The Gordon Neufeld Approach: Making Sense of Children

Lisa Knight, B.A., CCLS
lknight@cw.bc.ca
BC Children’s Hospital ~ Child Life Department
Outline

• What is child life?

• Why expressing emotions is important.

• Why understanding attachment is useful in patient interactions.

• How do we engage attachment instincts in our patients?
What is Child Life?

The child life department strives to make hospitalization a more positive experience.
Our Main Goals

Assisting with coping.

Promoting normal development within a hospital setting.
…so you *PLAY* with patients?

Play is a main intervention to reach therapeutic goals. Play is important for all children, but especially for those in hospital.
Dr. Gordon Neufeld

- Vancouver-based clinical psychologist.
- Internationally known for his work with child development.
- neufeldinstitute.com
What is your instinct of what this child needs?
What would be your reaction if you had a patient with this expression?
What is Emotion?  
(Neufeld, 2013)

- To be stirred up
  - It happens to us
  - It is irrational

- To be moved
  - Is meant to move us in ways that would serve us
The Action Potential of Emotion
(Neufeld, 2013)

acceptable or ‘positive’ emotions
- optimistic
- calm
- cooperative
- loving
- caring
- excited
- cuddly
- happy

irritable
- critical
- resistant
- upset
- discouraged
- disappointed
- alarmed
- hate

difficult or ‘negative’ emotions
Keys to Emotional Health and Maturity
(Neufeld, 2013)

1 – Emotion needs to be expressed

2 – Emotions should be felt

3 - Self-control requires inner development
Five Steps to Emotional Health (Neufeld, 2013)

- Expressing
- Naming
- Feeling
- Mixing
- Reflecting
Traffic Circle
(Neufeld, 2013)
What a Child Doesn’t Need to Express their Emotions

- Teachable moments
- Us to solve their problems
- To reflect on their “problem behaviour”
- To reflect on emotions they haven’t felt or named
What Does a Child Need From Us?

- An invitation
- Normalization
- A vent
Attachment

...that drive or relationship characterized by the pursuit and preservation of proximity.
Roots of Attachment
(Neufeld, 2013)
The Key to Satiation
(Neufeld, 2013)

The provision must be greater than the pursuit.
Counterwill

• An instinctive, automatic resistance to any sense of being forced.
Engaging the Attachment Instincts

- Collect before you direct
- Assume the Alpha Role
- Match Make
What Questions Do You Have?
References

Mate, G., and Neufeld, G. (2013). *Hold on to your kids: Why parents need to matter more than their peers.*
Toronto, Ontario: Vintage Canada.
