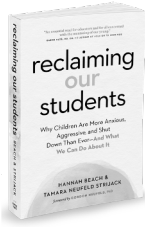



How We Lead Matters

Reclaiming Our Students

Chapters 3 & 13


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Alpha Instincts



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Alpha Instincts



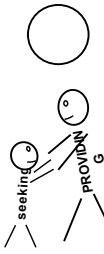
- to be first or number one
- to take over / to take charge / to take the lead
- to be on top or take centre stage
- to trump interaction / to have the last word
- to be in the know / to know more than others
- to displace or to resist being displaced: physically, emotionally or psychologically

Alpha instincts only make sense in the context of attachment

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The alpha-dependent dance

Two sets of roles:
Alpha = provider
Dependent = seeker



seeking dependent instincts


- to get one's bearings
- to serve and obey
- to seek assistance
- to look up to
- to belong
- to follow
- to wait for orders
- to look for guidance
- to comply and conform

providing alpha instincts

- to orient and inform
- to protect & defend
- to guide and direct
- to look out for
- to possess
- to lead
- to give the orders
- to transmit one's values
- to command and prescribe

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The alpha-dependent dance



attachments are **hierarchically structured** to facilitate dependency and care-taking

when becoming attached or pursuing proximity, one is **instinctively moved** to assume the alpha position or the dependent position


the posture of the one should typically call forth the **complementary** set of attachment instincts in the other

Alpha and dependent instincts **need to MATCH** up with their corresponding **societal ROLES**: e.g. parent-child, teacher-student, doctor-patient, coach-player, older and younger sibling, etc.

Individual **must NOT BE DEFENDED** against feelings of caring and responsibility.

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The alpha instincts and the PROVIDER role



The alpha provider assumes the following roles:

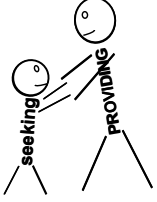
to move to dominate
e.g. to be first or number one, to take over / to take charge / to take the lead, to be on top or take centre stage, to trump interaction / to have the last word, to be in the know / to know more than others, to displace or to resist being displaced: physically, emotionally or psychologically

to assume responsibility
e.g. to take charge of, to take the lead concerning, to make things work for, to feel guilty when..., to feel badly when..., to fix things for, to make things better for, to feel remorse concerning, to make sacrifices for

to care for and to care about
e.g. to be concerned about, to help, to bear the burdens of, to give assistance to, to meet the needs of, to be devoted to, to feel compassion for, to provide for, to shield and protect

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Seeking child




Child : depending upon for, cued by felt need. Involves trusting in, wanting, aching for, asking for, wishing for, looking up to.

Adult : caring alpha who is cued by perceived need. Involves trumping, leading, initiating, giving, nurturing, taking charge. Holds self responsible, feels guilty when things don't work.

RESULT: Both parties feel fulfilled in this dance. The interaction is relatively easy and satisfying for both.

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Alpha Instincts




Why are children moved by their alpha instincts?

- There is a natural and intended purpose to the alpha instincts.
- We are all born with this potential.
- It is quite healthy for a child to show alpha tendencies.
- When children stay stuck in the alpha mode, they may be having difficulties with:
 - Experiencing vulnerable feelings
 - Feeling safe in the dependency role
 - Trusting the adult

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Defended against vulnerability



When a child experiences:

Overwhelming sensitivity

- Inheriting sensitive genes
- Prenatal stress
- Birth trauma


Wounding environment

- Facing separation too much to bear
- Feeling too alarmed or alarmed for too long
- Experiencing being shamed or humiliated or feeling as if something is wrong with oneself

It could lead to defendedness and stuckness

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The sensitive child and the alpha instinct




The more sensitive the child, the more easily stirred up and overwhelmed by experience, which can evoke more mechanisms of defense.

The inherent vulnerability can lead to attachment problems, such as more difficulty falling deeply into attachment, more likely to resist proximity, and more likely to defend against depending.

The sensitive child is more susceptible to becoming stuck, as they have more to adapt to, they tend to resist tears and they try to escape utility.

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The root cause of alpha instincts



alpha by default

happens when adults do not assume an alpha posture or convey an alpha presence

- parents reacting to their own backgrounds
- failure of today's culture to script alpha posturing
- weak or inadequate parenting
- parents looking to child to fill needs
- parenting on demand
- egalitarian parenting
- child-led parenting
- parents looking for answers rather than being their child's answer


alpha by defense

happens when it does not feel safe to depend

- separation too much to bear
- not feeling taken care of
- being bullied by parents, siblings, peers or teachers
- feeling abused or exploited
- extreme vulnerability or overwhelming sensitivity
- parenting practices that exploit a child's state of dependency
- experiencing alarming situations or circumstances

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Vulnerable feelings more likely to be defended against



feelings of shyness and timidity

feelings of embarrassment including blushing

feelings of shame (that something is wrong with me)

feelings of futility (sadness, disappointment, grief, sorrow)

feelings of fulfillment (joy, delight, enjoyment)

feelings of dependence (emptiness, neediness, missing, loneliness, insecurity)

feelings of appreciation (thankful, grateful, indebted)

feelings of caring (compassion, enthusiasm, devotion, concern, treasure, invested in)

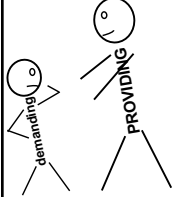
feelings of alarm (apprehension, anxiety and fear)

feelings of responsibility (guilt, remorse, to make things better, protective)

feelings of woundedness (hurt feelings, anguish, pain)

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Demanding child




Child : an **ALPHA** child who is cued by their own felt needs. Is bossy, assertive, prescriptive, controlling, and cannot let go; insists on fairness, rights, and getting what is deserved. **Holds others responsible, feels angry when things don't work.**

Adult : caring alpha who is cued by perceived need. Involves trumping, leading, initiating, giving, nurturing, taking charge. Holds self responsible, feels guilty when things don't work.

RESULT : both parties experience this interaction as **confusing, highly frustrating, exhausting, and ultimately unfulfilling.**

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Alpha children are challenging



much **less receptive to being lead** in general

highly resistant to direction and guidance

often are less endearing, tending to **alienate the adults** responsible for them

appear independent and much less needy and so not as likely to evoke care-taking responses in the adults responsible for them


very difficult to bring to state of REST and SATIATION

consequences and sanctions are highly **PROVOCATIVE**

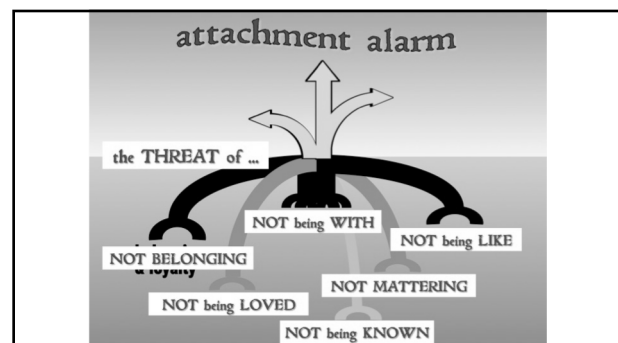
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Alpha children are prone to ALARM problems

- ALARM problems: anxiety-based problems, and if defendedness is an issue, agitation-based problems and adrenalin-based problems
- Alpha children cannot depend upon us to keep them safe. Since it is impossible to make oneself feel safe, alpha children become alarmed by default. The more they attempt to control us, the more alarmed they become.



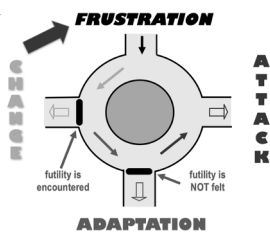
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Alpha children are prone to FRUSTRATION problems

- FRUSTRATION** problems, and aggression if defended against feelings of futility
- Alpha children tend to be highly frustrated when their alpha instincts are thwarted.
- A deep residual frustration also exists because their dependency needs are not met.



FRUSTRATION

CHANGE

ADAPTATION

ATTACK

futility is encountered

futility is NOT felt

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Healthy vs. Stuck Alpha

Healthy Alpha	Stuck Alpha
- highly responsive to situation and circumstance	- less responsive to situation and circumstances
- is hierarchically organized and evoked	- can be quite unresponsive to natural hierarchy
- less likely to be evoked in times of personal need or stress	- often elevated in times of personal need or stress
- is strongest in the context of one's own attachments	- can become depersonalized and generalized
- seeks to find balance with dependence	- typically characterizes one's personality

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Taking the Lead Orchestrating circumstances vs. Controlling the student

Trying to Control Students (the pitfalls):

- Impossible task – it's a myth that anyone can be controlled
- Increases felt frustration and alarm in students who are triggered by a perceived or felt coercive intervention
- This increases 'push back' and often provokes a disconnect with the relationship
- Upping the ante, adding consequences will only lead to a negative outcome
- The group loses trust in the adult as a capable care provider and subsequently they turn to each other to find new guidance and leadership
- Highly frustrating and discouraging for the adult, often left with a feeling of powerlessness

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Taking the Lead Orchestrating circumstances vs. Controlling the student

Orchestrating Circumstances:

- **Use structure and routine** – this is less coercive and confronting, particularly for students who are defended, alpha or alarmed
- **Maximize your physical space** to provide explicit messages of 'what' is expected in these areas.
- **Rely on these structures and routines** to support you in leading the way in a subtle manner. You have set them, taught and modeled them, now let them bare fruit!

Ex. Teacher to her group (grade 5) "We're getting ready for 'Work Time' – please choose your preferred location, ensure you have all your work tools – you have 3 minutes to get 'into location. Remember, it's important that you choose the spot that works best for you." This classroom has alternate work stations and flexible seating options for students to choose from.

- **Assign jobs** where students can show their leadership (under your initial leadership!)

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HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND while staying ALPHA

"I've decided that..."
"I see that we need a change of plans, we'll..."

Be willing to make the decisions you believe are best for the student, even if they are upsetting to them.



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What's needed:

Consistently be a warm leader

"I've got this" – attitude and demeanor

Add in routines to help orchestrate behaviors

Not reacting or shaming

Harness their alpha energy – provide opportunities to help this energy flow

For the school team to work in unison, being warm caring leaders to help the child feel safe at school

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Stepping 'into' the LEADERSHIP ROLE



- Laissez-faire
- Children decide "what" will happen "when"
- Teacher continually asks students 'if they want 'x' or if it's 'okay' with them

?

- Authoritarian
- Stern
- Micromanager
- Highly controlling

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When alpha leadership is missing:




Being an alpha leader is vital

- Children's alpha instincts are triggered
- They don't feel safe, which provokes and fuels their alarm
- They are moved to fill the alpha void
- Become pushy, bossy, and difficult to take instruction and be guided
- This is a very frustrating journey for them because others react to their commands and direction
- They can become progressively and increasingly more difficult to manage and teach.

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When an alpha leader is in the driver's seat:



Being an alpha leader is vital

- Meets their underlying needs
- Students feel taken care of
- Helps them to feel safe and puts their alpha instincts at rest
- Sets the conditions for them to be guided and tolerate being in a dependent position
- Opens up the gates for learning to occur


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Appropriate venues to channel alpha energy:

- Organizing outdoor games for younger students
- Reading buddies
- Mentoring roles with younger students – 2-3 years apart
- Teacher's helper, classroom helper
- Taking care of class plants, class pet
- Organizing "Special Activity Days"
- Orchestrate the schedule of an alpha student who struggles to manage themselves in unstructured times (ex. Mail delivery to classrooms)

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USE PLAY & PLAYFULNESS



- If not safe to depend, play provides the needed avenue to preserve and exercise the dependent instinct.
- Through fantasy, stories and make-believe, play can provide needed hope for being taken care of, of being rescued, of finding security, of finding one's answer
- Dependent play can increase trust as well as lead the way out of alpha defenses


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USE PLAY & PLAYFULNESS



- Invite the alpha instinct in the play mode, such as games or fantasies of being a superhero, person or animal in charge (boss, parent, policeman, conductor, lion), the most important person (king, queen), the most famous person, etc.
- Displacement play can also appeal to the alpha instinct, such as games of competition (e.g. dodgeball) and fantasy games where one displaces another
- When possible, use singing and playful actions to direct the alpha child
- Playing usually evokes smiles – increasing attachment

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Managing RESISTANCE is a matter of RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS and SOFT HEARTS.

- Gordon Neufeld, PhD

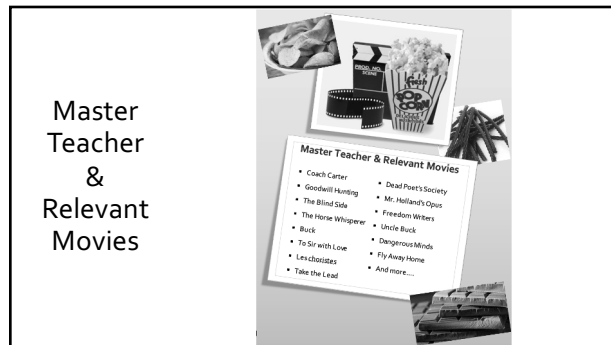
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Our ROLE as the adult

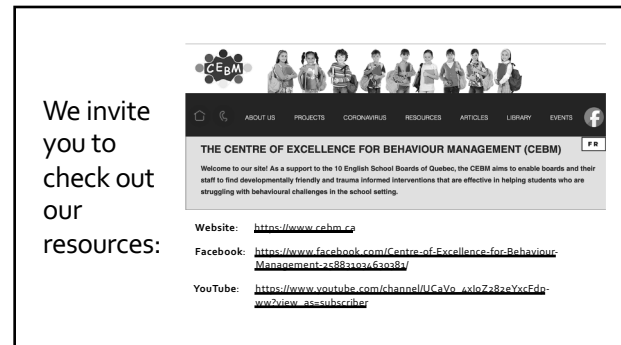
teacher
Educator
Principal
COACH
Technician
Attendant
counsellor

Adjusting our VIEW	Taking things LESS PERSONALLY
	Recognizing that instinct is involved
	Aiming to "do no harm"
Adjusting our STANCE	Allowing the child to feel safe in depending on us
	Conveying a strong alpha presence (inspiring trust & confidence)
	Refraining from revealing one's own needs, fears or felt inadequacies
Making ROOM for	To display some healthy leadership
	To be indulged in the play mode

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