

Parents as Partners: Bringing Positive Change to the family system by engaging and reconnecting caregivers with their child

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Parental resistance?

- Turn to a neighbor and brainstorm as many ideas as to why parents are hesitant to being involved in their child's counseling services.

Parents may feel....



Presenting Demeanor of Parents

- Frustration
 - Tried everything and nothing works
- “Just fix my child”
- Powerlessness
- Feeling blamed
 - Failing as a parent



**"AS CHILDREN DEVELOP, THEIR
BRAINS MIRROR THEIR
PARENT'S BRAIN.
AS PARENTS BECOME MORE
AWARE AND EMOTIONALLY
HEALTHY, THEIR CHILDREN
REAP THE REWARDS AND MOVE
TOWARD HEALTH AS WELL."**

- Dr. Daniel Siegel

Stressors faced by parents

- **Parents want the best for their children**
 - Problems and stressors can create feelings of fear, anger, and doubt of parenting ability.
- **Stressors**
 - Unrealistic societal expectations
 - Financial
 - Power/dynamic/authority
 - Family communication systems
 - Parenting styles and discipline
 - Work life balance

Parent Identities

- **The Doers**

- Typically, successful in other areas of their lives
- Read every parenting book, try every strategy
- May have a hard time connecting with their child- molding their child to fit their definition of “healthy”
- Benefit from support to meet their child where they are. “Be with” the child
- Protective play in therapy
- 5-10 minutes of child-led play

- **The Deflectors**

- Carry around shame and negative self-talk about their parenting
- Deflect emotions onto their child
 - If you didn't spill the milk, then I wouldn't yell.
- Culture of the home needs to be modified-help individuals take responsibility for their emotions

Parent Identities

- The Parents who are just done
 - Exhausted their internal resources and cope by checking out of parenting
 - Allow the children to tend to themselves
 - Don't enforce boundaries
 - Unlikely to seek treatment but find out what motivates them

(Goodyear-Brown, 2021)

Challenges to working with children

- Involving parents in the counseling process
 - Structure of session
 - Frequency
 - Balancing parent/child confidentiality
- Developing a strong therapeutic alliance with the parents
- Urgency by which you respond to a parent's request to target challenging behaviors (Fix them now)
- Parents' ambivalent feelings towards their children
- Parents serve as the gateway to their child

Are parents necessary in the process?

- The influence of play therapists/counselors may be limited if they do not include caregivers in the process
- Parents need a safe space where they can bring their shame, mistakes and frustrations about their child to share in a judgment free zone

Judgment free zone- This is an activity from Paris

- My child is so....
- When my child screams, I want to...
- Sometimes I wish...
- I am disgusted when my child...

(Goodyear-Brown, 2021)

Why include parents

- Builds a belief that parents are caring and available
- Helps develop a safeguard for stressors which can lead to mental health concerns
- **Allows the child to feel loved and develops a belief that they are worthy to be loved**
- **Family dynamics and meeting treatment goals can be strengthened by including and supporting families who are developing the needed skills (Butler, 2021).**

Goals of incorporating parents into session

- Self-reflection and understanding
- Collaborative communication
- Connecting with their children

Help parents work through

- Allowing their child to be with another person
- Being okay with psychological separateness
- Individuation and autonomy
- Building a trusting relationship with the therapist
- At times, their own attachment concerns



(Novick & Novick, 2005)

Parent sessions

- Separate caregiver meeting every three sessions
 - The need for more frequent contact
 - Crisis situations
- Meet with parents first 10 minutes or last 10 minutes of session
 - Confidential space for child
- Contemporary psychoanalytic therapists
 - Work with parents should be flexible and often precedes work with children
- Parents tend to struggle on knowing how to parent their children. Oftentimes, their parent style is based on how they were parented.

Conceptual Models of Parent Sessions

- Partners in Play: Meeting with parent to hear their concerns before meeting with the child (Landreth, 2012).
- Adlerian Play Therapy: Egalitarian relationship developed with the child and the parent. The parent serves as a consultant (Kottman, 2003).
- Conscious Parenting: Welfare of the child is the goal of the collaborative relationship with the therapist, child and caregiver. Children and caregivers are seen as equals and they aim for growth together (Tsbery, 2016).

Attachment

- Within attachment theory, *attachment* means "a biological instinct in which proximity to an attachment figure is sought when the child senses or perceives threat or discomfort."
- Attachment behavior anticipates a response by the attachment figure which will remove threat or discomfort.
- Four areas

Attachment Styles

- Secure Attachment – child is generally distressed by the separation from caregiver but calms down upon the return of the parent.
 - Caregiver traits
 - Available, meets needs, warm and nurturing
 - Child traits
 - Secure, confident, realize they can depend on the return of their parent

Attachment Styles

- Insecure Ambivalent
 - Caregiver traits
 - Inconsistent, doesn't always meet needs, caregiver needs before child
 - Child traits
 - Clingy, whines
 - "Come here, go away"
 - Older children – anxiety and depression
- Child needs
 - A parent who can stay present without getting tangled up in the child's dysregulation
 - Support and encouragement to sit discover themselves

Attachment Styles

- Insecure Avoidant
 - Caregiver traits
 - Rejecting, emotionally disengaged, do not contribute to the child's need for self soothing.
 - Child traits
 - Suppresses needs for attachment, does not seek help when in need
 - Does not appear bothered when the parent leaves the room and does not give attention when the parent returns.
 - Older children - addictive behaviors or covert aggression
- Child needs
 - Can be with them and offer compassion, co-regulation, and attunement

Attachment Styles

- Disorganized Attachment
 - Caregiver traits
 - Caregiver frightened by child's needs, abusive and neglectful, caregiver may have a history of abuse, trauma or loss
 - Child traits
 - Agitation, panic, rage
 - Older children - control issues, aggression, and borderline symptoms
- Child needs
 - Can stay present and regulated. Seems simple but it is very difficult.

Adult Attachment Interview

- Created by Mary Main
- 20 questions geared at helping the parent reflect on their early attachment relationships
- Give five descriptors (adjectives) of his/her relationship with his/her mother in early childhood.
- Incorporate a sandtray for the parent to depict the five adjectives

WOT ARE YOU DOING?

83

OVERRESPONDING	BEST PARENTING SELF	UNDERRESPONDING
<u>HYPERAROUSAL</u>	<u>OPTIMAL AROUSAL ZONE</u>	<u>HYPOAROUSAL</u>
YELLING	REGULATING MY EMOTIONS	WITHHOLDING ATTENTION
BARKING OUT ORDERS	GIVING CLEAR POSITIVE INSTRUCTIONS	WITHHOLDING AFFECTION
SLAMMING DOORS	SETTING CLEAR KIND LIMITS	SLEEPING A LOT
STOMPING AROUND	ASKING FOR WHAT I NEED	CHECKING OUT
SPEAKING CRITICALLY	LISTENING WITH COMPASSION	GIVING UP RULE ENFORCEMENT
CONTROLLING MY KIDS		SIGHING A LOT
HOVERING		FEELING FUZZY & UNSURE ABOUT HOW TO RESPOND
RUSHING AROUND		

This exercise helps you reflect on your Window of Tolerance for stress and how you tend to react when you are kicked out of your optimal arousal zone.

Circle the behaviors you engage in most often.

What does this say about how you respond to parenting stress?

FIGURE 4.2. WOT Are You Doing? Worksheet.

Child Parent Relationship Therapy

- Empirically supported model for conducting Filial Therapy
- 10 session model that focuses on improving the parent-child relationship
- Cover
 - Child development
 - Relationship skills
 - Parenting techniques
- “Be with” attitudes
 - I am here
 - I hear you
 - I understand
 - I care

Candy Go Round

- Helps with learning about family
- Identifying areas of change
- Improving communication

Items needed:

5-10 pieces of candy for each family member with varying colors

Green-Words to describe self

Purple-Ways to have fun

Orange-things that you would like to change about yourself or family

Red-Things you worry about or fears

Yellow- Good things about your family

Squigz



(Goodyear-Brown, 2021)

Mirrored Build

- Give parent and child the same number of block and the same type of blocks.
- Separate the parent and child so they cannot see what each other is building.
- First have the parent describe to the child what he/she should be building. As parent directs the child what to build the child should build the same object.
- Reverse the roles and have the child tell the parent what to build.
- Process the outcome and the process of the activity



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