

# Partnering with Parents

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# Infant Mental Health Is

The developing capacity of the infant and toddler to...

- \* Form close and secure relationships.
- \* Experience, regulate, and express emotions.
- \* Explore the environment and learn.

...all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children.

(Zero to Three Infant Mental Health Task Force).

# Attachment Theory

- \* The lasting and deep emotional relationship between child and caregivers
- \* Begins to develop in infancy
- \* Focused on sense of security as child begins to explore environment

# Positive Impact of Healthy Attachments

- \*Basic trust
- \*Positive self image and high self esteem
- \*Autonomy, good problem solving skills, goal orientation, determination
- \*Positive belief sets and outlook on life
- \*Good coping strategies and skills
- \*Good emotional control and behavior flexibility

# When we understand behavior, we build relationship. Through relationships, children learn:

- Safety
- Trust
- Affect regulation
- Sense of self
- Social skills
- Empathy
- Conflict resolution skills
- Physiological regulation



*Attachment is one of the best protective factors against stress and trauma*

# Still Face Experiment



# Resiliency Literature

Children are born **MALEABLE**.

Children are made **RESILIENT**.

## Foundations of resiliency:

- \* Supportive Relationships
- \* Adaptive Skill-Building
- \* Positive Experiences

# Touchpoints: Parent Assumptions

- \* The parent is the expert on his/her child.
- \* All parents have strengths.
- \* All parents want to do well by their children.
- \* All parents have something critical to share at each developmental stage.
- \* All parents have ambivalent feelings.
- \* Parenting is a process built on trial and error.

# What does it look like in practice?



# Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC)

- \* For caregivers of children age 6 mos to 2 years that have experienced early maltreatment and/or disruptions in care
  - \* Child behaves in ways that push the caregiver away → Helps caregivers to re-interpret children's behavioral signals
  - \* Some caregivers may not be “naturally nurturing” → Helps caregivers provide nurturing care even if it does not come naturally
  - \* Child is dysregulated at behavioral and biological levels → Helps caregivers provide a responsive, predictable environment that enhances young children's behavioral and regulatory capabilities

# ABC Results

## Attachment

- \* Children who received the ABC intervention were classified with more secure attachments than children in the control group (52% of children receiving ABC vs. 33% of children receiving a control intervention).
- \* In addition, children who received the ABC intervention were classified with significantly fewer disorganized attachments than children in the control group (only 32% of ABC children were classified as disorganized vs. 57% of children in the control group) (Bernard, Dozier, Bick, Lewis-Morrarty, Lindhiem, & Carlson, 2012).

# ABC results

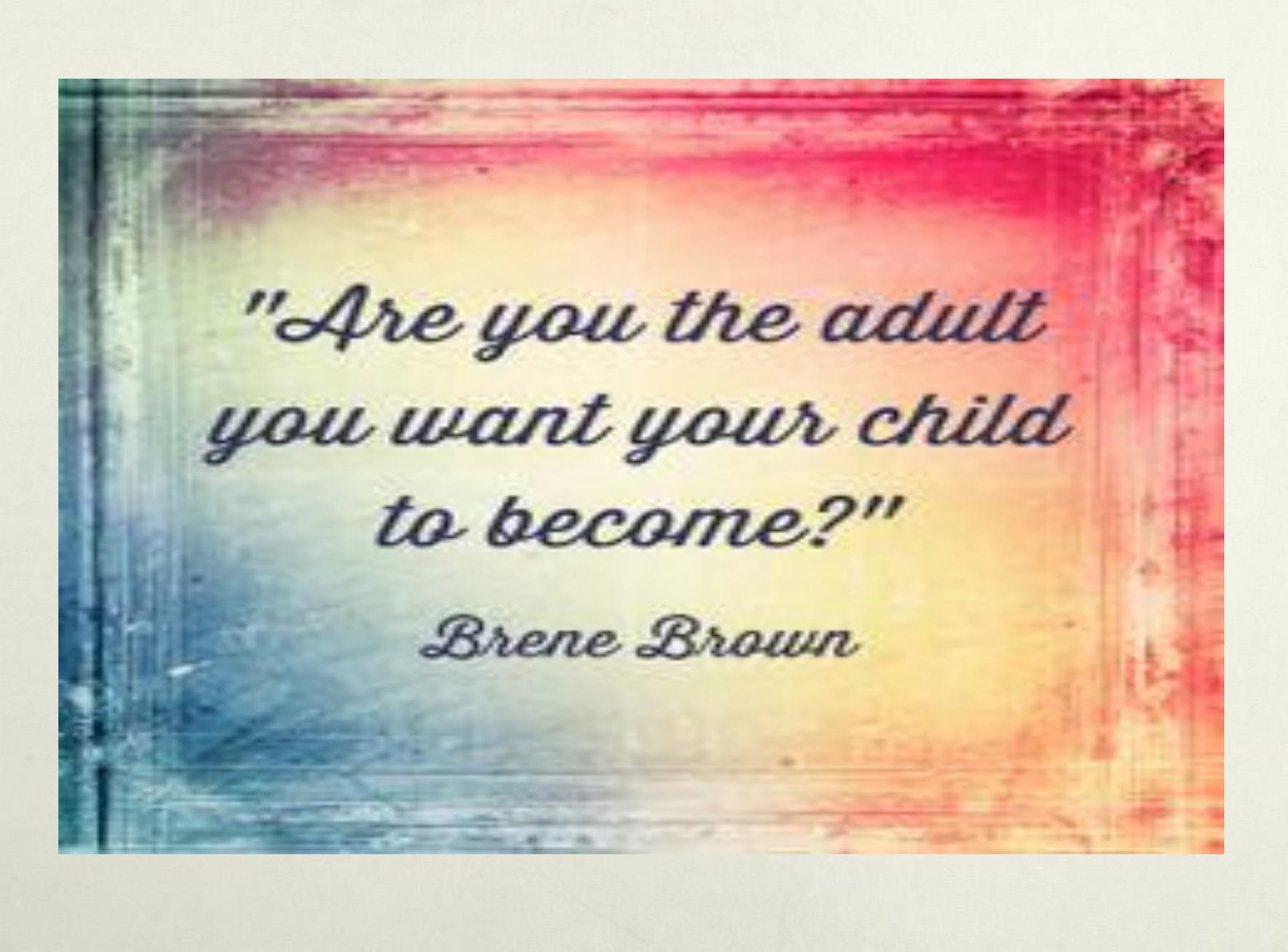
## Cortisol production

- \* The hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis has two functions, one of which is the diurnal production of the stress hormone cortisol. Cortisol levels in humans are high when waking up and low at bedtime; it is this downward slope throughout that day helps us have energy in the morning and be tired at night. This HPA axis function can be disrupted in children who have been maltreated. In fact, maltreated and neglected children have a cortisol slope that looks much more flat than that of their counterparts who have never been neglected or maltreated (Bernard, Butzin-Dozier, Rittenhouse, & Dozier, 2010).
- \* Children who received the ABC intervention had a more normative diurnal pattern of cortisol production (steeper slopes and higher wake-up values of cortisol) than children who received the control intervention (Bernard, Dozier, Bick, & Gordon, 2014).
- \* When assessed three years after completing the ABC intervention, children who received the ABC intervention continued to have a more normative diurnal cortisol pattern than the children who had received the control intervention (Bernard, Hostinar, & Dozier, in press).

## Other Interventions Focused on Relationships

- \* Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
- \* Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)
- \* Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)
- \* Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT)
- \* Theraplay
- \* Multisystemic therapy for physical abuse and neglect

**These are just a few family focused interventions which have proven efficient, cost-effective, and efficacious.**

The background of the image is a textured, watercolor-style wash of colors. It features a gradient from a pale yellow in the center to a vibrant red on the right side, with a blueish-grey wash on the left side. The overall effect is soft and artistic.

*"Are you the adult  
you want your child  
to become?"*

*Brene Brown*

# What Can We Help Caregivers Do?

- \* Gently hold and cuddle their child
- \* Respond to the child's efforts to communicate
- \* Enrich daily routines by making eye contact, sharing smiles, conversations, stories and books.
- \* Follow the child's lead
- \* Gently guide child through social situations
- \* Have developmentally appropriate expectations
- \* Understand the meaning behind behavior
- \* Be mindful of what the child is exposed to. Remember, children are always watching
- \* Be mindful of your own self-care. When caregivers are stressed, children are stressed.

Thank you!

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