



Franco Baldoni, MD, PhD
DMM News Editor

The DMM Changes How You Understand Clinical Issues

This issue of DMM News is dedicated to work with frightened young children. **Leda Sportolari**, a clinical social worker and experienced psychotherapist in private practice, works with children, teens, adults, couples and families. She is an adjunct instructor at the Bryn Mawr College School of Social Work and Social Welfare and a co-clinical director of the Philadelphia chapter of A Home Within, a national nonprofit that provides pro bono therapy to children and youth who are in, or have been in, foster care.

Leda recently began training in the DMM and has found this approach to have sharpened and expanded her understanding of clinical problems. In her case vignette, Leda's new awareness of strategic function allowed her to interpret a play scenario more accurately. A child's ability to use play to represent a shift in her relationship with her mother is beautifully illustrated.

At the end of this issue, as usual, a link to information about future DMM workshops and courses is offered.

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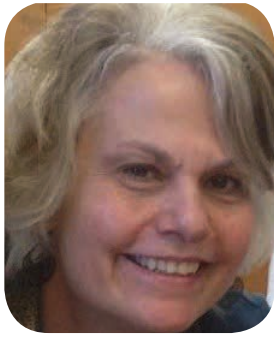
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Patricia Crittenden, PhD
Founder & Co-chair, IASA

**Every strategy is the best solution
for some problem, and none is
best for all.**

We need all the strategies.



Leda Sportolari, LCSW

Attachment in Action: *They're Tricking You!*

I had been working with 8 year-old Molly and her mother for almost 2 years in weekly dyadic play therapy sessions. Things at home had stabilized quite a bit when Mom told me Molly had said that she wanted to stop coming. Mom had responded, "Let's talk to Ms. Leda about it." Upon hearing this, I replied, "Let's see how the session goes today." While I was an experienced play therapist, I was new to the DMM when this session occurred; my newfound understanding was critical in my ability to correctly interpret what unfolded.

Mom and I became spectators as Molly created and then enacted a play scene, voicing all the parts herself. She collected a number of toy animals from around my office (wind-up toys, stuffed animals, puppets, wooden figurines) and arranged them on my table in families: monkeys, birds, cats, dogs, bears, etc. Starting with the cat family, Molly had one of the kittens exclaim, "Oh no! A tornado's coming!" to which she had the parent cat reply: "Don't worry! Let's go down to the basement." She then whisked the entire cat family to safety under the table.

One by one, she repeated this same scenario with each animal family, playing both the child and parent parts, until she got to the last family, the bird family. This time when one of the little birdies exclaimed, "Oh no! A tornado's coming!" Mother bird replied, "Wait a minute. Let me check . . . There's no storm. They're tricking you! But we can still go down the basement if you want." Peri, my parrot puppet helper, asked quickly, "Really? Are you sure they're tricking us?" Mother bird calmly reaffirmed that this was so. Then, the little birdie acknowledged that she was indeed tricking her Mom. Molly brought all the animal families back out on top of the table, there being no more need for them to take cover in the basement. Molly moved on to other play.

It was striking that Molly went right to this play scene: clearly, she had something to say about being ready to stop! Her parents and I had been discussing whether we would wrap up our work soon, but I hadn't wanted to simply accept Molly's semantic wish to terminate without knowing more about it. The story revealed, in representational episodic form, how far Molly and her mother had come. Firstly, when there's danger or even perceived danger, there's protection. My heart was warmed as the young animals turned to their parents when scared and their parents responded protectively. As I watched this unfold, I was thinking that our work was done, that Molly and her mother were now more comfortably attached. However, when Molly had the mother bird suddenly question the very reality of the storm, I was jolted out of my complacency, which is why I had my puppet anxiously ask, "Are you sure they're tricking us?"

My initial reaction was that mother bird was not responding at all sensitively, that the scared little birdie was getting challenged rather than comforted. But then it hit me: this was about Molly's use of C strategies! I had recently worked with Mom to help her not get overly wrapped up in her daughter's "tornado" of tears and remonstrations when Mom had to leave her at the dance lessons she'd been taking for years. Mom had told me in our last parent meeting that she had gotten much better at not falling into negative reactive cycles with her daughter. I had seen evidence of her calmer, more differentiated responses in our recent dyadic sessions.

I realized that the reversal in the play was even stronger evidence of integration: it revealed an awareness by Molly that she sometimes "tricked" her parents by being overly dramatic to get the protection and connection she needed. Moreover, Molly knew that her Mom could recognize this, not reactively respond to her, and yet still stay connected. Without my recent DMM training about the C strategy's reliance on deception, I would have misunderstood the ending of the scene: I would have felt concerned that Mom, who could be bristly and impatient, was still not sufficiently attuned. I would have been reacting to what a child using A strategies needed from her Mom, not what spirited, impetuous Molly needed. I would have recommended we continue our sessions rather than confidently saying I thought we were ready to stop.



At the time of this writing, the parent-child sessions have ended, and Molly's parents are beginning couples work. Stay tuned! The DMM will inform the course of that treatment too.

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The international association
for the study of attachment

Upcoming Special Issue of CCPP on the SAA

It's coming in July! The 2nd Special Section of Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry on the SAA. We'll have studies on clinical validity, autism, Family Drawings, siblings, and the match of mother's AAI classifications to the children's SAA classifications. Plus, there will be an overview editorial that will summarize, all in one place, what we know about children's functioning from the SAA and what we know about the validity of the SAA. Don't miss the July 2017 issue of CCPP.

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