Healing Wounded Hearts
Attachment Centered Play Therapy

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WEDNESDAY 12:30 PM - 4:00 PM

Goals of Attachment-Centered Play Therapy

• First assess the attachment needs of the family
• Does the family need to
  **SEPARATE AND INDIVIDUATE = ENMESHD**
  OR
  • Does the family need to
  **COME TOGETHER AND GROW CLOSER = AVOIDANT/WITHDRAWN**
• Second goal is to identify the attachment wound or “rupture”

• Third goal aims to strengthen or repair parent-child attachment bonds and improve family communication.

• As the normative secure base is restored, parents become a resource to help the child cope with stress, experience competency, and explore autonomy.

What Is Attachment Theory All About?

• What is attachment?
  • An emotional bond
  • “A lasting psychological connectedness between human beings”
    - John Bowlby

• Attachment Spectrum

• Key Concepts
  • Safe Haven
  • Secure Base
  • Proximity Maintenance
  • Separation Distress

Key concepts:

• Secure Base –
  The attachment figure serves as home base that provides the confidence to explore the world.
• Safe Haven -
   Finding comfort and safety in attachment figure to calm anxiety in the face of threat.

• Proximity Maintenance –
   • The desire to be near attachment figure to provide security and emotional soothing.

• Separation distress –
   Anxiety when separated from primary attachment figure
“Keeping precious others close is a brilliant survival technique wired in our evolution for survival.”

John Bowlby

Attachment needs:

- Physical touch
- Emotional closeness
- Acceptance
- Unconditional love
- Safety
- Security
- Play

Secure attachment

- Characteristics
  - Confident that caregiver will meet your needs
  - Appropriate distress when separated
  - Tolerate absences of attachment figure
  - Capable of being soothed upon reunification
  - Moves on to engage in tasks
Baby powder handprints

• Supplies:
  • Lotion
  • Baby powder
  • Black construction paper

• Example Questions:
  • Tell me about your favorite memory of these little, chubby baby hands
  • What is your favorite memory about these little, messy toddler hands
  • What are your favorite things these big kid hands can do now

4 S’s of Secure Attachment

• SEEN
• SAFE
• SOOTHE
• SECURE

• Daniel Seigal

Insecure Attachment

• Characteristics
  • Distress upon separation
  • Unsure if mother would return
  • Clingy or angry upon reunion
  • Difficult to soothe

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Show Me Your Mad Intervention

• Instructions:
  • Ask each client to create sand tray depicting their mad feelings and how it impacts others

• Supplies:
  • Sand tray
  • Various figurines

Feeling Monster Box

• Supplies:
  • Empty Kleenex box
  • Paint, stickers, etc
  • Egg carton (empty)
  • Emotions Chart

• Directions:
  • 1. Family chooses emotion
  • 2. Paint/decorate monster
  • 3. Feed monster when emotionally charged

Avoidant Attachment

• Characteristics
  • Showed psychological distress but showed little emotion on separation or reunion
  • Unsure if emotional needs will be met
  • Focused on tasks during separation and reunions
  • Attempt to deactivate attachment system
The Balloon Bounce Game
Liana Lowenstein

• Purpose:
  • To build each family member’s self-esteem, respect, and positive self-talk.
  • This also enhances relationships as each member is able to validate the other person’s personal resilience, resourcefulness, and improves communication.

• Supplies Needed: Sharpie, balloons

Questions

• What’s something you are proud you can do?
• Tell about a time you were able to do something difficult
• Tell about a time you felt proud of yourself
• Tell about a time you were nice to someone
• Tell about a time that you helped yourself feel better
• Say Something nice to someone else in the room

Disorganized Attachment

• Characteristics
  • Seeking closeness and avoidance of closeness
  • Traumatic experience
  • Others as source of fear AND solution to fear
The Walled-Off Heart Intervention – by Holly Willard

- Supplies:
  - Paper & marker
  - Sandtray, cookie cutter hearts, fences

Tangled Up In Knots

- Instructions:
  - Family stands in a circle facing each other.
  - Instruct them to put all their hands in the middle of the circle and grab any hand.
  - Once everybody is holding hands (tangled up) explore what this feels like
  - Instruct family members without letting go of each other’s hands to untangle themselves

- Once family is untangled, explore what it feels like to have space and still be connected together

- Object lesson: Tangled up hands represent enmeshed, anxious family systems. Healthy, secure families are represented by the circle that is connected but maintains autonomy

Understanding Attachment Ruptures

- What causes wounding or rupture?
  - Death
  - Divorce
  - Abuse
  - Neglect
  - Separation
Attachment Centered Play Therapy: Putting It All Together

- Goal is to strengthen family relationship to work through and address challenges
- EVERYONE meets with the therapist
- Parent and child work together in therapy to address challenges through play, talking, art, experiential activities
- Children that have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect need the loving support and presence of their parent(s) in therapy to help them feel safe, learn new things and enhance the parent-child relationship.
- The therapist will have some parent-only time with the goal of supporting parents and clarifying & enhancing the therapy outcomes.

Stars and Dots

- **Instructions:**
  - Read *You Are Special* with parent & Child
  - Have child draw each of their grey dots on My Blanco doll
  - Have parent draw child’s stars on doll for positive attributes
  - On other side, write opposite thoughts - reframe negative self-talk thoughts of dots

- **Purpose:**
  - Increase child's self-esteem and self-worth
  - Decrease negative self-talk
  - Help Parent reaffirm their love and acceptance to child (and self)
My Many Colors of Me

• Purpose:
  • To give language and understanding for the big feelings children feel as a result of trauma and attachment wounds

• Intervention:
  • Child is given book as a take home assignment; can only draw 1-2 pages inbetween sessions.
  • Explore drawings together in play therapy: "Tell me a story about this"
  • Bring in parent to explore drawings together, as well as when was the last time you felt this way
  • Identify how parent can help to the child when they feel the color inside of their body

• Goal:
  • Strengthen parent-child relationship
  • Identify emotions, give words to feelings, and increase healthy coping skills

Children oftentimes feel great big feelings and experience these feelings in great big ways in their bodies but lack the communication abilities to adequately describe what it is that they are feeling.

Sometimes there are no words for the feelings and emotions in grief

Helping kids connect and understand their somatic complaints can help them understand their emotions which are underlying their physical hurt and discomfort

• Instructions:
  • Give each child in the family their own personal workbook (this allows permission for personal interpretation and ownership/understanding of the individual's experiences).
  • As "homework" the child can draw 1-2 pages
  • In next family therapy session, review colors and art, asking the following:
    • Can you tell me a story about this? (the picture drawn)
    • When is the last time you felt this color?
    • Where is this color the biggest in your body?
    • How can Mom/Dad help when this feeling starts growing big inside of you?
Family Music Video Technique

- Family chooses song that represents their family or an issue they are struggling with and/or have resolved together
- Create music video using puppets, props, dress-ups, etc
- Watch video together in session to discuss family themes, values, rules, roles, etc.

Bibliography/Resources