



Shifting Perspectives- Structures and Mechanisms of Parental Behaviour

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Abstract

Since Freud (1905) first defined psychotherapeutic practice, it has been extensively discussed and documented in a vast number of ways. Over the years, psychotherapy has developed as a field of practice and research and these developments have produced more than four-hundred published approaches. However, it remains mainly an individual process which, in almost all approaches, is an intervention intended to promote the quality of the mental health of an individual patient in various ways. Working with children and adolescents differs in many ways to therapy for individual adults. In order to contextualize their wellbeing, therapy for this young population requires an understanding of their habitat and the socio-cultural environment in which their development is occurring. According to Brown (2000) the individual grows within a social system which influences his development and self-concept, and therefore his family and especially his parents are the most meaningful agents of his development. When I began my practice, I worked with children in their natural environment, utilizing the Reaching out method and including work with parents as part of my systemic approach. I soon identified that when parents undergo transformation during the process, their children quickly respond to that change. The change in the children's behavior and well-being was quicker and more efficient than when I worked mainly with the children directly. Thus, I concluded that the parents' involvement in the process was the most significant factor that influenced change. Moreover, working with parents promoted the well-being of all the family members, each of whom reported better Communication and more effective relationships within the family system [1,2].

Keywords Mental health; Psychotherapy; Parental behaviour

Methods

Today, 14 years later, after seeing hundreds of couples of parents in my practice, I suggest to direct attention and focus upon the main challenges parents are dealing with, while struggling to promote their family life situations. In the best case scenario, those parents will attempt to solve difficulties while seeking psychotherapeutic or psychiatric help for their children.

While most of the parents I encountered during the years of my practice were convinced that they do not know what to do, and requested behavioral skills enhancement or requesting to “heal the child’s problem”, in my experience, the behavioral aspects were not the core issue. Moreover, most of the parents know what to do practically in most of the cases when they encounter children. At first, most of the parents act intuitively. When they fail to achieve their goal, they often try to implement different behaviors outsourced from family and friends as well as internet forums. The challenge arises when they either cannot adhere to those behaviors or they simply do not “work” as they would have expected. While I tried to investigate the reasons for these futile attempts, I considered the potential factors which made the behavioral changes difficult for so many parents with motivation to undergo changes. Among other things, I inquired into the issues of consistency, couple cooperation, engagement with the process of change. In my clinical experience, none of those factors provided a satisfactory explanation for parental difficulties within the family situations. After inquiring about the challenge on a deeper level, implementing my family psychoanalytic training into the investigation of parental behavior and resistance to transformation, I identified the problem which prevented the parents from undergoing the transformational process. These theories combined with my practical experience led to the conceptualization of the 5shift model for developing parental intelligence [3].

In order to undergo a process of change parents must make shifts in their basic beliefs which underlie behavior. These basic beliefs are underlying mental processes such as cognitive schemes and emotional reactions; however, most of us are not aware of these basic beliefs. Until the parent is able to make a shift in those basic beliefs, any behavioral change will be superficial and temporary. Needless to say, children are sensitive to any lack of authenticity in their parents' behaviour, and usually in these cases whatever the parents strive to achieve will be prone to failure,

In order to accomplish an effective process of change the parents must undergo 5 major shifts. These shifts are prerequisites for succeeding in the transformation process. The following are the 5 shifts:

Your struggle is not with your child but with your own unconscious projections.

- You are not reacting to your child or trying to respond to an external situation – you are the situation and your child is reacting to you.

Once you understand this, you experienced the first shift in your parental perspective. This shift stimulates a process of change which enables proceeding to the next shift.

Co-author your family's story.

- Parents must define their parental philosophy (i.e. what underlies their parental values and aspirations)
- Parents must enable their child the ability to define his own values and aspirations for his life

Anchor your family's story into reality.

- Discover the difference between projections stemming from phantasy and the reality of daily life

- Make conscious the unconscious wishes, which originate from your personal history, and work through them, instead of inflicting them upon your child.

Put your mask on first.

- The parent is the most meaningful figure in the child's development
- The parent is the responsible adult
- Intentional parenting is an ongoing development process requiring self care and preservation.

You cannot make the shifts by yourself.

- We are, as parents, conditioned to think that “all you need is love”
- But parenting is, as any practice, is difficult
- In order to be able to approach the unconscious and make these shifts the parent needs professional help through this process.
- For proper self-reflection and self-authoring (i.e. to identify the practices and resources that fit exactly where and who you are), the parent needs parental counseling [4,5].

Conclusion

In sum, parenting is nonetheless a challenging practice. However, it is possible to help parents to elevate their predisposition to a new level of parental development by undergoing the process of internal change

which integrates 5 shifts as prerequisites for a family transformation and change.

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