



Early intervention : a relational perspective

Early intervention : what makes it work ?

1 Special knowledge

2 Helping relationship

**Helping relationship in early
intervention :
lack of scientific studies/publications**

**An alternative : concepts from
developmental psychology and
the study of psychotherapy with
parents and young children**

Holding
Containment
Emotional availability
Sensitivity and responsiveness
Moments of meeting

....

Mentalizing

(P. Fonagy)

Mentalization : an internal team project

How did we proceed?

1 Exploration of the concept

**2 Intervision sessions:
reflection on early intervention
activities**

Mentalization : definition

**Ability to understand the mental
state of oneself and others
which underlies overt behavior**

**Mental state : needs, desires, feelings,
beliefs, goals, purposes, reasons, ...**

**The ability to recognize what's in your mind
and in your heart and in another person's
heart and mind**

**Mentalizing often results in
short and immediate verbal
reflections**



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short and immediate verbal
reflections**



**It happens all the time in everyday
interactions between parents and
children**

**It happens in counseling with parents
and children ...
we believe it happens in early
intervention**

Mentalizing capacity in children

**growing through different
stages**

**depends on mentalizing
capacities of caretakers**

Why important ?

Sense of self

Theory of mind

Better communication

Safe attachment

Regulation of affects

Mentalizing : special meaning for children with visual impairment? Why?

- **1 parents' mentalizing capacities are at risk**
- **2 children with severe visual impairment have difficulties in understanding other persons' mental states**

How can we help parents use their capacities for mentalization?

1 We stimulate parents to wonder what would be going on in the child's mind (watch wait and wonder)

**2 We express feelings,
thoughts, intentions, wishes
of the child ...**

**... sometimes directly talking
to the parents, speaking for
the child**

When she is giving Hannah her bath, her mother does not say much. She puts her baby in the water. Hanna screams.

As a counselor you could ask : “does she always react this way?”

Or you could say :”oh mommy, that was so warm, and wet. I did not know what was happening”.

**3 we express feelings that are
connected with the
relationship between child
and parent**

Little Robin is pulling himself up at his father's legs, trying to get his attention by making noises. His dad stops watching television and takes him on his lap. Robin is installing himself very close, puts his arms around his dad's neck and hugs him. The counselor notices : 'how good it is when your daddy feels what you want''

Elisa's mother has left the room to go to the toilet. She did not tell her daughter she was leaving. When she has entered the room again and has taken her place on the couch, Elisa moves to her, nagging. She tries to get on her mother's lap. When mother picks her up, she resists. Mother replies : "did you see it? She pretends that she needs me, but in the end she refuses contact".

**The counselor could say : "Do you really think so?"
Or she can say "Would it be possible that Elisa did want to be close to you but that she wanted to climb on your lap all by herself? Just like she wants to do other things by herself all the time now ?**

4 We take the parents' perspective and express the parents' mental state as we perceive it

End of theory.



Let's practice
mentalizing together



Jamie

**Blind boy. Very occupied with
motor activities + emotions
involved in standing, walking,
alone ...**

**We watch a few scenes of an early
intervention session.**

**Can you make a 'mentalizing' statement
directed to the child or the parents ?**

Scene 1

**Jamie is getting up at the table with a little help from his dad, J. reaches for his mother's hand, seems frightened.
Mother : "don't panick, there is no need to"**

“it’s frightening for him, I guess”

“Daddy, can you please help me getting up? It’s still frightening you know”

“May I hold your hand, mommy. I like it and it makes me feel safe”

Scene 2

Jamie is playing on the floor. IE worker is sitting with him, offers him a toy.

Parents are nearby. J. is making sounds. M : “I don’t believe a word of it”. F : “I don’t understand a word of it”. J refuses toy, throws it away.

**“You would like to tell us a lot, don’t
you?”**

(when child throws away the toy)

“No, you don’t want it”

(when he throws it again)

“Off you go, you really don’t want it”

Scene 3

**Jamie is standing at low table. Mother offers a new toy. J is holding her hand, listens to the sounds of the toy ...
Mother insists ... At last he's ready to explore this new object.**

“I am listening, you know. But may I hold your hand for a while?”

(mentalizing the parents’ feeling)

“You need to be very patient... At last he is ready to explore something new, but he doesn’t know yet if he likes it.”

Scene 4

Jamie is standing at low table. Then he moves along the table ... searching for his dad? Dad does not reach out, only says : daddy is sitting here ... here!

“It is new for Yoran that he is able to move away from you. Then he knows that you are still here – but he doesn’t know where you are.

This ability to come and go makes him proud and anxious at the same time...”

Scene 5

After playing at the floor Jamie is getting up with the help of his mommy and he crosses the space between her and the seat. Both seem happy.

“Thank you mommy for your help”

**“Walking alone makes me feel strong
and proud.”**

**“It’s nice to know you’re safe when you
go into the world”**

Summary

The relationship is very important in counseling in early intervention.

Some concepts of developmental psychology and the study of counseling with parents and infants are relevant for our early intervention

**Mentalizing is one of them.
We believe it is worthwhile to
explore these concepts and
find out if we can integrate
them in early intervention
practice and team
coaching/staff training.**

Thank you for your kind attention



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