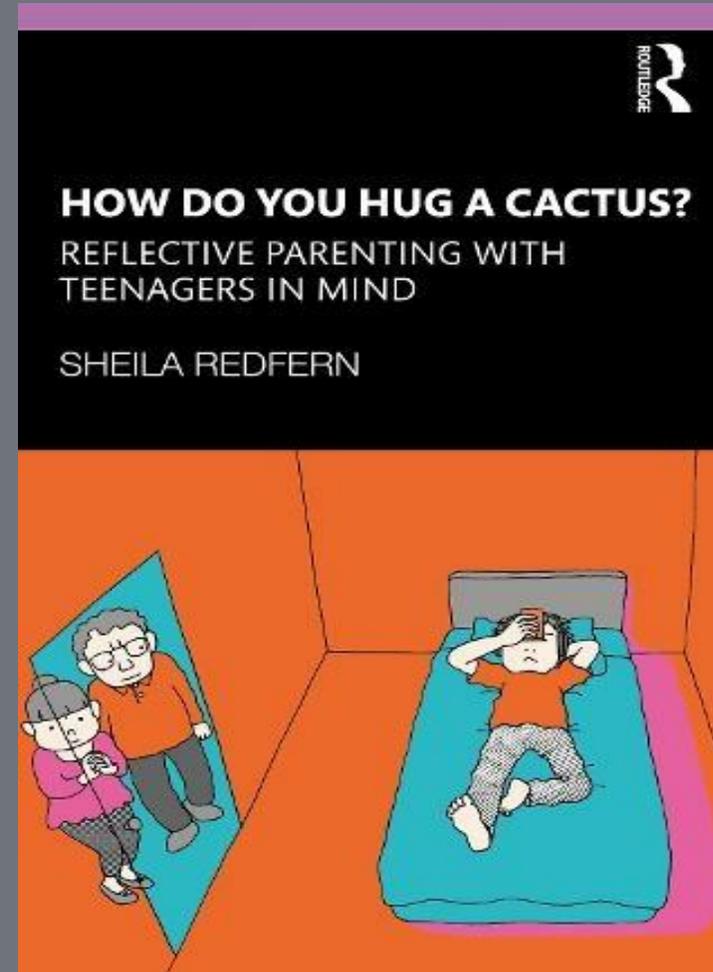
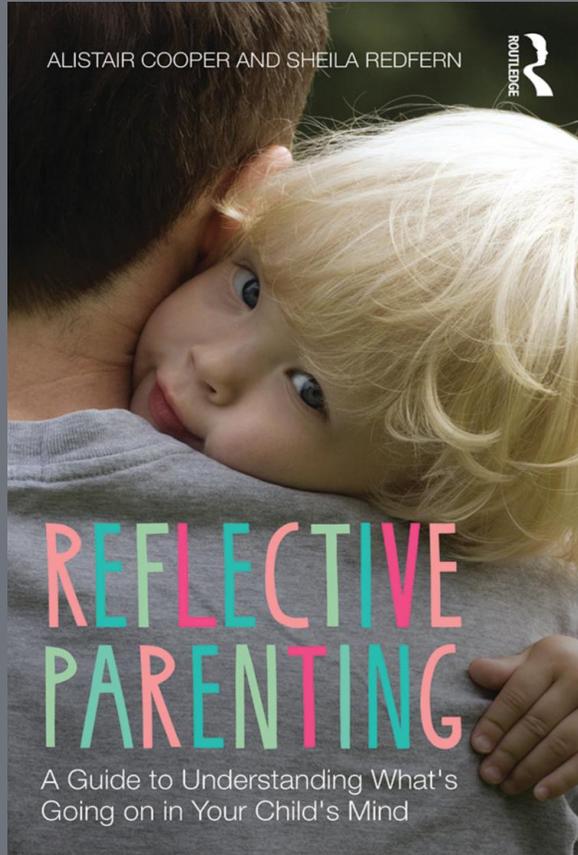


# Reflective Parenting with Teenagers



# What does good mentalizing look like?

- In relation to other people's thoughts and feelings
- Acknowledgement of opacity – I don't know what is in your mind....but I am trying to understand/guess
- Absence of paranoia
- Contemplation and reflection
- Perspective taking
- Genuine interest/curiosity
- Openness to discovery
- Forgiveness/providing empathy
- Predictability
- Narrative continuity

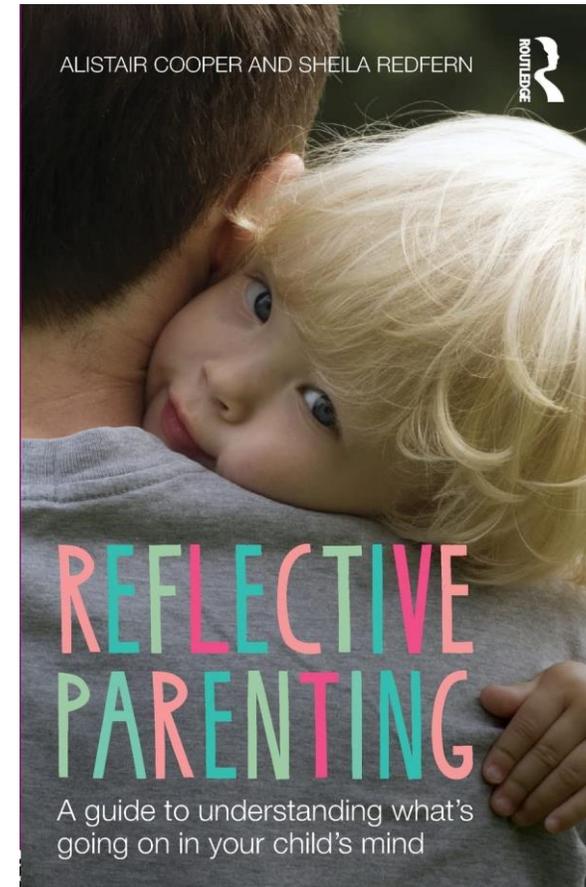


## Parental reflective functioning

- **Parental RF:** “the parent’s capacity to hold the child’s mental states in mind” (Slade, 2005)
- **Two components of PRF:**
  - *self-focused PRF:* focuses on parents’ own experiences
  - *child-focused PRF:* aimed at understanding the child’s experiences (Suchman, DeCoste, Leigh, & Borelli, 2010).
- Some evidence that self-mentalizing predicts quality of mother-child interaction significantly compared with mother’s capacity to mentalize the child (Suchman et al., 2016)

# What is Reflective Parenting?

- Reflective Parenting is a parenting approach with theoretical links to mentalizing and reflective functioning.
- The Reflective Parenting Programme is an 8-week psycho-education group programme based on mentalizing theory.
- Mentalization (and MBT) as a therapy helps adults understand their own minds and emotions better.
- Reflective Parenting helps adults to mentalise about themselves and their child - to keep their child's mind in mind.

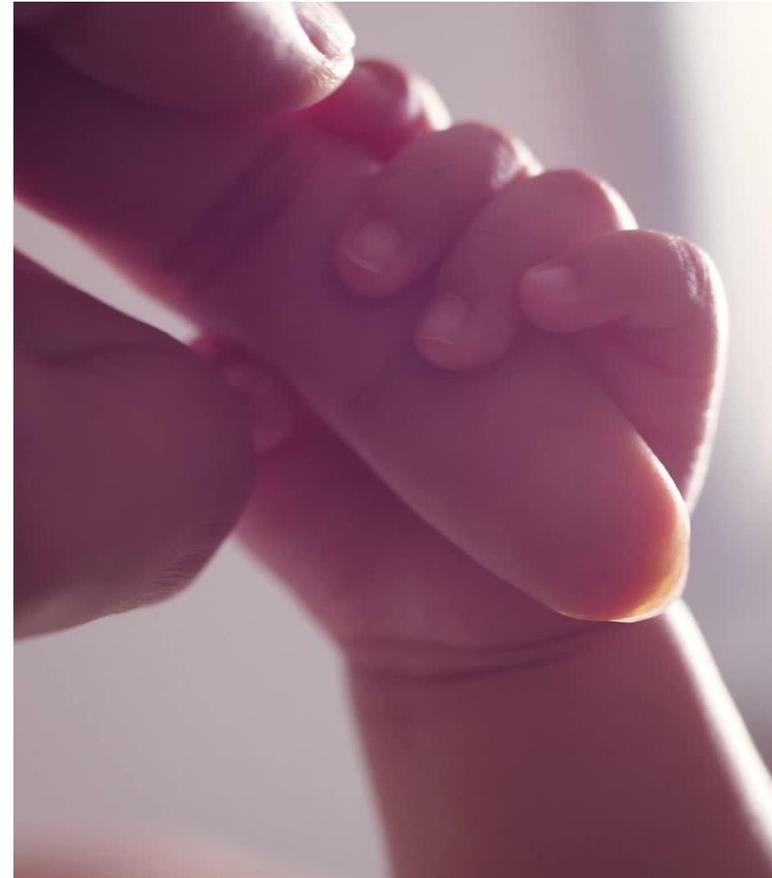


# Why Reflective Parenting?

- Parents high in Reflective Functioning (RF) have more secure attachment histories and more securely attached children.
- 
- Reflective parenting teaches a child about their emotions, how to recognise them and then how to control them (emotion regulation)
- 
- Secure attachment one of the best predictors of resilience in later life
- 
- Secure attachment is associated with mentalizing skills and Theory of Mind (Fonagy, Redfern and Charman, 1997)
- 
- Reflective parenting helps an infant and young child to understand other minds and other perspectives, interact with the world
-

# Where mentalizing starts in the parent-infant relationship

- For normal development the child needs to experience a mind that has his mind in mind.
- A mind that is able to reflect on his intentions accurately. That does not overwhelm him.
- Baby needs a relationship with another human who can be emotionally in touch with the baby.
- A person who can show a representation of the baby's feelings on their face – **contingent marked mirroring**.



## Mentalizing spectrum

Emotions

Thoughts

Both a *cognitive process* (psychological insight) and an *emotional process*, i.e. 'the capacity to regulate and experience one's own and others' emotions in a non-defensive way without becoming overwhelmed or shut down' (Sharp and Fonagy, 2008).

Self

Other

Effective mentalizing involves a balance between *introspection, and hypothesizing about others* – often parents' focus is on their children (natural defense)

## Mentalizing spectrum

Automatic

Controlled

*Unconscious, fast processing* of social information that is reflexive and requires little effort vs. *Conscious, verbal, and reflective processing* of social information that requires the capacity to reflect consciously and deliberately

Internally

Externally-Focussed

Understanding one's own mind and that of others through a *direct focus on the mental interiors* of both the self and others vs. Understanding one's own mind and that of others based on *external features*

## Modes of pre-mentalizing

### Pretend Mode

- One's psychic and physical reality are experienced as separate, e.g. endless inconsequential talk that feels detached from internal experiences.
- E.g.: telling a "story" without making meaning about what happened and what it really meant
- --> slow it down, rewind, explore

### Teleological mode

- Changes in mental states are only thought to be real or possible if accompanied by accordant physical actions.
- E.g.: "He does not do x, so it means he does not care."
- --> It must be painful to think he does not care – what is that like for you? Empathy
- --> Could there be other reasons why he does not do x? Perspective taking...

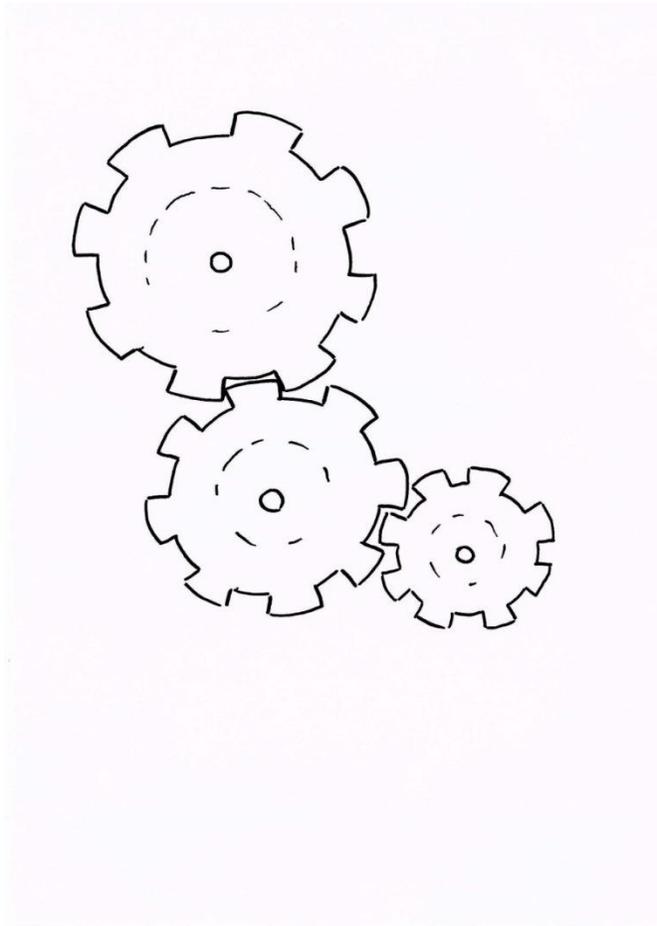
### Psychic Equivalence

- One's internal experience equals the outer reality, e.g. a conviction that one knows most definitely what someone else is thinking and feeling.
- For instance:
  - "He clearly wants to wind me up as he is not getting out of bed when I tell him to."
  - "I know what is going on and nobody can tell me otherwise."

### Important to remember!

- All of us only mentalize effectively about 30% of the time.
- When we don't mentalize, it tells us something is happening for us, and that it could be really valuable to think about it and make sense of it.

# Reflective Parenting Tools



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**The emotional thermometer** (for managing arousal)

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**Mind checks** (to learn how to identify one's own thoughts and feelings)

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**The Professional APP** (for the professional's mentalizing stance)

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**The Parent Map** (to encourage parental self mentalizing)

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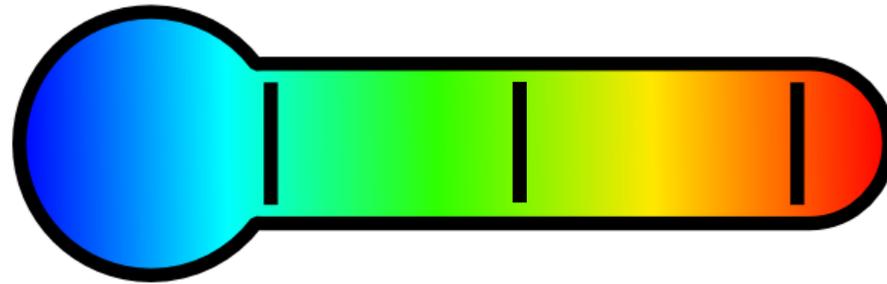
**The Parent APP** (to help a parent mentalize the baby/toddler)

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**Two Hands approach** – the balance between action and reflection: an approach to managing difficult interactions

# Reflective Parenting Tool

## The Emotional Thermometer



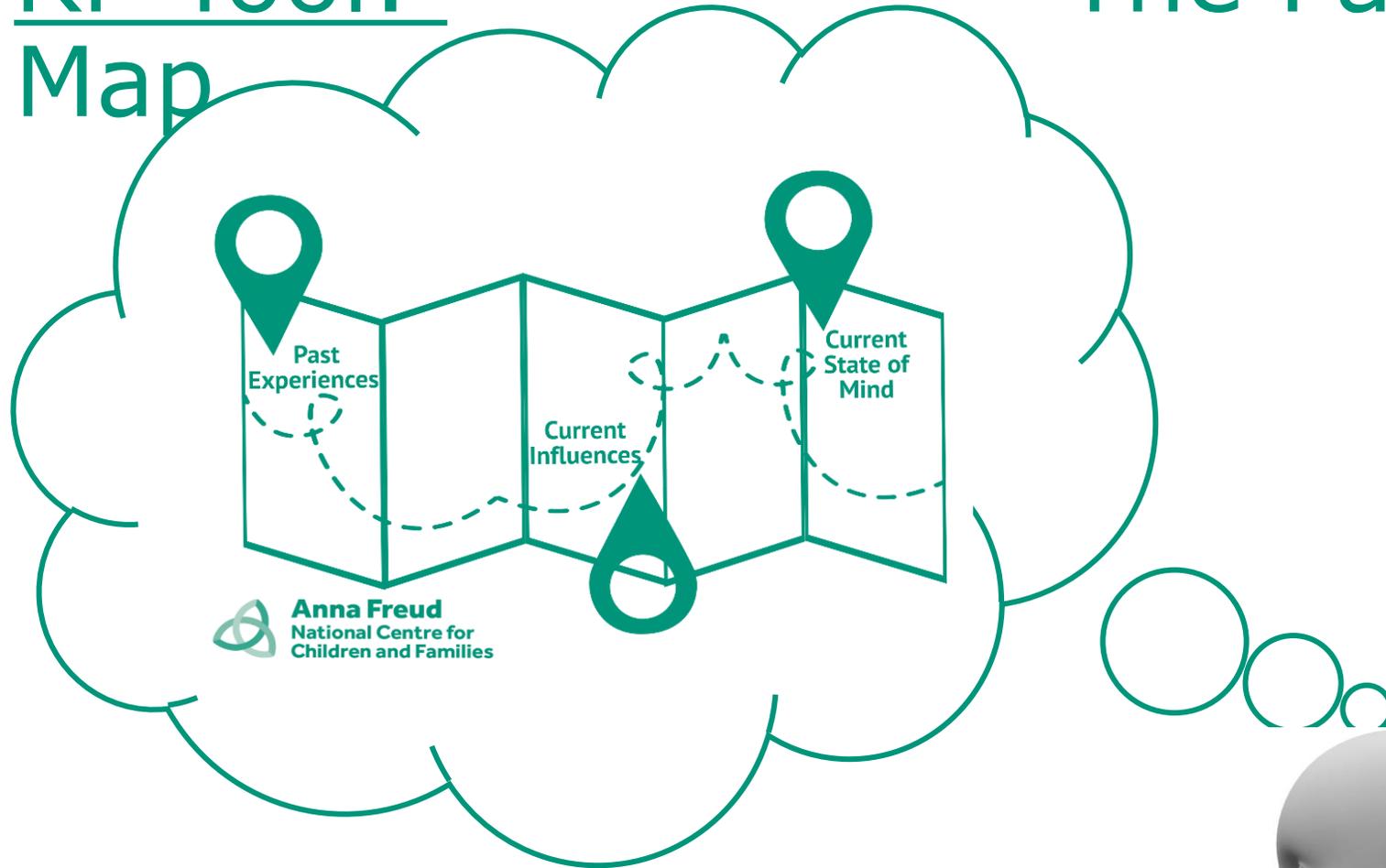
Too cold to  
mentalize

Warm mentalizing

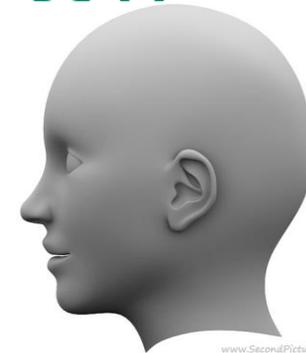
Too hot to  
mentalize

# RP Tool: Map

# The Parent



 **Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

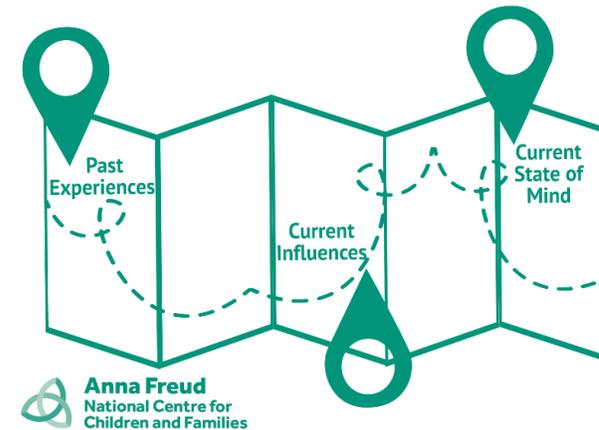


## What is the Parent Map?

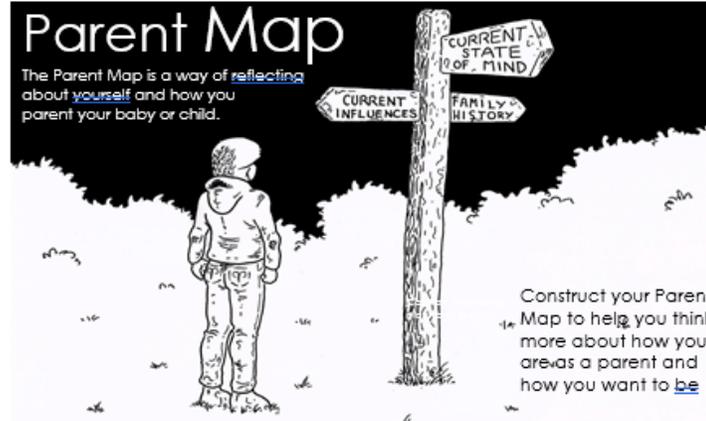
- A parent map is a tool that helps parents “map” how they want to be as parents and the factors influencing their parenting (both past and present).

*You may explore with a parent:*

- When do you think you parent at your best?
- What influences your parenting? What would your child say?
- When do you have strong feelings towards him?
- Can you use these times to reflect?
- How do you think your cultural background might influence your parenting?
- Lets build a picture for how you got to feel and think the way you do now
- Use your awareness of triggers to predict where similar situations may arise
- Do these times remind you of how you were parented?



# Parent Map working document



**Parent Map**  
 The Parent Map is a way of reflecting about yourself and how you parent your baby or child.

Construct your Parent Map to help you think more about how you are as a parent and how you want to be

The Parent Map encourages you to map out and think about what influences your parenting.

**Current state of mind**  
 Your emotions can be really informative. What can you learn from how you feel? What do you think when you are parenting? Do you have unhelpful negative ideas in particular moments?

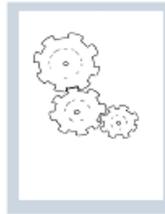
**Family History**  
 Be more aware of the influence of how you were parented, thinking about yourself and your past makes a difference

This might affect how you feel when you are dealing with situations with your baby or child.

**Current influences including social identity**  
 Think about what else influences your parenting, such as religious/ cultural beliefs, finances, housing, and relationships  
 How supported do you feel by important people around you, does this influence your parenting?

Thinking about your parenting can help you imagine future situations and how to handle them.

You will be in a better position to think about your baby and how you approach your interactions



**Thinking of a few recent difficult times.....**  
**Events** - Use this page to write down a list of recent events when you found it hard with your baby or where you felt you got into conflict with toddler or child.  
**Next think of what had an impact on how you reacted.** These things may be:

1. A particular situation or interaction
2. A sound or expression your baby uses sometimes
3. A comment someone makes (maybe another family member)
4. A thought you have.
5. A strong belief you have, e.g. it's rude to not listen (for toddlers) or babies should be happy all the time

Events	Is there a link or pattern to your triggers?

**What influences do you recognize? What had an impact on your reactions?**


**Can you predict and imagine future interactions that might bring strong feelings?**




# Parent map and developmental stage

- Parenting an adolescent
  - May provoke unresolved issues from parent's own adolescence
  - Likely to provoke issues linked to separation and individuation
- Parenting an infant
  - Cultural expectations of what a baby/child needs
  - The influence of stories of the parents as babies ('he never slept', 'he was a good feeder')
  - The baby's primitive pain and vulnerability resonates with parents own repressed pain or helplessness (Freiberg, 1975)



## What is Reflective Parenting with teenagers?

- Reflecting on states of mind about self (parent) and other (teenager)
- Trying to understand what's behind a parent's actions – Mentalizing Adolescent Parenting (MAP) - what is on their Parent MAP?
- Seeking to understand the meaning of your teenager's behaviour – not trying to change the behaviour itself
- Better emotionally regulated parents = more able to mentalize a teenager

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# Changes in adolescence

- Changes in the brain mean more impulsive behaviour – some potentially risky
- The pre-frontal cortex is still developing (responsible for rational decision-making)
- Not just related to brain maturation, also due to a normal drive towards needing to have novel experiences

# The importance of taking risks in adolescence





# Conflict with parents in adolescence

- What leads to conflict between teenagers and parents?
- Lack of feeling understood?
- Lack of understanding different perspectives?
- Parent's own preoccupations influencing interactions
- Parent's fears and anxieties dominating
- Difficulty regulating closeness and distance

# Conflict in adolescence



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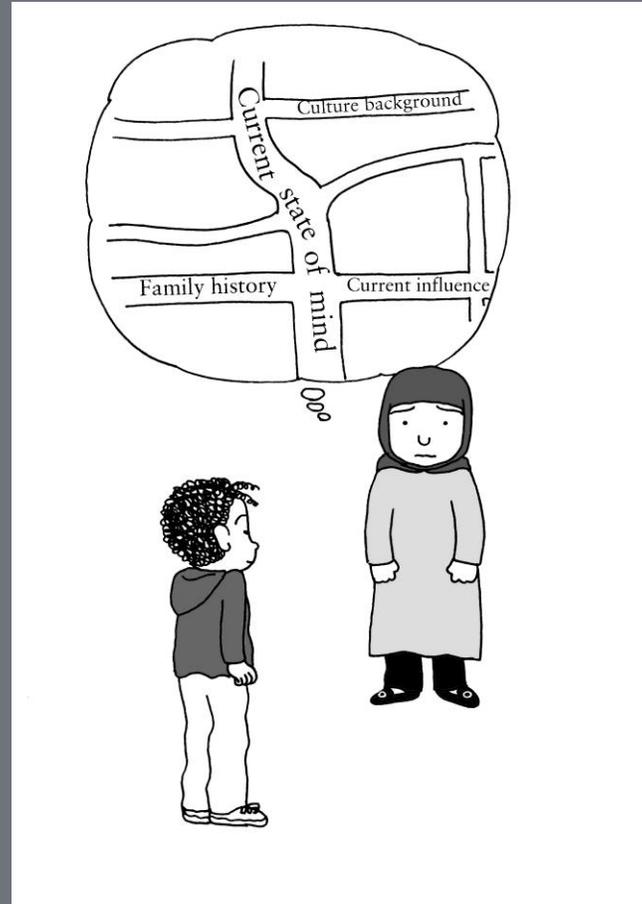


## How might we apply Reflective Parenting?

- **First step** – help the parent to notice her state of arousal – she’s at the top end of the emotional thermometer – HOT
- Once she’s in a middle-range of emotional arousal – try to notice and name thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage her, using a Parent MAP, to think about where these thoughts and feelings come from
- Once she has a better understanding of her own mind – encourage using the Parent APP to understand what her teenager is thinking and feeling; mentalize Rory

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# Mentalizing Adolescent Parenting (Parent MAP)



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# Mentalizing the teenager

“I’m not a kid. I’m nineteen.”

- What is Rory feeling?
- What is upsetting to her in what her mum is saying?
- Why might she have slept with her ex?
- What does it mean to her to have slept with Dean?



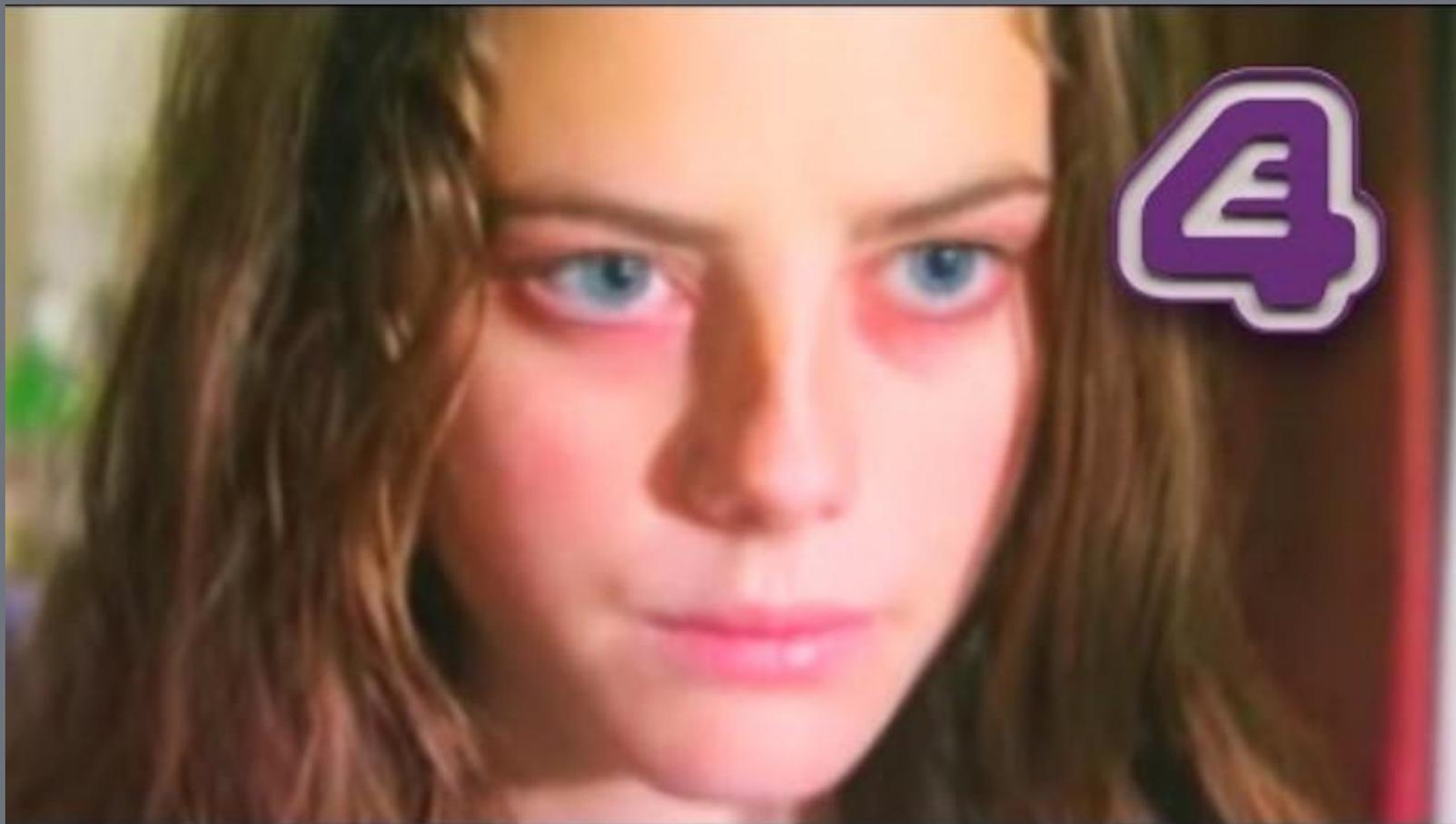
# Mentalizing the parent

“I didn’t raise you to be this way”

- Lorelai moves from friend to mum quickly
- Worry about safety and risk-taking
- Being unaware of her own Parent MAP – what is influencing Lorelei in this moment?
- What is the dominant feeling behind what Lorelai is saying?
- What’s causing Lorelei to be so dysregulated?

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## Not listening



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## More not listening



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## What adolescent brain changes are evident?

- Changes in the brain mean more impulsive behaviour- why did Ladybird jump out of the car?
- Where is mum's judgement coming from? What factors are impacting her strong reaction that precedes her daughter's jump?
- How might they have had a more mentalizing conversation? What did Ladybird need from her mum?
- What did mum need from her daughter?



## Need for separation and autonomy vs security

- Essential to survival to separate
- Stay close by, but not too close.
- Identity is forming – parental influence gets in the way
- Relationships with friends take priority over everything – essential for survival



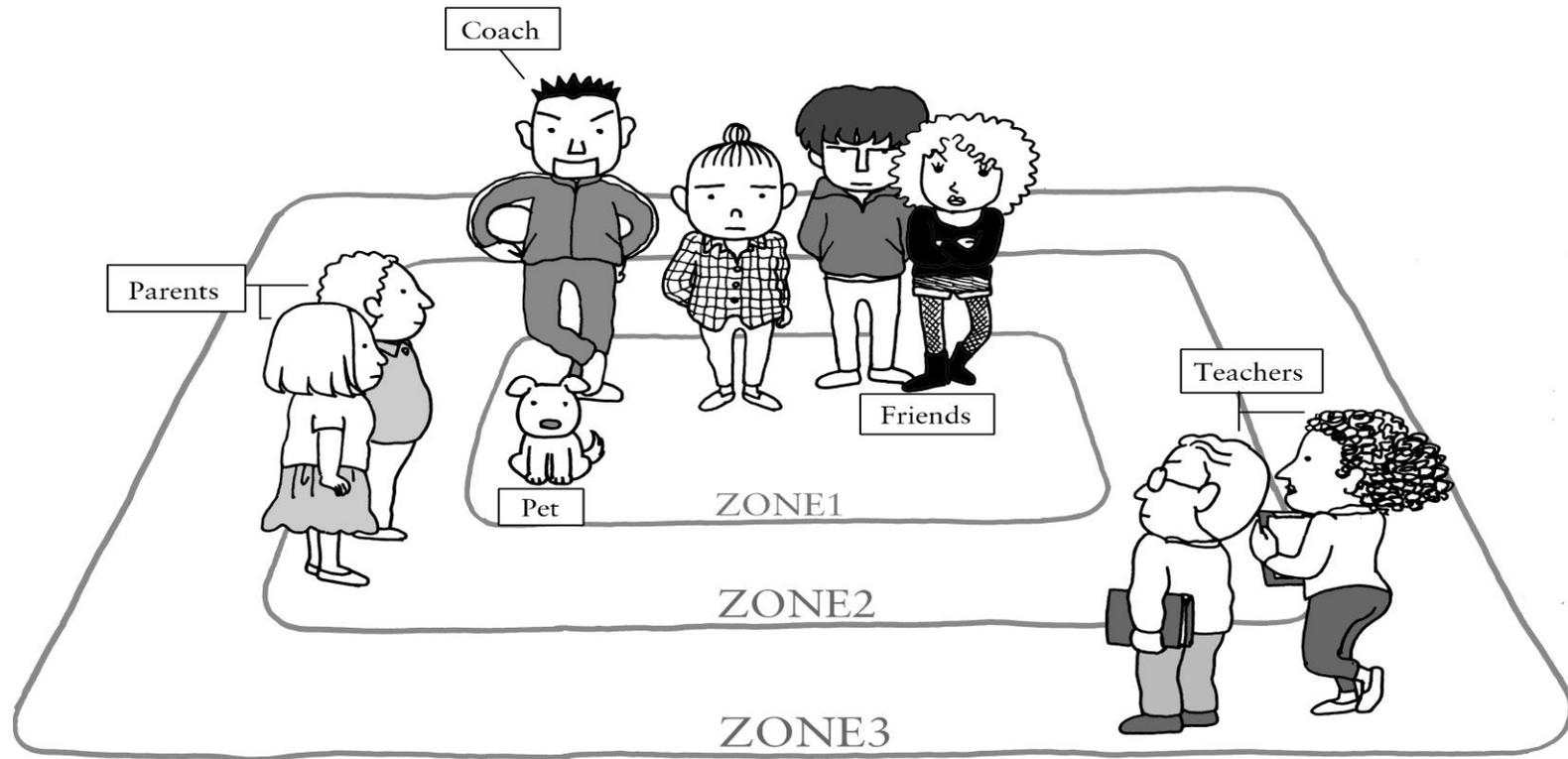
## Need for autonomy

- Teenagers need to lie – to keep parts of their lives private so they can forge their own identity
- Lying to avoid being shamed by parents or other authority figures
- Connecting with teenagers in ways that are respectful, thoughtful and intelligent will promote a similar response back.
- Judging when teenagers are striving for autonomy will force them further away – disconnection instead of connection

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# Finding a support network



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# Mentalizing into adulthood: The Safe Harbour



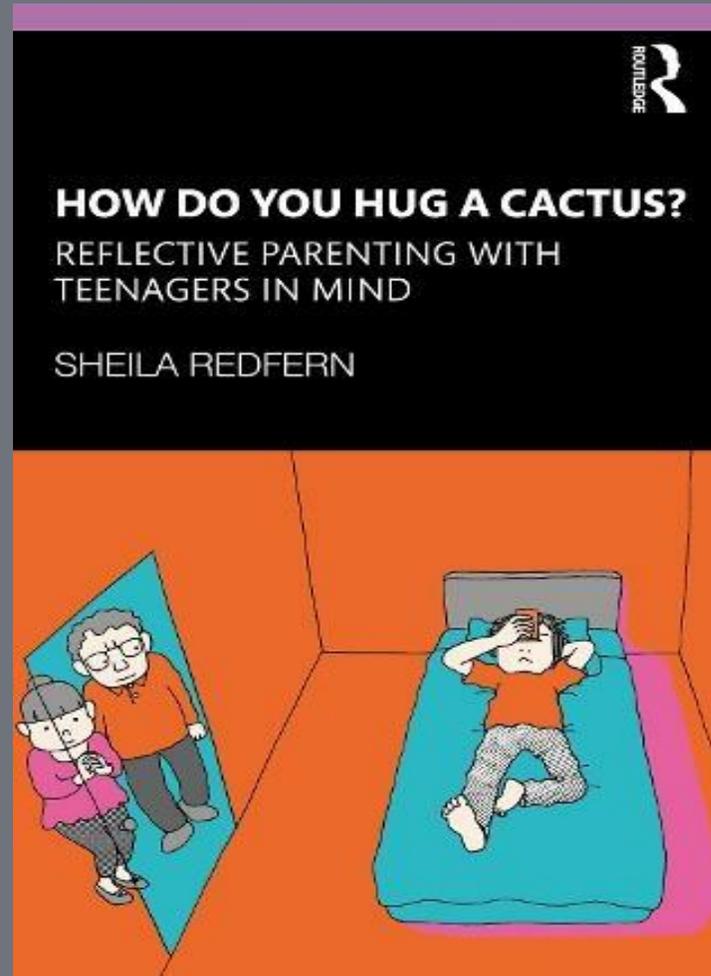
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# Mentalizing into adulthood

- The brain is still developing into the mid-twenties – young people are still vulnerable to impulsivity, risk-taking, mental health crises
- Mentalize a young adult by communicating ‘you are capable of making your own choices, but I’m here still to guide you if you need me.’ The Safe Harbour.
- Maintain the secure base from early childhood by maintaining contact and communication but allowing freedom and independence – continue to offer Bowlby’s ‘secure base from which to explore the world’.

# Reflective Parenting with Teenagers



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