



How can caregivers and non-profit organizations interact to promote the mental well-being of children with critical illness?

Background:

★ Make-A-Wish Hong Kong (MAWHK) is a charity organisation which aims to grant life-changing wishes to children with critical illness in Hong Kong and Macau.

- To encourage children with critical illness to live in hope
- Be optimistic in overcoming all the challenges



Why we chose this as our topic?

From internship experiences: caregivers sometimes neglect the real thoughts of their children and focus more on the practical aspects (e.g. financial, physical.)

- **Wish-Catching Zoom meeting & Home Visit:** Caregivers interrupt the child and guide them to give a "better wish idea" that they considered more cost-effective.
- **Interview after wish granting:** parents realized that they ignored children's simple wish

Arguments

- The mental well-being of children with critical illnesses can **create long-term problems** but are generally omitted
 - long-lasting psychosocial adversity (Manning et al., 2014)
 - the mere focus on parents' stress
- High tendency to develop mental disorders
 - Major depression
 - 25% of critically sick children develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Mallory et al., 2023)

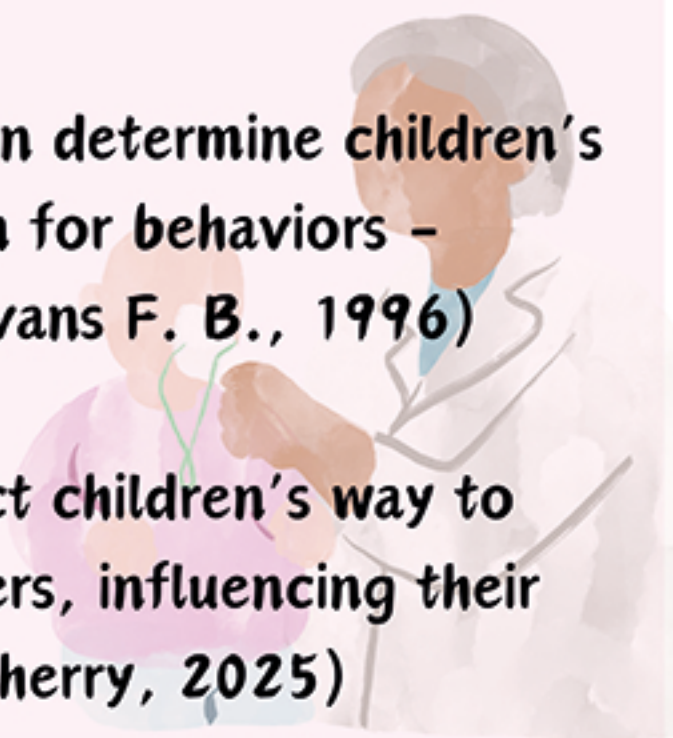


1. Interpersonal theory

- support from others can determine children's security and motivation for behaviors - receiving treatment (Evans F. B., 1996)

2. Attachment theory

- attachment styles affect children's way to seek support from others, influencing their emotional resilience (Cherry, 2025)



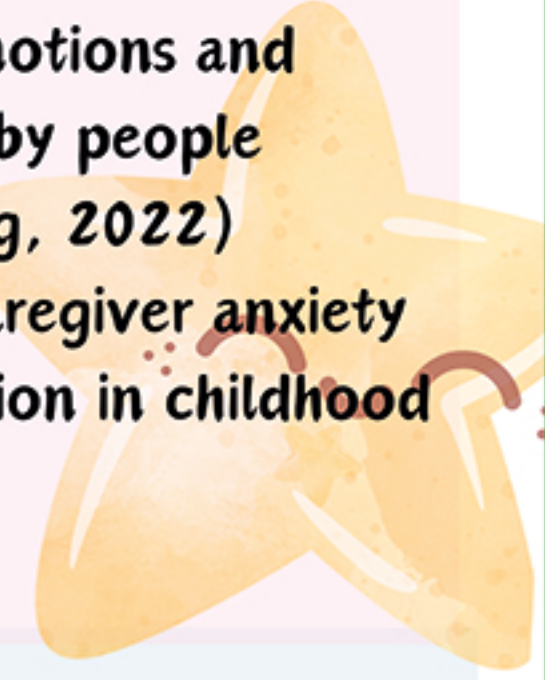
Suggestion

1. Prioritize the true desire of children

- Children simple wishes are usually neglected by their caregivers
 - Case study of Make-A-Wish
 - 92% of wish children reported an improvement in their mental well-being by achieving their true wish (Make-A-Wish, 2024)

2. Allieving caregivers' stress

- High Stress level hinders caregivers' ability to manage children's mental needs (Yagiela, 2021)
- **Social contagion theory**
 - one person's thoughts, emotions and behaviours are influenced by people surround them (Lu & Hong, 2022)
- Data: childhood exposure to caregiver anxiety increases in the risks of depression in childhood (Jin et al., 2025)



Conclusion & Key Messages:

- ★ Caregivers often downplay the importance of children's mental health
- Child with critical illness is independent individual whose **thoughts and feelings should be valued** under any circumstances
- Caregivers and NGOs should pay more attention to mental well-being of children with critical illness

