

Engagement and Empowerment of the Family in Dyadic Parent-Child Expressive Arts Therapy Program

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Introduction

Undoubtedly, having a loving, warm and respectful home environment is very important not only for the child but also the parents. However, the truth is that parenting a child with special needs is intensive and emotionally draining including - accepting the diagnosis, identifying a treatment plan, monitoring and worrying the child's progress, etc^{1,2,4}. Sometimes, high levels of parental stress and possibly parent-child conflicts create problems which could hamper the harmony in the family and the progress of the child^{1,2}. Therefore, there is a need for the child and the parents to spend some quality time together to "appreciate", "interact", "communicate" with each other and most importantly to "have fun" and enjoy the precious time together^{1,3}.

Dyadic parent-child expressive arts therapy is a joined up approach that involving both the children and their parents engaging different arts activities under a safe, relaxing and fun environment, facilitated by a therapist³. The sessions offer a number of potentially therapeutic opportunities³:

- Enhancing parents' observation skill, sensitivity, understanding and appreciation toward their children;
- Let the children establish a positive experience of having power and control to build up their confidence, self-esteem and creativity
- Learn and practice how to respect and listen to each other
- Learn and practice how to communicate the thoughts, ideas, wishes, needs to each other

Objectives

The primary focus of the dyadic parent - child expressive arts therapy is mainly on the children's relationship with their parents. Both the children and their parents are given a safe, relaxing and fun environment to engage in arts-based activities for better emotional expression, communication, and learning to appreciate and respect each other.

Methods and Materials

The group dyadic parent-child expressive art therapy program consists of 4-6 pairs of parents and children. Also there are eight 2-hour- expressive arts therapy sessions and two training workshops for the parents in total. Eight sessions are divided into 3 phases depend on the approaches (see Table 1)- i) child-oriented approach, ii) turn taking as "boss" approach, and iii) the parent-child co-constructing approach. Each session contains 3 sections including 1-2 theme- related warm up, 1 main theme EXAT activity and discussion/ sharing at the end of the session.

The parent training workshops are used to i) have the parents share their emotions and burden through the expressive art activities, ii) discuss the roles which the parents might take on in sessions depending on the approaches, iii) learn some techniques to use different art activities to build relationship with their child at home.

3 Dyad Parent-Child EXAT Approaches³

Approaches	Description	Benefits
Child-centered Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow the child's lead during the activities Witness the child's creative and art making process Reflect upon what they have observed Praise and acknowledge the work of the child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a positive and appropriate experience of having power and control Building confidence and self-esteem in children Gain insights about their children Learn to discover and appreciate their children's strengths, thoughts and creativity
Turn taking as "boss" approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child and parent take turns being "the boss" (make all the decision for the art piece) during the art-making process Reflection and discussion after the experience Let the child to be in charge first then the parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the awareness of both the child and the parent on how they interact and communicate to each other Both the child and parent learn and practice how to respect and listen to each other Facilitate the development of perspective taking
Parent-child co-constructing approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up specific tasks (theme but open-ended) joint expressive arts activities for parent and child Provide opportunities for them to communicate and work co-operatively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a co-operative working relationship with parents Learn and practice how to communicate the thoughts, ideas, wishes, needs to each other Learn and practice how to compromise, negotiate and respect each other

Dyad Parent-Child Expressive Arts Therapy Program

Phases	Approaches	Expressive Arts Therapy Activities	Art Modalities
Phase One	Child-centered Approach	My Favorite Character	Visual Arts (playdoh/clay) Drama (dialoging)
		Story Making & Story Enactment	Drama (comic story making) (role play)
		Mosaic Arts	Visual Arts
Phase Two	Turn taking as "boss" approach	Mirror Mirror My Favorite Things	Movement (imitation) Visual Arts (collage)
		Orchestra and Conductor	Music (instruments)
		Circle Painting	Visual Arts (painting)
Phase Three	Parent-child co-constructing approach	3D Dream "Home" Model I	Visual Arts (recycling materials building)
		3D Dream "Home" Model II	Visual Arts Drama (role play)

Conclusions

The significance of this study is to raise the awareness of the importance of empowering both the parents and the children in facing the challenges in the daily life. Also, there are needs in exploring how the dyadic parent-child expressive arts therapy program could be an effective intervention in providing a safe, relaxing and fun environment for children and their parents to learn the art of observation, respect, appreciation, expression, communication, cooperation, and having fun.

Table 1. 3 Dyad Parent-Child EXAT Approaches³

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