

*Effectively Blending Play Therapy Techniques  
with CBT: Helping Children Identify, Express &  
Integrate Angry and Aggressive Feelings*

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# Neurobiology of Maladaptive Aggression (James Blair et al 2005)

- Reactive (RADI) and Proactive (PIP) Aggression are supported by very different neuronal architectures
- Work with animals identified a neural circuit that runs from the medial nucleus of the amygdala, to the medial hypothalamus, and from there to the dorsal half of the periaqueductal gray. This circuitry allows the expression of reactive aggression in mammalian species, including humans.

# Neurobiology Continued

- The circuitry can become dysfunctional. This can occur in four ways.
- Not knowing right from wrong, not making rational decisions: adds other complexities that have to be addressed separately.
- The first two potential ways relate to the basic neural circuit that responds to threat and allows the expression of reactive aggression (fear and frustration).

# More Neurobiology

- The third and fourth potential ways relate to regulatory systems for this circuitry. The functioning of the medial and orbital frontal systems involved in the regulation of the basic threat circuitry can be compromised.
- Impulsive aggression can be the result of excessive activation, deficient restraint (self regulation) or both.
- These deficiencies can arise out of genetic vulnerability (endogenous) or abuse and trauma (exogenous) contingencies.

Dr. Hans Steiner, Stanford University School of Medicine, Center for Psychiatry and the Law, 2005.

Athena A. Drewes, 2009

# *Play Therapy with Angry and Aggressive (Traumatized) Children*

## ■ Treatment

### ■ Rapport Building

### ■ Setting a context for therapy

#### ■ Safety and Trust issues

#### ■ Speaking to the parents and children about therapy

# Directive vs. Non-Directive

- **Directive Approach:** The therapist takes responsibility for guiding the therapy process and challenges the child to address specific concerns.
- **Nondirective Approach:** Provides the child with ample opportunity to direct his or her own therapy and encourages insight and personality development through interpretation of play and behavior.
- **Integrated Approach:** Respects traumatized children's competing drives for mastery and control versus suppressing and avoiding painful and conflictual material.

# Feeling-Thought- Behavior Awareness

- To identify and understand the difference between a feeling state and a cognition
- To understand how feelings, thoughts and behaviors interact with one another.
- To understand that feelings are not mutually exclusive of one another.

**What is under the Anger?**

# *Helping Children Understand Emotions in Themselves*

## ■ Identifying Physical Manifestations of Different Emotions

- Guided Imagery Exercise (Paula, 2006)
- Basket of Feelings
- Gingerbread Feelings Map

■ Athena A. Drewes, 2009

## *A Simile from Angry/Feeling Words*

Simile – a comparison between two unlike objects  
(e.g., anger is like a thunderstorm).

Regularly the words “as” and “like” are used in  
similes.

Examples:

Silent as a guilty child

Excited as a wiggly puppy

Sad like an unused toy

# Create a Feelings Cinquain

- Cinquain is a short poem consisting of five lines. The lines usually do not rhyme.
- Create a cinquain about anger. “Anger” can be the title and the first line of the poem.

1<sup>st</sup> line – one noun (anger feeling)

2<sup>nd</sup> line – two adjectives describing the noun in line one above.

3<sup>rd</sup> line – three words that express feeling.

4<sup>th</sup> line – four related words that express a feeling, describe line one, and tie the poem together

5<sup>th</sup> line – another word or synonym for the noun in line one

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# “Anger” Cinquain - Example

Anger

Upsetting, disturbing

Poking, bumping, pushing

Not always a friend

Hot-tempered

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# Draw a Road Map of Your Life

- Show good places
- Bumpy spots
- Barriers
- Make a map of where you have been
- Where you want to go
- What's keeping you from getting there
- What I need to get there

# Magic Wand

- Create magic wand.
- What would you change if you could?
- What would you change about school?
- What would you change about your friends?
- What would you change about yourself?
- How would your life be better with the change?
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# Magic

- Imagine that you have power to do anything you want in this world
- If you were magic, where would you like to be?
- Draw what you would do and where you would be

# Magic Powers

- If you could have any of the following, what would you like most to stop people from bothering you or hurting you in some way?
- Color in or mark the ones you would like.
- If it is none of these, what would it be? Draw it in the empty box.
- Boxes: A fort, so they can't reach you. Magic dust to make them disappear. Your very own army. A coat of spikes. To be able to blow fire like a dragon. An invisible cloak. A magic sword.

# Safe Place

- Imagine Safe Place
- Zoom in and look around, feel, smell
- What is there
- Name the place
- Visit it when upset or scared
- Practice, practice, practice

## *Part III: Behavioral Dysregulation*

- Emotional Management Skills for Behavioral Distress:

- Time out

- Leaving the stressful situation

# Stick Puppets

- Use craft sticks and have child make one for each member of the family.
- Use the stick puppets to role play situations with family members or classmates.
- Use stick puppets to problem solve situations