



Words with a Purpose: *Transforming Childhood Trauma with Stories of Grace*

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Why Stories Work



- Stories are culturally universal
- Early stories create first mental model
- Channel different perspective of life events
- Model and facilitate integration of thought and feeling
- Change the story, change self understanding



Catholic teaching embraces
reverence of word and the
concept of a **narrative that holds
a moral**. This is illustrated in
biblical stories and parables told
by Jesus.



“Stories contain a moral character that encourages virtues of its listeners based on God’s wisdom and truth.”

(CCMP, Vitz, 2020)



“A story is an envelope with a moral inside.”

Narrative Therapy & FANT

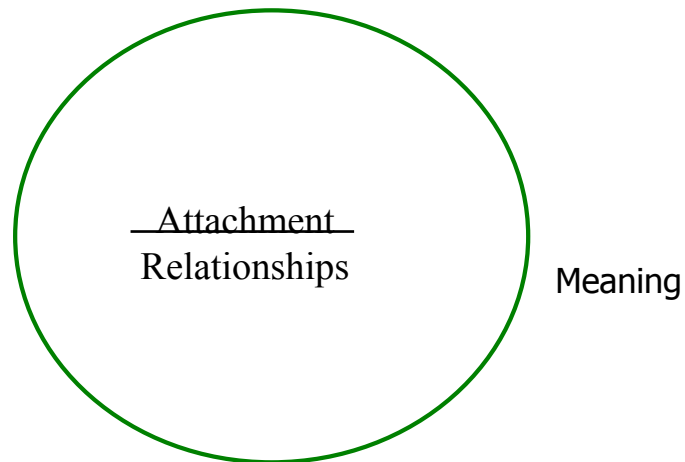


Narrative Therapy is a social constructionist, postmodernist therapy that would be suspicious of ultimate truths and would support an inquiring discovery process (White & Epston, 1990)

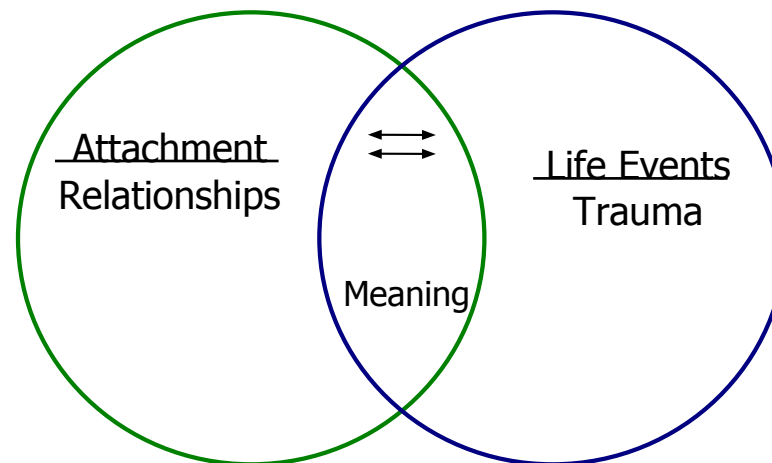
FANT posits a belief in the ultimate truth of the child's innate need for a primary attachment relationship in which the child is the recipient of the parent's attuned care and protection. This core belief is the impetus for the goal directed parent narrative methodology and is supported by the basic premise of attachment theory and research correlating patterns of early childhood attachment and narrative construction.

-Joanne C. May

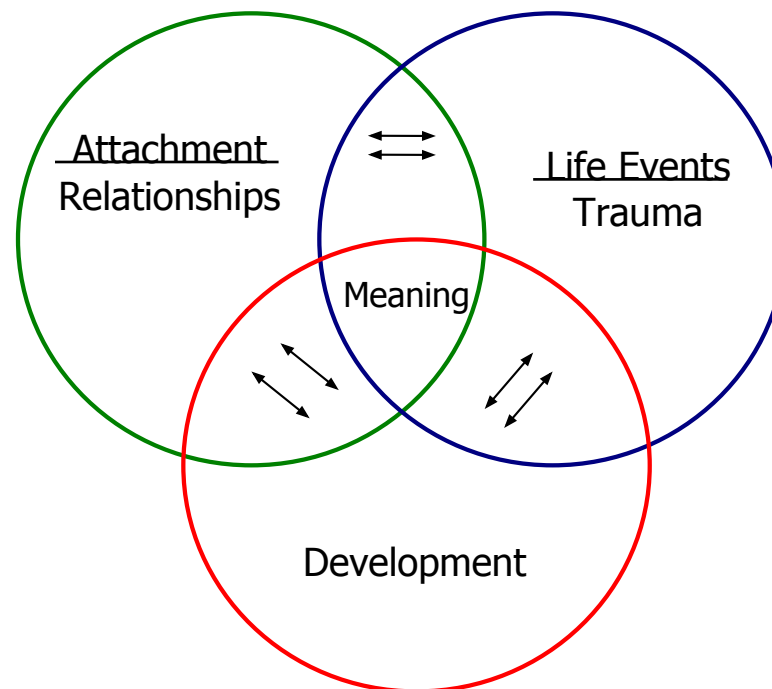
Model and Meaning



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Attunement

The ability of a parent to accurately read the emotional state and motivations of his or her child and appropriately meet the child's needs.

Regulation

A person's ability to calm--to regulate body, emotions, and states of mind. Parents help children to regulate.

Impact of Attachment on Development



- Physical
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Social
- Spiritual

Patterns of Attachment



I. Organized

- Secure
- Insecure
 - Avoidant Attachment
 - Ambivalent Attachment

II. Disorganized

- Insecure

III. Disinhibited

Secure Attachment...

- Regulates emotional state
- Helps form healthy concept of self and others
- Supports language development
- Assists a child in learning about a relationship-cooperative partnership
- Supports development of a coherent narrative

FANT



Family Attachment Narrative Therapy

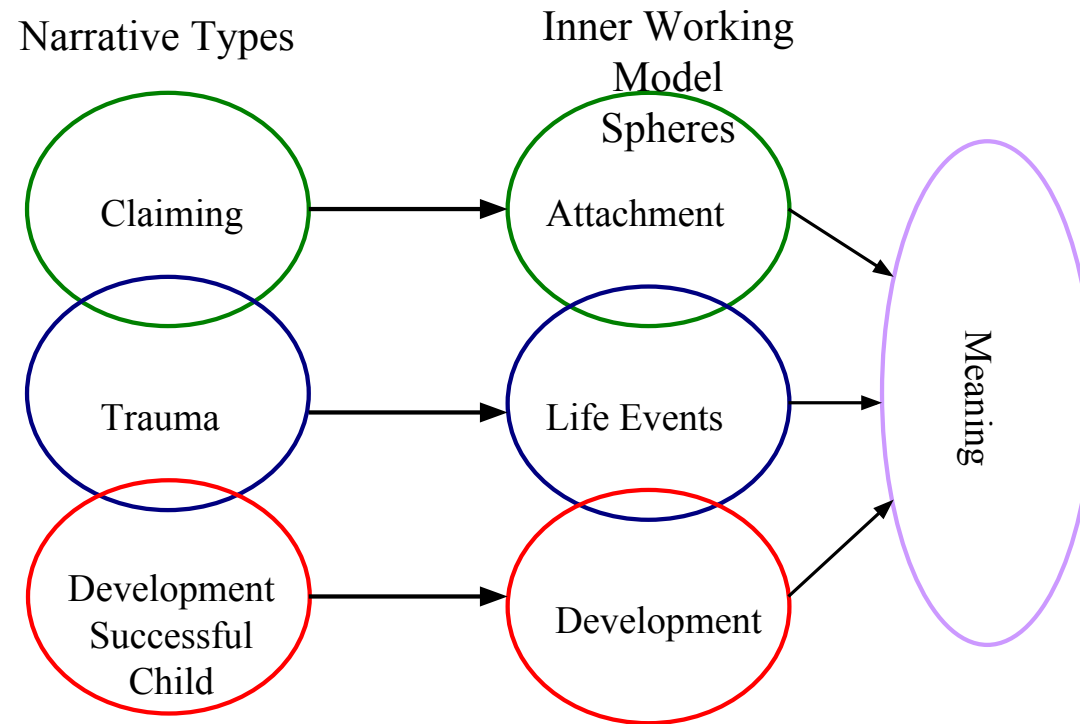
Narrative Types



- Claiming
- Developmental
- Trauma
- Successful Child



Shifting Model with Narratives



Claiming Narratives



- Strengthens emotional bonds
- Facilitates trust
- Establishes birth order
- Extended family
- Passes on traditions, history, rituals

Trauma Narratives



- Heals pain of trauma
- Creates empathy
- Fosters understanding

Developmental Narratives



- Facilitates cognitive development
- Enhances emotional regulation
- Remedial skill building

Successful Child Narratives



- Teaches values
- Reinforces cause and effect thinking
- Presents alternative behaviors
- Explains basics of “How To Do” life

Narrative Themes



From the first, you were a child that deserved
to be loved and cared for by parents you
could trust.

Narrative Themes



From the first, you were a child that deserved
to be loved and cared for by parents you
could trust.

Narrative Themes



Even though you experienced abuse,
abandonment, neglect, you
deserved to be loved and cared for
by responsible parents.

Narrative Themes



Your problem behavior does not
define your value and we will be
there to love and support
you as you make changes.

Preparing parents for FANT



- Building a collaborative relationship through acknowledgement and affirmation
- Helping parents to walk in the shoes of their child
- Education about child development

Creating a Story



1. What is the purpose or goal of your story?
2. What is your child's mistaken belief that keeps him/her from accepting their true value and worth?
3. What is your hypothesis concerning your child's belief? How did the belief form? How was it confirmed through life events?
4. What message do you want your child to take away from the story?

Constructing Stories



- Setting
- Props
- Perspective
- Genre
- Hero
- Message

Taking it home



- Homework
- Therapist's suggestions and ideas are optional and used at parent discretion
- Positive regard, encouragement and support
- Stories instead of talking about it
- Stories challenge beliefs, heal and teach
- Stories connect us to each other and to God



Everyman's life is a fairytale
written by God's fingers.

-Hans Christian Andersen

Supporting Research



- **Bower, G.H. & Morrow, D. G. (1990). *Mental Models in Narrative Comprehension*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence-Erlbaum.**

In order to make sense of a narrative or story, there must be an identification with a protagonist which allows a here and now perspective to be adopted. In doing so, the narrative has the capacity to travel back and forward in time and space, thus allowing the message to become immediately relevant.

- **Carnes-Holt, K. Child-Parent Relationship Therapy for Adoption Families. *The Family Journal*, 20, 419-426.**

Discussion of construction of a coherent narrative for a child due to capacity to verbalize feelings because of their developmental level or as a result of traumatic experiences.

- **Charon, J.M. (1985). *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, Interpretation, and Integration*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.**

The process of verbally interacting with self and others is essential in the development of the ability to evaluate present behavior and plan for change in the future.

- **Cozolino, L. (2017). *The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy: Building and Rebuilding the Human Brain*. New York: Guilford Press.**

- **Gofman, M. ; Kivity, Y. ; Bar-Kalifa, E ; Vidan, Z. ; Hasson Ohayon, I. ; Tuval-Mashiach, R. ; Peri, T. (2021). [Narrative Reconstruction as an Intervention for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Pilot Delayed Intervention Quasi-Randomized Controlled Trial](#). *Journal of traumatic stress*, 34, 92-103.**

The results of the current study provide support for the notion that organizing a coherent narrative of the trauma memory, integrating the traumatic memory into autobiographical memory, and incorporating new, personal meaning to the trauma are therapeutic.

- **Habermas, T. (2011). *Autobiographical Reasoning: Arguing and Narrating from a Biographical Perspective*. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 131, 1-17.**

Autobiographical reasoning is the activity of creating relations between different parts of one's past, present and future life and one's personality and development. It embeds personal memories in a culturally, temporally, causally, and thematically coherent life story. It also contributes to the development of personality and identity and assists in one's coping of life events. Family stories with adolescents show a progressing ability for autobiographical reasoning by interpreting the stories and excerpting a moral from them with the use of metaphor.

- **McQueen, C.; Hobbs, C. (2014). *Working with parents: Using narrative therapy to work towards genuine partnership*. *Education & Child Psychology*, 31, 9-17.**

Narrative approach in therapy states that over time stories shape lives and give meaning to everyday experience which is shaped by culture and history. Evidence suggests that engaging parents in professional practice improves outcomes for children and young people.

- **Osofsky, J.D. (1993). *Applied Psychoanalysis: How research with infants and adolescents at high psychosocial risk informs psychoanalysis*. *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association*, 41, 193-207.**

Supporting Research & FANT Publications



- Pynoos, R.S., Steinberg, A.M., & Goenjian, A. (1996). *Traumatic Stress in Childhood and Adolescence: Recent Developments and Current Controversies*. In B.A. van der Kolk & A.C. McFarlane (Eds.) *Traumatic Stress* (pp. 331-358). New York: Guilford Press.

When faced with a frightening situation, the inability to contemplate a solution seems to retard developmental accomplishments and interfere with successful processing of subsequent traumatic events.

- Siegel, D.J. (1999). *The Developing Mind: toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience*. New York: Guilford Press.

Parent-child reflective dialogue that identifies the mental state that fuels behavior, perceptions, intentions, goals, beliefs and desires seem to promote both secure attachment and the integrative process of co-construction of narratives.

- Solomon, J. George, C., & DeJong, A. (1995). *Children Classified as Controlling at Age Six: Evidence of Disorganized Representational Strategies and Aggression at Home and School*. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7, 447-464.

Securely attached children typically tell stories in which the child protagonist struggles, finds a solution and ultimately lives happily ever after.

- Zwaan, R. A. (1999). *Situation Models: The mental Leap into Imagined Worlds*. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8, 15-18.

The experience of narrative is the same as being in or observing the real situation.

FANT Publications:

- Nichols, M., Lacher, D., & May, J. (recent edition: 2022) *Parenting with Stories: Creating a foundation of attachment for parenting your child*. Deephaven, MN: Family Attachment Center.
- Nichols, T., Nichols, M, Lacher, D. (2018). Family Attachment Narrative Therapy in *Attachment Theory in Action* Edited by Buckwalter, K. & Reed, D. pp 173-184.
- Lacher, D., Nichols, T., Nichols, M. & May, J. (2012) *Connecting with Kids Through Stories: Using Narratives to Facilitate Attachment in Adopted Children*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Nichols, M., Nichols, T., Lacher, D., & May, J. (2007) *First Steps for Strengthening Adoptive Families: Tools and Techniques for Meeting the Needs of Your Adopted Child*. Minnesota: Skyhouse Productions.
- Nichols, M. & Nichols, T. (2007) *First Steps for Strengthening Adoptive Families: Tools and Techniques for Meeting the Needs of Your Adopted Child Study Guide*. Deephaven, MN: Family Attachment Center.
- May, J. (2007) Family Attachment Narrative Therapy: Healing the Experience of Early Childhood Maltreatment. *Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy*, .



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