

Engaging Parents: A Clinician's Roadmap To Empowering Parents and Creating Change In Families

MERCEDES SAMUDIO, LCSW AND PARENT COACH

What We'll Learn About Engaging Parents

1. Explain the process of parental identity development.
2. Discuss parental defense mechanisms and their effects on parental identity.
3. Describe strategies for developing a therapeutic relationship with parents.
4. Explain the concept of parent shame and the shame-proof parenting framework.
5. Recognize countertransference when working with parents.



Parenting Identity Metaphor

If you think of our parenting identity as a blank white board that gets created in our existence once we are born, that's the foundation.



Parenting Identity Metaphor

Then, think of each experience with parenting (whether it be good or bad) as being a new black marker stroke on that whiteboard...



Parenting Identity Metaphor

...Every healing experience being an eraser swipe that leaves a bit of residue on the space it previously occupied...



Parenting Identity Metaphor

Then, consider that our academic/logical/cultural knowledge becomes a red marker stroke, you can envision a whiteboard full of eraser swipes, and black and red marker strokes that we go into parenthood with.



Parenting Identity Metaphor

Does this mean that we cannot overcome what we learned in our childhood and adult life before having children?



Parenting Identity Metaphor

Not at all!

It means that we need a framework to reorganize that information so that it doesn't feel overwhelming.



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

- The framework that I uses the same framework of Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory
 - In the PID model, at each stage of development there is a task that needs to be completed in order for the parent to achieve competency, confidence, and a healthy self-image of their parenting identity



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

- The PID Model is supported by the work of
 - Ellen Galinsky (*who gave us the six stages of parenthood*);
 - Erik Erikson (*who gave us the psychosocial stages of development*);
 - Daniel Levinson (*who shared the seasons of life theory*);
 - Bessel van der Kolk and Donna Jackson Nakazawa (*who explored how trauma changes our human experiences*);
 - and infused with findings from ACEs study (*that showed us that childhood experiences can have a huge effect on our adult lives*).



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

- There is no framework for how a human transitions into parenthood like there are for transitioning into other identities or ages
- This leaves a wide space for clinician's to support a parent making that transition – no matter where you come in on that process



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

- Parents are living in a world where they are to blame for what happens in their family
- That creates defensiveness and shutting down
- Bridge the gap with the following:
 - *Storytelling*
 - *Reflective listening*
 - *Empathy*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

The following are the stages:

- *Pregnancy (nesting)*
- *Infancy (learning)*
- *Toddler (adapting)*
- *School-Age (exploring)*
- *Tween (questioning)*
- *Teen (role-playing)*
- *Young Adult (launching)*
- *Adult (rediscovering)*
- *Parenting Age Adults (sharing)*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Pregnancy (Nesting Stage)

- *This stage is concerned with creating a space: for the humans that will be a part of the family*
- *The task here is to lay a foundation for the nest that the parent and child will live in*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Infancy (Learning Stage)

- *The task here is learning basics of being human – walk, talk, do, be.*
- *The piece that culturally we have linked to terrible twos and three-agers is actually directly linked what a parent has learned about being a human*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Toddler (Adapting Stage)

- *The task here is to adapt to the parent you are (versus the one you wanted to be) while also accepting the child you have*
- *This is where shame really takes hold if not addressed in the previous stage and is the first stage when identity can be truly triggered*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

School-Age (Exploring Stage)

- *The task here is to recognize the influence of the world on parenting identity as the child is also beginning to do the same*
- *Parents' defenses become more pronounced in this stage due to this intense level of exploration*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Tween (Questioning Stage)

- *The task here is to create space for the next stage of role playing and developmentally appropriate detachment*
- *This stage is a filler stage for both parent and child – exacerbated by the existence of puberty and the fears of the parent*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Teen (Role-Playing Stage)

- *The task here is to develop a safe space for the parent and teen to role play real-life roles*
- *When holding a space for a parent's identity here, remember their own humanness will always come first*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Young Adult (Launching Stage)

- *The task here is to launch and let go; evaluate the tools given, and trust the foundation that was laid*
- *This stage is heavily influenced by what society says a parent should have done by now – shame can spring up at it's most intense here*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Adult (Rediscovering Stage)

- *The task here is to work on an identity that does not include caregiving*
- *If the parent has been developing their identity throughout, this phase feels refreshing; if not, this phase feels empty*
- *It's this stage that makes this whole model important for a human's journey as a parent*



Parenting Identity Development (PID) Model

Parenting Age Adults (Sharing Stage)

- *The task here is to share what you've learned and move into a shared caregiving experience*
- *The parent who in the Rediscovering stage found a way to reconcile their ups and downs of parents can enjoy the shared experience; on the flip, this stage feels like reparenting as they are doing double duty as parent and grandparent*



Parenting Defense Mechanisms

- *A parent's defenses are one of the main reasons connecting and engaging with parents is difficult during treatment*
- *A parenting defense mechanism is a strategy a parent uses to protect their parenting identity from shame, judgement, and the emotions that come from raising children.*
- *All parents are using at least one parenting defense mechanism while their child is in treatment*



List of Parenting Defense Mechanisms

DEFLECTION

Taking the spotlight off yourself and instead highlighting another aspect of your identity and/or making a statement about the other person's identity

PROJECTION

Taking your negative emotions and throwing them at someone (or something) else who was not the cause of your emotions.



List of Parenting Defense Mechanisms

REGRESSION

When a parent's behaviors reflect a past era in their lives – unfortunately the era they're regressing to is usually not a pleasant one

FEAR OF FAILURE

A way parents protect themselves from the pain of failing themselves and others; often this impedes them from trying new strategies



List of Parenting Defense Mechanisms

MARTYDOM

When a parent's actions reflect a desire to receive something in return from their child

THE SUPERHUMAN

A parent's way of validating their parenting identity by keeping busy and/or doing everything for their family



Developing Relationships With Parents

- Understanding the family's system is first and foremost
- Get rid of judgements
- Engage parents first
- Join in with the family without feeding off their chaos



Developing Relationships With Parents

Questions to ask the parent:

- *What's most important to the parent?*
- *What are the parent's main needs?*
- *What are the parent's main wants/desires?*
- *What is the parent willing to do?*
- *What is the parent unwilling to do?*
- *Where is the parent now?*
- *Where does the parent want to be?*
- *Who does the parent think that the identified patient is?*
- *Is the parent interested in getting their own support outside of the their child's treatment?*



Developing Relationships With Parents

Questions to yourself about the parent:

- *What do I need to meet this parent's needs*
- *What do I think about this parent?*
- *What is my role in supporting this parent?*
- *How does this parent remind me of my parent?*
- *Do I identify with this parent?*
- *Do I empathize with this parent?*
- *Can I detach my goals from the parent's goals?*
- *How do I see this parent succeeding?*
- *How do I see this parent failing?*



What is Parent Shaming?

- Any judgement made by someone towards a parent/caregiver about their parenting that does not help them become more effective in their parenting
- Or, you could define parent shaming as thinking you understand a parent's decisions based on science, experience, research, observation, or anything else we tend to use to bolster our shaming arguments



What is Parent Shaming?

- Parent shaming hurts families because when a parent is too embarrassed, too ashamed, or too fearful to reach out for support the whole family suffers.
- They don't get the help they need and they don't have the support they need to heal or be more effective.



A Framework For Reducing Parent Shame

- Shame-proof parenting is a framework, not a set of steps that any parent must adhere to
- This framework creates a foundation for a parent to connect with themselves, their parenting identity, and their children.
- Shame-proof parenting asserts that the harder it is for external forces to penetrate your family, the easier it will be for you and your family to find solutions to your unique issues



Using The Shame-Proof Parenting Framework

Shame-proof parenting focuses on helping parents connect to themselves and their families to keep external forces from breaking the family.

When using this framework to manage barriers in your work with parents, it becomes a tool to help bring more awareness to parents and help the parent identify where their transference is showing up.



Using The Shame-Proof Parenting Framework

- **Empathy** (*for connection to themselves and to make a space for problem solving their family's issues*)
- **Awareness** (*teach the parent how to recognize when something is amiss so the family can tackle it together*)
- **Knowing needs** (*allows for resolving conflict based on getting needs met*)
- **Confidence** (*for the parent to know they're good at and what they may need outside help with*)
- **Resilience** (*helping the family bounce back together and expand their problem-solving skills*)
- **Support** (*allows the parent to seek out the help they need to manage life's up and downs in a healthy way*)



Managing Countertransference

- We all come from families and when we work with families, it's not always obvious where the barriers to treatment can present themselves.
- We can also look within ourselves to see that our own perspectives, experiences, and beliefs about families come into the way we provide services to families.
- Be honest with yourself about how your own family history and experiences motivate your work with families, so you do not force or undermine a family's treatment.
- Use storytelling as a barrier to countertransference



Assessing A Parent's Level of Functioning

Stages of Working With Parents and Families:

- *Introduction*
- *Assessment*
- *Treatment Planning*
- *Setting Goals*
- *Obtaining/Achieving Goals*
- *Managing Crises*
- *Maintenance/Follow-up*
- *Termination*



Assessing A Parent's Level of Functioning

The most effective way to assess a parent's level of functioning is to use your assessment skills

Additional areas to be mindful of include:

- *Emotional intelligence*
- *Parent's own healing journey*
- *Parenting vision*
- *Societal/cultural norms*
- *Number of children*
- *Support system*
- *Career goals*
- *Intimate relationships*



Citations/Recommended Reading

Erikson, E., & Erikson, J. (1998). *The life cycle completed*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Galinsky, E. (1989). *The six stages of parenthood*. Reading Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Levinson, D. (1986). A conception of adult development. *American Psychologist*, 41(1), 3-13.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.41.1.3>



Citations/Recommended Reading

Lowenstein, L. (2008). Assessment and treatment activities for children, adolescents, and families: Practitioners share their most effective techniques. Toronto: Champion Press.

Lowenstein, L. (2010). Creative family therapy techniques: Play, art, and expressive therapies to engage children in family sessions. Toronto: Champion Press.



Citations/Recommended Reading

Nakazawa, D. (2016). *Childhood disrupted*. New York, NY: Atria Books.

Nichols, M. P., & Schwartz, R. C. (2005). *The essentials of family therapy*. Boston, Ma.: Pearson /Allyn and Bacon.

Samudio, M. (2017). *Shame-proof parenting: Find your unique parenting voice, feel empowered, and raise whole, healthy children*. California: Mercedes Samudio, LCSW.

Van der Kolk, B. (2015). *The body keeps the score*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.



Contact

Mercedes Samudio, LCSW

Parent Coach | Bestselling Author | Speaker

mercedes@shameproofparenting.com

<http://shameproofparenting.com>

