

CHILD CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR IN THE PCIT CONTEXT



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THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP "DANCE"

- **In healthy relationships**
 - Synchrony, affect regulation, "dance of attunement"
 - Emotional availability
 - Balance of power and control
- **In child maltreatment**
 - Asynchrony, dysregulation
 - Imbalance of power and control
- **Repair through PCIT**



WHO IS LEADING? CHILD CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR

Attachment Perspective

- Disorganized attachment, child abuse and controlling behavior have been linked.
- Controlling behavior begins as coping strategy for fear
- Controlling behavior emerges during preschool years
- Punitive and Caregiving subtypes first identified



ROLE REVERSALS

Child controlling behavior at more severe levels results in parent-child role reversal and parental surrender of power and authority.

- Child controls play
- Child assumes parent role
- Parent accepts role shift



CAARE CENTER RESEARCH ON CHILD CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR

- Controlling behavior tends to be present during times of transition (e.g., CDI to PDI) especially in younger children
- Controlling behavior is related to parent passivity (but not intrusiveness)
- Role reversal behavior seen in children with history of interparental violence and child abuse.

(Thompson, Timmer & Urquiza, 2010; Timmer et al, in press)



CURRENT STUDY: SAMPLE

- N= 211 dyads
- **Children:**
 - M=4.75 years old
 - 62% Boys
 - 57% Caucasian
- **Mothers:**
 - 54% Single
 - 59% Caucasian
 - 75% High school grad or less
- **Abuse History:**
 - 29% No maltreatment
 - 30% Physical abuse
 - 47% Neglect
 - 10% Sexual abuse
 - 52% Interparental violence



CURRENT STUDY: MEASURES

BEAS-T* EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY OBSERVATIONAL CODING SYSTEM

- Parent scales
 - Sensitivity
 - Hostility
 - Control
 - Passivity
- Child scales
 - Positive response
 - Engagement
 - Controlling Behavior
 - Role reversal/caregiving
 - Role reversal/punitive
 - General Bossiness
 - Coded only at age 3 and up



*BRIEF EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY SCREENER-
TRIAXIALOG

THE CONTROLLING-PUNITIVE SUBTYPE

- Intimidating, aggressive
- Excessively defiant
- Humiliates parent with name calling, laughing
- Parents at a loss for managing behavior

(BEAS-T Coding Manual)



CONTROLLING-PUNITIVE, CURRENT STUDY

- 49% of children show some controlling-punitive behavior
- 26% show role reversed controlling-punitive behavior
- Children who show more controlling-punitive behavior...
 - have multiple types of maltreatment
 - have multiple other risk factors
 - are less responsive and involved during interactions
 - have parents who show less sensitivity, more hostility, more intrusiveness & more passivity during interactions

THE CONTROLLING-CAREGIVING SUBTYPE

- Overly bright, solicitous, engaging, helpful
- Vigilant to parent's negativity, "checks in"
- Attempts to reduce negativity and solve problems
- Helplessness to elicit parent involvement

(BEAS-T Coding Manual)



CONTROLLING-CAREGIVING, CURRENT STUDY

- 64% of children show some controlling-caregiving
- 12% show role reversed controlling-caregiving
- Children who show more controlling-caregiving ...
 - tend to be older
 - show more optimal affect, are more responsive & involved during interaction
 - have parents who are less intrusive during interactions

GENERAL BOSSINESS

- Directs parent
- Decides what the dyad will do in play
- Corrects parent but is not parentified

(BEAS-T Coding Manual)



GENERAL BOSSINESS, CURRENT STUDY

- 62% of children show some bossy behavior
- 26% show role reversed bossy behavior
- Children who show more bossiness seem to have lower rates of specific risk factors, but show an accumulation of multiple risk factors, e.g., parental mental health and/or criminal history,

IMPLICATIONS FOR TREATMENT

- Clinical significance of child controlling behavior is not yet known; however,
- Potential areas for intervention include:
 - Attending to balance of power within the dyad, e.g., reducing parental passivity to prevent role reversals
 - Improving parent's confidence so child feels secure in parent's ability to take care of her/him.
 - Helping parent anticipate transitions with child and provide reassurance to reduce fear and anxiety



NEXT STEPS

- Continue exploration of child controlling behavior and its meaning/function.
- Examine treatment outcomes of controlling children.
- Determine PCIT elements most successful in treating controllingness.

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