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% Inteparental 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

THE CONTROLLING-PUNITIVE SUBTYPE

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

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

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

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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