Attachment-Traumata, Attachment Disorders and Attachment-Based Therapy: From Clinical Intervention to Prevention

Karl Heinz Brisch
Dr. von Haunersches Kinderspital
University Children's Hospital Munich/Germany
Dept. Pediatric Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy
Karl-Heinz.Brisch@med.uni-muenchen.de
www.khbrisch.de

Outline

• Introduction to attachment theory
• Trauma
• Attachment disorders
• Attachment-based therapy
• Prevention

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Motivational Survival Systems

Attachment Theory (1)

• During the infant’s first year he/she develops a specific emotional attachment to a primary attachment figure.
• The attachment system ensures survival
• The attachment figure is the “secure base” for the infant (“haven of safety”)
• The attachment system is activated by fear and separation.
Attachment Theory (2)

- The attachment system is reassured by the physical proximity of the attachment figure.
- The attachment system is in reciprocity with the exploration system.
- As soon as the attachment system is reassured, the infant is ready to explore his/her environment.

"Attachment – Exploration – Seesaw"

Development of secure attachment

- Sensitivity to infants signals
- Gaze
- Verbal interaction
- Rhythm of dialogue
- Touch
Window of Tolerance of Stress Regulation

Hyper-Arousal ➔ Sympathetic Nervous System ➔ Dissociation ➔ FREEZE

Hypo-Arousal ➔ Parasympathetic Nervous System ➔ Dissociation ➔ COLLAPS/ATONY/SUBMISSION

Video-Demonstration of sensitivity

• Mother/Father-infant interactions

Attachment quality of term infants (1)

• Secure (approx. 60%)
• Insecure
  – Avoidant (approx. 15%)
  – Ambivalent (approx. 10%)
• Beginning of psychopathology
  – Disorganized (approx. 10%)
• Attachment Disorder
  – Severe early psychopathology (approx. 5%)
Video-Demonstration

- Attachment quality examined in the Strange Situation Procedure
- Two short separations of infant from mother
- Evaluation of reunion behavior
- Balance of attachment and exploration behavior

Attachment and psychic development

- **Secure attachment** ➔ PROTECTION
- **Insecure attachment** ➔ RISK

Consequences of the development of attachment (1)

- **Secure** attachment
  - protective factor under stress
  - greater coping ability
  - ability to seek out help
  - more attuned social behavior
  - larger numbers of relationships
  - greater creativity
  - greater flexibility and persistence
  - better memory and learning
  - empathy for the emotions of others
Intergenerational transmission of attachment

- Correspondence between attachment of parents and child
  - Securely attached parents with securely attached children
    - mother-child approx. 75%
    - father-child approx. 65%
  - Insecurely attached parents with insecurely attached children
  - Traumatized parents with disorganized children
  - Attachment disordered parents with attachment disordered children

Origins of attachment disorders

- Early multiple traumatization of children by attachment figures
  - Severe emotional and physical deprivation and neglect
  - Physical violence
  - Sexual violence
  - Emotional violence
  - Verbal violence
  - Multiple separation from attachment figures
  - Loss of attachment figures without secondary attachment figure
  - Witness of violence between attachment figures

Triggers for re-traumatization

Traumatized parents react to trigger in the behavior of the infant, child or adolescent

- Attachment behavior
  - search for closeness, clinging, crying, pain, neediness
- Separation / exploration behavior
  - Distancing, autonomy,
- Trigger by affective arousal of the child
- Unconscious process!!!
Re-enactment of trauma

• In the interaction with the infant/child
  – Avoidance of contact and proximity with child
  – Abrupt/intermittent breaks in activity and relationship
  – Understimulation vs. overstimulation (sexual-sensory)
  – Aggressive behavior/violence
• In the affective communication
  – Transference of traumatic affects onto the child
    • Hyperarousal, panic, rage, shame, feelings of guilt

Types of attachment disorders

• No signs of attachment behavior
• Promiscuous (indifferent) (ICD 10)
• Inhibited (ICD 10)
• Hyper-vigilant
• Aggressive
• Role reversal
• Addiction
• Psychosomatic symptoms

Video-Demonstration of Attachment Disorders

• Strange Situation Procedure
  – Promiscuous (indifferent) attachment disorder
  – Inhibited attachment disorder
Reaction to traumatization by the attachment figure

- Search for an attachment figure
- Attachment dilemma
  - Attachment figure is present, but source of great anxiety
- Pathological attachment to perpetrator
- Activation of archaic reactions
  - Fight and flight are not possible
  - Freeze, dissociation, submission
  - Aggression against non-attachment figures with latency

Neurobiological consequences

- Permanent stimulation of stress hormones
- Decrease in growth hormones
- Destrucions of neurons in the brain
- Reduction of brain volume

Consequences of attachment disorders

- Deficits in right brain development
  - Affective attunement
  - Affect control
  - Theory of mind
  - Empathy
  - Insightfulness
  - Mentalizing
- Deficits in cognitive development

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Consequences of attachment disorders (continued)

- No development of secure emotional base
- No or fragmented inner working model of attachment
- No feeling of emotional security
- No ability to stay in relationships
- Severe behavior disturbance in attachment relevant situations

Consequences of attachment disorders (continued)

- Desorganisation
- Derealisation
- Depersonalisation
- Dissociation

Consequences of attachment disorders (continued)

- Panic attacks
- Anxiety disorders
- Severe depression
- Severe narcissitic disorders
Consequences of attachment disorders (continued)

• Somatoform disorders
• Psychosomatic disorders
• Eating disorders
• Addiction

Consequences of attachment disorders (continued)

• Chronic Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
• Aggressive behavior disorder
• Antisocial behavior disorders

Therapy I

• Attachment Based Therapy
  – Patient's anxiety "activates" his/her search for an attachment figure
  – Therapist must establish a secure therapeutic bonding
  – New attachment experience of safety in therapy
  – Focus on exploration of
    • Traumatic experiences of loss, separation, violence
  – Psychotraumatherapy
Therapy II

• Attachment Based Therapy
  – Integration of segregated affects into inner working model
  – Mourning
  – New experiences in relationships
  – Separation from therapist
  – Interval-Therapy

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Prevention of Attachment Disorders

SAFE®

„Secure Attachment Formation for Educators“

• Group-Education in parenting from pregnancy till end of first year of life
  – Children need early attachment
  – Recollection of traumata
  – Information about re-enactment
  – Preventive treatment of traumata even before birth
  – Intervall-treatment of parents

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DVD and Homepage

• DVD "Embracing Closeness"
• DVD "BASE – Babywatching"
• Send Order to
  Karl-Heinz.Brisch@med.uni-muenchen.de

www.safe-program.org
www.base-babywatching.de

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Applications

• Treatment of patients of all ages
• Treatment of all diseases
• Adoption and foster care
• Institutional care
• Day care
• Group therapy
• Family therapy
• Couple therapy
• Prevention of emotional disorders

Summary

• Attachment theory helps to understand
  – Human development
  – Psychopathology
  – Treatment process
  – Prevention

10th International Attachment Conference
Munich/Germany,
October 14-16, 2011

Attachment and Addiction

• Information and programme
• Geber-Reusch@t-online.de
  • www.khbrisch.de
**DVDs available**

- Embracing Closeness (Engl)
- BASE-Babywatching in Kindergarten (Engl.)
- BASE-Babywatching in School (German)
- SAFE – Parents (in German)
- SAFE – Therapists (in German)
- Strange-Situation-Procedure High Quality (in press, available in autumn)

**Reference**

Brisch, Karl Heinz (2002)

*Treating Attachment Disorders. From Theory to Therapy.*

Guilford Press, New York, London

Japanese, Korean, Italian translation available!
Russian and Ukrainian translation in print