Trust Survival Style

Vulnerability is intolerable.

Anger is my default emotion.

I hate to fail.

Trusting others = getting used.

I had to live out my parents' dreams.

I believe in mind over emotions.

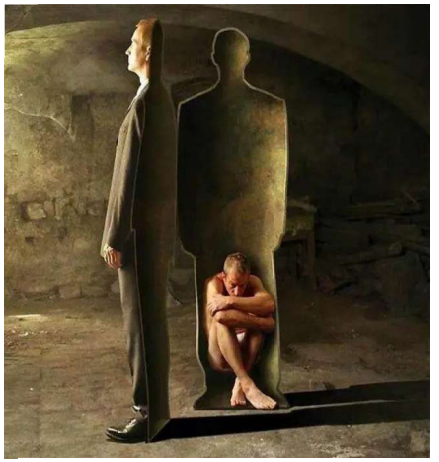
Don't let them see you sweat.

I was rewarded for selling myself out.

I had to parent my parent. Where was my childhood?!

I am competent and in control.

Common Themes



- ➔ We will not see them in your office very often. Puts them in a core bind: "I need you."
- ➔ Better chance you will see one partner in couples therapy, the avoidant who fears losing himself in relationship. Or your client will talk about her partner who is not in therapy ("he doesn't need it").
- ➔ Self-sufficiency. Asking for help feels threatening and risks betrayal, humiliation, or feelings of helplessness.
- ➔ Parentified child, mom's confidante. Used to dump their conflicts and distress. Didn't experience what it was like to safely depend/rely on another.
- ➔ The child was used as a repository for the unmet dreams of the parents and was rewarded for taking on these dreams (made special). False self emerges.
- ➔ A healthy sense of trust and age appropriate dependency was not encouraged.
- ➔ Tend to stop therapy when they feel threatened by the therapeutic process. Fragile sense of self.
- ➔ Underneath the veneer of the false, powerful self is often a lonely, depressed, empty and acutely disconnected person.
- ➔ **There is a continuum. Various levels of mistrust: From mild to pathological.**

NARM Personality Spectrum

A Continuum from Organized to Disordered



Organized Self	**Survival Style**	**Personality Disordered**
More Connection	Disrupted Connection	Profound Disconnection
More Separation-Individuation	Disrupted Separation-Individuation	Minimal Separation-Individuation
More Self-regulation	Disrupted Self-Regulation	Dysregulation
More Agency	Disrupted Agency	Minimal Agency
Strong Therapeutic Alliance	Disrupted Therapeutic Alliance	Weak Therapeutic Alliance
Empathy	Disrupted Empathy	Minimal Empathy
Self-awareness/Insight	Disrupted self-awareness/insight	Minimal self-awareness/insight
Clearer Objective Reality	Disrupted objective reality	Distorted objective reality
Self-activation	Distorted self-activation	Minimal self-activation
Presence	Distorted presence	Minimal presence

Moving to Resolution



- ➔ Hold clear, firm limits and boundaries. Don't get pulled into power game.
- ➔ Stay grounded so as not to get knocked off your ground when they attempt to turn the tables on you or locate your vulnerability.
- ➔ They often need straightforwardness to trust others and won't trust touchy-feely, nicey-nicey approaches.
- ➔ Understanding and validation of their suffering even in the "being done to" narrative: We are building trust.
- ➔ Providing them the sense you are going to hang in there with them and not take advantage of their vulnerability.
- ➔ **Reality: Not as helpless as you secretly believe and not as powerful as you try to appear.**

Moving to Resolution

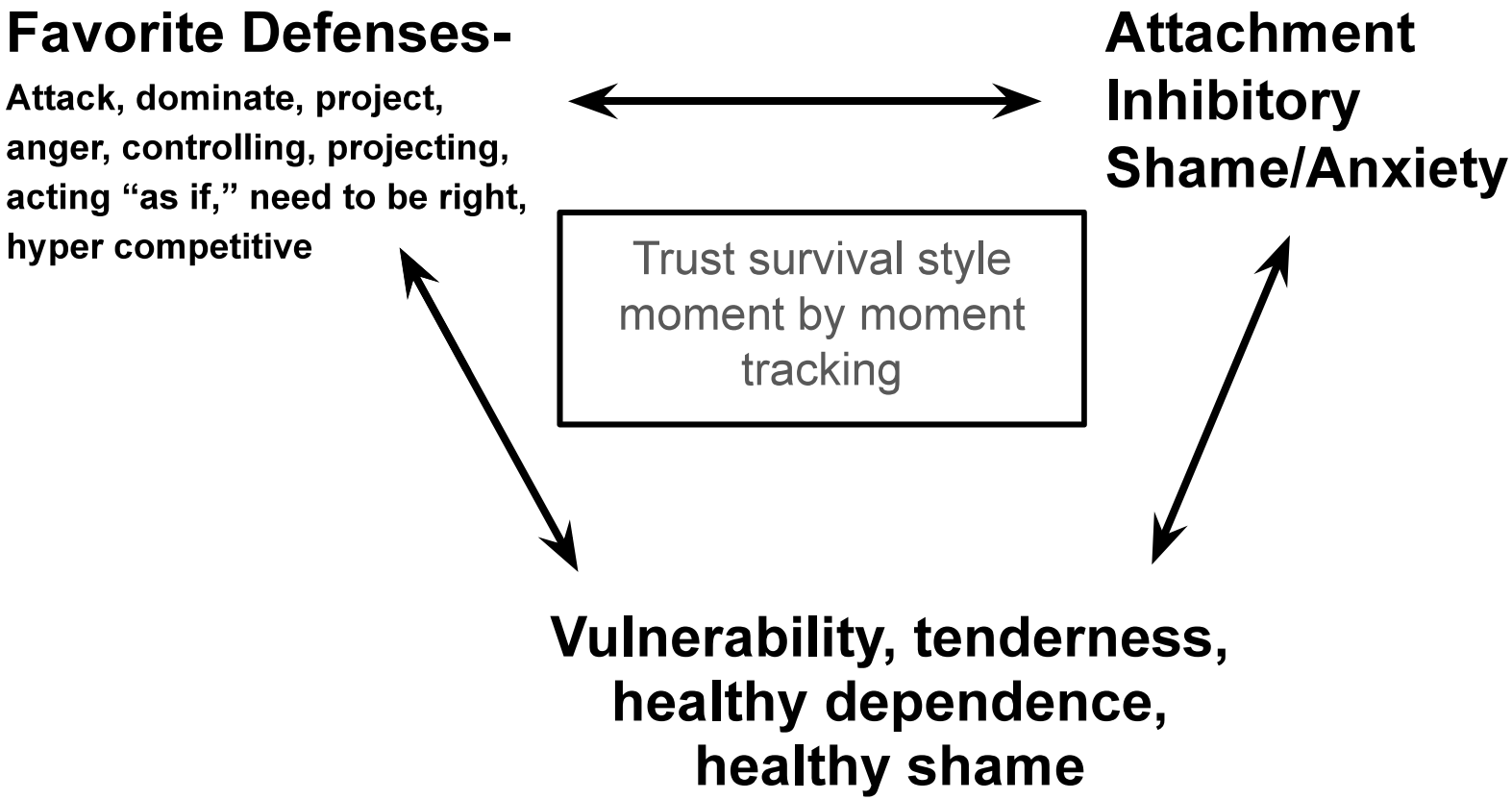


- ➔ **Avoid direct confrontation ("poking the bear").** Instead mirroring and validation to build trust.
- ➔ Address the betrayal as children and help them become aware of how they have kept this betrayal alive in their adult lives by creating a false self at the expense to what is most real in them. **It may take some time to get there.**
- ➔ Corrective experience either with the therapist or partner in couples therapy: I can be vulnerable and I don't get hurt with an attuned presence; in fact, I feel closer. Make space and time for these moments!
- ➔ Help them shift from the need for self-sufficiency and control to more capacity for healthy dependency and vulnerability.

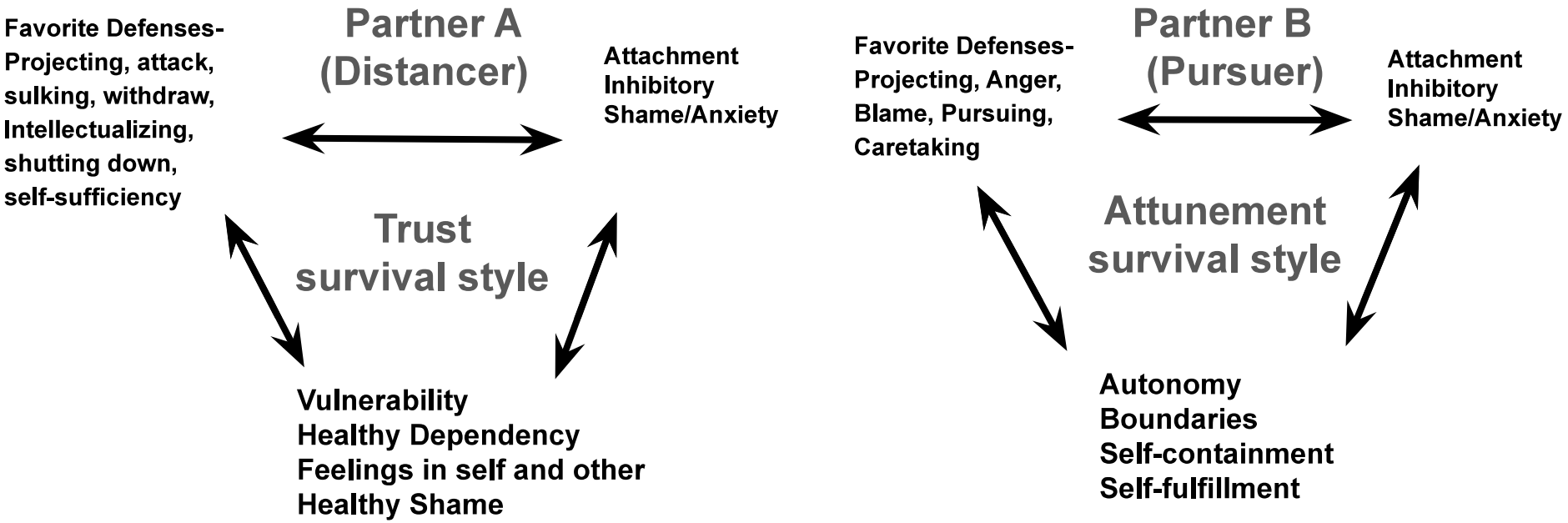
Moving to Resolution



- ➔ Holding compassion for the underlying pain. Empathize with the impact on the self and the need to protect against the pain and then **GENTLY** identify the function of the defense to protect against the pain.
- ➔ "It makes so much sense to me that you protected yourself against the hurt and betrayal! You promised yourself that you would never feel that way again!"
- ➔ Explore the cost of holding onto this survival style: Failed relationships, loneliness, depression, and all the **energy expended to maintain a false self**!
- ➔ Facing the profound grief and pain of betrayal, where trust was broken and from there, SLOWLY learning how to allow genuine, reciprocal relationships in your life.
- ➔ **Holding dilemma: I want more depth in my relationships, but fear it.**


Favorite Defenses-
Attack, dominate, project, anger, controlling, projecting, acting "as if," need to be right, hyper competitive
Attachment Inhibitory Shame/Anxiety
Trust survival style moment by moment tracking
Vulnerability, tenderness, healthy dependence, healthy shame

The Dance of Pursuer/Distancer



Trust Survival Client: A Vignette

51-year old male comes to you because his wife tells him it would be good idea to get some therapy. He starts each session with a litany of complaints. And you ask, "In light of what you're saying what is it that you really want for yourself today."

But he continues with his "being done to" mantra and you continue to mirror with understanding and validation with a clear and direct disposition. On session eleven, you **ask the contract question again** and this time he says, "I feel so lonely and you want to more depth in my relationships." And he starts to open up more about his childhood. **Eureka!**

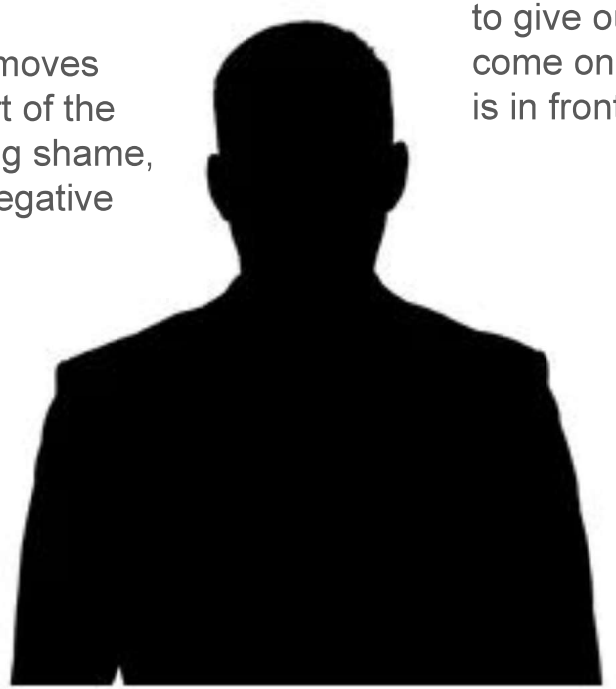
"It sounds like your parents placed an image on you and then you identified with it. You were so young; what choice did you have?! Makes sense to me! It was your way to try to earn love." But at what cost? "Now it feels like people have an agenda with you (including your wife) and you feel overly stressed." Over the subsequent sessions, he starts to slowly open up to you and feels safe and more connected doing so (corrective experience).

He comes in one week with a big smile on his face: "My wife told me that she wants to give you a big hug (true story)."

Bottom up processing

1. Somatic experience: Accelerated heart rate, tension in musculature, shallow breathing, quesy in belly, baseball size tension in the sternum.

2. Sensation moves into limbic part of the brain activating shame, anxiety and negative associations.



3. Pause and reflect, take a breath to give our prefrontal cortex time to come on line so we can see what is in front of us.

4. Great intervention for individuals and couples. Help your clients bring more awareness to their bodies see how they automatically **react** from their bottom up experiences. Mindfulness and corrective experiences can help us be less reactive and help us choose how we respond!