COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS ABOUT THEIR CHILD IN THERAPY

THE HOUSE-TREE-FIRE-WATER-Person DRAWING AS A BASIS FOR COMMUNICATION

ABSTRACT

A major difference between adult psychotherapy and child psychotherapy, is the therapist’s contact with parents. Review of the literature on the relationship between parent and therapist confirms a positive alliance as the most influential factor in the initiation, continuation and ultimate success of the therapeutic process with children. Literature on the alliance between parent and therapist dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite this, it has been noted that concrete guidance about the formation of such alliances and steps to follow in order to foster a positive alliance between therapist and parent, are less apparent. This gap in the research therefore informs this qualitative, exploratory study. The study proposes an investigation into the use of the HTF WP drawing as a medium for discussion during feedback sessions with parents. It therefore proposes a protocol when using the drawing in this way, which will allow for a better understanding by parents of their children’s developmental and emotional needs, as well as helping to express the therapist’s understanding of the dilemmas experienced by the child. The exploratory nature of the study will help clarify possible hindrances and strengths of the process.

The process of enquiry will include research participants of 20 parents whose children are in therapy. As the ages of the children are between 9 and 12 years, it is assumed that the parents’ ages will range from 30 to 50 years. Research subjects will be sourced from a local primary school. Therapy will predominantly involve sandplay therapy but include other possibilities like story writing and drawing. Each therapeutic process will consist of one intake interview and three feedback sessions with parents. The feedback sessions will be spread over 12 therapy sessions. Each child will complete three HTF WP drawings in the course of therapy, at the beginning, middle and end of the process. The paperwork at the start of the process will include a form requesting background information on the child and biographical information on the parent. Each parent will also complete a child behaviour checklist. Feedback sessions will be transcribed and the transcriptions, drawings and initial anamnesis forms as well as the process notes of the researcher will make up the data. Data will be analysed using grounded theory as a basis. The timeline for gathering the data is estimated at two years.

The objective of this study is to provide therapists with an effective, step-by-step approach of creating an alliance with parents to help further their work with children. If validated, this manner of communicating with parents may also be considered as additional training for therapists.