



***Increasing Permanency: Seven Principles for Building Emotionally Stable Families***  
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***Seven Principles***

1. Brains prioritize processing fear over everything else
  2. Limbic brains harmonize
  3. Parents always define the child's world and experiences
  4. Parents must project positive outcomes
  5. Parents must intentionally manage their affect
  6. Children learn what works
  7. Children need to be enjoyed
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1. Brains prioritize processing fear over everything else
    - a. Explanation
      - i. There is a natural tendency in the cognitive brain to pay attention to elements of the environment that trigger a fear response in our limbic brain. Even when trying to intentionally focus our thoughts, this tendency constantly competes for our focus.
      - ii. The Negative Internal Working Model (N-IWM) generates constant fear which is diametrically opposed to the parent's desire to make children happy. The behaviors that most homes consider problematic indicate the child is trying to reduce fear to highlight this discrepancy.
    - b. Application-Fear is a foundational part of human existence. While not particularly desirable, it is an unavoidable part of life. It leaves us feeling vulnerable and propels us into flight, fight, freeze, or fold. Avoiding the emotion or turning it into mad are two less functional ways our brains manage fear.
  2. Limbic brains harmonize
    - a. Explanation-Limbic resonance: Human emotions are contagious. Our limbic systems are open to other's emotions (especially loved ones or family) and driven to synchronizing our internal emotional experiences with our external.
    - b. Application
      - i. This harmonization provides rapid coordinated responses in dangerous circumstances. Our emotional response, however, is derived from a combination environment and core beliefs (self, care giver, and others) without recognizing this tendency to harmonize unintentional

- interactions will often lead parents to harmonize with children's emotional states instead of the opposite.
- ii. In healthy systems, children naturally tend to feel the same emotions as their parents. (Pump is working in the right direction.) When traumatized brains are brought into our family systems, parents tend to feel the same emotion as their children. (The pump is pumping the wrong direction.)
3. Parents always define the child's world and experiences
    - a. Explanation-As soon as an infant is born, parents begin defining the world, verbally and non-verbally (via actions), to their child. They tell the newborn child whether the world is too cold or hot, too noisy or quiet, too hungry or tired. The child is hardwired to depend on the parent. As this dyadic relationship is constantly enacted, the child learns the parent is the **"definer of experiences."**
    - b. Application
      - i. The parent's interpretation becomes the child's internalized experience and provides the filter to interpret and navigate the world through adulthood.
      - ii. Our nonverbal communication is most often driven from the limbic brain. This adds contrast and depth to connections. However, this also means that when we are angry (disappointed, irritated, or disgusted) the message received by the child is used to define the child's sense of self. This anger is so often manifested when we are clueless of why the child behaved in a certain way or the parent feels helpless in how to get the child to change. Unintentionally, our frustration **defines the child** instead of just the circumstance.
  4. Parents must project positive outcomes
    - a. Explanation-When a child with early trauma joins a new family, the child's Negative Internal Working Model (N-IWM) is used to create expectations for every interaction both short and long term. Conversely, it's a parent's task to maintain and project a Positive Internal Working Model (P-IWM) into the system and, eventually, the child. The child will only become as positive as the parent can project. This maintenance and projection can be very hard to sustain in the day to day verbal and behavioral projections of the child's N-IWM.
    - b. Application-Our projections are ultimately dependent on our personal limbic experience. It is not enough to tell a child "things will get better" if we don't internally feel like things will get better. We must guard our own personal definitions of experiences, keep them positive, and make sure our families reflect those definitions.
  5. Parents must intentionally manage their affect
    - a. Explanation-For healing to occur, children must be surrounded by emotionally attuned and available caregivers so they can learn to co-regulate with trusted adults. In today's world, it is very popular to say, "he made me feel..."

Additionally, we are bombarded by advertising constantly implying, “we **should** be happy.” The truth is we are largely responsible for our own feelings. Research has shown we can change our feelings about 40% of the time. Without understanding this fact, we go through life as victims of our interactions. It is impossible for a victim to teach a victim how not to be a victim.

b. Application

- i. Children learn how to manage emotions via co-regulating with trusted caregivers and through their modeling emotional regulation. Traumatized children need to be shown how to mediate fear. Parents are the vehicle for this learning.
- ii. Most adults have a number of techniques for managing life’s fears but few actually think about how to model them, much less, how the techniques work or whether more is needed! Some like eating or shopping work great but have long term side effects that make them less functional. Modeling these to traumatized brains can contribute to hoarding and stealing.

6. Children learn what works

a. Explanation-

- i. We unconsciously internalize “relational rules: followed by our primary caregiver and other influential persons from our early years.” (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/irrelationship/201605/learning-relate>)
- ii. Maturation can be defined as a constant observance, internalization, and application of behaviors that produce desired outcomes in our world.
- iii. The \*second technique human brains learn is to turn fear into anger. What makes this strategy so difficult to give up is, quite simply, “it works.” The process is completely internal and immediately relieves the fear. Reinforcing turn fear into anger requires interactions with adults but we must recognize the initial payoff is unstoppable. We are asking a child to give up a fear mediating strategy that works in favor of one that did not work previously. \*The first technique is to talk (communicate) with a trusted adult.

b. Application

- i. Children learn to elicit care from their caregivers through all means of communication. Even when “a child’s parents aren’t effective caregivers, the child will “find a way to elicit the care she needs so that she feels safe.”
- ii. This principle explains what happens when emotionally healthy children mimic the behaviors of a traumatized child. It does not necessarily mean the child is traumatized but instead demonstrates a healthy child’s ability to learn and mimic an effective fear mediating strategy.

*“As the caregiver’s “scream-reading” skill improves, her anxiety about parenting decreases. This leads to a reduction in the child’s anxiety as the child learns to “manage” his environment i.e., the caregiver.”*

*“If relating means trying to make our caregivers feel good about themselves as caregivers, the child’s real needs are probably going to be neglected.”*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/irrelationship/201605/learning-relate>

## 7. Children need to be enjoyed

### a. Explanation

- i. One of our innate reasons for having children is to increase our ability to enjoy. We can be happy watching our children be happy. Children with early trauma usually have a Negative Internal Working Model (N-IWM) that developed from the lack of emotionally sensitive and attuned caregivers. When the child joins a new family, the child will begin to act defensively against expected hurts. The desire to be defined positively (hardwired in) will be masked by these defenses.
- ii. Healthy children thrive on experiences of parental pleasure. They internalize that parental pleasure into a Positive Internal Working Model (P-IWM). Traumatized children thrive on keeping themselves from being hurt. This conflict makes parenting (enjoying) a traumatized child very difficult. Without this enjoyment, children will internalize the parental response to defense strategies as their sense of self.

- b. Application-To change the child’s internal working model, the child must see positive messages in the parent’s eyes. If the child is not enjoyed, the child’s N-IWM will be reinforced. Healing will be hindered. Our job, as parents, is to continually find and enact new ways to enjoy this child, even while the child’s behaviors are trying to push us away.