

Acceptance as a Transitional Process & the Myth of Closure


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- ▶ Birth
- ▶ Diagnosis
- ▶ Early Intervention
- ▶ Preschool
- ▶ Kindergarten
- ▶ Elementary School
- ▶ Middle School
- ▶ High School
- ▶ Vocational/ College
- ▶ Adulthood


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Diversity is the New Normal

- ▶ Single Mothers
- ▶ Single Fathers
- ▶ Blended Families
- ▶ Same-Sex Parents
- ▶ Step-Parents
- ▶ Grandparents
- ▶ Adoptive Parents
- ▶ Foster Parents
- ▶ Nuclear Families
- ▶ Trans Families

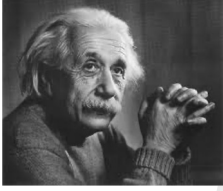
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The simplest things can be the most profound

- ▶ "Educate each child according to his ways."
- ▶ -Proverbs 22:6
- ▶ "Start where the child is and make contact."
- ▶ -Bertram Ruttenberg, MD
- ▶ Start where each family member is and learn together how to cope and grow from there.

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What is Evidence?

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

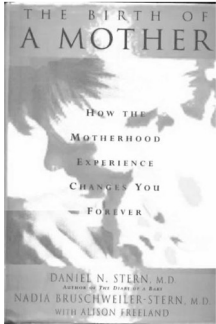
►- Albert Einstein

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Becoming and Being a Parent from *The Birth of the Mother*

As the infant emerges, there are two other births: the woman becomes a mother and the man becomes a father. The family is born. The experience of parenthood changes us forever.

-Drs. Daniel Stern & Nadia Bruschiweiller-Stern



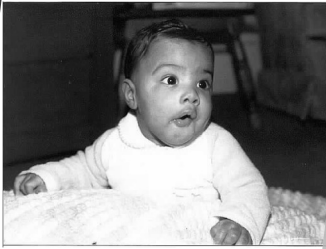
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Making eye contact at 1 day old!




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My Story:
Meeting
Milestones



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Special Needs Challenge the
Relationship



“There is a strain
on any marriage
whenever a baby
is sick. And we
always have a
sick baby”

Josh Greenfeld in *A Child
Called Noah* (1970).

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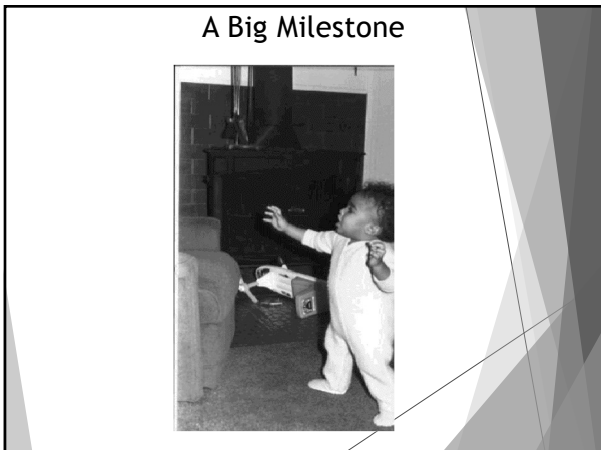
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Second summer:
No longer playing normally.
What was it like for you?




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Families are thrown into emotional turmoil

- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Guilt
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Grief
- ▶ *Loneliness*


My head felt like it was going to explode!



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The Stages of Grief:

- ▶ Denial
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Bargaining
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Acceptance



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“The birth of a severely developmentally delayed or handicapped baby is a trauma that virtually stops time in its tracks. . . . Suddenly your future is unpredictable and emotionally unimaginable. . . . your past, full of hopes and fantasies of pregnancy, is obliterated and becomes too painful to remember. Parents are held prisoner in an enduring present”
-Stern and Bruschweiler-Stern, 1998

Chronic Emotional Trauma

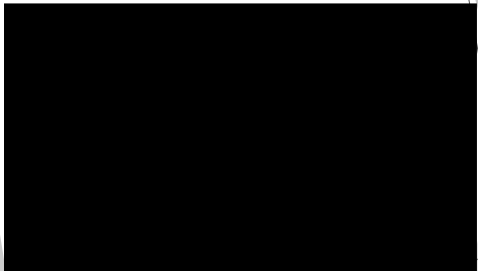
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“Groundhog Day”

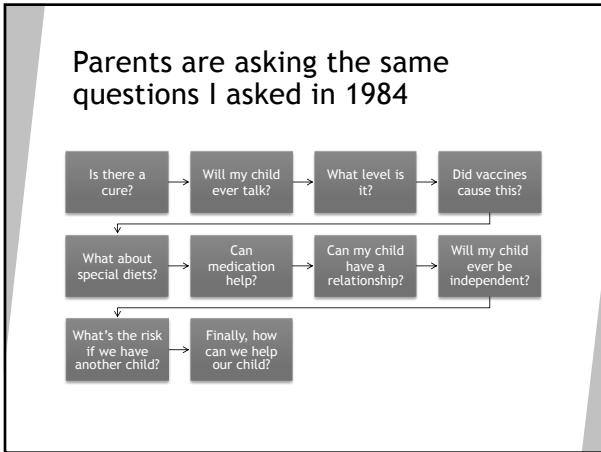
- ▶ Stuck and re-living the same day for who knows how long?
- ▶ If he does nothing different events repeat. If he changes his behavior, people respond differently and then possibilities open up.
- ▶ What we can do is to relate to our lives differently accepting that change is inevitable and believing it's possible.
- ▶ Even the most challenging situation is always unfolding and shifting.

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Rainman & Tariq



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Ambiguous Loss
 Pauline Boss (1999) has named two types. The first is when a person is physically present but psychologically absent as in autism, mental illness, addiction, dementia, divorce, etc.. The second type is when there is physical absence but a psychological (emotional) presence, such as MIAs.

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“With ambiguous loss there is no closure; the challenge is to learn how to live with the ambiguity.”

-Pauline Boss, Ph.D.

This is called Complicated Grief in DSM 5 because there is no possibility of closure or resolution. The loss is complicated and not pathological.

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Words of Wisdom

“I think mothers are helped by being able to voice their agonies at the time they are experiencing them. Bottled up resentment spoils the loving which is at the back of it all.”

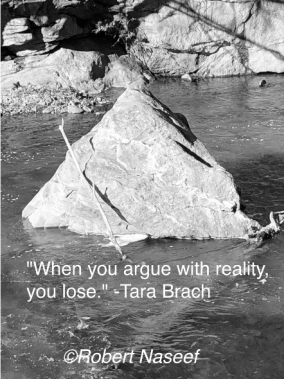
-D.W. Winnicott

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Living with ambiguous loss

- ▶ There are no linear stages and no ritual
- ▶ It's illogical, chaotic, and painful
- ▶ We don't have to get over it
- ▶ We don't have to obsess, just remembering
- ▶ This is normal
- ▶ We learn to live with 2 opposing ideas: things may get better or they may not
- ▶ This is the only way to live with the stress
- ▶ We can be transformed and live without too much stress
- ▶ Truth is the middle path, open to experience and listening to emotion

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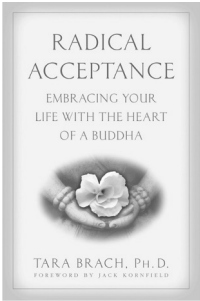
"When you argue with reality, you lose." - Tara Brach

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Radical Acceptance



- ▶ Tara Brach (2003) describes this willingness to experience ourselves and our lives as "Radical Acceptance" and a moment of genuine freedom. The root of our suffering in life is longing for things to be different from the way they really are.
- ▶ Psychologist Carl Rogers had a similar insight when he stated, "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."

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PTG: Posttraumatic Growth



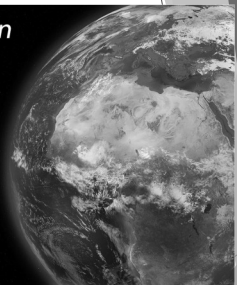
- ▶ PTG is positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event. **Posttraumatic growth**, the idea that human beings can be changed by their encounters with life challenges, sometimes in radically positive ways, is not new.

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*We are here to awaken
from the illusion of
our separateness.*

-Thich Nhat Hahn

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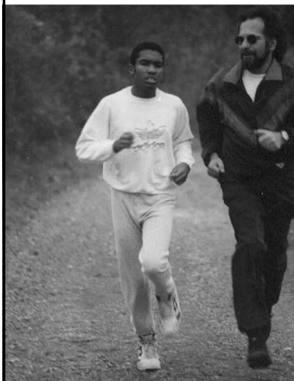
Most mothers are passionate and obsessed with the challenge



According to Winnicott "Primary maternal preoccupation is a consuming attachment to one's baby, a normal sickness from which most mothers recover." He was talking about the mothers of typical children—who presumably have a little less to be preoccupied with on the average.

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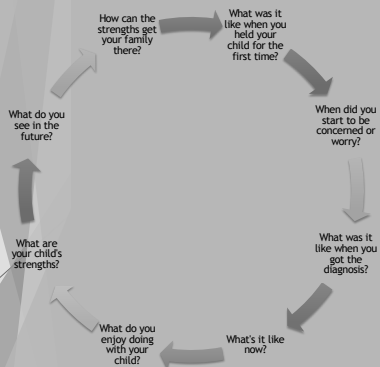
Learning to be with him



- When you love someone you love to be with him or her...
- Children with autism are often hard to be with...
- Finding joy in the relationship is where we do have some control

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Questions I ask parents:



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“He gave me a glimpse into the human heart...”


- ▶ Accept your feelings.
- ▶ Accept yourself.
- ▶ Fall in love with your child all over again.
- ▶ With a clear mind, Enjoy the life you have.



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Start where your child is

- ▶ This father would rather have a catch with a football but his son may be more interested in computer games or legos.
- ▶ Start where your child is. Watch, wait, observe. Often finding out something that you can build on.
- ▶ Being interested in what your child is interested in is key. To ask a child to enter our world, we have to enter his first.



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Acceptance does'nt mean giving up

- ✗ It does not mean wanting or liking autism.
- ☁ It does not mean changing your opinion.
- ⊘ It does not mean resignation.
- 🧠 It does not mean giving up on life or possibilities.


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Acceptance does mean avoiding the traps

It does mean finding balance in the family.

The Chinese finger trap is a metaphor for trying too hard to solve autism or fix it.

How do you get out of the trap?





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Acceptance is about opening up

- To the sad and the sweet in life.
- To the possibilities and the alternatives.
- To the lessons that come with really hard experiences.
- Becoming comfortable with what we cannot solve.
- What are some of your lessons?


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Life: A Balancing Act

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The simplest lesson




Special CHILDREN Challenged PARENTS
The Struggles and Rewards of Raising a Child With a Disability
REVISED EDITION
Robert A. Naseef, Ph.D.

As I wrote to Tariq, "I have tried so hard to change you, and in the end it was you who changed me. Instead of becoming the son I wanted you to be you made me become the man I needed to be."


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Always autistic, usually happy



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Serenity Prayer



Give us grace
To accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things that should be changed,
And the wisdom to discern the one from the other.
-Reinhold Niebuhr

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Take what helps you, and leave the rest...



- ▶ I invite you to visit: www.alternativechoices.com
- ▶ Check us out on Facebook
- ▶ Finally, I thank you for listening to my voice today.
