

## CPD Online summary note

**Behavioural problems in the under fives: Part 1****Dr Margaret Thompson and Dr Paula Jenkins**

Behaviour and emotional problems in pre-school children are important and do not go away. Feeding problems and sleeping problems are the most common. However, hyperactivity and oppositional behaviour found in pre-school children are very predictive of future problems.

Depression and anxiety are rarely found in pre-school children, but if found need to be addressed. There are diagnostic tools that aid assessment with young children.

Children with underlying problems often present with physical manifestations of these, e.g. stomach aches (anxiety and/or depression) or sleep/feeding problems and crying for temperamental issues.

There are underlying developmental learning psychological theories underpinning the development of the child, aimed at understanding the child's position in the world and the development of morality.

When a child presents with a behaviour or emotional problem a good assessment is essential and should cover:

- the history in the parent's own words
- a description of the child's behaviour (a day in the life of)
- pregnancy, birth, developmental history and the mother's view of this
- parental and family background
- life events, environment.

Aetiological issues should include biological, social and psychological factors. An assessment of the mother-child relationship is important in order to consider attachment issues. The parents' own childhood experience is also relevant to the child's presenting problem.

**Reflective questions**

(1.1) What percentage of young children might have a serious disorder? Which problems might they present with? What would be the most common and second most common?

(4.4) What kind of information do you think you should ask for when taking the history?

(4.7) Write a short summary of what you would cover when making an assessment.

(5.3) Think about possible causative factors for behavioural problems in the under fives. Divide them into biological, social and psychological factors.

(6.8) Which attachment type do you think each child belongs to?

(6.14) What do you think would be Billy's differential diagnosis? Keep in the back of your mind whether his behaviour is because he has suffered abuse.

(6.16) What do you think would be John's differential diagnosis?

(6.18) What do you think would be Molly's differential diagnosis?

## References

- Ainsworth MD (1969) Object relations, dependency and attachment: a theoretical review of the infant-mother attachment. *Child Development*, **40**: 969–1025. [[PDF](#)]
- Ainsworth MD & Wittig BA (1969) Attachment and exploratory behaviour of one-year-olds in a strange situation, vol 4. In: *Foss, B.M., (Ed.) Determinants of infant behaviour*, Methuen.
- Belsky J, Hsieh KH & Crnic K (1998) Mothering, fathering, and infant negativity as antecedents of boys' externalizing problems and inhibition at age 3 years: Differential susceptibility to rearing experience. *Development and Psychopathology*, **10**: 301–319. [[abstract](#)]
- Bowlby J (1969) Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1. *Attachment*, New York: Basic Books. [[Amazon](#)]
- Bretherton I (1985) Attachment Theory: Retrospect and Prospect. In: *Bretherton, I and Waters E, (Eds) Growing Points of Attachment Theory and Research*, **50**: 3–35. SRCD Monographs. [[abstract](#)]
- Egger HL & Angold A (2006) Common emotional and behavioral disorders in preschool children: Presentation, nosology, and epidemiology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **47**(3/4): 313–337. [[abstract](#)]
- Fonagy P (1998) Prevention, the appropriate target of infant psychotherapy. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, **19**(2): 124–150. [[abstract](#)]
- Fraiberg S, Adelson E & Shapiro V (1984) Ghosts in the Nursery: A psychoanalytic Approach to the problems of impaired Infant-Mother Relationships. In: *Fraiberg S, (Ed) Clinical Studies in Infant and Mental Health*, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- Harlow H (1974) The Nature of Love. *The American Psychologist*, 673–685.
- Piaget (1982) Piaget: Research into the Minds of Children. In: *Sylva K and Lunt I, (Eds) 91–116*.
- Stallard P (1993) The Behaviour of 3-year-old Children: Prevalence and Parental Perception of Problem Behaviour: a Research Note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **34**(3): 413–421. [[abstract](#)]
- Stevens SE, Sonuga-Barke EJS, Kreppner JM, Beckett C, Colvert E, Castle J, Groothues C, Hawkins A & Rutter M (2008). Inattention/overactivity following early severe institutional deprivation: Presentation and associations in early adolescence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, **36**: 385–398. [[abstract](#)]
- Thompson M, Sonuga-Barke EJ & Stevenson J (1996) Chapter 1 page 6, 2005. In *Child and Adolescent Mental Health; Theory and Practice*. Ed Cooper M, Hooper C Thompson, Hodder Arnold. [[Amazon](#)]