

# Parent-Infant Psychotherapy with traumatised parents

Amanda Jones

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## What to expect in this presentation ...

I'll discuss how psychodynamic parent-infant psychotherapy can help parents who are feeling threatened and traumatised by their baby.

I'll use a case example to show how parental defensive responses can become a problem.

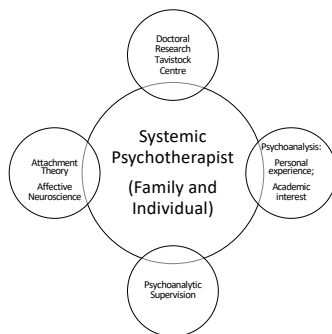
The risk for the baby is that a parent may find it hard to provide good enough parental care.

Finally I'll describe a systematic way to think about parental care and how to monitor how and whether the parent-baby relationship is becoming safer for the baby.

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## Who am I?



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## Setting the scene ...

UK National Health Service (NHS)

Adult, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Perinatal Mental Health Services for parents and babies

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## Perinatal: the word (if it's unfamiliar)

"Peri" means a "surround".  
"Natal" means a new life.

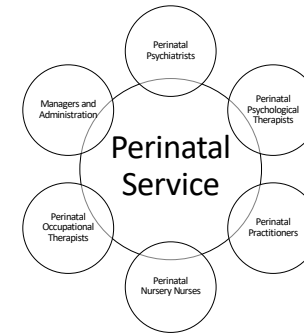
A parent's *surrounding mind*.  
A woman's *surrounding uterus/body*.

Pregnancy and birth involve managing many physical risks.  
Pregnancy and after the baby is born also involve emotional risks.  
A parent can become emotionally ill.  
The parent-baby relationship can suffer.  
Perinatal Mental Health Services aim to help a parent's mental health and the parent-baby relationship.

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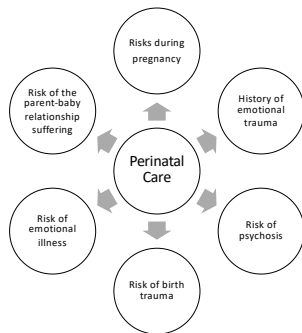
## Who is in an UK NHS Perinatal Mental Health Service?



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## Why is perinatal care necessary



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## Different organizations involved ...

Maternity Services

Perinatal Mental Health Services

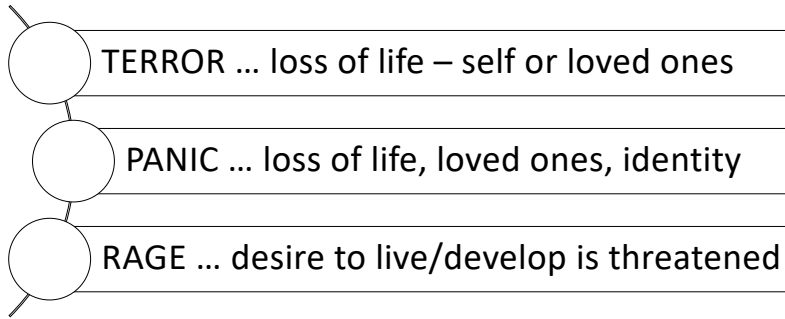
Children's Services (safeguarding)

Adult Mental Health Services

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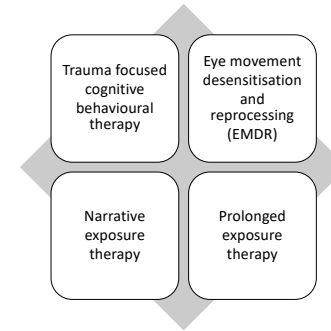
Trauma ... hold in mind ...



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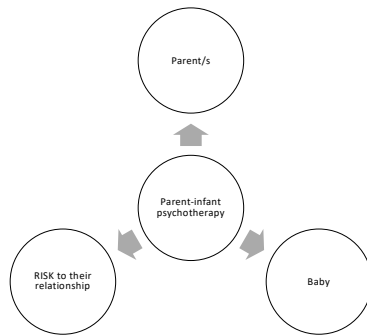
Many interventions can help traumatised parents ... for example ... (NICE Guidance)



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Focus today: Parent-infant Psychotherapy ...



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What is the perinatal timeframe:  
it is a crucial developmental "touchpoint" time for  
parents and babies ...

TOUCHPOINTS-BIRTH TO THREE: YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
BRAZELTON, T. BERRY: *COACHING* JOSHUA, D. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition revised

Conception

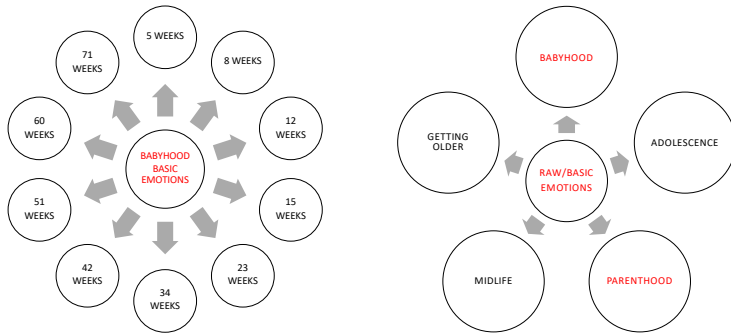


Toddlerhood

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## TOUCHPOINT Developmental Times: Bodies, brains and minds change



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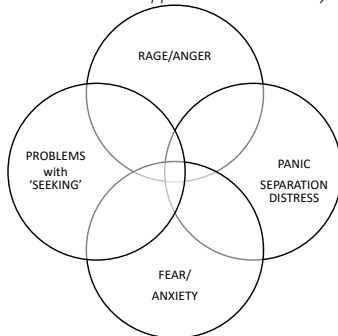
## BABY DEVELOPMENTAL TOUCHPOINTS: ...

- As a baby's brain develops, the baby has to adapt to change.
- Babies' brains go through 10 predictable spurts in the first 20 months of life.
- These times of change lead to an increase of 'attachment behaviours'.
- **Attachment behaviours (come and help!) – crying, clinging, being out of sorts, irritable.**

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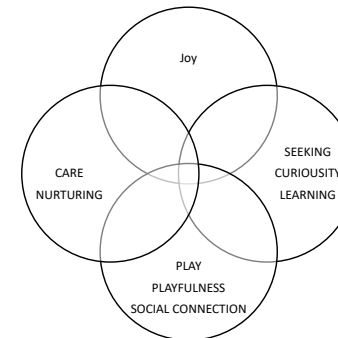
Painful emotions can become more prevalent during a baby's touchpoint developmental times but also during lifecycle touchpoint developmental times ...  
*(Affective Neuroscience: Jaak Panksepp's Basic Emotional Systems)*



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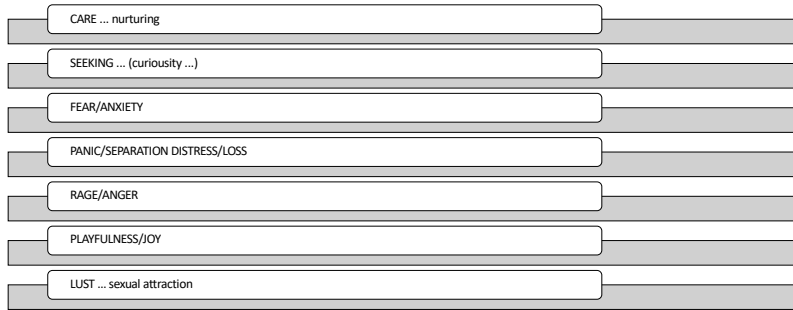
Pleasurable emotions can be very intense ...



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## Basic EMOTIONAL systems (below the cortex) (*Affective Neuroscience/Jaak Panksepp*)



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## Focus: trauma and parents and babies

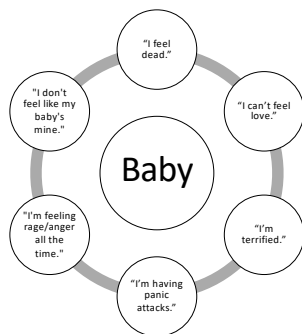
Parent-infant psychotherapy is particularly helpful  
for cases involving babies  
IF the baby is caught up in the parent's experience of trauma.

I will describe how long history of emotional trauma  
can interfere with a parent's  
capacity to care for their baby.

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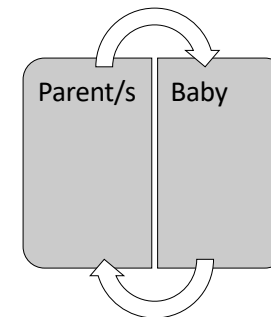
## What does the parent ask for help for?



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Who is the referred 'patient'?  
The new patient is the parent-baby relationship.



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## The process of change in parent-infant psychotherapy ...

What happened \_\_\_\_\_  
... \_\_\_\_\_

The data.  
\_\_\_\_\_

The parent's words.  
\_\_\_\_\_

The parent's feelings.  
\_\_\_\_\_

The therapist's observations.  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## The process of change in parent-infant psychotherapy ...

What happened \_\_\_\_\_  
... \_\_\_\_\_

Defensive use of *projections and projective identification*  
\_\_\_\_\_

Defensive use of *denial*  
\_\_\_\_\_

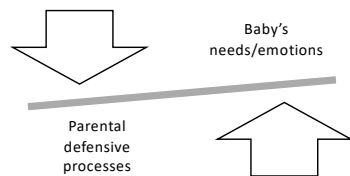
Defensive use of *splitting*  
\_\_\_\_\_

Defensive use of *omnipotent control*  
\_\_\_\_\_

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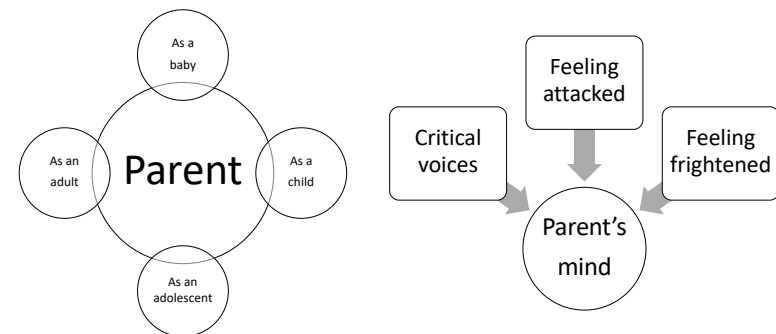
## When a baby is felt to be a "threat" to a parent's emotional resources ...



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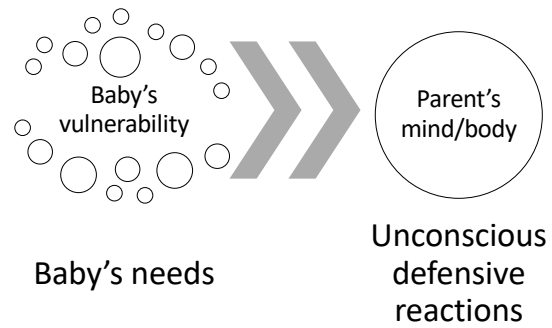
## The history of traumatic loss ...



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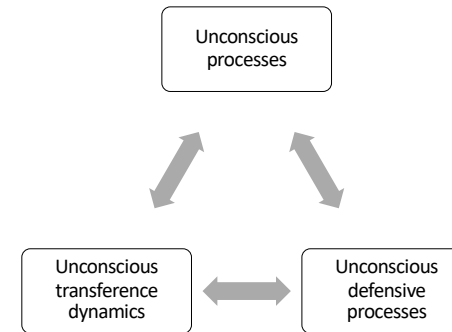
How does the parent react ....



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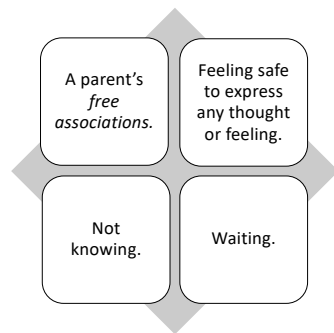
Psychoanalytic theory helps ...



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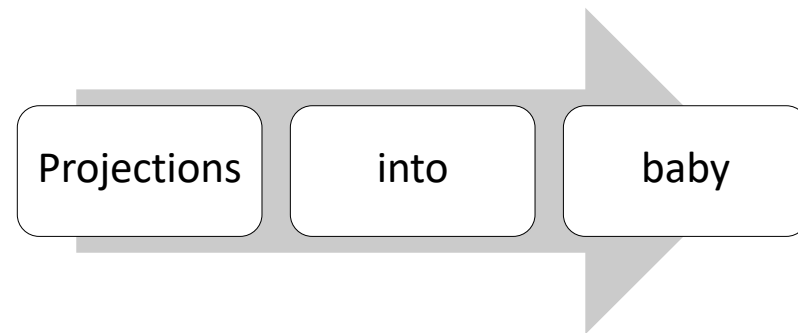
A psychoanalytic approach encourages ...



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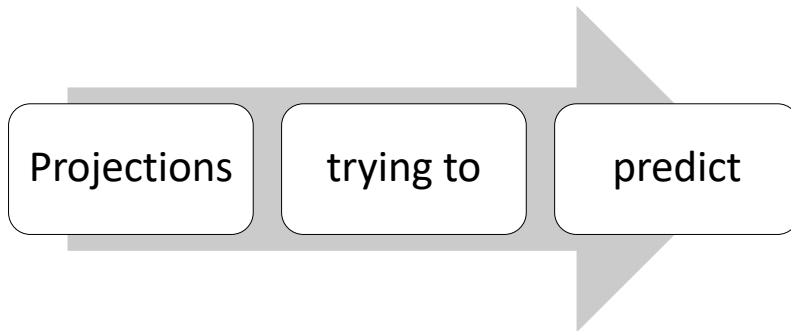
Transference dynamics: parent to baby ...



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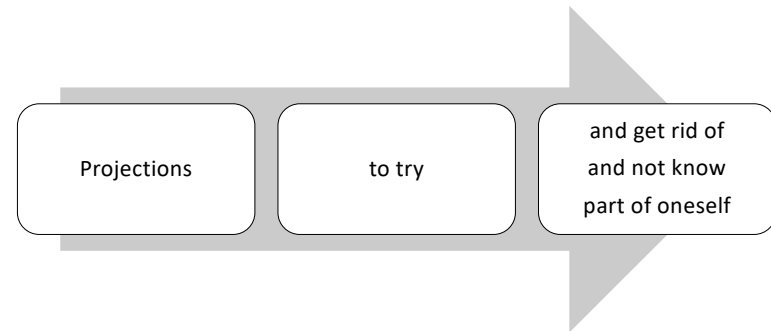
Ordinary helpful *projections* ... but these can also become unhelpful ...



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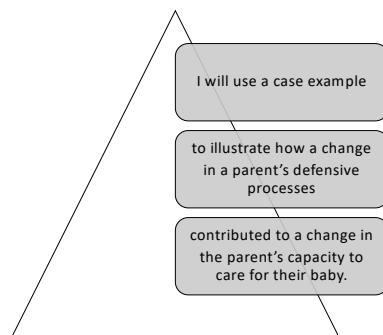
Ordinary projections ... (from a developmental perspective) ...



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How did these changes affect the parent's capacity to CARE ...



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Most importantly I hope to show ...



And the parent  
can be unaware  
of what's going  
on.

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But ...

... a problematic projection can also express something potentially life-affirming.

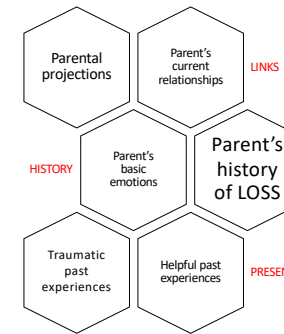
We have to look for clues about a parent's resilience.

There may be a combination of influences that can come to life in a helpful way linked to experiences of love/care that a parent has known before.

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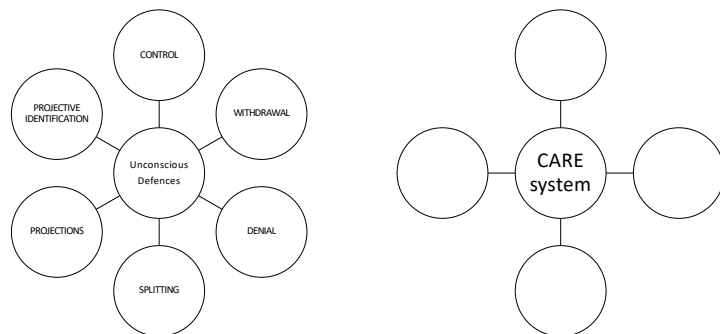
Using the case to highlight:



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Why thinking about defensive processes is useful ...



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A framework to address a constant challenge:

- We ask adults referred to PPIMHS to share important and intimate information about their thoughts and feelings.
- We particularly ask about thoughts and feelings about their baby and their intimate relationships.
- We start to develop our own ideas and opinions about the parent and their relationships, especially with their baby.
- We're constantly evaluating what kind of parental care the baby is getting.
- We are often asked to share our opinions with other professionals, especially when there are concerns about a parent's capacity to provide good enough care. This is a huge responsibility.
- And it can be challenging.

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## We need to make important decisions ...

What treatments/interventions to offer.

For the baby, what needs to change?

When does it make sense to end the treatment?

How can we systematically think about parent-baby relationship?

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## A framework to help guide and organise our thinking ...

Draws on our 'common sense'

Aims to be fair

It's relevant for all perinatal clinicians

Once you get used to using it, it's efficient

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## Parental Care: ... a parent's *capacity* ...

A way of

thinking

systematically  
about *parental care*

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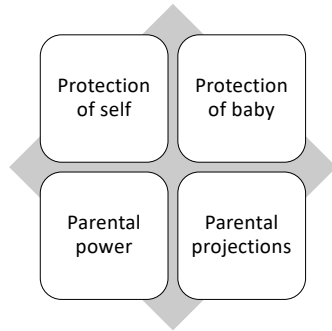
## PARENTAL CARE ...

- P – prioritizing protection
- A – attachment affects (difficult)
- R – realistic about risk
- E - empathy
- N - nurture/neglect
- T - trust
- A – attachment affects (positive)
- L - learning
  
- C - communication – curiosity/cooperation/consent/control/compromise
- A - ambivalence
- R – responsibility/reflection/relationships/repair
- E – endurance/energy

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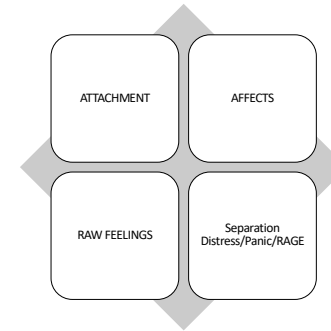
## Parental care ... PRIORITISING PROTECTION (past and present)



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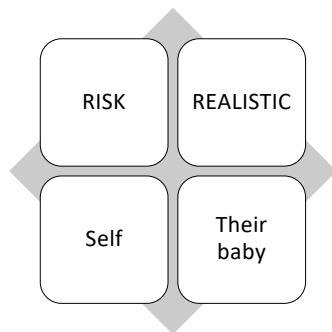
## Parental care ... ATTACHMENT AFFECTS (physiologically uncomfortable raw feelings)



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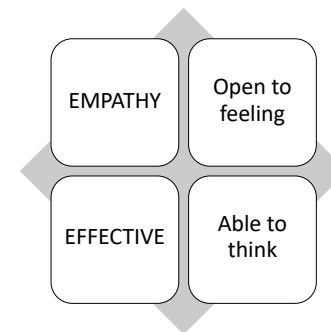
## Parental care ... REALISTIC ABOUT RISK



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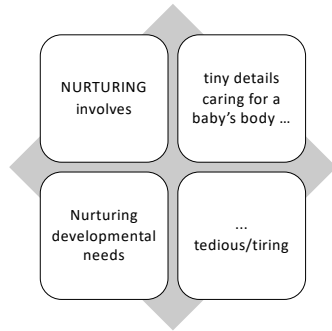
## Parental care ... EFFECTIVE EMPATHY ...



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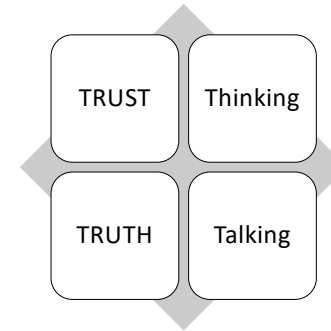
Parental care ... **NURTURE/NEGLECT** ...



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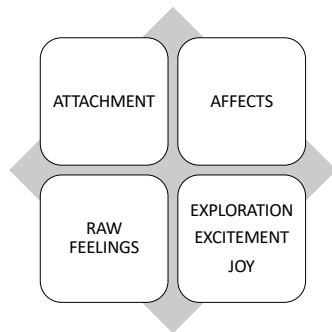
Parental care ... **TRUST** ... ('epistemic trust' – reliable information about the world ...)



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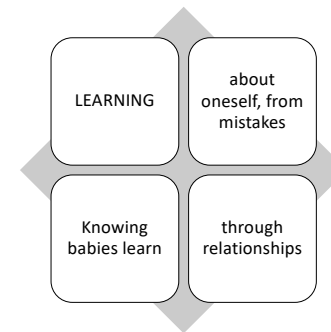
Parental care ... **ATTACHMENT AFFECTS** ... (physiologically **PLEASURABLE** feelings)



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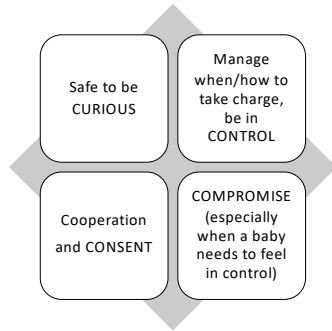
Parental care ... **LEARNING** ... from experience



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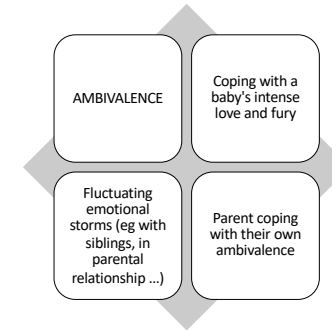
## Parental Care ... COMMUNICATION ...



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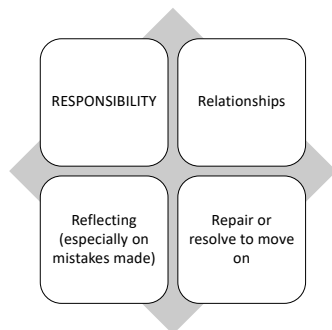
## Parental Care ... AMBIVALENCE ...how to cope with contradictory/confusing/changing emotions and thoughts



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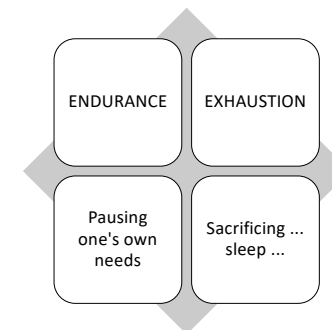
## Parental Care ... RESPONSIBILITY IN RELATIONSHIPS



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## Parental Care ... ENDURANCE/EXHAUSTION



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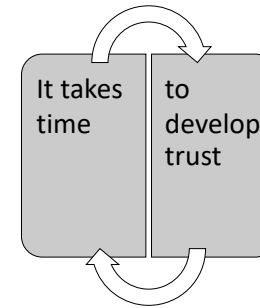
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Like a ladder ... each rung needs attention ...

- When ... in an appointment
- to ... when writing notes
- use ... preparing a report
- this ...
  - ... trying to make a conversation useful
  - ... sharing concerns with a parent

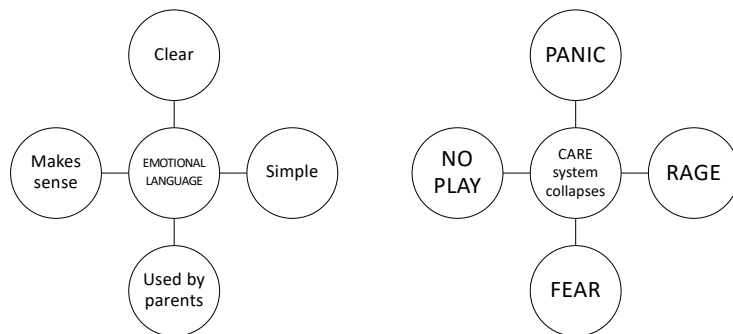
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For the clinician: trusting the process ... taking time to get to know someone ... thinking about what you notice and what you're told ...



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Why Panksepp's model of basic emotions is useful ...



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