



early risers

Waking up to racial equity
in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 7, Episode 7: [Rupture and Repair, Part 2](#), released August 20, 2025

Learning Goal: Learn additional strategies of Dr. Anne Gearity's Developmental Repair method and explore terminology that can influence mindsets and responses to children and their behaviors. Discover stories which illustrate practical applications of Developmental Repair and The Whole Child Model. Consider implementing specific behaviors and language that adults can use when interacting with young children to help repair and support positive identity development.

Suggested Conversation Length: 60 minutes



[Early Risers](#) is a podcast focused on how to talk with young children about race. The podcast invites early childhood experts into conversations about how parents, caregivers and early childhood educators can tackle this big topic with the little ones in their lives.

Background

In this second episode of a two-part series, we continue our conversation with Dr. Anne Gearity about her seminal work in developmental repair. In our previous episode we learned about the basics of developmental repair and how caregivers help dysregulated children become regulated. But what happens when a caregiver doesn't look like the child, or is not part of their community? Dr. Gearity explains how building a "bridge" with the child can help the child feel safe and help the caregiver earn the child's trust.

We also learn what developmental repair looks like on the ground. Chantell Johnson, a practitioner of Dr. Gearity's model, says when kids "don't have the language to tell you, they'll show you." And that can be confusing for adults who are working with pre-verbal children. But it can be equally confusing for the child, who also may not understand their own behavior. "Kids are really doing the best they can with what they have, even when it's inappropriate."

Guest Bios

Dr. Anne Gearity earned her Ph.D. in clinical social work from the Institute for Clinical Social Work in Chicago, IL. Research from her dissertation was foundational for Developmental Repair, an intervention manual for behaviorally challenged and challenging children, written in collaboration with the Washburn Center for Children in Minneapolis. This manual is now used extensively throughout the state. She taught for 25 years at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work and was faculty of the U of M's Infant and Early Child Mental Health Certificate program in the Institute for Child Development.

Chantell Johnson is an MSW Candidate at the University of Minnesota. She's also the Community Wellness Program Manager & Family Academy Facilitator at the Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis, MN.

Discussion Questions

- Host Andre Dukes opens this episode by asking Dr. Anne Gearity about the role adults need to play when they might not "look like" the child who is dysregulated. Reflect on her comments and make connections to your interactions with children when they are dysregulated.
- Throughout the podcast Dr. Gearity introduces several terms used in the Developmental Repair model. Discuss the following behavioral terminology as you understand them: Intruding vs. Joining, Impose vs. Invite, Rupture vs. Repair. How might you implement Dr. Gearity's recommendations to support Developmental Repair in children?
- Dr. Gearity spends some time talking about reciprocity and mutuality, and how fear-based approaches impact young children. In your experience, how do racial tensions and power differentials affect mutuality? How do you imagine lost mutuality affects the parent-child relationship and the teacher-child relationship? What can be done to repair mutuality?
- After talking about fear-based approaches, Dr. Gearity folds in how unconscious and conscious bias can impact adults' responses to children. Reflect on ways you experienced discipline at home and/or at school as a child. How did it impact you? In what ways do you think biases (racial, gender or otherwise) impact young children's identity development?

- A conversation unfolds about ways in which some African American families may approach parenting. How could some of the examples shared by Dukes and Dr. Gearity be directly influenced by racialized trauma and by parents' reparative efforts as well? How do the lived experiences of individuals (and communities) inform identities from early childhood to adulthood?
- Guest Chantell Johnson is a practitioner of Dr. Gearity's Developmental Repair model. She believes that children need safe adults to regulate and navigate life and that Developmental Repair and The Whole Child Model can help adults learn those skills. What models or approaches are you using to be a "safe adult" and to help young children regulate?
- Dukes asks Johnson to define "big behaviors" and explain what children's behaviors are communicating. How can adults misread and misinterpret behaviors? Instead of asking a child "why" they did something, what else can we ask or say?
- Johnson shares several phrases that adults can use when talking with young children who are experiencing big behaviors or emotions. Reflect on this statement: "This is what's happening now, but it's not who you are." Why is this particular phrase important to young children's identity development?
- Dukes provides a brief overview of The Whole Child Model. Johnson shares concrete examples of daily rituals called "Strong Start" that are intended to support the whole child. How do you think these specific strategies impact children's [whole] development? How do they impact classroom and potentially home settings?
- Throughout the episode, Johnson and Dr. Gearity recommend numerous behaviors, phrases, questions and comments adults can use when interacting with young children. What are some key examples that resonated with you? How does communication – through adults' behaviors and language – promote repair and identity development in young children?

Closing the Discussion

As you close the discussion, encourage reflection on practical applications of the specific strategies shared in this podcast: Developmental Repair, The Whole Child Model, Strong Start rituals, and seeing children's identity beyond their current emotions and behaviors. Identify a goal for responding to challenging behavior differently and in a way that will repair and support positive identity development in children. Share your goal and key learnings from this episode with one another. Finally, share relevant resources including previous episodes of the Early Risers Podcast and their corresponding discussion guides.

Additional Resources

- [Northside Achievement Zone](#)
- Dr. Rita Pierson - [Every Child Needs a Champion](#)
- [Developmental Repair Manual](#) (2012, Gearity)
- [Dr. Anne Gearity](#) University of Minnesota Dept of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

General Facilitator Tips

- Read through all the questions first.
- Reiterate the purpose of the discussion is to learn from each other.
- Create an agreement with everyone in the discussion group that helps create a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere. Acknowledge that talking about race can be difficult.
- Be sensitive to how people identify.
- Be prepared for a response to any remarks that might be offensive. The person saying it may not be aware that it is offensive, so be gentle in pointing it out.

Group Agreements

Ground rules and group agreements are a way to respect safety. Ask members to brainstorm and collectively determine group agreements. Here is some information you can reference:

- [Group agreement information from Seeds for Change](#)
- [Community Agreements tool from Just Lead Washington](#)
- [Sample group agreement from GSAFE](#)

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