Psychological Defence Mechanisms

- **Barriers to protect the personality from fear of threat/anxiety and to keep this conflict from coming to the conscious level.**

- **Projection** – when we have unbearable, painful feelings we externalise them by pushing them out and trying to attribute them to others.

Implications

- How you are feeling when with a child might give you an indication of what they are feeling. The task is to recognise which feelings are our own and which are projected.

- Feelings need to be contained, named, 'digested' and withstood

- If they are projected back in the same way and with the same intensity, they cause terror and 'nameless dread'.
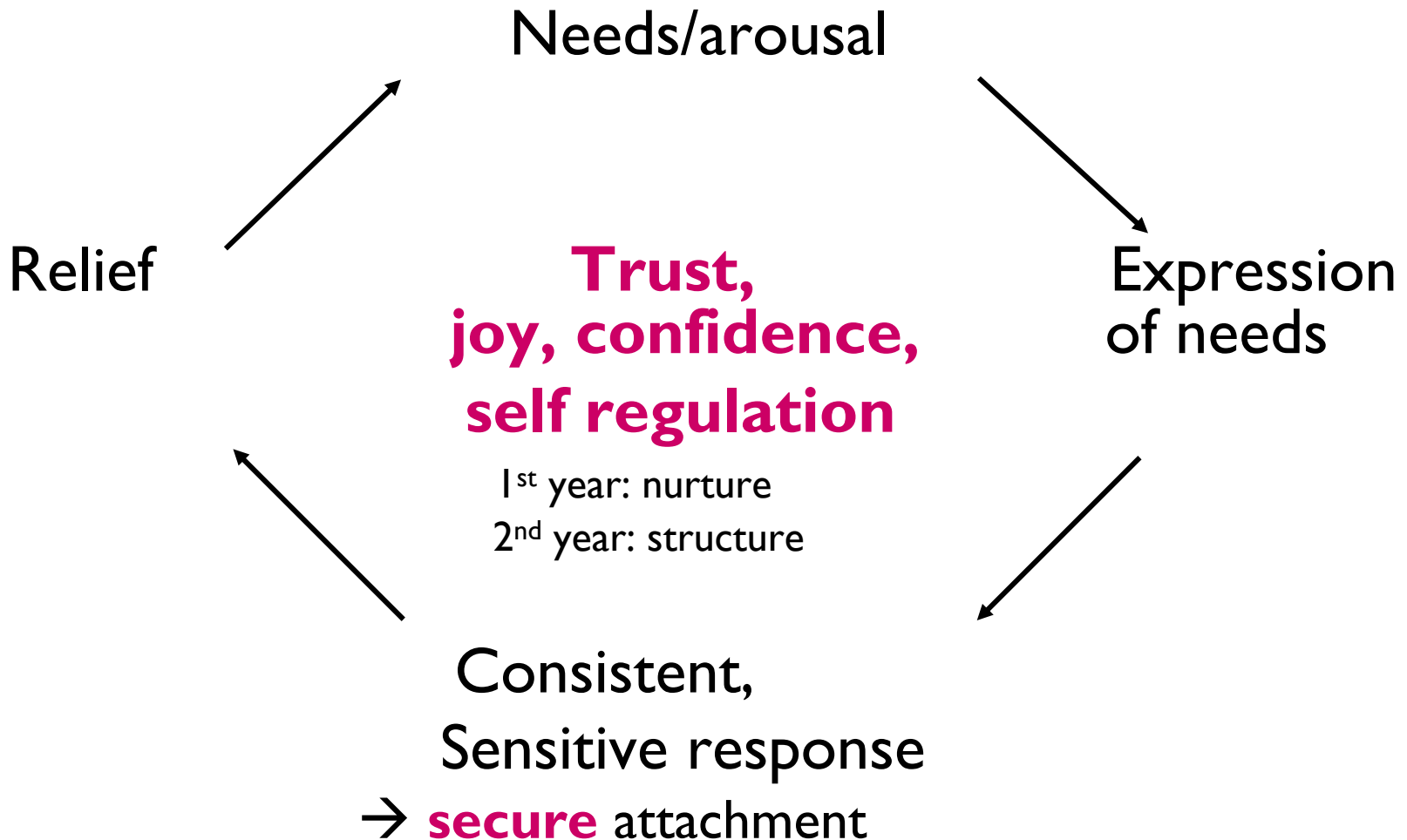
Transference

- Where feelings and attitudes from a relationship with main carers in the past are 'transferred' and re-experienced in a later relationship, for example, a teacher.
- **Implications**
- A child's seeming inexplicable reaction to a member of staff may be triggered by who they are reminded of. We can get caught up in the counter-transference. Our own reaction to a child may relate to our own experience of a relationship.

Displacement

- Displaces an emotion from one situation to another. For example, a separation anxiety due to a depressed or ill parent can lead to a school phobia.

- **Implications**

- Look for an underlying cause in another situation. For example, a bully may use power at school because of feeling powerless at home

1. Secure Need/Attachment Cycle

Needs/arousal

Relief

**Trust,
joy, confidence,
self regulation**

1st year: nurture
2nd year: structure

Expression
of needs

Consistent,
Sensitive response
→ **secure** attachment

2. Insecure Need/Attachment Cycle

Needs/Arousal

Increase of negative emotion

Distrust, anger fear, shame, lack of self regulation

in varying degrees

Expression of needs

Insensitive response:

1) inconsistent → **ambivalent**

2) dismissive → **avoidant**

3) abusive → **disorganised**

3 types of insecure attachments

Why learning can be dangerous

- Learning requires us to feel positive about ourselves
- Learning requires taking risks
- Learning requires trust in relationships
- Learning requires 'taking in' and some children feel they are not worthy or too full up with other stuff
- It involves letting go of 'hypervigilance'

The Learning Triangle

- Relationship

Teacher

Pupil

Task
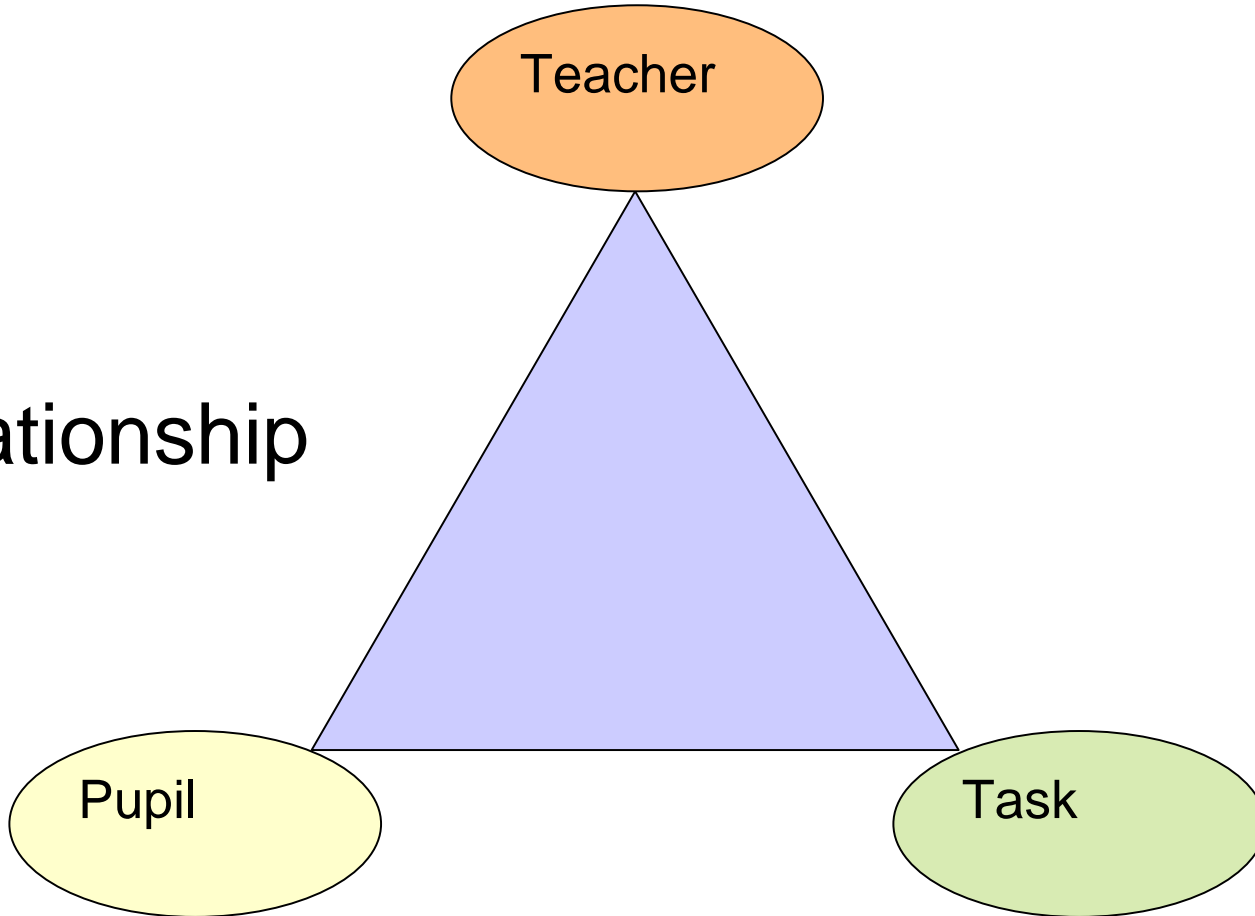
Resistant/Ambivalent

- <u>Stage 1. Approach to school/classroom</u>
- high levels of anxiety and uncertainty
- <u>Stage 2. Response to the teacher</u>
- need to hold onto the attention of the teacher
- apparent dependence on the teacher
- expressed hostility towards the teacher
- <u>Stage 3. Response to the task</u>
- difficulties in attempting task unsupported
- unable to attend to task because of concerns about loss of teacher attention
- <u>Stage 4. Skills and difficulties</u>
- likely to be underachieving
- Verbal language may be well developed to maintain relationship

Teaching Strategies

- Avoid 'colluding' with need for constant teacher involvement and thus 'over-helping'

- Acknowledge in your words and strategies that you understand their need to check you can remember them when you are not directly engaged with them

- Set clear time-limits for when you will come back to them ' Do the first 3 questions and I will come back and check'

- If you do not come back on time, name the anxiety ' I am sorry I was not able to get back to you, maybe you thought I had forgotten you, but I had not'

- Encourage them to 'Trust your own brain'

Avoidant child in the classroom

- <u>Approach to the classroom</u>
- Apparent indifference to anxiety in a new situation
- <u>Response to the teacher</u>
- Denial of need for support and help from the teacher
- Over-Sensitivity to the proximity of the teacher
- <u>Response to the task</u>
- Need to be autonomous and involved in the task, independent of the teacher
- Hostility felt towards the teacher is directed at the task eg work ripped up
- The task acts as an emotional safety barrier between the pupil and the teacher
- <u>Skills and difficulties</u>
- Likely to be underachieving
- Limited use of language as not using communication opportunities
- Limited use of creativity as cannot take risks, ask for help

Teaching Strategies

- Avoid the temptation to build a relationship too soon, this feels dangerous to these pupils
- Develop the relationship through the task e.g comment on the characters, themes in the tasks/stories rather than the pupil
- Allow the pupil to keep internal control even of praise e.g. '**You** must be pleased/proud of that'
- Use groupwork where the pupil can have input into the research/reading and not have to present directly to the teacher
- Make use of metaphor work with stories/drawings/dialogues/ cartoons
- If you feel ignored, remember 'It's not meant for you'.

Disorganised Attachment in the classroom

- Stage 1. Approach to school/classroom
- intense anxiety which may respond to the safe building and a predictable routine over which may induce a sense of having some control
- may seem to adopt an air of authority over the routine
- Stage 2. Response to the teacher
- great difficulty experiencing trust in the authority of the teacher but may submit to the authority of the head of the school
- may be unable to accept being taught as this implies that they 'do not know'
- Stage 3. Response to the task
- task may seem like a challenge to their fear of incompetence, triggering overwhelming humiliation
- difficulty accepting 'not knowing'
- appear omnipotent and to know everything already

Teaching Strategies

- Remember this is a small proportion of students
- Consistent structure and routine is vital
- Changes in routine can seem catastrophic so wherever possible let pupil know if there is going to be a change of routine or change of teacher
- Have a 'back-up plan' for times when student cannot cope e.g go to safe place/person
- Set up a staff support group and have a 'team around the child' who meets regularly and not just for crises
- Use calming left-brain tasks such as ordering/sorting/tidying to help the pupil calm down when necessary
- Work with other professionals in other agencies

Transitions

- Mark Beginnings, Endings and Transitions
- Be prepared for children to avoid endings
- Have a planned, clear timetable for ending
- Create group memories e.g photos,memory book
- Review work, focus on what has been learned
- Get pupils to write letters to new pupils
- Use symbolic ending activities e.g tidying up, sorting out, putting away

Donald Winnicott

- 'Naming makes shared, and therefore, socially acceptable, what was previously private fantasy, gives greater self-awareness and therefore control, allows fantasy to be checked with reality, increases the capacity to remember and reduces guilt. It is not, therefore, a failure to interpret. Winnicott, 1971.

Partnership with Parents

- Encourage them to give you as much information about their child's history as possible

- Meeting with key staff and parents

- Regular communication

- Don't let difficulties grow

- Tell them how you will be monitoring progress

- Ensure that you say what is working well and what the challenges are

For the staff

- Ensure all staff know the importance of emotions in learning, discuss it with them, help them manage their own stages.
- Encourage the setting up of staff support groups to discuss cases.
- Admitting to not knowing something or feeling overwhelmed is not a weakness.
- Focus on a skill e.g empathy and make explicit links in all curriculum areas.
- Link to learning styles

And finally ….

- Remember that Winnicott talks about 'good-enough mothering'. There is also 'good-enough' teaching. You do not need to be perfect. You need to be prepared to think about the good and the bad.