

# The Changes of Mother – Child Interaction and Preschool Children Externalizing Behavior Problems during the Marte Meo Therapy

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# Objectives

- Externalizing problems in preschool-aged children have been demonstrated to be strongly predictive of externalizing problems later in life (Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, 2000).

- Positive parenting may prevent the child from developing externalizing problems. But the recent studies show that convincing empirical evidence for the causal relation between parenting behavior and childhood behavior problems is lacking (Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, Van Ijzendoorn, Mangelsdorf, & Zevalkink, 2006).

- Once psychologists have identified children who are at risk for stable externalizing behavior problems, it is important, that they use adequate interventions (Stormont, 2002).

- Marte Meo could be selected as the treatment model of choice. Marte Meo therapy was developed in the 1980s (Aarts, 2008) in order to help to build a supportive dialogue between the child and the parent.

- The aim of this intervention study is to test the causal relation between parenting behavior and early childhood externalizing behavior problems by increasing positive parenting and then examining whether this results in a reduction of externalizing problems.

# Method

- *Participants*

The sample consisted of 15 mother – preschooler dyads (children mean age 5.0 years) in which a child had high results – 70 T scores and more - of externalizing behavior in Latvian translation of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). There were 9 mother – preschooler dyads in control group.

# *Measures*

- *Preschool Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/1.5 - 5) and School-Age Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/ 6 – 18)* (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; adapted by I. Laizane, I. Skreitule-Pikse, S. Sebre, M. Rascevska, R. Upenieks, 2006). For this study we focused only on Aggressive behavior and Rule breaking scales.

# *Measures*

- *Videotapes* were coded and analysed in order to measure the qualitative changes in mother's supportive behavior and interaction with child during the therapy.
- We focused on seven important elements for a natural supportive dialogue between the child and the mother. The score „1” was given, if there were more than 50% of moments, when desirable behavior was observed. The score „0” was given, if there were 50% or less than 50% of moments, when desirable behavior was observed.

Elements for a natural supportive dialogue  
between the child and the mother.

- (1) Mother seeks to locate the child's focus of attention
- (2) Mother waits and follows the initiatives of the child and the child's reaction
- (3) Mother uses warm tones and good faces to create a warm atmosphere
- (4) Mother names the ongoing and forthcoming actions, events, experiences and feelings
- (5) Mother confirms child's desired behavior approvingly
- (6) There are appropriate turn taking and turn dividing processes between mother and her child
- (7) There are moments of emotional exchange between mother and child

# ***Procedure***

- The intervention was 3-4 Marte Meo individual sessions with video feedback. Video recordings of free play and interaction with mother in structured situation were analyzed before the therapy, after the therapy and after the 3-months waiting period.
- Marte Meo therapist selected the right video clips for the therapy session, those, where the mother demonstrated supportive behavior and those, that showed a child's needs for a certain type of support, according to M. Aarts (Aarts, 2008). At the end of every therapy session mother was given the homework of practicing new type of behavior in daily situations. Mothers also were encouraged and empowered in positive parenting practices.

## Results

### Means and Standard Deviations for Achenhach's Aggressive Behavior and Rule Breaking Scales and Mother's Supportive Behavior

*\*p < .005*

| Varriable                                   | <i>M</i> (1)  | <i>SD</i> (1) | <i>M</i> (after th) | <i>SD</i> (after th) | <i>M</i> (after 3 m) | <i>SD</i> (after 3 m) | <i>M</i> (after 6 m) | <i>SD</i> (after 6 m) | <i>F</i> |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Aggressive behavior (3-7 yrs) Exp. Gr.      | 73.33<br>n=15 | 4.60          | 69.14               | 7.47                 | 61.12                | 7.12                  | 61.63                | 5.97                  | 7.80*    |
| Aggressive behavior (3-5yrs) Exp. Gr.       | 72.63<br>n=11 | 3.47          | 66.60               | 5.56                 | 62.83                | 7.11                  | 64.42                | 4.15                  | 5.04*    |
| Rule breaking (6-7 y-rs) Exp.gr             | 78.5<br>n=4   | 11.70         | 66.75               | 10.30                | 59.00                | 12.72                 | 59.50                | 6.60                  | -        |
| Mother's behavior; Exp.gr.                  | 2.46<br>n=15  | 1,45          | 6,21                | 0.80                 | 6.20                 | 1.03                  | 6.00                 | 0.89                  | 14.95*   |
| Aggressive behavior (3-5 y-rs); Control gr. | 75.00<br>n=7  | 4.08          | -                   | -                    | 73.2                 | 3.54                  | -                    | -                     | 0.93     |
| Mother's behavior; Control gr.              | 2.4<br>n=9    | 1.01          | -                   | -                    | 2.5                  | 1.1                   | -                    | -                     | 0.30     |

# Conclusions

- The results showed that Marte Meo therapy was effective in changing mother – child interaction patterns and in preventing preschool children externalizing behavior.
- In all cases there were growth of mothers' supportive behavior and better interaction moments between mothers and their children were found during the therapy. In the present study the externalized behavior symptoms decreased after the Marte Meo therapy and remained stable after the three and after the six months waiting period.

- *Video demonstration (an example from a case study) - 3-5 min.*

## References

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