

## INTERNAL WORKING MODEL EXERCISE



Pathways to  
Permanence 2

Parenting  
Children  
Who Have  
Experienced  
Trauma  
AND LOSS

Session 5  
Creating  
Positive  
Attachments  
Part 2

Exercises

**Purpose:** To assist participants in understanding a child's Internal Working Model (IWM), which develops within and through the attachment relationship. The facilitator will demonstrate the differences between Secure and Insecure attachment, and how each become part of the child's IWM.

**Time:** 20 minutes

- 1 Place two empty chairs at the front of the room, facing the participants, with a flip chart next to each chair. Ask for two volunteers to sit in these chairs, each representing a child.
- 2 State that Child 1 is in the good nursery, and elicit from participants what happens in the good nursery. What is the caregiver doing to make that nursery good? Make sure the responses include that the caregiver uses his/her affect (non-verbal emotional responses) to stimulate the non-verbal, up-pleasure state of the child. Get at least 15-20 examples of what the caregiver in the good nursery is doing in response to the child's needs.
3. Direct Child 1 (volunteer) to demonstrate a need, such as hunger, by putting out his/her empty hands towards the caregiver (Facilitator). The caregiver responds, i.e., the Facilitator puts something in Child 1's hands, symbolizing the need being met.
4. Have participants come up with what Child 1 is incorporating into their psyche about his/ herself, caregivers, and the world in general. This is the Internal Working Model for a child with a Secure attachment. Write participant responses on the flip chart next to Child 1, categorized in this way (participants may also note these examples on their worksheets):
  - I am...
  - Caregivers are...
  - The world is...

It is important here to discuss that this process is like the child laying the foundation of his/her house. The core of the self is being created, as the child is learning a great deal about him/herself, all through and within the attachment relationship (refer to Alan Sroufe's notion that "attachment precedes the self"). All of this is occurring before the child has any words.

5. Next, explore what happens in the bad nursery. When Child 2 expresses a need (volunteer puts out empty hands to caregiver), the caregiver (Facilitator) responds in a rejecting, neglectful or abusive way. Child 2 continues to try to get his/her needs met, and the caregiver responds in an unpredictable, harsh, punitive way, or does not respond at all. The Facilitator is showing participants how Child 2's needs are responded to very differently than Child 1's. The caregiver is hostile, non-responsive, provocative, abusive or neglectful, creating a child's world that is unpredictable, chaotic and painful.
6. Have participants come up with the Internal Working Model for Child 2, a child with an Insecure attachment. Write their responses on the second flip chart, again categorized in this way (participants may also note these examples on their worksheets):
  - I am...
  - Caregivers are...
  - The world is...
7. To close the exercise, ask participants to imagine these two children at age 5, entering kindergarten. Give examples of behaviors that you might expect for each child, showing that the reason the



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children behave differently is because they are built differently from the inside out! Connect this to the Developmental Buckets by having the participants think about how much filling each child's buckets received.