

# the Attachment Network of Manitoba

May 2009 Newsletter

## HELLO MEMBERS!

The Attachment Network of Manitoba is pleased to bring you this edition of our Newsletter issued to coincide with our first ever AGM! The intent of our newsletter was initially to share network news and information, provide updates and to pass on stories. With the launch of the website, we now have a "virtual representation" of the Network with speedy, in-depth access to all aspects of who we are and our activities. So, the piece that is left from the original purpose is the stories, your voices. We invite submissions for the sections "Putting it into Practice", Literature Reviews, Resource Highlights, or "Salute to...", or anything else that captures your imagination! We hope you enjoy the read and by all means, feel free to contact us through the website and let us know what you think!

The Network wishes to acknowledge all the time, energy and creativity so generously provided to us by our webmaster, Guy Dugas of Spright.ca. Many, many thanks Guy!

spright.ca



Bill Whelan, Circle of Security trainer

## SALUTE TO YVETTE PRESTON

Past Chair of the Attachment Network of Manitoba

*The Attachment Network would like to acknowledge Yvette for her enormous contributions including her passion, her vision, and her experience and for just being her! She was there when the first baby steps were taken and with her guidance we can now walk we now are walking with confidence and a sense of purpose. We are grateful to know that she remains in the wings for us to seek her out when the need arises, (or just to have a fun gathering at the Forks!).*



**Yvette, we wish you well as you go on to explore new things, and want you to know that you are always welcome to touch base whenever you feel like it.**

## What John has Taught Me

by Yvette Preston

John Bowlby, my hero, is the British child psychologist who formulated the theory of attachment. I carry his wisdom with me, everywhere I go, and when I'm contemplating a difficult moment in a relationship, I wonder, "What would John do?" Although John Bowlby has left us many years ago, his wisdom continues to spark the curiosity of some of the most brilliant minds in the field of psychology, which in turn, resulted in the publication of some of the most brilliant readings,

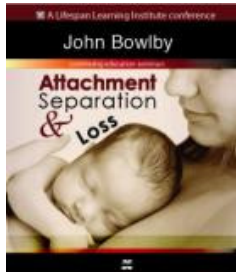
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teachings and research by these same individuals. Some of whom, I might add, have set foot right here in Manitoba, sharing their knowledge and expertise. As a result, Manitoba has a pool of individuals who have begun the journey of specializing in attachment based techniques, as well as others who continue to further their knowledge through a variety of workshops, conferences and training opportunities.



As for me, I can't get enough of the brilliant readings that have come to be written over the years. (Have you seen the recommended readings on our web page?) In studying attachment theory, I have learned many things about relationships, children, child rearing, adolescents, adults, and myself by exploring this ever expanding field of knowledge.

John's theory has touched me in many personal ways. Once I over came the shock of realizing that I was not a perfect person, nor a perfect parent, and most shockingly that mother had her share of faults, I was better able to appreciate the struggles and pressures we sometimes impose upon ourselves and on those around us. Generally speaking, I am more conscious of the fact that we are more the same than we are different. As the theory states, we all need to feel a sense of security in our environment, through access to a significant other, be it a parent, a spouse or a best friend. This means that it is important to respond with sensitivity to those who seek to be understood. I learned that an anxious mind is not primed for learning, and that I must decrease anxiety in order to learn, and to properly carry out the tasks of daily living. I also learned that my goal in life is not to be self sufficient and independent, but rather to be interdependent, meaning that sometimes I'll need you and sometimes you'll need me, and that's ok. In fact, it is what attaches us to one another and creates long lasting relationships. So when I think about John and his theory, I remind myself that my actions and reactions have an impact on those around me. These may be simple lessons, but they are not always obvious choices when buttons are pushed, tension is high, and competing needs to be heard exist. I have learned that taking a deep breath, slowing down, and doing my part in creating an environment conducive to learning has big payoffs.

But putting my experience aside, science has volumes of proof that these approaches have immense neurobiological benefits. If John Bowlby could see the advances in brain research that now supports the theory both through neurochemistry and through the anatomical development of the brain, he would look at us with pride and say "I told you so".

By the way, did I mention Dr Gabor Mate is my other hero?



## PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

### Helping New Foster Parents Understand the Importance of Attachment

by Leslie Johnston

*Social Worker, Foster Home Development, Winnipeg Child and Family Services Branch*

For many years now, the staff of Winnipeg Child and Family Services Branch has been devoting a section of our Foster Parent Orientation training to the topic of Attachment. Based on the Competency Based training model, the section has provided a basic introduction to the concept of attachment (including symptoms of disrupted attachment in children), as well as concrete examples of ways in which Foster Parents can actively promote attachment with their Foster Children. Our belief was that it was essential that new Foster Parents have at least a rudimentary understanding of this concept, given that disrupted attachment is an obvious reality for many children in care.



Over the past year, we have begun to evolve even further in the provision of pre-service training on the topic of attachment. Within our Foster Care Program we are fortunate to have Social Worker Tracy Miller, who with the support of Winnipeg Child and Family Services Branch, has completed the Modified Interaction Guidance Training through the Aulneau Centre. Utilizing this training, Tracy has developed, along with co-worker Marge Chomoway, and Marymound colleague Pam Freeth, a day-long workshop that builds on the rudimentary concepts introduced in our Orientation sessions. As of this past spring, completion of this one-day session has become a pre-licensing expectation for our new foster parent applicants, essentially becoming "Session 5" of our Orientation series. The feedback that we have received from these applicants with respect to this additional training has been overwhelmingly positive. Many have commented that this training has helped them not only with their foster children, but with their own children as well!

As I know many of you have, my Orientation co-presenter Jana Gerbrandt and I have begun to view many of the challenges faced by foster parents through an "attachment lens". Accordingly, this permeates the work that we do with foster parents, which includes the process of preparing them to foster. For example, during the orientation sessions, when questions arise pertaining to discipline, we tend to couch our responses in terms that encourage the promotion of attachment as the long-term key to true discipline. This past June, we took this perspective one step further and incorporated sections of the newly released video "Listening to Baby"

into our Orientation. Using several of the vignettes, we encouraged participants to begin to see behaviour as a child's way of communicating his or her needs and feelings to us. We used this as a jumping-off-point and then moved on to providing participants with scenarios involving older children, and asked them to work in small groups to try to uncover the "message", "feeling" or "need" behind the child's behaviour. This proved to be an extremely productive exercise. With the help of the video, and its crystal clear demonstration of the concept of the feeling/need behind the behaviour, our participants were able to generalize this to challenging situations involving older children as well. The fact that the video is also a lot of fun, and extremely well-produced helped to capture people's attention and keep them interested and even entertained!

We are gratified by this initial experience and are very hopeful that by continuing to educate our Foster Parents on the important concept of attachment, we will help them to become more skilled in meeting the needs of the children in their care. It is anticipated that this will also enhance their experience as Foster Parents and allow them to take greater pride in their accomplishments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Angels in the Nursery: The Intergenerational Transmission of Benevolent Parental

*Alicia F. Lieberman, Elena Padron, Patricia Van Horn, and William W. Harris*

*Reviewed and submitted by, Karen Johnston, FASD Outreach Program*



In this article the researchers propose that there are angels in the nursery, which are defined as care-receiving experiences between parent and child, where the child feels perfectly understood, accepted and loved.

These researchers feel that uncovering the angels is very vital and helpful for traumatized parents. The angels can serve as protective factors for the overwhelming traumas they may have experienced.

They propose that there are angels which are passed on from one generation to the next, but may be seldom noticed or talked about. Parents unknowingly carry forth their angels from their childhoods into their baby's nursery.

Researchers believe that the angels and ghosts within the nursery compete against each other, and shape the development of the child.

They feel that uncovering the angels can be growth promoting and of value within the therapeutic work.

Looking for early experiences of safety, intimacy, joy, and other pleasurable experiences with the primary caregivers can encourage a greater sense of self worth.

They propose that creating a balance in interventions between pleasurable experiences and the experiences of pain conflict and alienation from caregivers can be helpful in treatment.

### Study

Clinical material was gathered from child-parent psychotherapist with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample of children aged birth to six years and their parents.

The children were referred because of symptoms associated with witnessing domestic violence, physical abuse or traumatic bereavement.

Parenting difficulties took the form of severe conflicts in the parent-child relationship.

Researchers reviewed clinical charts containing narrative's notes of therapeutic sessions and assessment protocols that included transcripts of the AA1.

Parents were asked to reflect on their early relationships with their parents and their thoughts on how these experiences influenced their hopes for their children's future.

Then they reviewed parental narratives in assessment and clinical notes to identify early experiences of love, care and nurturing that might stand out as a source of strength in the parents, sense of themselves and ability to care for their children.

The question that the researchers had is why are some parents affected by their past and will re-enact the trauma onto their children, whereas other parents despite their childhood traumas protect their children from repetition of the past.

They have found that some maltreated children who are securely attached may be able to register simultaneously the bad and the good parts of their parents which are the building blocks of mental health.

The researchers believe that the transmission of nurturing experiences come from different facets of early interpersonal affective experiences such as mirroring, attunement, containment, security, refuelling, and secure base. The moments of particular connectedness become part of the child's identity. These experiences may not necessarily come from the parent, but another adult.

The question that the researchers posed is what accounts for the repression of angel-like early experiences?





They believe this, the unfulfilled wish for a happier life course, can trigger grief and mourning for missed opportunities.

The re-experience of lost goodness can make the loss even more painful making the retrieval of angel-like memories a destabilizing emotional experience. On the other hand, researchers found that if a parent evokes good memories of parent-child experiences may become an incentive and a reward and can be a starting point for the therapist.

An example they gave was in a therapeutic setting. A treatment goal was for the clients to find a word or phrase that holds special meaning and elicits inner strength. Some women selected words as hope, endurance and baby. The words that these women selected helped them to gain an inner balance and re-establish a more harmonious interaction with their children. The word selected by one participant was baby, which helped her to recall a time where her mother was patient and able to calm her down when she was upset. This reminded her that she was a good person and mother. This was helpful in guiding her behaviour when her child acted up, she would say this word to herself.

Another therapeutic vignette shared in this article was about a therapist who had arrived at a client's home. She had arrived at a time when the parent and child were frustrated. The parent was trying to untangle a



kite and couldn't, and the child was upset that they wouldn't be able to fly the kite. The therapist untangled the kite and they all went out to fly the kite. This experience was good, because the parent was able to share with the therapist an experience of how her and her dad used to share the same experience and how connected she felt. The beginning of the session was marked by an angry and distance mood that was triggered by the tangled kite string, which for the mother was one of the few pleasurable memories she had of her adoptive father. The therapist had restored the memory by untangling the kite, which allowed with the physical re-enactment.

This vignette is an example of how the ability to retain loving memories can be one of the building blocks of psychological health.

They discuss a play therapy session with a five year old child who had an alcoholic father, who would go in these alcoholic rages, which scared her.

Through play the therapist could see mixed feelings of fear of her father, and also the protective factors are important people in her life as her grandparents, that would make her feel secure, and safe. The child communicates this



through play by having animals surround her bed at night, to protect her from her father. This illustrates how suppressed memories can be supportive ones, as well as painful mixed together. It's important for the therapist to pull out the positive to help the client gain a compassionate view of the attachment figure.



A third example that they gave is a father and son relationship, which is problematic, due to a miss match between his father's expectations around the sports that his son participated in. Through therapy the father was able to identify the negative attributes of his own father, the ghost, which presented themselves in his parenting. He was also able to find positive memories which counteracted the one-sided negative perception.

The research has found that by finding the angels in the nursery become valuable in maximizing the potential for growth in parent-child relationships.

The researchers also find that the current tools used to assess adults working models of parent-child relationships can be used to identify the presence and importance of angels in the nursery.

Researchers feel that perhaps the data obtained from these tools to determine whether the positive and negative experiences from childhood would better equip parents to mirror and empathize with their children.

They have found it helpful to cultivating a frame of mind where experiences of joy, intimacy, pleasure and love are considered to be as worthy of therapeutic attention as negative experiences can be of great assistance towards psychological health.

They also believe that the result of both recognition and acceptance of both positive and negative experiences can perhaps result in forgiveness and compassion.



**There's always a reason to celebrate,  
right Tracey?**

**Thanks go out to Pam Freeth, for the time that  
you spent with us on the Board**

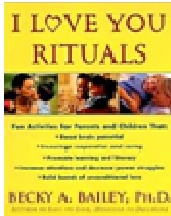
**We appreciated your expertise!**

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

### "I Love You Rituals"

Becky A. Bailey

*Reviewed by Julia Wellwood,  
FASD Outreach Program*



I recently reconnected with this book, much to my delight. I was introduced to it by my colleague a number of years ago and remembered the feeling that the book left with me about how gentle playfulness paired with imagination can create powerful connections between a child and their parent. As I read the book again, an image came to mind of my two boys when they were little, running around after their bath, naked and dripping. All I had to say to "collect" them was "Who wants a Pinetree rub?" and they would come running to me. Pinetree was the name by which my father was known to his grandchildren and I realized that the Pinetree rub was one of those rituals of which Becky Bailey writes about in *I Love You Rituals*. When I was a little girl and spent hours at the beach in the cold Atlantic breakers, my father would wrap his blue-lipped daughters in a big towel and rub us down. Despite the shivering, it was a warm moment. It went on to be passed, naturally and without effort, through me to my sons, complete with its own variation of getting "lost" under the towel only to be found again part by part. After being "lost" and "found" again, we were connected and ready for the next part of the bed time routine.

Becky talks about routines and rituals and makes the following distinctions between the two. She describes routines as being essential for young children for providing predictability to their day and for developing their capacity for self regulation. She says that while the goal of routines is continuity, the goal of rituals is connection. As I read this I think of the children with FASD with whom I work. The best practices associated with FASD emphasize consistent routines and predictable transitions paired with visual cues, and even so, I come across children experiencing a great deal of trouble despite these practices being in place. What they are often missing is a sense of connection, which is not surprising given the degree of attachment disruption that many of them have experienced. Connection, the way Becky speaks of it, occurs in the context of eye contact and touch paired with delight and loving words. Children need to be noticed, they need to feel seen in order to properly develop a sense of self and the emerging self control that follows. Rituals combine these elements of noticing, touch and delight and lead the way to better outcomes. At the brain level, these elements appear to play a role in developing the dopamine system which supports focus and goal

directed activity and is responsible for creating the good feelings that come from loving satisfying connection.

According to Becky, rituals create a designated "space" in the day where togetherness can occur and when you strengthen the connection when you strengthen the connection you strengthen cooperation. This in turn reminds me of how Gordon Neufeld talks about "collecting our kids", especially before critical times such as going to daycare or coming home, or when you need to ask them to do something. It also reminds me of what Bill Whelan, our Circle of Security attachment intervention trainer recently said, that "it is in the small spaces of the day where healing and repair can take place". Finally, I am reminded of how Beverly James, referring to her work with children with attachment trauma, describes the importance of giving children the experience of being seen, and how through touch you can name and claim your child.

I found the first three chapters where Becky describes her philosophy to be a very worthwhile read. The remaining chapters contain examples of rituals sorted into various categories including interactive finger plays, soothing and relaxing games, and hide and seek. They provide lots of ideas and therefore a process to get started, but my sense is that the best rituals are the ones that grow out of your own interactions with your child.

So whether you have a child who is at risk due to a neurobehavioural diagnosis like FASD or attachment experiences over which you feel you had no control, these little rituals are something that you can do in the here and now. They provide a way to enter the moment, to be fully present for your child, and to invite your child to be fully present with you.



**Thanks to all our network members who have  
contributed to our subcommittees.**

**It is through you that we are able to put our  
vision into practice!**



**COS trainees at Phase 1 last September**