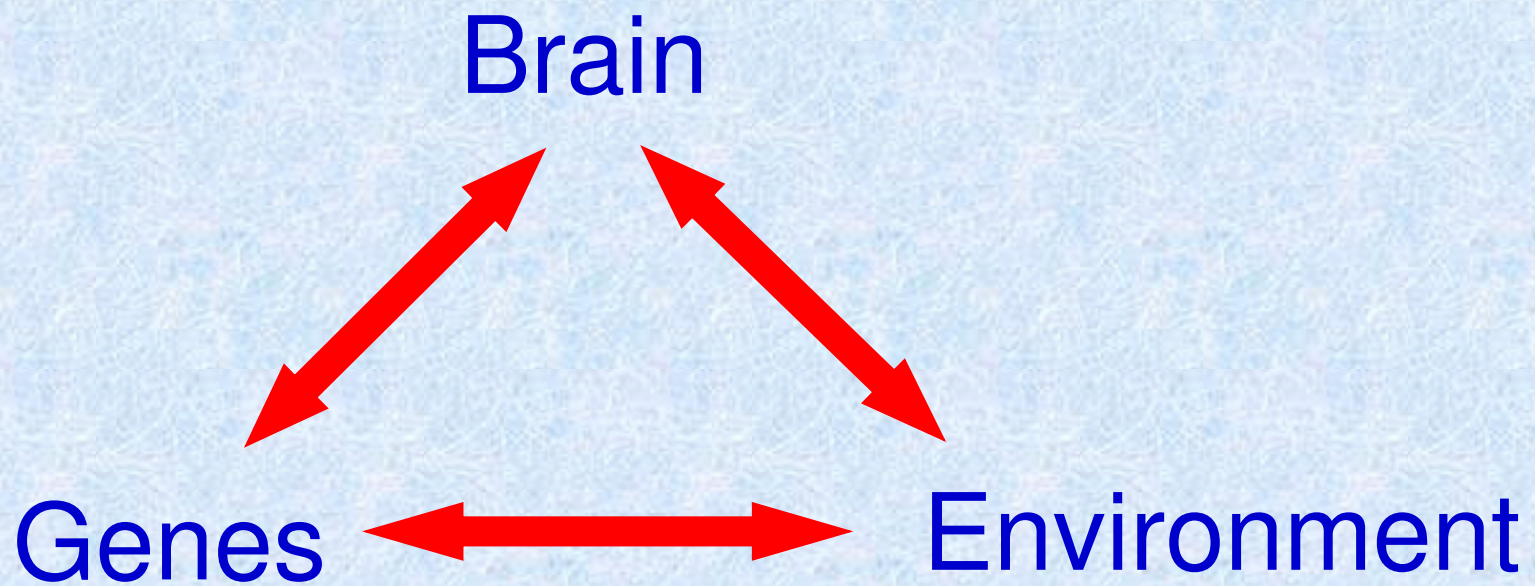


Domestic violence (interparental conflict) and children's development

Norwich
16 March 2016

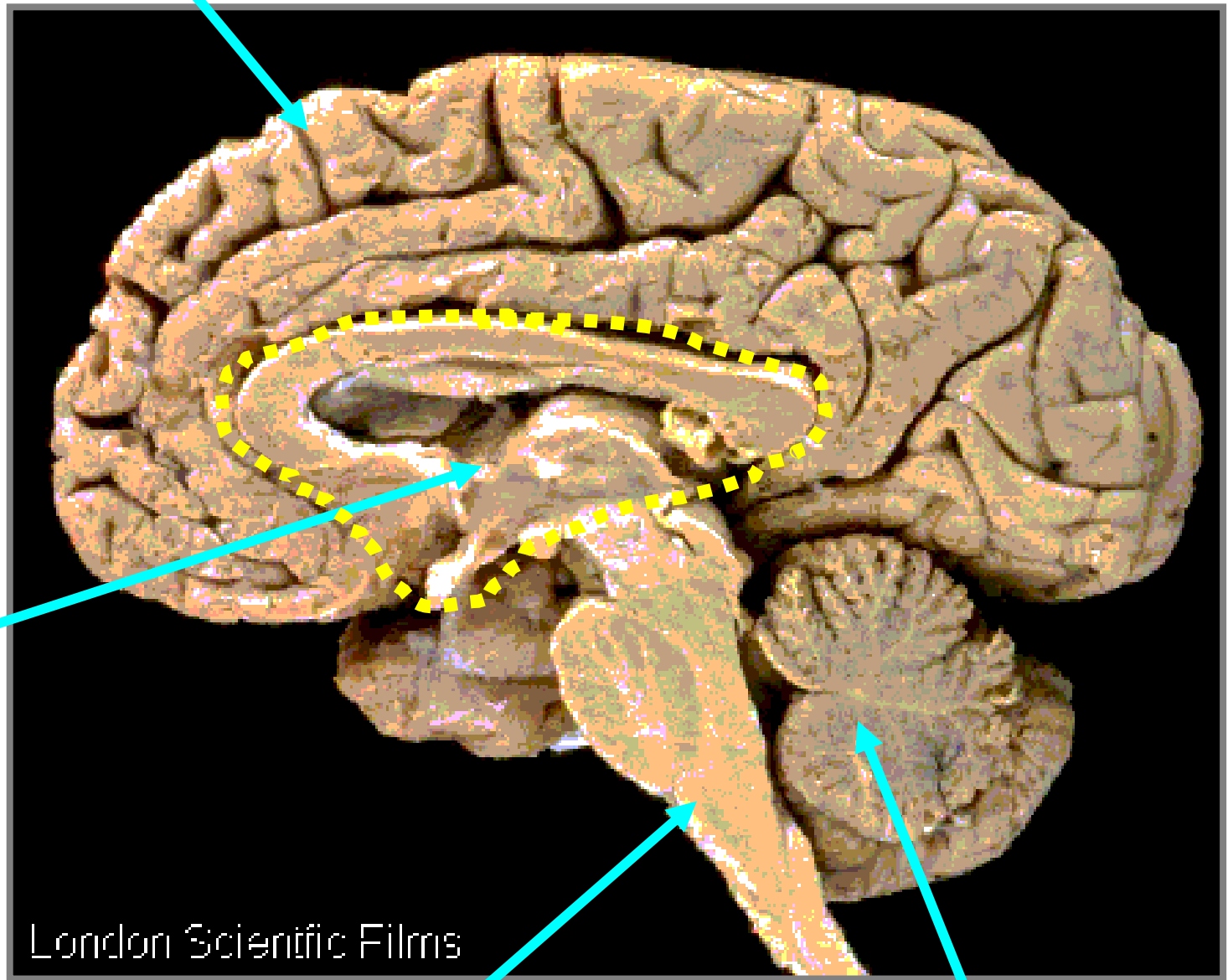
David Howe
University of East Anglia
Norwich



G X E

Nature via nurture

cortex

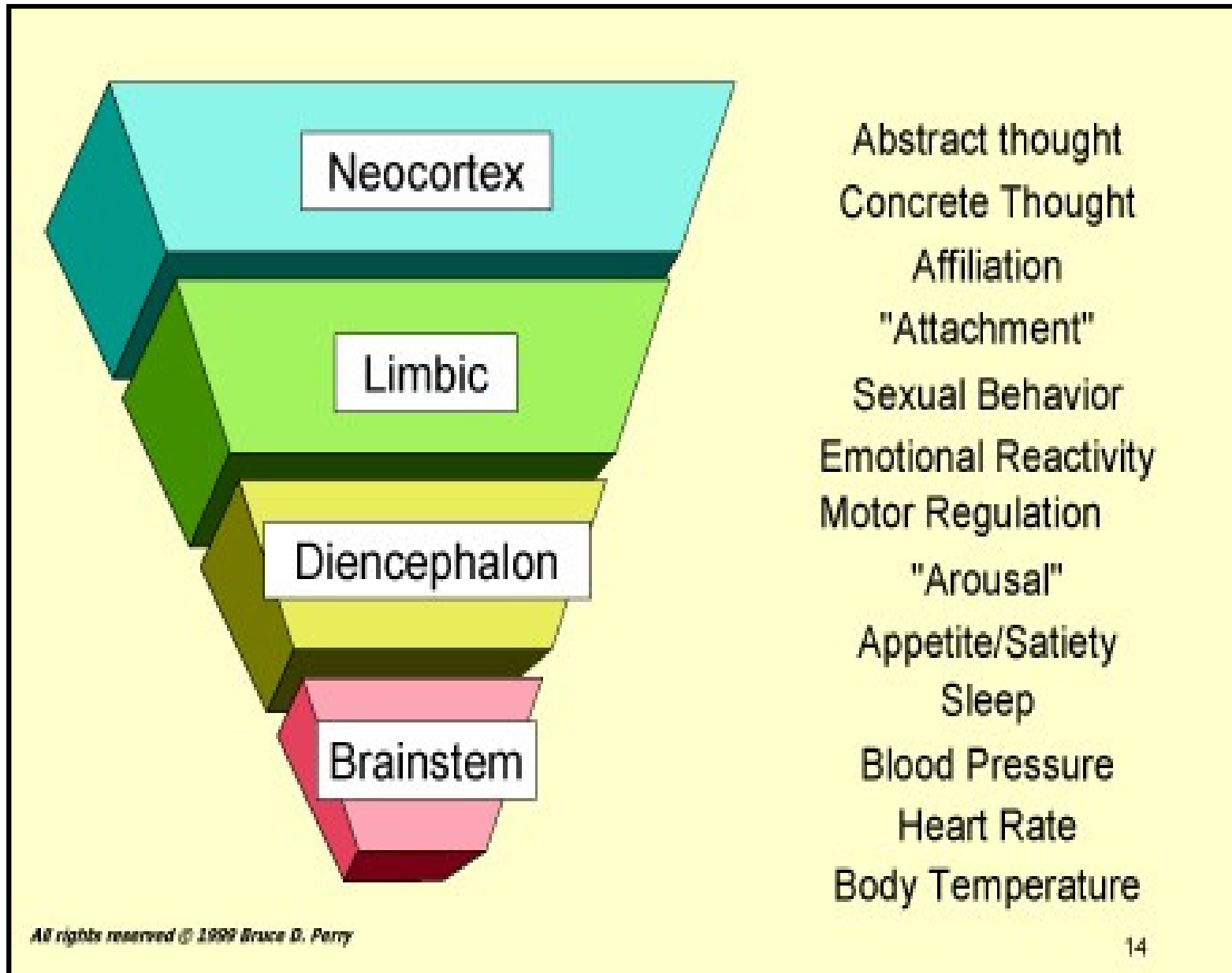


**limbic
system**

London Scientific Films

brain stem

cerebellum



Bruce Perry: The ChildTrauma Academy, 5161 San Felipe, Suite 320
Houston, Texas 77056

Attachment





SURVIVAL

REGULATION
physiological,
emotional, cognitive

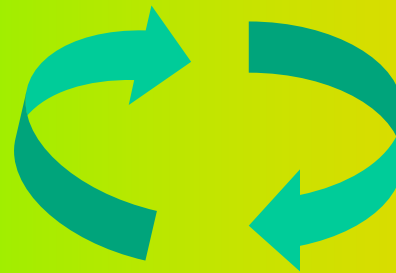


**Attachment
system**



Intersubjectivity

Safe Haven
Attachment
Feeling safe



Secure Base
Explore/Play
Reflect/Think

ATTACHMENT



- None of us is born with the capacity to regulate our own emotions.
- The caregiver- child regulatory system evolves where the infant's signals of changes in state are understood and responded to by the caregiver, thereby becoming more regulated.

Open-mindedness and stress tolerance
'Mentalising' and Reflective Function
psychological availability
mind-mindedness
attunement
sensitivity



Sensitivity and mentalisation



- The parents' capacity to observe the child's mind seems to facilitate the child's general understanding of minds, and hence his/her self-organisation through the medium of a secure attachment.
- The child has the opportunity to 'find himself/herself in the other' as someone with thoughts and feelings - with a mind. The child recognises themselves as an intentional being.

Helpless/hostile caregiving/ Unresolved states of mind

Feelings of fear, helplessness and hostility which result in *frightening/frightened* behaviour might be the result of parents being unable to control frightening memories or emotions associated with their own childhood loss/traumas.



Disorganized attachments: infancy



Disorganized attachments arise when the attached infant has been alarmed *by the parent* rather than the external situation.

The parent is experienced as:

Frightening physically alarming/*hostile*
dangerous parental behaviour

Frightened psychologically alarming
parental behaviour/*helpless*



Disorganized attachments



Simultaneous activation of two incompatible behavioural responses:

FEAR
(avoidance)


and

ATTACHMENT
(approach)




Fear and disorganisation

fear without escape;
fright without solution.

Eric Hesse
and Mary Main

relational trauma

Bruce Perry

Domestic violence/PTSD

Danger, especially unpredictable danger

Helplessness; no control over events

No escape

No safety

No regulation or management

Stress system

- Prolonged exposure to stress causes the body to regulate arousal by decreasing the number of receptors for arousal
- Hippocampus damage and memory
- Sensory stimulation associated with past trauma
- Immune system

Stress-response system

Small to moderate amounts of stress experienced in predictable or patterned situations, help children develop brains that can regulate arousal, and minds that can develop coping strategies and resilience.

However, if the stress is great, sudden, unpredictable, and threatening, it will be experienced as trauma with which young brains and minds cannot cope.

Although the nervous system may habituate even to predictably high levels of stress over time, such habituation does not occur if stresses are severe, unpredictable, uncontrollable, or novel. In these conditions, high levels of stress hormones will continue to be secreted even in response to stimuli that are not inherently traumatic.

(Yehuda et al 1991: Lieberman and van Horn 2008)

It is as if the switch that controls the production of stress hormones is recalibrated to a position where less frightening stimuli are sufficient to activate the stress-trauma response system.

(Yehuda et al 1991: Lieberman and van Horn 2008)

With maturation:

Controlling and adaptive strategies develop

- *compulsive caregiving*
- *compulsive compliance*
- *compulsive self-reliance*
- *controlling punitive/coercive strategies*
- *compulsive self-reliance/coercive strategies*

Controlling Children

Many abused and neglected children find *mentalising* hard, particularly in interpersonal and intimate relationships because mentalising interactively is one of the most complex tasks.

It is at these times that we are all vulnerable to hyperarousal and we need a buffer to protect us against overwhelming affect – it is mentalising that acts as a cushion.

Foetal development

- Miscarriage
- Foetal injury
- Maternal stress
- Poor foetal growth
- Foetal brain development
- Premature birth
- Low birth weight

Infancy

- Physical abuse/shield
- The importance of the early environment – physical, emotional, social – on early brain development
- Irritability/fussiness
- Sleep problems
- Exaggerated startle response
- More minor illnesses
- Lethargy
- PTSD



Preschool children

- Self-blame (guilt, worry, anxiety)
- Emotions manifested behaviourally (rather than verbally)
- Withdrawn, clingy, whiney
- Generalized and intense anxiety/worries/fears
- Inconsolable crying
- PTSD

Preschool children

- React with stress to anger + increased aggression
- Raised feelings of sadness
- Sleep problems
- Eating disturbance

Preschool children

- Physical complaints (eg headaches)
- Regression in toileting (eg bedwetting) and language
- Poor concentration
- Physical abuse

Young school-aged children

- Sleep and eating problems; nightmares
- Externalizing behaviour problems/aggression/tantrums
- Internalizing behaviour problems /anxiety/distress
- Oppositional, defiant, rebellious behaviours, particularly at school
- Threatening peers with violence unless they comply

Young school-aged children

- Violence as a way of resolving social conflicts
- Gaining attention through hitting, kicking etc
- Irritability
- Low self-esteem
- Withdrawal



Young school-aged children

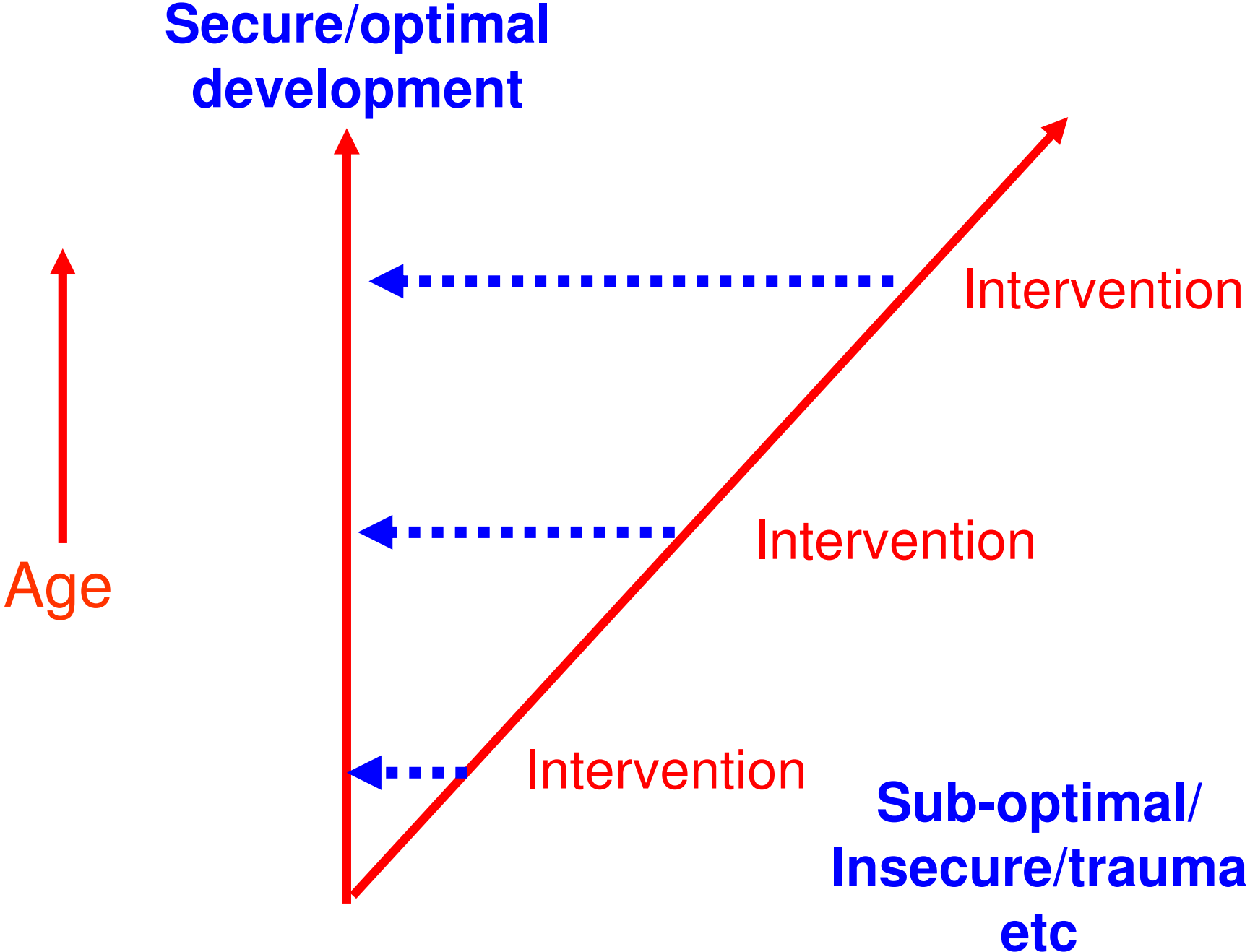
- Disorganised attachments
- Controlling strategies
- Overestimation of danger
- Hypervigilance; exaggerated startle response
- Hostile attributional bias
- Obsession/excitement with violence

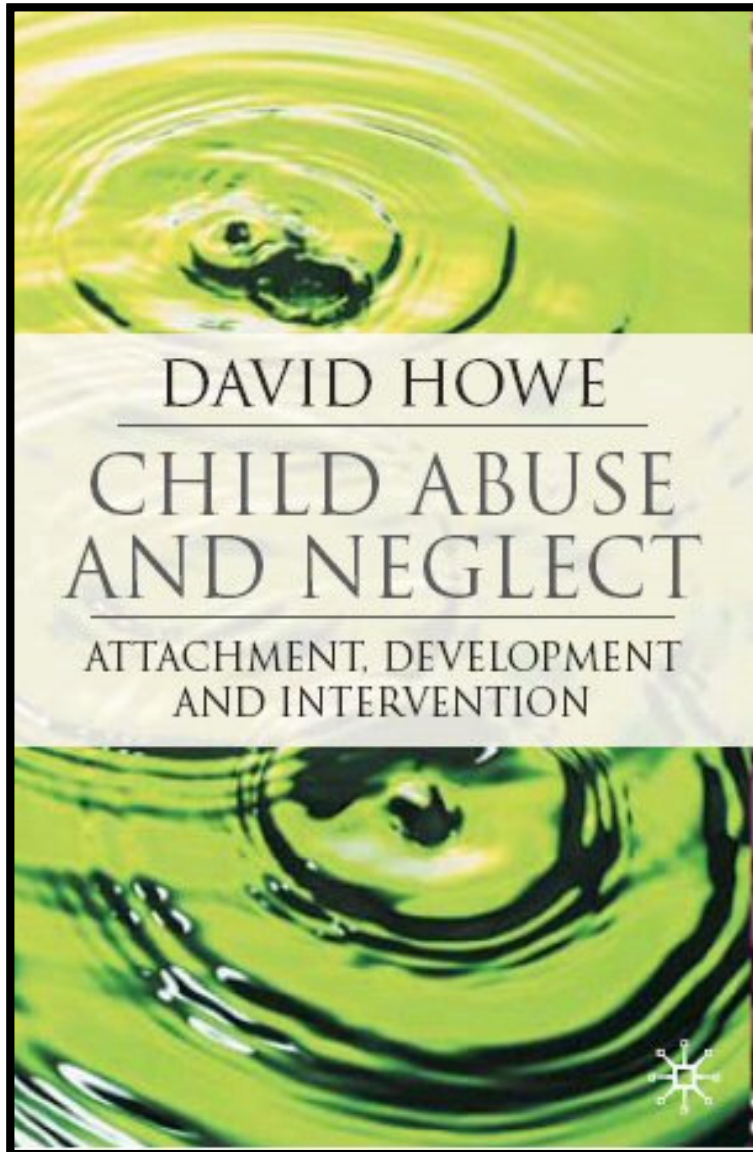
Adolescence

- Delinquency
- Substance abuse
- Abusive (emotionally, mentally, physically, sexually) in dating relationships
- Academic failure
- Truancy

Domestic violence and increased risk of children developing PTSD

- Unpredictable danger
- Fear
- Feelings of helplessness
- Lack of a comforting, protective caregiver
- Multiple stressors
- Extreme behaviours 'meaningless' – no one talks about the violence – fragmented, disorganised thinking, dissociation

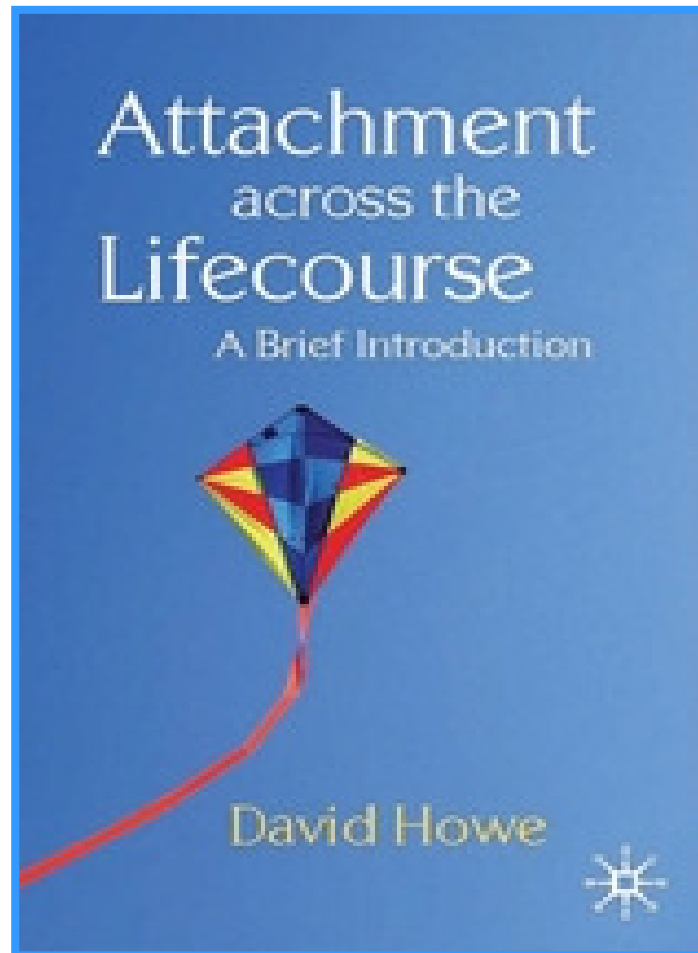




David Howe

***Child Abuse and Neglect
attachment, development
and intervention***

**Palgrave/Macmillan
2005**



David Howe

*Attachment
across the
Lifecourse*

Palgrave Macmillan
2011