



Mentor Attunement: An Interpersonal Approach of More Effective Mentors

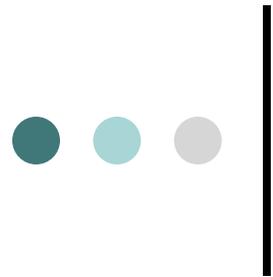
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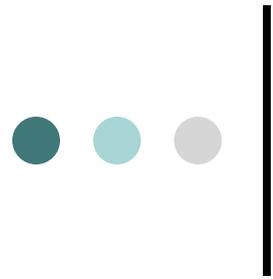
Presented at the *Mentoring in Illinois: Research Meets Practice* Symposium

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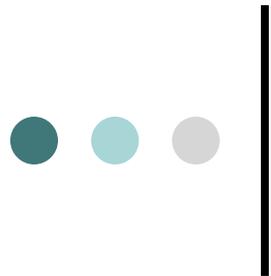
● ● ● | Introductions

- Background and interest in mentoring
- Introductions within audience
 - What brought you into mentoring?
 - What are 2-3 characteristics of the *approach* of a successful mentor in your program or experience?
 - Group introductions & discussion of mentor attributes



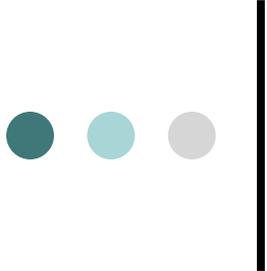
Overview of presentation

- Attunement
 - Where it came from
 - What it is
 - What it looks like
- Connections to other fields
- Implications for mentoring relationships & ways to promote attunement among mentors
- Next steps in work with mentors and program staff



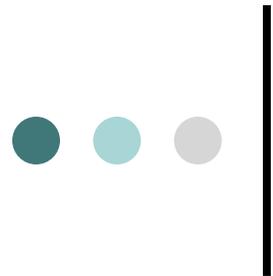
Quality of Mentoring relationships

- Conceptual models proposing how individuals might benefit from mentoring necessarily begin with the assumption that some type of relationship exists between the youth and mentor.
- Nevertheless, the development of the mentoring relationship itself rarely has been the object of study.
- A better understanding of the processes involved in the formation, maintenance, and conclusion of mentoring relationships holds promise for more effective intervention. (Keller, 2005)



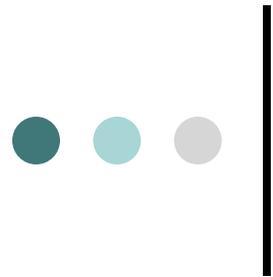
Influential study of relationship development

- Mentoring style (Morrow & Styles, 1995)
 - Prescriptive mentoring A
 - Transformation goals early, often, consistently
 - Authority and control of decision making
 - Rigid and frustrated
 - Prescriptive Mentoring B
 - Wanted reciprocal partnership
 - Unrealistic expectations for youth to initiate activities
 - Wounded and discouraged
 - *Developmental mentoring*
 - Relationship-building goals (throughout) and transformation goals (emerging later)
 - Youth-centered, reading youth's cues
 - Flexible, adaptable and persistent



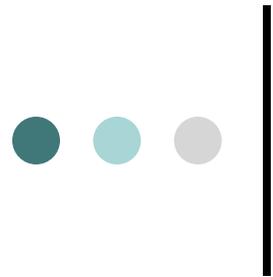
Related research on relationship variability

- Prior analyses revealed relationship patterns that distinguished subgroups
 - Dimension of interpersonal ***tone*** (affect, communication, connection) (Pryce & Keller, 2013)
 - Dimension of developmental ***trend*** (trajectory of relationship over time) (Pryce & Keller, 2012)



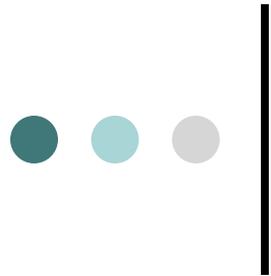
Generating explanations

- What underlies variations in mentoring relationships in terms of relationship tone and development?
- Through additional analysis, ruled out:
 - School site (3 sites included)
 - Variation in student needs/issues
 - Gender & race as related to matching
- Are there common factors among mentors that seemed to contribute to stronger relationships?



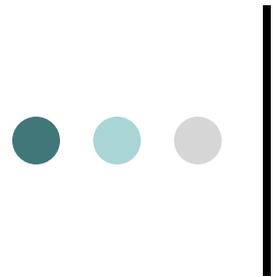
Common factors

- Common factors that help contribute to higher quality mentoring relationships (Spencer & Rhodes, 2005)
 - Authenticity, empathy, & companionship (Spencer, 2004); including engagement & empowerment (Liang et al., 2002 in study of college students)
 - Shared decision-making regarding activities within match tends to generate closer relationships (Herrera et al., 2000)
 - Relationships with aggressive children may benefit from more “therapeutic” approach provided through training in relationship-building, problem-solving, and regular supervision (Cavell & Hughes, 2000)



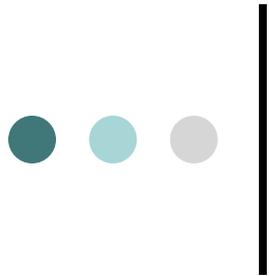
Study aims

- Define: Identify patterns of mentor factors/ behaviors that may explain variation in quality of interpersonal tone and developmental trend
- Distinguish: Develop and validate coding system to reliably distinguish between mentors on this dimension
- Corroborate: Use other data to evaluate concurrent and predictive validity of categorization



BBBS school-based program

- One-to-one relationship in group setting
- Students referred by teachers
- Teams of mentors from businesses, organizations
- Regular after-school meetings (1 hr/week)
- School-year commitment
- Activities within schools (e.g. library, cafeteria)



Sample

- Three elementary schools in low-income urban areas
- All program participants asked to be in study
- Enrollment rates: Mentors=95%, Students=85%

	Mentors (n=37)	Youth (n=33)
Age range	25-81	9-13
Gender (m/f)	38% / 62%	45% / 55%
Race		
African American	53%	78%
Caucasian	39%	0%
Latino	5%	12.5%
Other	3%	9.5%

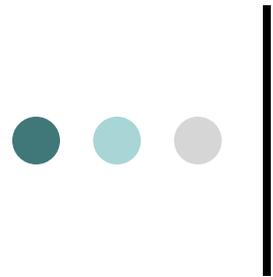
Number of complete matches analyzed:

27



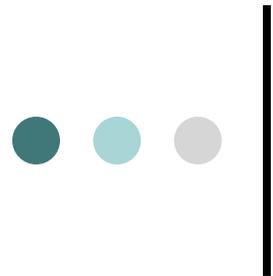
Perceived needs of students

Category	Characteristics Identified by Teachers	Sample
Disruptive	Short attention span, impulsive, difficulty managing anger, frequent conflict with peers, related academic difficulties	N = 11
Withdrawn	Shyness, social isolation, low self-esteem, failure to engage with peers or academic work	N = 7
High-Potential	High potential for leadership and achievement paired with lack of environmental or familial supports	N = 8



Emerging construct: Attunement

- Mentor's capacity to respond flexibly to youth verbal and nonverbal cues by taking into account youth needs and desires
- Represents broad strategy for mentors to elicit, read, interpret and reflect on youth cues
- Requires adaptation of expectations based on youth interests, as well as intention to build relationship



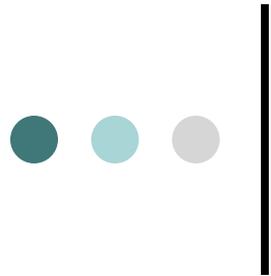
Attunement, cont.

- Involves mentor's level of intentionality in his/her approach toward building the relationship with his/her mentee
- Mentor "capacity" does not rely solely on inherent ability
 - Impacted by program context as well as the transactions that occur between him/herself and his/her Little
 - Behavior of the Little also influences mentor attunement
- Program facilitators too can indicate varying levels of attunement to match needs



Attunement

Category & Sample	Characteristics
Highly Attuned (n = 11)	Consistently seeks to attend flexibly and creatively to verbal or nonverbal signs from youth as to preferences, concerns, and feelings
Moderately Attuned (n = 13)	Inconsistent response to student needs. Although generally attuned, mentor's attention and flexibility varies due to challenges connecting with youth, involvement with other group members, or lack of program support.
Minimally Attuned (n = 3)	Consistently limited in response to youth. Slow or unable to adjust approach based on youth's verbal or nonverbal signs as to preferences, concerns, or feelings.

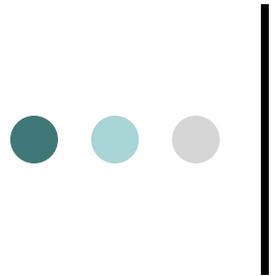


High Attunement

“I know when she’s reading out loud, I notice that she gets, loses interest even though I know she’s a very avid reader. And I actually attribute it to the fact that, I don’t really like reading out loud, I’m a fast reader and I get bored by the slow pace. So I made a decision, at a certain point I was trying to press us along, read more pages. And I actually sort of realized, I said to her, ‘actually maybe it’s just that reading out loud can be kind of annoying?’ So I made a decision not to push her then because why spoil something she loves?” (drawn from interview with female mentor)

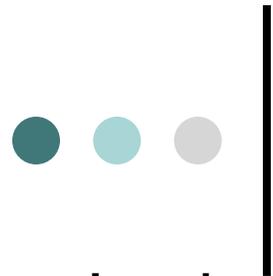
● ● ● | Components of attunement

- Insightfulness, inter-subjectivity, adaptability
 - Identifies issue (*child loses interest*)
 - Notices incongruence (*child avid reader*)
 - Looks to own experience for insight (*I don't like to read out loud*)
 - Considers own role in interactions (*I was trying to press along*)
 - Weighs trade-offs (*important to make progress but not spoil love of reading*)
 - Considers child's perspective and makes adjustment



Moderate Attunement

“Initially I didn’t have to form that relationship, it just happened. She was open to it and then it kind of tapered. Something I believe, I don’t know, she was disinterested and needed other people or I wasn’t sure what it was and that’s where I had to decide how to get back into that relationship with her. Building her trust but I wanted her to want to be around me, like I was a treat.” (drawn from interview with Susan, female mentor)



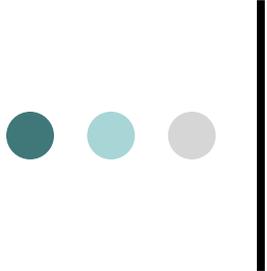
Moderate Attunement: Indicators

- Lack of insight, less capacity for reflection, inconsistent investment, focus on self
 - Lack of insight regarding Charlene's change in approach expresses her uncertainty (i.e., "I don't know...I wasn't sure...")
 - Attribution to Charlene's shift is to external reasons (e.g., "she was disinterested and needed other people")
 - Susan recognized her need to reinvest, to "decide how to get back into that relationship with her"
- Inconsistency could be due to
 - lack of keen observation and insight
 - reduced confidence in capacity to build rapport with the youth
 - frustration due to struggles that were not attended to by program facilitation support
- Moderate attunement may be due to mentors' mixed feelings regarding their own needs relative to the needs of their mentee



Minimal attunement

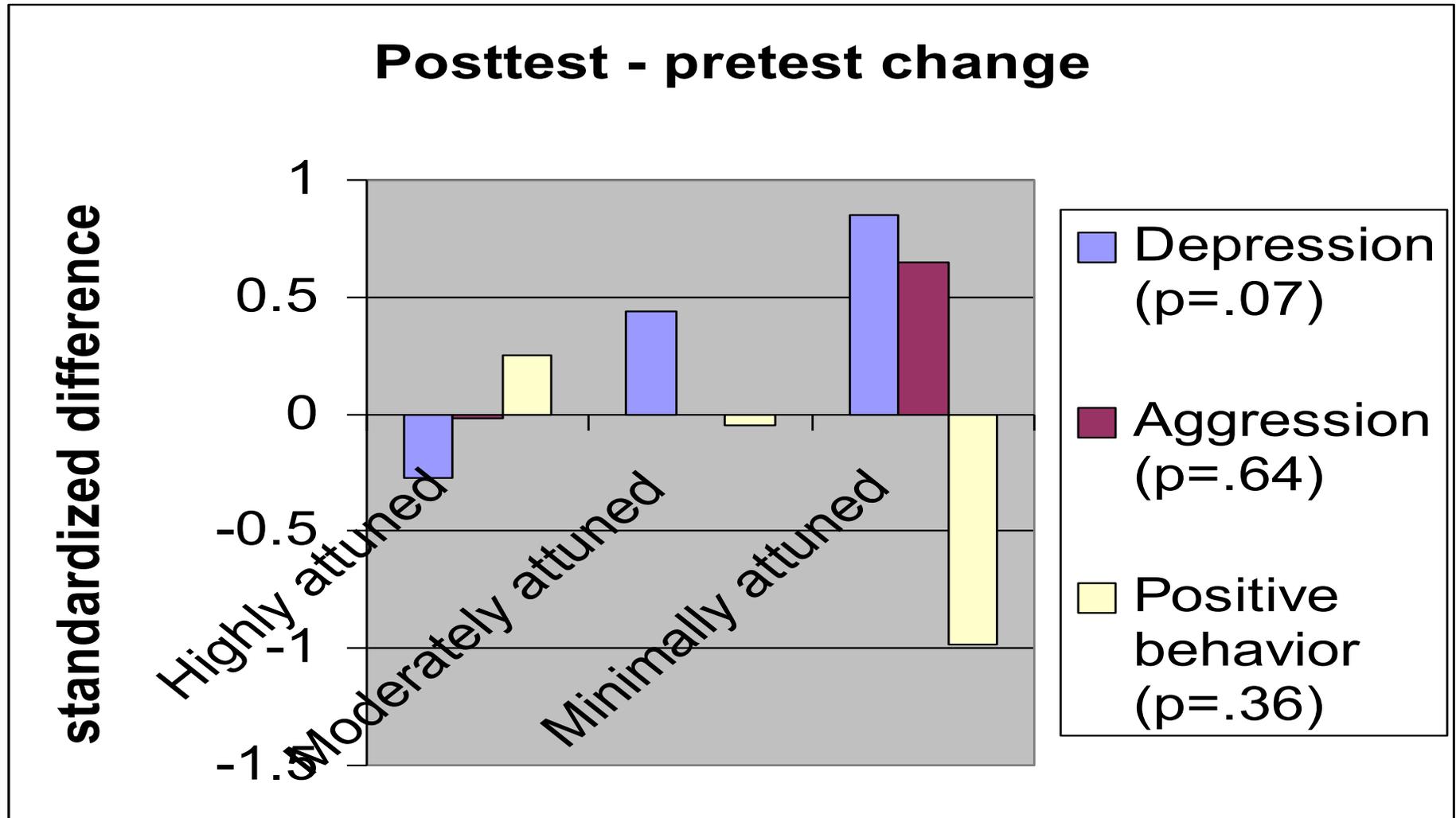
Dwain sitting at the table, and Yvette (his mentor) comes in. She immediately sits down and pulls out tissues from her purse and begins wiping up the table. It is not clear from this writer what she is wiping up. “Hi, how are you?” she asks the Little, without making eye contact. Continues [without waiting for response], “Sorry I couldn’t make it last week”, still wiping table. Scrubbing it now. The Little is looking around the room, distracted. Big asks, “What were your grades? What did you get in English?” The Big has candies in her bag and the Little sees them and makes a gesture with his head toward them. Big again asks about grades. She says, “Well, how many As did you get and how many Bs and how many Cs?” Little is chewing something and she then says, “Wait until you finish chewing!” as he begins to tell her about his grades. Her voice is urgent and raised. He, by affect, seems uninvested and unattached and does not continue speaking. (observational data)



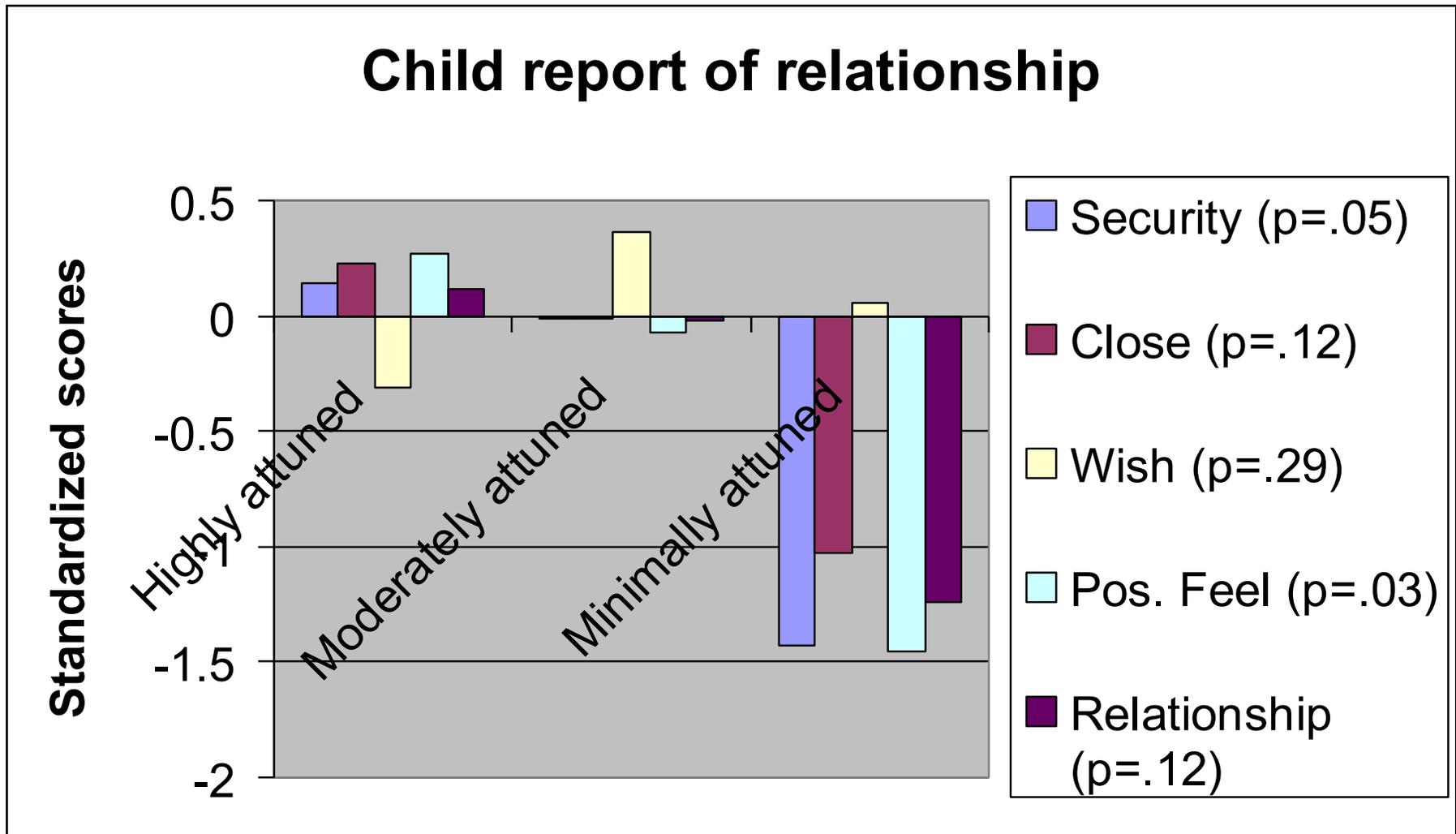
Indicators of lack of attunement

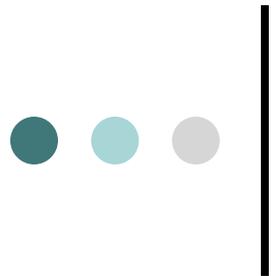
- Self-focused, failure to adapt to non-verbal cues, inflexible, unable to release one's own interests in order to respond to child
 - Focus on task rather than child (*scrubs table rather than greets mentee*)
 - Failure to listen (*speaks over him without awaiting his response*)
 - Persistent address of one's own interests (*child's academic progress*) rather than noting mentee's interests as expressed by non-verbal cues (e.g., *distraction, hesitancy of verbal response, lack of engagement*)
 - Criticism and failure to notice effort of mentee (*once mentee starts to speak, mentor criticizes him for something else that he has done wrong*)
 - Failure to adjust and engage child (*child remains detached throughout exchange*)

Relationship between attunement & youth outcomes



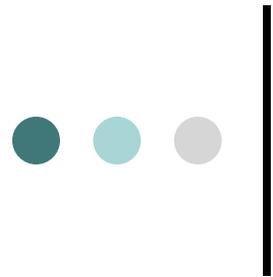
Relationship between attunement & relationship quality





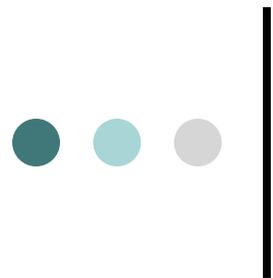
Connection with other fields and literature

- Psychotherapy research (client and therapist)
- Attachment research (infant & caregiver)
- Brain research
 - relationship building not only as shared behavior and understanding
 - neural matching mechanism that occurs via mirror neurons is critical to establishing a close and empathic connection
- Mindfulness research
- Home visitor and mother



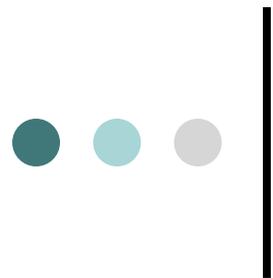
Mindfulness research

- “Mindfulness is awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way” (Jon Kabat-Zinn)
- Mindfulness training used with counselors, psychotherapists, primary clinicians, educators, & nurses, among other professionals
- Promising evidence to support improved communication, decreased burn-out, reduced anxiety, increased social connection, and enriched interpersonal relations (Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn 2008; Ruff and Mackenzie 2009)



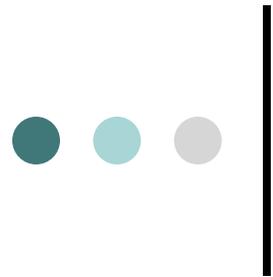
Background on Fussy Baby & FAN

- Funded for the past 11 years as a national child abuse prevention home visitation model
- Erikson Institute FBN is known for its approach to family engagement, called the FAN (Gilkerson & Gray, 2013; Gilkerson et al, 2013).
- FAN model first developed around issues of family stress and challenging infant behavior
- FAN approach proven applicable to the communication and engagement process & to a broader approach to reflective practice in relationship-based services.



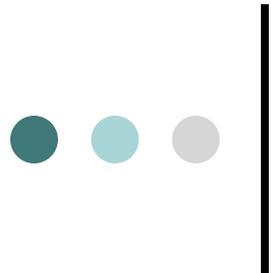
FAN for Mentoring staff and volunteers

- Help the mentor and/or support staff organize engagement around the youth/mentor's dreams and concerns
- Train adult to observe and match his/her interactions to what seems most helpful in the moment--Listening to Feelings, Exploring Ideas, Supporting Action, and Highlighting Discoveries
- Learn to use Mindful Self-Regulation to track and regulate own responses in the interaction so as to maximize attunement



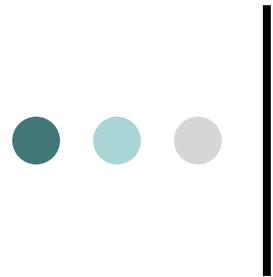
Discussion & feedback

- How does the concept of attunement resonate with your prior ideas regarding approach of more successful mentors?
- What, if any, aspects of attunement ‘miss the mark’ in your opinion?
- How does “FAN” training and approach resonate or ‘miss the mark’?
- What challenges might we face in aiming to support staff and/or mentors in this way?



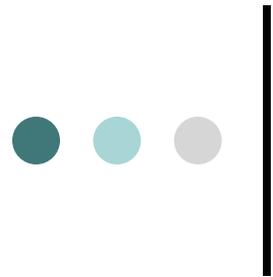
Additional practice implications

- **Assessment of relationships**
 - Multiple dimensions and sources over time
 - Informative questions, increased observation
- **Different relationship configurations**
 - Attunement critical for work with youth of various needs and strengths
- **Relationship development**
 - Role of mentor attunement in relationship development over time
- **Matches**
 - Screening, training, matching with attention to mentor attunement
- **Case management and match support**
 - Role of active involvement
 - Constructive potential of conflict
 - Importance of ending relationships with attention to development and youth needs



Assessment of relationships

- What are common practices of relationship assessment over time?
- How could level of attunement be assessed early in the relationship? Screening? Initial period of relationship?
- How could attunement be a tool for
 - Matching?
 - Match support?
 - Termination/conclusion of relationship?



Next steps

- Practice

- Pilot of trainings that promote attunement
 - Attunement of mentors and of program/match supervisors
 - Follow up and practice
- How might skills trainings differ based on different mentoring programs? Different settings?
- Other resources?