



HEALING THROUGH PLAY- AN INTRODUCTION TO ATTACHMENT-CENTERED PLAY THERAPY

Clair Mellenthin 2018

Clair Mellenthin, LCSW, RPT-S

Director of Child and Adolescent
Services

Wasatch Family Therapy

7084 South 2300 East suite 215

Salt Lake City, UT 84121

(801) 944-4555

FOLLOW ME ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

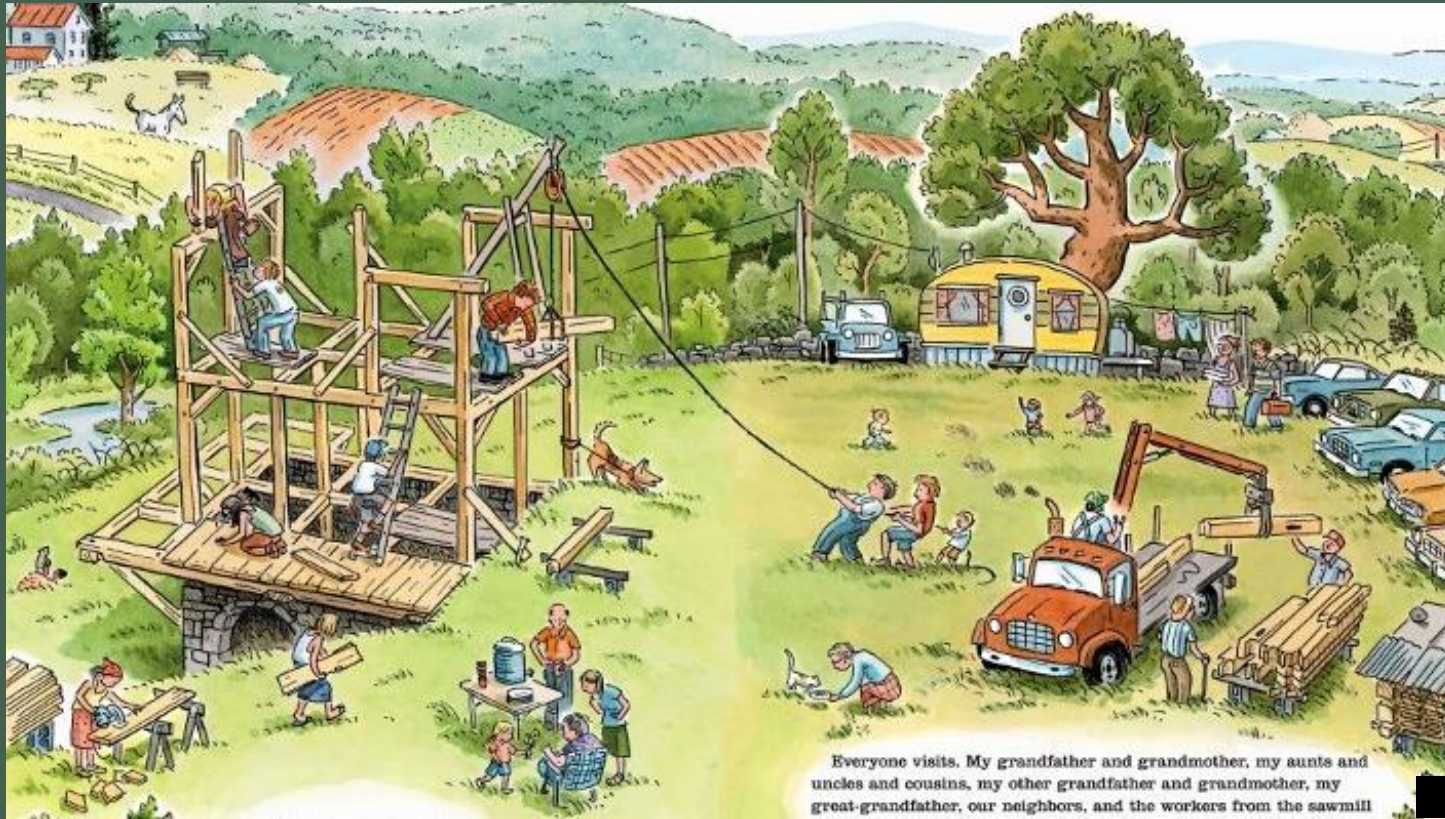
- www.clairmellenthin.com
- <https://twitter.com/ClairMellenthin>
- https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=58690221&trk=nav_responsive_tab_profile_pic
- <https://www.facebook.com/clair.mellenthinlcsw>

Attachment defined

- What is attachment?
 - An emotional bond
 - “A lasting psychological connectedness between human beings”
-John Bowlby
- Attachment Spectrum
- Key Concepts
 - Safe Haven
 - Secure Base
 - Proximity Maintenance
 - Separation Distress

“Keeping precious others close is a brilliant survival technique wired in our evolution for survival.”

John Bowlby



Everyone visits. My grandfather and grandmother, my aunts and uncles and cousins, my other grandfather and grandmother, my great-grandfather, our neighbors, and the workers from the sawmill

4 KEY CONCEPTS OF ATTACHMENT



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Key concepts:

- Secure Base –

The attachment figure serves as home base that provides the confidence to explore the world.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

- Safe Haven -

Finding comfort and safety in attachment figure to calm anxiety in the face of threat.

- Proximity Maintenance –

The desire to be near attachment figure to provide security and emotional soothing.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

- Separation distress –
Anxiety when separated from primary attachment figure

Attachment needs:

- Physical touch
- Emotional closeness
- Acceptance
- Unconditional love
- Safety
- Security
- Play



Secure attachment

- Characteristics
 - Confident that caregiver will meet your needs
 - Appropriate distress when separated
 - Tolerate absences of attachment figure
 - Capable of being soothed upon reunification
 - Moves on to engage in tasks



Baby powder handprints

- Supplies:

- Lotion
- Baby powder
- Black construction paper

- Example Questions:

- Tell me about your favorite memory of these little, chubby baby hands
- What is your favorite memory about these little, messy toddler hands
- What are your favorite things these big kid hands can do now



4 S's of Secure Attachment

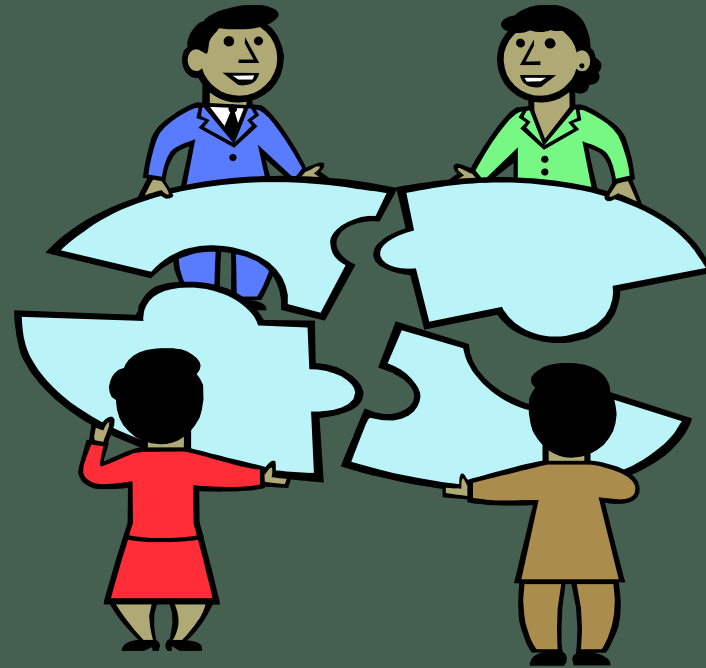
- SEEN
- SAFE
- SOOTHE
- SECURE

• Daniel Seigal



Insecure Attachment

- Characteristics
 - Distress upon separation
 - Unsure if parent would return
 - Clingy or angry upon reunion
 - Difficult to soothe



Emotion Sand Trays Intervention “Show me your mad”



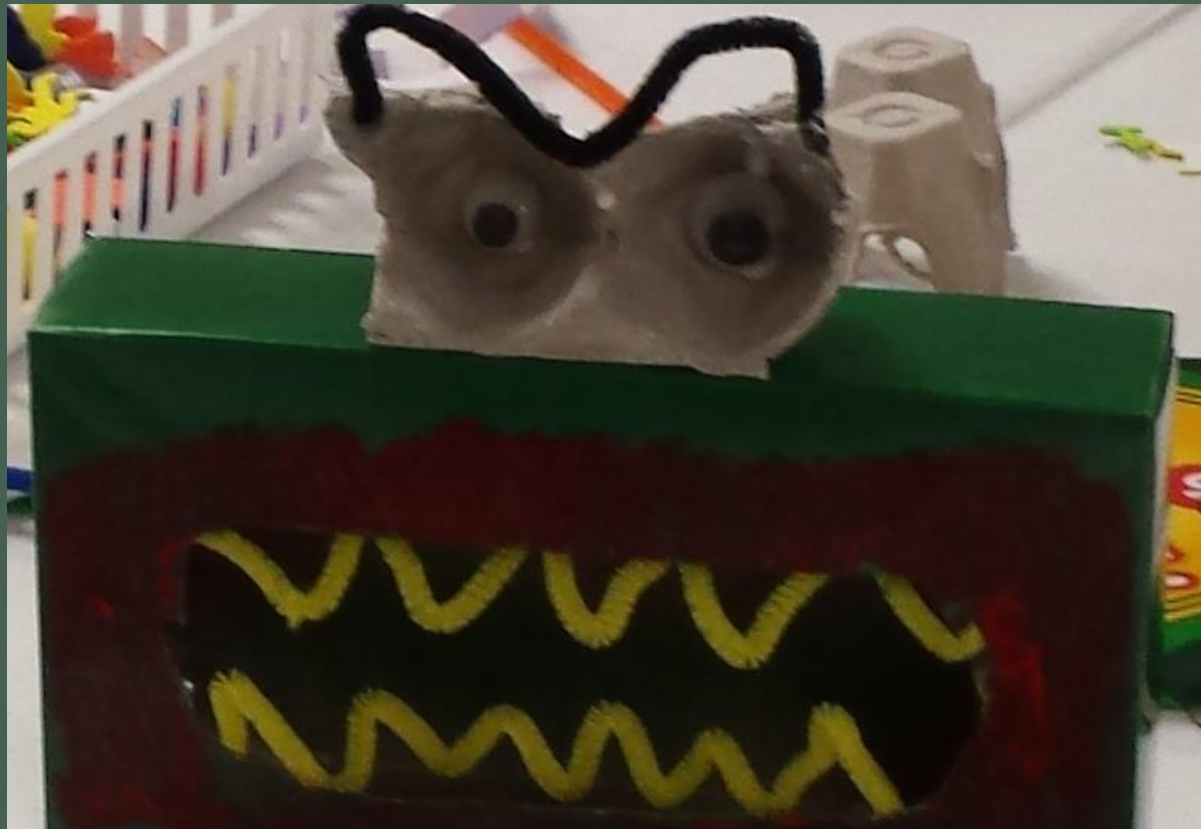
Feeling Monster Box

- Supplies:

- Empty Kleenex box
- Paint, stickers, etc
- Egg carton (empty)
- Emotions Chart

- Directions:

- 1. Family chooses emotion
- 2. Paint/decorate monster
- 3. Feed monster when emotionally charged



Clair Mellenthin 2018

Avoidant Attachment

- Characteristics
 - Showed psychological distress but showed little emotion on separation or reunion
 - Unsure if emotional needs will be met
 - Focused on tasks during separation and reunions
 - Attempt to deactivate attachment system



The Family Self-Esteem Game

- Purpose:
 - To build each family member's self-esteem, respect, and positive self-talk.
 - This also enhances relationships as each member is able to validate the other person's personal resiliency, resourcefulness, and improves communication.
- Supplies Needed: Sharpie, balloons



Questions

- What's something you are proud you can do?
- Tell about a time you were able to do something difficult
- Tell about a time you felt proud of yourself
- Tell about a time you were nice to someone
- Tell about a time that you helped yourself feel better
- Say Something nice to someone else in the room

Disorganized Attachment

- Characteristics
 - Seeking closeness and avoidance of closeness
- Traumatic experience
- Others as source of fear AND solution to fear



The Walled-Off Heart Intervention – by Holly Willard

- Supplies:
- Paper & marker
- or–
- Sandtray, cookie cutter hearts, fences



Tangled Up In Knots

- **Instructions:**

- Family stands in a circle facing each other.
- Instruct them to put all their hands in the middle of the circle and grab any hand.
- Once everybody is holding hands (tangled up) explore what this feels like
- Instruct family members without letting go of each others hands to untangle themselves

- Once family is untangled, explore what it feels like to have space and still be connected together
- Object lesson: Tangled up hands represent enmeshed, anxious family systems. Healthy, secure families are represented by the circle that is connected but maintains autonomy

Goals of Attachment-Centered Play Therapy

- First assess the attachment *needs* of the family

- Does the family need to

SEPARATE AND INDIVIDUATE = ENMESHED

OR

- Does the family need to

COME TOGETHER AND GROW CLOSER =

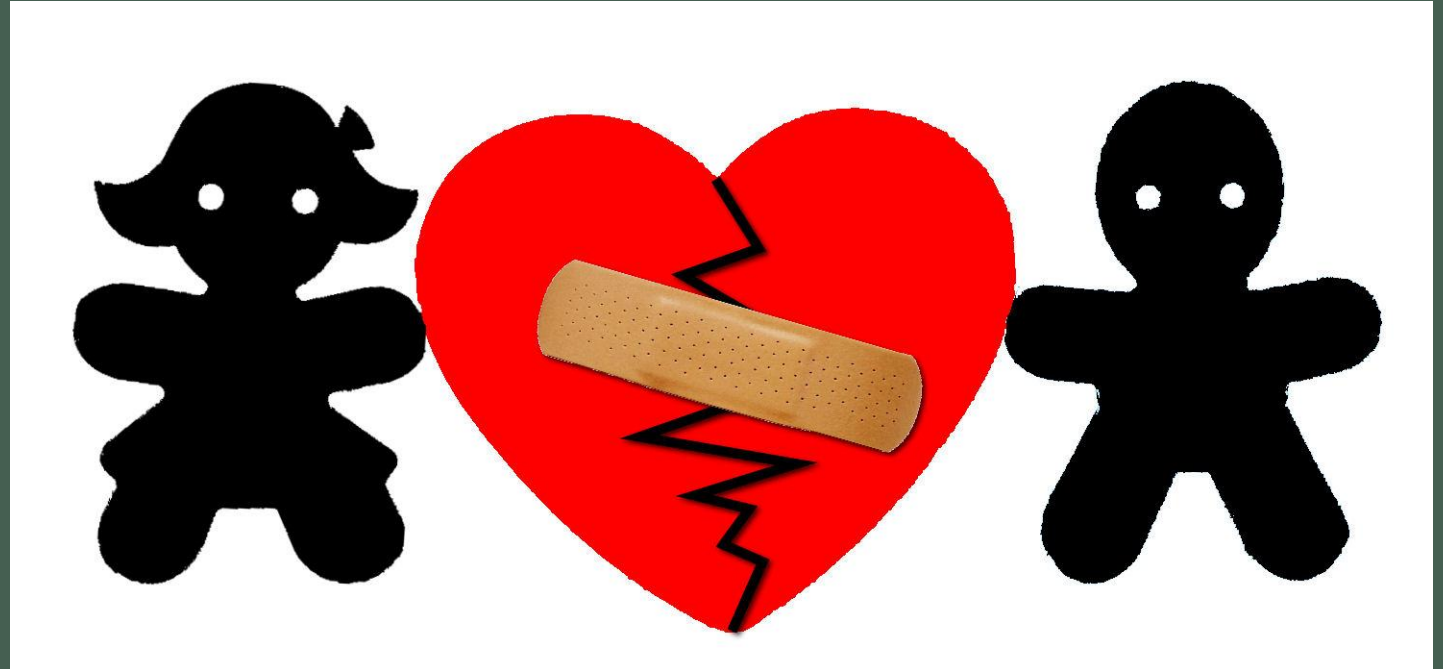
AVOIDANT/WITHDRAWN

- Second goal is to identify the attachment wound or “rupture”
- Third goal aims to strengthen or repair parent-child attachment bonds and improve family communication.
- As the normative secure base is restored, parents become a resource to help the child cope with stress, experience competency, and explore autonomy.

Understanding Attachment Ruptures

- What causes wounding or rupture?

- Death
- Divorce
- Abuse
- Neglect
- Separation



Grief

- Deep and poignant distress **caused by or as if by** bereavement
- Deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone's death.
- Deep mental anguish, as that arising from bereavement.
- A source of deep mental anguish.
- Something that causes keen distress or suffering
- *synonyms: sorrow, misery, sadness, anguish, pain, distress, heartache, heartbreak, agony, torment, affliction, suffering, woe, desolation, dejection, despair*
 - Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Google, The Free Dictionary.com

- **“Children grieve in cycles.** For example, they may be more inclined to play and divert their focus from the death when the death is recent and parents are grieving intensely. More than adults, children need time to take a break from grief. It is important to know that it’s okay to take a break. Having fun or laughing is not disrespectful to the person who died; this is a vital part of grieving, too. “
 - (Dougy center.org)

Different types of grief

- Complicated grief is characterized by an inability to accept the death occurred, denial and avoidance of reminders related to the death, an irrational sense of longing to be with the deceased person, and persistent and intrusive thoughts about the deceased (Dickens, 2014).
- A parent who is experiencing complicated grief may experience these symptoms in addition to intense distress at reminders of the deceased, demanding that family members do not speak of the deceased or their death in any way, an impairment in the ability to take care of self and others, as well as significant separation distress (Mancini & Bonanno, 2012).

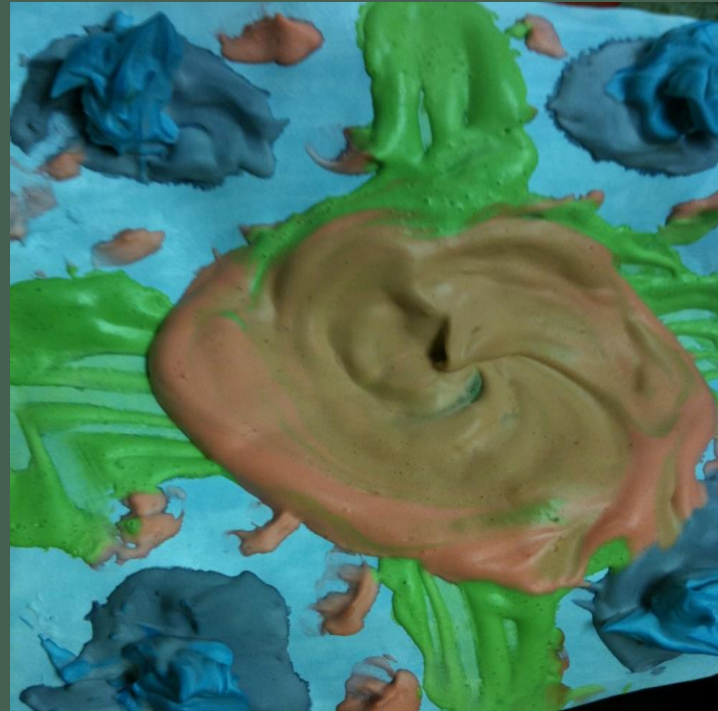
- *Delayed grief* occurs when the typical grief responses occur weeks, months or even years after a death has occurred.
- *Absent grief* occurs when grief is inhibited, denied, or there are no external symptoms of grief, and no external signs of the grief process observed
- *Unresolved or chronic grief* occurs when grief is unending, prolonged, and incomplete. The parent or child is unable to recover from the loss of their relationship and does not find resolution to their pain or an integration of the deceased into their everyday life and functioning. They remain stuck in the immediate attachment response of despair and the attachment goal to re-establish proximity to the deceased (Field, 2006).

- *Repairing and restoring the bonds of connection and attachment between parent and child following the death and loss of a loved one is a critical component of healthy grieving. A child's internal working model of love and belonging guides them in understanding loss, responding to loss, and ultimately integrating the loss they have experienced into their life narrative. The nature of attachment prior to loss is also important to understand and nurture. A securely attached child will still experience some feelings of fear and insecurity following a death, as this is developmentally appropriate. However, they do not need to detach from their emotions and compartmentalize their grief, as their parent has the capacity to hold and understand them, to nurture throughout the grieving process, and to is able to remain consistently available.*

Shaving Cream Feelings

Supplies

- Shaving Cream
- Food coloring
- Bowls
- Spoons
- Paintbrushes (optional)
- Paper



Tear Soup

Supplies



- Tear Soup Book
- Pot
- Long spoon
- Play food (vegetables, etc)

ACPT Treatment

- Goal is to strengthen *family* relationship to work through and address challenges
- EVERYONE meets with the therapist
- Parent and child work together in therapy to address challenges through play, talking, art, experiential activities
- Children that have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect need the loving support and presence of their parent(s) in therapy to help them feel safe, learn new things and enhance the parent-child relationship.
- The therapist will have some parent-only time with the goal of supporting parents and clarifying & enhancing the therapy outcomes.



Clair Mellenthin 2018

More ACPT Interventions

- Sticking Together
- Measuring with Licorice
- Feeling Charades
- The Nurturing Game
- Communication Blocks

Sticking Together

- Supplies:
- Marshmallows
- Stick Spaghetti



Family Music Video Technique

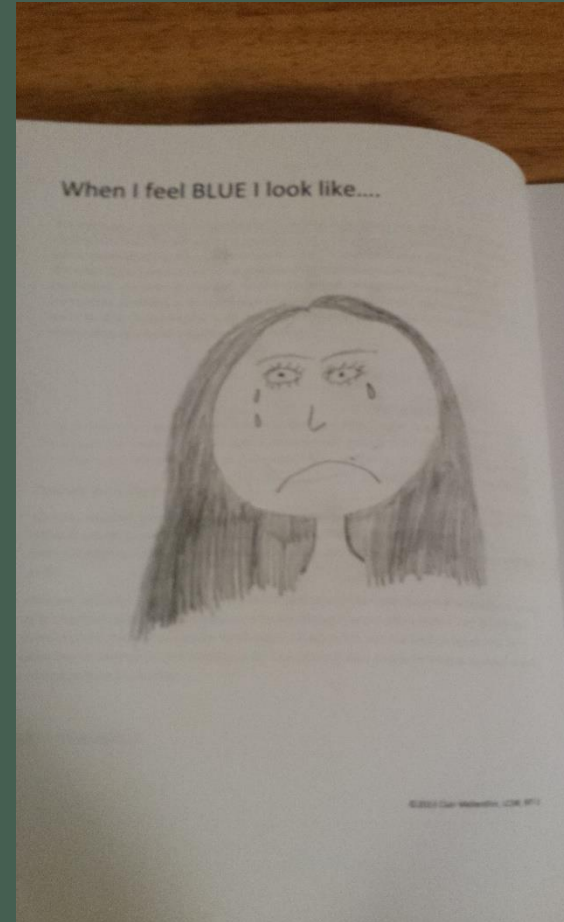
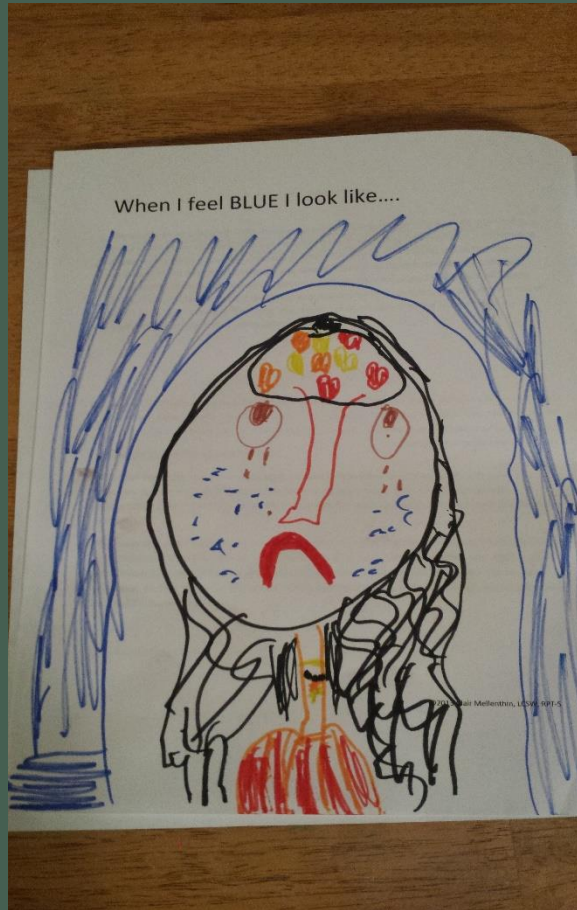
- Family chooses song that represents their family or an issue they are struggling with/resolved
- Create music video using puppets, props, dress-ups, etc
- Watch video together in session to discuss family themes, rules, roles, etc.





Clair Mellenthin 2018

My Many
Colors of
Me



Clair Mellenthin 2018

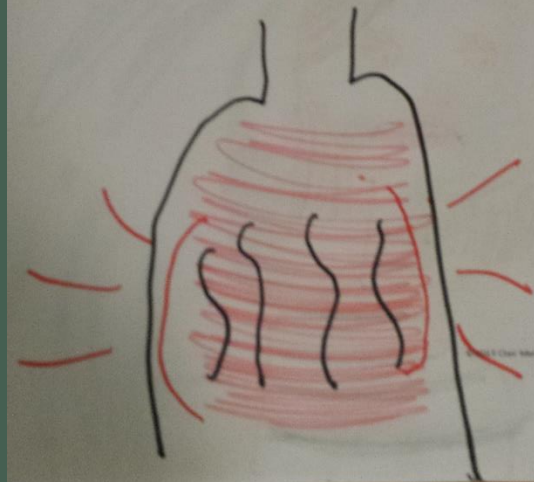
When I feel black, my
tummy looks like...



When I feel black, my
tummy looks like... ickei



When I feel BLACK, my tummy looks like...



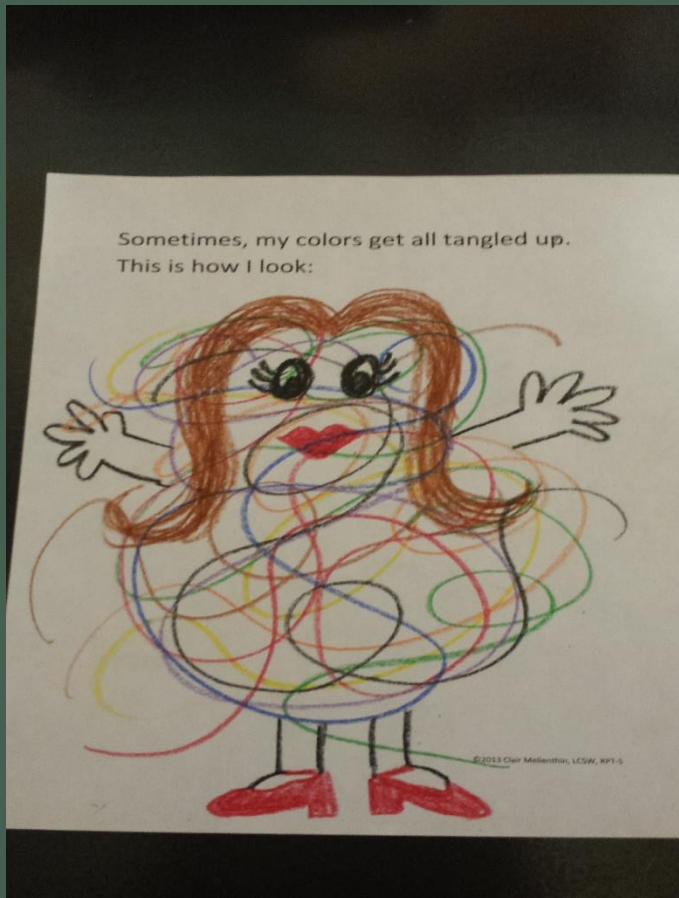
When I feel RED, my face looks like...



©2013 Clair Mellenthin, LCSW, RPT-S

When I feel white, my head looks like...





Nurturing Spoons Intervention



- Supplies:
- 3 ft long $\frac{1}{4}$ " wooden dowel with a spoon taped onto one end and a piece of colored duct tape taped on the other end
- M&M's or Skittles
- Bowl
- Ask family to form a circle. Give each family member a "spoon". Place bowl of candy in the middle.
- Family members try to eat candy using their spoons. Goal is to eat 2 spoonfuls using only 1 hand on the taped area of spoon
- Only way to eat candy is to feed each other (family members need direction)



Love Circle: Evangeline Munns in *Supervision Can be Playful*

- **Instructions**

- Family forms circle. One person chooses to sit in the middle of circle.
- This person faces each person while they say something positive without talking
- Take turns until everybody has had a chance to sit in the middle and receive positive statements
- Explore how it feels to receive praise, how difficult it can be, especially when positive comments don't fit in with our self-image & attachment wounds

Baby Memories : Evangeline Munns in Supervision Can be Playful

- **Instructions:**

- Form an inner circle standing and facing each other
- Form an outer circle standing and facing inner circle
- Whisper to the person in front of you what you would have liked to hear as a little baby
- When done, move to the next person and whisper the same sentence or something new
- Reverse circles and repeat

Bibliography/Resources

- Baggerly, J; Bratton, S. Building a firm foundation in play therapy research: Response to Phillips (2010). *International Journal of Play Therapy*, Vol 19(1), Jan 2010, 26-38.
- Bowlby, J (1979). *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: The Tavistock Institute
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment*. London: The Tavistock Institute.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J, Ainsworth, M., Boston, M., & Rosenbluth, D. (1956), The effects of mother-child separation: A follow-up study. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 29, 2 11-247
- Bratton, S., Ray, D., Rhine, T., & Jones, L. (2005). The efficacy of play therapy with children: A Meta-analytic review of the outcome research. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 36(4), 376-390
- Goodyear-Brown, Paris (2005). *Digging for Buried Treasure 1 & 2 Workbook*

- Gerstein, J.S. (1999). *Sticking Together. Experiential Activities for Family Counseling.*
- Johnson, S. (2004). *The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy.* New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Lowenstein, L. (2006). *Creative Interventions For Children of Divorce*
- Moles, K. (2003). *Strategies For Anger Management*
- Mellenthin, C. (2013). *My Many Colors of Me Workbook*
- Mellenthin, C. (2018). *Play Therapy: Engaging and Powerful Techniques for the Treatment of Childhood Disorders.* Eau Claire, WI: Pesi Publishing
- SAMHSA'S National Registry of Evidence-based Practices : Attachment-based Family Therapy www.nrepp.samhsa.gov
- Seigel, D & Bryson, T. (2012). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind.*
- Theraplay Institute: Theraplay Activities Flip Book (2004).

- Drewes, A.A. & Mullen, J.A. (2008). Supervision Can Be Playful