

Principles and Foundations
When Therapist Empathy Lags:
Developing an AEDP Way to Work with Therapeutic
Impasses, “Acting Out,” Disruptions, Rigid Defenses,
Boundary Crossings and other Michugas

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Two Pillars of AEDP

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When Empathy and Authenticity Collide



Coordination-
Disruption-
Repair

- Even secure relationships only spend about 1/3 of their time in coordinated states
- Relationships are strengthened by good repairs
- Relationships can be harmed (enervated) when differences/ conflict is avoided
- "mutual coordination does not mean perfect empathy and flawless mutual attunement" (Fosha, 2001)

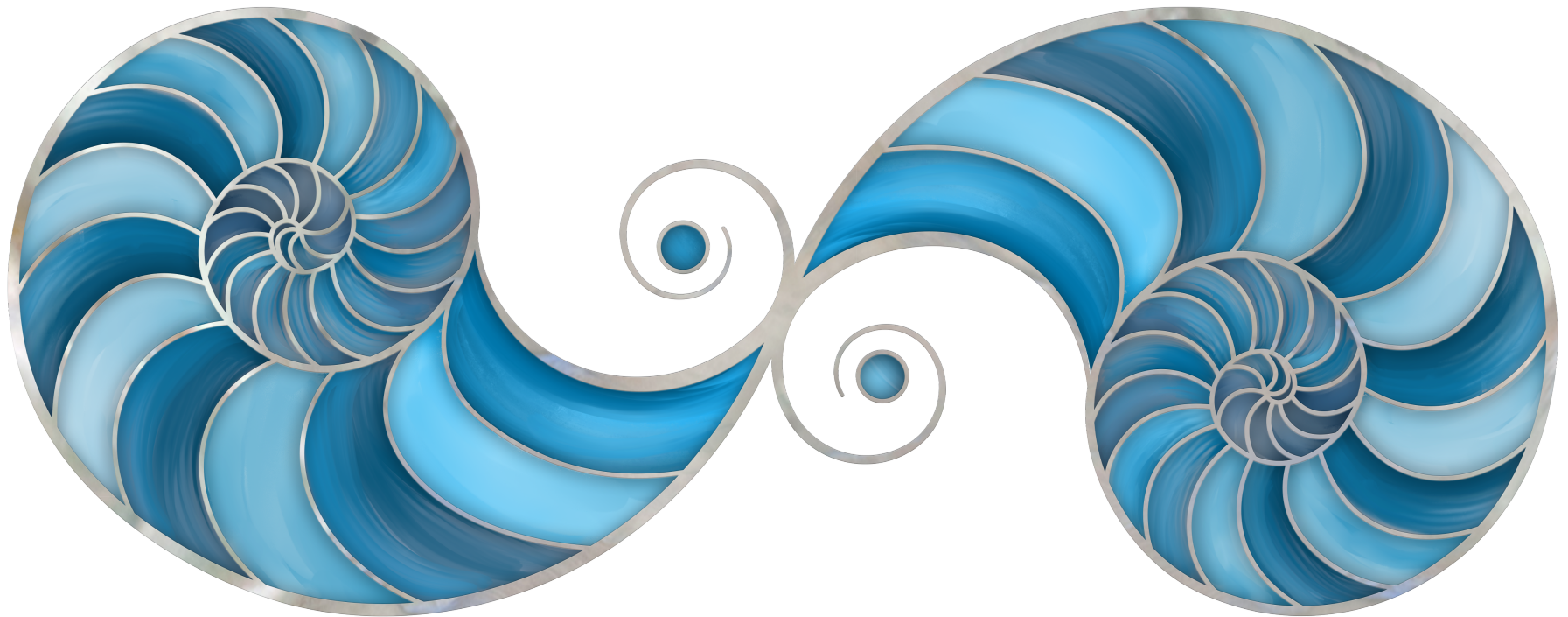
Conceptualizations & Interventions

- *The map of resilience*- resilience underlies resistance and transference (how is one's energy getting directed/ expressed)
- Otto Rank's idea of the negative vs. positive will
- Leading from a place of deep care/ love/ commitment
- Dyadic affect regulation
- Disruption is part of relationship
- Psychoed (e.g. map of resilience, ways defenses work and backfire, Rank's ideas)
- Humor (used in a normalizing/ humanizing spirit)
- *Experiential processing of defenses*
- Reminding people of what they have said in the past
- Kindness *and* courage on the part of the TP
- Metaprocessing
- Explicitly talking about the security of the relationship

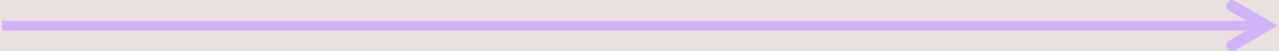
Development and Healing

- Individual development occurs in and through a process of relatedness and relating, including connection and disconnection (or togetherness and separateness), coordination, disruption, and repair. Therapeutic change and healing occur in the same way.
- This means that no one person is responsible for the success of development or healing.
- So, what is coming from the patient/ client?
- Some stages of development privilege differentiation/ individuation and “pushing against” in order to develop the self. How do we facilitate these?

Resistance/ Transformance



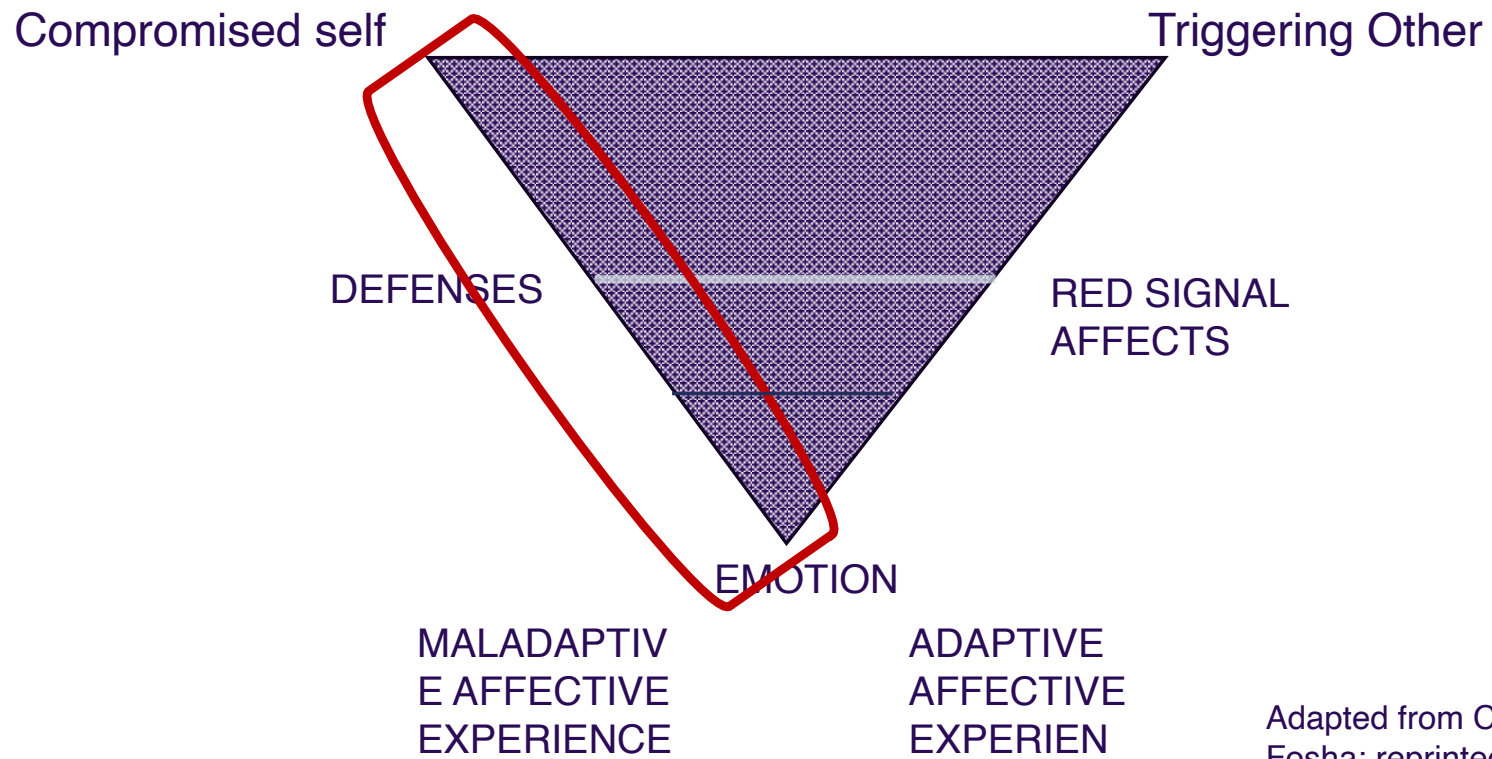
Continuum of Resilience Processes *On Behalf of the Self*



Resistance/
Constriction/
Defense

Transformance/
Expansion/
Flourishing

Self-at-Worst



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Freedom is Frightening

Expansion/
transformation
can feel too big
(because it is)

Vulnerability
does not always
feel safe
(because it
hasn't been)

Resistance is
reliable

Defenses are
known and "safe"

Change is
disruptive and
discontinuous

Growth involves
loss and letting
go

*"Every time I want to make
this movement, I almost
faint; the very same
moment I admire so
absolutely, I am seized with
great anxiety."
(S. Kierkegaard)*

The place of *disruption* in AEDP

- Transformance only makes sense in a dialectic with resistance and resistance is real and not always easily “melted.”
- We over emphasize the “attunement” part of the “Attunement-disruption-repair” cycle that characterizes secure attachments. What if disruption is also essential?
- There is a danger of overregulating, empathizing with defense. So, let’s work toward *safe enough*.
- *Attuned disruption*- within the safety of a securely attached therapeutic relationship we sometimes have to allow for disruption in order for growth to happen
- This may mean pushing our patients or letting them push against us to find their voice and to differentiate from us (security is essential; felt sense of safety is not)
- Good parenting sometimes involve saying to our kids “you can do it!” when they are trapped in fear and self-doubt. The same is true with our patients.

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Dyadic Affect Regulation

- AEDP is fundamentally a two-person psychology
- Cannot become a one-person psychology (e.g., expert or neutral observer) when things get challenging without risking the patient feeling abandoned.



Principles...

- We have taken the time to build a secure connection and safe enough experiences
- Dyadic Affect Regulation
- Model of a Two-Person Psychology
- Resilience underlies both resistance and transformance
- Doing our own self-analysis first (w/ self, supervisor, peers)
- Formulate the dilemma to yourself as clearly as you can *including your feelings.*

...And Foundations

- Question of “What are we being asked to empathize with?”
- Corrective emotional/relational experience
- Mindful of the asymmetry in the relationship and the need for care in the disruption
- “radical curiosity” (Tell me more...)
- Holding in mind both attachment security and developmental needs/ tasks (too much “safety” may hinder growth and expansion)

Attachment Security & Development

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- Keeping a developmental perspective:
 - In-syncness is different in infancy vs. toddlerhood vs. adolescence
 - To feel truly safe, we all need boundaries and to know where we end and another begins
 - Thwarted agency often leads to chronic passivity or undo aggression
 - Weathering the storm of adolescence (we can't just fold)
 - Push from our own place of security in the relationship or in ourselves
 - Being an attachment figure means sometimes encouraging the other do hard things, communicating our faith in them, not giving in to our own fears. We may be experienced as *solid*, but not especially soft.

What are we doing?

- Encouraging *mentalizing* (Fonagy et al.)
- Modeling security and capacity for repair
- Helping them develop *reflective self function*
- Communicating that they matter to us
- Communicating boundaries around self- or other-destructiveness
- Facilitating separation/ individuation
- Privileging the *truth*

What are we doing? cont'd

- Helping people *affectively experientially process* the consequences of defenses
- Dyadic affect regulation- using our relational experience with them to help them grow
- Helping them develop a both/and mindset (one the one hand.. And on the other...)
- Increasing their sense of having a *choice* (defenses are not the only way)



A photograph of a small, vibrant green seedling with two leaves growing out of a crack in a field of dry, cracked earth. The background is a vast expanse of similar cracked soil, creating a grid-like pattern of dark lines. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the soil and the freshness of the plant.

“The world breaks everyone and
afterward many are strong at the
broken places”

Ernest Hemingway