

The Relation between Affective Tone in Play and Mental State Talk

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Aim

Background:

- Play is very important for children to express themselves symbolically and children use various emotional expressions in play including important components of the ways to regulate own negative emotions and switch between different affects. In their play, they use various coping strategies including adaptive ones and conflicted ones (Chazan, 2002; Kernberg, Chazan, & Normandin, 1998).
- Mentalization capacity which can be defined as an ability to think about one's own and other people's mental states with the acknowledgment of uniqueness of each person's mind, is also crucial factor in organizing affects (Fonagy et al., 2002).
- Especially children with behavioral problems suffer from regulating their emotions and organizing affects as well as thinking about their own and other people's mental states (Halfon, & Bulut, 2017).

Aim: The aim of the study was to see if different affective tones and coping mechanisms in the play and mentalization capacity of children who applies for therapeutic support associate.

Methods

Participants

- 89 Turkish children who applied for therapeutic support
- **Child's age:** $M = 6.87$ years, $SD = 2.1$ Range = 2–10 years

Measures

• **Mental State Talk (MST)**

- Coding System for Mental State Talk in Narratives (CS-MST; Bekar, Steele & Steele, 2014)
 - Coded through story-stem narratives before the therapy sessions begin
 - Different mental state categories: Emotions, cognitions, perceptions, physiological states, action based and pseudo mentalization
 - Different orientations: Self oriented MST and other oriented MST

• **Child Play Therapy Instrument (CPTI)**

- Child Play Therapy Instrument (CPTI; Kernberg, et al., 1998)
 - Coded for initial sessions of the therapy
 - Structural Analysis; Affective Components: Affect regulation, affect transition, appropriateness of affect
 - Functional Analysis: Adaptive and conflicted coping strategy use

• **Receptive Language:**

- The Turkish Expressive and Receptive Language Test (TIFALDI-RT; Berument & Güven, 2013)
 - Receptive Language subtest

• **Expressive Language:**

- The Turkish Expressive and Receptive Language Test (TIFALDI-RT; Berument & Güven, 2013)
 - Expressive Language subtest

Procedure

- Data is acquired from children who applied for therapeutic support in İstanbul Bilgi University Psychological Counseling Center. Approval for participation in research was taken from parents before the therapy sessions begin.

Results

Correlation Analyses:

• **Zero-order Correlation:**

Zero-order Correlations								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Other oriented MST	-							
2. Inappropriate MST	-.27*	-						
3. Total MST	.24	.15	-					
4. Affect Regulation	.21*	-.31**	-.02	-				
5. Affect Transition	.32**	-.22*	.31**	.50**	-			
6. Appropriate Affect	.14	.01	.18	.31**	.35**	-		
7. Adaptive Strategy Use	.13	-.30**	.06	.34**	.25**	.18*	-	
8. Conflicted Strategy Use	.00	-.19	-.02	-.12	-.15	-.21*	-.04	-

• **Partial Correlation:**

- **After controlling for children's receptive, expressive language and age:**
- The association between other oriented MST use and affect regulation was no longer significant, $r = .19$, $p = .08$.
- The association between inappropriate MST use and affective transition was no longer significant, $r = -.17$, $p = .13$
- Other associations continued to be significant

Discussion

- Other-oriented mental state word use was positively associated with child's ability to regulate and modulate emotions and transitions between affective states. Focusing on other people's mental states can be useful for affect regulation and transition in children.
- Inappropriate mental state word use was negatively associated with child's ability to smoothly switch between different affective states and use adaptive strategies. Inappropriate attributions of mental states has also related in a negative way with affect regulation supporting the literature on mentalization deficit and affect regulation problems in children with behavioral problems (Fonagy et. al., 2002).

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