How to Measure a Relationship: 
A Practical Approach to Dyadic 
Interventions

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Learning Objectives

• Outline the psychological tasks of children that promote successful social emotional development and mental wellness
• Introduce participants to the 'Causal Rubric' for understanding challenging behaviors
• Increase skills towards developmental approach to treatment planning
• Build an increased appreciation for the value of protective factors and how to build protective factors within families and communities

Why Measure a Relationship?
The need to thrive
The need for reimbursement
The Power of Relationships

- Relationships fuel development
- Relationships shape self understanding
- Relationships are complex
- Relationships are embedded in culture, values, and social expectations
- Relationships are the building blocks of empathy
- Relationships are impacted by
  - The inner self
  - The other in the relationship
  - And the environmental context

Creating Medical Necessity

- Medical Necessity for infants and toddlers is embedded in the quality of the caregiving relationship
- Medical Necessity for preschoolers is tied to regulation and developmentally appropriate social emotional skills
- When caregiving relationships do not adequately nurture Medical Necessity results
- When regulation is off line Medical Necessity results
- When social emotional skills are age inappropriate Medical Necessity results

Medical Necessity

- An unsuccessful attempt to make use of available caregiving relationships to move development forward
- The child is unable to function in the areas of social behavior, cultural expectation, and emotional expression within the guidelines of their family system
Psychological Tasks of Childhood

- To develop a strong secure attachment bond
- To learn to modulate external sensory input
- To learn to manage my internal affective states
- To effectively communicate and get my needs met
- To effectively adapt to my changing world

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*Somato-sensory = bottom up thinking*
*Prefrontal cortex = top down thinking*

When Development is Off Track

**We See**
- Behavior that indicates a developmental delay
- Limitations in social – emotional expression
- Unmanageable affective response
- The absence of a caregiving resource of support

**We Feel**
- Frustrated by the child’s behavior
- Hopeless and defeated by lack of progress
- Empty because the caregiving system lacks joy
- Disorganized because the child’s responses just don’t make sense
### Challenging Behaviors vs. Clinical Symptoms

**Challenging Behaviors**
- Behaviors that annoy others
- Often respond to positive attention from caregivers or redirection
- Intervention to create change does not require a defined scope of practice

**Clinical Symptoms**
- Behaviors that derail development
- Tend to persist in the face of intervention from teachers or parents
- In order to create necessary change a professional with a specific scope of practice is required

### Strength Based Understanding

- **Behavior as communication**
- **Behavior as a method of emotional regulation**
- **Behavior as a means to seek connection**
- **Behavior as a method to push others away – safety**

- Defining the function of the behavior
- Reflecting on the child’s strength in the context of the problem behavior
- Seeing the problem behavior as an adaptation

### When to Refer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioners Question</th>
<th>Observed Relationship Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How does this dyad recover or respond to dis-regulation in their relationship rhythms?</td>
<td>Regulation issues – establishing and maintaining a state of calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How does this dyad manage and make use of sensory information?</td>
<td>Sensory regulation – caregiver recovery and support to infant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) How does the caregiver in this dyad manage personal stress and furthermore, support the stress recovery systems of the child?</td>
<td>Managing stress responses – dyad’s established methods of stress recovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) What is the capacity of the dyad to maintain a regulated emotional state?</td>
<td>Affective tone – how are feelings expressed and experienced in the dyad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Do the observed concerns within the dyad negatively impact the child’s developmental success?</td>
<td>Will a counseling intervention be sufficient or should a psychotherapy referral be considered?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Stroud/Morgan*

Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health: Core Concepts and Clinical Practice (2014)
The ‘Causal Rubric’

- The Causal Rubric is a clinical triage tool used to help providers target the specific area that underlies the problem behavior or symptom.
- This tool allows the 0-5 providers to consider issues of:
  - Development
  - Relationship
  - And Environmental Conditions

as they influence expressed behavior and the relationship quality.

Targeting Development

- Is this behavior the result of a developmental delay?
- How might a delay impact the relationship?
- How might a delay increase stress in the caregiving environment?
- Given your scope of practice how might your interventions target development while improving the caregiving relationship and/or decreasing environmental stress?
Targeting Relationships

- Does the behavior result from a less than optimal relationship dynamic?
- How might this relationship influence development?
- How does the caregiving relationship build stress recovery skills or limit stress recovery skills?
- Within the guidelines of your scope of practice how can you support improved relational quality for this dyad?

Targeting Environmental Causes

- Is this behavior the byproduct of intense stress in the system or severe trauma?
- How might stress be negatively impacting this dyad’s relationship quality?
- How might stress be influencing development for this child?
- What internal stress recovery skills can you add to the system?
- What external stress recovery ideas can be brought into this system?

Protective Factors

- Protective factors serve to mitigate risk factors and strengthen internal and external support systems
- Where can you strengthen a system that acts in opposition to the risk issue
- Protective Factor Can Targets:
  - Child’s overall development, social competence, and mental wellness
  - Parent’s internal resilience, capacity to manage challenges, and developmentally appropriate parenting skills
  - Environmental supports, such as school, community connections, peer supports, general safety, and access to needed resources
Building Caregivers Up

Require:
• Emotional Energy
• Self-Understanding
• Compassion
• Patience

Teach:
Competence & Confidence
Social Understanding
Family Culture
Stress Recovery Skills

Parental Risk Factors to Development
• Limited emotional availability to the child
• Poor internal emotional modulation by the parent
• Limited understanding of the impact of parental behavior on child’s functioning and emotional development
• Intense life stress —without relief
• Limited parenting skills and developmental knowledge
• Missing a history of a strong and secure parenting figure

Parent Focused Protective Factors
• Managing stress
  ▫ Creating skills parents can access in times of stress
• Co-regulation
  ▫ Ability to demonstrate a balanced emotional response to the child
• Finding hope
  ▫ The internal belief that things can be different or get better
• External supports
  ▫ People and places to find emotional support and help fuel your personal reservoir