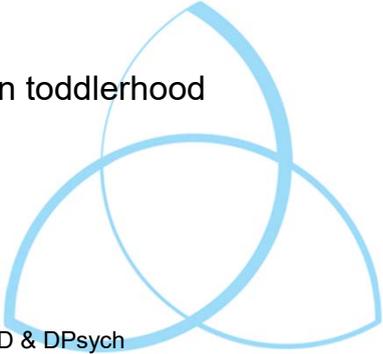


Difficulties in toddlerhood



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1

Contents

1. Types of conflicts
2. Common problems in toddlerhood
3. Normal difficulties vs early signs of pathology
4. Importance of early intervention
5. Case study

2

1. Types of conflict

- Development through toddlerhood is conflict based
 - external conflict with parents and/or environment
 - internal conflict between incompatible wishes
 - internalised conflict

3

Typical toddler conflicts

- rapprochement phase-rapprochement crisis
- anality
- the struggle to modify the pleasure principle in accordance with reality

4

Rapprochement phase

- toddler is more aware of smallness vulnerability and dependence
- mother and toddler need to negotiate a new distance and way of being together
- toddler needs to develop a new representation of mother
- toddler develops separation anxiety
- toddler rapidly alternates between wanting to push mother away and cling to her

5

Timor (1 year 7 months) and his mum, Rilinda

Timor and Rilinda had been absent from the group for several weeks. When they arrived Timor clung to his Mum, and observed the group from her lap. After a short period of time he moved away from her and played with the toy cars, but he frequently ran back and held his arms out to be picked up. Rilinda greeted him warmly, but told him firmly that he did not need to be picked up. Timor then returned to play with the cars.

Anality

- heightened aggression and conflict over ambivalence
- toddler developing capacity to decide whether to comply with mother's wishes and where/when to defecate
- wetting soiling and retention can be used to take control
- conflict between wish to demonstrate independence and wish to please mother

7

Struggle to modify the Pleasure Principle and omnipotence

- modification of toddler's narcissism and illusion of omnipotence
- toddler recognises his dependence on mother, and fears losing mother
- tantrums may result from conflicts in all these areas

8

Atifa (girl, 1 year 9 months) and her mother, Mariam

Atifa and her Mother were sitting at the play-doh table. Atifa was hitting her play-doh with a rolling pin, and squeezing it between her fingers. Mariam was rolling out play-doh and cutting out shapes. She showed them to Atifa who smiled. Mariam told Atifa to roll out her play-doh. Mariam held Atifa's hands and tried to help her roll the play-doh. Atifa began shouting, and pushed the play-doh off the table.

Demands on parents

- to be emotionally available
- to mirror and share toddler's experience
- to be firm yet flexible
- to allow toddler to separate
- to let the toddler take control of his body while keeping him safe
- to respect his individuality

10

2. Common problems in toddlerhood

- aggressive behaviour
- anxieties around separation (clinging)
- sleeping difficulties
- eating difficulties
- battles over toilet mastery
- sibling rivalry (sharing)
- tantrums
- fears
- language delay

11

3. Normal difficulties vs early signs of pathology

- Developmental strain
- Developmental interference
- Developmental disturbance

12

Parental difficulties

- their own unresolved conflicts may be similar
- their identification with the toddler encourages regression
- guilt and shame about negative feelings and/or loss of control
- stressful external circumstances
- own developmental needs

13

Timor (boy, 1 year 4 months) and his mother, Rilinda

Timor and Rilinda arrived to the group for the first time. Rilinda told us that after being cast out of her family home while pregnant she had come to live in the hostel (for homeless people), and had not left her room much since Timor's birth. Timor clung to his mother, and looked around the group fearfully. Rilinda told us that Timor clings to her, because she clings to him, as he is the only family that she has now.

Developmental interference "Ghosts in the nursery"

- toddler's world and that of his parents becomes confused
- toddler's identity burdened by unwanted aspects of parents
- toddler's own experiences are denied

15

Toddler defences

- Avoidance
- Inhibition
- Fighting
- Transformation of Affect
- Reversal of roles
- Restriction
- Projection
- Regression

16

Developmental disturbance

- toddler is unable to move forward in development
- development is uneven due to arrests distortion regression
- excessive or pathological use of defences
- ongoing problems in parent-child relationship

17

4. Importance of early intervention

- problematic symptoms are associated with problems in later life:
 - disorganised attachment at 1 predicts aggressive behaviour later
 - behavioral inhibition in toddlerhood is associated with anxiety disorder in adulthood
 - behavioural disinhibition is associated with problems in emotional regulation in adulthood

18

5. Case study

A boy who attended the parent-toddler group with his mother

19
