Rupture and Repair
(How We Disconnect and Reconnect)

Parents will inevitably experience misunderstandings, arguments, and other breakdowns in communication with their children. Such a breakdown is called a rupture.

*Restoring a collaborative, nurturing connection with the child is essential. This reconnecting can be called repair.*

Ruptures without repair lead to a deepening sense of disconnection between parent and child, and prolonged disconnection can create shame and humiliation that is toxic for the child’s growing sense of self.

Parents must take responsibility to make a timely repair with their children after a rupture.

*The result of the repair is a new level of alignment where both child and parent feel understood and connected. And, the child learns the hopeful fact that reconnection after rupture is possible.*

**Types of Disconnection and Ruptures**
- Oscillating disconnection (both parent and children have oscillating needs for connection and solitude)
- Benign rupture (misunderstandings in which a parent doesn’t “get” the messages being sent by the child)
- Limit-setting rupture (resulting from limits which parents have set to teach appropriate behaviors)
- Toxic Rupture (parent loses control of his/her emotions and parent’s behavior is frightening to a child)

**Things That Get in the Way of a Parent Trying To Reconnect**
- Parent’s guilt at own anger
- Parent’s unresolved issues from childhood
- Parent’s shame (resulting in excessive concern about the opinion of others)
- Parent’s desire to “move on” as if the rupture had never occurred
How To Repair the Rupture

• Center yourself in order to become calm and move from the “low road” to the “high road”. Here are some techniques to try: Breathe. Do something physical. Go outside or to a different room. Get a glass of water or a cup of tea.

• Reflect upon the situation. Being able to focus on your own experience and that of your child is the central feature of effective repair. Think about how to reconnect with your child. See the interaction from your child’s point of view. Think about your own leftover issues and why they got activated.

• Go to your child, and state your intentions to make a reconnection. Acknowledge the difficulties that you have been having with each other. Address the experience of the rupture in a neutral way, keeping both points of view in mind: “This has been so difficult for both of us to be fighting like this. I really want us to feel good about each other again. Let’s talk about it.”

• Listen to your child’s thoughts and feelings.

• Reflect back to your child how you hear his/her experience of the events.

• Discuss the toxic aspect of the rupture. Tell your child that sometimes people, even parents, have meltdowns in which they do not act rationally.

Helpful Things To Remember

• Younger children may need more help in incorporating toxic ruptures into a coherent story through role playing, puppets, storytelling, and drawing.

• Young children may want you to be physically close, older children may prefer that you keep your distance.

• Learn and respect your child’s style for processing a rupture and making a reconnection. Timing is important. If you feel rebuffed after your first attempt, don’t give up.