

Training: Neuro Affective Touch Foundation training, London July '24 and Oct '24

Trainer: Dr Aline LaPierre

Objectives:

- Work somatically with early development, bringing healing to the deepest core of the self.
- Touch and support the emotional body, releasing the impact of relational shocks and shifting the body-mind toward states of emotional regulation.
- Use integrated psychological principles to foster post-trauma growth, resilience, and joy as you guide your clients to deepen their relationship with their body's intelligence and wisdom.

I am grateful for the grant provided by the FPSA, which enabled me to undertake the NeuroAffective Touch foundation training. This experience has deepened my understanding of how touch, presence, and attunement can support children and adolescents in healing from trauma and neglect. The training provided valuable insights and skills that are directly applicable to my work. The fundamental principle that the body's wisdom and intelligence are equal to the minds, and experiencing how this approach fosters their collaborative partnership, has been a powerful aspect of my learning throughout the training. This understanding deepened through personal sessions, where I experienced a shift in states while processing implicit information. I was struck by how quickly this occurred once safety and containment were established through the creation of a *nurture surround space*.

Additionally, the contemplative exercises and creative strategies such as drawing and journalling, have also given me new ways to engage young clients in self-exploration and healing.

The emphasis on working with the whole family resonated strongly with me. In my work with the Adoption Support Fund, I frequently advocate for addressing parental trauma and attachment wounds alongside child-focused interventions. The training reinforced the importance of this approach, particularly in understanding how a parent's unresolved history can be reactivated when their child reaches a similar developmental stage. One example from my practice involved a mother whose anxiety became enmeshed with her daughter's eating difficulties, reflecting unresolved issues from her own adolescence. This experience underscored the need for thorough history-taking, leading me to refine my assessment process to include more targeted questions about parental experiences.

The training also provided a profound perspective on neglect. The concept of the "void"—the absence of care, presence, and attunement—was particularly striking. I recognised this dynamic in many of my clients who exhibit self-sufficiency and withdrawal as coping mechanisms. One client, who had a significant history of neglect, struggled with connection in therapy, experiencing a push-pull dynamic over several years. Through incremental steps, including the use of a physical object to bridge connection, she was eventually able to request direct comfort. This highlighted the role of shame in neglected individuals, who often internalise a belief that they are inherently flawed rather than recognising the failures of their environment.

Observing the live demonstrations reinforced the importance of meeting clients where they are and honouring their protective mechanisms. The careful exploration of protection versus vulnerability, using body movements and gestures, demonstrated how therapists can help clients shift from fearful protection to nurturing protection. The recognition that neglected individuals often experience repeated "heart shocks" helped me better understand how these experiences contribute to despair and depression in adolescents. Additionally, the insight that gaze avoidance may stem from a fear of witnessing the absence in another has deepened my awareness of subtle cues in my sessions.

This training has enriched my practice by providing new ways to support children and adolescents in developing a sense of safety, connection, and self-awareness. I am eager to integrate these approaches further, particularly in using body-mind dialogues, incorporating metaphor and imagery, and refining my ability to recognise the subtle manifestations of neglect. I am deeply appreciative of the Foundation's support in making this invaluable learning opportunity possible.