**AGPA Connect 2023 Presenter Information**

**Course Code:** VIII

**Course Title:** Cultivating the internal secure base: Treating insecure attachment in group therapy

**Course Times:** 9:30 AM - 5:30 PM & 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

**Course Dates:** Tuesday, March 7 & Wednesday, March 8

**Instructors:** Aaron Black

**Course Description:** Secure attachment bonds in childhood promote adaptive internal working models of relationships and robust mentalizing capacities. This Institute explores a clinical approach that supports the development of secure attachment by resolving intrapsychic, interpersonal, and group barriers to emotional engagement and immediacy. We will also examine how theory-guided modifications to psychodynamic technique can enhance the developmental sensitivity of group interventions. The dynamics of attachment will be studied as both intrapsychic and interpersonal processes. Essential concepts will be demonstrated experientially and didactically.

**Learning Objectives**

The attendee will be able to:‎

1. ‎‎‎‎‎‎‎‎‎Define the concept of the secure base in attachment theory, as both an external and internal entity.
2. Describe the mechanisms by which the secure base facilitates emotional self-regulation.
3. Provide an example of how resistance facilitates emotional self-regulation in group therapy.
4. Distinguish between secure vs. insecure self-states.
5. Describe how racial/ethnic/cultural differences influence the development or impairment of epistemic trust and vigilance in group therapy.
6. Name three interventions for engaging and resolving resistance in group treatment.
7. Explain how the difference between relational coercion vs. cooperation may enhance the ethical practice of clinicians.

**Significant Articles:**

1. Black, A.E. (2019) Treating insecure attachment in group therapy: Attachment theory meets modern psychoanalytic technique, International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 69(3), 259-286.
2. Chang-Caffaro, S. & Caffaro, J. (2018). Differences that Make a Difference: Diversity and the Process Group Leader. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy 68: 483-497.
3. "Bateman, A., Campbell, C., & Fonagy, P. (2021). Rupture and repair in mentalization-based group psychotherapy. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 71(2), 371–392."
4. "Fonagy, P., Campbell, C., & Bateman, A. (2017). Mentalizing, attachment, and epistemic trust in group therapy.
5. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 67(2), 176-201."
6. "Levine, R. (2011). Progressing while regressing in relationships, International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 61(4), 621-643."

**Agenda**

Day 1

Day 1 Agenda (360 Min., 9:30am - 5:45pm): The development of secure attachment and mentalization.

I. Personal introductions and overview of institute (15 min., 9:30am - 9:45am)

II. Initial process group (90 min., 9:45am - 11:15am)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 90 minutes.

a. Establish group goals/agreement, which include sensitivity and respect to member differences both visible and invisible, assumption that group members are operating with good intentions, and that people take full responsibility for the impact of their words, regardless of their conscious intentions. Also, will establish group as a talking, not acting group, confidentiality agreement, and that people will name emotional injuries when they occur. Define difference between emotional safety vs. comfort. b. Interventions to explore emotional disclosure/resistance to disclosure. c. Highlight needs for relational security vs. exploration.

d. Provide emotional education regarding resistance to emotional immediacy. e. Begin to identify attachment themes and dynamics.

III. Break (15 min., 11:15am - 11:30am)

IV. Second process group (45 min., 11:30am - 12:15pm)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 45 minutes.

a. Find language to describe prementalistic modes of emotional experience, including teleological, pretense and psychic equivalence (Fonagy).

b. Interventions to support/explore emotional disclosure/resistance to disclosure. c. Highlight needs for, tension between, relational security vs. exploration. d. Use emotional communication to engage and resolve resistance to emotional immediacy. e. Identify attachment themes and dynamics.

V. Lunch Break: 12:15pm - 2:15pm

VI. Third process group (90 min., 2:15pm - 3:45pm)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 90 minutes. a. Identify and study resistances.

b. Demonstrate interventions (mirroring, joining object-oriented questions, identify resistance and insecure attachment dynamics) used to engage resistance.

c. Track mentalization, pre-mentalistic self-states, and attachment dynamics. d. Continuing emotional education regarding resistance and attachment. e. Develop secure vs. insecure attachment as metaphor: Anxiety/Avoidance.

VII. Break (15 min., 3:45pm - 4pm) VIII. Fourth process group (60 min., 4:00pm - 5:00pm) A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 60 minutes.

a. Carry forward themes from ongoing process.

b. Interventions to identify, engage, and resolve resistances to emotional immediacy. c. Emphasis on relational attunement/misattunement and engage resistances to putting disavowed feelings of aggression and fear into language.

d. Enlarge focus on attachment dynamics, mentalization, and resistance.

IX. Didactic portion I: The "internal secure base" and development of mentalization in attachment theory (45 min, Figures 1 and 3, handouts, 5pm - 5:45pm). Instruct participants that we will now be out of process to focus on intellectual learning. Didactic Lecture 1: The Developmental Moment

A. BOWLBY - Attachment as a way for child to manage needs for exploration vs. safety. The Strange Situation explained. The secure base defined. Secure vs. insecure attachment defined.

B. Childhood attachment classifications described. Avoidance and Anxiety dimensions. Avoidance of intimacy; Anxious about availability. Children: Secure, Anxious-Ambivalent, Anxious-Avoidant, Disorganized. Adult: Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, Unresolved.

C. Is attachment theory and research applicable across ethnicities and cultures? (Messman, et al., 2016). Universality, Normativity, Sensitivity, and Competence are largely supported in cross cultural research. --->Needs for safety and exploration are complementary in secure attachment but get set against each other as an internal conflict in instances of insecure attachment. Felt Security vs. Exploration = Central Conflict. Felt Security = Fear; Exploration = Aggression. Fear and Aggression are in conflict as well. Anger of hope/despair; Aggression of desire/Destruction. Question: What is actually going on between a parent and child within the Strange Situation paradigm?

D. Develop of Mentalization: Pre-mentalistic mental states for young children: Teleological, Psychic equivalence, Pretense. (Fonagy) ---> Develop in sequence: Tel--->Psychic Equiv.--->Pretense. Teleological - Goal oriented; Feelings and impulses in body convert into action; Need concrete representation to stand for internal state...hug, cutting, etc. What I feel is real because of the outcome of my action, or another person's action. E.g., I need to get away from you in order to feel safe. Example: Laura leaving the room during group. Psychic Equivalence - Internal and external reality are equated; My feelings determine the facts of the external world. E.g., You looked at the clock and I feel abandoned, so you must want to hate me and what to get away from me. Single interpretation of feelings, motivations and events. Example: Nancy and her fear/anger that I saw another group member. Feelings are TOO real. Pretense - Internal reality is completely decoupled from external reality; Imaginary play with feelings without consequence in the real world. I imagine that you despise me, therefore I am terrified of you. Example: Kate believing that the group would attack her if they knew she was my patient, and therefore "special."

E. Emotional biofeedback: The transactional relationship between the child's modes of emotional experience and parental responsiveness that serves to regulate the child's difficult emotions (fear, anger, hurt, shame, guilt) and promote and maintain positive feelings. Emotional self-regulation.

F. Secure base functions defined: Validation mirroring, anaclitic attunement, imaginary play, and behavioral structure. The combination of child factors and parental responsiveness leads to secure vs. insecure attachment (insecure self-states) and the ability to mentalize which emerges later in development.

G. Epistemic Trust and Epistemic Vigilance, Defined. Key as to whether the CHILD allows the ADULT to be successful in serving as a secure base. A key intrapsychic pathway to attachment.

H. Mentalization: A developmental achievement and outcome of attachment, defined. Discuss how perceived threat disrupts mentalization, making unconscious material more accessible. Basis of Epistemic Trust and Epistemic Vigilance.

I. The Internal Secure Base, Defined.

Day 2 Agenda (390 Min., 8:30am - 5pm): Attachment theory and psychodynamic technique.

I. First process group (90 min., 8:30am - 10am)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 90 minutes.

a. Review group agreement and goals.

b. Interventions to identify, engage, and resolve resistances to progressive emotional communication and immediacy.

c. Emphasize the relationship between needs for relational safety and exploration. d. Identify and engage states of insecure attachment and pre-mentalistic modes of experience.

e. Demonstrate connection between the relational secure base and the intrapsychic secure base.

II. Break (15 min., 10am - 10:15am)

III. Second process group (105 min., 10:15am - 12:00pm)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 105 minutes.

a. Interventions to identify, engage, and resolve resistances to progressive emotional communication, with emphasis on pre-mentalistic modes (insecure self-states) of emotional experience (Teleological, Psychic Equivalence, Pretense).

b. Identify enactments, induced feelings, and somatization as emotional communication. c. Continuing emotional education regarding resistance and insecure attachment. d. Demonstrate connection between the relational secure base and the intrapsychic secure base.

IV. Lunch Break: 12pm - 1:30pm V. Third process group (90 min., 1:30pm - 3pm)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 90 minutes.

a. Interventions to identify, engage, and resolve resistances to progressive emotional communication, with emphasis on pre-mentalistic modes (insecure self-states) of emotional experience (Teleological, Psychic Equivalence, Pretense).

b. Identify enactments, induced feelings, and somatization as emotional communication.

c. Continuing emotional education regarding resistance, insecure attachment and emotional self-regulation.

d. Demonstrate connection between the relational secure base and the intrapsychic secure base.

VI. Break (15 min., 3pm - 3:15pm)

VII. Didactic portion 2: The developmental intervention (45 min, Figures 1 and 3, handouts, 3:15pm - 4pm). Instruct participants that we will now be out of process to focus on intellectual learning.

Didactic Lecture 2: The Developmental Intervention Key Points:

1. The "Developmental Intervention: Resolves internal and external barriers to secure attachment, thereby raising epistemic trust and lowering vigilance, creating moments of emotional co-regulation, and promoting enhanced mentalization.

2. The Mentalizing Group: Treatment Goal ---> stimulates and integrates non-mentalizing states into formal mentalization.

3. Treatment Goals: Resolve resistances to secure attachment such that the group process transforms insecure mental states into secure ones, repeatedly, over time.

4. The leader uses the internalized secure base functions to restore mentalization through interventions involving emotional validation, anaclitic attunement, behavioral structure, and imaginary/creative play.

A. Resistance defined as deviations from treatment goals and/or agreement. Resolution involves cooperation, as opposed to opposition or compliance.

B. Developmental needs for felt security (i.e., fear reduction) and exploration (aggression support) are re-stimulated upon joining group. Resistance and attachment dynamics are activated as a way of coping with this tension, as well as managing fears of abandonment, attack, merger, aggressive impulses in self/other, damaging the object, and fears of exposure/vulnerability.

C. Insecure attachment (insecure self-states) and disrupted mentalization and epistemic freezing create resistances. Resistance serves as a substitute form of emotional self-regulation to manage painful emotions that excludes internal or external secure attachment. Wish for secure base is stimulated and observed.

D. Insecure self-state emerges, define: Emotions communicated via "enact, evoke, and embody" rather than putting words to feelings. More primitive modes of emotional relating emerge as mentalization is disrupted (Teleological, Psychic Equiv., Pretense) due to physiological arousal. Unconscious symbolization is prevalent. Epistemic trust decreases, vigilance increases or freezes, which maintains a dysphoric, regressed mental state.

E. Epistemic trust and vigilance in the context of social diversity and difference. Cultural and social transferences and social reality complicate the process creating an alliance of greater trust and lower vigilance. Without high epistemic trust and lower vigilance, attachment bonds cannot form as the attachment figure loses the ability to influence the other.

F. Emotional biofeedback: How therapist/group members/group relate to insecure attachment by engaging resistance. Moving from unilateral self-regulation via resistance to relational self-regulation, characterized by validation, attunement, playful engagement, and behavioral structure (secure base functions).

G. Therapist/Group responsiveness: Interventions to resolve resistances attend to pre-mentalistic modes of emotional experience found within insecure self-states to restore impaired mentalization, increase epistemic trust and reduce vigilance and epistemic freezing.

H. Five Mentalizing Questions: What are you feeling? Why are you feeling it? Where are you feeling it in your body? What do you want right now? How are others affecting you? i.e., Self-feelings vs. feelings toward others.

VIII. Fourth process group (45 min., 4pm - 4:45pm)

A. Instruct the participants that we will be in process for 45 minutes.

a. Interventions to engage and resolve resistance to feelings related to termination. b. Emphasis on relational attunement and misattunement, and the feelings associated with each.

c. Identify and address termination themes.

d. Link termination feelings to developmental attachment losses.

IX. Evaluations (15 min., 4:45pm - 5pm)

**Assessment Questions**

Question 1 (include possible answers)

True or False: Attachment styles influence both emotional development and the quality of adult relationships.

Correct Answer 1

True

Question 2 (include possible answers)

What is the most effective approached to addressing resistance in group therapy?

Correct Answer 2

The leader should actively explore resistances with the individual, subgroup, and group, with an emphasis on curiosity and discovery.

Question 3 (include possible answers)

What is the internalized secure base?

Correct Answer 3

A set of internalized functions that the group leader calls upon to create an attachment-supportive culture within the group process.

Question 4 (include possible answers)

How do racial and ethnic differences influence epistemic trust and vigilance?

Correct Answer 4

As children, we tend to rely on social emotional information from caregivers who hold the same social identities as we do.

Question 5 (include possible answers)

In what way does insecure attachment arise as resistance in group psychotherapy?

Correct Answer 5

Through observable, behavior deviations from the group goals and agreement.

Question 6 (include possible answers)

How does one know when a resistance resulting from attachment insecurity has been resolved?

Correct Answer 6

When the group member learns more about the emotional basis for their resistance and voluntarily moves toward cooperation and collaboration.

Question 7 (include possible answers)

What developmental capacity is a potential outcome resulting from both secure attachment relationships in development and successful group therapy?

Correct Answer 7

Mentalization

Question 8 (include possible answers)

.What does epistemic trust mean?

Correct Answer 8

The identification with a caregiver whom the child believes is modeling trustworthy emotional and cultural information.

Question 9 (include possible answers)

What is “earned” secure attachment?

Correct Answer 9

The relational competence that can be achieved later in life through healing, therapeutic experiences such as group therapy.

Question 10 (include possible answers)

What are the four secure base functions?

Correct Answer 10

Validation mirroring, anaclitic attunement, imaginary play, and behavioral structure.

Specific Focus Process Group registration limit

14