



OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

In the context of trauma, attachment failure is inevitable and inescapable, leaving behind a lasting imprint on all future relationships, including the therapeutic one. Instead of experiencing therapy and the therapist as a haven of safety, the traumatized client will be driven by powerful wishes and fears of relationship. Because the capacity to tolerate affect without becoming overwhelmed develops in the context of secure attachment, therapeutic work will be challenged by the client's vulnerability to affect dysregulation and recurrent crises.

In order to address the trauma, therapists increasingly find that they must first address its effects on the client's attachment patterns. Until the client's disorganized attachment, traumatic transference, and disturbances in the capacity to self-regulate and self-soothe are addressed, the therapy either becomes stagnant or unstable. In this presentation, we will address the impact of traumatic and sub-optimal attachment experiences on affect regulation, exploring how to understand the effects of traumatic attachment from a psychobiological perspective and how to work with both the somatic and relational legacy of attachment.

Using interventions drawn from the neuroscience and attachment research and from Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, a body-centered talking therapy tailored to the treatment of trauma and affect dysregulation, this workshop will utilize a combination of lecture, video, and experiential exercises to explore a neurobiologically-informed understanding of the impact of trauma on attachment behavior, somatic interventions for challenging trauma-related relational patterns, and opportunities to use ourselves as "neurobiological regulators" of the client's dysregulated emotional and autonomic states.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- identify trauma-related attachment patterns
- describe disorganized attachment behavior and its effects on affect regulation
- describe the theory and practice of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy
- utilize Sensorimotor Psychotherapy techniques to address attachment and trauma-related issues in psychotherapy
- describe somatic interventions to address preoccupied, avoidant, and disorganized/unresolved attachment
- employ interactive neurobiological regulation to address affect dysregulation

Program Outline

1. The Neurobiology of Attachment Formation

- An evolutionary view of attachment patterns in humans
- Early attachment as a somatic experience

- Attachment styles and brain development
- Development of affect regulation abilities
- Autonomic arousal and affect regulation
- Effects of traumatic threat on the body and nervous system

2. Attachment Styles from a Neurobiological Perspective

- Attachment style and maternal behavior
- Regulatory ability as an adaptation to maternal behavior
- Secure-autonomic attachment patterns
- Avoidant-Dismissing attachment patterns
- Ambivalent-Preoccupied attachment patterns

3. Disorganized Attachment and Trauma

- When the source of safety is the source of threat
- “Frightened” and “Frightening” caregiving
- Disorganized-unresolved attachment in caregivers
- Correlation with maltreatment in childhood
- Disorganized-unresolved attachment as survival defense
- Statistical predictor of Borderline Personality Disorder
- Long-term impact of disorganized attachment
- Evolutionary-determined internal tensions
- Impact on affect regulation/dysregulation

4. Introduction to Sensorimotor Psychotherapy

- A body-oriented talking therapy
- Theoretical foundation
- Focus on the organization of experience in the body
- Neuralplasticity
- Procedural learning and memory
- Tracking the body

5. Facilitating Mindfulness

- Mindfulness and procedural learning
- Mindfulness as an affect regulator
- Directed vs. directionless mindfulness
- Nonjudgmental self-observation and awareness
- Non-attachment to thoughts, feelings, and memories
- Ability to shift focus
- Attunement and contact
- Mindful experiments as interventions

6. Effects of Disorganized-Unresolved Attachment on Transference

- Phobia of therapy and the therapist
- Traumatic transference and disorganized attachment
- Affect dysregulating effects of psychotherapy
- Safety and dysregulation
- Induction of the therapist as affect regulator
- Risk management and de-stabilization
- Adaptive and defensive projective identification

7. Stabilizing Traumatic Attachment Responses

- Therapist as “consultant”
- Role of psychoeducation
- Balancing attachment striving and defense
- Right brain-to-right brain communication
- Somatic resources for relationship
- Increasing regulatory ability in therapy
- Somatic countertransference

8. Neuralplasticity and Affect Regulation

- Lessons from neuralplasticity research
- Inhibiting habitual trauma responses
- Learning new physical patterns
- Role of repetition
- Transitional objects

9. The Therapist as Neurobiological Regulator

- Dysregulated states and psychotherapy
- What does it mean to be a ‘neurobiological regulator’?
- Lessons from the attachment research
- Minimizing negative affect
- Maximizing positive affect
- Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy
- Successful experiences of feeling regulated while in relationship

Note: Videos demonstrating techniques are generally not included in the electronic recording of this seminar for client privacy and copyright reasons.