

# *The Carter-Jenkins Center*

*presents*



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# Working Psychotherapeutically with Children and Adolescents Who Resort to Violence



# Themes of the paper

- Is there a difference between aggression and violence?
- Why does someone act violently?
- Are there developmental factors that set someone on the road to violence?
- Are there danger signs or triggers that we can be alert to?
- How can we work with patients who are violent?
- These points will be illustrated with 3 clinical examples

# Differences between aggression and violence

## Aggression:

- a major source of energy
- vital for progressive development
- necessary for assertion and protection of self and other
- necessary for effective learning and work
- necessary for separation and autonomy
- it can be used constructively or destructively

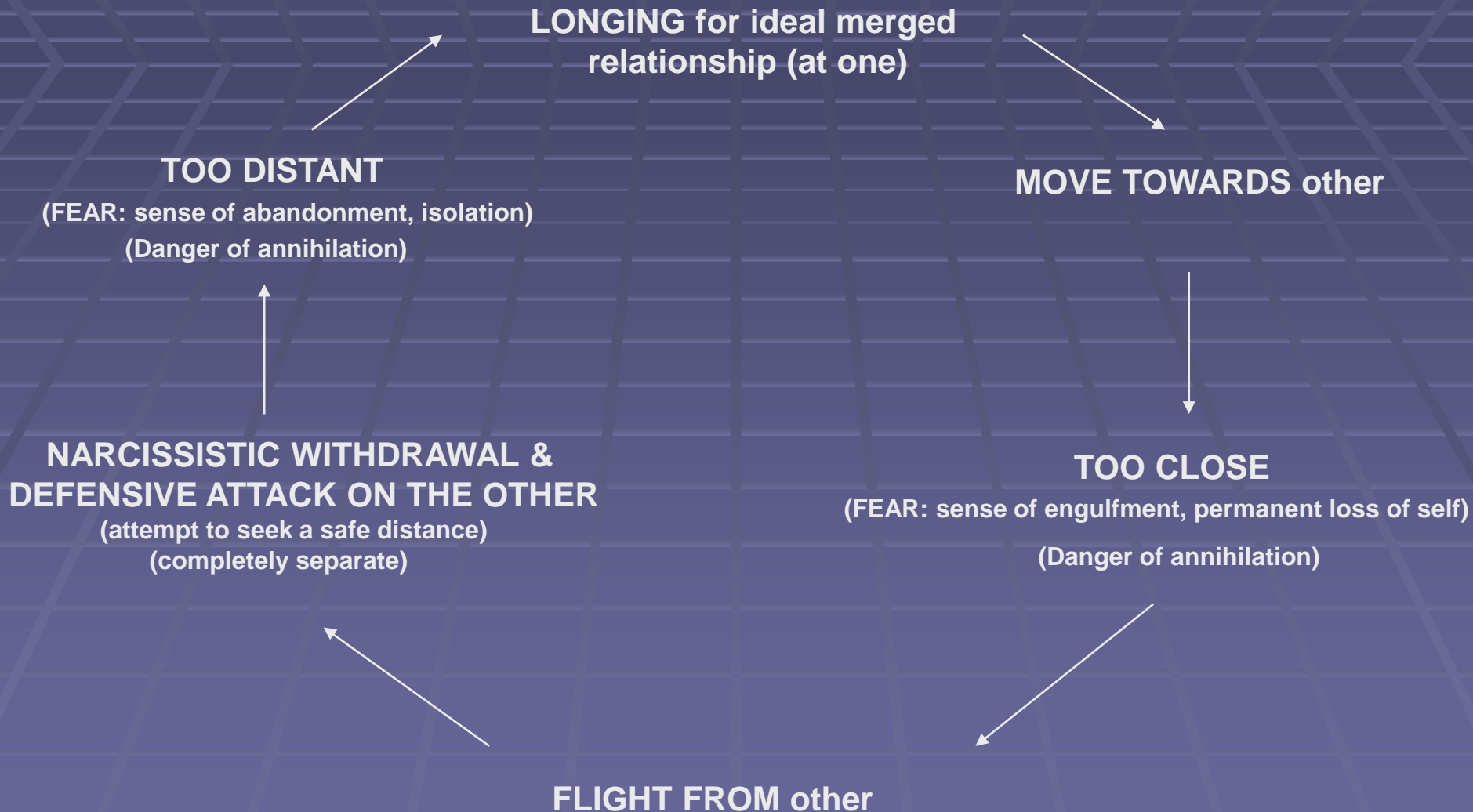
## Violence:

- A physical attack on the body of another person when this is not developmentally age-appropriate or in response to real physical danger

# Causes of the violent act

- The most primitive (physical) response to a perceived threat to the integrity of the psychological self
- An attempted solution to the overwhelming unprocessed trauma of being helpless in the absence of a protective other.
- Self-preservative violence erupts to destroy the person who threatens psychic annihilation of the self

# THE 'VICIOUS CIRCLE' OF THE CORE COMPLEX



# Developmental sources

- Deficient emotional development leaving aggression unbound by love
- Lack of mother's protective function leading to the building of a rigid internal barrier
- Parental attitudes and handling
- Distorted superego development



# Danger signs or triggers to violence

## Fears and anxieties :

- Helplessness
- Humiliation
- Fear of annihilation in relation to **core complex** terrors of engulfment and abandonment

# Implications for working with the violent patient

- Don't focus only on aggression but acknowledge health and strengths
- Consider the developmental factors, dangers and triggers
- Empathise with his feelings, thus offering the missing protective function, but recognise his fear of intimacy
- Try to establish a safe setting but understand that he will be frightened of you
- Be very careful not to seem dismissive, intrusive, humiliating or punitive
- Be aware that his primitive anxieties will trigger your own
- Recognise his potential violence whilst being receptive to his needs
- Perceive him as both a perpetrator and a victim

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# The End

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