

European Association for Research on Adolescence
Thursday May 8th 2008 15.00-16.45

Reducing Teen Aggression & Violence through Attachment Based Intervention: Change Processes

Dr. Marlene M. Moretti, University Professor
&
Ingrid Obsuth, M. A.
Psychology Department, Simon Fraser University, BC CANADA
moretti@sfu.ca
Dr. Ofra Mayseless & Dr. Miri Scharf
University of Haifa



Overview

- Aggression and attachment
- Effectiveness of an attachment based program for reducing teen violence
- Conceptualizing and measuring change processes in parenting representations and parenting behavior

2

What is Attachment?



John Bowlby

- Evolutionarily selected regulatory system to ensure survival and reproduction
- For a child "... to stay in close proximity, or in easy communication, with someone likely to protect you is the best of all possible insurance policies" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 81).
- Supersedes other drives.
- "From cradle to grave..." John Bowlby.

Attachment: The Function of Angry Behavior in Relationships

- Bowlby (1973) → *Anger* is the natural response of the child when the expectation of safety, closeness to the attachment figure, is jeopardized.
- In normal development, *angry behavior can strengthen the bond* between the child and caregiver, serving a *signaling function* closely tied to the child's capacity for autonomous functioning.
- Caregivers' sensitive responses to angry behavior soothe the child, provides a *safe haven* and a *secure base* for exploration of the world ~ and important *opportunity for developing emotion regulation skills*.

4

Other Instances of Angry Behavior in the Service of Attachment

- Parents' angry behavior toward a child for engaging in dangerous behaviour...
- Anger toward a romantic partner who appears disinterested, or anger displaced on to a person perceived as a threat to the relationship...
- These relationships provoke strong emotions, the desire to maintain the relationship and distress when it is threatened.
- *Bowlby (1988) concluded.... "at the right time, and to the right degree, anger is not only appropriate but may be indispensable. It serves to deter from dangerous behaviour, to drive off a rival, or to coerce a partner. In each case, the aim of the angry behaviour is the same - to protect a relationship which is of very special value to the angry person" (p. 89).*

5

Attachment & Aggression: From Function to Dysfunction

- Children whose pleas for attention are *persistently ignored or rebuffed* -- or who experience maltreatment -- by their caregivers frequently *escalate their expressions of anger* in a desperate bid to engage their caregivers
- Increasingly aggressive and violent behavior may *elicit a response from caregivers*, but often punishment and retaliation
- Children who observe their caregivers use of aggression in intimate relationships may *learn that this is how attachment needs are met*.
- Extreme aggression and violence can *build equally if not stronger, but pathological bonds*.

6

Attachment & Aggression: Research Findings

- Moretti et al. (2007):
 - Insecure attachment related to higher aggression and higher psychopathy in adolescent girls and boys
 - Attachment anxiety in girls and attachment avoidance in boys is related to higher aggression
- Allen et al. (2002): anxious-preoccupied attachment at age 16 predicted increasing delinquent behavior between the ages of 16 to 18 years
- Orcutt, Garcia, and Pickett (2005): females high in attachment anxiety and low in attachment avoidance reported higher rates of perpetrating violence toward their partners.

7

Attachment Based Interventions

- Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003: 70 studies representing 88 intervention effects on parental sensitivity and/or children's attachment security
- Interventions that specifically focused on promoting sensitive parental behavior proved to be effective in changing insensitive parenting as well as infant attachment insecurity
- Marvin: "Circle of Security"
- Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn: Videofeedback Intervention to promote Positive Parenting
- Diamond: Attachment Based Family Therapy - adolescent substance use problems
 - *Common Focus: Enhance parental sensitivity and capacity to reflect on child's experience as prerequisite for changing parenting behavior*

8

CONNECT[®]

Moretti, Holland, Braber, Cross & Obsuth, 2006

- Manualized -10 Sessions
- Group Format
- Role Plays, Reflection Exercises; Instruction & Discussion
- For parents or alternate caregivers
- Evidence based & integrated program evaluation
- Directed at reducing aggression and violence, and promoting healthy relationships.



9

Connect: An Attachment Based Approach to Working with Parent-Child Relationships

- Focuses on the building blocks of secure attachment:
 - Caregiver Sensitivity: *Ability to perceive and interpret implicit communication in behavior in terms of attachment needs.*
 - Mentalizing/Reflectivity: *Capacity to sense and read human behavior- both in ourselves and others- in terms of underlying feelings and needs.*
 - Cooperation: *Ability to organize care so it fits with the quality of the child's state, mood and current interests.*
 - Dyadic Affect Regulation (Fonagy & Target, 1996): *Capacity to hold, tolerate and explore difficult emotional states in ourselves and others.*
- Caregiver sensitivity, reflectivity, cooperation and dyadic affect regulation **particularly during conflict** opens new opportunities for healthy relationships and development of self-regulation.

10

Connect: A Principle Based Approach to Working with Parent-Child Relationships

What Skills Do Parents Learn?

- Identify underlying attachment/interpersonal needs and reframe parent-teen conflict.
- Reflect on the psychological experience of their youth and themselves with empathy.
- Maintain emotional availability and modulate emotional arousal in the face of conflict.
- Strategic use of basic parenting skills to set limits and support their relationship with their adolescent.

11

CONNECT: GROUP STRUCTURE

- Each week focuses on a key attachment principle as it relates to adolescent development and parenting, followed by role-plays, exercises.
- Integrate techniques from CBT, mindfulness training, emotional regulation, distress tolerance.
- One hour sessions only! Ten sessions only!

12

CONNECT – Illustrative Session Principles

	Title	Principle	Illustrative Goals & Skill Development Focus
#3	Attachment over the Lifespan	Attachment is for life.	• Enhance recognition that attachment needs continue throughout life but are expressed differently as children develop.
#4	Conflict: An Opportunity for Understanding and Connection	Conflict is part of attachment.	• Enhance recognition and acceptance of conflict as a normative part of relationships. • Develop skills in regulating affect, maintaining connection and negotiating in the face of conflict.
#7	Empathy – The Heartbeat of Attachment	Understanding, growth & change begins with empathy.	• Enhance understanding of the role of empathy as essential to secure attachment. • Develop skills in empathic listening in conflict situations. • Emphasize that empathy is not condoning problem behavior • Strengthen skills in setting limits while maintaining empathy

13

CONNECT – Waitlist Control Study Effectiveness

Client Group:

- 13 boys and 7 girls (mean age 14.5) and 20 caregivers
- Severe behaviour problems – e.g., within six months prior to admission:
 - 21% of youth had dropped out of school
 - 59% placed outside their biological parents' home for period of time
 - 49% had threatened to kill or seriously harm themselves
 - 61% had threatened to kill or seriously harm someone else

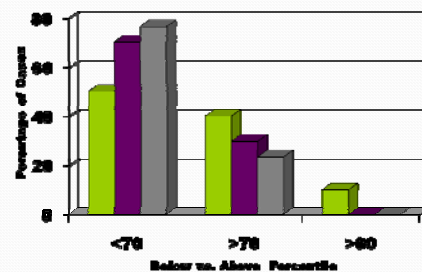


14

Waitlist-Control Study: Summary of Findings

- Good attendance; high treatment acceptance
- Significant reductions in over treatment phase in:
 - Aggressive behavior
 - Rule breaking
 - Social problems
 - Depression/anxiety
- Treatment gains maintained at follow-up 12-18 months

Clinical Significance: Percentage of Cases in Clinical Range on CBCL Total Score



■ PRE-TREATMENT ■ POST-TREATMENT ■ FOLLOW UP

16

CONNECT – Phase II: Community Generalizability

Clients

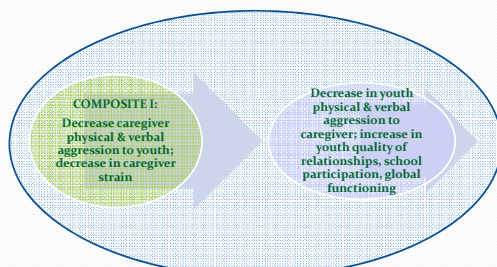
- 78 adolescents (Mean Age - 13.5) and 78 caregivers
- 35 girls; 53 boys
- Severe behaviour problems – e.g., within six months prior to admission:
 - 83.3% threatened to harm someone a few times
 - 21.6% arrested (16.7% more than 3 arrests)
 - 20.8% incarcerated
- Drop out rate – 14%
- Attendance at all sessions: 86%

17

Connect Generalizability Study: Summary of Results

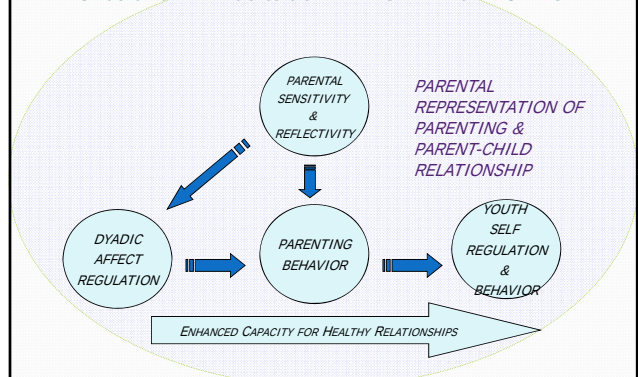
- Significant pre-post treatment reductions in:
 - Teen physical and verbal aggression toward caregivers
 - Caregiver physical and verbal aggression toward teens
- Reduced caregiver burn out as reflected by:
 - Lower caregiver reports of:
 - objective strain (e.g., missing work; disruption in daily return)
 - internalized strain (e.g., feeling sad, unhappy, worried)
 - externalized strain (e.g., feeling embarrassed, resentful)
- Significant increases in:
 - Consistent discipline
 - Parenting satisfaction
 - Perceived parenting efficacy

Behavioral Processes Mediating Change



⌘ Redundancy Analysis: orthogonal linear combinations of the predictors that maximize the variance explained in the outcome variables

REPRESENTATIONS OF PARENTING AND THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP: STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES UNDERLYING BEHAVIORAL CHANGE



Parenting Representations & Change

- Parents' beliefs, emotions and motivation to provide care and protection, including their:
 - Beliefs about parenting
 - Representation of their child
 - Representation of their relationship with their child

Hypothesis:

- Parents' underlying representations about parenting and their relationship with their child guide their parenting behavior, particularly under stress.
- Interventions that focus on sensitivity and reflectivity produce change in behavioral aspects of parenting via change in parents' internal representations.

Measuring the Impact of an Attachment Based Program on Parenting Representations

- Clients: Caregivers of high-risk teens identified for severe antisocial behavior, aggression and violence who complete Connect program.
- Design: Pre-Post Interview and 6 Month Follow-Up
- Measure: Parenting Representations Interview-Adolescence (PRI-A; Scharf & Mayseless 1997/2000)
 - Semi-structured interview taps parents' view of themselves as parents, their child and the parent-child relationship
 - Specifically designed for parents of adolescents, with an emphasis on age-specific parent-child challenges, such as the need to balance monitoring and care with respect for adolescent autonomy

Parenting Representations Interview-Adolescence (PRI-A; Scharf & Mayseless 1997/2000): Scale Examples

Representation of Parent and Child	Representation of Parent-Adolescent Relationship
Representation of Parent	• Secure base
• Competence	• Partnership & Mutuality
• Self understanding	• Emphasis of achievement
	• Autonomy granting
Representation of Adolescent	• Monitoring
• Trust/confidence in child's capacities	• Nature of future relationship
• Child's understanding	• Pain and/or difficulty
• Elaborate perception of child in future	
Narrative Styles	
• Balanced (Secure)	• Flooded (Anxious-Preoccupied)
	• Restricted (Avoidant-Dismissing)

Narrative Style

(see Mayseless & Scharf (2002). Maternal representations of parenting in adolescence and psychosocial functioning of mothers and adolescents.)

Balanced-Secure	Logic, consistency, lucidity and cogency of parent's evaluation of self and child. Parent offers evidence that supports assertions; information given is relevant and complete. - High warmth, partnership, mutuality, monitoring and autonomy; sound attributions for self and child behavior; elaborate perceptions of child and relationship in future; moderate negative emotions coupled with positive emotions
Flooded (Anxious-Preoccupied)	Parent is unable to contain feelings or thoughts regarding child, self and relationship. Incapacity to focus and explore objectively. - Inappropriate boundaries, high level of negative emotions, conflicts, pain, worry and guilt.
Restricted (Avoidant-Dismissing)	Parent avoids answering questions or resists by not giving information; neutral language in describing self and child; seems uninvolved - Inadequate and questionable attributions for self and child behavior; low monitoring; low emotional and psychological engagement

Measuring the Impact of an Attachment Based Program on Parenting Representations (in progress; n=5)

Representation of Parent-Adolescent Relationship	Pre-Treatment	Post-Treatment	
• Secure base	1.4	2.3	↑
• Partnership/mutuality	1.9	2.6	↑
• Autonomy granting	1.3	2.0	↑
• Monitoring	1.5	2.0	↑
Narrative Style			
• Balanced/Secure	1.50	1.80	↑
• Flooded (Anxious-Preoccupied)	3.60	2.95	↓
• Restricted (Avoidant-Dismissing)	2.5	2.1	↓

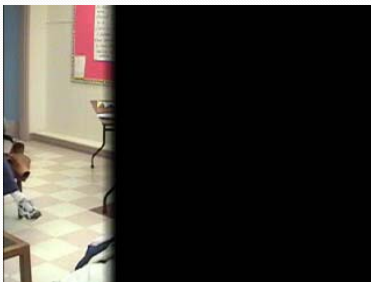
Interview Excerpts

I. Now I would like to ask you some questions related to the Connect Parent Group, okay? How do you think the Connect Parent Group influenced you?

- **Father:** Quite a bit, actually. It gave me a different insight into how to deal with Sandy, how to react with him and how to see what was actually in his mind, you know, like try to see it through his eyes, and I think that helps a lot. It's uh, you know, it gives me food for thought whenever I see him doing something or seeing him getting upset, I try and figure out why or what's he doing, what's he thinking sort of thing. Instead of just going in and saying, don't be angry, don't be upset. That doesn't work that well, so it's helped a lot.
- **Mother:** Well, I did do parenting classes before where I felt like I was talked at and told what to do in certain situations, which for Sarah, she's not an average kid.. What I never really thought about before was there is a need behind the behavior. I knew there would be a reason for the behavior, but not so much there's a need that's not being met. That's why when she was younger, she would say be turning everything upside down or....it's not that she just wants to be a little hellion, there's a reason for it. And that's what I try and keep in my mind most now when things are going on ... it helps a lot in just sort of fitting, like little puzzle pieces ... in our life, it seemed like everything was upside down and now it's starting to right itself.

26

Empathy Session: Parent Role Play



Empathy Role Play: Debriefing

Leader: How did that feel for you?

Parent: It felt... actually.. it was amazing.. because you diffused the anger in me.. the way you were talking to me... you diffused the anger... it's funny that I did this because now that I'm starting to do this with Ashley.. this is what she does... she'll come in, and she's like going to kill somebody, she's swearing and yelling...

Leader: And if you get stuck on the content: "What, you want to kill somebody? Well, that's not Christian like, we don't do that". You could get caught in the content easily...

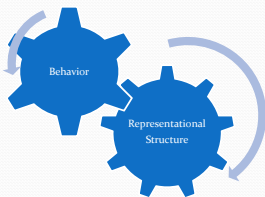
Parent: It's a weird experience.. you guys should try it.

Leader: Was that a good experience for you?

Parent: Yeah, that was a really good experience, because to tell you the truth, to do this you have to sort of get into how the child is feeling.

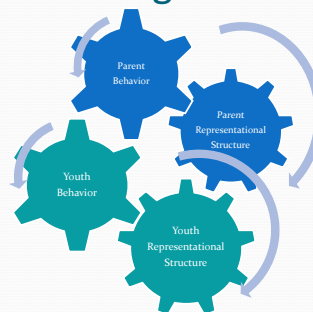
Transactional Patterns of Representational and Behavioral Change

- Efficacy is most frequently defined in terms of indicators of behavioral change
- Change processes occur at multiple levels
- Change in behavior influences change in representational structure which in turn changes behavior



Dyadic Patterns of Change

- Dyadic change is transactional
- Changes in parental beliefs and behaviors trigger change in youth beliefs and behaviors and vice versa
- Future analyses: Patterns of parent and youth representational change in relation to behavior change in parenting and youth functioning



Thanks to...



CHIR Institute of Gender and Health (IGH) & CHIR Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health (IHDCYH) (CHIR #54020; #84567)



Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre

Youth Justice

Research Trainees

Dr. Kim DaSilva
Janice Haley
Dr. Jessie Klaver
Ingrid Oluseth
Dr. Mayya Petel

Dr. Rosalind Catchpole
Dr. Stephanie Penny
Andree Steiger
Dr. Vanessa Wiebe
Dr. Zina Lee

Community Collaborators

Karla Struber, Connect Trainer Supervisor, Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre
Dr. Susan Cross, Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre
Dr. Roy Holland, Maples Adolescent Treatment Center
Ken Moore, Director, Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre