

Child Neglect and Behavioural Parent Education

Research and Practice

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and
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Russell House Publishing

First published in 2014 by:
Russell House Publishing Ltd.
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British Library Cataloguing-in-publication Data:
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-905541-91-1

Typeset by TW Typesetting, Plymouth, Devon
Cover photo: www.dreamstime.com
Printed by IQ Laserpress, Aldershot

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Foreword

Child neglect presents as the most common form of child maltreatment which only in recent years has begun to receive more attention by policy makers, researchers and practitioners. It is no longer seen only as omission of children's basic needs, but, due to the accumulative nature of neglect, is now also recognised as commission, if early identification and intervention do not take place. The understanding of this problem now goes beyond physical neglect, to incorporate health, emotional, educational and social areas which often have devastating long-term consequences for a child. This is encouraging.

Having been involved for over 30 years in researching and working with failure-to-thrive children and their families, where neglect and emotional abuse were dominant features, I was very happy to write a foreword to this very useful and well-written book.

Child Neglect and Behavioural Parent Education: Research and Practice, by Dr Benny McDaniel and Professor Karola Dillenburger, describes in a very clear way parenting education and skill training that was originally developed for very young and vulnerable single mothers who were undergoing assessment in a Barnardo's Residential Family Centre. When undertaking this work there and elsewhere, the authors use behavioural methods in doing painstaking assessments of each mother and then devise a tailor-made individual parent-training programme to accommodate specific learning needs and skill deficits.

Behavioural methods lend themselves to co-operative goal setting and working together, empowering mothers to take control of their lives as well as take responsibility for the way they parent their children. Of course, there is no single theory or approach that can claim universal success when dealing with multi-variant problems such as neglect. But focussing on a few clearly defined, achievable tasks can go a long way, as demonstrated in this book.

What sets this book apart from others is its careful attention to all training details and to collaborative processes in working with these young and vulnerable mothers. For parent education to be successful requires a good working relationship between the young, inexperienced mother and the practitioner, in which the knowledge and skills of the worker embrace identified maternal strengths and motivation to produce mutually desirable changes. It means that the mother actively participates in the setting of the learning goals and the process of learning.

The authors convincingly demonstrate that such an approach, through the use of behaviour analytic theory and procedures, empowers and motivates the mothers to become better-informed parents. The book describes a range of methods and techniques which have been used, and their effectiveness is demonstrated through individual case studies. It also provides assessment and evaluation tools on feeding,

bathing, safety, hygiene, etc., which practitioners and researchers are bound to find useful in their work with neglectful parents.

I believe that this book will provide valuable information for practitioners, policy makers and managers on how to prevent the escalation of neglect, by allocating resources and devising treatment and intervention for vulnerable parents early on, helping them to become better informed, sensitive and responsible parents.

Professor Dorota Iwaniec

Hollywood, Co Down

October 2013

Preface

The scale of the problem

About half of the children on child protection registers or subject to child protection plans are listed because of neglect or serious concerns about the potential of neglect.

Last year over 21,000 children in the UK were subject to child protection plans because they were at risk of harm from neglect – up 7.5 per cent on the previous year.

NSPCC, 2012

Yet, child neglect has received much less attention than other forms of maltreatment, such as physical or sexual abuse. There is little empirical evidence on interventions that specifically address neglect or the prevention of neglect.

The effects of neglect on physical and mental health

Safeguarding children from neglect is a key function of the family, child care workers, educators, and society at large. Child neglect causes untold damage not only for the baby or child at the time, but in the long-term as children grow into adults. Adults who have been neglected as children are often unable to lead happy and fulfilled lives because they may find it difficult to form good relationships and can be prone to develop mental health problems or become involved in the criminal justice system. At a time when evidence-based practice is demanded in all areas of child care and protection, effective strategies for safeguarding children from neglect must be a key focus for research and practice.

Neglect impacts on all areas of children's health and development. In addition to the obvious physical risks that result from poor caretaking practices, such as physical injury due to poor supervision, neglect has adverse effects on children's psychological and emotional wellbeing. Neglected children are likely to present as passive and withdrawn, have complicated attachments, experience cognitive delay, and experience low self-esteem.

The intention of this book

In this book we build on over 40 years combined experience in research and working directly with children and using behavioural parent education and training to promote child development, care, and education. The research and practice described in this book shows how parents, in particular those who are young and vulnerable, can be educated to ensure that their babies and young children are safe and appropriately cared for. The behaviour analytic parent education and training methods described in this book are not prescriptive, but entail guidance on drawing on a range of techniques including coaching and feedback, video or in-vivo modelling and role play, instruction, rehearsal, and triadic methods that involve the professional,

parent and child. They guide child care workers on how to design and evaluate individualised programmes in a context of behavioural parent education. The book outlines the issues and the theory and research underpinning behavioural parent programmes for neglect and shows how evaluation of such programmes in individual circumstances can help make them accountable, transparent and effective in a way that is culturally sensitive, empowers parents and effectively safeguards children from neglect.

This book does not depend on any additional materials and, unlike some commercial parent education packages, is not restricted to specific intervention techniques in particular contexts. The goal is to enable and empower workers and parents, rather than to make them adhere to a fixed programme.

Because it is adaptable, both in agreeing on individual targets and by adapting their application through individual evaluation, the approach can be used with all parents, including those with intellectual disabilities and those who are vulnerable, for a variety of possible reasons, including being young first-time mothers. The programmes will generally need to be supplemented by other services such as individual counselling, learning homemaking skills, and on-going advice and support with child care duties. Individual data collection instruments and assessment checklists are described in detail under each programme with guidance on using them and examples of research findings that show their effectiveness with very young, vulnerable families with children at risk of neglect.

The emphasis in this approach on adaptability means that this book can be used in study and practice throughout the world. Developed by Benny McDaniel while managing a Barnardo's residential family assessment unit in Northern Ireland, and already used within Barnardo's across the UK, it is supported by the work of internationally respected educator and researcher Karola Dillenburger.

The advantages of using parent education based on behaviour analysis

First, it offers a transparent way of working that promotes service user involvement and has a comprehensive underpinning knowledge base.

Second, expectations of parents are clearly outlined and progress is evidenced.

Third, the emphasis on reinforcing parents' strengths rather than focussing on parental deficits create positive collaborative relationships. Rather than assuming that the parent is inadequate or at fault, the emphasis on evaluation in behaviour analysis allows working methods to be adapted quickly to ensure that they are effective in achieving the agreed goals.

Behaviour analytic interventions fit well within an ethical, evidence-based practice paradigm, as they are based on a well-established knowledge base and on methods that have been tested and can be replicated. In particular, the use of single system research designs provides accountability and transparency and facilitates data-based decision making (Keenan & Dillenburger, 2012).

The structure of this book

This book describes how a behaviour analytic knowledge base can inform research and practice to address a wide range of behaviours relevant to safeguarding children from neglect. The first chapter explores the definition and family, child and socio-economic factors of child neglect. The second chapter outlines the basic principles of behaviour analysis. Some of the most common misrepresentations of behaviour analysis are addressed. The third chapter applies behaviour analytic knowledge to child neglect, in particular examining contingencies that lead to and maintain patterns of neglect. Examples of behaviour analytic interventions are discussed. Chapter 4 delineates the issues related to behavioural parent education. This leads on, in Chapter 5, to the development of individual programmes. Chapters 6 to 10 provide examples of individual programmes for families whose children were on the child protection register at risk of neglect. Each programme is linked to specific aspects of parenting, including basic child care skills, child care routines, home safety, home hygiene, and parent child interaction. Chapter 11 outlines the implications of the development and evaluation of these programmes and explores why behavioural parent education is more effective with some families than with others. Finally, recommendations are made for families, professional practice, and policy.

Practice Tools

At the back of the book is a facsimile of the Practice Tools used in the authors' own work at the time of publication.

They include information on how the Practice Tools can be obtained in an adaptable, electronic format.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank the young mothers and their babies who participated in and contributed to the research, sometimes during very difficult life circumstances. We also want to thank the staff involved for their perseverance and hard work during the development of the programmes. For confidentiality we do not mention any names here, but you know who you are.

We want to dedicate this book to Ross Oliver and Mickey Keenan.

About the Authors

Benny McDaniel is Quality Specialist, working in Colin Early Intervention Community in Belfast, where she is responsible for supporting the implementation and quality assurance of a range of evidence-based early intervention programmes for children and families.

Benny is a qualified social worker with more than 25 years practice and management experience. Benny previously worked in Barnardo's, managing a residential family assessment unit where the material for this book was developed. Since the completion of her PhD in 2003, Benny has worked on service design and evaluation across a range of family and child care services. Benny has published a number of academic peer reviewed papers and has presented her work at numerous local and international conferences.

Karola Dillenburger is Professor of Behaviour Analysis and Education and Director of the Centre for Behaviour Analysis at the School of Education at Queen's University Belfast, where she also co-ordinates the MSc in Autism Spectrum Disorders, leads the approved Behaviour Analyst Certification Board (BACB) online course sequence, and supervises many Masters and Doctoral Students. Her research focuses on evidence-based early intervention for vulnerable children, parent education, and parenting across the lifespan.

Professor Dillenburger is a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst-Doctoral (BCBA-D) and has worked extensively in child care, education, and therapeutic settings before being called to Queen's University Belfast. She has published widely, including five paper-copy books and one ibook, five multimedia training resources on DVDs and CD-ROMs, and over 50 academic peer-reviewed papers. She frequently is invited to teach or deliver international keynote addresses in USA, India, Europe, and Australia.