

# Empathy, the Family, and the Core of Social Justice

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The Creation & Transmission of Global Trauma  
through Parenting Practices with Children

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Childress, Pruter; APA


Prager, J. (2003). Lost Childhood, Lost Generations: the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma. *Journal of Human Rights*.

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“Trauma, as a wound that never heals, succeeds in transforming the subsequent world into its own image, secure in its capacity to re-create the experience for time immemorial. It succeeds in passing the experience from one generation to the next. The present is lived as if it were the past. The result is that the next generation is deprived of its sense of social location and its capacity to creatively define itself autonomously from the former... when time becomes distorted as a result of overwhelming events, the natural distance between generations, demarcated by the passing of time and changing experience, becomes obscured.” (p. 176)

Childress, Pruter; APA

The trauma of child abuse is like a stone thrown into a lake, there is the stone of the abuse, the splash of the trauma, and the ripple of trauma out into the world, and across generations. Trauma is embedded into psychology through Freud and Perry, van der Kolk and ACES; trauma and complex trauma. Trauma is time standing still, secure in its capacity to re-create the experience for time immemorial.



Progress in social, economic, and political structures is linked to progress in parenting practices.

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“The central force for change in history is neither technology nor economics, but the “psychogenic” changes in personality occurring because of successive generations of parent-child interactions. ” (deMause)

deMause, L. (1974). The Evolution of Childhood. In Lloyd deMause, Editor, The History of Childhood. New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974.

Childress, Pruter; APA

Our challenges of social justice are not social problems, they are personal problems housed in the people who inhabit our social structures and institutions. Our social challenges are caused by us, as individuals, inhabiting the social institutions. We cannot resolve trauma in the world, when we fail to recognize its impact in ourselves.

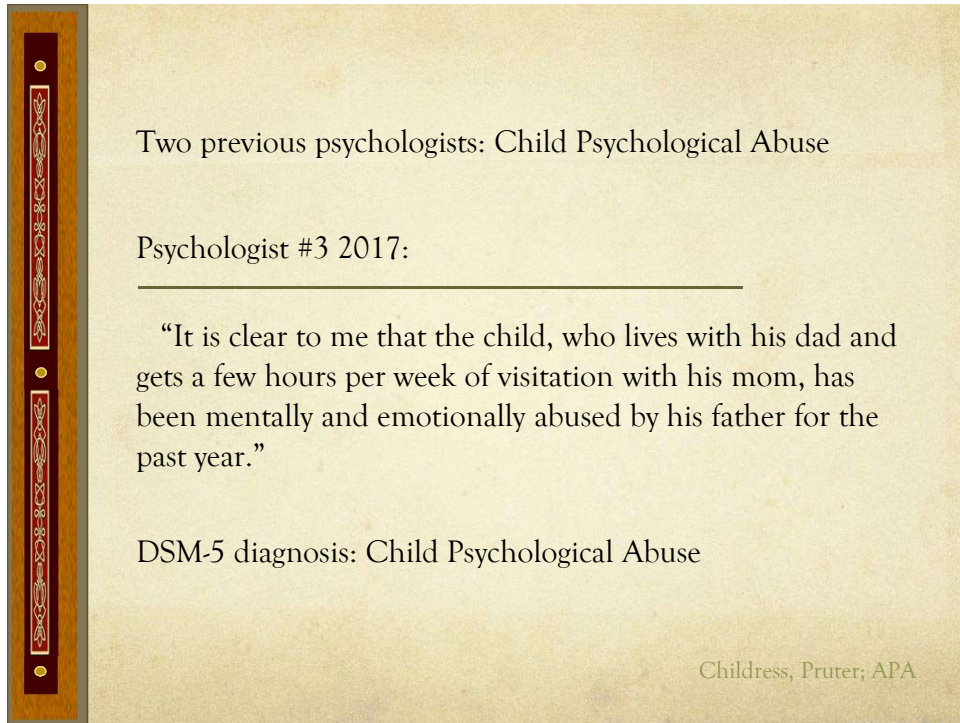
## Damaged Empathy

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- The ripple of trans-generational trauma damages empathy in the parent-child bond, leading to the violence and the traumas of global social injustices, human trafficking, indentured foreign slavery, war and refugees, poverty and starvation.
- Humanity has the full capacity to solve these social justice issues, because they originate in us, in our trans-generational transmission of trauma, the unseen rippling of childhood trauma across generations.

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This paper reports on a single-case ABA clinical case study of trauma recovery in a parent-child relationship, recovery from three years of documented child abuse, child abuse documented by three independent psychologists across that span. The third psychologist made a DSM-5 diagnosis of Child Psychological Abuse.

The court ordered a protective separation of the child from the psychologically abusive parent, and the 15 year-old adolescent entered a 2-day psycho-educational workshop for trauma recovery.

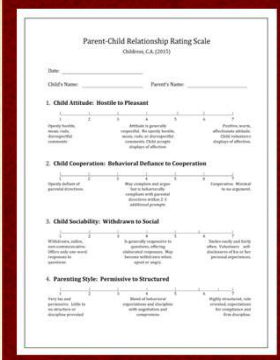
## Single-Case ABA Design:

Independent Variable: High Road

Dependent Variable: PC-RRS

7-point Likert scale anchored for a normal curve distribution.

- Affection: Attachment networks (Aff)
- Cooperation: Emotional regulation networks (Co)
- Social Involvement: Mood and arousal networks (SI)

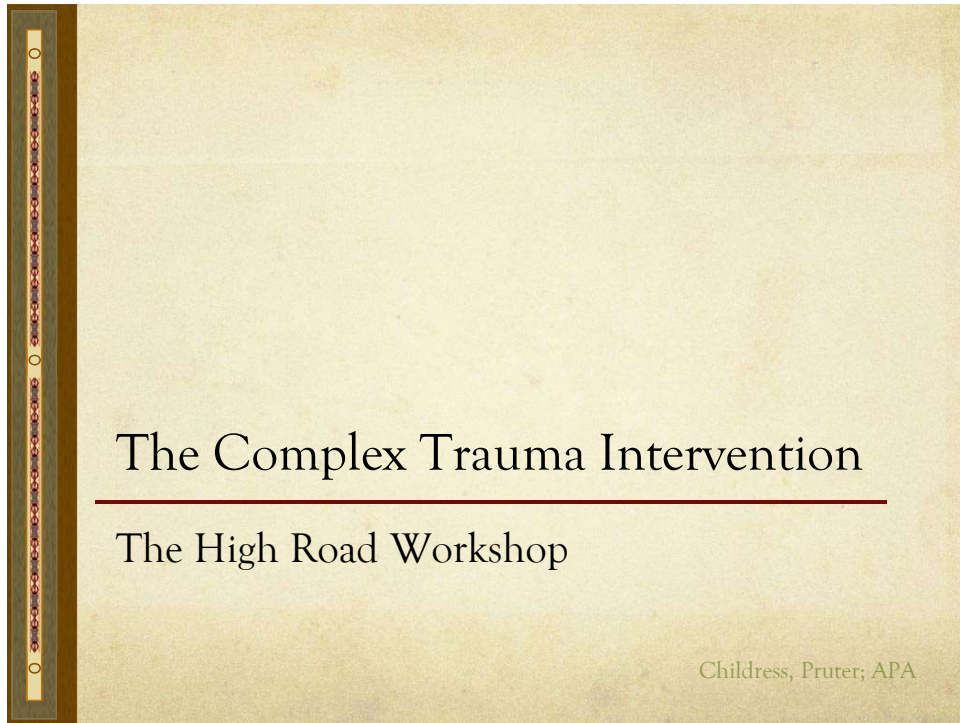


The image shows a sample form of the Parent-Child Relationship Rating Scale (PC-RRS). The form is titled "Parent-Child Relationship Rating Scale" and includes fields for "Date", "Child's Name", and "Parent's Name". It is divided into four sections, each with a 7-point Likert scale:

- 1. Child Attitude: Hostile to Pleasant** - Items include "Seemingly hostile, uncooperative, unresponsive", "Seemingly cooperative, uncooperative, unresponsive", and "Pleasant, warm, cooperative, responsive".
- 2. Child Cooperation: Behavioral Defiance to Cooperation** - Items include "Disobedient or defiant", "Resistant and uncooperative", "Cooperates and follows directions", and "Cooperates and follows directions without complaint".
- 3. Child Sociability: Withdrawn to Social** - Items include "Withdrawn, aloof, unresponsive", "Somewhat withdrawn, unresponsive", "Somewhat sociable, responsive", and "Sociable, friendly, and responsive".
- 4. Parenting Style: Permissive to Structured** - Items include "Very lax and indulgent", "Somewhat lax and indulgent", "Somewhat structured and firm", and "Highly structured and firm".

Childress, Pruter; APA

The outcome measure is the Parent-Child Relationship Rating Scale, a 7-point Likert scale, anchored to a normal distribution with normal-range being central ratings of 3-5. Ratings of 1-2 represent extremely problematic behavior, and ratings of 6-7 represent highly positive relationship behavior. The Relationship Rating Scale monitors three domains of the child's functioning, Affection (the attachment networks), Cooperation (emotional regulation networks), and Social Involvement (mood and arousal).



Following the court's order for the child's protective separation from the abusive parent, the child and mother enrolled in the 2-day trauma and bonding recovery workshop.

## High Road Workshop:

- The High Road protocol is a 4-day psycho-educational intervention designed to quickly eliminate child symptoms associated with prior trauma and child abuse, and to quickly restore the child's normal-range attachment bond to the parent.
- Since 2006, I have recovered in the range of 200 children. We have recovered 100% of the children during the workshop. Some children will occasionally relapse following the workshop, but this only occurs when contact with the abusive parent is not prevented, and when the children were re-exposed to the abusive parenting.

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## High Road Workshop:

- The High Road workshop protocol is a context-oriented approach to change for restoring the child's healthy development.
- We do not talk about "problems", we do not talk about the past, we remain solution-focused on skills, and on establishing the context needed for change.
- The workshop is a combination of narrative-story videos that activate emotions of warmth and bonding, psycho-educational videos on critical thinking and forming judgments, and workshop activities for trauma-informed skill building in communication and relationship skills.

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## High Road Workshop:

- Child Protective Services does not do an adequate job protecting children from complex trauma and psychological child abuse.
- In this case, three separate psychologists had diagnosed the child with psychological child abuse since 2016 through 2017, the third psychologist gave a DSM-5 diagnosis of Child Psychological Abuse and referred to the High Road workshop.
- CPS left the child in the care of the abusive father for 1½ years following the DSM-5 diagnosis of Child Psychological Abuse, before a protective separation was ordered by the court, and the child was recovered from complex trauma.

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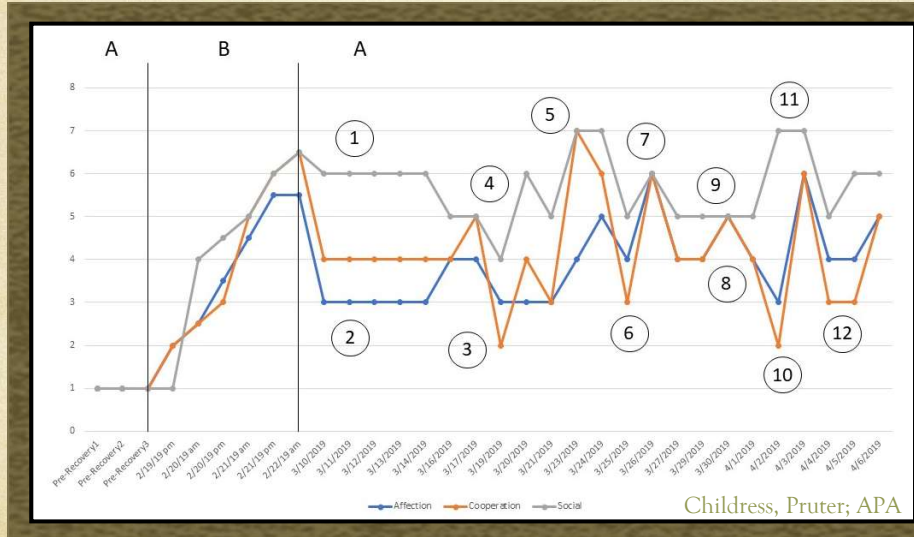
# The Clinical Data

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## Single-Case ABA Design

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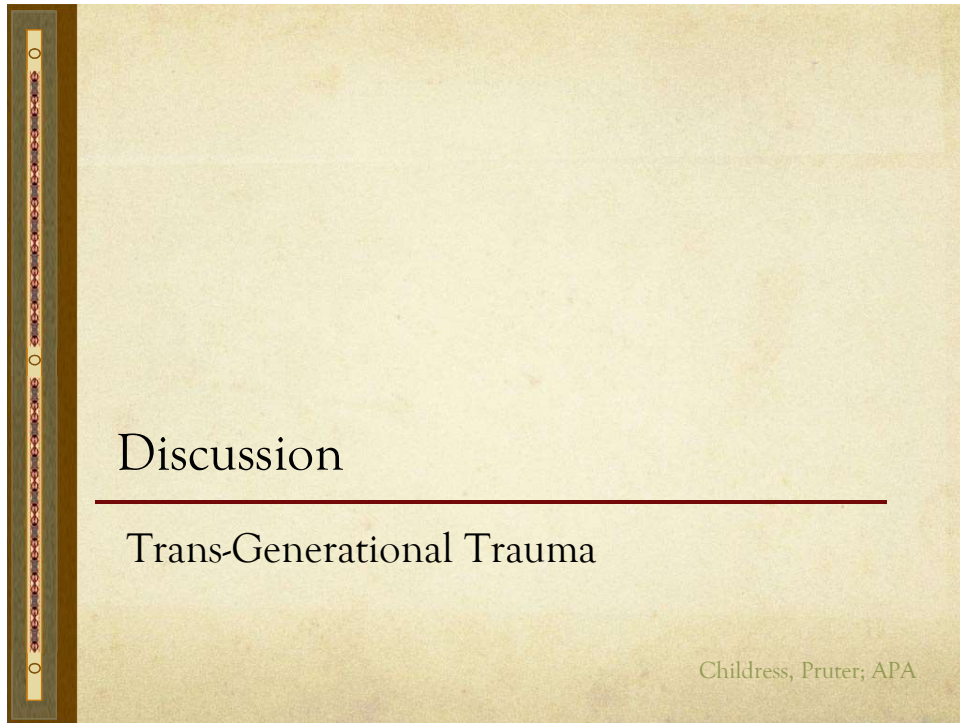
## Single-Case ABA Clinical Data: Recovery from Complex Trauma



The results of the single case ABA are depicted in figure 1. The PC-RRS data was collected twice daily during the two-day workshop, and once daily in the follow-up maintenance therapy period. When the 15-year-old adolescent entered the workshop, his scores on the PC-RRS were all 1s and 2s. Beginning on the first day of the workshop and continuing throughout the two-day workshop, the ratings began an immediate and rapid rise to extremely positive relationship behavior, rates 5s and 6s, by the end of the two day workshop.

The child's recovery was maintained across the two-weeks until follow-up maintenance care with a the clinical psychologist began. I am that clinical psychologist, the data from the second A follow-up phase is data from my clinical therapy. I had no involvement with this case prior to my beginning follow-up recovery therapy following the workshop.

The circled points on the PC-RRS data from the second A follow-up therapy period represent points of note in the therapy, as reflected in the parent-child relationship data. The points of note from the therapy period are not the focus of today's paper, which instead focuses on the rapid, complete, and stable recovery from complex trauma and child abuse achieved by a two-day workshop. The perturbations in the treatment data from the follow-up period in response to therapy interventions indicate that the child's recovery as achieved in the workshop PC-RRS data was full and robust.



The High Road workshop fully recovered the child's healthy parent-child bond to the mother in two days, following three years of documented complex trauma and child abuse.

## Discussion

- Problems in social justice are not social problems, they are human problems, unresolved trauma in the people who inhabit our social institutions, unresolved trauma in us.
- Trauma passes from the parent to the child. We must develop larger scale interventions that will interrupt the trans-generational flow of trauma as it is passed to children.
- Psychotherapy offers one avenue, but not the only avenue for change. Alternative context-oriented and skill-based recovery approaches are available and are effective in recovering children from complex trauma.

I am a personal survivor of childhood trauma. I saw over 30 therapists growing up and they all left me in my complex trauma caused by child abuse. While therapy provides benefit to many, for many others, children caught in childhood trauma, we need to find other methods for reaching them and recovering them from trauma.

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## Trans-Generational Trauma

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- Resolving the Trans-Generational Trauma in families begins with resolving the childhood trauma in the parents. The application of strategic step-by-step skill building techniques through alternative workshop interventions that have demonstrated an increase in success and a reduction of traumatic responses in the parents when the child is recovered during the workshop
- The same skills are being taught to all members of the family empowering the entire family system with healthy relationship skills restoring the proper family hierarchy and freeing the child from the complex family trauma.

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- Potential application of skill-based and context-oriented workshops for trauma-involved pathologies such as substance abuse and prison recidivism warrants additional exploration and are currently being explored and implemented in some private prisons in partnership with work release programs to reduced recidivism showing promising results.

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- Complex trauma recovery programs are currently being implemented in Post War Liberia, teaching child soldiers conflict resolution skills using the same skills being taught in the High Road workshop
- The methodologies taught in the High Road and a parenting curriculum, Higher Purpose Parenting, have expanded to working with refugees from war, famine and poverty, and migrant families being separated within and between countries, addressing an urgent worldwide challenge of our times.

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## Trans-Generational Trauma

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- Solutions for our largest problems of social justice are found in the most intimate of relationships, in accurate parental empathy for the child. Empathy training workshops as described by Perry and Szalavitz and skill-based psycho-educational workshops like the High Road and Higher Purpose Parenting offer new avenues into solutions for long-standing human suffering endlessly repeating itself in our world and across our generations and cultures.

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