

## Earned Secure Attachment: Helping Clients Rewire their Brains through Creating a Coherent Narrative

with Dr. Lisa Firestone

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## What is Attachment Theory?

Human beings are born wired for connection. At the very beginning of our lives, we form attachments to our primary caretakers as a survival mechanism.

Our attachment pattern forms as a result of the adaptations we made in infancy to get our needs met. Children make the best adaptations they can to their family.

## What is Attachment Theory?



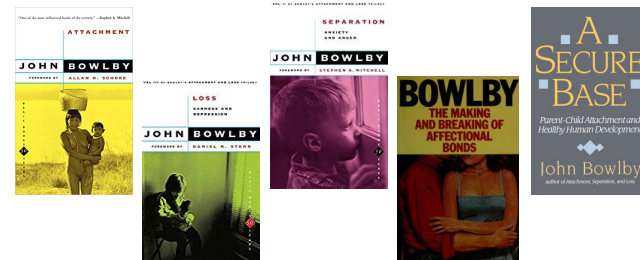
How do I get these people to take care of me?

## Attachment Theory Developmental



Created by John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, based partly on primate ethology, to explain why "maternal deprivation" leads to anxiety, anger, delinquency, and depression

From 1969-1988, he published five books about the theory, including one on psychotherapy.



## Attachment Theory and Research

Bowlby contended that internal working models of attachment help to explain:

- Emotional distress
- Personality disturbance
- Emotional detachment

*“Attachment underlies later capacity to make effectual bonds as well as a whole range of adult dysfunctions,” particularly with marital bonds and trouble parenting.*

From "Attachment Theory and Research: Implications for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy"  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1\\_24#page-1](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1_24#page-1)

## Attachment Theory Distilled

- ▷ Humans, especially young children, rely on attachment figures for protection, support, and emotion regulation
- ▷ The attachment behavioral system is an evolved, innate regulator of proximity (hence of safety and safe exploration)



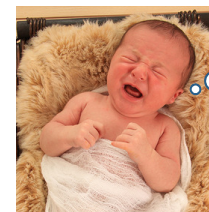
## Attachment Theory Distilled

- ▷ When threats abate, behavioral systems other than attachment (e.g., exploration, caregiving) can be activated, allowing a person to become more competent/ autonomous
- ▷ Attachment orientations, or “styles,” develop in relationships, resulting in systematic individual differences in attachment orientation: secure, anxious, avoidant. . .
- ▷ The theory applies from “the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby)



## Attachment Theory Distilled

- ▷ Our attachment system is activated when we are distressed.
- ▷ The way our parents interact with us (particularly during times of distress) forms the basis of our attachment style.



Attachment System  
Activating!

## Attachment Theory Distilled

Humans rely on attachment figures for:

- ▷ Protection (**safe**)
- ▷ Support (**seen**)
- ▷ Emotion regulation (**soothed**)



## Reasons Why it's Important to Know about Attachment Style

- ▷ You assess the patient's attachment style, because it influences the process of psychotherapy, the quality of the alliance and the ultimate outcome of treatment.
- ▷ Provides clues as to how the patient is likely to respond in treatment and to the therapist.

From "Attachment Style"  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jclp.20756/abstract;jsessionid=12D0C6113EB8A6D4EAB21F6477ADF8D5J04102?deniedAccessCustomisedMessage=&userIsAuthenticated=false>

## Psychotherapy Relationship as Attachment

Psychotherapy relationship with an adult client exhibits all the essential elements of attachment bonds:


- ▷ They regard their therapist as stronger and wiser.
- ▷ They seek proximity through emotional connection and regular meetings.
- ▷ They rely upon the therapist as a safe haven when they feel threatened.
- ▷ They derive a sense of felt security from their therapist who serves as a secure base for psychological exploration.
- ▷ They experience separation anxiety when anticipating loss of their therapist.

From "The Psychotherapy Relationship as Attachment"  
[http://www.researchgate.net/publication/232509555\\_Attachment\\_patterns\\_in\\_the\\_pschotherapy\\_relationship\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_Client\\_Attachment\\_to\\_Therapist\\_Scale/file/72e7e52b89f8021b12.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/232509555_Attachment_patterns_in_the_pschotherapy_relationship_Development_of_the_Client_Attachment_to_Therapist_Scale/file/72e7e52b89f8021b12.pdf)


## Patterns of Attachment




We have different attachments to different people...




Father



Mother



Aunt or Uncle



Grandparent

### Measuring Attachment

The Strange Situation





The Adult Attachment Interview





### Patterns of Attachment in Children

<u>Attachment Style</u>	<u>Parental Interactive Pattern</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Secure</li> <li>▷ Insecure – avoidant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive</li> <li>▷ Emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, unresponsive and rejecting</li> </ul>

### Patterns of Attachment in Children

<u>Attachment Style</u>	<u>Parental Interactive Pattern</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Insecure – anxious/ ambivalent</li> <li>▷ Insecure – disorganized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▷ Inconsistently available, perceptive and responsive and intrusive</li> <li>▷ Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming</li> </ul>

## Attachment Figures

### Low Risk Non-Clinical Populations

❖ Secure	55-65%
❖ Ambivalent	5-15%
❖ Avoidant	20-30%
❖ Disorganized	20-40%
(Given a Best Fit Alternative)	

### High Risk, Parentally maltreated

❖ Disorganized	80%
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## Secure Attachment Promotes

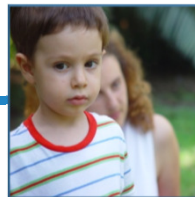
- ▷ Flexible self-regulation
- ▷ Prosocial behavior
- ▷ Empathy
- ▷ Positive sense of emotional well-being and self-esteem
- ▷ Coherent life-story



## What causes insecure attachment?

Unresolved trauma/loss in the life of the parents statistically predict attachment style far more than:

- ▷ Maternal Sensitivity
- ▷ Child Temperament
- ▷ Social Status
- ▷ Culture



## Implicit Versus Explicit Memory

### Implicit Memory



### Explicit Memory

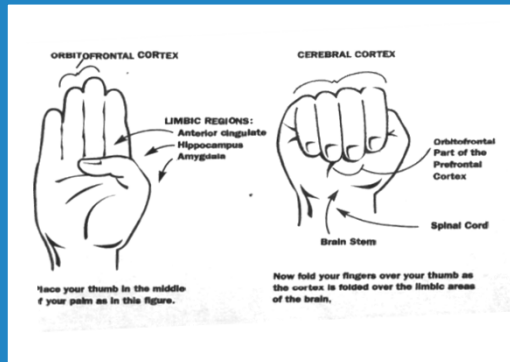




## The Brain in the Palm of Your Hand



Daniel Siegel, M.D. – Interpersonal Neurobiology

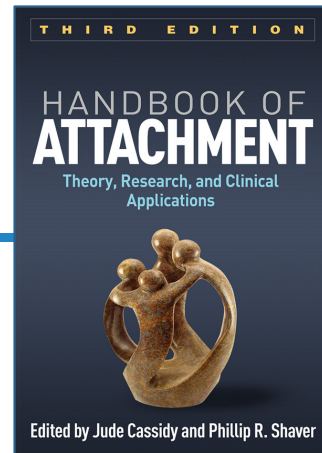


## 9 Important Functions of the Pre-Frontal Cortex

1. Body Regulation
2. Attunement
3. Emotional Balance
4. Response Flexibility
5. Empathy
6. Self-Knowing Awareness (Insight)
7. Fear Modulation
8. Intuition
9. Morality



A 1000-page summary of basic and applied attachment theory and research



From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.

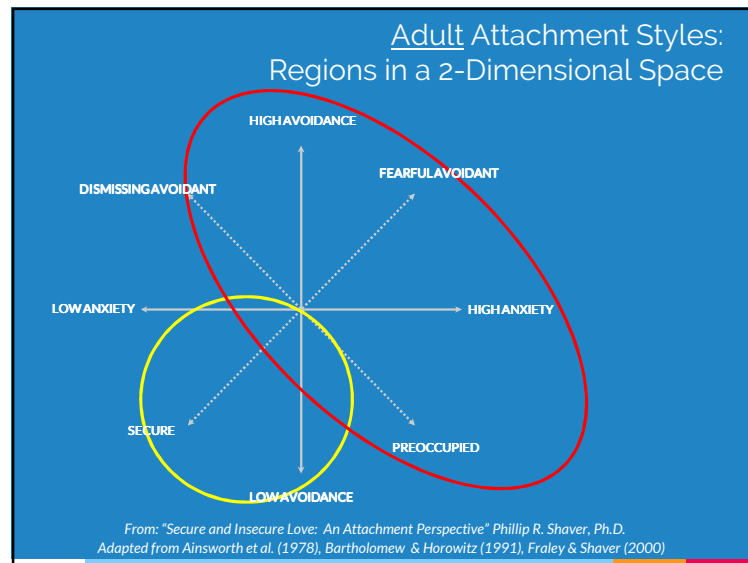
## Maternal caregiving at 18 months predicts self-reported anxiety and avoidance at age 22

(Zayas, Mischel, Shoda, & Aber, SPSS, 2010)

- > When each of 36 children were 18 months old, they were observed in a preschool playroom at Stanford University with their mother, and her behavior was reliably coded on three observational scales: sensitive, controlling, and unresponsive.
- > At 22 years of age, the now-grownup children completed a short version of the ECR as a measure of attachment anxiety and avoidance in romantic and self-mother relationships.
- > Attachment anxiety at age 22 correlated -.75 with maternal sensitivity measured 20 years earlier, and .70 with maternal controlling. Avoidance at age 22 correlated -.73 with maternal sensitivity and .52 with maternal controlling.
- > These correlations were much higher than similar correlations with self-reported attachment to mother at age 22.



From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.



### Self-Report Attachment Measure

(Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998)

#### Avoidance (18 items, $\alpha > .90$ )

1. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
2. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
3. I feel comfortable depending on relationship partners. (reverse-scored)
4. I turn to a relationship partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance. (reverse-scored)

#### Anxiety (18 items, $\alpha > .90$ )

1. I don't often worry about being rejected or abandoned. (reverse-scored)
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by a partner.
3. I get frustrated if a relationship partner is not available when needed.
4. I resent it when a partner spends time away from me.

From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.

### Attachment and Caregiving

Many studies have shown that attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to deficits in caring for relationship partners and engaging in altruistic behavior more generally (e.g., Kuncé & Shaver, 1994; Gillath et al., 2005).

Anxious people tend to be self-focused when engaged in supposedly caring/altruistic actions, leading to intrusiveness, poor assessment of others' actual needs, and personal distress.

Avoidant people tend to be less interested in helping others and to derogate needy others. They are relatively deficient in the domain of compassion and love.

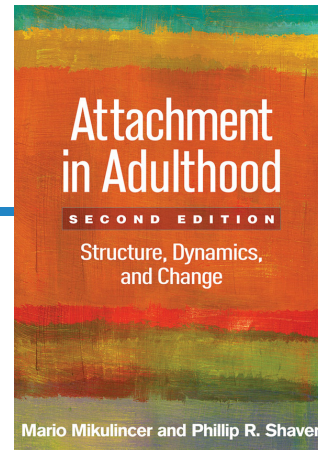
From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.

### Overall Conclusions

- ▷ Attachment theory has proven to be a very fruitful framework for studying social and psychological processes
- ▷ Our priming studies show that security infusions, whether administered consciously or subliminally, have beneficial effects on mental health and interpersonal relations
- ▷ This suggests that insecurity lies at the heart of many psychological and social pathologies (as Bowlby suspected from the beginning)
- ▷ Similar mental and social processes occur in different contexts: romantic relationships, teacher-student relationships, leader-follower relationships, etc.; and many attachment-related mental processes occur in religious/spiritual contexts (prayer, meditation)
- ▷ Humans' social-relational nature shows up everywhere and perhaps can eventually be conceptualized in a general theory

Since Hazan & Shaver (JPSP, 1987)...

Hundreds of studies using self-report attachment measures have been conducted



## Strategies for Developing More Secure Attachments



Strategies for Success in Developing More Secure Attachments

## Why is it important to make sense of your life?

Research shows that with self-reflection and understanding, we can free ourselves from the limitations of our upbringing.

Making sense of our lives by writing a coherent narrative allows us to have a sense of who we've been, who we are now, and who we'd like to become.



*"Research reveals that the more coherent a narrative we have of our own attachment issues in childhood, the more we've made sense of how our early life experiences have shaped us, the more likely our children will have a secure attachment to us and the more rewarding in general our interpersonal relationships will be." ~ Dr. Dan Siegel*

*"When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too." ~ Dr. Dan Siegel*



## Developing a Secure Attachment

- ▷ It is never too late to develop an Earned Secure Attachment. Models of attachment are changeable, but only if we come to understand them.
- ▷ Feel the full pain of your childhood and make sense of it.
- ▷ Grow toward security by developing integration from non-integrated brain functioning.
- ▷ Because our attachment ability is broken in a relationship, it can be fixed in a relationship. This can be with a romantic partner, a close friend or a good therapist. It takes time to develop an Earned Secure Attachment in a relationship. Stick with it!



## Questions for Self-Reflections

The following questions are designed for self-reflection, guiding you to think about your early life experiences. These questions were adapted from Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Brainstorm*. In your journal, write responses to each of the following questions. Your responses can be as long or as short as you like.

- ▷ Family Background
  - Who was in your family? Include significant adults, siblings, etc.
  - What was it like growing up in your family?
  - What was your parents' philosophy about raising children?
- ▷ Family Relationships and Attachment
  - Was there anyone in your life, other than your parents, who served as a parental figure or to whom you felt attached? Please state a few words to reflect your relationship with those individuals as well.
  - What were the major conflicts in your family? Did you have conflict with anyone?
  - Was there anyone you could turn to or any place you could go to help you feel comforted during difficult times?
- ▷ Childhood Experiences
  - Did you ever experience a long separation from your parents in childhood? What was that like for you?
  - How were you disciplined as a child?
  - Have you ever felt threatened by your parents?
  - Have you ever felt rejected by your parents?

## Looking Back on Your Early Relationships

Choose five adjective s or words that reflect your relationship with your mother or mother-like figure. Try to think back as far as you can remember to your early childhood.

Now, try to think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate each of the words you chose to describe the relationship. Write these memories or incidents down.

Adjective 1:  
Memory :

Adjective 2:  
Memory :

Adjective 3:  
Memory :

Adjective 4:  
Memory :

Adjective 5:  
Memory :

## Reflect on Your Attachment Models

Look over your responses to the "Questions for Self-Reflection" and "Look Back on Your Early Relationships" exercises. As you read through your responses, think about the attachment model or models you have experienced in your life. Were they secure, avoidant, ambivalent, and/or disorganized? Remember, many of us have experienced more than one of these attachment models.

Keep in mind that, as Dr. Dan Siegel writes in *Brainstorm*, "Your attachment model is a summary of how you've adapted to the relationships you've had with the important people in your life. It's not however, a sign of some problems to have inside you – it's merely a reflection of a learned response to real-life events, to your actual relationship in your early days."

We invite you to reflect on your attachment models in your journal. Consider how your early relationships and the attachment models you developed in response shape how you connect with others today.

## Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative

~ James Pennebaker & Janel Seagal, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1999



"Writing about personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes over the course of three days brings about improvements in mental and physical health."

"...writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences."

"...the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health."

"Forming a story about one's experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations."

## Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative

- ▷ Write as an adult.
- ▷ Write rationally.
- ▷ Write autobiographically.
- ▷ Write intuitively.
- ▷ Write with feeling.
- ▷ Write about how the past influences your present.
- ▷ Write with balance.
- ▷ Write with self-compassion.



## Toolkit

- ▷ Name It to Tame It
- ▷ Wheel of Awareness
- ▷ RAIN Approach
- ▷ Balancing the Mind
- ▷ Strengthen Your Internal Observer

## The RAIN Approach

- ▷ **R**ecognize
- ▷ **A**ccept/Acknowledge/Allow
- ▷ **I**nvestigate
- ▷ **N**on-Identification

## Identifying Traumas

List some emotional or physical traumas or traumatic events that have happened in your life. These do not have to be "Big T" traumas. A trauma can be any significant, distressing event or incident that shaped you as a child – things that made you feel bad, scared, ashamed, etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

## Understanding for Triggers



How Elements from our Past Trigger Us in the Present

## Choose Your Words

Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up when you get triggered emotionally. This is often some kind of fear about yourself or how others feel about you. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.



Lonely	Panicked	Sad
Dismissed and	Rejected	Forlorn
Unimportant	Like I Don't Matter	Disappointed
Frustrated and Helpless	Ignored	Isolated
On Guard and	Inadequate	Let Down
Uncomfortable	Shut Out and Alone	Numb
Scared	Confused and Lost	Humiliated
Hurt	Embarrassed	Overwhelmed
Hopeless	Ashamed	Small or Insignificant
Helpless	Blank	Unwanted
Intimidated	Afraid	Vulnerable
Threatened	Shocked	Worried

Source: Johnson, Sue, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, Little Brown & Co, 2011.

Think about a recent time that you got triggered...

*How did you feel at the time?*

*What event or feeling in your childhood do you think led you to feel triggered in the recent situation?*

*Write a story that makes sense out of why you felt triggered.*



## Practice Integrating Your Brain

Mindfulness helps integrate the brain for all attachment patterns.



## Interpersonal Neurobiology

Curious

Open

Accepting

Loving



## Self-Compassion

*“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”*

“

**From Kristin Neff:**

*Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.*

**Three Elements:**

1. Self-kindness Vs. Self-judgment
2. Mindfulness Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. Common humanity Vs. Isolation

SOURCE: <http://www.self-compassion.org/>

## Practice Integrating Your Brain

### **Avoidant Attachment:**

- ▷ Become aware of non-verbal signals. Try watching TV without the sound on.
- ▷ Build autobiographical memories. Write down the details of what you did today.
- ▷ Pay attention to any desires you have to be closer to people in your life. Reach out to another person to express your feelings of wanting to connect.

## Practice Integrating Your Brain

### **Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment:**

- ▷ Cultivate the ability to name your internal emotional states (“name it to tame it”). Simply describe what you feel, you don’t need to explain it.
- ▷ Write in a journal. Use your left hemispheres drive to tell a logical, linear, language-based story.
- ▷ Pay attention to when your attachments system goes into overdrive. Focus on keeping an internal state of calm at these times.

## Practice Integrating Your Brain

### Disorganized Attachment:

- ▷ Keep a journal and be sure to write about times when you feel triggered or your internal world may feel fragmented.
- ▷ When investigating your past, try to use the RAIN approach: recognize the trauma or loss, accept that it has occurred and may be in a state of being unresolved, investigate the nature of the experience in our past and present lives, and have non-identification with the experiences (meaning the events don't define you).
- ▷ SIFT. Pay attention to your sensations, feelings, thoughts and images, as they arise.

## eCourse



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## Treatment



## Develop Security in Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is an excellent vehicle to develop an earned secure attachment.

Find a therapist that resonates with you. Stay in therapy for two to five years.





## The making and breaking of affectional bonds. II. Some principals of psychotherapy. The Fiftieth Maudsley Lecture

~ John Bowlby, BJPsych, 1977



*“...a psychotherapist is seen to have a number of inter-related tasks: (a) to provide the patient with a secure base from which he, the patient, can explore himself and his relationships; (b) and (c) to examine with the patient the ways in which he tends to construe current interpersonal relationships, including that with the therapist, and the resulting predictions he makes and actions he takes, and the extent to which some may be inappropriate; (d) to help him consider whether his tendencies to misconstrue, and as a results to act misguidedly, can be understood by reference to the experiences he had with the attachment figured during his childhood...”*

## Attachment Theory-Based Interventions

Most existing therapies use techniques and principles that are in line with attachment theory.

For example, healthy therapeutic relationships, exploration of significant relationships in past.



From "Attachment Theory and Research: Implications for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy"  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1\\_24#page-1](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1_24#page-1)

## Implication of Attachment Theory for Treatment

- ▷ Behavioral and family systems therapies focus on making procedural memories conscious and available for inspection.
- ▷ Cognitive therapies focus on changing family semantic generalizations.
- ▷ Psychodynamic therapies focus on retrieval of forgotten episodic memories in order to process them through to resolution.
- ▷ Meditative therapies emphasize the need to attain distance from distressing life events in order to achieve integration.

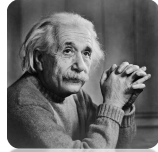
*Psychotherapy promotes self-understanding by illuminating how clients' internal working models as opposed to external forces are what shape the present quality of their interpersonal relationships.*

From "The Role of Adult Attachment Styles in Psychopathology and Psychotherapy Outcomes"  
<http://cmapspubli2.ihmc.us/rid=1LQRRMMH0-FYR87-1L42/pdf.pdf>

## A Few of Many Clinically-Oriented Books Based Partly on Shaver's Research...

- ▷ Johnson, S. (2008). Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- ▷ Johnson, S. (2013). Love sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- ▷ Levine, A., & Heller, R. (2010). Attached: The new science of adult attachment and how it can help you find – and keep – love. New York, NY: Tarcher/Penguin.
- ▷ Marmarosh, C. L., Markin, R. D., & Spiegel, E. B. (2013). Attachment in group psychotherapy. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ▷ Obegi, J. H., & Berant, E. (Eds.) (2008). Attachment theory and research in clinical work with adults. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

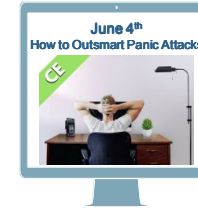
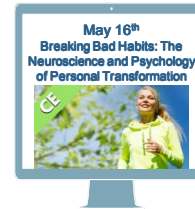
## Albert Einstein



“

*"A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."*

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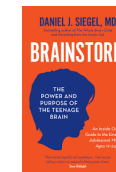
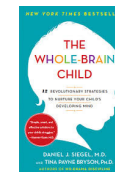
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