Intrinsic Change
Training for Helping Professionals

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The Neuroexperiential Model (NEM)

Quick reference

NEM — David Grand's psychotherapy theory (macro-frame) underneath brainspotting.

1 Neuro-experience

Bottom-up; the "what" over the "why"

Interoception, focused mindfulness, eye position, body reflexes, implicit and explicit feedback

2 Dual attunement frame

Relational attunement + neuro attunement

Compassionate presence, co-developing the frame, WAIT (why am I talking?), following the comet, noticing reflexes and eye movements

3 Uncertainty principle

Brain, body, world always changing

Humility, flexibility, no rigid protocols, following the comet, mindful acceptance, compassionate inquiry

4 Liberatory practice

Healing tied to culture, identity, power

Cultural humility, self-disclosure, client's language and worldview, self-reflection, spirituality, intuition, identity

Top-down vs. bottom-up

	Top-down	Bottom-up
Brain	Neocortex	Subcortical
Tools	Language, reasoning	Interoception, mindfulness
Focus	Why	What

Dual attunement

Relational	Neuro
Trust, rapport, nonjudgment, accurate empathy	Reflexes, body language, eye movement
Safety, community	Access to deeper, less-conscious brain and body

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Addendum: full text

The Neuroexperiential Model (NEM) of healing and expansion is the psychotherapy theory (or macro-frame) created by David Grand that serves as the foundation for brainspotting therapy practice. Psychotherapy theories guide therapists in how they work with themselves and others in the therapy room; theory helps to frame therapeutic issues, therapy goals, and therapist interventions (Kazdin, 2000). David Grand's NEM builds on existing integrative and "bottom-up" psychotherapy theories, and the NEM provides a ground for the practice of brainspotting therapy. The NEM can currently be grouped into four overarching principles: 1) Neuro-experience, 2) Dual Attunement Frame, 3) Uncertainty Principle, and 4) Liberatory Practice (Grand, 2021).

Neuro-experience

Most traditional talk therapies work from the "top down," meaning that the therapist engages the neocortical brain using language, reasoning, and cognition; eventually this can result in changes to subcortical brain functions like emotional experiences and traumatic reactions. The NEM and several other trauma-based therapy theories use a "bottom-up" model that aims to work first with the deeper subcortical parts of our brain using interoception and mindfulness (Grabbe & Miller-Karas, 2018). In the NEM, the "what" of the deeper brain (information, experience, sensations, etc.) is more important in healing than the "why" of the neocortical brain (reason, logic, language, etc.).

Grand explains that the "neuro" of the NEM refers to "the nervous system, the neurobiology, the brain and the body which are primarily unconscious" (Grand, 2021, p. 3). The "experience" part of neuro-experience refers to using our six senses (feeling, smell, sound, vision, taste, and thought) along with body and eye position to notice what is happening in our bodies. Neuro-experiencing is the activity of bringing awareness to the internal sensations of our body and brain (e.g., memories, feelings, thoughts, images) without judgment. Brainspotting skills and therapeutic qualities related to neuro-experience include interoception, focused mindfulness, eye position, observation of body reflexes, and seeking implicit and explicit feedback.

Dual Attunement Frame

Most therapy models highlight the importance of compassion, connection, and empathy in the therapeutic process. It is widely agreed that the therapeutic relationship is one of the most important factors in therapy regardless of modality (Stubbe, 2018). The NEM expands the classical therapeutic alliance with the concept of the dual attunement frame. The dual attunement frame highlights the

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importance of noticing and responding to both 1) the therapist-client relationship (trust, rapport, nonjudgment, accurate empathy, etc.) and 2) the client's brain and body experience (reflexes, body language, eye movement, etc.). Relational attunement is the foundation for creating the safety and community needed for healing; neuro attunement allows access to deeper, less-conscious parts of our brains and bodies. Brainspotting skills and therapeutic qualities related to dual attunement include compassionate presence, co-developing the frame, patience (WAIT: why am I talking?), following the comet (trusting the client and lower brain to guide), and noticing reflexes and eye movements.

Uncertainty Principle

Change and uncertainty are undeniably part of our human experience. David Grand often cites the Greek philosopher Heraclitus: "No man steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." The human brain is also in a constant state of change, with a rough estimate of 100 trillion to 20 quadrillion synaptic firings per second (Bryant, 2013). Our bodies, environments, and internal experiences are always in flux. Given the complexity and change in our bodies, consciousness, and environment, uncertainty helps us stay connected with reality. By embracing the uncertainty of the healing process, we can be better connected with what arises. We can drop our expertise and rigidity in favor of flexibility, creativity, and openness. Grand often states that true attunement is impossible without embracing uncertainty. Brainspotting skills and therapeutic qualities associated with the uncertainty principle include humility, flexibility and rejection of protocols, following the comet, mindful acceptance, and compassionate inquiry.

Liberatory Practice

Liberation psychotherapy incorporates social, historical, and cultural context into the therapy process. It aims to promote social justice and emancipatory approaches in therapy through consciousness building, advocacy, intervention, and other means (Comas-Díaz, 2020). Likewise, the NEM includes factors such as socially engineered trauma, intergenerational trauma, and the mental health impacts of social exclusion and oppression. The NEM rejects the supremacy of the Western medical model, which has traditionally focused on compliance and on pathologizing human suffering. Instead, the NEM aims to de-pathologize and broaden perspectives on human experience, and it seeks to incorporate a diversity of worldviews, wisdom traditions, and healing practices. The NEM posits that healing is inextricably tied to culture, identity, and the social context of power structures. Rather than compliance-based models of therapy, the NEM seeks to promote liberation from the internalized and somatic impacts of oppression and social exclusion. Skills and therapeutic qualities related to the

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liberation principle include cultural humility, self-disclosure, using the language and worldview of the client, self-reflection, and incorporating spirituality, intuition, and identity into the healing process.

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Further reading

Heller, D. P. (2024). What is brainspotting and how does it work? Trauma Solutions. traumasolutions.com

By Jesse Jonesberg, MSW, LCSW, CPS, drawing on David Grand's teaching, lectures and writings, including Brainspotting as a Neuroexperiential Process for Healing and Expansion (2021)