

## Adapting & Thriving

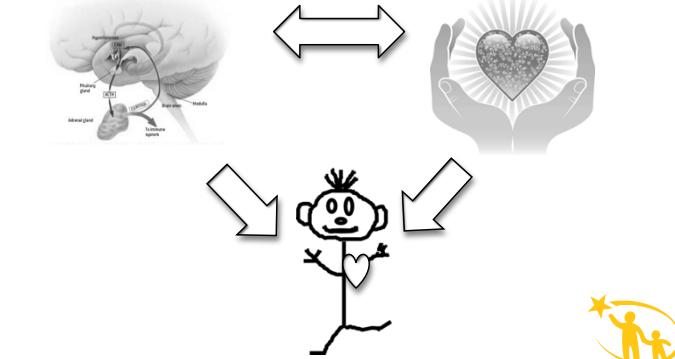
The key role of *relationship* in promoting resilience for children & youth

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## Plan

- What is adaptation?
- Why is it important?
- How can we foster it?

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*Sometimes the things we cannot change are meant to change us*

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*"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And wisdom to know the difference."*



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## Why adapt?

- Adaptation as resilience
- Resilience = achieving better than expected outcomes
- Resilience is determined by 3 things (Hunter 2013):
  1. risk factors
  2. protective factors...Relationship!!!
  3. functioning...adaptability!!!



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## Why adapt?

- Adaptation as a component of development
  - Multiple perspectives
  - Perseverance
  - We are taken care of
  - Direct our energy to growing



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## Why adapt?

*"Life is neither static nor unchanging ...in an inherently changing world, any species unable to adapt is also doomed." — Jean M. Auel*



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## Why adapt?

*"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but rather the one most adaptable to change."*  
— Leon C Megginson



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## Why adapt?

*"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got."*  
— James P. Lewis



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## Why adapt?

*"We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails."*  
~ Dolly Parton



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## Emotional Safety & Adaptation

- To accept the unchangeable we must be safe to fail and express big feelings about fear
- Able to feel our emotions
- Able to express our emotions
- Confident that our emotions can be "held" by those responsible for our care
- Confident that our emotions can land without reproach



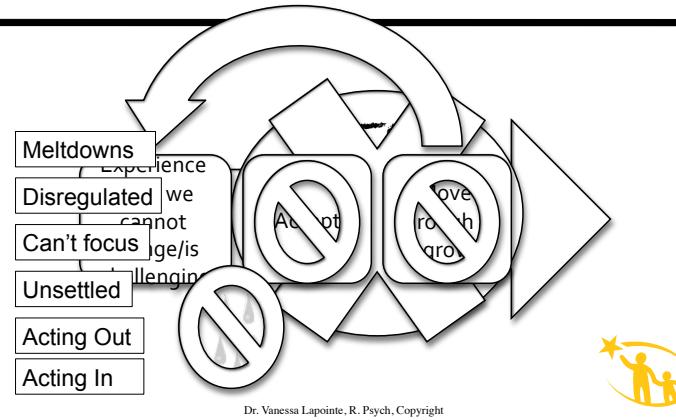
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## The Process of Adaptation



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## The Process of Adaptation



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## What gets in the way

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## What gets in the way of adaptation?

- The very sensitive child
  - Life is difficult
  - A nervous system with no skin to protect it
  - The climb is too steep sometimes
  - Can be exacerbated by environment and big people

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## What gets in the way of adaptation?

- The child for whom no boundaries are defined
  - In order to know adaptation, we have to have **experience it**
  - In order to be vulnerable, we have to **have an adult** we can rely on to hold our big feelings for us
- If the adult has given up or fearfully backed off in an **enduring way**, then neither of these conditions exist.



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## What gets in the way of adaptation?

- The child who is drowning in the unchangeable/ challenging
- Situational; environmental; Trauma; Loss; Developmental exceptionalities; Life changes – sibling, move, new school, divorce, etc.
- Overwhelmed – too much!
- If you have too much of these things, you get “adaptively maladaptively smart”
- You don’t let yourself blow about in the wind and be beaten down
- You eventually lose your feelings



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## What gets in the way of adaptation?

- The child whose brain is protecting them from feeling
  - They might not feel like they can **rest** ever and so they have to numb out for a little while
  - No sense of safety
  - “Numb out and tuned out” (Dr. Gordon Neufeld)
  - Without feelings, you cannot adapt, mature, and grow up... you get stuck – there is no resilience unless you can feel



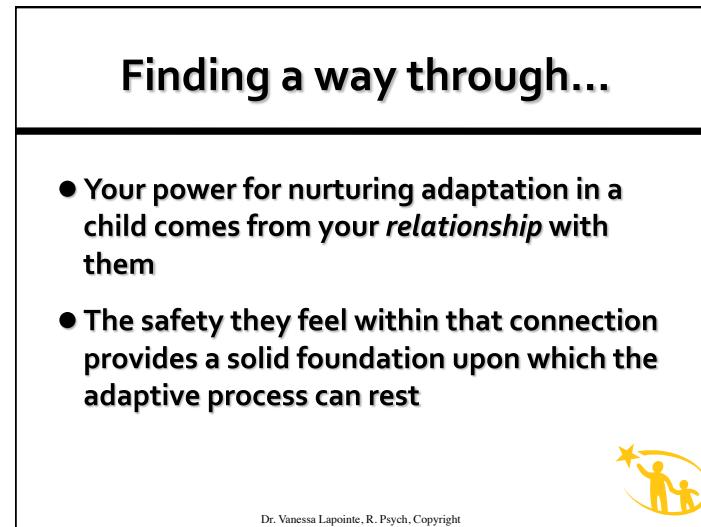
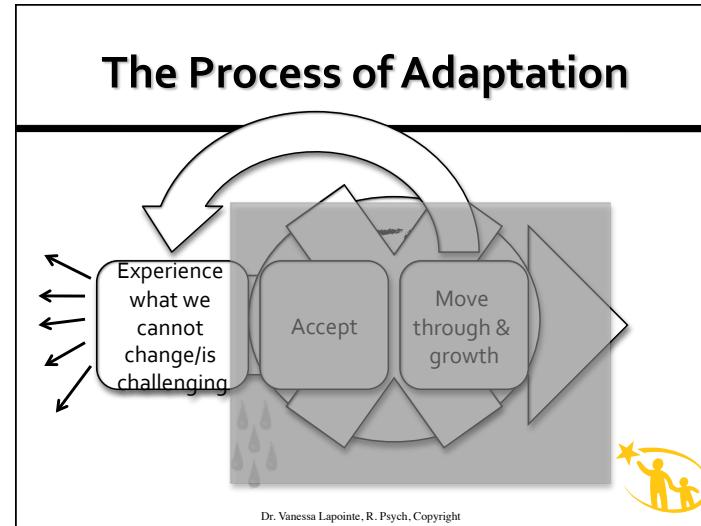
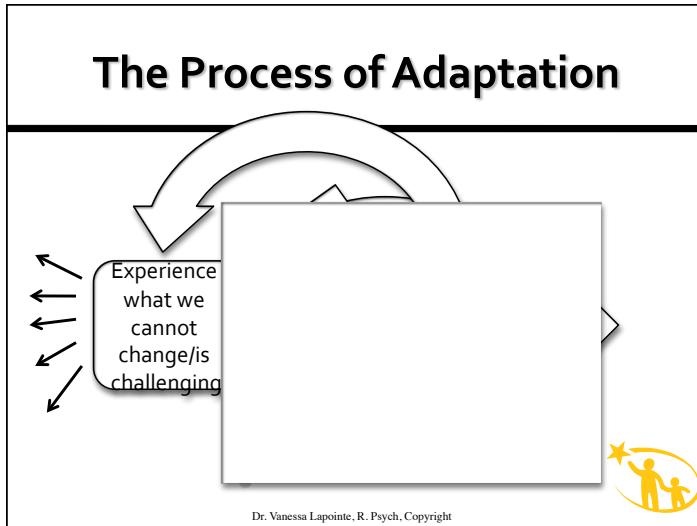
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## What gets in the way of adaptation?

- The capacity for adaption for each child is a shifting entity
  - Guided by the safety they have in their existing attachment relationships
  - Concepts like emotional safety and rest have a bigger picture that is more enduring and also a moment by moment picture that can be more fleeting
  - The demands of a given day, hour or moment
  - The demands of a given environment (e.g. school compared to home)



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## Finding a way through...

**There is a process:**

- 1. Take care of the things that overwhelm – rely on structures and routines; keep a small radius**
- 2. Come alongside – support, protect, pave way**
- 3. Move forward with the things that challenge or are difficult**



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## Finding a way through...

- Back off if the going gets too rough**
- The moments for pushing forward will come and go**
  - be confident and gentle**
  - “pick your battles”**
  - Rely on your intuition**
- Start low and go slow**



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## Finding a way through...

- Be In Charge**

- Kids need that feeling of having a big person who is in charge**
- Not bossy; not parading; not in your face**
- Gentle and all-knowing**
- An adult that can *be* the answer even if they don't *know* the answer**



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## Finding a way through...

- Connection Security leads to Maturity**

- Children always find their way to maturity through the grounding presence of connection security**
- “Children need us to be bigger, stronger, wiser AND kind” – Circle of Security**
- If we force independence in the hopes that it will yield independence, we actually stunt adaptation**
- We must be WISE and conscious about knowing the difference between “helicopter” big person and facilitative big person**



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## Finding a way through...

- **Be “all knowing” about the things that don’t work out or go as planned**
  - Be “omnipotent” in a restful way
  - Of course this will happen...
  - You need to...
  - Go ahead and...
  - Walk alongside and make room for what is inevitable



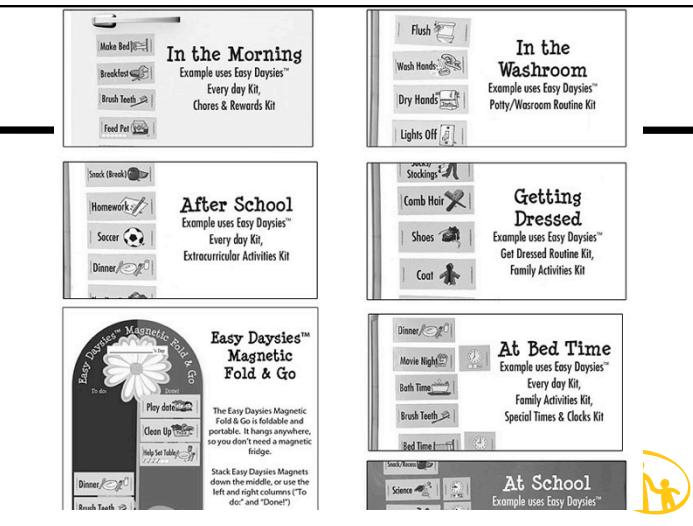
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## Finding a way through...

- **Plan for transitions, change, the things that are difficult...**
  - Routines
  - Plans
  - Advance warnings of transition times
  - Visual scripting
  - Reminder of rules and routines in advance
  - Visual timers with a “snooze” option



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## Finding a way through...

### ● Hope in Advance

- Give the child a message of hope in advance of the things that you know will be hard.
- Remove the point of no return
- Give the ultimate soft place to land



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## Finding a way through...

### ● Do-overs

- There is such safety in knowing that there are no absolutes in terms of "performance"
- Sometimes we all need another kick at getting it just right
- Sometimes we need a window of time to regroup or collect
  - Build this in with structure and routine
  - AVOID the feeling of contrived "consequence"



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## Finding a way through...

### ● Limit justifications and explanations

- You cannot reason with an illogical part of the brain
- If something is a FULL STOP then you do not need to explain yourself
- Explanations are for times of discussion, not for moments of adaptation
- By diving into explanations and justifications, you end up removing the very line you are attempting to hold



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## Finding a way through...

### ● Graceful exits...

- Sometimes you won't be able to hold onto yourself in the moment of trying to hold a line in place
- Other times you might realize that this was the wrong time to push and you need to back up
- You also need to not be seen as wavering and not being in charge
- So take a graceful exit stage left...!!



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## Finding a way through...

- **Get your Comfort on!**

- Connect rather than banish in moments of frustration
- Empathize
- Be soft
- Nurture
- Pick up what they put down
- Be "the one" that "gets it"



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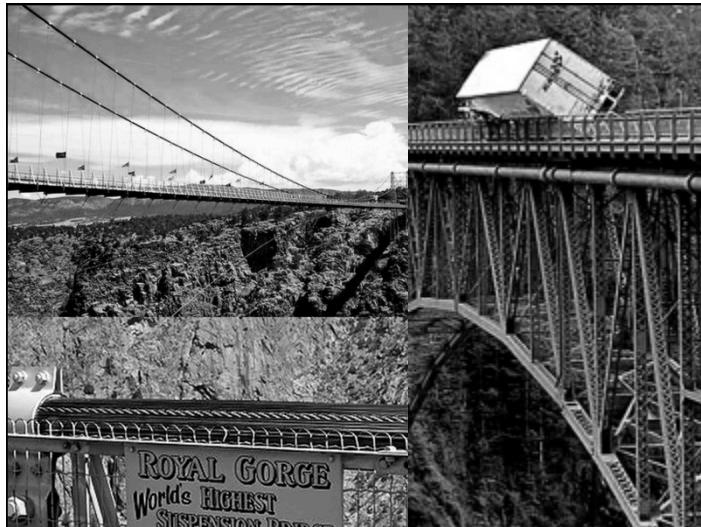
## Finding a way through...

- **Boundaries & Saying No**

- Establish them and have them be known
- But be kind and flexible with a workable grey zone
- The magical combination of FIRM and KIND
- "No...I know..."
- Safety in containment
- This is the "in charge" that must coexist with your "comforter"



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## Take home points of the day



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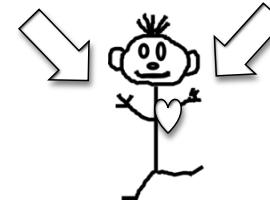
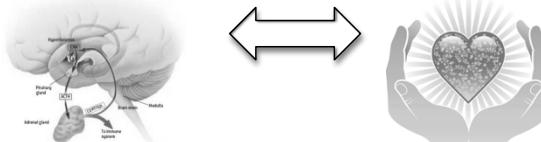
## Take home points of the day

- Children need to be adaptive.
- In the world of challenges, big people have a hugely central role to play in facilitating this to promote resilience – better than expected outcomes!
- The conditions of emotional safety and relational connection must be met for adaptation to unfold
- Adults need intuition and the resultant wisdom to know how to prime the process – when to push and when to protect
- A gentle consistent approach goes a long way toward cultivating deep roots and lasting change



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