Rupture and Repair Practice, Explanation

Rupture and Repair Practice sheet (track 2 parent-child conflict situations, then reflect and try to repair- when calm). There are a couple of important aspects of this practice.

The first aspect is to encourage you to deconstruct the conflict situation, jotting down what happened, what you thought, said and did – *taking your own perspective*. If you were angry, why were you angry? And how did you handle that emotion? Were you able to use mindfulness, pause, consider how you want to situation to be resolved, and react with intention? Or did you react impulsively, carried away by emotion and loosing control of your actions? This self reflection helps you to reflect on those aspects and consider how things unravelled as well as the benefits of using mindfulness in the moment, if you are able to.

The second aspect is to encourage you to take your child’s perspective. To use your theory of mind and empathy to imagine what your child may have been thinking and feeling. Every thing your child does he/she does for a reason. He may rip up a book because he likes the sound of the pages ripping, or the look of the shreds. He may bite you when you take away a toy because he is mad that took it and he wants to get it back. She may throw food on the floor because she hates the taste of it, wants to avoid eating it, or likes the sound of the plate smashing. With children with ASD, it is not always obvious to us why they do what they do, but we can be detectives, and think about why they may do what they do. Can we identify the emotion they are feeling? Do they seem happy? Sad? Angry? If so, why might that be? That requires us to use our theory of mind and imagine what our child is thinking or feeling, including when they can’t tell us. If we behave in a way that is not in sync with our intentions, e.g., yell, or act punitive, can we imagine how our child may feel (e.g., sad, scared?) And can we make amends some how? Explaining to our child in a way he understands that we behaved badly, because we were feeling – frustrated, mad, tired, etc. And we are sorry about that?

Apologizing or making amends is the third aspect. If we can take responsibility for our own behaviour, explain it, and then apologize, we are being excellent models and teachers for our child.

If you don’t think you did anything wrong, you can still push your own theory of mind abilities and try to figure out why your child did what he did and this can help you manage his behaviour (generally it is to get something, avoid something, or to obtain some kind of sensory input such as visual, sound, touch, etc. or a self stimulatory behaviour such as lining things up or echolalia). If you can figure out why your child does something, then you can make changes. E.g. if he likes to rip up books, because he likes the sound or look of it, can you provide some things he is allowed to rip up (e.g., old magazines) and make it clear that these are the things he can rip up, not the books. You can also help him to learn to communicate or request “rip up” materials or time. If he has a meltdown when you take the video game away, maybe you can put video game time on a schedule, let him know how long he has, provide a count down strip or timer, give plenty of warning before taking it away, and then when he hands it over, provide some kind of reinforcement. There is much more that could be said from an analysis of behaviour perspective, but using your mindful attention and awareness of your child can help you to tap into his or her perspective, and learn to better understand him or her.