



# Being Therapeutic When You Aren't A Therapist

Early Impact Virginia

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May 17, 2023

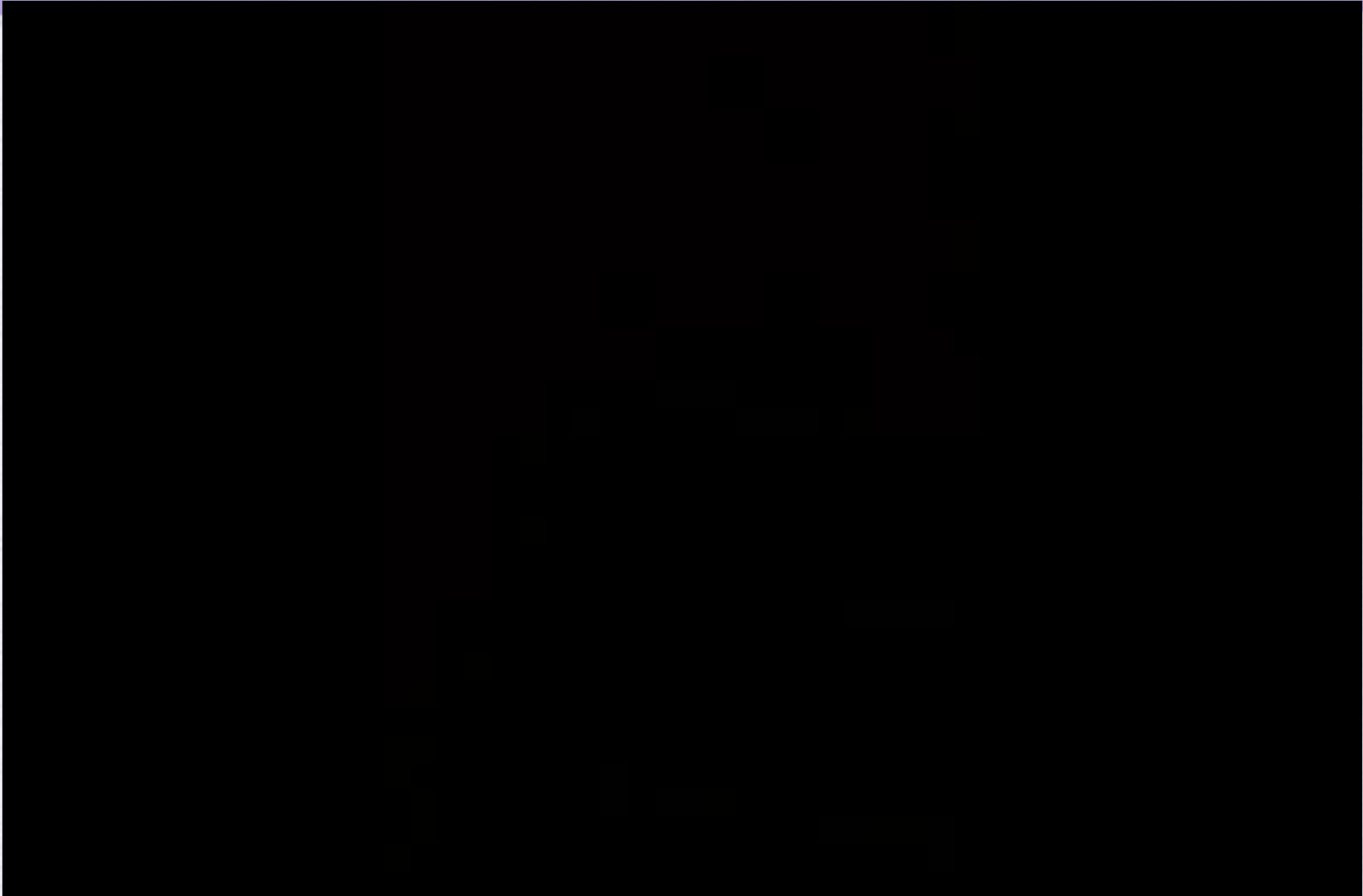
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# A Safe Haven



# The Mother Dog

- Provided proximity (presence)
- Provided scaffolding
- Was reassuring



# The Human Companion

- Provided Proximity (verbally)
- Provided Cheerleading
- Was Emotionally Attuned



# The Puppy

- Signaled clearly when needed help
- Received the needed help
- Felt increasingly safe to explore



# We are the Human Companions

- It is “therapeutic” to:
  - Be emotionally available
  - “Cheerlead” by recognizing strengths/capacities/encouraging/validating
  - Be attuned to the emotions of the parent and child
- In so doing – we make it *safer* for caregivers to explore different ways of being with their baby than adults were with them
  - NOTE: We cannot assume clients or children think or feel we are a “safe” person – we must earn that!



# Ghosts in the Nursery

- The birth of a child and the vulnerability of the period of infancy join forces to awaken unresolved feelings from parents' own past



- This period of increased vulnerability allows for an opportunity to rework early models (i.e., the Internal Working Model) of how relationships “go” - related to safety in closeness and safety in exploration

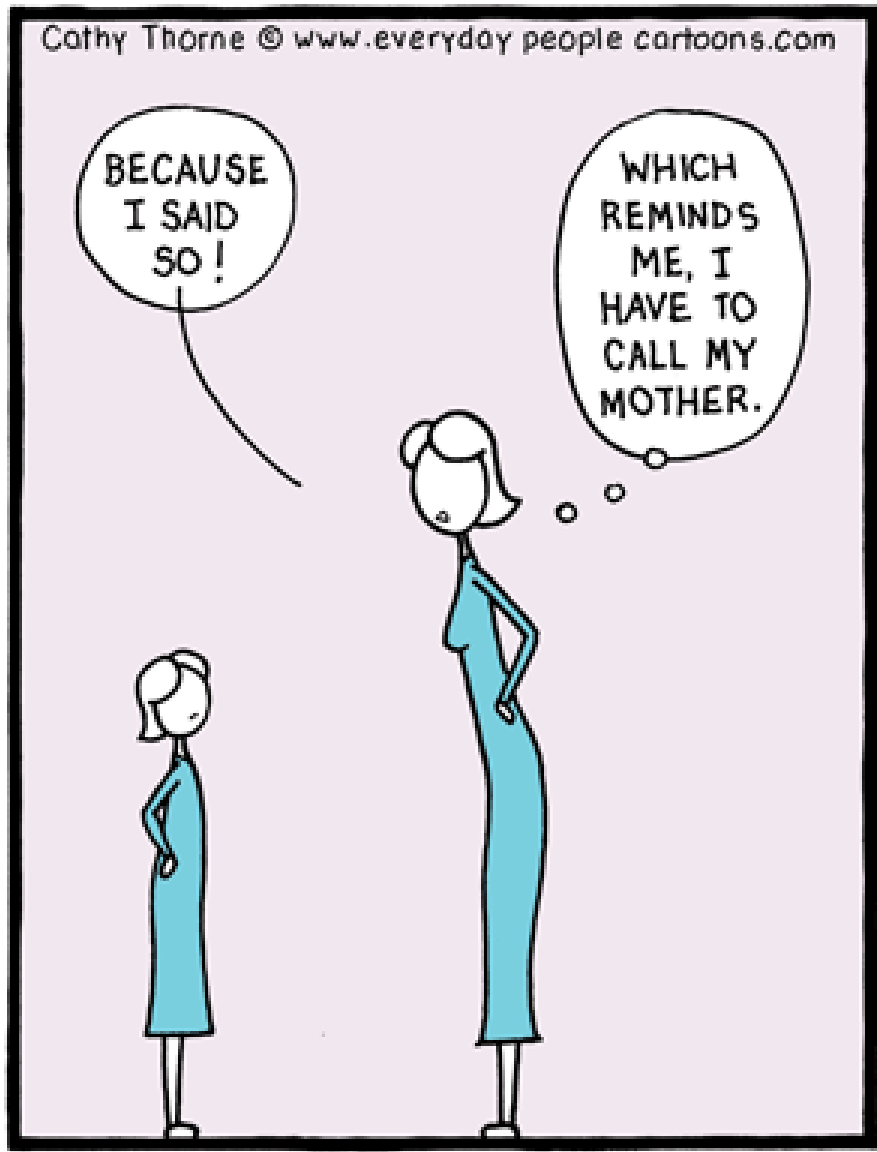
# “Parenting Comes Naturally”

For better or worse, parenting involves an implicit “knowing” what to do based on what was experienced as an infant and child



BECAUSE  
I SAID  
SO!

WHICH  
REMINDS  
ME, I  
HAVE TO  
CALL MY  
MOTHER.





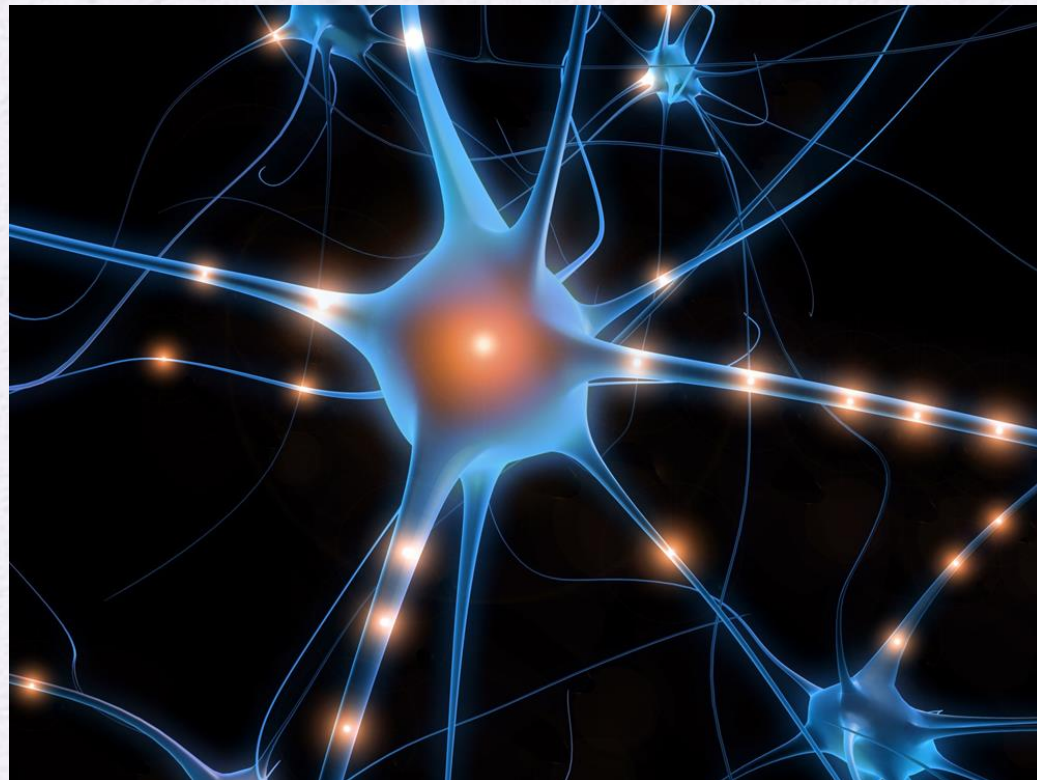
# The Premise -

- “...a weekly interview in which their problems are approached analytically and traced back to childhood has sometimes been remarkably effective. Having once been helped to recognize and recapture the feelings which she herself had as a child and to find that they are accepted tolerantly and understandingly, a mother will become increasingly sympathetic and tolerant toward the same things in her child.” (Bowlby, 1940, p. 23)

**Easier Said Than Done!**

# Using Parallel Process

## Mirror Neurons

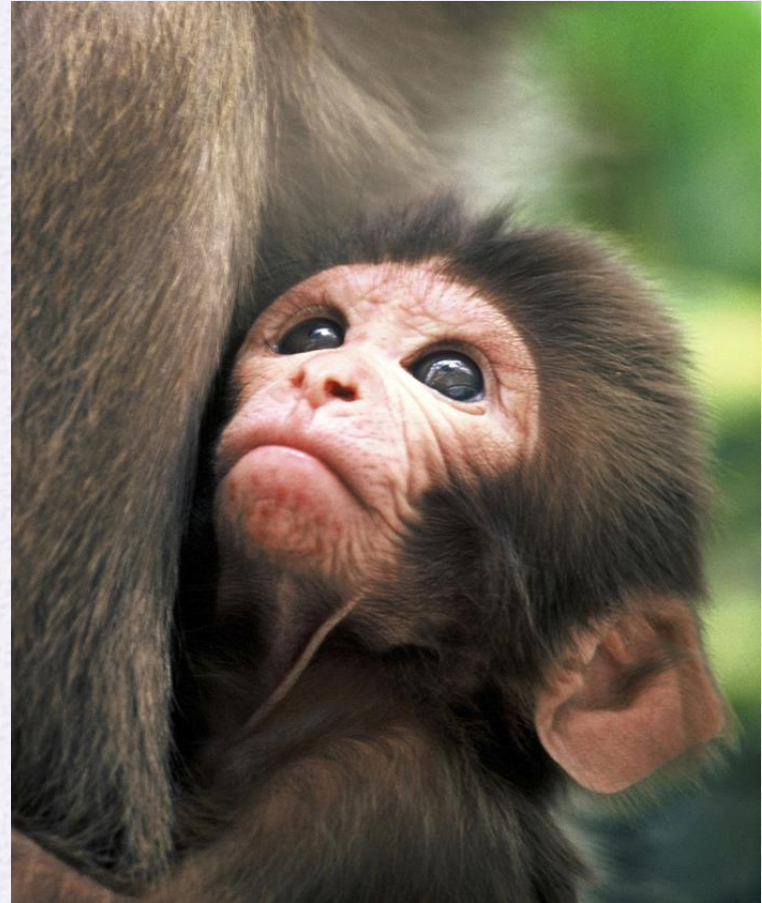


# Mirror Neurons

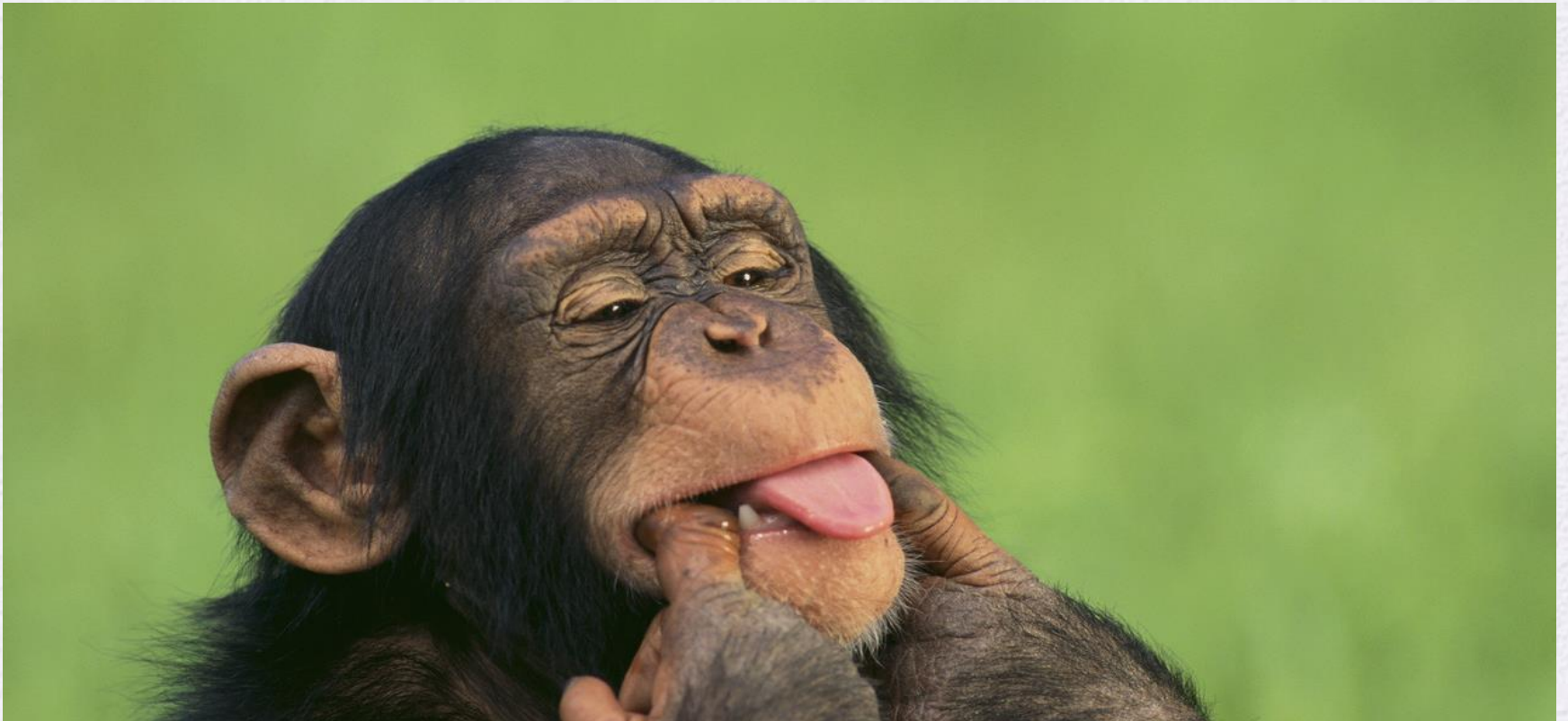
- A set of neural circuits, located in a variety of regions of the brain, including the parietal and premotor cortex, that links perception and motor activity and interpretation of intention
- Part of the system that assists the human brain to create “representations of other’s minds”
- Has contributed Theory of Mind and Intersubjectivity fields of study
  - The capacity for attributing mental states – intentions, beliefs, and desires – to others

# Mirror Neurons

- ◆ First identified by Italian researchers in primates
  - ◆ A monkey eating a peanut with another monkey observing
  - ◆ The same part of the brain that was firing in the monkey who was performing the activity fired, though with less intensity, in the brain of the monkey that was observing



Must involve a “goal directed activity”





# Mirror Neurons in Humans

- Researchers have now begun to look at role of mirror neurons in humans –
  - Motor neurons – finger movements triggered firing of a specific part of the brain in both the participant and the observer. This “Sensory-Motor integration” plays a role in imitation as a way to develop fundamental social skills
  - Communication neurons – the resonance circuitry – comprised of the insula and the limbic areas of the brain

# Resonance Circuitry

- Involved in perceiving and responding to the emotional cues of another



# Cognitive Appraisal vs. Experiential Appraisal

- Vittorio Gallese has expanded research of the mirror neuron system to examine “our capacity to share experiences with others...” i.e., not just a cognitive appraisal but an actual shared “felt sense” of another’s experience.
  - Cognitive appraisal – the how and why of feelings
  - Emotional appraisal – the feeling of feelings – the felt sense
    - On the receiving end - “FEELING FELT”
- Sociopaths – may have cognitive appraisal but lack the emotional appraisal

# Why does that make a difference?

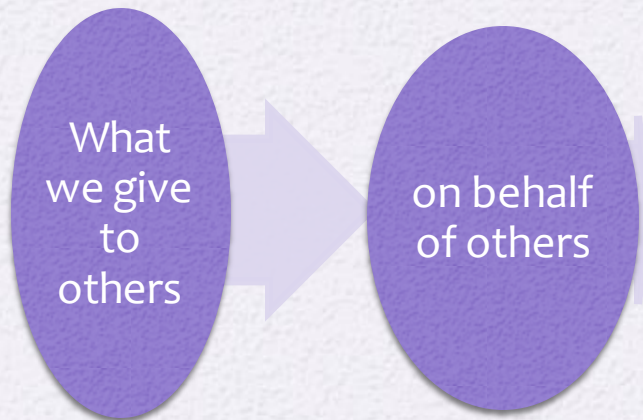
- Parallel Process – the mechanism by which we can use our understanding of the “resonance circuitry” to:
  - begin to understand the emotional world of another,
  - mirror it back to them in a way that **makes them feel understood...i.e.**, not just straight imitation but with an understanding of the underlying feeling/intention
  - thus paving the way for the parent/child to experience more attuned interactions with others

# Affect Regulation

- Schore's work has noted the “right-brain to right-brain” communication that happens in periods of attunement and understanding. Seems to activate the prefrontal areas of the brain (problem solving area of brain)
- *Leads to some of the scientific “evidence” that feeling deeply understood and “held in the mind of another” is a major component toward healing*

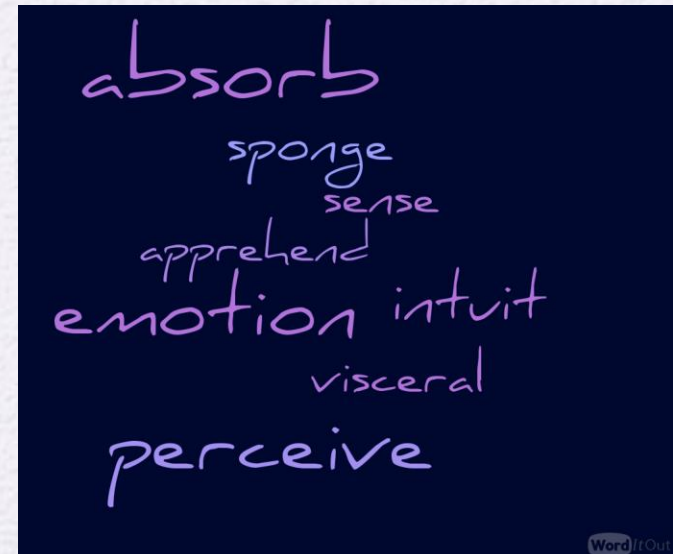
# Two Forms of Parallel Process

## Do Unto Others



## Induced Countertransference

- The way we comprehend the states of others –



# Mirroring Exercise



# The Platinum Rule

*“Do unto others as you would have others do unto others.”*

*~Jeree Pawl*





We must look carefully to  
see the baby



Thank You!