



# LEARNING WEEK 2021



## **Making up is more important than breaking up: the rupture-repair cycle and relationships during the pandemic**

**Dr Suzanne Zeedyk**

### **Full transcript**

0:05

Hello, everyone. I am delighted to be with you today as part of Learning week and to talk about something that we will all have been experiencing during lockdown that many people may not realize that.

0:19

And I hope that as I talk about the rupture or repair cycle, it will help to bring a lot of comfort to all of us, coping with this really odd time.

0:31

So, let me pull up some PowerPoint slides.

0:37

So if we wanted to give that idea, a particularly evocative title, what might we call it? Well, I tried this.

0:46

Making up is more important than breaking, especially during a pandemic.

0:55

Or, we might have called it this.

0:58

The relief of knowing about the rupture repair cycle, and to have that relevant to family, friends, and colleagues.

1:11

Because I do think it's a relief to understand how valuable and helpful to relationships making up is, and one of the best ways to learn, that is when that film inside out.

1:30

Now I do love that a Pixar film with cartoon characters.

1:38

It's one of the best ways that I know, for helping us to understand science.

1:44

So I hope that some of you watching this, will be thinking, "I've seen that, I've seen that 100 times."

1:50

Some of you might be thinking, "I've been meaning to watch that film, but I've never seen it yet."

1:56

Some of you might be thinking, "I've never heard of that film. What are you talking about?"

2:02

So if you have seen this film, you might recognize the storyline.

2:08

And if you haven't, you might go watch this film afterwards.

2:12

Because it gives us an insight to the value of making up.

2:20

It's a film about a little girl named Riley.

2:24

She's 11 years old, and she's had a really happy life up till now until her parents decided that they wanted to move and she misses home.

2:34

She's really struggling in San Francisco that she never asked to move to in the first place.

2:40

And there's a really crucial scene in that film.

2:45

Where Riley is very, very sad.

2:48

She's been trying to get her parents to listen to the fact that she doesn't really like San Francisco, that she is really sad living here and she's struggling.

2:58

She needs some help with all that struggle.

3:02

But here's the crucial thing.

3:05

The crucial moment in this movie.

3:09

In fact, where the whole storyline is leading her, her parents have not been able to hear that she is sad, and that's meant it's been harder for Riley.

3:21

And so there's a crucial thing.

3:26

When she gets angry, and she shouts, and her dad doesn't like it.

3:33

So, because he doesn't know that her shouting is coming actually from distress, he sends her to her room up those stairs at the back of this scene.

3:45

In other words, it creates even more and more distance between Riley and her parents, and it comes from the fact that they have not been able to hear her sadness. They haven't been able to talk about what she's feeling, and so really craft a plan.

4:02

She's gonna run away. She's gonna go back home.

4:06

Where she misses, she's going to get herself back to what she longs for.

4:12

And this is the scene, which she is heading out the door.

4:15

And this is the scene where she gets on the bus.

4:19

She has booked herself a ticket for, at 11 years old, Riley is creating a rupture.

4:26

She's running away from home, because she doesn't feel included.

4:32

She doesn't feel like she belongs. She doesn't really feel safe in the relationship anymore because her parents haven't been able to hear her sadness.

4:42

They wanted her to be happy. They thought San Francisco would work well for them.

4:48

So the idea that it isn't working for their daughter is hard for them to face up to, and they've kind of been protecting themselves from Riley's feelings.

4:57

Because they tried to cheer her up, and it's led to this.

5:01

It's led to her running away on a bus.

5:05

Now, because it's a Pixar movie, there's one final chance.

5:10

This is the theme where Riley changes her mind, she decides to get off the bus.

5:15

Go home, Give her parents one last try.

5:20

And now we're back to that scene that you've seen.

5:24

Riley has just come through the door, her parents are shocked.

5:29

They don't know where she's been, they realize she was gone and they were frantic. they didn't know how to find her.

5:35

Riley comes through the door.

5:38

And finally is able to say, I am really sad, you can see it in her eyes.

5:45

And here is such an important moment in that part of the story.

5:52

Her parents finally listened to her.

5:56

We can see them all big-eyed here tuning in to what Riley is feeling.

6:02

Even though it's a really uncomfortable feeling uncomfortable for her because sadness is hard and uncomfortable for them because they contributed to that sadness.

6:14

But the point of the story is that it is in there finally in their ability to listen to what wryly is feeling, that the family has a moment of repair.

6:29

And we can see it really clearly in this scene as they all lean into each other.

6:35

And the strength of their relationship is renewed.

6:41

This is a moment of repair.

6:45

And this is what it looks like when the scientists talk about it.

6:51

There is a cycle, called the rupture repair cycle, which infant psychologist and others who work with families have tried to understand the dynamics.

7:05

And so what I've just been telling you, the story of with Riley and our parents is an example of the rupture repair cycle. And I think it is the most valuable thing that we can know about relationships.

7:19

Because there's a huge relief in knowing that you can have a really tricky time.

7:24

Your daughter can get so angry at you that she wants to run away.

7:28

You can have hurt her feelings, and it will still be OK if you can get back to a place where you can hear feelings.

7:39

So, what does that cycle look like through the eyes of scientists?

7:43

It looks like this. relate rupture repair, relate, rupture repair.

7:48

The point of this cycle is that we all go through this hundreds of times a day, in little ways, and sometimes in big ways.

8:01

So we've just heard about a big way when there was a big bus stop in the family. But you can also go through it in little ways.

8:07

like when you leave the room, to go make a cup of tea, or when you can't see your sister, because we are in a pandemic, so you colour instead, because you're missing her.

8:22

All these little moments of disconnection, which then lead back to connection are examples of the rupture or repair cycle.

8:32

Now, here's one fascinating thing that scientists have discovered.

8:37

That in healthy relationships, roughly one third of our time, is spent in each stage of this cycle.

8:44

In other words, this is just ordinary stuff.

8:48

And we go round and round that cycle.

8:51

As I said, multiple times a day, OK, so that's look at it a tiny bit more closely.

9:02

The most important moment in that cycle is repair.

9:08

That's why I've told us a story of it.

9:11

It is in moments of repair that trust is built in relationships.

9:17

And it's because we've come through a hard time or we come through a little tiny disconnection and we've come back together, trust is built and knowing that we will be there for each other, whatever has happened, OK. Here's the next insight.

9:38

Resilience in relationships comes from this shift between rupture to repair. I love knowing this.

9:49

Resilience is built in the shift from rupture to repair.

9:55

In other words, you can't build trust in a relationship unless you have ruptures.

10:02

They're actually to be welcomed.

10:05

Even when they're hard, you can't build trust in a relationship except after moments of rupture of disconnection.

10:17

So when a baby looks away and then she looks back, she finds her parents face waiting for her smiling, and so she knows that she can look away and then come back. Or maybe her parents' faces not looking at or maybe your parents' faces looking at the mobile phone.

10:38

That'll be OK.

10:41

That moment of disconnection. extended disconnection will be OK.

10:47

As long as it ends, finally, in reconnection, in repair.

10:54

where difficulty comes in relationships is when rupture doesn't lead to repair.

11:00

When you skip over the fact that you had a difficult time or you got disconnected from each other, and you couldn't get back to place of connection.

11:11



I think there is huge relief in knowing that when relationships have moments of difficulty, it's going to be OK as long as we focus and get back to repair.

11:25

And then finally, once you're back to repair, we can come back to Relate.

11:30

And those are the moments where we have emotional intimacy, where we add where we hang out together, where we have fun together where it fills easy.

11:41

And that moment of relate will give back two moment of rupture.

11:47

This is really ordinary stuff in ordinary, healthy relationships.

11:53

And I think people deserve to know about it, because I think it helps us to relax.

11:59

I sometimes summarize it this way that making up is more important than messing up.

12:07

But today, I called it making up is more important than breaking up.

12:11

Because the length of disconnection in this pandemic has really felt like breaking up too many people.

12:22

It has felt really, really heavy.

12:27

And so, I just wanted to highlight some of the ways that we have really been experiencing this during the pandemic so that we can think about the consequences of this time and we can think about how to move on to the next stages. We start to look forward now to the end of lockdown.

12:45

We're not just going to go back to normal.

12:47

We're going to need a period of reconnection and healing and finding out what has been happening for all of us and we're going to need to pay attention to that in order to heal healthily from this time.

13:01

So let's just have a little bit of think about where this cycle has been applying.

13:07

to the way we've all been living.

13:11

It's been relevant to the relationships of colleagues.

13:17

Do you know many people have welcomed furlough. It's kept many people in jobs.

13:22

But I've talked to many people who've also struggled with furlough.

13:27

So sometimes some of the team got furloughed and others of the team didn't.

13:34

For some people, that's been really hard, they've almost taken that as a rejection, as a rupture.

13:40

How come I got furloughed and other people didn't? Am I not wanted?

13:45

That was really hard being away from all of you, especially when all of us aren't furloughed.

13:51

Paying attention to what furlough has felt like, especially if it has felt different ways to different team members, will be an important part of recovering from this pandemic, building cultures where people can talk about what furlough felt like will help that to happen.

14:15

For some people furlough was time in homes with your family, who you liked. For others,

14:22

furlough meant a time of loneliness because they're on their own. For some they were furloughed in a crowded house of people where there was lots of rupture going on.

14:34

So, I'm just trying to give an example of the way the rupture or repair cycle has intersected with economic decisions.

14:44

And that as we start to come to the next phase, one thing we could look at is people's experiences, a furlough.

14:53

Here's another one. This is an early years setting and many early years settings are not coping and have been for some time actually coping with the pandemic by dividing their teams into bubbles.

15:07

That's the difference.

15:09

Often, the teams used to work together more as a cohesive whole.

15:13

And so I've talked to a number of early years teams, where they're actually struggling with the fact that their other team members are in a different room or a different space.

15:24

Or maybe they're alternating between who is outside and who's inside.

15:29

The children might be struggling as well to be in bubbles not to be with your friends. Yes. Us keeping us safe.

15:37

But it creates a rupture.

15:40

So if we can find ways to think about the experience of that rupture, to create connection, to have opportunities, the way that our friends, or to have opportunities for staff, to reconnect, just my facial expressions.

15:56

Maybe my wave, it may be by being sure that you have a time of reconnection at the end of the day which has had disconnection in it.

16:04

That will help in getting through this time until we get back.

16:10

Get back, listen to me. That makes it sound like we're gonna go back to normal.

16:16

We're not gonna go back to normal.

16:18

We're going to go on to something else.

16:21

But we will have been changed by this pandemic.

16:25

And so, thinking about what that has felt like, and where some of the disconnection that we hadn't anticipated has come from, so that we can hear each other's feelings, will help us in doing this in a healthy way.

16:42

How about family?

16:44

This is an This is just him.

16:46

You know? A tenant building on a street.

16:50

We don't know what's been happening in families.

16:52

We're starting to hear reports, but I think we are likely to hear much more.

16:59

Some families have enjoyed this time together.

17:03

It has not been so much a rupture for them.

17:06

Other families have been crowded too much together and they've got tense and there has been a lot of ruptures.

17:14

And, if there hasn't been a focus on repair, perhaps, because parents are tired, perhaps, because family culture hasn't actually highlighted repair.

17:23

Perhaps, because parents are stressed, then, that means that the family has been through an extended time of ruptures.

17:32

And, as pressure may be, starts to ease, What can we do to create a bigger period of repair, to really focus on repair?

17:43

And that will get us through, as families, even really difficult times of the last months.

17:50

And, of course, there are some families who really experience a lot more domestic violence.

17:55

That domestic violence might not have happened so severely if people weren't crammed together and trapped with their abuser. That will carry long term consequences for our society, and I think it's worth saying, so that we don't hide from it.

18:15

And we can think really carefully about what do we do now as we come toward the end of lockdown.

18:23

What do we do to help and creating healing for those families, too?

18:28

And as long as we're talking about hard things, we've all seen these news stories of families who have grieved at not being able to see loved ones in care homes and sometimes nothing they're at their desk.

18:42

We're going to need to think about the grief that our country is carrying.

18:49

If we think of that as a rupture in today's world, words that I'm using, how can we mark that grief so that we have forms of re connection in relationships, even if those people are no longer here with us?

19:05

I know that's a hard thing to think about.

19:08

But I wanted to pop it in because there have been so much death and so much separation.

19:15

If we think about it in terms of the rupture or repair cycle, then we can start to think about, How do we help to create and just experiences of reconnection and to help others, to have that, so that we can heal from this difficult time.

19:36

And finally, lots of us are longing to see trends, to have relaxed time with our partners. I loved this piece from the Metro.

19:46

It was trying to help people to know what the coffee shop rules were, so that you could spend time your friends, your partners, your loved ones.

19:59

This is a moment of repair.

20:01

That's what's in this image, and yes, it's a joyful image. Yes, we can see the smiles. Yes, that makes sense to all of us at an intuitive level. That's the point for me.

20:14

The rupture repair cycle is an ordinary part of ordinary human lives.

20:19

It's just that sometimes, we don't realize there's a cycle.

20:22

And sometimes, we take the power of reconnection for granted.

20:28

And so, I hope that one of the things you might have taken away from my contribution to Learning Week is the power of exactly that of reconnection.

20:40

And I laugh that there are more and more people talking about it. So if you would like to have to have some resources and to understand more of the science about this, then here's a recommendation. For me. This book came out in last summer. So it's called *The Power of Discord* and it's all about the ruptured repair cycle. It's by Ed Tronick and Claudia Gold. And you can see that the subtitle is *why the ups and downs and Relationships are the secret to Building Intimacy, resilience, and trust*.

21:15

That's exactly what I was trying to say. Just a wee bit of go, with that image of the rupture repair cycle, Ed Tronick, is one of the leading developmental psychologists.

21:24

His can tap is to understand with his research, how the rupture repair cycle works.

21:31

And Claudia Gold is a pediatrician who tries to help families, who she works with, to see the power of relationships as well. So this is a great book. And if you would like to hear somebody talking immediately, as we get off this, here's a lovely two minute film from Allen Schore, who is also an infant psychologist.

21:54

And he, too, is a leading voice on the rupture repair cycle, and on how important that is to relationships. So you could just pull that up.

22:04

If you Google for that video and you will understand a bit more about the science that underpins what I have been talking about today.

22:14

But I especially love that the best tool I know to help us to really get this idea is a Pixar film that never uses the phrase rupture or repair cycle.

22:27

But instead gives us five cartoon characters to help us to think about the emotions that live in Riley's head.

22:37

And, if we could have more of those kinds of tools, fun, relaxing, engaging, to help people to know the power of relationships, then I think we would all benefit.

22:52

So thank you for having me today to give one little tiny insight, and yet, one of the most important insights I think, that we can have.

23:05

And that's because it is such a relief to know.

23:12

Making up is more important.

23:15

Thank you so much, It has been a delight to be here today and I hope that I have offered something that's a real value to you in the coming weeks as you get through lockdown.

23:29

And then, as we come to the next page, reconnection across our society.

23:37

Thank you.