Welcome to Profectum's Parent Education Program

Introduction to the DIR® Model

Serena Wieder, PhD
Clinical Director
Co-Creator of the DIR® Model

Our Priority Is To Support Parents And Families Raising Children Of All Ages

We are who you are!
Many of us are parents of children with special needs
All of us have extensive experience and are dedicated to working with parents
We are here to share the journey with you
To advance the development of your child!
Through courses, webcasts, conferences, resources, and “office hours”

Development Belongs To All Parents, Siblings, Families…. To All Of Us

- DIR® is a model for all children of all ages
- This widespread applicability is possible because it is based on a theory that focuses on capacities fundamental to the development of all children and understands individual needs.
- Especially, relationships, our greatest influences.

We Partner with Families
- We respect you as the only parents a child will ever have and your child is like no other
- We respect your understanding of your child’s needs, feelings and abilities
- We work together with you at every stage to carve the pathways to development
- We hope to strengthen your efforts and your family as you strengthen us by allowing us to learn with you and from you on this unique course
- We understand these are life long journeys and we are here to address the core deficits challenges of ASD and build the strengths and competences we all need

Development Belongs to All Children

- Did you think about development or your child?
- What do you hope for?
- What if our child has special needs?
- How do you get there?
- We will share a developmental roadmap called the DIR® Model that guides all children and parents

DIR® is a trademark of ICDL founded by Stanley Greenspan, MD and Serena Wieder, Ph.D.

Engaging Autism

Greenspan & Wieder, 1997
Our Start: The Clinical Infant Development Program- A Six Year NIMH Longitudinal Study By Greenspan And Wieder

A research program for multi-risk multi-problem families parenting young children

- How would we know we are on track? – Necessary for preventive and early intervention
- We learned development was part of a bio-psycho-social dynamic systems model – the complex interplay between what the infant brings, what the parent brings, and what the environment and culture bring interacting together
- Development needed a foundations and structure to prepare for life

The Components Of The DIR Model Have Long Theoretical, Clinical And Research Traditions…

- Psychodynamic developmental frameworks go as far back as Freud, were expanded by Erikson, Piaget, Anna Freud, Mahler, Pine and Bergman and others who looked at early experience
- Enhanced by the clinical reports of Spitz, Bowlby, Winnicott, Fraiberg, Lourie, Provence and others who described the critical impact disrupted and impoverished environments had on early relationships and development.

Opening The Doors To Understanding Individual Differences

- Meanwhile, Brazelton, Escalona, Murphy, Ayres, Tomaso and others were identifying neuro-biological influences in development and their interaction.
- Brazelton demonstrated the remarkable capacities of infants through affect based interactions
  - Looked at what infants brought into the world
  - The impact of sensations and individual differences
  - Sensory Integration, sensory motor, sensory processing, regulation...are now common place
  - Developmental language models emerged – communication

From The Past To The Present...

- These developments coincided with the rejection of psychogenic theory which blamed parents for their children’s autism implied by Kanner, Asperger, and Bettelheim in prior decades.
- A comprehensive model was needed to integrate theory with the emerging understanding of environmental risks, individual differences (neurobiology), parent-infant interactions and pyramid of services.

This Model is DIR®!

So......

What Is Autism?

- ...a group of complex disorders of brain development characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors.
- Most cases of autism appear to be caused by a combination of autism risk genes and environmental factors influencing early brain development impeding connectivity.
  (autism speaks)

Autism is a learning disorder of the brain

Chart is updated from Autism Speaks study 2020.
**ASD: Estimated 1 in 54 boys – 1 in 252 girls**

- Many autisms
- No one cause
- No one type – unique profiles
- 40% average to above and
- Some exceptional skills/talents
- Others need more support
- 25% non-verbal but learn to communicate through other means

**What do we know?**

- 21st Century neuroscience is giving us new insights into understanding developmental and learning disorders
- No one cause – most combination of autism risk genes and environmental stresses that influence brain development; some rare genetic mutations; immune system role
- ERP and fMRI studies in young children is showing us how the brain functions and the changes that come with intervention - increased activity indicates better emotion detection and processing

**First Signs from Graham: Autism Like by Erik Linthorst**

1. C. Graham

**The Challenge of Development in ASD**

In Graham we see:

- Development is not automatic, is very uneven, and presents with core deficits in relating and communicating
- It is a disorder of neural connectivity between different regions of the brain
  - Auditory Processing and Language: the way in which we receive information, comprehend it, and express it.
  - Motor Planning and Sequencing: how we act on our ideas or on what we hear and see.
  - Visual-Spatial Processing: the ability to make sense of and understand what we are seeing.
  - Sensory Modulation: the ability to modulate or regulate sensation as it is coming in.

**How do we begin to understand these challenges**

- *Usually, an infant connects the sensory system to the motor system through affect.* e.g., seeing the caregiver’s smiling face or hearing her wooring voice entices the infant to turn and look and listen and smile back.
- Through many of these interactions the infant begins to recognize patterns as they share attention, take pleasure in interactions, read each others’ cues and respond to each other over and over again through gaze, vocalizations, and gestures.

**Interconnectivity Fewer Connections**

- fMRI studies show abnormalities in the neurological wiring through which brain areas communicate...have difficulty performing complex tasks that involve brain areas working together...difficulty understanding complex figures of speech, like idioms and metaphors” (Minshew, 2006)
- Recent studies on the ESDM show brain changes following intervention (Rogers & Dawson, 2012)
Infant Connects The Sensory System To The Motor System Through Affect
To Engage And Form Attachments

Simultaneous Emotional and Cognitive Development

- Intelligence is forming as baby discriminates the difference between mother’s and father’s voice and touch
- Dual coding of experience is key to understanding how emotions organize intellectual abilities— even at a few days infants react to sensations emotionally— suck harder to see mother’s image, prefer mother’s touch and smell, like sweet liquids. Later learn hot and cold from baths and bottles, and a little or a lot based on how much of what they like they get!

Meaningful Interactive Experiences
When a child’s sensory motor system is equipped affect serves as a vehicle for relating and learning:
- By the end of the first year the infant recognizes variations in his caregiver’s affect as well as his own feelings related to love, anger, feeling proud, disapproved of, etc.
- By the second year of life, these patterns lead to a sense of self as purposeful and a differentiated sense of others.
- By the third year of life these affect based interactions enable a child to form and give meaning to symbols leading to higher levels of thinking.

The “R” has to be Working
Relationships are the primary vehicle for creating learning interactions Convey the affect that first drives the action and then reasoning and ideation.
- Child’s individual constitutional processing differences and relationship - care giving patterns together influence development
- Parents and children grow together — intervention must focus on their interaction to mobilize development

Coming for Kisses

DIR®: A Dynamic Systems Model of Development
Greenspan & Wieder

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Every Child Has The Capacity For Relationships...the Vehicle To Development Every Child Can Learn!
The "I" needs to be working

But when if you are compromised?
• You don't know where to turn to look or search
• You don't understand the words
• You get alarmed by sudden sounds, touch, moves
• You don't know how to use your hands to gesture or imitate...
• You need to constantly move, spin...
• You may turn elsewhere and find your own solutions
So many differences...every child is unique!

For this we need a comprehensive program

The “I”
■Refers to individual differences related to
  • sensory reactivity and regulation,
  • visual-spatial processing
  • auditory/language processing, and
  • purposeful movement - praxis

Challenges in these neuro-biological factors make it difficult to participate in the emotional interactions that enable mastery of the developmental capacities (the “D”).

DIR® theory identifies six (9) fundamental capacities or levels that emerge in infancy and expand in duration, range and stability as the child grows and reach across the life span.

At all ages it is critical to identify gaps and go back to support/strengthen the development of these capacities

I - Regulation and Shared Attention
(between child and caregiver)
Between birth to three months, an infant's capacity grows for calm, focused interest in the sights and sounds of the outer world while she begins to share her interests with the caregiver.

II- Forming Attachments and Engaging in Relationships
■During the next first four months, infant and parents become more intimate as they interact with warmth, trust and intimacy. They each use their senses to enjoy each other through looks, hugs, songs and dancing together. Over time the child will need to remain related and engaged across the full range of emotions, even when disappointed, scared, angry or feeling other stress. Similarly for older children, adolescents and adults.

III- Intentional Two-Way Affective Communication
■Between four and ten months, purposeful, continuous flow of interactions with gestures and reciprocating emotions gets underway. The infant begins to act purposefully, now that she has matured and is more aware of her body and the functions it can perform beginning with gestures and movement.

■ As the infant gains motor control over her body and intent, she is better able to communicate her desires. With emerging abilities to reach; sit and turn; crawl and creep; and give and take or drop objects, the child’s awareness of the interpersonal world is growing, as is her awareness of her body in space and in relation to others who may also be moving.

Every Parent Wants to Connect

Serena Wieder, Ph.D. ©
Every Child Can Communicate!
I’m Trying To Tell You Something!

Noah Early

The Magic of Floortime - Interaction
Noah play after n

IV - Complex Social Problem Solving

Between 9 and 18 months, an infant has learned the back and forth rhythm of interactive emotional signaling and begins to use this ability to think about and solve problems that are emotionally meaningful to get what he wants, such as pulling mommy to the door to go outside and play.

All of the child’s senses work with his motor system as he interacts with others to solve problems as he grows. Difficulties arise when he becomes aware that things are not as they should be based on his memory of prior experiences and encounters new difficulties to solve as his experience expands.

Serena Wieder, Ph.D. ©

I did it! It’s ok, I did it!

Graham Motor

Hocus Pocus – The Magic Of Development

Hocus pocus
Level V. Creating Emotional Ideas

- Between 18 and 36 months, the toddler begins to represent or symbolize intentions, feelings and ideas in imaginative play and/or language, using gestures, words and symbols.
- The toddler now calls on a toy phone, sets up a picnic or tea party, takes the sick baby to the doctor or repairs his car before driving somewhere and enters fantasy.
- These first ideas come from experiences in real life that can now be enacted in pretend dramas as the child experiments with different roles and feelings.

Level VI. Emotional Thinking, Logic and Sense of Reality

- At about three, the child begins to combine ideas to tell a story as he develops more logic and understanding of himself and others, and of what is real or not real.
- His stories use imaginative characters and animal figures who talk and may have magic as he discovers he needs more power to encounter the fears and conflicts in life, but reasoning skills click in to elaborate sequences and stories become increasingly logical and realistic.
- Over the next few years, the child’s emotional and mental abilities move toward abstract thinking and he develops the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, self from non self, one feeling from another; and to make distinctions concerning time and space.

The Continuous Flow

- Longer chains of co-regulated affective gesturing will enable the child to recognize the variations in the caregiver’s gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice and become aware of his anxiety and repetitive behavior.
- The relationship becomes the vehicle for affect transformations that allow the child to negotiate each of the above functional emotional developmental levels.
- It is affect that transforms labels into meanings leading to symbolic thinking and more complex and abstract reasoning. (Greenspan & Wieder, 1998; Wieder & Greenspan, 2003; Greenspan & Shonkoff, 2004)
The “Secret” Is No Longer A Secret … Affect Activates Development

- Connecting affect to activate, organize and sequence actions makes them purposeful and competent.
- Connecting words to underlying affects that give them purpose and meaning, leads to the formation of symbols, imaginative play and reflective conversations.

DIR® is also commonly known as Floortime

- Floortime is both a philosophy and a specific technique where caregivers follow the child’s natural emotional interests create states of heightened pleasure in playful interactions to engage and stay connected tailor interactions to the child’s unique motor and sensory-processing profile
- But also has other components: semi-structured social activities, playdates, sensory motor work, education, therapies, and biomedical interventions
- We will be covering a wide range of topics through lectures, videos and various resources

When development derails…

- For a disorder as complex and as heterogeneous as autism, research from various methods, including combined developmental and behavioral approaches, support elements of DIR’s complex model.
- Empirical results point to the importance of natural and spontaneous interests and initiation
- Recent studies on behavioral interventions show significant benefits in adding an interactive affect based and symbolic focus on outcomes.
- DIR Studies – Solomon; Casenheiser; Stieben
- Fein – Developing out of autism

Without All The Answers - It Is Our Mission…
To Overcome Barriers And Advance Development

- No one method claims to be effective for all individuals on the spectrum – no study has been able to compare methods – new era seeking to identify profiles of intervention for different profiles of individuals
- DIR provides a theoretical and clinical model now building research that integrates available knowledge without disregarding the complexity of the increasing challenges we face with emotional and developmental disorders over time.
- When progress stalls we must revisit, re-examine, re-evaluate, and reorganize intervention

Every Child’s Journey Is A Family’s Journey..

Parents develop too!
- Parents know their children- want to learn more
- Family is the most important support - is constant
- When one member is challenged, the entire family is effected – stress is constant
- Support family coping and strengths but recognize challenges and transitions
- Family need other families
- We work together and we respect boundaries and reflection
There is a very big problem,…

- When underlying beliefs fail to recognize the developmental options of the child
- When educational efforts are reduced to choosing content only relevant to that point in time
- When you lack belief in the propensity to modify development or cognition and modify the impact of stress and trauma
- When you don’t focus on what matters most!

The DIR® model provides the path.

A Comprehensive DIR Program Includes

- Floortime
  - Starts with frequent sessions (6-8, 20-30 min.)
  - Talktime
- Semistructured Activities
  - Social, Work, Groups
  - Sensory-Motor activities
  - Movement, sports, gym
- Family Supports
- Other Interventions
  - Education, special education, hybrid
  - Therapies
    - Language, OT & PT, Visual Spatial,
    - Psychotherapy
    - Creative Arts
  - Peer Play Dates
  - Social Thinking
  - Bio-medical interventions

DIR Introduced Major Paradigm Shifts from Behavioral to Dynamic Developmental Systems

- That affect was central to relating, learning and understanding—emotions drive early cognitive development
- That we were now treating relationships and not just the child—this relationship provides vehicle for learning as does ours with each family
- That every child has an inner world with feelings and desires and experiences he or she cannot always express but lets us know in different ways and so does each parent in relation to their child
- That emotional capacities organize experience at successively higher levels and provide the structure for development
- That everyone has individual differences and needs tailored interventions
- That integrated interdisciplinary comprehensive models are important
- That competencies come from experience—not training
  - That development cannot be taught but builds on what you know and moves forward.
  - That developmentally appropriate approaches are needed and Development is Dynamic—changes with progress—not bound by age

www.proflectum.org

Visit our website for:
Table of Contents of the Parent Curriculum
- Resources for parents and professionals
- Information on training programs and conferences
- Educational webcasts