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I was deeply touched...

...or How to Brainspot with Children and Adolescents!

Recently I was deeply touched by an 11- year- old young girl, asking me if I could help her to get rid of her stuttering.

I applied Brainspotting and she shared special moments of her life with me.

While she was processing--very profoundly--her tears dropped slowly, heavily, and silently on my office floor – the tissue she used got soaked! I witnessed her face changing... relaxing. Her body sensation, of having a tight band around her neck, slowly disappeared. She was relieved!

Still the girl could not take her eyes off the little "King" finger-puppet, whom she chose to be her assistant. It became like a magnet for her gaze. I somehow felt, just to be silent.....

Tears again– but they were different tears. This time running quickly down her chest, and then a Whisper, "I'm so happy – so deeply happy!"

My therapeutic feeling for her tears at this moment was: "What a gift."

Last fall I asked therapists from various groups to share their experiences with Brainspotting for young people. Martha from New York, Marie José from Amsterdam, Monika originally from Poland, Patricia from Brasil, and Mark from Great Britain provided their time and experience while Skyping with me. A big thank you to them.

I asked five questions, which I will first answer describing the above case from a therapeutic point of view, followed by discussions about Brainspotting with young people.

Case Discussion:

1) Do we need to prepare our young patients?

Some days ago an 11 year old girl came into my office to Brainspot her stuttering. This girl is definitely a very bright young lady and so far, she had never stuttered in front of me. But, she said, she often stuttered in school or at home – especially when she was arguing with one of her siblings.

Having a very smart, wonderful young lady in front of me motivated me to explain how her brain could help the Brainspotting process. She basically understood the neurological

background of Brainspotting, before we started. I also told her the following fairy tail, to make clear that "kissing the ugly frog" can mean transforming stuttering into normal fluent language.

.... There once was a princess who was playing with her golden ball all of a sudden the ball fell into a deep well, and she wept bitterly. Unexpectedly, an ugly frog emerged from the depths and offered to bring the ball back, on one condition. His condition was, that from then on she had to take him everywhere as a playmate and treat him lovingly. The princess promised everything and the frog brought her the golden ball. Overjoyed, she ran home alone, disobeying her promise. During the family dinner the frog appeared. The princess was frightened and told her father what had happened. He advised and supported her to be loving and respectful with the frog. Although the frog disgusted the princess, she held on to her father's advice. As soon as she was in her playroom with the frog, he was accepted for the first time. In some versions of the story the frog is kissed by the princess, in other versions he is thrown against the wall. Either way, however, the frog could turn into a prince again, and the two still live together, happily!

With this fairy tail, I gave her the reassurance of knowing that I will be with her whatever may come. (Attunement – Relational and neurobiological frame)

2 How do we use the pointer with young clients? How do we use Inside Window, Outside Window, and Gazespotting with them?

Finding the spot with a finger-puppet on top of the pointer was done in a traditional way. By using the Inside Window, the girl chose a spot in front of her and to her left side.

Motivated by the above story - a finger-puppet frog (that we later changed into a finger-puppet king) was selected and put on the pointer. The girl could clearly define the activation point (Inside Window) which later became a Resource Brainspot, when she changed the frog into a king!

3) How do we find out from young clients about their body activation or body resource, and how do we use the SUDS?

The girl described the feeling of a tight band around her neck (SUDS 9). She kept telling me that the band became steadily looser, and in the end it felt like it had fallen off of her (SUDS 0).

4) Do we use Biolateral Sound with young people?

The girl liked to put on the headphones, with the "Best of Biolateral" playing, before she found the activation point.

5) What is processing like for young people?

Fixing the Brainspot was also easy for the girl, and her processing was as I described above: deeply emotional. She shared life moments with me, when she felt very impotent. (e.g death in her family, unsolved conflicts...) I could observe her being helpless with her tears dropping silently on the floor and in her very deep way of looking at the pointer.

During these times no one supported her. Being so lost, she started stuttering.....what a feeling of shame – what a feeling of being helpless!

While processing, the girl's face turned from very sad, with many silent tears, to a relaxed young lady's face! Sitting near to her, I could see and feel that she was getting released from her tension. She told me, that it seemed like the band around her neck slowly fell off of it.

Processing continued. She asked me to change the frog into a king and then kept staring at the same Brainspot. Finally her words, " I'm so happy – so deeply happy," changed it into a Resource Brainspot!

General Discussion of Brainspotting with Kids and Adolescents:

1) Do we need to prepare our young patients?

The emotional part for us as therapists is the trust that young people bring with them. They want to get rid of their symptoms and we are allowed to be creative and find any possible access to start Brainspotting.

In contrast to the case described above, let me share the experience that once our clients trust us, they do not necessarily need an explanation of what will be done!

It depends on the age and development of the clients, and on us as therapists-- whether we feel that the frame is well-enough set.

A general observation is, the younger the children are, the less explanation they need. Many kids trust easily and are mostly very brave in processing.

"A four year old boy was sitting on his mum's lap. There was no need at all to explain what will be done, because he was ready to process. His mum described sexual abuse and explained his difficulties since then. He felt so confident, that Brainspotting (Gazespotting) with him happened without any explanation during the talk".

By the way, sometimes children are overwhelmed by their feelings. A way of keeping them processing, is to explain that these emotions are like waves – coming huge and then drifting away. They can also be told that their brain is very clever and stupid at the same time. Clever because it starts facing horrible thoughts and stupid because it says, "Oh what a horrible thought – I have to run away...." So let us help the brain not to be stupid, and to change the horrible thoughts!

Mark from Great Britain wrote a picturebook: *"Brainspotting with young people – An adventure into the mind – by Mark Grixti and Illustrated by Rosanna Dean"*

explaining Brainspotting for kids. He mentioned that he uses it more for the parents than for the young ones.

A form of explanation used successfully is *that the pointer shows the direction of the "window" through which they can have access to the forgotten and often painful worlds! By opening this window (looking at it) they can clear those forgotten worlds and make them more cozy and fresh.*

Often it is not even planned to use Brainspotting in a session and it just happens. So let me answer the question "Do we need to prepare our young patients?" with one guideline: Kids are so open minded. Whatever we explain or do not explain in advance of using Brainspotting in a session, let us hold the frame around the young people in such a way that they can keep their confidence!

2) How do we use the pointer with young clients? How do we use Inside Window, Outside Window, and Gazespotting with them?

Brainspotting with this age group can be so full of happiness and joy and at the same time full of seriousness.

You may have them lying on the floor, dancing hip hop while focusing on an activation point, seriously sitting in the chair and processing for a long time, drawing pictures (e.g one for the resource point and one for the activation point), using Gazespots or day dreaming while focusing, playing theater, role playing, using the one-eye glasses (giving them the feeling, that they are smart enough to change their symptoms into normal feelings with only one eye), darken the room and let them work with flashlights.....and so on, and so on, and so on! Just catch them from where they are and use the Inside or Outside Window, or a Gazespot, as it is appropriate.

Whatever you choose to do, enjoy finding an access to the subcortex!

3) How do we find out from young clients about their body activation or body resource, and how do we use the SUDS?

Young people easily get access to their body feelings (even if they suffered from abuse – which personally surprised me).

Also with adolescents it is observed that they can feel where the body has its resource or activation point. They sometimes need special help because they feel this question to be inappropriate for them or their age. It helps to let them know that *"one of my other clients felt a crummy feeling in her stomach when she was thinking about the difficult situation...."*

Finding a Body Resource is described as a great help during the therapy, especially when the patients are overwhelmed. Making a "Body Resource gift" at the end of the Brainspotting process provides a feeling of strength that can always be recalled. *"It was so funny, whenever I passed the place where they attacked me, I thought of Mr. Poppy and felt his strength in my arms.....no more worry, that I would be unable to pass."*

There are many ways of offering SUD Scales:

Smilies, playing cards, using our hands as a measure, colours or just the difference between three feelings: really bad – bad – not any more.

"A very scared 8 year old girl was left alone and locked in her room by a babysitter 5 years before the therapy. At the beginning of the therapy she was not able to be by herself or stay at home, even with trusted persons, if they were not in the same room with her. She drew a picture of her body and pointed to the heart as a body sensation. To express the intensity of her feelings she chose UNO cards and created a SUD scale across the floor. She processed the trauma several times over various sessions, and always turned the cards face-down when she did not feel the described feeling. After five sessions all of the cards were turned over and her parents could leave her with a responsible caregiver, without her showing any fear if the caregiver was in another room."

4) Do we use Bilateral Sound with young people?

The Bilateral Sound seems to be very pleasurable to young people They enjoy listening and it gives them a feeling of importance.

"Wow you've got blue headphones!"

The music and the reason to use it can be described as a help for our brain, to allow the bad feelings to dissolve: *"Did you know, that our brain consists of two parts, and that in reality each part needs the help of the other one? This music, while being louder and then softer on each side, activates the little helper in the brain....."*

When the Brainspotting happens spontaneously, you might not use the Bilateral Sound.

5) What is processing like for young people?

Working with young people is "gift time" for us as therapists. As I described in the case above, this age group so often surprises us.

The innocence, honesty, and/or directness of these clients increases their ways of expressing feelings, sharing their lives with us, and showing emotions for which they have no words. Young people are mostly quicker in processing than adults. With confidence, it can be said that witnessing children's different ways of processing and healing can motivate us to use Brainspotting creatively with the age group between newborns and approximately sixteen/seventeen-year-olds.

The following two examples are from different therapists, who were surprised by the processing of their clients.

*1--A **forteen-year-old girl**, very fashionable and cool, who has just had her first bad experience with drugs:*

When she found the Brainspot she jumps up in her chair – shouting at me loudly:

"What is that – something happens here – this is spooky!"

I start to explain a little bit while she focuses the pointer. She gets calm and starts telling about her childhood.....she goes back to the time when she was eight and nobody limited her bad behaviour.....

"Why did they never stop me? At that time my father was still there and nobody ever told me that I was so disrespectful and nasty, and the more they let me do what I wanted, the worse I behaved----can you imagine, they just didn't stop me... I think they were afraid of me, is it possible that they were afraid of me?"

2--A seven year old boy suffering from fears:

"We found the Resource Spot, connecting with the sensation of fear and imagining that the little bee (at my pointer) felt the same. I asked him to try to become aware if the fear he felt, was more like if something bad would happen, or a feeling of abandonment, or of being alone and unprotected (he could never answer this before). He promptly answered that it was a sensation of abandonment.

"Just watch what is happening with the little bee and inside of you."

"The bee died."

"What happened to her?"

"She was born and then died."

"What happened when she was born?"

"I was abandoned. I was born from other parents who had abandoned me.

Then my parents who are now my parents got me. But I was abandoned when I was born."

"So just stay with that idea and notice what else comes up while you look at the bee."

"That's it."

"Well, I wonder if this is a feeling that something really bad happened when you were born, that felt as if your parents abandoned you. Remember when we talked with your mother and she told you that she got really sick shortly after you were born and could not take care of you, carry you on her lap and show you love, as you needed? "

"Yes." (With a sad face)

"Could it be that the baby J there inside you still feels abandoned because of it?"

"Yes."

"Can you imagine yourself, explaining to him what happened to your mother, that she is a loving mum now, and is with you when you are afraid, so that he does not need to feel abandoned anymore? "

(He repeated to the baby inside him my words his own way, looking at the pointer)

"So, what happened to him when he heard these words?"

(He became more agitated, distracted for a while, mostly not looking at the pointer, and did not answer)

"Can you now look at the bee again and try to see how baby J is?"

(Spent little time looking at the pointer, talking playfully about the sofa, twisted my pointer he had in his hand (!!!), was distracted, and then stopped)

*"He understood. He feels loved now." (tiny tears in his eyes).
"Where do you feel that good feeling of being loved in your body?"
"In my heart" (now quiet, looking at the pointer without distraction)
"So take some time enjoying this good feeling, looking at little bee..."
(After a while)
"It's good. Let's play now?"
"Yes. But just to finish for today, try to bring back your fear, as we started and see what happens now?"
"Much better. But I still feel that my father doesn't love me. He must come here too! Shall we play now?"*

Just to let you know!

We all: Martha, Marie José, Patricia, Monica, Mark and I, feel that it is a special honor to be responsible for this age-group. We work with children who have a huge variety of symptoms: From learning disabilities, to autism, abuse, abandonment, fears, hyperactivity, suffering from disasters, school shootings, etc. etc. None of us mentioned any difficulties using Brainspotting for a special symptom or therapeutic question.

Reading the cases and thoughts above, you might have realized that working with kids and adolescents is full of creativity and of surprises.

Sometimes they have no words but find great ways of expressing their emotions.

To finish this article let me share with you the WhatsApp message, I recently received from the 11 year old girl who gave up stuttering:

*"Hi
It's me.
You know what!
I'm not stuttering any more!
I'm having great times after your treatment. 😊"*

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..... all my thanks to David, for providing such a special treatment technique to us....