

CPD Online summary note

Behavioural problems in the under fives: Part 3**Dr Margaret Thompson and Dr Paula Jenkins**

Various therapies can be offered to young children and their families. It is important to understand the problem in the context of the child's temperament, parental mental health, the marital situation and the family dynamics.

As in all therapy it is important to gauge the parent's motivation and energy for change. It is also important to stress that changing a problem will take time and may become worse before it gets better.

Any therapist offering therapy to a family should be trained in that therapeutic modality and have good supervision.

- Mother-child therapy is particularly applicable when a child presents with a fairly well defined problem, like a feeding or sleep problem or temper tantrums, but which is often also in the context of a mother-child relationship that needs to be nurtured.
- Sensitivity training is an example of a programme that is useful with young children, for example crying babies or temperamentally difficult children.
- Video interactive programmes which include helping parents learn to play with their children are useful when there are attachment problems between parent and child.
- Parenting programmes that tackle ADHD are proving helpful where a child has problems of dysregulated temperament.

There is also a role in helping parents understand the reasons why children present the way they do. This leads on to helping the parents change their parenting style to accommodate the child they have and thus help that child learn to self-regulate.

Child psychotherapy would be considered when assessment of the child has indicated that the problems are complex and the child may have deep rooted psychological distress which has to be unravelled slowly and carefully.

Child therapy will involve the child alone, but the mother will work with another therapist while the child sees his or her own therapist, in order to make sure the mother can hold the child through therapy.

Family therapy is particularly applicable when a child presents with a problem within the family that might be influenced by the marital relationship and/or older children in the family. It has also been used where there are multiple problems.

Reflective questions

(1.8) A health visitor offered advice to a parent with a child who had a feeding problem. The family were moving house, and the child also was a very temperamentally difficult child.

Mother was also going through a messy divorce. Why did it not work? Give three reasons.

(2.4) Which skills do you consider parents need to enable them to be good parents?

(2.8) What would you say are the attributes of positive parenting?

- (2.10) What is your understanding of the term 'scaffolding' in the context of the parent-child relationship?
- (2.11) What do you think are the benefits of scaffolding for the child and the parent?
- (2.16) What is your understanding of the principles of social learning theory?
- (2.23) Which parents do you think might find parenting harder than usual?
- (2.26) A parent was offered therapy by a CAMHS nurse to help change the behavior of her three-year-old boy, who has ADHD. The nurse carried out an assessment, but the mother was harassed and the nurse thought that she had not got to the root of all the problems. She finished the first session giving some ideas of how the mother could start work with the child. She gave her diaries to fill in. The next week, the mother was not in when the nurse called. She managed to catch up with her two weeks later. The mother had not done the diaries. How should the nurse tackle this? What questions do you think she should ask?
- (2.27) What do you think the nurse should do at the end of the session?
- (3.8) Shannon, aged three, is referred to the clinic with a sleep and settling problem. She will not go to sleep on her own. If she wakes up at night she ends up in her parents' bed. What do you think should be considered in Shannon's case?
- (3.9) The mother was depressed after the birth of Shannon and feels very guilty about this as she feels she has not bonded well with her. What therapy do you think would be appropriate?
- (3.10) Jane seems to cry all the time since she was born, and her mother finds her very difficult. What therapy do you think would be appropriate?

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