

Report of the Theraplay Level one training I attended as a result of funding provided by The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the funding that you provided that enabled me to attend the Theraplay Level one Training in May 2013. This training took place in Corby and was facilitated by Donna Gates and Jo Williams, both certified Theraplay Therapists. The following report details what I learnt from the training and how I will be applying it to my role within a CAMHS Children Looked After and Adoption Team.

Theraplay

Theraplay is a relationship focused parent-child therapy. It aims to promote secure and positive attachments between a child and their carer(s). Theraplay offers a carer and child the opportunity to engage in activities, games and interactions that aim to develop specific dimensions within their relationships. The 4 dimensions focused on within Theraplay are;

Structure; Supporting the carer to implement and maintain limits, order and direction and supporting the child to accept these.

Engagement; Supporting the carer to attune to and engage the child, supporting the child to respond and accept the carers attuned attempts to engage

Challenge; Supporting carers to use challenge appropriately (considering emotional development and expectations) and supporting the child to participate in activities that support and encourage their efforts to advance developmentally.

Nurture; Supporting carers to offer nurture and supporting the child to accept the carer's attention, soothing and care giving.

Initially a MIM (Marschak Interaction Method) is carried out as an assessment and treatment planning tool. The MIM (video recorded assessment of a structured interaction between the carer and child) helps a therapist to assess which of the 4 dimensions are working well within a relationship, and which may need extra support.

The principles of Theraplay are based on attachment theory, intersubjectivity and brain research. Theraplay can be used within the parent-child dyad or can be offered in a group setting.

Theraplay outcome aims

- Theraplay aims to support the carer to more empathically understand the child and their presentation and to become more attuned, available and responsive to the child and their needs.

- Theraplay aims to support the child to become more comfortable with; mutual enjoyment, carers establishing limits and boundaries, being successful/unsuccessful and with seeking and receiving nurture.
- Through the intervention the child's sense of effectiveness, mastery and lovability increases, and this more positive self concept and sense of worth enables their emotional, cognitive and social functioning to develop.

Course Structure and content

The course was facilitated by Donna Gates (Certified Theraplay Therapist and Trainer from Illinois, USA) and Jo Williams (Certified Theraplay Therapist and Supervisor from Northampton, England). It ran over 5 days and covered;

- Marschak Interaction Method (MIM) Assessment and treatment planning tool
- Theory and practical training on treatment planning and implementation
- Group Theraplay

How I found the course

Both Trainers of the Theraplay Level 1 training were extremely knowledgeable and passionate about Theraplay. They were exceptionally engaging and the content of the training was very inspirational. The balance of theory and practise enabled attendee's to have a clear understanding of how and why Theraplay can be beneficial, whilst enabling us to develop confidence and competence in carrying it out. The trainers used a wide range of video recordings of their work to illustrate many of the activities and skills that Theraplay involves and bought a wide range of Theraplay equipment that enabled us to practise several activities from each dimension. Trainers also supported us to think about managing sessions with resistance as well as thinking specifically about how you might adapt Theraplay for children that have experienced trauma. The venue was comfortable and the facilities were to a high standard. Overall a very enjoyable and valuable training course.

How I can use the training within my role

Theraplay can benefit children with a wide range of presenting problems; Attachment insecurity, developmental delays, autistic spectrum, PTSD, ODD, ADHD, children that are angry and/or non-compliant, and children that are withdrawn, low in mood or fearful. Working in a CAMHS Children Looked After Team, we regularly receive referrals related to attachment difficulties that make parenting and developing a relationship with a child particularly difficult. The children that are referred to us have usually experienced abusive and neglectful parenting which has resulted in the development of insecure attachment styles. The attachment behaviours the children have relied upon to feel safe within their birth families often inhibit the child from developing emotionally, socially and cognitively. The children's lack of trust in caregivers and high levels of insecurity and anxiety mean that forming relationships with, and parenting these children can prove challenging.

Within our work, Theraplay can be extremely useful in supporting the child to develop trust and feelings of safety with their foster/adoptive parent. This is considered the foundation of a healthy secure attachment. Theraplay also supports the child to feel safe enough to gradually rely less stringently on the strategies that they once needed to survive life with birth families i.e. need for control and emotional distance. Furthermore, Theraplay supports the development of several skills that may have been delayed/inhibited, such as emotion regulation, empathy and problem solving. Theraplay aims to offer the child more a positive inner working model through experiences of sensitive, responsive and safe care from others. As the child feels safe enough to trust and allow the care giver to care for them, the child experiences feeling loved, wanted, significant and successful. This helps them to develop a more positive self identity (inner working model) and can reduce their sensitivity to shame. As the child is emotionally developing and forming a more secure attachment with their caregiver, Theraplay aims to facilitate the child to communicate their needs in a healthy appropriate manner as opposed to using behaviours such as aggression or withdrawal.

The Theraplay theory and techniques can also be explored with the child's network i.e. caregivers, social workers, educational staff and other professionals through consultation. It's activities and interaction techniques can be discussed during consultation sessions and then integrated by the network into the child's everyday life to promote, encourage and support emotional development, feelings of security and healthy attachments.

Finally, the training has given me inspiration to think about how we might be able to integrate group Theraplay into the interventions offered by our team. Myself and a colleague are planning to set up a group Theraplay pilot in September of this year. Furthermore I am keen to conduct research into Theraplay to help develop the small evidence base.

Jade Griffiths
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