

## **Combining Experiential Learning and Attachment-based family therapy**

Two primary goals.

1. Endeavor to shift the family perspective from seeing issues as purely individual problems with the youth to understanding them as symptomatic of broader relational struggles within the family. To that end, treatment works to identify negative interaction cycles. Providers foster a safe empathetic space for youth to express their feelings and concerns. By validating the youth's emotions and experiences the provider cultivates trust, and a comprehensive understanding of the attachment narrative, so that the youth rekindle a value for attachment and expresses a renewed willingness to renegotiate and foster it.

2. Build an alliance with the youth's parents. Establishing a collaborative relationship with the parents is needed to create a united front in addressing the youths' challenges. Parents are encouraged to explore their feelings concerns and hopes, as the provider offers guidance on effective parenting strategies tailored to the family's unique dynamics and challenges. Ideally parents will experience a resurgence in their caregiving motivation and acquire valuable emotional coaching parenting skills. Resolving attachment ruptures are meant to address and heal past relational traumas and conflicts between the youth and their parent. The provider facilitates open dialogues between the youth and parents, promoting mutual understanding by exploring and processing past wounds so the family can start to rebuild trust, develop healthier communication patterns, autonomy and balanced parental support; striking a balance between being protective and granting the youth appropriate freedoms. Youth are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, understanding the consequences of their choices. Parents are coached on how to support their youths' journey towards autonomy while remaining a steadfast source of guidance and love. Parents learn to adeptly assist youth in resolving external problems such as those related to schoolwork or depression.

Experiential activities in this context should foster trust, emotional expression, and understanding, encouraging deeper connections. Here are six activities that align with ABFT principles:

- **Emotion Sculpting (Family Role Play).**
  - Purpose: Facilitates expression of emotions and perspectives.
    - How it works: Family members take turns creating “sculptures” by placing each other into physical positions that represent their feelings or relationship dynamics. For example, a child might place a parent standing far away to represent emotional distance. Afterward, they discuss how these positions reflect their feelings.
    - Benefits: Promotes empathy and understanding of nonverbal cues.
- **Shared Journaling**
  - Purpose: Enhances emotional expression and reflective communication. •
    - How it works: A parent and child share a journal where they write notes or letters to each other. The purpose is to express feelings that

may be hard to talk about face-to-face. They can exchange the journal and reflect on what was written.

- Benefits: Encourages open communication in a safe, non-confrontational way.
  - Trust Walk
    - Purpose: Builds trust and reliance on each other.
      - How it works: One family member is blindfolded, and another guides them through an obstacle course using only verbal cues. The exercise can later be reversed. Afterward, they discuss how it felt to trust and rely on each other.
      - Benefits: Encourages communication and highlights the importance of trust.
  - Emotion Ball Toss
  - Purpose: Helps family members share feelings in a fun, interactive way.
    - How it works: The family sits in a circle and tosses a soft ball to one another. Whoever catches the ball has to share a feeling they had that week or something that is on their mind. This opens a discussion on those feelings. •
    - Benefits: Encourages emotional sharing in a light-hearted, non-threatening manner.
  - Family Collage
    - Purpose: Strengthens family identity and shared understanding.
      - How it works: The family creates a collage together using magazines, drawings, or printed images that represent their collective values, memories, and aspirations. After creating the collage, they discuss why each image was chosen and how it represents their relationship.
      - Benefits: Promotes collaboration and deeper reflection on family dynamics.
  - Repairing a Broken Object Together
    - Purpose: Symbolizes mending emotional breaks in relationships.
      - How it works: The family takes a broken object (such as a shattered ceramic pot or puzzle) and repairs it together. They can decorate the item afterward. This activity serves as a metaphor for working through and healing emotional ruptures in the family.
      - Benefits: Provides a tangible representation of reconciliation and teamwork. Each of these activities focuses on improving emotional connection, communication, and trust, key elements of ABFT.
1. Experiential Learning Theory is a widely recognized and influential framework that describes how people learn through experience. Since learning is the primary process used to navigate life, people can use this process for all forms of learning, development, and change. Learning occurs in any setting and continues throughout

life. The experiential learning process supports performance improvement, learning and development. The experiential process of learning is a four-step cycle.

Experiencing – Reflecting – Thinking – Acting.

1. Experiencing (Concrete Experience): Learning begins when a learner uses senses and perceptions to engage in what is happening now.
2. Reflecting (Reflective Observation): After the experience, a learner reflects on what happened and connects feelings with ideas about the experience.
3. Thinking (Abstract Conceptualization): The learner engages in thinking to reach conclusions and form theories, concepts, or general principles that can be tested
4. Acting (Active Experimentation): The learner tests the theory and applies what was learned to get feedback and create the next experience.

The way in which we navigate the learning cycle varies from person to person. People develop preferences for how they use the learning cycle. This makes understanding one's own process an exceptional way of building self-awareness and choosing what one might do to meet situations most effectively. No one uses only one learning style. Everyone has "back up" styles that make them more flexible to manage different types of situations. Learning flexibility, the ability to use all nine learning styles, is very beneficial. Flexible learners are more successful in life, more effective in making changes, more mature, and they even report being happier. Learning styles also provide a framework for understanding others whose approaches are different from yours. Being aware of your own learning style tendencies and knowing the preferred approaches of those with whom you interact help foster stronger relationships, an appreciation for deep diversity, productive outcomes, and effective teamwork.

- ✓ Experiencing: In the Experiencing style, one emphasizes feeling while balancing acting and reflecting, spending the least amount of time thinking. When using the Experiencing style, you are engaged, connected, warm and intuitive. You excel in teamwork and establish trusting relationships with others. You are comfortable with emotional expression.
- ✓ Imagining: In the Imagining style, one emphasizes feeling and reflecting, spending the least amount of time deciding. When using the Imagining style, you are caring, trusting, empathetic and creative. You demonstrate self-awareness and empathy for others. You are comfortable in ambiguous situations, and you enjoy helping others, generating new ideas and creating a vision for the future.
- ✓ Reflecting: In the Reflecting style, one engages in sustained reflection informed by both feelings and thoughts, spending the least amount of time acting. When using the Reflecting style, you are patient, careful and reserved, allowing others to take center stage. You listen with an open mind and

gather information from a variety of sources. You are able to view issues from many perspectives and identify underlying problems and issues.

- ✓ Analyzing: In the Analyzing style, one learns primarily through thinking and reflecting, spending the least amount of time initiating. When using the Analyzing style, you are structured, methodical and precise. You plan ahead to minimize mistakes, integrate information to get the full picture, and use critical thinking to understand situations. You are methodical as you analyze details and data.
- ✓ Thinking: In the Thinking style, one emphasizes thinking while balancing reflecting and acting, spending the least amount of time experiencing. When using the Thinking style, you are skeptical, structured, linear and controlled. You use quantitative tools to analyze problems and frame arguments with logic. You know how to communicate ideas effectively and make independent judgments.
- ✓ Deciding: In the Deciding style, one emphasizes thinking and acting in situations, spending the least amount of time imagining. When using the Deciding style, you are realistic, accountable and direct. You find practical solutions to problems and set performance goals. You are able to commit to one focus.
- ✓ Acting: In the Acting style, one uses feeling and thinking to initiate action, spending the least amount of time reflecting. When using the Acting style, you are on time, assertive, achievement oriented and courageous. You commit to goals and objectives and find ways to accomplish them under a deadline. You are able to implement plans with limited resources.
- ✓ Initiating: In the Initiating style, one uses feeling and acting to initiate action, paying the least attention to analyzing. When using the Initiating style, you are outgoing, spontaneous and able to shrug off losses or “failure” in favor of trying again. You actively seize opportunities and participate without holding back.
- ✓ Balancing: In the Balancing style, one tends to shift between the opposites of experiencing-thinking and acting-reflecting. When using the Balancing style, you identify blind spots in a situation and bridge differences between people. You are resourceful and can adapt to shifting priorities.