

Parenting Through the Lens of Core Energetics
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Abstract

This paper applies the theory and practices of Core Energetics pertaining to parenting to offer a practical guide for expecting parents and parents with children aged 0 to 6. It focuses on identifying and meeting child developmental needs in order to nurture a child's connection to and foster expression of their life force energy which is, in other words, maximum health and capacity for a fulfilling life experience.

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Introduction

As a parent and someone who has benefited personally from Core Energetics therapy and training, I am deeply moved by the Core Energetics perspective that personality, behaviors, and even body shape are formed by the movement of energy as we reacted to our environment and adapted ourselves for survival. This began at least from the moment we had a heartbeat. Our early strategies lay the groundwork for future patterns, so our infancy and early childhood experiences really shape our

personality and beliefs as we develop into adults. Unfortunately, what worked for us when we were a child often are the very patterns that lead to and maintain us in our problems and dissatisfaction in our adult lives.

Some of my hardest challenges in parenting are: to manage the constantly competing needs of my child and myself, and the conflict and questions around when to discipline a child's tantrum and expressions of anger and frustration. Questions like, what does a parent do when a toddler or kindergartner is upset, crying or screaming, and what are the consequences on the child's development? Is it best to teach them early that they need to stop crying and control their emotions? If we choose to offer empathy and compassion, do we let the child cry and scream? For how long? Or is this the time to teach them positive thinking to stop feeling upset? How does a parent find that holy middle ground of authoritative parenting that lies between authoritarian and permissive parenting?

These are difficult questions because they imply certain assumptions, such as that a parent's task is to successfully control a child's expression and behaviors, or to teach the child to control themselves, as if children, expressions, desires, and needs are things that need to be controlled. But for children the priority might be love, acceptance, and connection. When these basic needs are satisfied, people, not just children, have a greater chance of becoming better regulated. Connection, love, and acceptance will help children move through the vaso-motoric cycle. This will be discussed in Chapter 2 but suffice to say now that it is the body's cycle of learning that occurs in response to events in our

environment. It happens naturally and spontaneously if an individual's energy is allowed and supported to flow through each stage of the cycle, rather than being inhibited or blocked. Then the child naturally learns from each tantrum, each stressful and frustrating experience, and the result will be that they become better regulated. They are more likely to stay joyful, curious, expressive, and become more resilient because they have been supported.

This paper hopes to offer an understanding of infants and young children's developmental needs and behaviors from a Core Energetics perspective, so that parents and caregivers, such as myself, may become better prepared and equipped to respond to children during high-stress moments. Core Energetics has helped me so much in understanding emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in terms of purposeful and responsive energy movements. With this knowledge and experience caregivers can practice responding to children in ways that encourage energetic flow versus suppression and blockage. Our children get to feel seen, heard, and supported; and parents and children enjoy a stronger bond and flow of love and connection, not to mention better physical and mental health outcomes for all.

What is Core Energetics?

We are organisms of energy; the world is energy. Babies are glorious energy systems. Core Energetics, founded by John Pierrakos, is a type of body psychotherapy centered on the finding that each person has a CORE. CORE is an acronym for Center of Right Energy. It is what Freud

initially named the libido drive, a sexual energy. His student and contemporary, Wilhelm Reich, developed a deeper understanding that it is more than a sexual energy. Rather, it is the source of energy, impulse and vitality which he called orgone energy.

Alexander Lowen and John Pierrakos developed studies of this energy into Bioenergetics and came up with a comprehensive set of physical exercises and movements to be used in therapy. John Pierrakos then combined this work with that of his wife, Eva Pierrakos, that became Core Energetics. Eva channeled a being she called The Guide and the result of this work is called Pathwork. Among many teachings, it spoke about how human beings' reactions and defenses form a Mask, which is patterns of adaptive behavior that also trap us in vicious cycles. The Pathwork sees humans as inherently divine and spiritual beings striving and experiencing life in the arena of the physical world we live in. The Mask teaching and the spiritual elements of the Pathwork sets Core Energetics apart from Bioenergetics or other predecessors of body psychotherapy. Rather than focusing on the body, Core Energetics offers a more holistic approach and emphasizes the human potential for growth and transformation.

Core Energetics recognize that humans are energetic beings born with this essential life force. It flows from the center of the body to the periphery and then out into the world, and it is the same life force that is in everything in the world. This energy, the essence of our being, operates on five levels that interact with each other as a whole functional unit. The five levels are: physical (the body), emotional (feelings), mental (intellectual), will (behavior), and spiritual. The spiritual relates to our worldview of why

and how we come into life in this world, and how we find meaning for ourselves in this world.

There are different types of functional unities in the world. As a person, being a functional unity means that when faced with a stimulus, we react on all five levels. When someone gives me a stern look, my reaction is that I will constrict in fear. Others might feel a contraction that mobilizes energy for a fight or flight response. The difference depends on how well we progressed through our childhood developmental stages. Using myself as an example, my body will constrict with fear (physical level). My thoughts race, wondering whether I have crossed that person in some way, “Have I said or done something wrong?” (mental level). I may feel rising fear and anger at their aggressive look, and also feel despair (emotional level). I reinforce an existing belief that “I am always doing something wrong. People just don’t like me” (spiritual level). And my behavior in reaction (will level) to this stimulus might be avoidance, confrontation, or placation.

The five levels make up a system; they constantly engage and interact with each other in order to maintain a status quo, to protect and to serve us by managing the flow of our life force energy. In the above example, my body constricted to shut off energy flow to prevent drawing unnecessary attention to myself in a moment of potential danger. Energy travels to my head and I go through many thoughts. Energy is mobilized to serve a purpose of protection or connection depending on whether I confront or seek understanding with that person. The action I take indicates also where my energy was able to go and was likely habituated in going.

What happens on the five levels are spontaneous, without conscious control. Since we were infants we have been reacting to stimulus, to adapt, protect ourselves, and find ways to meet our needs. We react to a stimulus by mobilizing or stopping energy and the way we do this is on the five levels. Recordings from the renowned “Still Face Experiment” in the 1970s by developmental psychologist Edward Tronick demonstrate an infant’s reaction and strategies. At the beginning of a session, mother and infant are interacting and enjoying each other’s company. As part of the experiment, the mother then abruptly stops reacting to her baby. She no longer smiles. She puts on an expression-less face, a “still face”. The baby immediately notices this unresponsiveness. She mobilizes energy and use many strategies to get her mother to respond. First she smiles, then she reaches her arms towards her mother. She points at something; usually when babies point, mother will look. But mother’s face remains still and flat. This clearly is extremely distressing to the baby as she begins to cry.

When the baby observes that the mother is not even responding to her crying, at one point she turns away and begins to give up connecting; energy is immobilized. Mobilization or immobilization of energy is enabled by means of the five levels. The body’s skeletal-musculature first attempts to contract and mobilize. When it seems to fail at resolving the distress, the system will try to hold in or split from that impulse, energy, or emotions (which are energy in motion) to become still. These energetic pathways get reinforced over time, becoming patterns.

As infants and children react and adapt to stimulus, be it from their caregivers and the world, they begin to form systems made up of images. The formation from stimulus into a belief system begins in infancy and childhood. It is mostly an unconscious process. It begins with a new experience which is the stimulus. Our reaction to the stimulus creates an energetic imprint that, once a child has developed verbal capacities to organize the experience into a memory, is called an image. As adults, when we have a flashback of a memory that seems to bring us back into the experience of that event or moment, along with the thoughts and feelings we experienced then, that memory flashback is the image. When an infant has not yet developed linguistic capabilities no image is formed, but the infant will nonetheless carry that energetic imprint on the five levels. As adults, this will show up as a feeling or “a sense” we carry that is charged with emotion but difficult to articulate, because it was formed and experienced during a time when we did not yet have language.

Here is an example of the development of a stimulus into an image, mass image, and a belief over time. When a baby perceives an external stimulus such as discomfort in their soiled diaper, they cry. Father comes to the rescue and smiles and coos at the baby to soothe her. The baby relaxes and enjoys the connection. To the baby, Father becomes associated with comfort and joy. The image is that “This man brings comfort and joy.” As this experience repeats over time, the mass image forms that “Men bring comfort and joy”, and henceforth a belief is formed that “Men are good, helpful, and enjoyable to have around.” Imagine in a different household where the father is overwhelmed and

irritated, and he is finally eating lunch when he hears the baby crying for the fifteenth time today. He stomps over to the baby, changes her diaper roughly while looking angry and hateful, and grunting at her. At the father's frightening response to her, the baby may cry even more, then give up and withdraw herself. The image becomes that "This man is frightening". The repetition of this experience develops into the mass image that "When I cry people become frightening". Unaware of how she came to see the world this way, she may grow into someone who believes that "Having needs and asking for help is despicable and makes you unwanted", or "Asking for help is futile and dangerous."

These are examples that illustrate the formation of images and beliefs, and people will each form their own images and beliefs in various circumstances. But the formative years lay the ground for a lot of the patterns, images, and beliefs that a person will form. Because of the absence of mature language and cognitive functioning in children, and because these were their strategies that were initially effective, they carry these into adulthood often without conscious awareness of these strategies, images, and beliefs until they experience difficulties in life, seek therapy, and begin to uncover them.

Mask formation

A person's strategy for regulating their own energy and impulses, and negotiating their needs, as they interact with their caregivers, the world, and their belief system is called a mask. We begin to do this as early

as when we were an infant in utero, with whatever capacity we have at our disposal.

As an infant grows she begins to learn when her energy is met and accepted and when it is not. When our expression is rejected or denied, eventually we develop a Mask to hide and trap our energy. In the example above, it is hard to imagine a baby making a decision to give up and withdraw from a harsh and frightening father. Indeed, babies do not make that decision on a mental or cognitive level. In Core Energetics, the CORE is illustrated as a ball of energy called the “higher self” with a surrounding layer known as the killer instinct. Together, the CORE is ultimately self-serving, self-protective, and self-preserving. In response to her internal stimulus of hunger, a baby’s higher self acts on behalf of her survival, directing energy through her body, engaging the muscles and systems to cry out. If a parent comes to feed her, the energy has done its work and achieved its goal. The baby can stop crying. When a baby cries and no one comes to her, however, she will also eventually stop crying. Because nourishment is not coming to her, her system learns that there is a scarcity of resources. Instead of mobilizing energy, her system begins to conserve energy. To achieve this, all bodily functions including breath and respiration become shallow and limited. The internal stimulus of need becomes a cue for shutting off energy rather than a motivation to reach out to get what it needs. She learns to give up and despair because her needs were not being met.

Here’s an example of the development and use of Mask in an older child: When I was a kindergartener I had a cough and a cold and my

mother took me to the doctor. We brought back cough syrup and little antibiotic pills. I disliked the syrup but the pill was the problem. It refused to go down even after I took a big gulp of water. It stuck to my tongue and began to release a bitter taste. It causes me to have a gag reflex. A gag reflex is literally a contraction in the body, and it is also my “higher self” protecting myself from the threat of a disgusting foreign object. My mother scolded at me for being a bad child and wasting the pill. Most of the time my mother was relaxed and affectionate so it startled me to see her angry. Simultaneously I hated her for not seeing that it was an accident and how difficult it was for me too. But I was afraid of her anger, I didn’t want to be a bad child and lose her affection. Despite my fear of the pill being stuck again, I was more afraid of losing my mother’s affection, so I made a second attempt. Imagine forcing yourself to do something you don’t like, perhaps trying an exotic food that you do not find appetizing. It takes a certain level of resolve which we sometimes call “steeling yourself”. As we steel ourselves to the task, notice that the diaphragm tenses and our abdomen pulls in. The muscles around the heart and chest area feel as though they turned into protective armor. We mobilize our will to move our arm to pick up the unwanted food and move it to your mouth. And your jaw and throat will instinctively pull back to the back of your head, shrinking back from the food, because the body doesn’t lie. Your jaw tenses up, and you continue to exercise your willpower to open your mouth and put that item in there.

As a child, it was a terrifying surprise that my normally warm and affectionate mother was becoming cold, stern, angry, and forcing me to do

something I didn't want to. To the child, it seemed like there was no choice but to comply. The physical and will levels were engaged to make the movements to take the pill and to suppress the emotions and spontaneous impulses such as to cry, push or pull away, yell at my mother, and so forth. The child forms, on the mental and spiritual level, the thought and beliefs that mother only loves her when she's "being good". Words of praise such as "There's a good girl" became signs that I was doing the right behaviors to keep mother's love. This "good" behavior I put over any "unacceptable" reaction and feeling is the Mask.

The Mask is formed to serve three survival purposes: to placate the parents, allow us to hide from others and to forget our negative feelings, and to affirm our self-worth. The mask hides the negative, unacceptable feelings and experiences, including that momentary hatred and anger I felt towards my mother. These so-called negative and unacceptable feelings are often intense and difficult that we, adults, especially understand why we are compelled to hide them. We had all started picking up cues since we were infants as to what feelings and expressions are accepted, and which are not. The paradox is that because those are very strong and uncomfortable feelings, children need loving supportive adults to help them, rather than to punish them. The vaso-motoric cycle which is discussed in Chapter 2 will offer a deeper look at how to support children and parents during emotionally charged moments.

The child's anger, hatred, fear and frustration that are unexpressed becomes trapped energy in the child's system. Unexpressed and trapped higher self energy is called the "lower self". It is not bad in

nature but its expression becomes distorted, meaning that its expression is incongruent with his original impulses and desires. Imagine a parent who is overwhelmed and burned out. Their mask, formed over their lifetime of adapting to certain caregiving and experiences that perhaps punished them for needing and wanting, hides their need and desire to be nurtured and taken care of. This need and desire are trapped as lower self energy which then escapes as resentment towards their partner and children for constantly placing demands on them.

As the mask stops the flow of the lower self energy, more lower self energy gets trapped, forming a vicious cycle. Eventually, what was initially an external stimulus (e.g., the father's angry look) becomes an internal stimulus as an infant learns and anticipates this response. As we continuously react to what we anticipate based on the past, a rigid pattern of perception and reaction develops that becomes our personality. When we are reacting to the past rather than what is happening in the present, our pattern and strategies tend to become maladaptive over time and trap us in recurring, problematic, dissatisfying experiences.

The mask is the name of this survival mechanism, and it is operated through the five levels. In the example of myself taking medicine at a young age, I had to engage certain muscles to “steel myself” to the task, and to hide and suppress my displeasure. Even though I did not act out, when my mother's hand approached my mouth with a second pill, my chin would have been pulled in because I was reluctant. My jaw would be tight, unwilling to open. To hide my feelings from my mother, I would avert my eyes and stare instead at something else rather than her. Breaking eye

contact and looking deliberately away is one way to disconnect from a person or a moment. My movements to take water and swallow would be stiff, slow, reluctant, not just for fear that the pill would stick to my tongue again but also my arm and hands would be forced, by my own will, to act in conflict with what I would have rather done. We don't all have memories of making decisions and using our body in those ways as a young child, but we can imagine being back in those moments and gain a sense of what we would do and what happened on our five levels. Emotionally I might have felt unloved and betrayed by my mother for forcing me to do something I didn't want to. I might be having thoughts such as "Taking the pill is for my own good and I am bad for making this hard for my mother" that tells me I am a better child for complying and not acting out. I am putting on the best behavior I could muster in that moment, and beliefs around compliance, medication, self, and my mother may be forming around this experience as well.

The angry things I didn't say, the frustration I didn't fully feel due to the stress of the moment, the frustration I didn't express, the impulses that were suppressed, the reactions or acting-out that did not happen – all these that are trapped under the mask is the lower self energy. As with higher self energy, the trapped lower self energy wants to get out. A child may naturally find ways to discharge the unexpressed emotions. She might be more aggressive in her play. She might act out at something seemingly minor that she usually has little trouble with. It is a primal and innate ability of the human organism to self-regulate and heal. In children it is easily mistaken as immature volatility. Yet, the seeking out expression is perhaps

not so different in adults with their strong masks, except that most of us have found acceptable disguises and rationalized our expression, such as in road rage, exercise, competition, complaining, and criticizing or blaming others. But as long as our Mask is in place, there is always lower self energy being trapped. Those ways of discharge only provide temporary relief.

An essential part of Core Energetics is to bring into expression the lower self energy that is trapped within the original image or memory. The expression of lower self energy goes beyond venting, ranting, complaining, or yelling. The goal is to move those emotions and move the body. Often the movement evokes an earlier memory because movements have shifted the blocks that protected us from feeling the pain in that memory. As if we have gone back to that moment in time, we may find ourselves re-living the memory of the five levels, experiencing again the emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations. In effect, the energetic charge of the image is now present for us to move, shift, discharge, and let pass.

By feeling and expressing the unwanted and “unacceptable” emotions and reactions, we allow ourselves to be seen, supported, and accepted in our vulnerable, “unlovable” states. We experience being accepted even as we are angry, hateful, afraid, vulnerable, or needy. The expression of lower self shifts the energy, and being witnessed in safety and support both in the present and in regards to the original memory, makes a crack in the Mask. There a narrow space is cleared that the higher self may shine through. The goal of Core Energetics is to move

energy on all five levels and integrate the higher self into all five levels of being.

What is the higher self? In Core Energetics, higher self refers to an individual's essence, the streaming of one's life force energy. An impulse to dance, sing, or create is a movement of life force energy. Tears that come as one feels heartbreak at a natural disaster or a shooting on the news may be the movement of life force energy, an expression of our higher self. (Because, Mask is how we stop ourselves from breaking into a dance, a song, or tears as we learned that such expressions are not acceptable in certain settings). Higher self is not an ideal. It is not just our pure joy and creativity; it is open to pain and adventure. A person whose life force energy flows unhindered through the cracks in the Mask, through the five levels and out into the world can feel love and connection for themselves and for others. They feel and live with passion, often making positive impact on people and the world. They live in truth and are congruent people whose yes means yes, and no means no.

As human beings our higher self is perhaps most evident and radiant when we were little. Then we learned not to dance or sing but sit still, not to cry and scream but to “be good”, “be brave”, or “be strong” by suppressing our emotions, impulses, and energy.

Life is a moment-to-moment experience of energy being channeled through the five levels. The more streaming of energy is nurtured, supported, and restored, the more a person may live life's ultimate purpose, which is to become oneself.

Therefore, it is so important to allow children their expression and support it. Parents can do this by providing safety that includes empathy, validation, and limits. Parents must hold space and make sure the children's expression is not causing physical or emotional danger to themselves or others, including the parents.

How wonderful it would be that with a Core Energetics parenting approach, we nurture and support the children's natural tendency of being and becoming more and more of themselves.

That said, there is no perfect parenting and children will face challenges, rejections, distress, and pain in their lives. It is inevitable that children will be emotionally wounded, at whatever extent, even by the most loving and nurturing parents. Because parents are humans who have wounds and traumas too. If I have felt hurt and dismissed by my mother, I have also turned to my daughter with a sigh and a frown, and an annoyed "What now?" more times than I'd like. Fortunately parents can make repairs and change their ways that lead to greater trust and connection in the relationship.

Each child is unique and may have a different energetic strategy even if under similar circumstances. The following section pinpoints major strategies that develop during childhood. But there is no need to worry that if you think your child's development has been interrupted in one way that they will for sure become a certain kind of person. Life, children, and parents are all evolving landscapes interlaced with each other.

Every developmental stage poses certain new challenges to a child. As a child develops greater capabilities there will be different

strategies that engage different muscle groups and affect the other levels differently. Through repeated use of a strategy, certain muscle groups strengthen and become what is called muscle armoring that blocks life force energy from moving out into the world. Patterns in feeling, thinking, and behaviors are part of the strategies that can eventually become blocks that inhibit and stop the free flow of life force energy. These blocks and patterns are known as character structures.

Chapter 3 looks at the five psychosexual developmental stages of a child from ages 0 to 6, what are a child's typical needs and challenges, and how they lay the foundation for character structures in the future. There is no perfect parenting. The hope of this paper is to spread some knowledge that helps parents see a child's reactions and behaviors from an energetic perspective, and promote interactions that allow and support energetic flow rather than blocks, and to meet the children's developmental needs.

How do we do that? - Between authoritarian and permissive parenting

As we grow up we develop strategies that manage our energy and expression by blocking the flow. We physically hold back tears by straining the muscles of our eyelids and the ocular areas. When we cry or break into a sob, our diaphragm contracts to quicken the breath. And we stop that by tightening our throat, involving the neck and jaws too as we do so. Without knowing, we pull in our stomach as we get nervous, afraid, want to disconnect, or suppress any strong feelings and emotions that our

system learned as unacceptable or threatening to our survival. With fear and terror, the body actually starts constricting from as deep as the membranes around the spine, the constriction pulling in even the outermost muscles and skin.

Before we developed these adaptations, when we were still babies and young children, energy and emotions flowed freely and naturally sought to be expressed, to be discharged. In my experience of my own family and friends' or relatives' families I have known, caregivers often forbid or discourage this in children. I am from Hong Kong and some of these examples are translations of the Cantonese way these comments and demands are made, which I've deliberately kept some of the original verbiage. A crying child is hushed and encouraged by "You're good, you're brave, good kids don't cry". When a child is frustrated and screams, the caregiver may immediately harden their voice and commands "You're not allowed to scream. You can't lose your temper like that. I'm not going to give it to you when you yell like this." The underlying message being: "You are unacceptable. I don't love you when you're like this." When I cried or yelled as a child, I only remember being told to stop or left alone. "Well you go cry yourself out," the caregiver said and literally walked away. It is not permission for the child to cry and express. Rather, it is a threat or at least a warning: I've had enough of you, I'm leaving unless you stop. The child senses this, which further deepens her initial distress. In either situation, the child is in a double bind where she must give up on having her feelings and expressing them if she were to keep her parent's love.

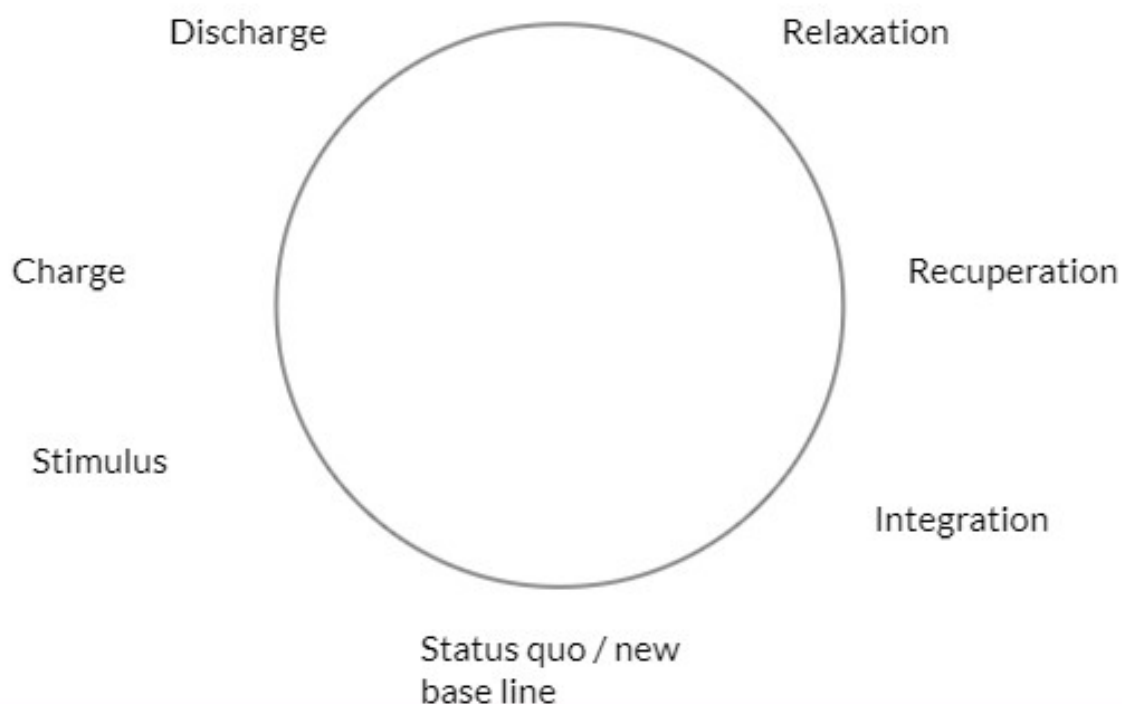
I can hear the echo and retort of these exasperated caregivers: “Yelling and losing temper is just not acceptable behavior. You can’t encourage it. They’ve got to learn.” I see many caregivers with deep love and the best intention for their children believe this. To not guide the children to control their temper and feelings would be too permissive and a sign of bad parenting. This outlook and belief are so deeply seated in the culture it can feel as though there is no other way. Yet, distressing and upsetting the children (or people of any age, really) and putting them in binds causes them to adapt, and it goes against their natural and healthy way of learning.

What is the natural and healthy way of learning?

The Vaso-Motoric Cycle

Gerda Boyesen, the Norwegian psychologist in the twentieth century who founded Biodynamic Psychology and Psychotherapy, found that the body has its own cycle of learning which she coined the vaso-motoric cycle. “Vaso” refers to involuntary, and “motoric” refers to “doing”. It is the system’s involuntary actions and processes which occur spontaneously and outside of our conscious control. We cannot make ourselves or others move through the cycle. Rather, in the body where energy flows freely, one stage occurs naturally after another. The stages around the circle start with the status quo. When there is a stimulus, there will be charge. Charge is mobilized energy that often comes from a contraction in the body. In the words of Aylee Welch, founder and director of Seattle School of Body Psychotherapy, “Energy is here to do work.” The

work or the purpose of the energy can take various forms: self-protection, creation of something, gather new information, or anything that we have a sudden urge, impulse, or inspiration to do. Once the energy is discharged and the work accomplished, the system can move into the next stage of relaxation. In deep relaxation comes moments of recuperation where insight and learning occur. Finally there is integration, where the individual makes a commitment to integrate the learning into their life, and the circle completes as they arrive at a new baseline.



Using my childhood memory of taking antibiotics as an example, the bitter pill sticking to my tongue is the stimulus. My feelings of distress and rising gag reflex is the charge, the energy mobilizing my system to get

rid of the unpleasant foreign object. When my mother stopped me spitting it out, or forbid me to get upset about the horrible experience, I did not get a discharge. Instead, my five levels were engaged to block the energy from being discharge. Successful discharge and relaxation would be if I was allowed to be angry at my mother and at the situation, empathized with, and supported until eventually I calm down. Once energy has been discharged, relaxation will follow. It is the involuntary outcome of the body's learning process. When the caregiver supports me in realizing that I have not been harmed by the medication or the experience, and I have her help and her knowledge that most people take medication effortlessly, that is the moment of recuperation. Integration would be to apply it to life, which is that I can safely try taking it again. In the scenario where I was not given the chance or support to discharge, what develops over time might be beliefs that "Medication is bad" and "Feeling and expressing distress to people equals unacceptable behavior". Because children always take things personally, it turns into "I am bad for having that urge". What we learn from the incident is wildly different.

The stimulus and charge can be positive experiences. For instance, a child sees his father coming home early is the stimulus that makes him feel excited. The excitement is the charge that wants to make action. Naturally he runs towards his father to hug him (discharge). Father also greets him with a big smile and picks him up, and they both laugh (still in discharge) and have a moment of connection. Then the son relaxes (relaxation), feels his love for his father and his father's love for him (recuperation: learning that they love each other), which is carried into the

rest of the evening and the son's feeling of love with his father is more reinforced (integration and a new status quo). If the father were to dismiss or ignore the son, the son cannot finish what he had wanted to do and unable to discharge, the cycle is interrupted. However, the beauty is that every moment may bring a new stimulus and a new chance at moving through the cycle. The father recovers from work stress and realizes how he missed his son big welcome, so he goes to him and invites him to play. It may or may not take a few more moments for the son to realize it is now safe to express his love for his father, that father won't ignore him again. Ultimately they could both return to connection and enjoyment of each other. There is precious learning in reparations like this. When the son reaches recuperation stage he learns that even when father was not nice for a moment, father comes back and loves him just as much. In the final stage of the cycle, integration, the son may decide that next time when father comes home early he will not run up to him right away, or the next time father seems unwelcoming, the son will not take it as personally.

This father and son interaction is an illustration of what the stages of the body's cycle of learning might look like in action. Every child may feel a different kind of charge, have a different impulse that translates to a different action, and extracts different learning and meaning from the interaction. Many internal and external factors shape the event and the participants' experience. If father was coming home early to a baby rather than a toddler and did not greet the baby, the baby may not have the same experience of disappointment or rejection. In each developmental stage a child has different tasks to achieve and needs to be met.

This following section describes the four developmental stages from age 0 to 6 in terms of the child's tasks, needs, challenges, and the signs of early Mask, or defensive strategy, development from a Core Energetics perspective. Understanding of the developmental stages will hopefully destigmatize crying and other loud or intense forms of emotional expression in children, and question whether the quieter reactions, or the absence of reactions, may in fact be the child's compensation or defense. What does the child need, why is the child doing this or that, and how do we nurture and support their energy and facilitate them around the vaso-motoric cycle?

Developmental stages

Each human's life experience begins in the mother's womb. Life began before we took our first breath. Even though being born is seen as the beginning, babyhood is a continuation, not the start, of development. Being born is the culmination of having grown as much as they could inside the womb required for survival. Helpless, brand new and sometimes nonsensical as they seem, they come as intelligent beings just as we adults are. As adults we have layers of defenses and adaptations developed and reinforced over decades. With children, the younger the child, the more direct their expression and strategy tend to be both because of the limited capacities available to them at first, and the absence of old defenses.

In Core Energetics there are five common character structures in people that are set up during early developmental stages. A child faces a developmental task in each stage. When it is interrupted or unsuccessful,

the child's system develops strategies on the five levels. Over time, this becomes their character structure. Each structure is characterized by certain physical features on the body, and patterns in behavior, thoughts, and feelings. The rigidity of these patterns often leads to life and relationships dissatisfaction, and physical and mental health issues. The structure is like their personality, but it is rather a distorted or compromised version of their true nature.

The names of the character structures and the developmental stages during which they develop are, in chronological order: Splitting, Reaching, Upholding, Inholding, and Rigid. These names describe what the child's system do with the energy. Each is examined in the following section to shed light on how parents and caregivers can meet their children's needs at each stage and support their development task.

A note on culture

Values, traditions, beliefs, and various aspects of culture influence parenting attitudes, practices and norms. Some of the suggestions offered in the following sections may differ from the existing or popular parenting advice that you have learned in your culture. My intention is not to critique, but to focus on preserving and enabling healthy energy flow in children. For example, from what I experience in my Hongkonger family, giving food is an expression of deep care and love. As gratitude and respect for having food to put on the table, we always try to eat all the food regardless of how they taste or how full we already are. It is part of the culture and trained in children from a young age as parents and grandparents ask, coax,

demand, or incentivize children to finish the food, take “one more bite” after another. The intention of the caregivers never ceases to be loving and as children grow into adults, many can experience and appreciate this as a love language. Yet, when this occurs during an age when the child’s developmental task is to notice their own hunger and fullness cues, and be able to experience autonomy in their bodily functions, this loving practice inadvertently distresses the child. It causes the child to compensate and adapt, to the extent that they may live and build their lives around the belief that their own physical cues are unacceptable, and their autonomy and joy becomes tainted with guilt, and pain confused with joy.

Another example of how a seemingly common and well-intentioned parenting technique impacting a child’s energy patterns might look like this: A child falls, scrapes her knee, and breaks into tears. Parent runs over and says variations of “It’s OK, you’re OK!”. Indeed, it is a small scrape that the child will get over in a minute. But the feelings and tears are energy in motion, and the parent’s effort to soothe may signal the child to stop feeling and crying abruptly. Broadly speaking, what the child may learn over time is that even when she does not feel OK, she is supposed to be OK and there is no need or use to feeling sad or crying.

It is delicate and important work that parents do to preserve and foster children’s life force while setting limits and teaching them the ways of the world so that they can navigate and participate safely and enjoyably, and build satisfying interpersonal relationships. When possible, take a moment to reflect on your own experiences as a child, on the parenting

practices you have been exposed to, and give yourself the empathy, compassion, and love that you would give to your child.

Child developmental stages and tasks

Splitting – prenatal to 6 months

Developmental task: To feel welcomed.

The fundamental need of a newborn is to feel welcomed and safely connected with the caregiver. From the tight, dark quarters with muffled sounds that was the womb, being born is to be thrust into an extremely vast and stimulating environment of light and sound, let alone the change of texture of the surrounding from liquid to air. The infant used to be part of the mother and now she is literally cut off from her life support and begins to exist on her own, in the physical limits of her body.

The developmental task is to arrive into the world and experience symbiosis with the mother (or primary caregiver). When the baby receives a frightened or frightening reaction from the caregiver, the baby's system senses threat and terror. This can occur in environments where the parent is abusive, emotionally unavailable, or stressed out, anxious, or overwhelmed. When the parent has a look of hatred towards the baby, an expression of annoyance or frustration, or is unable to connect with the baby due to stress or distraction the baby does not feel welcomed. Rather, it causes in them a deep terror of their own existence and of being annihilated. Because the infant has no life or existence separate from the mother, the infant feels trapped in a void with no right to exist. They sense

that their own life force and their mere existence is a source of threat that brings upon annihilation.

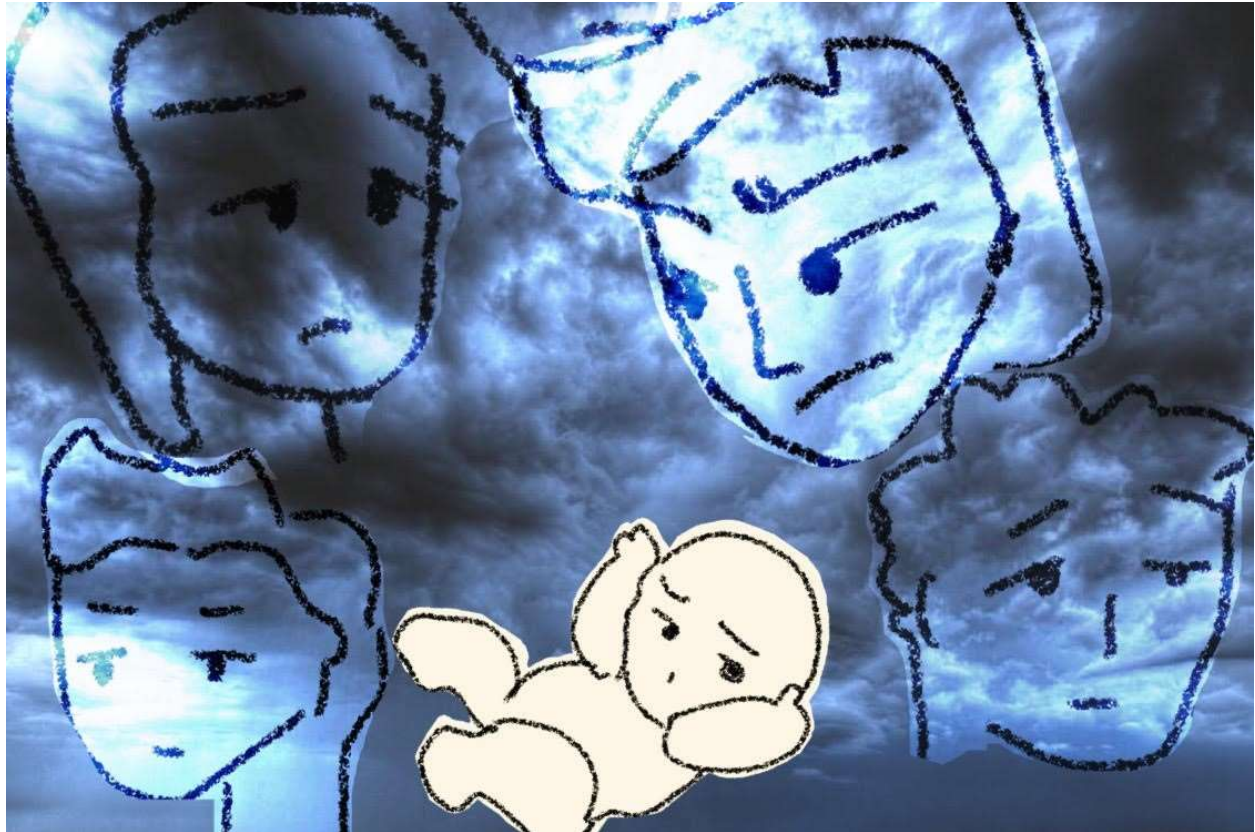


Figure 1. artwork by Rebecca Liu 2021

The defense that the baby adopts at this stage forms within the deepest layers of their being. Unlike young children who have better control of their muscles for physical movement, an infant can only pull into the endoderm, the skin and connective tissue of their bones, and in their nervous system. When they sense unwelcome, fear, anxiety, or hatred from the caregiver, they are unable to leave the terrifying and painful situation. So in their system they split and fragment themselves. Their system pulls in and constricts their breath. Infants actually need a lot of breathing for their system to function and grow, so this directly causes less

nutrients and nurturing in their bodies. They will also withdraw attention from the caregiver and the world to avoid those unbearable feelings. Infants also need touch in order to establish a sense of having a body, of where it starts and where it ends. In an environment where the infant is not held or is not given emotional connection not only feels terror, they will begin to have lack connection to their body as well.

Babies who learn to split cannot be soothed or may appear unresponsive. It can be easy to misinterpret these cues. Unresponsiveness can be mistaken as a “well-behaved, good baby”, whereas the dysregulated baby could be misunderstood as “bad” or “something wrong” with the baby. Due to the caregiver’s ambivalence or hatred described above, or a chronic lack of warmth and touch due to any reason, the infant becomes afraid of their own life force, and associates their own life as a threat or something bad. By constricting and splitting breath, they cannot enjoy life as they are focused on surviving. The painful bind they face is that: they must limit their liveliness in order to preserve their life.

When splitting becomes the primary strategy in life, the mask they develop is dissociation, whether it is by withdrawing from external reality, or by disconnecting from their internal experience and from themselves. Their energy holding pattern is to hold together to prevent fragmentation and, in response to fear, prevent annihilation. They often become very intellectual, favoring thinking over feeling. Or they have a strong affinity with spiritual forces or have creative imagination for other worlds and realities, because they did not have the experience of fully landing and being welcomed into this world. The mask and the holding pattern are very insidious because it developed so early in life before they

had language. The terror and pain of the early hatred and unwelcoming they experienced cannot be explained or articulated verbally, but it is a feeling they carry.

During the first several months of life, what the baby needs the most is for parents to be responsive, warm, welcoming, and give them affectionate touch. In other words, while providing adequate care, parents may focus on enjoying and marveling at the baby, and holding him as much as possible because it is exactly what he needs.

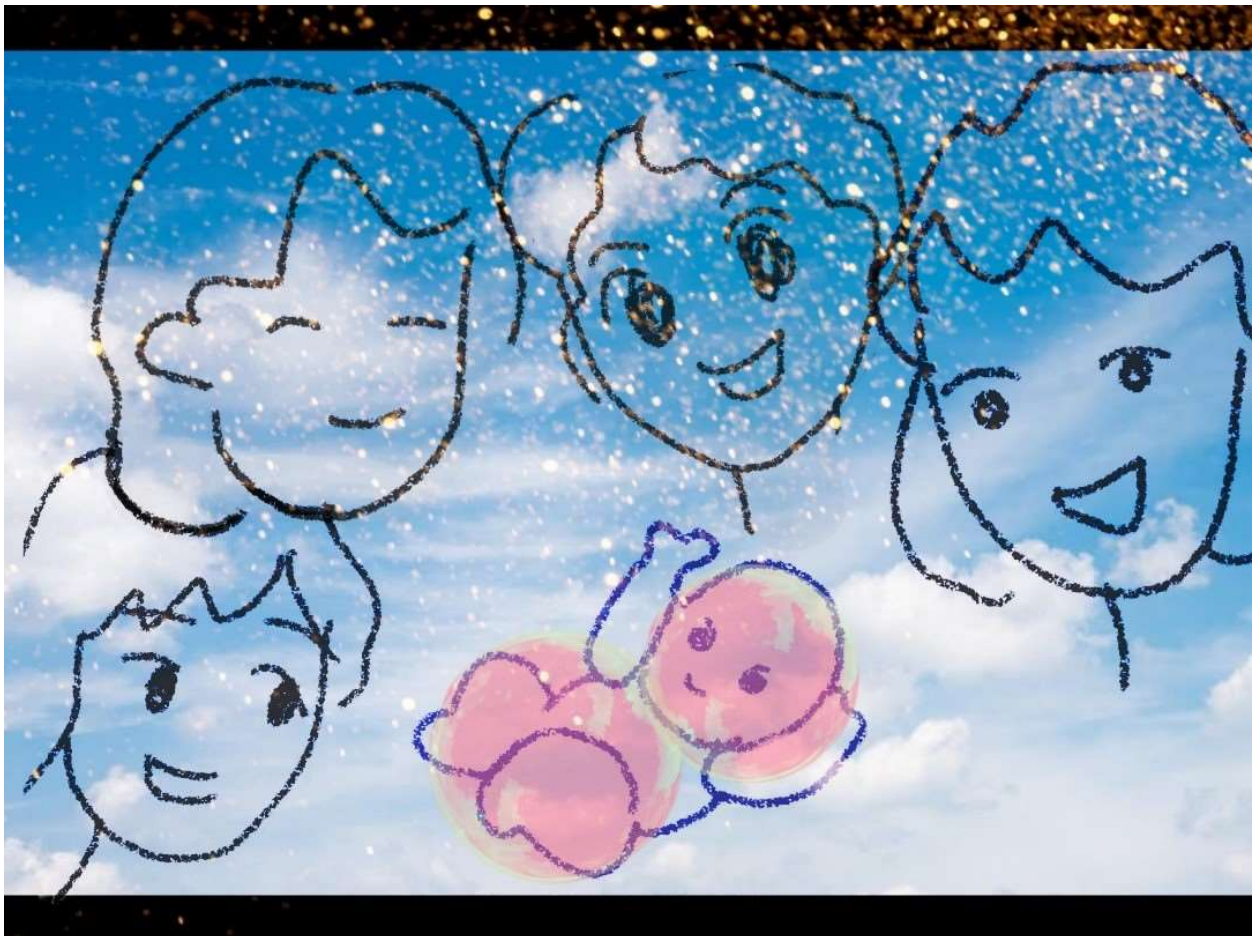


Figure 2. artwork by Rebecca Liu 2021

Reaching – 5 to 18 months

Developmental task: To have a need and trust they will be able to get their need met.

As the baby grows, their demands on parents continue. When I had a newborn, my parents and in-laws helped, and we often questioned if we were spoiling my baby and setting ourselves up for trouble by holding her too much, picking her up right away, and not laying her down. A friend of mine shared her sleep training success. Over a number of days, she let the baby cry himself out in increasing intervals before she went to him, until one day he just cried himself to sleep. From then on, all she needed was to lay him down for bed and she would be done for the evening.

I remember the exhaustion and trying to train my baby too, though I steel myself to let her cry alone. I remember hearing my elders tell me that the baby is just crying for attention, as if she were trying to trick us adults into answering her demands. Yet, this is exactly the baby's task and need at this stage.

Apart from hunger or diaper-changing, a baby needs connection and entertainment too. Whatever their need is in a moment, they reach for their parent. In hunger, their mouth reaches for the nipple. In curiosity, they also use their mouth to explore. As they get older, they reach with their arms too. When the parent is out of reach or out of sight, they make noise and cry for the parent. This is developmentally appropriate and it is their only way to get their needs met.

When unresponded to, their system shuts off the crying to conserve energy because there appears to be a lack of help, a lack of resources, to meet their needs. When this experience repeats over time the child no longer protests and they go straight into despair and gives up. In order to need less, because their reaching for needs is not met, their system constricts the output of energy such as in stopping the crying, limiting their breath and activities. A baby does stop crying when we leave them to cry it out. It is easy to mistake this as training the baby to self-regulate in a mature way. The baby's system is managing itself but it is out of despair at the lack of resources and care, and it is for survival.

Initially the higher self reaches out to get her needs met when there is an internal stimulus of need. Imagine the parent comes but appears stressed and annoyed, which elicit feelings of fear threat in the child. The child will associate the experience of need with the experience of fear, or with the parent's anger, which is threatening.

Whether it is the first scenario where the parent does not respond to the baby's needs, or in the second scenario where the parent reacts unapprovingly, the child's fear of showing their need, hiding and denying their need becomes a survival mechanism. This is the mask that covers up the higher self's longing and reaching.

Due to the scarcity of care, they also learn to hold on when care is given. When this occurs in this stage before the baby is mobile, the baby may appear to be clingy. If the child is mobile, they may try to meet their own needs and develop a pseudo-independence. Both these traits continue on into adulthood if Reaching becomes their primary structure. In adults

they try to become indispensable to other people as a way to satisfy their own unmet needs. While they are very attentive, generous and nurturing caregivers, they will seem needy and always needing more. They may criticize people a lot and be very demanding. The underlying motivation unconscious to them is that they want people to do things for them, because of that lack of responsiveness from their parents during this reaching developmental stage.

If the interruption to the developmental task occurs after the baby is mobile, it may become a grandiosity of “I’ll do it myself. I’ll give it to myself.” It looks like individuation but it is premature individuation, a false independence. The person will be rigid and stubborn in how they do things and unable to flexible or adaptive.

Babies in this age range need to be responded to quickly and consistently in order to internalize a sense of safety, connection, and trust that when they reach or ask for help, they get it.

I remember the sleepless months of caring for my baby and my own moments of despair when I heard her cry out *yet again* just as I thought I could get a break. It can seem like there is no end to the demands and exhaustion. It is tempting to blame ourselves or place the blame on the baby as though she should be able to control her impulses and tolerate discomfort better and for longer periods. But what we need to do is not to control her, or prevent or predict her needs, but only to support her through the vaso-motoric cycle as often as we can. Then, perhaps we can support ourselves through our own cycle too.

To apply the vaso-motoric cycle: Baby detects a stimulus, such as a wet diaper. His system acts on behalf on his wellbeing by contracting to create a charge (feeling discomfort and distress), which he discharges as his body is mobilized into crying out. Caregiver, who is not acting frightened of the baby or frightening to the baby, comes along to sooth him and change him as he continues crying, until the discharge is complete, he has a new diaper, and he moves into relaxation. Recuperation and integration for the baby might be internalizing the experience that “Mom will come help me when I cry” and “I can always cry to get help in the future”.

Upholding – ages 2 – 4 years

Developmental task: To follow their own impulse while remaining emotionally close and safe with parent.

As the child grows into the “Terrible Two” stage, they can walk now and want to go exploring away from the parent. But they will also look back to check that their parent is still around, to come back and share their discoveries, and to continue feeling closeness and connection. Meeting this task would be that they are supported in their curiosity and impulses to explore, and they are fully accepted and supported upon return.

They also begin to recognize and feel the sting of inconsistent caregiving, which is where the developmental crisis may occur that lead to a pattern of upholding energy. During this stage where the child has started to walk and talk, it is not uncommon that they experience being parentified or triangulated by their parents. This can occur, for instance, when one parent is harsh to the other. The latter parent goes to the child for

gratification and comfort. The child is triangulated emotionally to take care of this parent, and this causes a disturbed dynamic between both parents and child.

The crisis for the child who begins to develop the Upholding character structure at this stage is set into motion by inconsistent care. Compared with those who develop the Reaching structure, they have had better care. But the subsequent inconsistent care makes them feel betrayed. As they have had a degree of nurturing before, they have energy to pull up rather than collapse into despair. In the Upholding adult, they pull up their energy into their shoulders, arms, and head becomes their direct physical response to the threat of despair. Their system had learned to rise up above the vulnerability of painful betrayal. Instead of being the child who is dependent on parents and others, their strategy becomes to flip it and make others dependent on them.

This adaptation becomes more evident as they grow into adolescence and adulthood. The betrayal and boundary violation involved in the parent's triangulation leads to distrust in and control of people. They cut themselves off from the vulnerable feelings of being dependent, defeated, manipulated, rejected, humiliated and not in control. Therefore, they believe that they must always have control over others, whether by force such as in a bully, or by seductive or manipulative ways.

As the child enters the Terrible Two stage, parents can be reassured that it is normal for the child to want to go away and explore, and it is normal for them to want to come back. If the parent seems disappointed that the child wants to go off and play rather than stay close,

or finds it a nuisance because they are out in public and doesn't want to child to run away, the child will pick up the cues that their impulse to separate costs them emotional closeness. It is a bind where either they lose some closeness with their parent, or they give up on their own impulse. For the sake of keeping parental love, they may choose to stay. This also constitutes a feeling of betrayal where their parents made them choose.



Figure 3. artwork by Rebecca Liu 2021

Another common parenting challenge during these ages is the child's tantrums and big feelings. Children seem to have unreasonably

huge reactions to seemingly minor things – in the parents’ eyes. Honoring our children’s experience means accepting that those “minor” things are felt as significant in their day. Not getting the right cup for their juice might be as frustrating as an adult hitting unexpected bad traffic first thing in the morning. When I cleaned up my daughter’s toys when she wasn’t finished with them, it might be like someone shutting off my computer without letting me save my work. The only difference is that in my old age I have trained myself not to scream or burst into tears, while my child’s impulse and expression are still fully open rather than blocked.

Children’s tantrums and big feelings are difficult to handle when we believe the child should not be behaving that way and that our job is to stop it. Rather, we can recognize, accept, and acknowledge that their feelings and expression are normal and natural. Parents can support them in empathic understanding, help name their feelings and experience, and stay right next to them supportively, unflinchingly, and without judgment as they cry. It shows the child that we encourage and accept their feelings and expression. The rigorous breathing involved in crying and sobbing is the part of the discharge stage in the vaso-motoric cycle. As discharge nears completion, crying and breathing begins to slow, parents can soothe the child as the stage of relaxation begins. After the child is relaxed, parents can engage in talking and reasoning as part of the recuperation and integration stages.

When the child is older even by one or two years they may develop strategies that are listed in the later chapters, such as holding in or holding back their energy. The younger they are, the less they are able to shut off

their tantrum. When discharge is not allowed or incomplete, the unexpressed energy stays around seeking other ways to discharge. It might appear that the child becomes increasingly difficult and dysregulated as the day goes by, which is because there is unexpressed energy still in their system.



Figure 4. artwork by Rebecca Liu

Inholding – ages 3 to 5 years

Developmental task: Gaining independence while remaining emotionally close and connected with parents.

In my family, my previous generations especially show their love and care for children by making them eat. They prepare an amount of food based on what they think the child should eat, and they feed the unwilling child “One more bite” repeatedly until the food is gone. Parents coax and pressure by phrases such as “Be a good child”, “If you don’t finish, I won’t play with you”. They may flatter the child when the food is finally finished, or they incentivize by rewards, or pretend to have a competition with the child to see who can finish first if the child likes to win.

Sometimes the child had already left the table to play. The parents would call the child back, or follow the child with spoon and bowl in hand, waiting for every chance to feed the child another bite.

In my family, food is a love language. Parents just want to ensure the child is eating enough nutritious food. Despite the best intentions, smothering the child does not align with the child’s developmental task from ages 3 to 5. At this stage, the child begins learning to control their orifices such as in eating and defecating. However, diligent parents may believe in making effort to train their child to use the bathroom at a certain age, at a certain time. Or eat at a certain time and a certain amount. When the child protests, walks away, cannot use the potty on the parent’s demand, those may be cues that the child is not hungry or have eaten enough, or does not need the bathroom. The parent’s persistence conveys a disregard for the child’s own attunement to their bodily needs and impulses, which is the opposite to their developmental task. The child has no choice but to sit on the potty. Some children keep their food in their mouth for a long time before actually swallowing it. These are signs that the child is learning that

attempts at resistance are futile. At this stage, their system adapts by holding in their energy. Their abdominal, back, and shoulders are engaged to “hunker down”, in order to hold in and hide their impulse to resist. This also holds in their resentment towards the parent, in order to act in compliance and allows them to endure through the smothering experience. If enough experiences occur where one must resort to this strategy, it develops into the Inholding character structure.

Eating and defecating at will are normally pleasurable acts. But over time, the child may begin to associate them with pressure and rejection from the parents. As they develop great ability to endure, they continue to perfectly hold in and conceal their resentment. This secret resentment is how they can feel powerful because no one else knows or can get to it. This could lead to a pattern of confusing pain and pleasure, shutting off pleasure, negating their own impulses, associating pleasure with guilt, as the child grows into adulthood.

Hunkering down and enduring, and losing touch with their resentment and rage are features of the Inholder’s mask. Energy that is trapped by the mask is called lower self energy. For a person who adapted by in-holding, it often appears as though the person likes to complain without taking actions to change their situation (because the secret resentment is a kind of pleasure for them), and a heavy feeling of hopelessness.

To honor energy flow rather than induce inholding, instead of over-focusing on the child, caregivers may support the child by honoring her own attunement to her impulses. It does not require giving up on set

meal times or letting the child eat cookies for dinner. But also caregivers don't need to punish, shame, or withdraw love and connection when children tell you what they want or don't want, or when they decide to eat or use the bathroom outside of your intended time slots.

As preschoolers and kindergartners begin to have vocabulary and behaviors to channel their feelings and have tantrums, it's important not only to keep supporting the children through the body's cycle of learning but pay attention to the verbal messages by which we try to soothe them. A child falls and cries. Parent picks him up and say, in a sympathetic and affectionate voice, "Hush hush. You're OK. It's nothing. Don't cry." In Cantonese, we often say "Oh you're a good child, don't cry", "You're a big kid now, aren't you? Big kids are good and brave. Big kids don't cry." There is a false belief that the caregiver's job is to hush the child, to stop the crying as soon as possible. In the vaso-motoric cycle, that would be to interrupt the discharge. The child engages her abdomen, jaw, and throat to slow down and shut off the tears. When this repeats over time, that muscle group grows stronger by usage, and the child becomes better at holding back tears. The parents may believe that they have succeeded in fostering the child's strength and resilience. I would think most adults appreciate the important skill of holding back emotion and it is indeed a very helpful strategy in life. But perhaps we have been convinced, just as the child in the example may learn, that "Crying is bad and a sign of weakness". Rather than a natural healing impulse that they can flexibly engage and disengage, the holding in of tears and sadness through their muscles may become a

physical armoring. The individual starts to be unable to cry or access vulnerable feelings.

Only when children are allowed and supported in discharge (expression) will they reach the relaxation, recuperation, and integration stages. That is when they learn the various lessons from the experience, such as gain new insight about the cause of distress or practical information about the situation, learn how to work through an issue, how to deal with their feelings, and know that uncomfortable feelings will pass and that they are accepted, loved, and supported through the struggle.

During this inholding stage children need to be able to eat only until they are full, to turn away when they are done, and to ask for more when they want. They will develop better attunement to their bodies and internal cues, honor their desires and pleasures rather than sacrificing them for parental love, or associating pleasure with guilt and shame.

Rigid – ages 4 – 6 years

Developmental task: To explore and enjoy pleasure, and feel supported and loved in what they do.

A specific need and task for the developmental stage around 4 to 6 years is around gender and genital exploration, and feeling loved and supported as children begin to go out into the world and form new relationships, such as in going to school.

At this stage the child is naturally curious and explorative; their body is part of the world and everything else that they are interested in. The interest in the genitals will naturally pass; after all, there is so much more in

the world for them to explore. I remember asking my mother the big question of “Where do babies come from?” around age 5 or 6. She actually explained simply and matter-of-factly the mechanics of intercourse and fertilization. When I heard it, I thought it was gross and bizarre. Rather than become obsessed with it, which is perhaps what some parents fear if they allowed children to be interested in genitals, I moved on after I got an answer.

When caregivers are uncomfortable with seeing their child touch or talk about genitals, they may overtly or inadvertently condemn and punish the child for what is actually developmentally normal behavior. For instance, a four year old touches her vulva and squeals at the sensation. It evokes embarrassment and shame in the mother who is uncomfortable with sexuality and self-pleasuring. She sternly tells her daughter to stop. The child may ask “Why?”, as children do. And mother reveals disgust and plainly tells her to just stop it. In terms of the image, mass image, and belief system formation as discussed above, the daughter may form an image that “Mother gets mad and disgusted when I touch my vulva”. If repeated over time, the image becomes a mass image that “People get mad and shame you for touching/giving pleasure to your body”, which may turn into the belief that “Sexual pleasure and self-touching is shameful.” Children are not born with sex shame but they learn it from their caregivers first and foremost. Sex positivity, therefore, ideally begins with the caregivers.

The Oedipal Complex also is a feature of this developmental stage. The concept of the Oedipal Complex was first developed within the Freudian psychosexual developmental stages. The theory was developed

in a context of binary genders and heteronormativity that maybe it is not translatable to diverse genders, sexuality, and family structures. Originally it is about competing for affection of the opposite-sex parent. A major tenet of this theory is that the child learns of and takes pride in their gender identity by being recognized and appreciated by their opposite gender-parent in their gender identity. In other words, a daughter feels she is father's special girl. That she is a lovable female, like her father's wife. A son is proud of being his mother's second man. For gay or non-binary children there will usually be a parent they feel closer with and with whom this experience takes place. The child gets to enjoy their erotic feelings towards a parent and any jealous feelings for the connection between both parents. They need to learn that while there are boundaries, e.g., they cannot get married to their parent despite feeling like they want to, nor win one parent over the other in a competition for their love, they are still loved and supported. When the child is supported through these feelings, they can become healthily regulated, feel safe and confident to go out and negotiate the world and find their true peers.

If the child is embarrassed or shamed for their curiosity, feelings and initiative, or if their erotic energy is exploited, however, the task is unsuccessful. As they internalize the sense that they are shameful and unacceptable, their system's strategy is to hold back their energy and impulse. Painful feelings can simply be too painful to experience alone, so the system does what it can to avoid it. They re-direct their energy to please the parents and gain approval through being "good" and performing well.

In stifling expression of feelings and emotions and striving for “good” behavior and performance to maintain parental love, the patterns of armoring are laid that can develop into the Rigid character structure in adolescence and adulthood. The Rigid person has an attitude of “I can do it. I got this.” They are competent, competitive, and high-achieving. These traits are normally celebrated by society that the cost and pain motivating this strategy may go unnoticed or overlooked. The Rigid person can seem narcissistic in their indifference or obliviousness to people’s feelings which is because they cut themselves off from their own feelings. In this structure, one has difficulty receiving love or expressing love. They may confuse getting praise and approval as being loved, and one cannot feel intimacy and sexual arousal at the same time.

Children don’t want to lose their parents’ love and connection with them. Like the other strategies from previous stages, it is so effective that as parents we may believe we’re doing a great job socializing our children to behave well according to our expectations. We do not realize that our children, as young as they may be, are sacrificing their own vital life force and higher self impulses in order to feel loved by us.

Without knowledge of this, we as parents may simply approve of and reward the child, perpetuating their use of this strategy without accessing or meeting their true feelings and needs.

As I mentioned before, the body’s learning cycle may occur with positive stimulus and charge, such as excitement to see a puppy, an impulse to create something, etc. Supporting children through the body’s cycle of learning in these circumstances goes a long way to foster their

creativity, and access and trust their impulses. Imagine a child has an inspiration to play astronaut. She goes through the pile of cardboard boxes to look for a spaceship. She has followed the internal stimulus and is in a state of charge and discharge. Parent comes in, notices the mess, and startles her by saying “What are you doing?” in a condemning tone. Whether she becomes afraid of getting into trouble, or she explains, protests, and gets scolded for making a mess anyway, she falls off the learning cycle at discharge. Instead, she may form the belief that creative pursuits are messy, troublesome, reckless, and can get you into trouble, if her parents continuously stump her taking initiative at creative projects.

Conclusion

Seeing parenting practices through a Core Energetics lens reminds us that every human is born with essential life force energy that moves on the physical, emotional, mental, will, and spiritual levels as a functional unity. In this lens, life dissatisfaction and mental and physical health issues encountered in adulthood are related to one’s identification with Mask and lower self energy, with Mask being a continued managing and blocking of life force energy, and lower self being distorted life force energy. The overall presentation of set patterns is called a character structure.

There are five developmental stages roughly from prenatal to six years of age when the foundations for Mask and character structure is laid if the child’s developmental task is interrupted. Parents are encouraged to enable the child to meet the developmental task and, based on the body’s

cycle of learning known as the vaso-motoric cycle, and to navigate parenting in a way that allows, accepts, and nurtures energy flow and expression.

The purpose of the parenting examples is to illustrate a possibility, not a definitive outcome. There could be any number of turns of events in these examples that lead to a child learning different images and beliefs. As parents and caregivers we do the best we can in the best way we know how. Whether we are aware of it or not, we pass on our own tried-and-tested strategies we have learned from our own experiences, which may also carry our pain and fears. Children will develop their defenses because self-protection and preservation are part of human nature. Yet, I hope that parents can learn of children's developmental tasks and needs, how their system adapts to avoid painful experiences, and remember about the vaso-motoric cycle. This could reduce the binds and pain we may inadvertently place on our children. We can better support our children through their pain and challenges, so that they have more opportunities to live in a state of flow of their essential life force, to become more and more of themselves, rather than learn to suppress or cut off from it.

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