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NEWS FLASH



PUPPET PLAY:

A SUPPORTING TOOL IN DIRFLOORTIME®

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ABOUT: For some of us, using puppets in our DIRFloortime work can be intimidating. Our own self-consciousness can sabotage our use of puppets in our therapeutic work. In this insightful Newsflash, André Zirnsak invites us to put down that self-conscious attitude and begin to use puppets to help individuals progress in their developmental journey through their FEDCs.

André invites us to take another look at puppets as the perfect tool to use in DIRFloortime.

PUPPET PLAY AS A SUPPORTING TOOL IN DIRFLOORTIME®

I would like to introduce puppets to you as a supporting tool for helping children on the autism spectrum climbing up and moving along the developmental continuum. To use puppets in DIRFloortime we need to be aware of the fact that it is first about us and then about the puppet. That means, we need to make ourselves familiar with this tool before we can use it effectively. How can we do that? It can be useful to choose one puppet for yourself and consider these questions to guide your selection for self-reflection:

- Which puppet do I like and why?
- Which puppet feels good on my hand?
- Which puppet could embody some character traits as an exaggeration of myself?
- Which character traits do I want to exaggerate with my puppet (being a little cheeky, shy, grumpy etc.) and why?
- Which kind of voice do I want to choose for my puppet and why? Or do I need a puppet which is not able to speak and just make sounds?

After choosing a puppet for yourself, try it out in front of a mirror. Because if you are not into it, your play partner will not be either.



Now, let's have a short look at how we can use puppets at different FEDCs (Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities):

AT FEDC 1: a puppet could just be just a transitional object as described by Donald Winnicott. It could also be a moving object, which grabs a child's attention. Or it could be something one has at their side, when doing parallel play. It could also be a tool for expanding a theme and providing variation, by thinking about various activities one could do with it. (For Example, Put the puppet in a box and take it out again, roll it over the floor or throw it to the child, hide it under a blanket and search for it etc.). A puppet does not have to speak, it is much more important that the affect we use in our play with the puppet matches the play.

AT FEDC 2: we try to make interactive processes a little smoother by setting the stage for opening and closing circles of communication. We could hand the puppet to the child and take it back as a way to promote sharing attention and interest. We could physically interact with the child by having the puppet give a massage with it as an object. Or the puppet could just sit next to the child while doing parallel play.

AT FEDC 3: the puppet could just join us in interactive processes, helping build circles of communication with the child as a medium for a continuous flow of interaction and communication between the child, the play partner and the puppet.

AT FEDC 4: our play with the child becomes deeper and stretches toward the symbolic naturally. Puppets begin to take on a different meaning within our play at this point. We can use them as real supporting characters or little helpers now, which support so many components of Floortime including:

- Puppets can open the door to a child's emotional capacities
- Puppets can support the child's understanding of the emotions of others and to develop mindfulness
- Puppets can offer a platform for communication, by challenging the child to get into connection with an adult.
- Puppets can mirror the child and support self-regulation.
- Puppets can accompany everyday life situations, e.g.. brushing teeth, eating, going to the potty etc.,
- Puppets can support making a transition from one situation to another and can be used as a security object, e.g. going from home to preschool
- Puppets can support the child who is adjusting to a new situation, because a puppet also has to experience everything that is new, and could potentially feel insecure and by providing similar emotions to those of the child.
- They could support the child's ability to take on responsibility for another one, e.g.. the child could show care by bringing food when the puppet is hungry etc.

If children are not distracted by a puppet as a partner within an interactive process and perhaps are even interested in it or better yet are thrilled with it, then we know that a puppet can be a wonderful supporting character to encourage children to make their first steps into the symbolic world in a general sense. And obviously children will gain the understanding that symbolic play is not real and real at the same time...

FEDC 5 and 6: solidify the symbolic capacities. First children start with one theme in their play, like feeding a stuffed animal, playing to fall asleep and wake up etc. With time children develop little stories by combining a few themes with each other, e.g.. waking up, going to the toilet and eating breakfast. The more complex a story gets, a variety of different puppets can be used within the play. Children are able to structure their play now, by finding a concrete location where the story takes place, by using different objects which support the storyline (e.g. something to eat, a treasure box, weapons for defending oneself or fighting etc.) and use different characters to express various aspects of their personalities. In such a setting puppets can become different kinds of supporting characters, because the child is able to play with them on their own. Now every puppet symbolizes parts of the child on the subject level and possibly real life references on the object level. If symbolic play is at this stage of development, we can use puppet play as a therapeutic approach on its own. Therapeutic Puppet Play initially can provide an emotional relief for the person by helping to sort out emotions and answer unconscious questions and finally to develop a clearer perspective of one's own wishes to support development of a sense of self.



IN CONCLUSION, puppets are not only a tool to be used on the symbolic level. They can be so much more than that!

I hope you have collected some ideas about the use of puppets in DIRFloortime. I would appreciate hearing about your experiences with them as you integrate them in your own floortime practice.

Just one last thing: **NEVER** use a puppet as a teaching/educational tool! It will lose its "magic" and will no longer be powerful as a player in the drama and dance of floortime. Better to remember to:

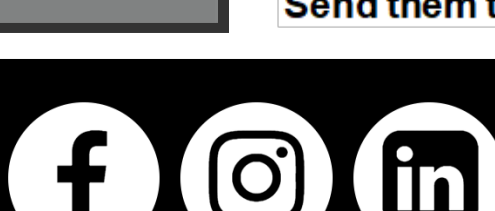
Have fun, do not take yourself too seriously, but do take your puppet seriously!!!

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CONTACT US!

- Questions or Comments About this Newsflash?
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- An Innovative Use of DIRFloortime® to Share?

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