Attachment-traumata, attachment disorders and attachment-based therapy: from clinical intervention to prevention

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Outline

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

Attention please!

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• Thank you for your understanding!
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.

Sensitivity (1)

- The caregiver with the highest sensitivity during interaction will become the infant’s major attachment person.
- A high parental sensitivity will enhance the development of a secure attachment of the infant.
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

Hyper-Arousal ➔ Parasympathetic Nervous System
➔ Dissociation ➔ COLLAPS/FLOPPY

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 $\rightarrow$ PROTECTION
- Insecure attachment $\rightarrow$ 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, needness
- 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

Attachment psychopathology

- Attachment disorders are severe early psychopathology
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 (attachment traumata)

- 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
  - Aggression against non-attachment figures with latency
Neurobiological consequences

- Permanent stimulation of stress hormones
- Decrease in growth hormones
- Destructions 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

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
Components of treatment
- Somatic treatment
- Social work
- Milieu-therapy
- Individual- and group-psychotherapy
- Trauma-therapy (EMDR)
- Education

Prevention of Attachment Disorders

„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

Baby-Watching in Kindergarten and School

B.A.S.E.
B. = Baby-Watching
A. = Against Aggression and Anxiety
S. = For Sensitivity
E. = For Empathy
Summary

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

International Attachment Conference
Munich/Germany,
October 12 -14, 2012

Attachment and Adolescence
Individuality, Group, and Autonomy

• Information and program
  • www.khbrisch.de

DVDs available

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

Brisch, Karl Heinz (2012)
Treating Attachment Disorders.
From Theory to Therapy.
2nd Edition

Guilford Press, New York, London

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

Thank you!

• Further information
• www.khbrisch.de
• www.safe-program.org
• www.base-babywatching.de

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