

Touchpoints Approach to Development and Relationships

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As a pediatrician espousing child development as the language to communicate with parents, I shall describe the steps in my own progress to achieve the Touchpoints Project. My course parallels the progress of the field of child development. After training in pediatrics, I trained in child psychiatry. There, I was stunned to realize that parents were “victims” -- whatever went wrong in their child's development was their “fault.” I developed the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale to change the field's view of the infant as incompetent to competent, shaping his environment. Studying other ethnic groups, it became even more apparent that his powerful contribution shaped his parents and the culture around him.

Within the context of relationships, his cognitive development proceeds. “Emotional intelligence” has developed as an accepted concept within the field. The Face-to-face work demonstrated that a 2-month-old can be relied upon to show in his behavior his ability to distinguish mother vs. father vs. stranger. At this age, he shows behaviorally the withdrawal from the deprivation of a depressed mother. The first demonstration of cognitive storage -- dependent on the quality of the relationships around him.

Learning occurs at the type of regressions which precede in his development. Regression (five times in year one, four times each year, up to six) become opportunities for the infant's learning, for parents to regress, cope, and learn from their infant's coping. This led to Touchpoints -- a relational model for providers of all disciplines to join the parents and see them as the experts on their child. By understanding, supporting, and identifying these regressions as opportunities for learning, parents learn their own job of parenting. Fueling this job are the

feedback systems. For the child, it is a chance for the one developmental line to regress, to feed the other developmental lines toward the development of the child as they integrate toward his progress. Parents learn from their child.

Now the brain researchers are establishing the location and the basis for these regressions and this emotional learning, couched in the passion of parent-child relationships. We have come so far.