

Week 2 – Birth - Two

Again, this week, if your parents are alive, here are some questions that could prompt conversation. If they are not, use your imagination from the stories you heard and who you knew them to be later in life.

- What do you know about your development in your first year of life?
- Did your parents keep a baby book for you outlining your developmental milestones?
- Did they delight in your development? Did they take an anxious pride in you as a baby in comments like, “She walked at nine months...” “He was very precocious and started talking at 1 year....” Etc.
- Did they ever express wishing that you remained a baby? Did either of them express a preference over which age they enjoyed most about having children?
- How were your basic needs for touch met? Were you cuddled and held, soothed and rocked?
- Did you have a mother who fed on demand or on a schedule? Did your mother breast feed? How did it go for her?
- When did your mother introduce you to solid foods?
- How did she deal with teething?
- What are the stories about you as a baby? Did you cry a lot? Did you sleep through the night early or late? Were you an “easy” baby or a “difficult” baby? What did they do to help you sleep?
- Have your parents made comparisons between you as a baby and siblings as babies?
- Was the external environment safe for them? Were there any threats to your life in any way that you know of?
- Did you have any early diseases, surgeries, accidents or set-backs in your first year?
- Do you think you could have trusted your parents to meet your needs lovingly as a child?
- Would you imagine they were nervous and very attentive parents, or more hands off and would not really rush to meet the needs of you as infant? Were there circumstances in their lives that would have made them more, or less attentive to you as a baby, like birth order?
- Are the stories of you as a baby exaggerated? Or is there very little information and memory of you as a baby?
- When you look at pictures of yourself as an infant, what do you see?

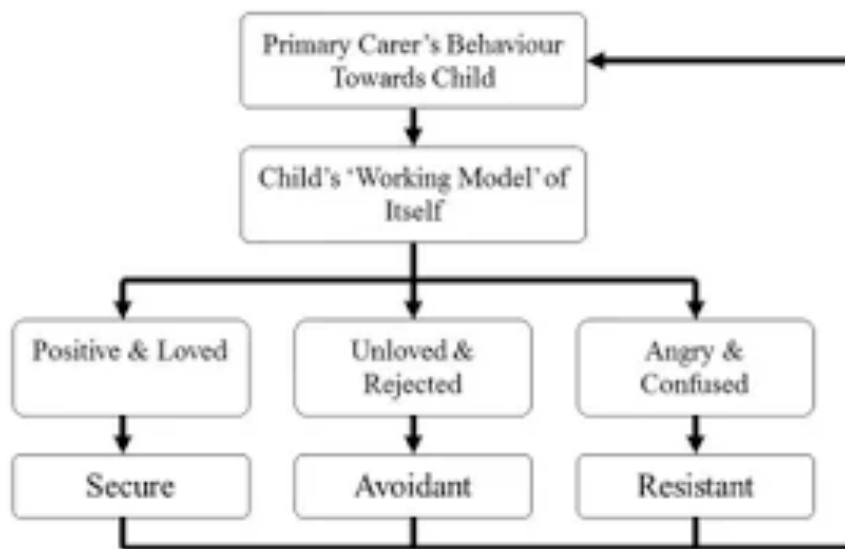
Consider the answers you have and see if you can see how the messages you received have informed the rest of your life. What are your attitudes about touch, food, sleep, rest, safety?

Maslow's Developmental Theory – Survival Needs

The young child's basic needs are for shelter, warmth, touch, milk, food, water – all that is required to survive in a completely dependent and vulnerable state that extends further for humans than any other animal on the planet

The patterns of how you meet your own basic physiological needs today are patterned into your being in the same ways in which they were met as children by your parents. So, the relationship you had with your primary caretaker, is the relationship you now internally have with yourself regarding these basic needs. To the extent that this is done in unawareness is the extent to you have little choice to change the inner dynamic if it was not loving.

If basic needs are not met in the extreme, the baby of course, dies. For 95% of the world's children these needs are taken care of adequately enough to preserve life, with the advent of better sanitation, disease control, vaccines, early childhood education etc. However, the quality of love with which these needs are met, vary greatly depending on many social factors like education, income, support and parental psychological health, just to name a few.



Bowlby's Attachment theory, developed out of his experience with abandoned and traumatized children after the 2nd world war. Many infants were institutionalized and there were not the personnel to actually hold (touch) the babies. They were fed by bottles propped in cribs. The infant mortality rate was very high even though the infants were healthy and fed - but not held lovingly. His entire career was devoted to abuse and deprivation of children and the long-lasting effects on the development of the human and their ability to fulfill their potential as loving

human beings themselves.

I strongly recommend studying deeply the work of John Bowlby – which is beyond the scope of this course – we could do 6 months just on his work. Watch this youtube video for a short introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LM0nE81mIE>

Our own inner work, now as adults, is to examine deeply whether our physiological needs **were under met or overly met**. Needs that are overly met can result in inner patterns of indulgence of feelings and need, and dependency on other people to meet our needs. Very often we can look at current issues that arise in our lives and surmise, very accurately, how the inner dynamic we have with ourself originated. If needs are overly met by the caretaker, for instance, how will the child learn self-efficacy, confidence and knowing of their own inner strengths and resources.

Let's look at some examples of how over-indulgence of needs results in adult problems. Consider a mother who is overly anxious when the baby cries, has little knowledge of what all might be going on for the baby and cannot read the needs accurately – comfort, rocking, pain from the diaper, colic, etc. And so, in her anxiety, she does whatever she can think of to stop the crying because it makes her very anxious, meeting the need with food every time to calm her own anxiety. How might this then manifest in our own relationship with ourselves later in life? It would show in an inability to recognize our own need, know our own feelings and whenever there is a little internal distress or agitation we experience it in the memory state of extreme anxiety and we would go to the fridge for some “comfort” food. This is just one small and common example. What we were taught was comfort, not how to meet our needs, with disastrous consequences to health and well-being as an adult.

On the other hand, imagine a mother that is irritable with the child's needs and cannot wait for the baby to learn to meet its own needs – long before it is able to do so – eg. propping up a pillow with a bottle on it and leaving the room. How might this then be internalized and manifest in relationship to self and others? It might manifest as an unaware desperate inner longing for touch paired with a fierce independence to do things oneself. It is obvious how this inner relationship would then manifest in outer relationships. Can you see this might be confusing to anyone in relationship with such a person? Can you recognize the split between the need and the defense which results in others getting the double message of “I want to be touched, don't touch me.”

The core emotions resulting from needs not being met are fear (anxiety) and fear of shame (depression, apathy). The child's internalized relationship to these unmet or overly met needs and emotions are the same as the parent's relationship to them.

Our adult work is now to recognize the feelings and needs instead of splitting them off in the tactics of defense you learned. If we can see this and then if we can bring a more loving a mature Self to the wound, you can heal what was learned in fear, instead of love.

Consider your relationship to your own feelings:

- **Do you deny, ignore, refuse to feel or know them in some way, living only in the behavior to get away from them?**
- **Do you know how they are connected to unmet needs?**
- **Can you tell the difference between an unmet need and a tactic to get the need met which is defense and splitting?**
- **Can you see that the feelings and needs that arise in the present, are memory states of the past.**
- **Can you bring a mature loving part of yourself to the task of mothering the wounded child memory rather than repeating the patterns of defense you learned as a baby?**
- **Do you use your feelings to blame, manipulate and control other people into caring for your needs by doing what you want them to do that proves to you that they are meeting your need?**
- **Do you allow other people to control, guilt and manipulate you into doing what they want (not need).**

We use the word need to talk about our wants and there is a big difference. Need is universal and required for human life to survive and flourish. A want is a tragic tactic to try to get the need met because it never was met in love. In other words, when I say, “I need a big diamond ring,” I am really saying, “I want a big diamond ring as a tactic to get the need for you proving you love me, met.” It can, of course, never work to meet the need.

Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Theory – The Sensory-Motor Stage from birth to 2 years

This is a summary of the six substages of this stage of development very briefly: (There are many youtube videos you can watch for a more detailed explanation) This is a very rough time guide – every child is unique in it's development due to multiple factors:

Reflexes (0-1 month)

Any understanding the child has is through the instinctual sensori-motor reflexes to suck, startle, watching... much like a little animal.

Primary Circular Reactions (1-4 months)

At this stage there is some pre-cognitive knowing to repeat an action because it brings pleasure or relief from fear and tension. So, a sensation is coordinated with an action. Learning happens through experience in the body. If I suck my thumb it brings inner soothing, for example. There is no thought about this. Very basic patterns and schemas are learned before language and thought can be applied to them giving them any kind of "awareness." All learning, at this stage, is based on discomfort physiologically.

Secondary Circular Reactions (4-8 months)

The next step is that the child begins to intentionally repeat an action in order to trigger a response in the environment. This is very powerful in getting the infants attention focused on the external environment. Have you seen a small child sitting in high chair throwing the spoon on to the ground. It is learning, without language and thought, cause and effect. There is a knowing, of I cause something outside of me to happen.

Coordination of Reactions (8-12 months)

There is a greater and greater focus of attention on the external environment. They are gaining a greater sense of control and knowledge about the external world and inner connections are made in terms of external objects having function and quality. Eg "If I throw the spoon on the ground, it makes a noise and so does mommy." This thing that falls to the ground has a sound called "spoon," associated with it. The first inkling of symbolic thought is happening through the learning of language. Imitating others is a primary way of learning. This is biologically wired into the nervous system. If the mother smiles at her infant, the child's telomeres or mirror neurons in the brain, are activated and the child instinctually smiles back. It creates pleasure and now repetition can come from fear and also pleasure.

Tertiary Circular Reactions (12-18 months)

The child has a repertoire of unaware but learned choices to try to manipulate the external world. If crying doesn't work, maybe words do and if that doesn't work then maybe whining or a temper tantrum will!

The primary, secondary and tertiary circular reactions are the child learning the complexity of cause and effect without words or thought, in the physical world with which it has to interact, with increasing complexity.

Early Representational Thought (18-24 months)

By this age the child has learned to distance itself from the raw sensori-motor responses by learning language. Usually this is rewarded and the split away from raw experience of needs and feelings happens through symbolic representation of language... talking about, instead of experiencing directly.

So, all of this, summed up, means that the child is moving away from raw physiological experience and developing symbolic and abstract ways of understanding the world around it through language. It is developing the capacity to hold this knowing in awareness (thought and language). This represents a split away from unmitigated experience into the awareness of what the experience is in terms of words and dynamics. The child is beginning to have “memory.” Eg. If I throw the spoon on the ground, I now have a knowing of the cause and effect. It goes and then it miraculously appears again when mommy picks it up. Eventually the child realizes that even though it does not see where it has gone, it comes back. When it can hold that it being gone means it is on the floor and will come back, it is learning to “remember,” which is a cognitive function that only humans have, known as **object-permanence**. We will go into this aspect in more depth next week. This is the main task of the first stage of cognitive development. It is a function that other animals do not have.

Now imagine a child in a very under-stimulated and unresponsive environment, where they are not smiled at and not taught words, never read to. The fact is that critical stages of brain development are passed and if the learning does not happen, it cannot happen at later stages. Those parts of the brain change and shrivel. The child is totally dependent on its caregivers to develop out of an inner space to an external world and function in it.

To watch what happens in a very extreme case watch this youtube video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjZolHC8E>

Consider now for yourselves:

- **How was I cognitively shaped by my early external environment?**
- **Was I over stimulated through the parents need to have a smart child? Was this motivated by their anxiety and need, or out of true delight in your childhood learning?**
- **Was I under stimulated as a function of parental neglect for whatever reason? Was this due to a lack of love and connection or just the circumstances of their lives?**

Erickson’s Psycho-Social Developmental Theory

The earliest and foundational stage of development psycho-socially for a child is whether they learn to trust or distrust other humans, when the child is completely dependent on the caregivers in its world being consistently there to meet its needs.

Predictability, reliability and consistency are essential. Without this the child will develop no sense of hope or trust in others being there in any way, or learn that others are a source of support or a resource when needed. Children that cannot trust their caregivers, grow up feeling very anxious, insecure with a deep mistrust of others. This is the template for them relating to themselves and the world. To use Bowlby’s language, they will not have a secure and trusting attachment to others. They will either distrust and be suspicious, assigning meaning to even innocuous interactions, or they will learn to be overly dependent on people that are just like the people that they had to depend on as children. They will form, to use, Bowlby’s terms, anxious, avoidant, and resistant attachments to others that -re-create the original dynamics as when they were infants.

Consider for yourself:

- **How am I trusting of other people?**
- **For what do I not trust other people? To care about my feelings, meet my needs, be there for me safely, return to me, if I make a mistake.**
- **Do I accurately assess whether someone is reliable, dependable and predictable in relationships or do I get into relationships that are not reliable, dependable or predictable?**
- **How anxious am I of offending others, of conflict?**
- **How anxious I am of being abandoned emotionally?**
- **Do I misinterpret peoples words and actions to mean something negative about me?**
- **How is my inner relationship with myself secure, dependable, reliable and predictable? Do I always recognize my inner needs for good boundaries and loving limits? Do I know how to meet my inner needs and tell myself the truth? Or do I have an inner relationship with my own wound that cannot be trusted? To what extent am I internally still living the external experience of reliability, dependability and predictability with myself?**

See if you can find some way to gain a little insight from the above into how your current struggles are connected to very early experience -, very often before two years old, when you had no choice in your learning and experience. Hopefully this can bring the maturity of compassion (willingness to be the non-anxious and loving presence that you never got) to your young self instead of judgement.