

Title
SafePath™ an intervention to support and strengthen institutional teams working with children who externalise
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Key Words
Staff-support Institutional-setting Externalising-behaviours
Background
People living in institutional care settings have often experience abuse and neglect. These early experience have profound impacts on their functioning. Care institutions aim to heal by creating a therapeutic milieu. But they are also places of high stress for patients and the staff who have limited specialised training in the management of these extremely vulnerable children. Challenging behaviours which are common in these settings can be understood as a maladaptive ways of coping. Different behaviours require different responses. Thus it is important for all staff members with varying degrees of training to know what each child needs at a given time.
Program Objective
SafePath™ aims to strengthen the capacity of teams who work in various residential settings. Stronger teams can respond more appropriately to various challenging behaviours. As well as appropriately support children when they are in need of connection and attachment. This is done by supporting staff, helping them recognise their emotional reactions and then helping them to respond more appropriately to child's underlying emotions by providing the appropriate intervention. Thus facilitating an improvement in the overall therapeutic milieu of an institution.
Program activities
This is achieved by a highly experiential basic-training (14 hours), followed up by weekly sessions with all staff members. Learning is deepened and embodied through client specific discussions as well as reviews of incidents. The entire program is supported by cards which included images for the different child emotions and behavioural states.
Strength & challenges
SafePath™ is based on a simplified MODE model from Schema Therapy. Schema Therapy is a well-established emotion and experiential focused cognitive-therapy with a strong evidence base (numerous RCTs) for Personality Disorders. To be effective all stakeholders need to be on board, to ensure sustained and committed implementation instead of the once off training.
Outcomes and Evaluation
There is one published research study from the Netherlands, (and a few unpublished ones). These show significant impacts on the therapeutic milieu. SafePath™ is already used in numerous Dutch state treatment facilities, as well as child protective services. Other sites include Australian and Israeli forensic units.
Take Aways
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a safe and committed space for staff to talk about their experiences goes a long way to improving the children's experience. • Ongoing support of staff is more important than once off training sessions.

- Having a simple (easily communicated) conceptualisation of each child's problematic behaviour has a major pragmatic value when interacting with a child.

Citation

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