment styles
  - Autonomous attachment :
    - have a model of others as warm, reliable
    - model of oneself as lovable and worthy of care.
  - Dismissive attachment:
    - the self as worthy
    - view others as unreliable or rejecting, untrustworthy or dissapointing



# Attachment style of the parent

- Adult attachment styles
  - Preoccupied attachment:
    - the self as unworthy or unlovable
    - but hold a positive evaluation of others.
  - Fearful attachment
    - hold negative views of both the self and others.



# Intergenerational transmission

Parent's early attachment experiences



Parent's attachment representation



Parenting behavior



Infant's attachment experiences

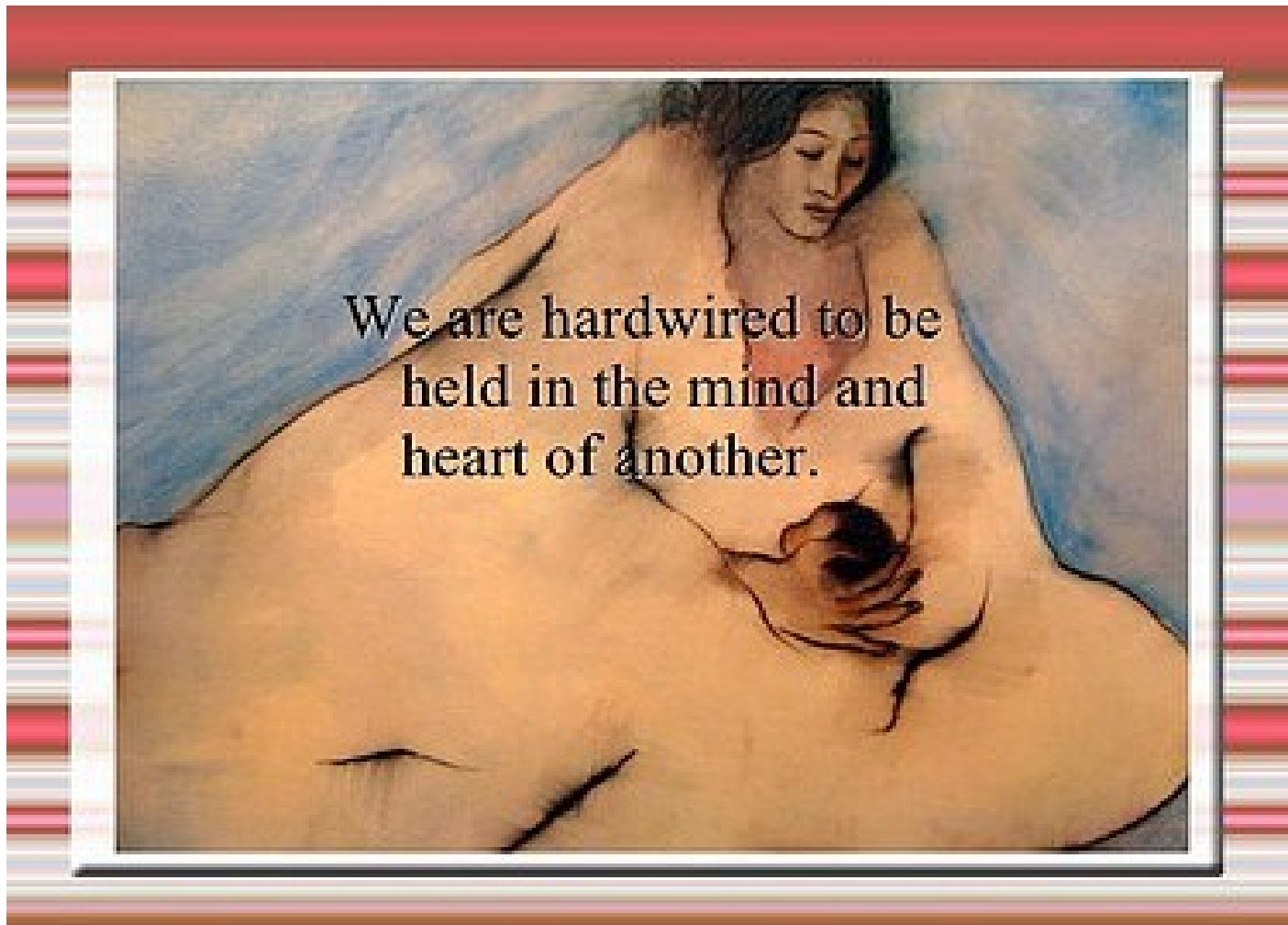


# Processing attachment related information

- Crittenden (1993) (Dynamic Maturational Model)
- Failures of perception
- Misinterpretation
- Failure to select a response
- Failure to implement a response



# The quality of parenting



# The quality of parenting

- Sensitive responsiveness
- Reflective functioning
- Mentalization
- Containment
- External regulation
- Play



# The quality of parenting

- Sensitive responsiveness
  - Ainsworth and others (1974)
  - The infant's point of view
- Four essential components:
  - Her awareness of the signals
  - An accurate interpretation of them
  - An appropriate response to them
  - A prompt response to them



# The quality of parenting

## – Mentalization (Fonagy)

- A theory of mind (internal world)
- Oneself and others as psychological
- Mirroring
- Sense of self





# The quality of parenting

## – Reflective functioning:

- Reflect upon their own history (trauma, attachment)
- Influence
- Trigger
- “Ghosts in the nursery” (Selma Fraiberg)



# The quality of parenting

## – Containment (Bion, 1959)

- Receive and understand
- Without being overwhelmed by it
- Communicates back



# The quality of parenting

## – External regulation

- Regulatory theory (Allan Shore)
- Be attuned to the internal state
- Able to regulate the own arousal state
- Down regulate and up regulate



# The quality of parenting

## – Play

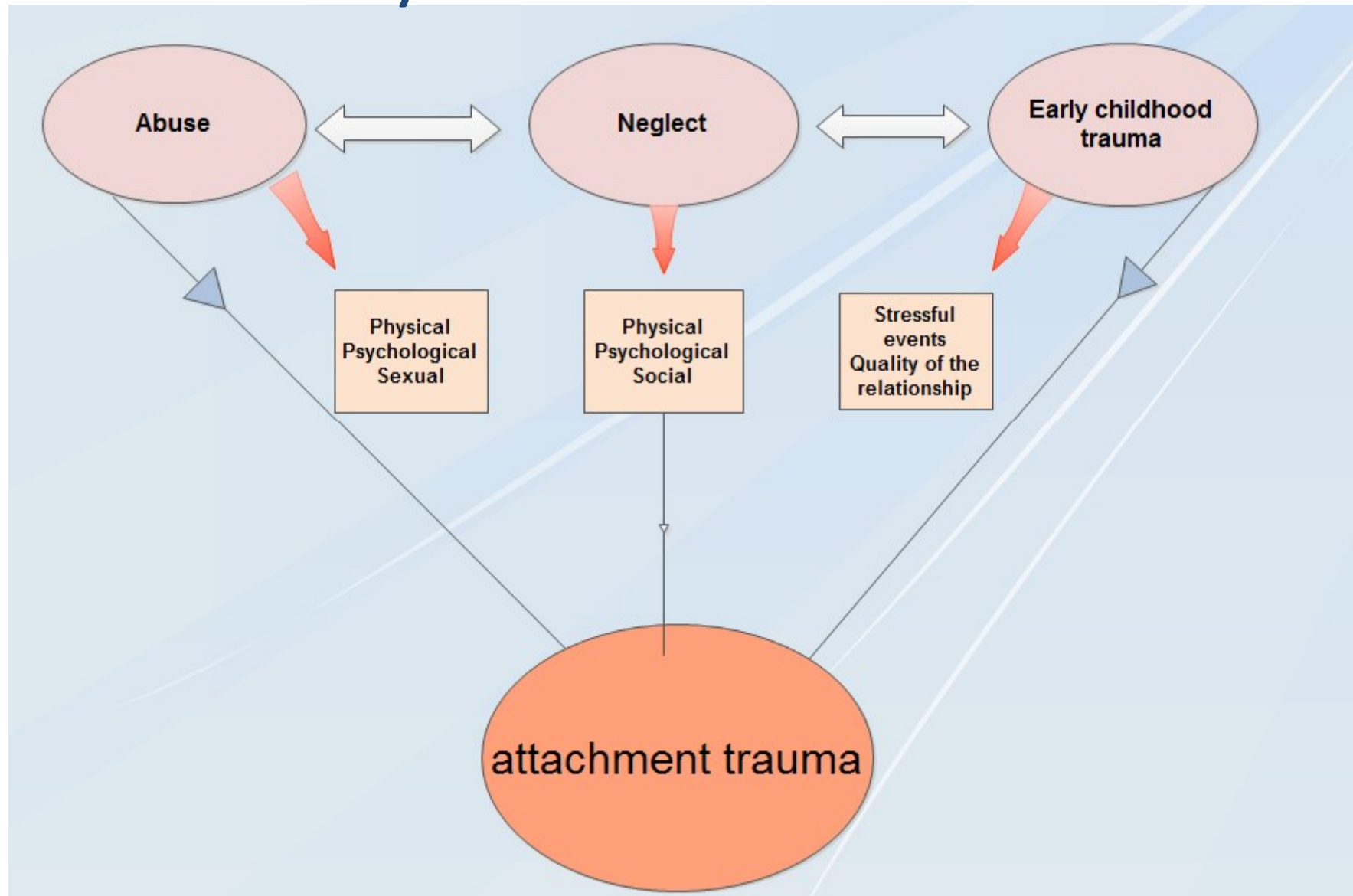
- Confidence, trust, security
- Communicate and connect
- Reduce stress
- Strengthens attachment



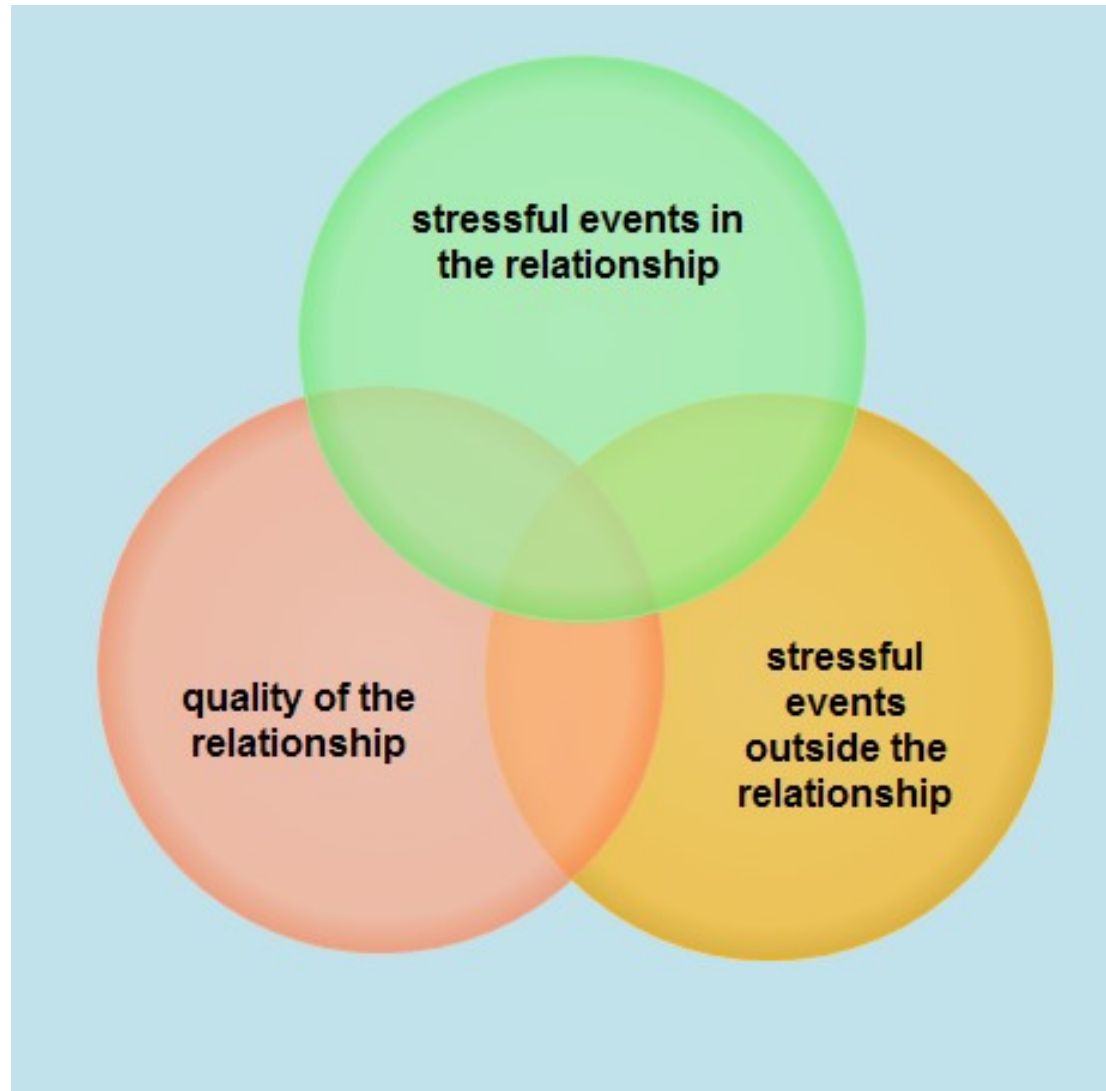
# Secure base



# Early attachment trauma



# Early attachment trauma



# EAT ?

- Early attachment trauma?
  - Caregiving relationship
  - Early
  - Repetitive
  - Chronic (over time)
  - Multiple
  - Adverse impact on the development of a secure attachment relationship





# Stressful events in the relationship

- Prenatal trauma
- Birth trauma
- Disruptions in the attachment bond



# Disruptions in the attachment bond

- Bowlby
  - Continuous relationship
- Physical availability
- Emotional availability
- When not fulfilled = disruption in the attachment bond

# Emotional availability (EA)

- EA:  
refers to an individual's emotional responsiveness and attunement to another's needs and goals (Emde 1980)
- Personal characteristic
- Mother's internal working model
- Mother's relationship with the father
- Context of the relationship with others



# Emotional inaccessible

- Inappropriate response
- Stressful life episodes
- Suicide threat
- “Ghosts in the nursery”
- Parent psychopathology
- Relationship problems



# Specific on EAT

- **P**erception of threat
- Non- verbally
- Implicit memory
- Neurobiology
- Body



# Specific on EAT

- Self- regulation
- Layer on layer
- Basic trust
- Internal working model
- The possibility to integrate the experience



# Severity of EAT

- EAT and the overlap with complex trauma
  - Interpersonal stressor
  - Multiple
  - Repeated
  - Cumulative
  - Developmentally vulnerable times
- Early stage:
  - The impact on the brain
  - Developmentally
    - Margret Mahler: Individuation –separation model



# EAT

- Hidden epidemic
- Looking broader than abuse and neglect
- The courage to ask about it
- Using a new classification
- Starting redefining trauma in children







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# Dissociation

- Deficit of integration

Dissociation is usually defined as:

” a deficit of the integrative functions of memory, consciousness and identity,

and is often related to traumatic experiences and traumatic memories”.



# Integration.

- (Steele, Van der Hart, Boon)
  - Organization of all the different aspects of personality into a unified whole that functions in a cohesive manner
    - It is a natural tendency
    - Stable sense of who we are
    - Distinguish the past from the present
    - Develop our sense of self
  - Secure and safe emotional and physical environment



# EAT and integration

- Young children = ↓ ability to integrate:
  - Brains
  - Sense of self
- EAT:
  - ↓ emotional support
  - Parents lacking skills → quality of parenting ↓
  - Disruptions → inaccessibility and unavailability
- Integration fails

# Dissociative disorder = Attachment disorder ?

- Peter Barach ( 1991)
- EAT
  - Quality of the attachment relationship
  - Availability of the caregiver
  - Disruptions of the bond/ Separation
- Insecure attachment
- Survival strategy



# Dissociative disorder = Attachment disorder ?

- PDD ( protest – despair – detachment)
- Detachment :
  - Deactivation of the attachment system
  - Excluding from awareness
- Detachment = dissociation



# Disorganized attachment

- Care-seeking or attachment system
- “From the cradle to the grave”
- “Unresolved” parents
- “The source and the solution”
- Psychobiological reactions
- The simultaneity of approach and avoidance  
→ lack of organization
- Disorganization = Collapse of the integrative functions of consciousness

# Dissociation

- Liotti's:

“Failure in organizing multiple and incongruent models of the self and other into unitary mental states and coherent behavioral states rather than an intrapsychic defense against unbearable pain and severely traumatic experiences”





# Secure attachment and affect regulation

- Attachment → helping the brain to integrate and to process
- Attachment → dyadic regulation of emotion
- Caregiver → external regulator:
  - Reading the child's signals
  - Providing optimal stimulation
  - Modeling of behavior
  - Affect attunement
  - Meet their infants' needs



# EAT and affect regulation

- Panksepp (1998, 2009)
  - 7 emotional circuits at birth
  - Subcortical neurocircuitry of the mammalian brain
  - Environmental experiences.
  - EAT → the circuits don't flow
  - EAT → no integration → **dissociated states**
  - EAT → no self
  - EAT → no embodiment



# Dissociation and affect regulation

Early Attachment Trauma

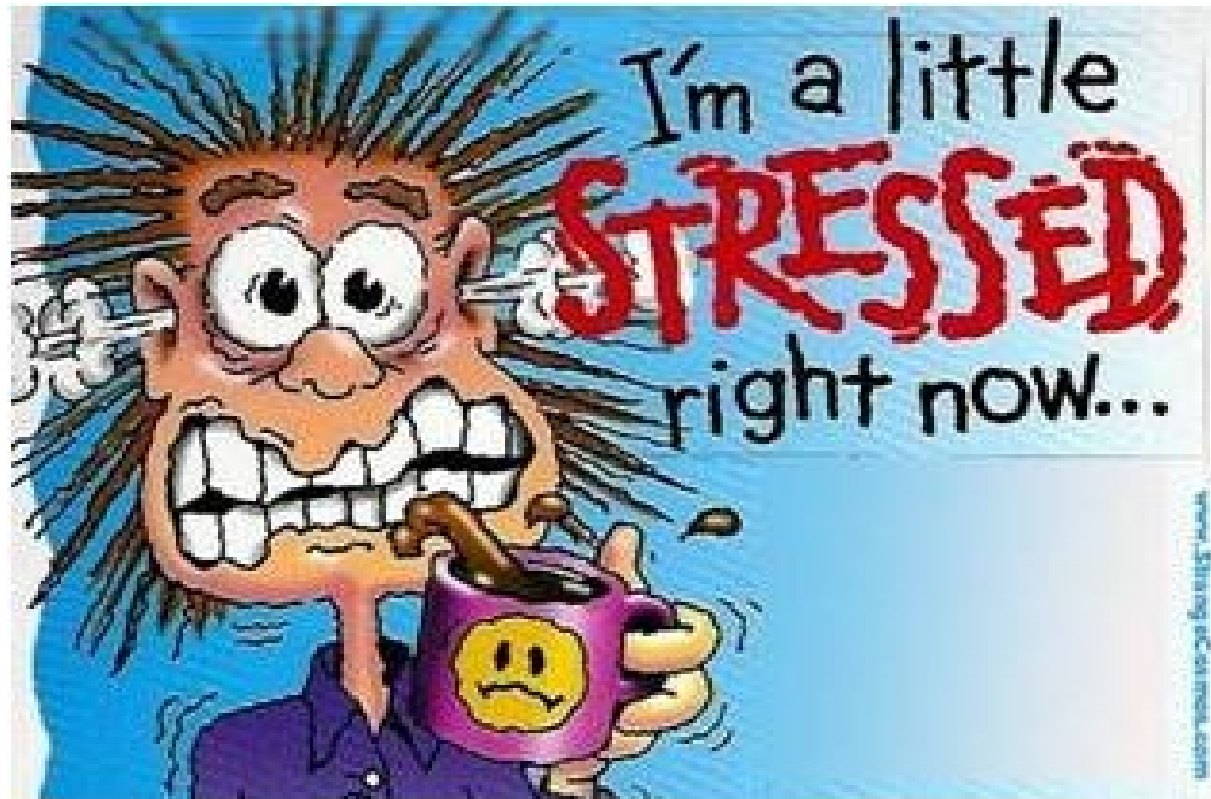
overwhelm      ↓      consequence

Affect (dys)regulation

lack of integration      ↓      defense

Dissociation





# EAT and stress regulation

- Autonomic nervous system (ANS)
  - It regulate the autonomic, somatic aspects of the stress responses
  - Specific behavior and physiological responses
  - ANS: = system of balance
    - Sympathetic = “accelerator” = fight/ flight
    - Parasympathetic = “brakes” = rest /digest

# EAT and stress regulation

- Stephen Porges (2001)
  - The Polyvagal Theory:
    - ANS = hierarchical system that responds to environmental challenges
    - Three different subsystems
      - Parasympathetic ventral vagal (Social engagement system)
      - Sympathetic arousal (fight/flight )
      - Parasympathetic dorsal vagal (freeze responses )



# EAT and stress regulation

- Social engagement system
  - Parasympathetic ventral vagal
  - Physiological foundation for secure attachment.
  - An inborn neural organization or action system
  - Regulate ourselves
  - Connect well with others
  - Social behavior
  - Social communication





# EAT and stress regulation

- EAT:
  - Inhibit the availability of the social engagement system
  - Constricting the child's capacity to
    - respond adaptively to stress
    - self regulate
    - form healthy attachment and social bonds



# Dissociation and the neurobiology

- Traumatic stress → changes in brain areas
- Psychic dissociative symptoms
- Neurobiological consequences.
  - HPA axis: stress system of the body
  - Neuroendocrinological and neurophysiological dysfunctions → somatic components
  - Lack of integration → somatoform dissociation

# Prevention

- Collect data
- Public awareness campaigns
- Share knowledge
- Screening
- Treatment
- Parent/child education
- Parent –child centers
- Home visits



# I'm doing great!

hello doris,

I send you an email to tell you I'm doing great.

I hardly get angry anymore.

I went to Eeklo today with my grandma to buy clothes and we went for a drink and of course a pancake.

Things are better with my mom.

I went to Technopolis with school and then to Living tomorrow it was fun  
With Whitsun weekend we are going to the Ardennen with my aunt and uncle and little niece.

Well that's all I've done so things are all very well.

With lots of sweet greetings



