

# Empathy, Emotional Intelligence and Relationship-based practice

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NUI Galway  
8<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference  
*Rediscovering Empathy*  
8-9 June 2017

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David Howe  
University of East Anglia  
Norwich

Doing social life – troubled and  
troublesome people

Empathy, emotional intelligence, mentalizing  
mind-mindedness, social cognition,  
social understanding



Resilience, social competence

Studies which have used complex statistical techniques to investigate whether some therapists consistently perform better than others have shown that they do. It seems that the differences in effectiveness between therapists carrying out the same type of psychotherapy often exceed the differences observed between different psychotherapies.

(R. Bentall, 2009, *Doctoring the Mind*, p 249)

Why this should be the case is not completely understood, but the ability to form a strong therapeutic alliance is undoubtedly a skill that is likely to affect the outcome of any kind of treatment.

(R. Bentall, 2009, *Doctoring the Mind*, p 249)

# Evolution – why EI, social cognition, empathy etc?

- Sociable, group-living species
- *Prediction*
- Co-operation and collaboration
- *Division of labour, range of talents*
- Individual differences
- *Brain size, brain functions*
- Sarah Hrdy – *Mothers and Others*

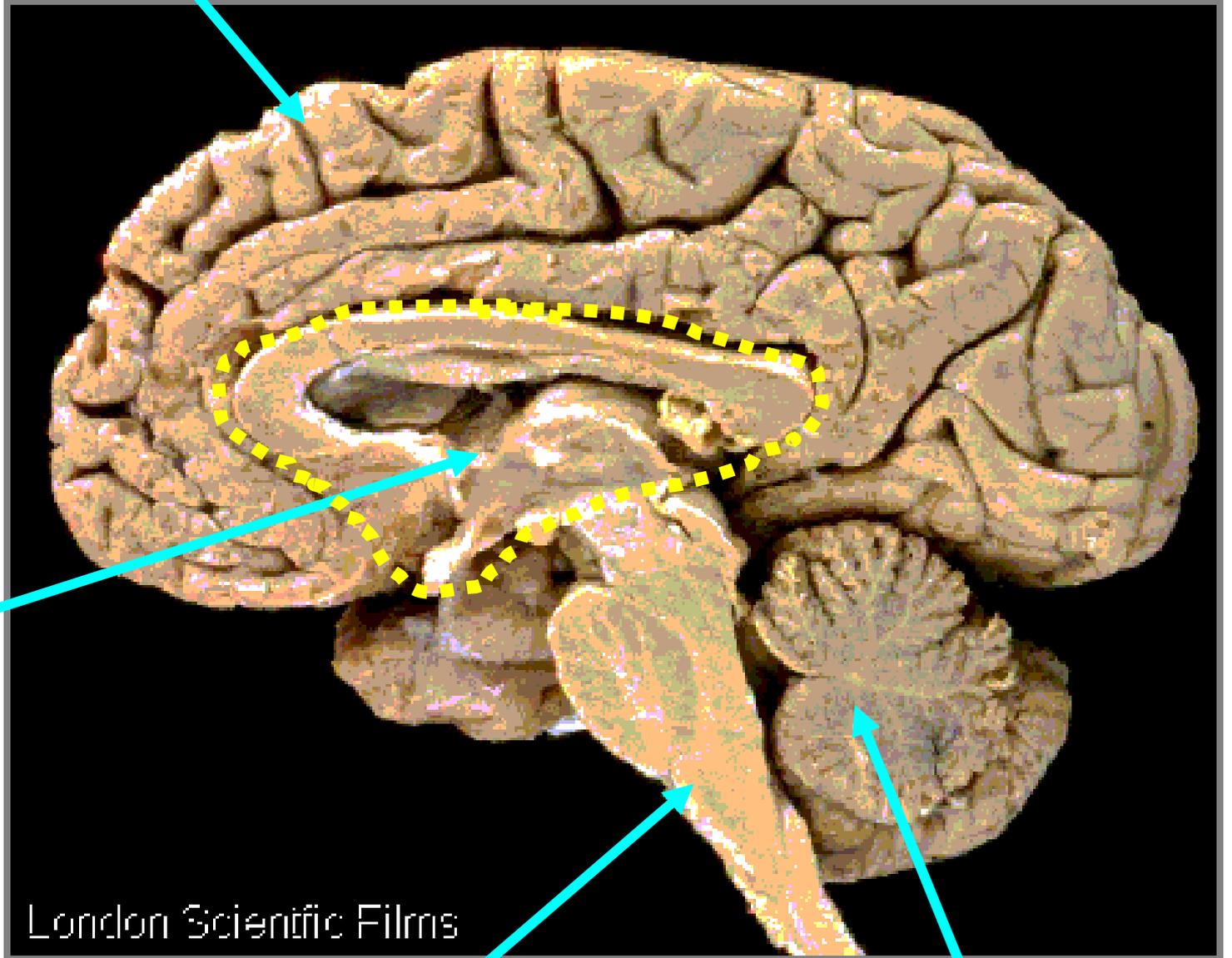
NB abandonment, rejection, being ostracised

# How do we develop empathy, EI, mentalisation, social cognition?

Development, attachment, 'environment of evolutionary adaptedness', co-operation, collaboration, safety.

Emotional regulation, management of stress, mind-reading, reflective function, growth of the psychological self.

**cortex**



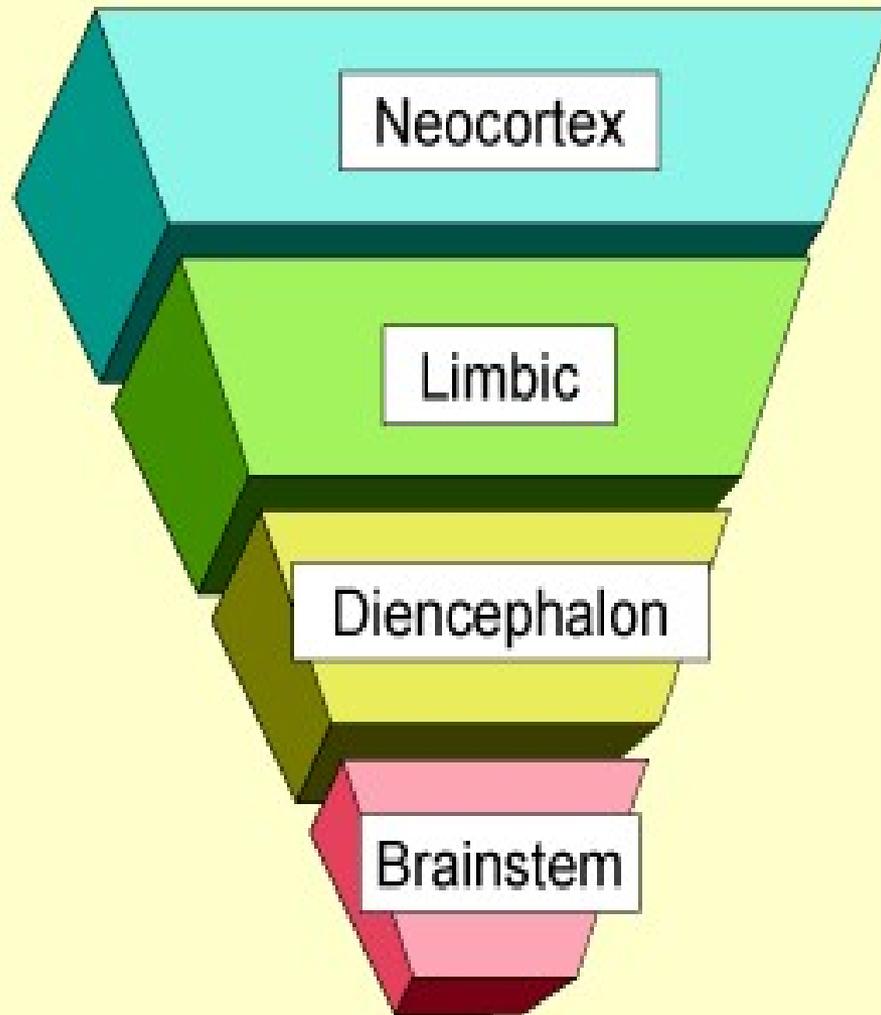
**limbic  
system**

London Scientific Films

**brain stem**

**cerebellum**

# Emotional regulation



Abstract thought  
Concrete Thought  
Affiliation  
"Attachment"  
Sexual Behavior  
Emotional Reactivity  
Motor Regulation  
"Arousal"  
Appetite/Satiety  
Sleep  
Blood Pressure  
Heart Rate  
Body Temperature

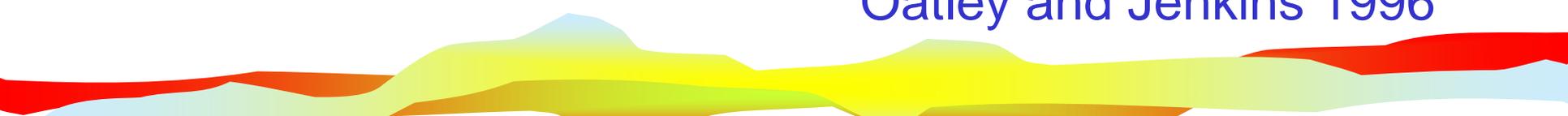
# The Emotions

Emotion is an evaluative response (a positive or negative feeling) that typically includes some combination of:

- Physiological arousal - increased heart rate, sweaty palms, blushing eg anger = “*feeling hot under the collar*” **BODY**
- Subjective experience **MIND**
- Behavioural or emotional expression - the overt behavioural sign of emotion, particularly facial expressions but also other bodily language **BEHAVIOUR**

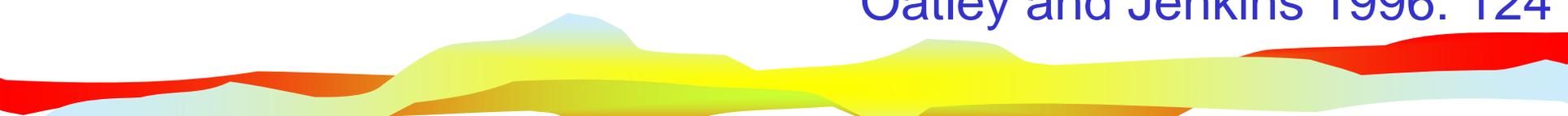
‘So emotion is not something opposed to reason. Emotions and their potentiality for guiding and managing thought in a general way are more basic. They complement the deficiencies of thinking. And perhaps most important of all... emotions provide the infrastructure for social life: the plans they prompt are largely plans that involve others.’

Oatley and Jenkins 1996



‘The readiness that emotions induce provides outline structures for particular modes of relating: emotions of happiness and affection provide for co-operation, sadness allows for withdrawal from social interaction and the seeking of help, anger provides for conflict with others, and anxiety makes for wariness and deference.’

Oatley and Jenkins 1996: 124



# EMOTIONS

Positive

Negative

**Love**

**Joy**

**Anger**

**Sadness**

**Fear**

Fondness

Infatuation

Bliss

Contentment

Pride

Annoyance

Hostility

Contempt

Jealousy

Agony

Grief

Guilt

Loneliness

Horror

Worry

*approach*

*avoidance*



# EMOTIONS

- Expressions -

Autonomic  
changes

Self-reported  
emotions -

— Moods —————

- Emotional disorders -

- Personality traits



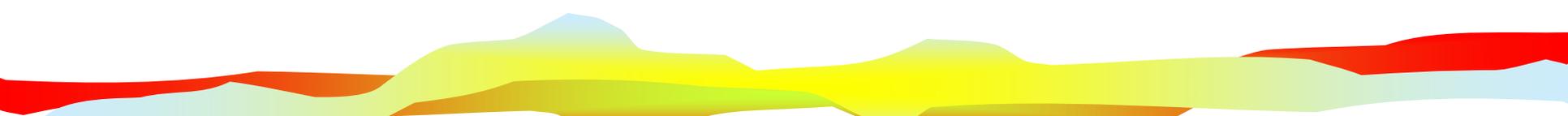
Seconds   Minutes   Hours   Days   Weeks   Months   Years   Lifetime

# Emotional regulation and wellbeing

Psychoneuroimmunology, health,  
longevity, epigenetics

Stress, social and economic inequality,  
mental health and social stability

Control, stress and locus of control



## SOCIAL CAPITAL:

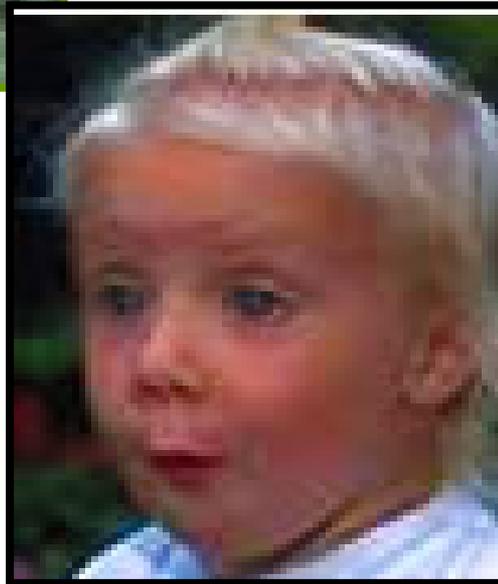
Over recent years, social scientists, economists and politicians have recognised that there is something tantalisingly important about happiness, personal relationships and social support. The sum of all these elements they refer to as 'social capital.' Social relationships and a sense of emotional connectedness with others appear to bring great social benefits.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL:

Communities that are rich in social capital have lower rates of crime and social unrest. Conversely, they enjoy higher levels of physical health and social cohesion.

*Social inequality = reduced social capital, increased stress, increased social problems*





# Emotional intelligence

Four-branch model which proceeds from perception to management:

- The perception and expression of emotion in the self and others.
- The use of emotion to facilitate thought, and the integration of emotion in thought.
- Understanding and analysing emotions in self and others.
- Regulating and managing emotions in self and others depending on one's needs, goals and plans (the management of relationships).

**Intrapersonal intelligence**

**Interpersonal intelligence**

**Self-awareness**

**Other awareness**



**Self management  
Self regulation**



**Relationship  
management  
and regulation**

Relationships and outcomes: examples:

Driving

Medicine eg I.C.E. (ideas, concerns and expectations)

# Client Views

(from D. Howe, *On Being a Client*, Sage)

## ● Feel secure:

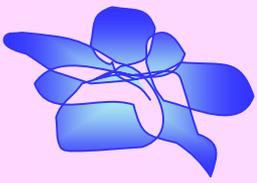
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1. Warm and friendly
2. Acknowledge and accept feelings
3. Understand

## ● Then explore:

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4. Opportunity to talk
5. Make sense of experience
6. Re-order/re-structure/change  
thoughts, feelings, behaviour,  
circumstances.



Emotional intelligence  
empathy

Intellectual knowledge  
technical know-how

Be responsive



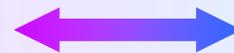
Be systematic

Inside



Outside

Experience



Behaviour

Understanding



Explanation

Meaning



Cause

Relationship



Technique

Feel secure



Then explore

# The relationship and therapeutic change

For Carl Rogers (1961, 1986), the three essential qualities that must be present in the worker-client relationship in order to bring about therapeutic change are *warmth, empathy* and *genuineness*.



These became known as the 'core conditions' of the helpful relationship. It was felt that not only were they necessary, but they could be sufficient.

# Principles of therapeutic change (Castonguay and Beutler 2006)

Three major variable domains:

Technique

Participant characteristics

Relationship



Good relationships, it seems, are a universal therapeutic good, and yet may turn out to be the single most important ingredient of effective psychiatric care.

(R. Bentall 2009: 260).



# Relationship-based practices

“Whatever the individual approach or clinical technique employed, the therapeutic relationship is one of the most powerful determinants of positive outcome...”

(Daniel Siegel *The Mindful Therapist* 2010)



# Relationship-based practice

- Containment
- Mentalisation, EI, empathy
- Transitional attachment figure
- Zone of proximal development



Hold the child in mind for the parent  
as a *mentalizing* being.

See the child's behavior as *meaningful*.

Holding the parent in mind so that the  
parent can begin to hold the child  
in mind.

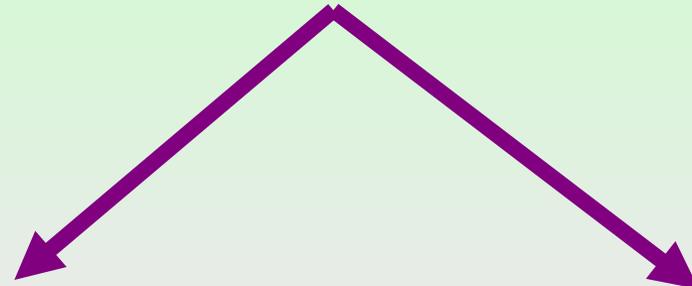
Being held in mind by the worker is a powerful way of containing the parent's anxiety, fear, doubts, anger, and sadness. This makes it safer for the parent to think about the child who is therefore not only more likely to be in mind but also in sight, and as a result that bit safer.

David Howe (2010): 'The safety of children and the parent-child relationship in cases of child abuse and neglect'. *Child Abuse Review*, 19 (5): pp 330-41

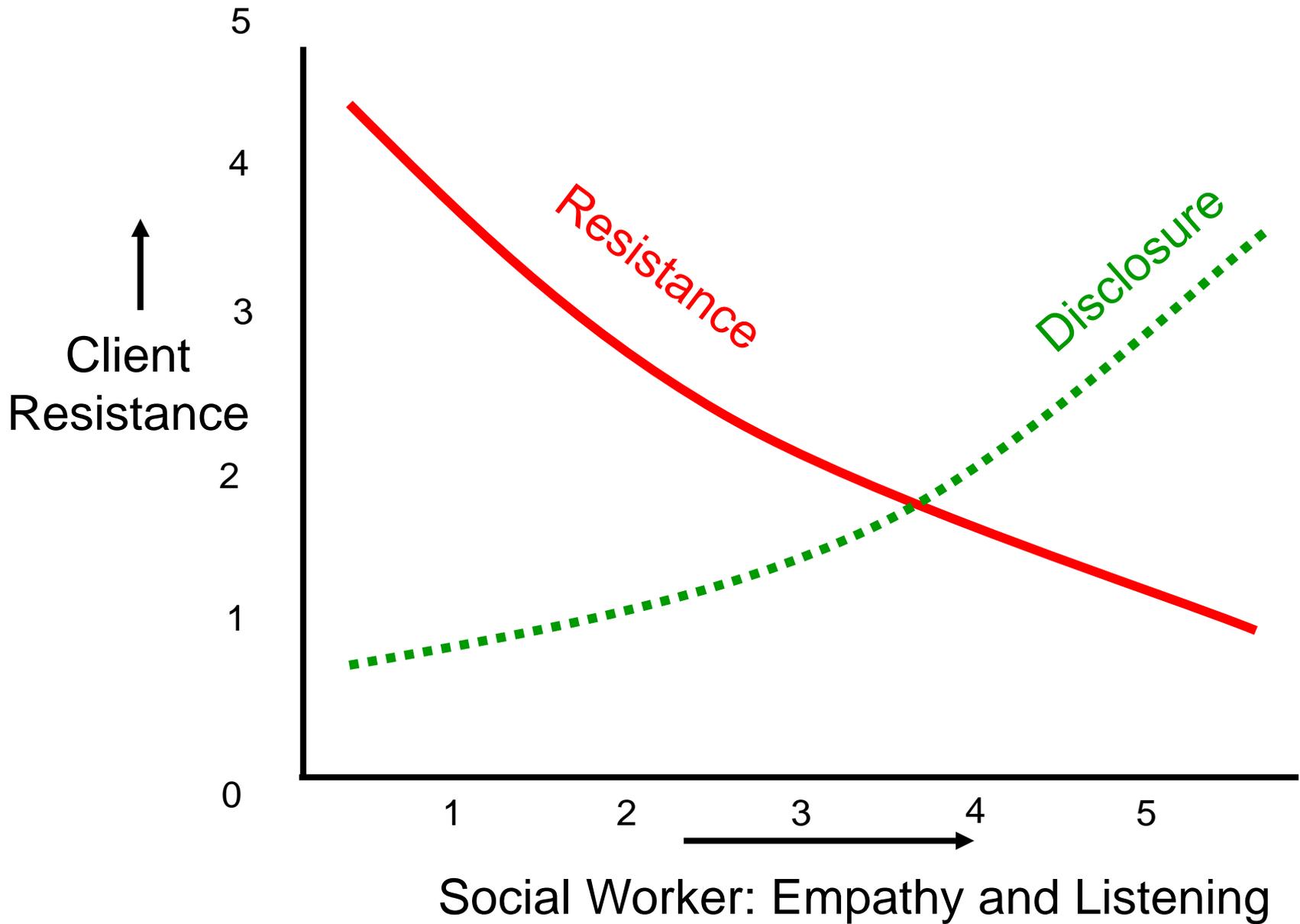
Empathy

Emotional

Cognitive



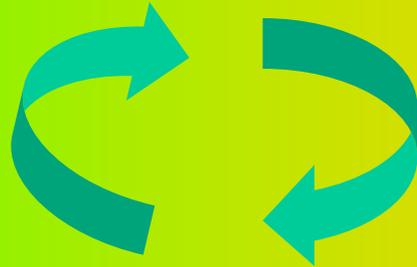
# Donald Forrester (University of Bedford)





Tony seeks help

Safe Haven  
Attachment  
Feeling safe



Secure Base  
Explore/Play  
Reflect/Think

Compare the therapeutic/working alliance

## Feel Secure

Feel safe

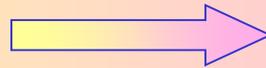
Less anxious  
and fearful

Less defensive

Less resistant

More co-operative

More collaborative



## Then Explore

Think

Work

Change

Feel motivated

Go forward

Therapeutic Alliance  
*empathy*

+

Technical know-how  
*structure*

Empathy

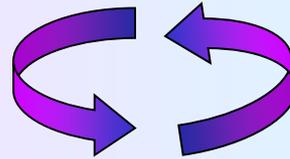
Emotional  
intelligence

The relationship

Connection

Understanding

Mentalising



Structure

Problems

Needs

Purpose

Aims

Goals

Methods

Techniques

Collaboration

Empathy

*and*

Structure

Good  
Relationships

*and*

Working  
Well

Therapeutic  
alliance

*and*

Technique/  
purpose

Feel secure

*then*

Explore

Connection

*before*

Correction

Task-centred

Behaviour modification

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Brief Solution Focused

Strengths-Based

Motivational interviewing

Multi-systemic therapies

Critical Best Practice

## Mentalising:

Thinking about thinking in self and others

Thinking about feeling in self and others

Thinking about doing (behaviour)



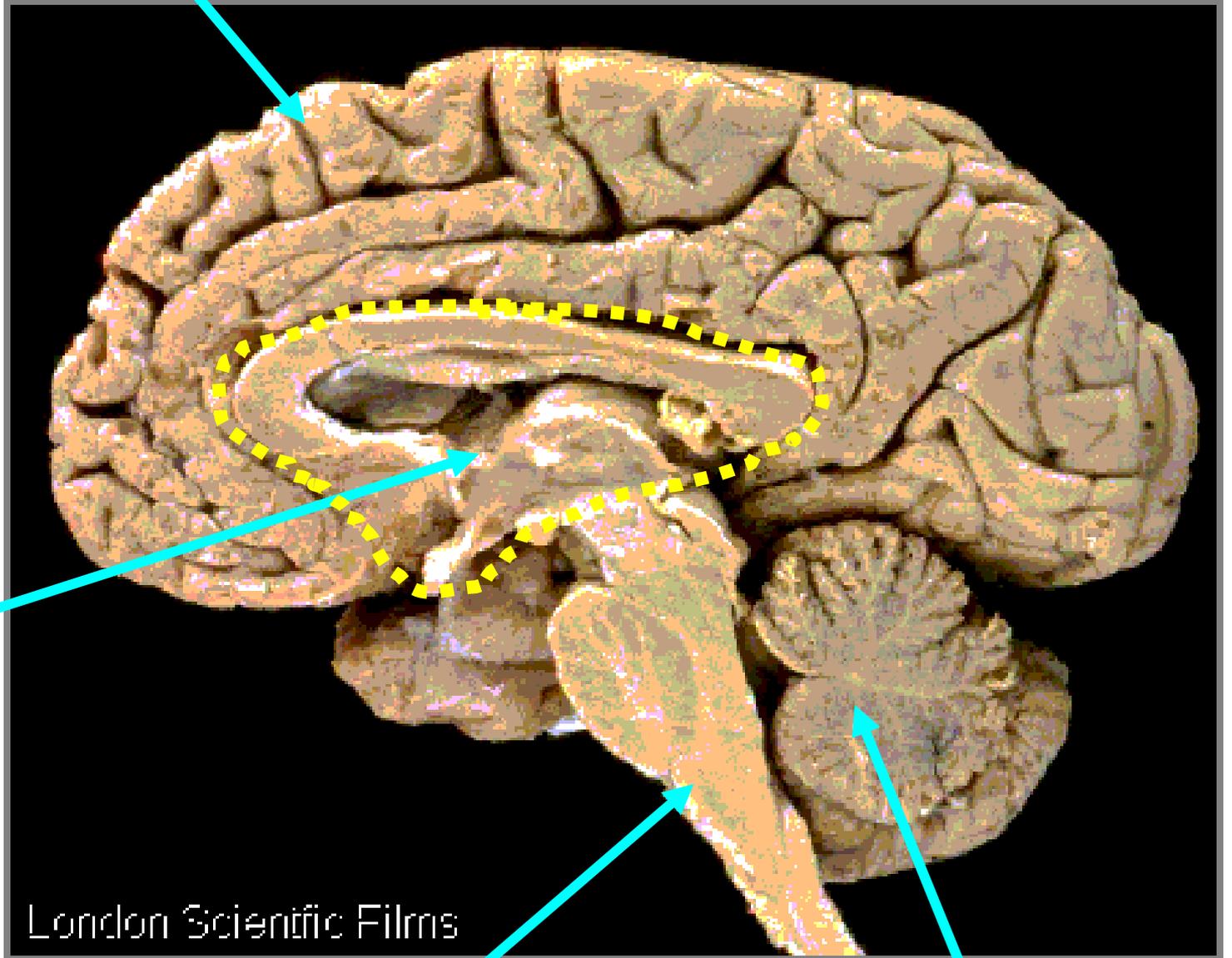
*Getting mind to consider mind.*

When I work with a client, I am trying to create a context in which he or she can slowly shift from a physical to a reflective or mentalizing stance...

I help people to see other people's behaviour as behaviour as *meaningful*.

A. Slade (2008)

**cortex**



**limbic  
system**

London Scientific Films

**brain stem**

**cerebellum**

**Bottom-up, inside to outside**

**Respond to developmental age and not chronological age**

**Relationships as the most powerful of therapeutic experiences**

behavioural and cognitive development

social support and relationships

peer relationships

social cognition, understanding, empathy

mentalising, attunement,

affect regulation

predictability, repetition, routines, structure

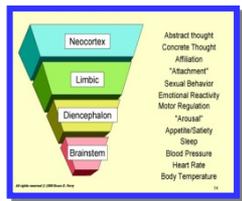
safe and in control

animal assisted therapies

play, art, music, movement and dance therapy

sensory integration treatments

rocking, touch, massage



Intellectual understanding and making sense



Less anxious



More emotionally available



Containment, safe haven-secure base, emotional intelligence, empathy, transitional attachment figure



Therapeutic alliance



The social work relationship and relationship-based practice



Technique (eg strengths, solutions, MI etc)

Containment  
Emotional intelligence  
Mentalisation

Organisation  
→ s/v, SW

Containment  
Emotional intelligence  
Mentalisation

Supervisor → SW

Containment  
Emotional intelligence  
Mentalisation

SW → client

Containment  
Emotional intelligence  
Mentalisation

Client → child, partner, parent etc



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**"Before you continue your emotional tirade,  
let me know if you're picking up on my  
nonevaluative and empathetic listening."**

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search ID: rde1807

**"Cheer up. I hate your job too."**

The  
Emotionally  
Intelligent  
Social Worker



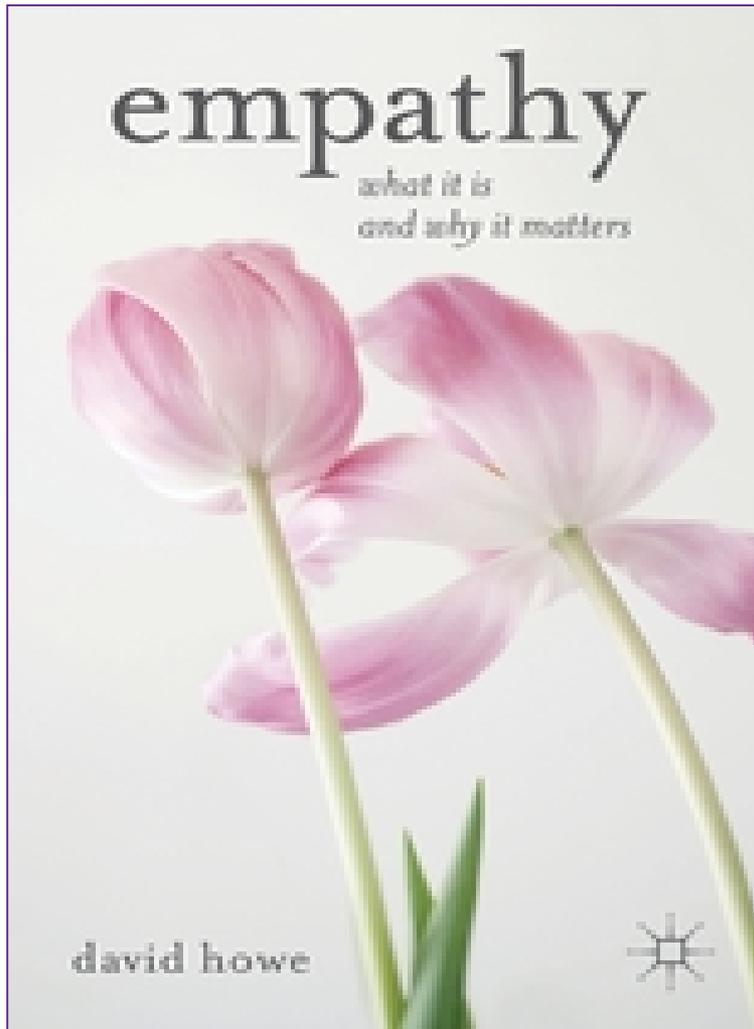
David Howe



David Howe

*The  
Emotionally Intelligent  
Social Worker*

Palgrave Macmillan  
2008



# Empathy

what it is  
and why it matters

David Howe

Palgrave Macmillan  
2012



The Compleat



Social Worker



David Howe



# The Compleat Social Worker

David Howe

Palgrave Macmillan  
2014