

*The bond  
between  
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and adults  
is part  
of Mother  
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design  
for health.*



# BENEFICIAL BONDING

**M**y perceptions of children have shifted since I first began studying embryology. If you consider the stages of consciousness as they evolve in utero and throughout early life, you cannot avoid the fact that prenatals, babies, and children are astoundingly conscious beings. Yet, we have managed to do just that—ignore the fact. Spurred by breakthroughs in research about brain function and development, we are now prime for a shift in how we regard pregnancy, infants, children, and youth.

This paradigm shift is important for parents, of course, but it is equally significant for healthcare professionals, bodyworkers, educators, and therapists of all kinds. As part of that shift, those who serve children have the responsibility of providing attunement to who these young people *really* are.

Attunement is, on the one hand, very simple. But in our complex society, it has also become elusive. For service providers, whether they are nurses, social workers, massage therapists, psychologists, educators, or cranial therapists, attunement is the art of being with the person you are serving. It is heart-centered witnessing, and includes both self-respect and profound respect for another. Attunement softly acknowledges the entelechy (essence) of the one being served so that they have a felt sense of being seen, heard, and mirrored. In silently and deeply recognizing the other, that individual has the space



## Attuning to Young People

By  
Stephanie  
Mines

to know themselves. Attunement produces its own language and expression, as it naturally stimulates neuro-hormones that evoke balance and reorganization in the mind-body. When you are truly

attuned to another, it is impossible to traumatize or re-traumatize.

Care providers who can read—with their eyes, ears, hands, and heart—who they are truly serving, give the gift of integration.

Integration inspires wholeness and embodiment and stimulates the healing response. This is true no matter what the age of the person being seen, but it is especially true for babies, children, and youth who

have every right, as well as a biological predilection, to expect attunement from adults.

Attunement is simple in the sense that, from a healthy mother's standpoint, it is hormonally driven and instinctual. Unfortunately, the industrialization of the childbearing and birth processes has derailed natural responses so that we hardly know what they are anymore. Nevertheless, this last decade of inquiries into the brain has resulted in the unquestionable evidence that attunement stimulates neurological unfolding. Knowing this, we become even more responsible for providing attunement, which is often the missing experience in development.

When caregivers attune to children, there is an increase in the healing response. The physiology of the response catalyzes immune function and cellular repair, making attunement an indispensable component of any healing process.

## Attuning—In a New Light

The bond between children and adults is part of Mother Nature's design for health. Children offer us the precious gift of their union with undifferentiated consciousness. In return, we offer them protection and mirroring, the validation of who they are, and the safety to be just that.

The belief that children are simpletons is part of an atrophying paradigm in which we talk to children as if they are cute, but stupid. Our voices become chipmunk-like and we offer cute things to distract them. But children do not actually have a lower intelligence. They have a more spacious intelligence. Attuning to children means reading them as you would read a wonderful book that you have fallen in love with and that you are absorbing and understanding, chapter by chapter, orienting always toward what it is really telling you.

Attuning to children can also be compared to listening to great music that holds you spellbound

as you soak up the nuances, responding to textures and subtleties that form an experience of magnificence, uplifting you and making you appreciate life. This is what happens when you truly attune to others.

Healthcare practitioners, as well as parents, can open developmental windows simply through their attunement to children. Attunement

## The essential components of attunement are:

- Empathy/compassion
- Eye contact
- Intention
- Listening
- Mirroring
- Non-projection
- Presence
- Respectful, well-boundaried contact
- Sensitivity

means putting one's own projections and desires aside. It is a state of openness. Attunement is receptivity. It is imbued with curiosity, a joyful but simultaneously neutral interest that radiates out, putting children at ease. Attunement cannot coexist with control, projection, manipulation, or disinterest. It requires genuine empathy and compassionate presence.

One can attune with one's eyes, ears, hands, and heart. When you are attuning with all these parts of yourself, you are vibrating at a very high level of consciousness. Attunement is simultaneously altruistic and compassionate. It is the single most important skill necessary to empower and serve children so that they can realize their entelechy or essential self. →



## Adolescence and Attunement

The TARA Approach for Teenagers

Providing healing treatment for U.S. adolescents these days requires more attention than caring for a newborn. The two tasks are at least equal, and similar in many ways. For one, the communication is indirect. What you see is not what you get.

Newborns are mysterious *tabala rasas* who communicate their needs in gestures and sounds that attentive parents can only try to interpret. It is certainly a trial and error process at best. The same is true for adolescents, but the potential for misunderstanding is even greater. Depression is more deeply hidden than anger, though it is anger that tends to catch everyone's attention. The key for adults serving adolescents is to read nonjudgmentally the messages youth are constantly sending about who they are and their struggles.

Teenagers are simultaneously sensitive and guarded. They are also profoundly absorptive, like litmus paper, soaking up all of the world's passions, obsessions, needs, and sufferings. Many teenagers inhabit a world of jail-like high schools, strewn with noise and airless clamor. They feel the pressure of tabloid fashion and impossible movie star bodies. They are acutely self-conscious. Like smaller children, they are watching and responding to everything, though largely implicitly.

The biggest obstacle to treatment during this agonizing and blossoming life phase is the resistance to two things: touch and exposure. The exposure I speak of is personal truth and vulnerability; the touch is the subtle healing kind. Getting close to a teenager is like getting close to a volcano; sometimes the burning embers are blacker than night. Teenagers are cooking their entire lives in their hormones, boiling up a soup of embodiment that is almost always too hot.

The hormonal delicacy of this period is acute. Teenage brains are permutations on three-, five-, and nine-year-old brains. Right and left



hemispheres are starting to speak to each other in tongues. Life integrations are percolating. Listen for them in late night conversations and questions on the way to somewhere. "Do you remember when ...?" The neo-cortex has its training wheels on; the visionary capacity is reopening with its shades of neonatal moments on the horizons of consciousness. This is a precious interval that deserves to be protected. Instead, in the West and elsewhere, it is bombarded, objectified, capitalized upon, ravished, pummeled, and eaten alive. The result is escalating rates of teenage suicide, crime, self-mutilation, drug addiction, depression, and extreme loneliness. Furthermore, the facilities and staff competent to serve these consequences are virtually nil.

What can we offer teenagers and youth?

- Profound respect for who they are and their struggles.
- A listening ear that believes in the adolescent perspective.
- Safe and satisfying expressive outlets.

- Cultivation of the witness self so that teenagers can learn to see themselves and notice their sensations and responses.
- Support in integration of life experience. This is the neurological highlight of adolescence. Reviewing daily, weekly, and lifelong patterns allows the nervous system to do its job of integration.
- Physical outlets appropriate to each individual. This includes sports, exercise, dance, hiking, kayaking, or whatever physical activity is satisfying.
- Safety in being who they are.
- Mirroring and validation for feelings, thoughts, and unique perspectives.
- A broad assortment of viable resources for relationships, outlets, activities, and ways of being with self.

The healthcare provider serving teenagers needs a thorough overview of each individual's health history, including prenatal and birth experiences. Family dynamics play a major role in shaping all health conditions. Services to teenagers are most effective when there is follow-through and continuity.

All healthcare services to adolescents must be seen in the context of their overall lives and not in a momentary vacuum. The care necessary to do this must be taken. Treatment to minors also requires signed release forms from both parents. Adolescents deserve to be informed of the implications of all services offered to them and their permission must be requested before any intervention is provided. They deserve the information to make fully informed decisions for themselves and their bodies. They also deserve a broad spectrum of alternatives to address their healthcare needs.

—Stephanie Mines



The essential components of attunement are listening, eye contact, mirroring, presence, sensitivity, empathy, compassion, well-boundaried contact, intention, and non-projection.

### Who Children Really Are

Every child embodies the destiny of civilization. As therapists, healthcare providers, and family members we are called to see each child as a cherished, purposeful being. It is not true that only some children are gifted. Every single child, without exception, is a special one.

Children are extraordinarily present. They notice not only individuals and the things around them, but they are energetically observing and engaging with everything, all the time. Their attention is so thorough and comprehensive that they naturally absorb and

notice the intention of all those they encounter.

Each child is a manifestation of love and courage. It takes enormous fortitude, endurance, and creativity to navigate the challenging waters of prenatal life and birth. Adults are given the task of mirroring back to children their unique purpose in being. There is no child without such a purpose or entelechy.

### How Do We Know When Children Need Help?

The indications that children need help in resolving over-

whelming experience is seen in different ways for different age groups. Parents, educators, therapists, and healthcare providers need to be sensitive to these indicators without using them just for labeling.

The nervous systems of prenatals communicate distress through movement and respiration patterns that are designed to get the attention of the adults outside the womb. Newborns tell us about their experience through their crying, digestion, movement, and sleep patterns. Toddlers and young children with unresolved anxiety will have difficulty nursing and sleeping. They will also regress to earlier behavior. They may have difficulties interacting with other children, have tantrums, not maintain eye contact, or retreat from social engagement.

School-age children reveal their needs when they have difficulty

concentrating, are accident prone, have frequent stomachaches or headaches (or both), regress to younger ages, withdraw or hold back expression, dissociate, or are aggressive. Adolescents with eating disorders, who are addicted to reckless behavior, use drugs, cut themselves, have academic problems, confront or rebel against authorities, or are hypervigilant and negative are calling out for help. Youth who are disinterested, lethargic, passive, or chronically irritated are also calling out for resources. It is our job to translate their language.

### Children and Trauma

The greatest preventative for traumatic overload is a secure feeling that the world is friendly and resources are available. Instilling this confidence assures the best ongoing brain development, no matter what obstacles are met on the unpredictable journey of life. Healthcare providers of all kinds are as responsible for establishing this safety for young people as are parents.

Just as adult nervous systems demonstrate a sympathetic or parasympathetic dominance in response to stress, so do children's. Children who are tense and hyperactive are likely exhibiting sympathetic nervous system dominance and need to be calmed and soothed. Children who are withdrawn and lethargic are revealing parasympathetic dominance and need to be encouraged to express themselves. Energy medicine, subtle treatments, gentle massage, and craniosacral therapies can be effective in balancing the nervous system and shifting these dominances.

There are certain developmental sequences that need to be honored in the process of resolving early trauma. These sequences suggest appropriate interventions. For instance, children who were not comforted by their mothers after

### Simple, Somatic Applications for the Young

These suggestions are for massage therapists and all healthcare practitioners, as well as parents and other family members. There are no contraindications for any of these treatments and they can be done for as long as both therapist and recipient are comfortable. These interventions can also be used as self-care practices.

**Palming the Calves.** The practitioner places the palms of her hands on the calves of the young client's legs. This stimulates a deepening of the breath and an overall sensation of calm and ease. The practitioner may feel a resonant pulse building in the palms of her hands.

**Cradling the Ankles.** The practitioner places one finger on the outside of the ankle and another finger on the inside of the ankle, just under the ankle bone. Thus, the ankles are cradled in the practitioner's hands. This relaxes contracted muscles, while simultaneously balancing adrenal function. This application is helpful for overtired muscles and overtired bodies that cannot wind down or soften to rest. All four fingers will resonate with therapeutic pulse.

#### The Integrator.

Restlessness of all kinds, including jittery, jerky body movements can be soothed by holding the base of the big toe, while simultaneously holding just below the wrist bone. This can be done easily by standing or sitting first on one side and then on the other side of the recipient's body. Holding these areas stimulates integration between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, sending a signal of coherence to the nervous system.

**Clearing the Mind.** Hold the base of the occiput with one hand and cover the forehead with the palm of the other hand. This settles the mind and keeps it from jumping around like a mischievous monkey.

**The Oval.** This application is particularly effective for adolescents. Ask recipients to rest in a comfortable position. Direct them to envision an oval of protective and balanced energy that moves down the front of the body and up the back. Beginning at the top of the head, use a calm voice to guide awareness slowly from the forehead to the toes, halting wherever there is resistance or obstacles, staying with the resistance until it releases, and proceeding down the front of the body to the big toes. Then energy moves up the back of the body in two lines, from the base of each big toe, all the way up the back to the top of the head where energy then cascades again down the front. This oval of energy is continuous. It is aligned with the breath that helps the circulation of the protective field. This can be done for as long as necessary. It is an excellent tool for those who have problems falling asleep. It is also a sure cure for panic and over-activation under stressful circumstances.

Many of these applications are excerpted from *The Dreaming Child: How Children Can Help Themselves Recover from Illness and Injury*, by Stephanie Mines, PhD. This book is available through [www.Tara-Approach.org](http://www.Tara-Approach.org).



the arduous journey of birth, or who were overdosed with pitocin or other chemicals at birth, will often be unable to wind down when they are two or three years old.

Age three is when the connecting fibers of the corpus callosum, the part of the brain that links the right and left hemispheres, are growing. Linking right hemisphere functions of self-regulation to the left hemisphere creates the capacity to wind down. If, by the age of three, this linkage has not been built, then parents and care providers need to help stimulate the construction through their loving interventions.

Adolescence is when the prefrontal neo-cortex, or executive brain, develops rapidly. This is a period quite similar to the rapid growth of the three year old. Young people pick up the unexpressed emotions of their family members, and this is especially true for teenagers. Whatever has not been fulfilled in earlier developmental sequences will accumulate and show up in teenagers. We are called on as their mentors to recognize and validate their expression, while simultaneously guiding our children toward wholeness and responsibility.

Attunement describes the entry-level position for the job healthcare providers have signed up for in the treatment of young people. Take Lily, for example, whose experience of being attuned to by her craniosacral therapist demonstrates the miraculous power of attunement. Lily was born with severe eye problems that resulted in chronic headaches. By the age of thirteen, she wore thick glasses, retreated from the busy social scene of blooming adolescence, and frequently isolated herself in darkened rooms to rest her eyes from overstimulation.

Lily's mother discovered an excellent craniosacral therapist through another mom's recommendation. Upon meeting Lily, the therapist sensed the young girl's →

loneliness and fear, as well as the child's feeling she was a burden to her mother. The therapist asked Lily if she felt lonely, and the girl responded thoughtfully, feeling seen for the first time. The therapy sessions certainly helped, but "being seen" gave Lily permission to see the world, and over a period of several months her headaches decreased significantly.

Speech therapist and energy medicine practitioner Colleen Haney of Boca Raton, Florida, reports on the importance of "witnessing" young people who come for somatic therapies. She describes a three-year-old boy who loved to play with blocks while waiting for his session, while the mother was unaware of what the little boy was actually doing.

Haney noticed that the boy was building a wall and hiding behind it. She asked his mother why he would want to do this. The mom spoke of the death of her daughter at birth, just nine months prior. It was not long after this tragedy that her son's speech disorders manifested. Suddenly speech therapy took on an entirely new dimension.

Massage therapists and other somatic practitioners sometimes express concern about the use of dialogue in their practice. They fear crossing over the line into

psychotherapy. Certainly all therapeutic contracts must be honored. However, expression that is both in the interest of the one being served, and that is validated by one's own deepest and purest awareness, is usually communication that can be trusted. Offered naturally and simply, as observation with good intent and not psychotherapy, no harm can be done. Withholding perceptions can be more harmful than uttering them. **M&B**

*Stephanie Mines, PhD, founded and now directs the TARA Approach for the Resolution of Shock and Trauma, an international training organization based in Boulder, Colorado. Visit [www.Tara-Approach.org](http://www.Tara-Approach.org) for an overview of the non-profit's outreach, as well as its offering of books and media products, many of which are focused on serving children.*

### Resources

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### Glossary

- **Attunement**—Attunement happens when one human being aligns herself with another and is fully present to witness the other with compassion. The purpose of attunement is to mirror essence to the other. Attunement does not require language.
- **Compassion**—Merciful awareness of suffering, together with an inclination and willingness to give aid or support. Compassion creates the possibility of selflessness, allowing one to be in service to others, regardless of personal agendas.
- **Empathy**—To respond with understanding. To put oneself in another's place.
- **Healing**—The restoration of wholeness.
- **Healing Response**—The physiological responses to attunement that include increased circulation, increased mobility, heightened positive thoughts and feelings, a brighter outlook, encouragement, motivation, and an elevated immune strength.
- **Mirroring**—Reflecting to another, accurately and without projection, of who they are or what they have said or intended. This can be done without language, through facial expression and gesturing.
- **Neo-cortex**—The newest brain development, the neo-cortex or forebrain (located in the forehead), represents our highest brain functioning. Devoid of threat, the neo-cortex has visionary, intuitive, and prophetic capacities. It operates most effectively when there is total mind-body relaxation.
- **Paradigm**—A definition of one's perception of reality according to its limitations.
- **Social Engagement**—Expressive human interaction, including appropriate eye contact, speech, touch, and gesturing. Physiologically powered by the cranial nerves, social engagement is a prerequisite for attunement. The cranial nerves make engagement with others possible, including the setting of appropriate boundaries and the differentiation between self and other. Social engagement includes voice tone and the quantity and quality of all social and human communication. Social engagement also encompasses heart rate, digestion, facial mobility, and hearing.

