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Multi-problem families: How can Dynamic-Maturational Model (DMM) guide healing processes?

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Topic: Clinical work

The infant and toddler team at our Mental Health Clinic (BUP Ringerike) Vestre Viken Hospital Trust, has its base in DMM when doing assessments and therapeutic interventions with multi-problem families. Coping with life events and life adversities are often a transgenerational issue, in which the on going process of how adapting self to a problematic life not only affect the individual. Maladaptive family processes with harmful effects on children are often motivated by intentions of ensuring safety and doing well. The mismatch between good intentions and harmful effects are, by observers, mostly focusing on the effects and less on the intentions of doing good. In our work we are conscious regarding how this dichotomy represents two different stories in order to be able to guide parents and families towards self-healing processes. Avoiding feed the blame and shaming phenomena that often functions to deepen the cleft between clients and help-systems/therapists is important in order to establish trust that can bring families into curiosity to these discrepancies. Parents struggling in their interactions and upbringing of their children need to become aware of how these adaptive processes become potentially harmful to their family due to degree of danger (real, anticipated and/or imagined) they are exposed to. Our experience with these families underlines the need of the social support systems, who often can function as additional threat to these families to be in an on going collaboration with the mental health services.

How it uses the DMM

DMM developed Crittenden keeps attention to discrepancies between intention and effect. Individual, dyadic and family adaptive processes are understood and offered in DMM-integrative approach to treatment as a constructive framework to guide treatment. In our work we use CARE-Index as a screening tool for every referred case. For some families the video feedback based in the interaction works fine as an intervention. Our experience is however that the PAA/DMM is the most powerful guide to treatment within the attachment relationships. The laboratory setting catches in a powerful setting for understanding how information, communication and emotional transactions functions in families.

What it can contribute to DMM

We use DMM as a guide to work in close collaboration with the community health, social and support systems in order to make the systems aware of how multi-problem families adapt to life adversities with self-protective strategies, and how this effects change. Processes towards a better life are not necessarily shared, experienced as helpful or met with trust. Our own efforts also need to deal with the stretch between our intentions and the effect we have on families and their children. People don't change just because they know they are doing the wrong things or because someone told them to.