NRF Steps One & Two
In Ourselves, Our Relationships, Our Clients

Connie Lillas, PhD, MFT, RN
www.the-nrf.com

3 Key Concepts, 3 Key Steps

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The Neurorelational Framework (NRF) “translates” what matters in early brain development into three clinical steps:

**What Matters:**
- Stress Resilience versus Toxic Stress
- "Serve & return" levels of high quality engagement
- Development of brain networks and circuits

**Assess & Intervene:**
- *Step 1:* Adaptive vs. toxic stress
- *Step 2:* Age appropriate vs. low levels of relational engagement
- *Step 3:* Age appropriate developmental & functional brain capacities vs. delays or disorders

_Ourselves, Our Partners, Our Children_

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NRF Step #1 & 2
Basic & Intermediate Material

Ourselves, Our Parents, Their Children
Catch Yourselves At Your **Best & Worst!** Ourselves, Our Partners, Our Children

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**Chinese Proverb**

I hear and I forget

I see and I remember

I do and I understand
Roots Run Deep...

Flooded
Hyperalert
Alert Processing
Hypoalert

Child  MOM

Family #1

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### NRF’s 3 Steps and 4 Tiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1: Basic</th>
<th>Tier 2: Intermediate</th>
<th>Tier 3: Advanced</th>
<th>Tier 4: Synthesis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Physiology, Sleep-Awake Cycle:</td>
<td>Step 1: Heart, Hand, &amp; Head who We Are - Best &amp; Worst Interpersonal modes</td>
<td>Step 1: Inside &amp; Outside Cues [Physiological Equipment]</td>
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<td>Step 3: Micro level: Current Capacities Worksheet</td>
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### NRF Step #1 and Tier 2

- You are now in the INTERMEDIATE level of NRF information
- Folks in Group #1, who are only doing a one-time assessment will not have time to use this in the interview setting.
- However, it is important that even if you do not discuss these items with your family, you will “automatically” know where they are at with their relational style based on a good assessment of the Colors and their Patterns
Parallel Processes...

Integrating...from micro to macro

- Personal
- Interpersonal
- Institutional
- Cultural

Simultaneously, similar dynamics occurring on multiple levels

---

Parallel Process

- Use of all three steps to hold the baby and parent in mind
- Use of all three steps to hold yourself in mind!
- We focus on the use of ourselves because the power of the relationship is the most powerful change agent (we are part of a “relationship-based” approach to treatment)
- Stress responses relate to our transference & countertransference which we bring to Reflective Facilitation to digest
- These stress responses are also relational styles that can influence ruptures in the relationship and to how we repair them
NRF Step #1 & 2
Basic & Intermediate Material

Facilitate Recovery in Self

Put Your Oxygen Mask on First,
Then Help Others

Step #1 (Use of Self, T & CT)
DUAL TRACTS

- Body Patterns  BASIC
- Relational Patterns  INTERMEDIATE
Follow the colors!!!

- Once you done the “heavy” lifting of mapping out the stress recovery and stress responses in Step 1, you have done the bulk of the work for this part of Step 1 with HHH.
- Often, you may not get into the HHH rubric at front end of treatment! But it’s so useful as a clinical tool that you can have it ready to go in your mind.
- It informs you as to the clinical use of yourself and where a family has the most need
Green Zone is ‘just right’...
for learning and relationships

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Green Zone Grows!

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www.clipartof.com - 1114313
Green Zone: Reading alert processing cues

- Eyes
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Gestures
- Body movements
- Rhythm
- Intensity

- Bright, shiny
- Joy, Full range
- Modulation
- Relaxed with good tone
- Stability and Balance
- Fluctuating
- Midrange

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Who We Are At Our BEST!

HEART
- We follow the lead – we build trust

HAND
- We take the lead - we guide

HEAD
- We follow & lead – we collaborate

DIRECTS

RESPONDS

REFLECTS

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Awake States with Stress Responses

Step #1

Consciousness in the Neonatal Period

- Alertness
  - Can be alert to your voice

- Active movement
  - E.g., feet moving, hands moving

- Pain
  - E.g., respond to pain

- Movement
  - E.g., head movement

- Crying
  - E.g., responsive to crying

- Stirring
  - E.g., responsive to stimulation

- Activity
  - E.g., active in response to stimuli

- Etc.
  - E.g., responsive to other sensory inputs

Why the order of Heart, Hand & Head?

- How we build relationships
- The use of ourselves
- What’s been the advantages of this type of parenting?
- What’s been missing?
- If no heart, must begin here to repair the relationship! This will parallel the first 3 levels of engagement in Step #2
Finding Yourself
Heart Personalities
(Caring Feeling Matters)

Heart Personalities: Lead by Empathy

- Are warm & engaging
- Follow other’s lead
- Learn through feelings
- Mirror and offer empathy
- Prefer to seek harmony in relationships

Finding Yourself
Hand Personalities
(Active Doing Matters)

Hand Personalities Lead by Action:

- Like to be doing things with others
- Take the lead
- Are directive
- Set up structure and follow procedures
- Coach & mentor others
- Can tolerate conflict
- Press for results

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Finding Yourself
Head Personalities (Logical Thinking Matters)

Head Personalities Lead by Thinking:

- Are reflective
- Educate others
- Problem-solve
- Negotiate with others
- Gather knowledge
- Use logic
- Prefer self-reliance

Finding Yourself
In a natural disaster, would you...?

Hurricane Katrina

Adapted from Lillas & Turnbull, © 2009
Pour out your feelings?
Express yourself by calling, sending cards or letters, offering prayers from the heart...

Adapted from Lillas & Turnbull, © 2009

Finding Yourself
In a natural disaster, would you…?

Move into action?
Express yourself by wanting to go to help clean up the mess, help build houses, organize and collect supplies to be sent to the area...

Adapted from Lillas & Turnbull, © 2009
Solve the problems?
Express yourself by reading, talking, & thinking about the problems and coming up with solutions....

Finding Yourself
In a natural disaster, would you...?

Finding Yourself
In a time of grief, would you...?

• If a loved-one of yours or of a friend’s died, would you...
  – Let’s hear the heart responses
  – Let’s hear the hand responses
  – Let’s hear the head responses
Stress & Stress Recovery
Individual Differences

Who We Are At Our Best!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heart Under Coordination</th>
<th>Hand Under Coordination</th>
<th>Head Under Coordination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsive Engagers/Feelers</td>
<td>Directive Doers</td>
<td>Reflective Thinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body: Calm, alert, relaxed</td>
<td>Body: Calm, alert, relaxed</td>
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Adapted from Lillas & Turnbull, © 2009

How much Heart, Hands, or Head did you get growing up?

HEART
RESPONDS
We build trust

HAND
DIRECTS
We guide

HEAD
REFLECTS
We collaborate

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Who We Are At Our WORST?

Step #1:
How do we identify stress & stress recovery?

A. Recognize what stress recovery looks like and who we are at our Best!

B. Recognize three primary stress responses and who we are at our Worst!

C. Recognize four toxic stress patterns
## Dual Track – Body Responses & Relational Style

### Dual Track
- **Body Responses**
- **Relational Style**

### Awake States with Stress Responses

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Step #1</th>
<th>Stress</th>
<th>Relaxed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLOSER</strong></td>
<td>Distracted, unable to focus</td>
<td>Calm, focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td>Feeling rushed, states of mind</td>
<td>Feeling relaxed, focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMOTION</strong></td>
<td>Feelings of anger, frustration</td>
<td>Feelings of calmness, contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TENSION</strong></td>
<td>Muscles tense, posture rigid</td>
<td>Muscles relaxed, posture fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSE</strong></td>
<td>Defensive, resistant</td>
<td>Open, adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSES</strong></td>
<td>Need to control, rigid</td>
<td>Open, receptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Dual Track
- **Body Responses**
- **Relational Style**
Who We Are At Our Worst!

- **HEART**: Giving in too much!
- **HAND**: Expecting too much!
- **HEAD**: Ignoring too much!
- **DEFERS**: Giving in too much!
- **DEMANDS**: Expecting too much!
- **DETACHES**: Ignoring too much!
Reading Non-Verbal Cues:

**Combo Zone**

A Baby's Vigilant State:

- Eyes
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Gestures
- Body movements
- Rhythm
- Intensity

- Wide open
- Raised eyebrows
- High pitched
- Tense or clinging
- Rigid
- Fast
- Moderate to high

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“When States Become Traits”

Our Colored Stress Zones are...

- Body responses
  - Combo

Body responses set the stage for how we relate to others

- Relational responses
  Combo=Heart=Defers

Finding Yourself Under Stress

Combo Zone

Combo zone under stress can give too much

- Defer to others
- Over extend
- Do too much for others
- Avoid conflict
- Eventually feel resentment for not being appreciated and taken advantage of
Awareness of Self as a Cultural Being

**Heart Under Stress**
- Overly accommodating
- Anxious to fix things

**Heart In Green Zone**
- Empathic
- Connecting

**Dysfunctional rescuing**

**Functional helper**
- Sharing information
- Making contact

---

Reading Non-Verbal Cues:

**Red Zone**

A Baby’s Flooded State:
Red Zone: Reading Flooded Cues

- Eyes
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Gestures
- Body movements
- Rhythm
- Intensity

✓ Direct, intense
✓ Anger, disgust
✓ Hostile
✓ Forceful/threatening
✓ Rapid motion
✓ Fast, impulsive
✓ High

“When States Become Traits”

Our Colored Stress Zones are...

- Body responses
  - Red

Body responses set the stage for how we relate to others

- Relational responses
  Red=Hand=Demand
Red zone stress can demand too much:
- Controlling & intrusive
- Verbally hostile & attacking
- Escalate conflict
- Expect too much of others
- Dominate & threaten others

Finding Yourself Under Stress
Red Zone

Awareness of Self as a Cultural Being
Hand Under Stress
- Overly demanding
- Hostile attack
- Blaming the victim
- Blaming the system

Hand In Green Zone
- Assertive
- Directive, action oriented
- Confrontation
- Standing up
- Taking responsibility
- Noticing and sharing differences
Reading Non-Verbal Cues: Blue Zone

A Baby’s Shut-Down State

Blue Zone: Reading Shut-Down Cues

- Eyes
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Gestures
- Body movements
- Rhythm
- Intensity

✓ Glazed
✓ Expressionless or sad
✓ Flat
✓ Slow moving
✓ Slumped
✓ Slow, delayed
✓ Low

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“When States Become Traits”

Our Colored Stress Zones are...

- Body responses
  - Blue
  Body responses set the stage for how we relate to others
- Relational responses
  Blue=Head=Detach

Finding Yourself Under Stress
Blue Zone

Blue zone under stress can detach too much
- Dismiss others
- Ignore others
- Quiet anger
- Lack the need for others
- Escape into private world
### Awareness of Self as a Cultural Being

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Head Under <strong>Stress</strong></th>
<th>Head In <strong>Green Zone</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overly detached</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly dismissive</td>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive-aggressive anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problem-solving</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Antagonistic avoidance</em></td>
<td><em>Taking responsibility</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Denial of differences, culture, political significance of oppression</em></td>
<td><em>Learning, asking, &amp; noticing the impact</em></td>
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**Connie Lillas, PhD, MFT, RN**
infantmentalhealth@earthlink.net
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At Our Best & Our Worst

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<td>Heart Under Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defers too much</td>
<td>Demands too much</td>
<td>Detaches too much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over accommodates</td>
<td>Dominates and controls</td>
<td>Dismisses and ignores</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body Under Stress</td>
<td>Body Under Stress</td>
<td>Body Under Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypervigilance</td>
<td>Crying, Anger, Rage</td>
<td>Shut Down, Glazed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear, Anxiety</td>
<td>Hyperactivity, Mania</td>
<td>Depression, Dissociation</td>
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Adapted from Lillas & Turnbull, © 2009

When an “ism” Happens

Individual Uniqueness is Denied

One Aspect of Collective Identity is Given Negative Connotation

Common Humanity is Denied

REACH Center for Multicultural Education who adapted them from the work of Joe Boyer.
### Types of Oppression

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<th>Historically Included Groups</th>
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#### A Working Conceptualization of Historically Excluded (Target) and Historically Included (Non-Target) Groups

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### Our default mode reactions towards cultural differences & oppression

- **Heart responses**
  - Dysfunctional rescuing
- **Hand responses**
  - Blaming the victim or the system
- **Head responses**
  - Denial or avoidance of cultural differences and oppression
  - When have you been on the non-dominant side?
    - Your stress response?
  - When have you been on the dominant side?
    - Your stress response?
      - Batts, Capitman, & Lundrum-Brown, 2011
Heart, Hand, and Head Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heart 1s</th>
<th>Warm Empathic Connect Repair</th>
<th>Functional helper Share info. Make contact Cross-sector communication</th>
<th>Overly accommodating Overly controlling Anxious to fix things</th>
<th>Dysfunctional rescuing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hand 2s</td>
<td>Assertive Directive, action oriented</td>
<td>Take the lead Confront Stand up Notice and share differences</td>
<td>Overly demanding Hostile attack</td>
<td>Blaming the victim Blaming the system</td>
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<td>Head 3s</td>
<td>Neutral Reflective Problem-solve Dr. Connie Lillas</td>
<td>Take responsibility Learn, ask, &amp; notice the impact Dr. Valerie Batts</td>
<td>Overly detached Overly dismissive Passive-aggressive anger Denial Dr. Connie Lillas</td>
<td>Passive avoidance Antagonistic avoidance Denial of differences across domains Dr. Valerie Batts</td>
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Cultural Connections to Stress Responses

What is your family system’s default mode for stress responses?  
What pattern do you see from your family of origin to your current family?  
How do these automatic stress responses effect your cultural sensitivity?  
How do these effect you when you are in a dominant or non-dominant context?
## NRF’s 3 Steps and 4 Tiers

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<tr>
<td>History Worksheet</td>
<td>Purple Wheel</td>
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Step Two: Levels of Engagement

“serve & return”

Begin Bottom-up with Levels 1, 2, and 3

Resilience Factors

- Providing emotional care supports resilience
- Resilient factors come from:
  1. Concrete support in times of need (requires connections)
  2. Parental resilience (stress & stress recovery)
  3. Social connections
  4. Children’s social and emotional development
  5. Healthy parent & child relationships
  6. Knowledge of parenting and child development

Center for Social and Public Policy; Strengthening Families Illinois
“What fires together, wires together”
Ourselves, Our Partners, Our Children at Home

“Couple” = any two people

Parent & child

Parent & parent

BASIC

ADVANCED
Step #2: How do we identify high-quality relationships and positive procedural memories?

A. Recognize what high-quality “bottom-up” relationships looks like

B. Recognize what high-quality “top-down” relationships looks like

C. Link high-quality relationships with positive procedural memories
First! BASIC

- Observe how far up the relational tree trunk can this parent/child dyad get? This will always be the vertical axis of any NRF Worksheet

The Zone of Proximal Development

What a child or “couple” can do on their own, you let them do
What a child or “couple” cannot do on their own, you provide support
- How far up the relational ladder can the relationship get on its own?
- Where do things break down?
- Start at the earliest point in the breakdown to build new procedures
- Get support where you need it!
In Intervention –
Match the Developmental Level,
not the Chronological Age!

We start “bottom-up”
Step 2A:
Recognize “Bottom-up” Levels
Greenspan, 1985, 1992; Greenspan & Lourie, 1981; ZERO TO THREE, 1994, 2005

Bottom-Up (non-verbal capacities)

**Level 1** Getting calm (green) together

**Level 2** When calm able to make eye contact & look at faces and/or share a variety of sensations for comfort & connection

**Level 3** When making eye contact, able to share joy & fall in love

**Level 4** When sharing joy, able to create a continuous back-and-forth flow of communication (“circles”)

**Level 5** When in a flow, able to expand and read non-verbal emotional and gestural cues

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Step Two: What’s going on with the vitality of the tree(s)?

Positive procedural memories?  Negative procedural memories?
What will you most likely find in Step 2 if you have a Toxic Stress Pattern in Step 1?

- You will almost always need to either begin new procedural memories at Levels 1, 2, and 3 or
- Shore them up and strengthen them
- So, if there is a problem in Step #1, there will be a problem in Step #2
- We always start intervention at the earliest point in the breakdown with Step 1 and the first three levels of Step 2 regardless of the age of the couple

*Level 1, 2, & 3:* Couple’s build on sturdy green zone with eye contact to share joy...
What you are going to see

• Watch for the bright eyes
• Look for the baby breaking gaze, looking away, then coming back to the face again
• Feel the rhythm of the back and forth, the up and down in intensity of joy
• This is a high intensity, faster rhythm couple; compare that with the low intensity couple last time (fost-adopt father with spina bifida infant)

Happy Couple at 4 months
Joy Lights up the Tree!

Let’s Check Our Falling in Love Status!
• Observe what the quality of the relationship is. How “thick or thin” is it? How much support does this child or parent/child dyad need to begin to engage at each level? This is always the horizontal axis of the NRF Worksheet.

How thin or thick is the trunk?
How much support & co-regulation is needed?

NRF Step # 1 & 2
Basic & Intermediate Material

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What you are going to see

- Feel the difference in the rhythm and joy
- Look for the baby’s hyper-vigilance, furrowed brow and whiny cry
- Look for the baby’s glassy and glazed eyes, with low tone in his facial muscles and flat expression
- See the second of engagement and how it’s not sustained into any joy or back and forth
- Look for the mom’s facial features from green zone, to anxious rolling of her eyes, to frustration in pulling on his face

Teen Mom & Blue Zone Baby
Take Home Points

What To Look For:

Toxic stress can be identified through non-verbal behaviors across the lifecycle and is especially important to be “seen” in birth to five year olds

- Toxic stress can show up through red zone, blue zone, and/or combo zone behaviors that are too frequent or last too long

Key red flags that indicate the need for “dyadic” (parent-child) intervention are:

- Any toxic stress pattern
- If the parent (e.g., birth/foster/kinship/adopt) cannot soothe his/her child
- If the parent-child (e.g., birth/foster/kinship/adopt) cannot engage in joy

Step Two: Levels of Engagement

“serve & return”

Bottom up: Levels 4 & 5
Step 2A: Recognize “Bottom-up” Levels
Greenspan, 1985, 1992; Greenspan & Lourie, 1981; ZERO TO THREE, 1994, 2005

Bottom-Up (non-verbal capacities)

Level 1 Getting calm (green) together

Level 2 When calm able to make eye contact & look at faces

Level 3 When making eye contact, able to share joy & fall in love

Level 4 When sharing joy, able to create a continuous back-and-forth flow of communication (“circles”)

Level 5 When in a flow, able to expand and read non-verbal emotional and gestural cues
Level 4: Couple’s build on sturdy green zone to share joy & create circles of communication...

What is a “circle”?

- The first person begins a connection
  - Could be a look, a sound, a gesture
- The second person responds
- The first person responds back!

- It takes 3 prongs to complete a circle
- We call it opening a circle and then closing a circle
What we are going to see

• Look for the back and forth circles on a sensory-motor level ("daddy going to get you!")
• Look for the back and forth circles on a facial, joyful level
• Look for the back and forth circles on a vocal level
• What happens to baby when Daddy changes the game and he get’s stressed? Does he keep the circles going?

Circles of Communication
Circles of Communication

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS4fVSsPWw

Circles Create Thicker & More Rings!
**Level 5**: Couple’s build on sturdy green zone to share joy, create circles of communication, & read non-verbal cues...

**What we are going to see**

- Watch the play, including the gestures, looks, and sounds involved
- As soon as the mother goes “still” look for all of the baby’s same gestures, looks, and sounds as she tries to re-engage her mom
- These are all of her procedural memories!
- Notice as they do not work, she increasingly becomes distressed
- Notice how quickly they “repair” and the reunion occurs after the “rupture”
The Importance of The First 3 Years Experiences Lay Down Life-Long Expectations

Observing Procedural Memories (12 mo)

What we are going to see

We are going to watch the “pre-clip” of a teen mom and her child

1. Do we have a mutual green zone?
2. Do we have mutual eye contact?
3. Do we have mutual joy?
4. Do we have mutual back and forth circles?
5. Do we have mutual reading of non-verbal cues?
Case Study, Jean & Kevin

Now, what are the changes?

- Notice that he approaches Mom
- They make facial contact and smile
- He brings her toys to play with
- He cuddles in her lap
What we are going to see

• Just as children need to be shown how to play, so parents need to be shown how to play with their children
• Parents with no procedural memories for these levels of relationship will not know how to get to these levels, without your help!

Let’s Check Our Circles & Reading Nonverbal Cues
**Step Two: Levels of Engagement**

“serve & return”

**Top Down: Levels 6 & 7**

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**Step #2: How do we identify high-quality relationships and positive procedural memories?**

A. Recognize what high-quality “bottom-up” relationships looks like

B. Recognize what high-quality “top-down” relationships looks like

C. Link high-quality relationships with positive procedural memories
Step 2B: Recognize “Top-down” Levels

Top-Down (verbal capacities)

**Level 6** When reading cues, able to share feelings with others in pretend play and by talking

**Level 7** When sharing feelings, able to make-sense and to solve problems together

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**Level 6**: Couple’s build on sturdy green zone to share joy, create circles, read non-verbal cues & share feelings...
Showing & Sharing Feelings

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE9riLkRCVo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE9riLkRCVo) 1 min, 5 seconds, child gesturing and showing range of feelings with choir music
What we are going to see

Early forms of pretend play, simple daily activities one does with a baby

What are her procedures? (27 months)
• Feeding babies (5:15)
• Nurturing babies
• Putting them to bed routine (notice her procedures) (8:15)
• Her own procedures kick in, with her pretending to be a baby

Patli at 27 months
Level 7: Couple’s build on sturdy green zone to share joy, create circles, read non-verbal cues, share feelings, & solve problems...

What we are going to see

- Working out fears and anxieties with “baby dragon”
- Tries to be brave and still shows fears
- Uses grandmother to help her
- Grandmother slowly “titrates” the dose of stress and challenge to Cammy so she can slowly be less frightened
Grandma with grand-daughter
Levels 6 and 7, theme of fright

Let’s Check Our Sharing Our
Feelings & Problem Solving
Step Two: Levels of Relationship

Bottom-up:
• Level 1: Getting to green zone together
• Level 2: Sharing eyes, faces, & sensory experiences of comfort together
• Level 3: Sharing joy and falling in love
• Level 4: Creating circles back and forth
• Level 5: Reading non-verbal cues & gestures

Top-down:
• Level 6: Sharing feelings through pretend play and talking
• Level 7: Able to make-sense of feelings and solve problems together

Top to Bottom; Bottom to Top
How do we get Step 2 into our EI & IMH systems of care?

See you next time!