

ABOUT ICDP IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

As caregivers or significant adults, we are creating a safe haven for our children. Through our caring, sensitive responses to our children's affective cues we are communicating to them that they are welcomed in this world, that we care, protect them, that they are not alone. Through moment to moment exchange of our facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, gaze, listening and responding we are strengthening our right brain to right brain communication and we are literally helping our children's brains to wire and create neural circuits that will help them to be resilient, socially and emotionally regulated, empathic and attentive for a very long time. This is indeed one of the gifts of human interaction.

But what about the adults' themselves? Are we getting any benefit from it? **Does ICDP and the universal principles of interactions influence the adults' themselves? How can these principles be helpful in these times of pandemic?**

I can list several critical components of the benefits of using ICDP principles and I am sure you will have your own, even longer list of advantages of ICDP and the effect it has on you as a parent or caregiver. However, I would love to direct your attention to one element of human functioning that is adding extra layer of blinder to us to savor small moments in our lives and be more resilient in times of adversity. I am talking about brain's *negativity bias* when we tend to focus much more on what's wrong - our failures or misfortunes - than on what's right in our lives - when our teenager tells us that actually she is proud of us or when the dressing up of our hypersensitive child went smoothly in the morning.

According to Rick Hanson, the brain is like "Velcro for bad experiences and Teflon for good ones." The intensity and frequency of daily stresses including the vast information coming from various sources into our body/brain throughout the day makes it even harder for us to catch those beautiful moments of connection or coregulation with our significant other.

Evolutionary speaking, primitive parts deep inside our brain are trying to protect us. We had to be on guard and hypervigilant to remember where the threat was coming from, so next time we avoided it and stayed safe and survived. It is adaptive when we face physical danger. But nowadays - in our shelters with our loved ones - the danger is more about the looks, the words,

or no looks and no words. It is so important to correct the negativity bias, because it distorts our realities and leaves us feeling isolated, resentful, anxious, guilty (most of the time) and exhausted in the end of the day.

So how can ICDP help us to stay balanced? Through universal principles of positive interaction we are able to *intentionally* pay attention to moment to moment experiences in our typical daily interactions with the ones we care for. Visualize the process of waking up and intentionally tuning into an emotional dialogue with our loved ones or strangers. Isn't it beautiful? Sharing the affection, smiling to each other and being present with the verbal or nonverbal exchange is all vital to "weave into our brain fabric" those positive emotions and experiences that are so important to strengthening or even creating new pathways in our adult brains. This is fulfilling, this is expansive, this is the process of restoring balance and integration in our neurophysiology, mind and relationships.

What about other situations? What if the other person is in distress and talks to us harshly? This is exactly where the wisdom and beauty of eight principles are here to help us stay on track. Through tuning in to another person's feelings and needs, we are able to recognize where they are and choose the principles that they are in need of. We help them to coregulate, soothe them, create meaning of the situation and instill the sense of capability and autonomy. This dance between the two allows us to stay balanced: to see the complexities of the situation and neither to avoid nor be overwhelmed with the emotional currents happening in another person. We are able to hold space for another person through our touch, soft gaze and tone of voice. And seeing the effect it has on their muscles, gaze and tone of voice gives us feelings of relief, joy and hope. We just need to absorb and stay with this for several more seconds. We just need to savor our moment to moment accomplishments. We just need to celebrate the dance we danced - simple or hard. That is how we rewire the brain, that is how we stay safe and curious, that is how we find the "opportunities that would otherwise go unnoticed" even in our small apartments, even with our limited resources we are attending to the world right now.

So, what are your favorite ways to greet the child in the morning? How are you trying to generate positive emotions at the end of the day? How are you trying to balance the negativity bias and help your brain rewire exactly the same way as your child's brain is changing its architecture? Remember, this process is always bidirectional. The benefits of serving our children benefits us too.

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