

Understanding Attachment Trauma within Music Education

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Choose a student who demonstrates any of the following....

- Behavioral Issues in the classroom
- Emotional shutdowns
- Anxiety / Depression / Panic Attacks
- Avoidance / Seclusion
- Consistently seeks affirmation
- Over-achiever or Leader
- Struggles academically
- Grief or loss
- Substance use or abuse



Attachment Trauma & Substance Abuse

The correlation between attachment trauma and music education begin from the early stages of an individual's life. Students need a nurturing, secure, and safe environment to shape and formulate their early brain development and cognitive development. These interactions between child/caregiver/teacher/student are vital to the formulation of a **secure attachment**.

When an insecure attachment develops, this is due to attachment disruptions in an individuals life.

Students becomes at risk in later years for developing the need to self-medicate their yearning for inner safety, security, and love from substances. These substances travel through the MDS and NAC systems of the brain, releasing DA and endorphins to the reward system. This inadvertently, becomes the individuals form of secure attachment which can lead to emotional, physical, and psychological problems, even addiction or a SUD.

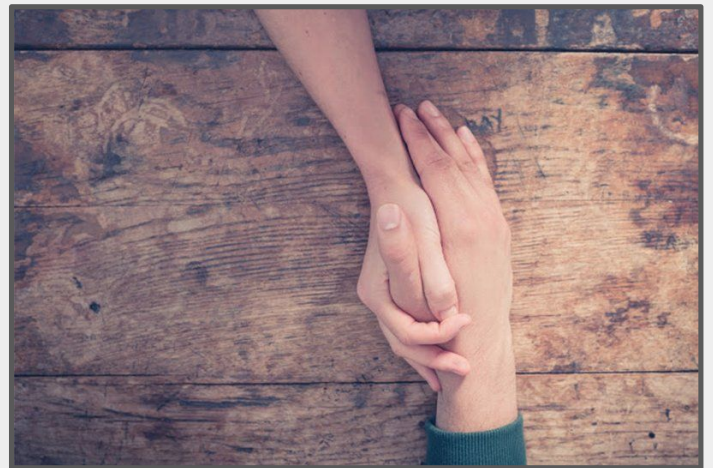


Substance Abuse & Use - something to ponder.....

Why is this important in Music Education?

Students may become at risk in later years for developing the need to self-medicate their yearning for inner safety, security, and love from particular substances.

These substances travel through the MDS and NAC systems of the brain, releasing DA and endorphins to the reward system. This *inadvertently*, becomes the individuals form of secure attachment which can lead to emotional, physical, and psychological problems, addiction or a substance use disorder.



Substance Use Disorder and Attachment

- Studies indicate a correlation between a SUD and Attachment Trauma
- Indicate that early attachment trauma in individuals increases the risk of substance abuse or a disorder in later years of life.



Securely Attached Adolescents at age 13

- Led to the prevention in heavy drinking at age 15
- The risk for a substance abuse disorder is **1/3 LOWER** in secure attached adolescents.

Insecure Attached Adolescents ages 10-12

- Led to Substance Abuse at the estimated age of 22

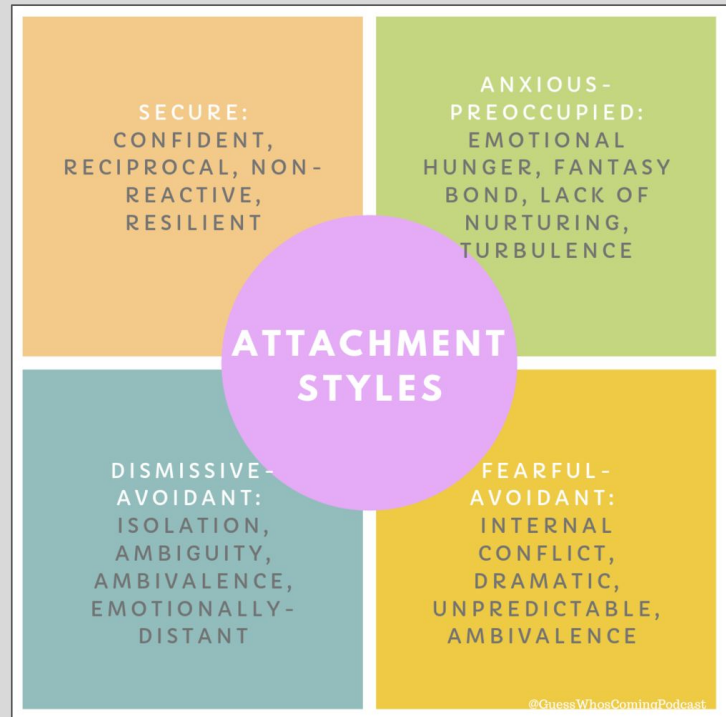


“In a room full of those who care, the individual is unable to experience love and belonging. Defenses get in the way. Families often wonder what more they could have done to help. The truth, however, is that the person struggling with active addiction and adversity is often unable to feel the love around him or her. It just does not penetrate.”

~Oliver Morgan, 2019~

Forms of Attachment

- Secured Attachment
- Earned Secure Attachment
- Insecure Attachment
 - *Anxious-insecure attachment*
 - *Avoidant-insecure attachment*
 - *Disorganized-insecure attachment*



The Attachment Styles

Secure

1. Can trust fairly easily
2. Is attuned to emotions
3. Can communicate upsets directly
4. Leads with cooperative and flexible behavior in relationships



Anxious

1. Has a sensitive nervous system
2. Struggles communicating needs directly
3. Tends to "act out" when triggered (i.e. makes partner jealous)

Avoidant - Dismissive

1. Downplays importance of relationships
2. Is usually extremely self-reliant
3. Can become more vulnerable when there is a big crisis



Avoidant - Fearful

1. More dependent in relationships than avoidant dismissive
2. Strongly fears rejection
3. Has low self-esteem
4. Has high anxiety in relationships

What is Secure Attachment?

- Secure attachment is when an individual, from infancy, has experienced security, nurturing, acceptance, physical touch, and love.
- A bond between parent and child is developed.
- A sense of yearning to be with the parent ensures the child's feeling of security and safety.
- Both physical and emotional needs are met for the child.
- These experiences impact the way a child feels in the world and where initial trust and relationship building begins.



Secure Attachment in within Music Education

- Relationship building and bonds through ensembles and peer connections.
- Social events/performances
- Music teacher / student bonds
- Security and safety in the classroom
- Music as the emotional outlet



Why is it important that music educators are aware of attachment trauma?

“Attachment trauma is at the core of a student’s wellbeing from early childhood developmental stages. Trauma in general specifically impacts all students, and their teachers, in a multitude of ways.

Mental Health is incredibly important within our classrooms and if we are not prepared to handle tough situations, we are not offering our students the best musical experiences possible.



Think of your student in mind.....

Think back to the student at the beginning of the presentation....

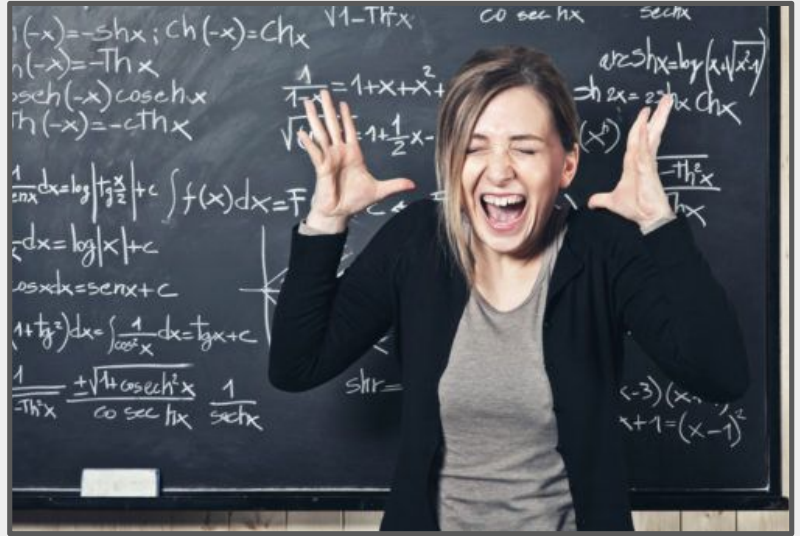
1. *Discuss with a neighbor the characteristics and behavior you are seeing on a daily or weekly basis?*
 - a. Do you suspect trauma?
 - b. Home life?
 - c. Isolation?
 - d. Over-achiever?
 - e. Anxiety? Low Self-esteem
 - f. Consistently seeking attention?



How have you handled this student in the past?

It's okay - we've all been here!

- Sent to the office
- Detention
- Ignore
- Frustration with demands of student needs
- Impatience
- Stern voice, body language
- Anger or impatience
- Lost your cool.....
- Etc.....



Now, look at this student through an attachment informed lens

“Put on your detective hat”

“Constructive consequences for behavioral challenges....”

- Connect
- Relate
- Understand
- Empathy
- Believe in them
- Be the role model in their life -
 - *Mirror the traits of secure attachment bonds*



When we look at our music students through the Attachment lens..... It CHANGES everything.....

CASE STUDY:

“LUCY”

- History of ACE - extremely high
- Adopted
- Daily detentions in school
- Acts out daily
- Loud, disruptive, blurts out
- Seeks attention
- Dysregulated - ADHD
- Low self-esteem
- Struggles academically
- Does not believe in self
- Likes to be the “funny guy”



LUCY - “*One day at lunch....*” (*Detentions are not the answer*)

- Detective Work
 - Talk to parents
 - Discuss options, if they are comfortable, history...
- Gather information from various perspectives
 - **Avoid the teachers lounge**
 - *Research - reshape your perspective and fine tune your personal lens*
- Eye level communication
- Name it to tame it
- Allow time in quiet space
- Calm Voice - motherly....
- Affirmations
- Foster a safe, positive student/teacher relationship
- Allow for the music room to be that space
- Squash the behavior of peer instigators



Earned Secure Attachment

- **An individual may not have received attachment from infancy and so measures are taken to develop these attachments later in life.**
- **Coming to terms with past experiences or trauma that impacted an attachment not being made are recognized by the person, allowing them as an adult to create relationships.**
- **As a music educator, how does this possibly relate to you?**



Insecure Attachment - Attachment Trauma

- From infancy bonds are not safe, feel threatening, neglectful, abusive, or un-nurturing.
- Sense of Rejection
- Feeling Unloved
- Needful of attention or clingy
- Struggles with trust and relationship building
- Feelings of isolation or possibly fear
- Feeling undeserving of love or affection
- Feeling anxious or avoidant



Trauma Triggers

- Particular song styles or types
- Memory recall
- Topics or discussions
- Difficult events in school
- Negative teacher interactions
- Reading facial expressions and body language of others

What do we see as educators?

- Fight, Flight, Flee, Fawn
- Anxiety
- Panic Attacks
- Depressive episodes
- Behavioral issues or acting out
- Emotional shutdowns
- Low self-esteem / confidence
- Isolation



“A fight response is triggered when a person suddenly responds aggressively to something threatening. A flight response is triggered when a person responds to a perceived threat by fleeing, or symbolically, by launching into hyperactivity. A freeze response is triggered when a person, realizing resistance is futile, gives up, numbs out into disassociation and/or collapses as if accepting the inevitability of being hurt. A fawn response is triggered when a person responds to threat by trying to be pleasing or helpful in order to appease and forestall an attacker.”

(Walker, 2014, p. 13)

*“Be the light and hope of
trauma students”*



*“The whole world is filled with triggers. As long as they can
imagine*

*only disastrous outcomes to relatively benign situations, anybody
walking into a room, any stranger, any image, on a screen or on a
billboard might be perceived as a harbinger of catastrophe.”*

(van der Kolk, 2014, p. 221)

AS MUSIC EDUCATORS WE MUST:

Being aware of the potential for individuals to react in unexpected
ways

to triggers may enable others to respond compassionately.

~Haunted Melodies~

Trauma Triggers may result in Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn

Think about your student.... Which one of these relate to that student?

<p style="text-align: center;">Fight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Physical / Verbal Aggression● “Power Struggles”● Defiance / Refusal● Tantrums● Hyperactivity	<p style="text-align: center;">Flight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Leaving the Classroom● Skipping Class● Avoiding Work● Anxiety● Hiding
<p style="text-align: center;">Freeze</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Shutting Down● Disassociation “Spaced Out”● Minimal physical, verbal, and /or emotional response● Blank expression / Dulled effect	<p style="text-align: center;">Fawn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● People-pleasing● Lack of healthy boundaries● Excessively helpful● Afraid to make mistakes● Takes on a caretaker role w/ peers

Adolescents and Risk Factors of Attachment Trauma

- ★ Risk increase for the adolescent age for several reasons:
 - Age appropriate transitioning from family direction, and searching for inner self, decision making, and their part in the world.
 - Media, Peers, and Societal Influences & Pressures
 - Teens may feel disconnected from support systems, self-isolate, or turn to self-medicating.
 - Access to substances can be found easily and quickly.



What can music educators do? “Attachment Building”

- ★ *Examples of attachment building interactions include:*
 - Eye contact
 - Get down to eye level - elementary
 - Gentle Voice
 - Nurturing
 - Calming fear
 - Help Hunger pain, sadness
 - “Name it to Tame it” (put on your detective hat and go to work!)
 - Talk through anger
 - Become emotionally attune to students
 - Facial expressions - “students read you like a book”
 - Loving or soothing in nature
 - Full-filing basic emotional or physical needs
 - Provide a quiet space in room
 -
 - Caregiver is available, responsive, inclusive to child
 - *Do what you can - get creative - ask yourself truly what this student needs and what you can do.*



NAFME - Trauma and Music Education

1

Develop a safe and supportive environment

2

Know your students

3

Reframe student behavior

4

Embrace the power of music

5

Practice self-care

Low to NO Effort

- proximity
- the "look"
- head shake
- a shoulder touch
- tap the desk
- kneel down by student
- whisper
- sticky note
- praise the CORRECT behavior (PBIS)
- 4 to 1
- silence
- change your tone of voice
- name drop
- bingo board on the desk
- ignore
- ask a question
- brain break for ALL to redirect



A little more Effort

- calming corner
- time out area
- change seat of student
- student / teacher hallway conference
- long pause
- brain break
- vary your teaching method
- assign an errand / redirect
- restate expectations to entire class
- have student practice expectation individually
- ask student to write out expectations
- stopping instruction for all
- email to parents/guardians
- ask colleagues for advice



EFFORT

- call home
- behavior plan meeting
- send to office
- stay in for recess
- Restorative Circle
- loss of privilege
- student writes an apology letter
- hallway conference w/ admin
- keep after school
- stay consistent
- 2x10 Strategy
- reassign seating for entire class



Need more support?

K-5 - bhawks@esusixteen.org

5-12 - lcaim@esusixteen.org

REGULATE - RELATE - REASON

- *Reasoning involves our THINKING BRAIN.*
- Only when someone is calm **(REGULATED)** are they able to form a trusting relationship **(RELATE)** and access their ability to understand, think, and reflect **(REASON)**.



Neurological Functions - Prefrontal Cortex

What is happening in the brain during attachment building?

- The prefrontal cortex is developed from infancy and ultimately controls our thinking and emotional signals within the brain. It is a gateway to all of the brains regions and when it is not developed in a healthy way, this is when problems arise.
- The prefrontal cortex develops from human interactions and the signals sent to the cortex from these experiences.



Attachment promotes Regulation

- *When a student feels safe, connected, and nurtured - the brain is calmer and regulated, reducing behavioral issues in the classroom.*
- *Music education can be a catalyst for promoting attachment bonds*



Did you know?

90% of the brain develops before age 5

10% of the Brain develops after age 5

Early experiences and attachments are vital to a healthy brain.

90%

of a child's brain development happens before age 5



■ 90% Brain development before age 5
■ 10% Brain development after age 5

Source: Harvard Center for the Developing Child

Parallels within the Brain



Mesolimbic Dopamine System (MDS)

- When music is performed or listened to, levels of Dopamine travel through neurotransmitters to the MDS or the “reward system” of the brain.

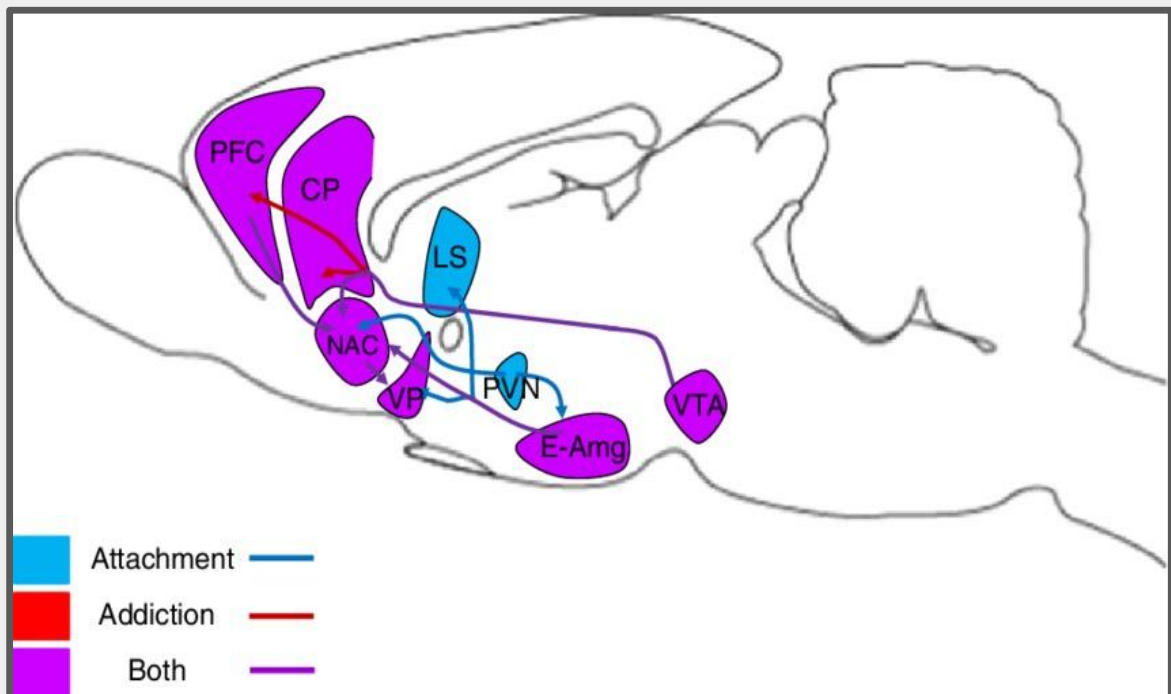
Nucleus Accumbens Shell (NAC)

- This is the **home of attachment**. When DA travels through the MDS, it also travels through the NAC.
- *Addiction and Attachment carry messages through the same pathways in the brain. The responses triggered from music also pass through the NAC.*
 - They share a parallel neurological highway in the brain.

• Ventral Tegmental Area (VTA)

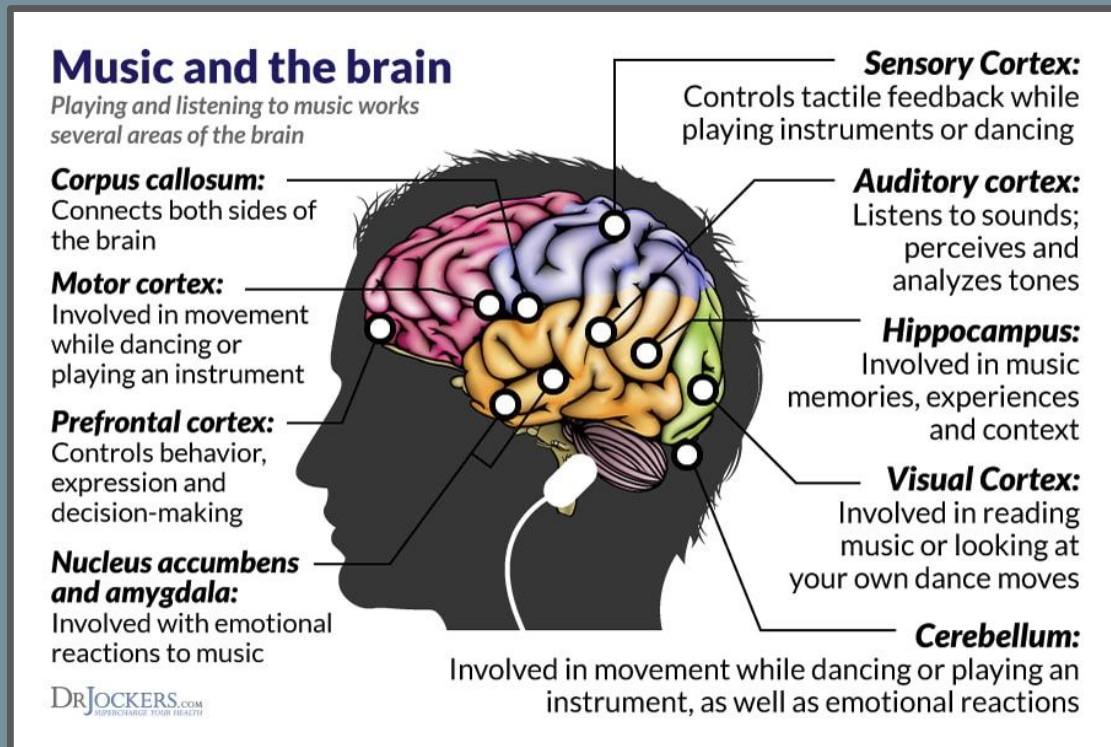
- When the reward system is blocked and not receiving what it wants, such as endorphins or dopamine, these do not reach the VTA, which signals to the individual to use a substance to appease this reward feeling. ***What if music could be the substance? What if music could be the earned secure attachment??***
- Attachment trauma leads to there being no reward or security to be felt, which can also trigger traumatic memories and disruptions.

The Brain with Attachment & Addiction Pathways



Brain Diagram (Burkett & Young, 2012)

Music and the Brain



1. *What are some ways you can implement relationship and positive bonding in your program?*
2. *What kinds of social activities are instilled in your program to build support and encouragement?*
3. *Do you as an educator feel comfortable or equipped to handle trauma impacted students in the classroom?*
4. *Do students feel like the music room is their safe place?*
5. *How often do students seek your counsel or share their day with you? Do they like to tell you stories? Are you their attachment figure and what might that mean?*
6. *Evaluate on your own potential trauma history - how might that impact your teaching?*



