

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN
PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

January 2007

Child & Family Focus Newsletter

A Unique Service Provider

What sets us apart from other services?

We are not generalists. Each practitioner has developed areas of expertise in child and/or family counseling. All therapists have specialized training in child and play therapy. Services are matched to individual needs. We offer comprehensive, results oriented services in 4 key areas:

- Play Therapy
- Assessment
- Mediation
- Family Counseling

Does one size fit all?

We believe services should be individually tailored, from beginning to end.

All services emphasize:

- Research based practice
- Professionalism that includes expertise, responsiveness and innovation
- Outcome focused activities
- A practical, future-oriented approach to growth and change

Should cutting edge leadership and management philosophies drive service?

We believe clients should have the expectation that all practices are monitored and professionally supervised. We pride ourselves in ongoing professional development activities and supervision by Directors who bring years of clinical and professional training experience.

Our unique facility is designed to provide a number of comfortable and flexible meeting spaces including: 4 fully equipped play therapy rooms; 2 board rooms; art-making and family meeting rooms.

RMPS is an affiliate to the **Rocky Mountain Play Therapy Institute**, which is an internationally recognized child psychotherapy and play therapy training provider and publisher.

Parent-child attachment: The Importance of Synchronizing with a Child's Emotional States

Attachment is commonly seen as an emotional bond that develops during infancy, with influences that extend across all stages of life. A pioneer in this research, John Bowlby, emphasized the quality of attachment, as it develops in the first months of life between an infant and parent. One of the critical early ingredients is the parent's ability to tune-in to the child's emotional needs and feeling states. In particular, a parent's ability to respond to and help regulate a child's experiences is essential to the development of self-regulation and emotional control, language and cognitive skills and, overall capacity to manage relationships.



The trend in recent research is viewing attachment theory as a regulatory theory, as it integrates both biological and psychological realms. On a moment-to-moment basis, situations can facilitate the child's ability to adapt to the stressor, so that they can approach, tolerate or incorporate these elements to increase future resiliency. Alternatively, mistimed or poorly matched responses of the adult to the stressor is disregulating to the child, as the adult essentially models an inconsistent or maladaptive emotional

response to the situation. Over time, the child misses critical opportunities to learn how to manage their feelings and arousal states. This deficit results in disorganized presentation of self, poor capacity to tolerate change and limited ability to learn and develop at later points in the life cycle.

It is increasingly clear that parents play a critical role in bridging their child's emotional experiences with development. Synchronicity can be defined as a match between a parent and child's activities that promotes mutuality in communication and play. Synchronizing with a child's emotional needs and behaviors regulates their attention, facilitates the development of verbal dialogue, and promotes the capacity for self-regulation. It is not simply the case of tuning-in to a child intermittently, instead, there must be a biological rhythm with the child such that the parent is constantly modifying their responses in accordance with the child's emotional state and responsiveness. Therefore, it is not just engagement with the child that is important, but a continual process of coordinated disengagement and re-engagement. Much like a dance pattern, the parent changes their steps and pace with the child's. The younger the child, the more critical it is to begin the dance. We now know that caregivers have a major impact on their child's brain development.

Lorri Yasenik and Ken Gardner

Co-Directors

Rocky Mountain Psychological Services

Referral Guide

Referral Process:

1. Third party or client phone 245-5981
2. Fax (faxable referral forms available) 245-4137
3. Phone consultations for screening

Intake Process:

Initial inquiries are immediately responded to and followed up by a Director to ensure appropriate matching. Typically, an initial parent-consultation meeting occurs prior to meeting with children. Parents are considered an important part of the treatment planning process. In the case of adults or couples, individual plans are discussed at the first meeting.

Referral Issues:

- Children of divorce
- Separation counseling for parents
- Mediation: specialized parenting plans
- Parenting coordination
- Psychoeducational evaluations
- Behavioural issues
- Emotional adjustment difficulties (i.e., anxiety)
- Achievement, motivation & school difficulties
- Peer issues
- Grief
- Trauma
- Transitional issues
- Attachment disruptions

** Expressive and play-based approaches are ideally suited to children 2-12 years of age. Clinicians work with adults, adolescents and children – across the lifespan.

Advances in Attachment Theory and Early Relational Trauma - A snapshot of Dr. Allan Schore's Regulation Theory

In September 2006, Rocky Mountain Play Therapy Institute (affiliated with RMPS) sponsored a 2-day workshop with Dr. Alan Schore at the University of Calgary. Dr. Schore is the author of *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self* (1994), and *Affect Regulation and the Repair of the Self* (2003). Dr. Schore is on the clinical faculty of the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine, and at the UCLA Centre for Culture, Brain and Development. He is described as the "American Bowlby" and "the world's leading authority on neuropsychanalysis."

According to Schore affective processes appear to lie at the core of the self, and due to the intrinsic psychobiological nature of these bodily based phenomena recent models of human development from infancy throughout the lifespan are moving towards brain-mind-body conceptualizations. These models are redefining the essential characteristics of what makes us uniquely human.

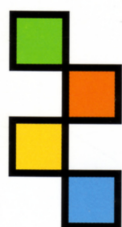
Schore discusses early development as setting the stage for every aspect of an organisms internal and external functioning throughout the lifespan.

"These early experiences shape the development of a unique personality, its adaptive capacities as well as its vulnerabilities to and resistances against particular forms of future pathologies. Indeed, they profoundly influence the emergent organization of an integrated system that is both stable and adaptable and thereby the formation of the self". (Schore, 1994)

In his theory, Schore notes that attachment theory is fundamentally a regulation theory. Schore defines self-regulation as a set of conscious control processes by which we influence consciously and voluntarily, the emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them. There is ample evidence that the Right Hemisphere is dominant in appraising and regulating non-verbal visual facial, auditory-prosodic and bodily-based information. The Right hemisphere is dominant for the first three years of life (Chairon et al., 1997), then continues to play a significant role in childhood in which the later maturing left hemisphere is still developing only to fully mature in late adolescence. Child therapists are therefore working much of the time directly with the developing client's right brain.

With respect to clinical outcomes, as identified by regulation/attachment theory, behavioral improvement in children is regularly associated with both increased expression of positive (joyful) affects, and increased tolerance or regulation of negative affects. The latter leads to the development of a more stable sense of self and more successful recovery from emotional injuries. Together these changes in the child's emotional life are manifest in increased resilience.

In his presentation, Dr. Schore emphasized the central role of expressive and play-based approaches to children who have experienced early relational trauma, and the critical importance of early intervention that focuses on interactive regulation.



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