



## PRESENTATIONS by Dr. Deborah MacNamara

### Making Sense of Kids through Developmental Science

*Based on the Relational and Developmental Approach of Dr. Gordon Neufeld*

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**Dr. Deborah MacNamara** is the author of the best-selling book [Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers \(or anyone who acts like one\)](#), is on Faculty at the Neufeld Institute, and is the Director of Kid's Best Bet, a Counselling and Family Resource Center. Her book *Rest, Play, Grow* has been translated into Russian and French languages with Italian, German, Spanish, and Danish versions currently underway.

Deborah is a dynamic teacher and experienced counsellor who makes developmental science come to life in the everyday context of home and classroom. She also provides counselling services to parents and professionals to make sense of learning, behavioural, and developmental issues in kids – from babies to teens.

Deborah travels nationally and internationally, speaking to child and adolescent development issues to groups including the United Nations and the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education. With over 60 presentations a year to groups including parents, educators, child care professionals, social workers, foster and adopt community, and health care professionals, Deborah shares her insight and passion for making sense of kids. She is a developmentalist at heart who is continually fascinated by the mysteries and beauty inherent in human maturation.

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### Presentations Descriptions

Based on the relational and developmental approach of Gordon Neufeld, the following presentations address a range of issues in raising and teaching children and adolescents. They are suitable for a variety of audiences including parents, educators, and child/health care professionals.



## **1. Rest, Play, Grow: Helping Young Children Flourish**

No one is more susceptible to being misunderstood than the preschooler. Precocious, brazen, obsessive, endearing, hysterical, impulsive, anxious, delightful, unreflective, dogmatic, generous, unstable, aggressive, resistant, compulsive, and anything but consistent - the preschooler could qualify for any number of personality and behaviour disorders. Unlike infants and toddlers, preschoolers actually bear a resemblance to grown-ups and therefore fool us into thinking that they are much more like us than they really are. Projecting our psychology onto them is a typical mistake. This presentation will address commonly misunderstood preschooler behaviour including resistance, frustration, attachment, the need for play, and impulsiveness.



## **2. Understanding Resistance in Children and/or Adolescent's: "You're Not the Boss of Me"**

Children are naturally inclined to resist and oppose when feeling pressed upon or controlled. Although the reaction is quite normal and even healthy in certain circumstances, its manifestations and impact can be highly disruptive and disturbing, making life difficult for parents and teachers. Counterwill can take many forms from negativism to noncompliance depending upon the age and personality of the child or teen. We will discuss the meaning of this deep-rooted instinct as well as the dynamics that control its existence and expression.



## **3. Tears and Tantrums: Understanding Frustration and Aggression**

The expression of frustration and aggression in children and teens can take on many forms including temper tantrums and various forms of attack. Part of making headway requires understanding the roots of frustration and aggression and how to deal with the resulting behaviours. This presentation will focus on strategies for dealing with a frustrated child while preserving one's relationship to them. It will address the importance of setting limits and helping children learn they can survive futilities that

are part of life.



#### **4. Nurturing the Natural Roots of Self Esteem**

Self-esteem has become a popular concept, with varying ideas on how to cultivate it in our children. There are two main strategies used to develop self-esteem, one built on shaky grounds and another that is more sustaining and enduring. The developmental roots of natural self-esteem

will be discussed, along with strategies for providing for its growth. Parents are ideally positioned to nurture an intrinsic sense of self worth in their child which will help grow them into their full human potential.



#### **5. Making Sense of Anxiety**

As many as 20% of children and teens qualify for an anxiety disorder diagnosis, making it the most common mental health issue today. Anxiety can take many forms including obsessions, compulsions, phobias as well as other perplexing behaviours. We cannot treat something we do not understand, and making sense of anxiety is fundamental in making headway. This presentation will bring a fresh and promising perspective to one of our most troubling human problems.



#### **6. Heart Matters: What to do with a Child's Feelings?**

Constructs like emotional intelligence, emotional self-regulation, emotional well-being and emotional social learning are being bandied about like never before.

Emotion, long dismissed as a nuisance factor, is now confirmed to be at the core of development and well-being. What are the implications for raising children? How can we ensure healthy hearts and what does heart hygiene look like? How do we teach our children the language of the heart? Should we be discouraging negative emotions' and encouraging our children to calm down? This presentation will bring clarity to the plethora of confusing information bombarding parents and educators today.



## 7. The Lost Art of Play: How Children Become Their Own Persons

Play - at least the kind that builds brains and forwards development - is becoming an endangered activity among those who need to engage in it most. Part of the problem is the premature pressure on children to learn and to become socialized. Another factor is that play has increasingly become associated with a sport or a screen activity. Probably our most significant failing is our lack of collective understanding concerning the pivotal role of play in development. We have never known more about the value of play and at the same time, we have never been so in need of this knowledge. The importance of play will be discussed along with strategies for helping kids get there.

## 8. Who's in charge? Why adults need to lead



A growing number of children are presenting as demanding, prescriptive, bossy and controlling. A disturbing number of these alpha children are turning into bullies as well. Alpha children tend to have difficulties letting themselves be parented or taught. This is making the child-adult dance much more difficult than it used to be or needs to be, despite the plethora of advice-giving and strategies available today. The surprising roots of the alpha complex will be examined, opening the doors for lasting change in the family, classroom, and society.



## 9. Roots of Resilience and Resourcefulness

Humans are some of the most adaptive creatures on the planet, with the capacity to overcome adversity and find creative solutions to our problems. While it is within everyone's capacity to be resilient and resourceful, this potential is not always realized for everyone. Raising resourceful and resilient children has never been more important and the role of tears in this process never more misunderstood. Adults play a key role in cultivating the roots of resilience that have lasting effects on their capacity to endure adversity and find a way through.



## 10. Raising Children in a Digital World

The digital world is here to stay, changing our society in a way that has far-reaching consequences for our children. What are the implications for raising children? How do we harness the spectacular connecting potential and yet avoid the pitfalls of attachment technology gone awry? How do we prepare them to live in this new world and yet preserve what is required for healthy development to take place? We have followed our children into the digital world and yet for their sakes as well as ours, need to restore our lead in order to avoid the insidious dangers that live in the shadows of this potent technology. We will consider the digital revolution through the lens of developmental science, committed to helping adults help children reach their full human potential.



## 11. Nourish: How Food and Relationship Go Together

The connection between food and relationship has become separated from one another despite how they were meant to be intertwined. This presentation will weave together the pieces of the feeding and eating puzzle by drawing on the fields of attachment science, neuroscience, developmental psychology, to cultural tradition. Come relish and savour in a thought provoking walk around our most basic human needs and nature's answer to feeding our kids.



## 12. Being your Kid's Best Bet: Helping Children Thrive

We all want our children and students to thrive – to become all they were meant to be. But how is this to be accomplished? What conditions are required for optimal functioning? What experiences are essential to the unfolding of human potential? In this presentation a comprehensive map for parents and professionals who want more than just strategies for handling problem behaviour. There are four essential experiences necessary for the unfolding of human potential. The answers to helping children flourish are surprising when seen in the context of current practice and prevailing attitudes.



### **13. Setting Kids up for Learning Success: The Role of Home**

The teachability of a child is the single most important factor in learning success. The psychological determinants that govern a child's capacity to learn are ideally fostered and cultivated in the home. What is the role of the parent in helping their child be 'school ready' and surviving the 'ups and downs' that come with it? How do we measure success in a way that goes beyond test scores and academic assessments and focuses on the realization of human potential? This presentation will tease apart the psychological determinants behind a child's learning success and the role of parents in getting them there.



### **14. Cultivating Caring Children: The Roots of Social Responsibility**

We all desire caring and considerate children but there is much confusion regarding how to get there. This presentation addresses the developmental roots of these highly held virtues and the negative effects prevailing parenting practices have on caring. This presentation will focus on how parents and teachers can best cultivate these characteristics and social responsibility as a whole.



### **15. Relationship Matters: Building Strong Connections with Kids**

The desire for relationship and connection is the greatest need humans have. This presentation will focus on the importance of adult relationships for children and/or teens, how they develop, and can be protected in light of disciplinary issues. The importance of human relationships in the maturation process will be discussed as well as the role of shyness in protecting attachments.



## 16. Making Sense of Discipline

One of the biggest challenges faced by parents, caregivers and educators is the safe discipline of children and teens in their care. Given that connection is the greatest need a child has, discipline that protects this attachment is critical. Seven principles of attachment safe discipline will be discussed along with an understanding of the 4 most common principles that erode attachment and threaten development.



## 17. Holding Onto Kids in a Digital World

How can parents today hold on to their kids and help them grow up when they compete for time and attention with peers, digital devices, and structured activities? What do kids really need from their parents so as to grow into socially and emotionally responsible beings? This presentation will discuss issues from technology to peer problems and how parents are the ultimate answer for what kids need most of all. Practical suggestions of building strong relationships with kids from preschoolers to teenagers will be discussed along with managing challenging behaviour.



## 18. Nature's Answer to Immaturity: Helping Children Grow Up

The capacity for self-control and to reflect on one's actions are at the root of a mature temperament. These capacities are at the forefront of the developmental agenda and are often referred to in the literature as self-regulation and executive functioning. The focus of the presentation will be on understanding the integrative process, how it unfolds in a child, and culminates in the capacity for increasing self-control and social responsibility. The cultivation of a mature temperament is critical in helping our children reach their full human potential and adults play a key role in creating the conditions for growth. Through the lens of developmental science we will examine how nature provided an organic solution to growing children out of immaturity and into socially responsible and caring adults.



## 19. Building Attachment Communities to Raise Children In

Who is to raise our children? The only answer compatible with nature is for parents and adults entrusted with their care to serve as their mentors, guides, nurturers, and role models.

Today's culture lacks rituals and customs to foster attachment villages for children to be raised in. We can create a sense of home for children by providing a sense of rootedness, belonging and connection wherever they are. If parents and other adults are to share the task of raising children then we must actively cultivate the village they need.



## 20. Making Sense of Sensitive Kids

Some children seem to be more intense and sensitive in their response to sensory stimuli in their surroundings. We can all feel overwhelmed at times but for some sensitive kids it can get very stressful, evoking strong emotions they don't know how to make sense of. In order to help sensitive children live in their world we need to start by making sense of them and appreciating things through their eyes. There is much parents and educators can do to help sensitive children find rest so that they can play and grow.



## 21. Sibling Conflict: Understanding Feuds and Cultivating Friendship

When children don't get along adults are left to manage disputes, upset, frustration and aggression. Rivalry between children can be exhausting and leaves adults wondering how to make headway in the situation and over the long term. Understanding the causes of sibling conflict can help parents and caregivers in managing outbursts and in getting to the heart of the matter. Cultivating relationships, dealing with disputes, and strategies for decreasing conflict will be provided.



## 22. Making Sense of Attention Problems

Attention and agitation issues are increasing at alarming rates among our children and youth. Such restlessness can pose challenges for learning and behaviour at home and school. Adults often feel overwhelmed and confused how to make headway with a child or teen who cannot seem to focus or sit still. In trying to alleviate symptoms we can unknowingly employ measures that serving to exacerbate their attention problem. There is much that can be done to help bring a child to rest by understanding the two common roots of attention problems.



## 23. Sex Education: A Developmental and Relational Perspective

Sex education has become divorced from issues of human attachment and vulnerability, as well as rendered solely scientific in discussions. Parents have a key role to play in helping children grow into mature adults who are capable of having an intimate healthy sexual relationship. What is a parent's responsibility in this area? How do we prepare our children for what lies ahead yet remain sensitive to what is developmentally appropriate? What can we do about the hyper-sexualized world they grow up in? Based on developmental science, embedded in human relationships and vulnerability, these questions and more will be addressed.



## 24. Bullying: A New Approach to an Enduring Problem

Bullying is an age-old problem with a new face in today's increasingly digital world. Cyber bullies are now replacing playground bullies at an alarming rate and the need to protect our kids is great. Efforts to curb bullying are failing and children are being wounded at the hands of their peers like never before. Protecting our children from bullies is possible when we understand the modus operandi driving bullies, how to thwart attacks, and guide our children through situations where bullies are involved. Parents and educators often feel helpless to protect children from bullies but there is much we can do to address this age-old problem.



## 25. What About Me?

What about us as parents and how do we grow in the face of caring for our children? What can we do about the guilt we feel and the grief we may have caused? While we cannot stop ourselves from feeling strong emotions nor would we want to, we need to assume our rightful position in a child's life by seeing ourselves as their best bet. Nature has a plan for parents in terms of growing us into the caretakers our children need.

## ADOLESCENCE

### 1. Making Sense of Adolescence



Crossing the bridge from childhood to adulthood has never been so daunting. The time of adolescence is longer than ever and yet society today offers little support in understanding or facilitating this transition. What is meant to happen? What is nature's purpose and design? Discussion will center on understanding the maturing dynamics occurring for the adolescent and the tools to help them through this journey. Topics may include (depending on time available) the seven rites of passage, increasing awareness and need for autonomy, teen resistance and becoming a sexual being. This presentation is suitable for participants with tweens and teens.



### 2. Understanding Resistance and Opposition in Adolescents

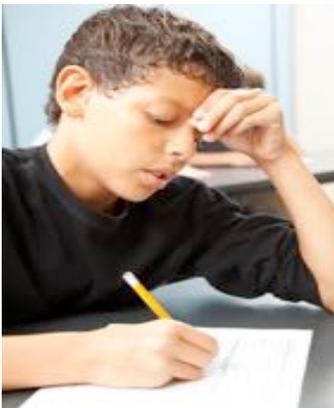
The shift to adolescence brings about a natural shift to increasing resistance and opposition when feeling pressed upon or controlled. Although the reaction is quite normal and even healthy in certain circumstances, its manifestations and impact can be highly disruptive and disturbing, making life difficult for parents and teachers. Resistance can take many forms from negativism to noncompliance depending upon the age and personality of the child. We will discuss the meaning of this deep-rooted instinct as well as the dynamics that control its existence and expression.



### 3. Becoming a Sexual Being

Today's adolescents live in a hypersexualized culture. Most have received a school-based sex education where safe sex typically refers to physical intimacy that is free of sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancy. Despite their greater exposure and education, current evidence suggests that many youth are in trouble sexually and that their sexual development is not unfolding as it should. How is sexuality meant to develop and how is sex affecting the brain and bonding? The meaning of safe sex from an attachment-based developmental perspective will be provided as well as suggestions for contributing to the healthy unfolding of sexuality in our youth.

## EDUCATORS



### 1. The Teachability Factor: Enhancing Student Success through Relationship

Teaching doesn't always result in learning and this discrepancy seems to be widening. Despite advances in curriculum, technology and pedagogy, the teachability of students is on the wane, making teaching much more difficult than it used to be or than it needs to be. Although the teachability of a student is the single most important factor in learning, this variable is rarely addressed. The psychological determinants of learning will be teased apart to reveal the impact of attachment, immaturity and vulnerability in facilitating or impeding the learning process. Practical suggestions are provided for improving the teachability of students as well as the 4 natural contexts for learning.

### 2. Peer Orientation in the Classroom



An increasing number of kids are coming to school to be with their friends, not to learn. Classrooms are filled with kids who are peer oriented and tribalizing into groups, leaving adult relationships to take a back seat. The fallout from peer orientation includes behavioural and learning problems as adults are less able to influence, teach, and provide direction. Strategies to collect peer attached kids and how to increase their teachability will be discussed.