Triple P - Positive Parenting Program®

The Triple P Positive Parenting Program: Does it address attachment?

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Outline

- What is attachment?
- How does TP address attachment conceptually?
- What does the research say?
- What are the potential differences in attachment oriented programs?
- Neurobiology
- Conclusions

What is attachment?

"the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment"
(Bowlby, 1951, p. 13)

"… the affective, cognitive and behavioural relationship between a parent and child that results in feelings of closeness, empathy, and understanding on the part of the parent for the child"
(Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2006)

What is attachment?

Most commonly measured using the 'Strange Situation'
(Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978)
→ A 12-18 month old infant remains in a lab playroom while the mother and a female stranger alternatively leave and return.
- Secure Attachment
- Insecure Attachment
  - Avoidant Insecure
  - Ambivalent Insecure
- Disorganised Attachment (later added by Mary Main)

Secure attachment

- Occurs when children have consistent, emotionally attuned, contingent communication with their parent or caregiver.
- The parent is responsive to the child and attuned to their emotional needs
- The child seeks proximity to the parent at times of distress
- Children are able to manage distress through the responsiveness of the parent

(Siegel & Hartzell, 2012)

Insecure attachment (Siegel, 2012; Powell et al., 2014)

Avoidant Insecure
- Occurs when a parent is repeatedly unavailable, rejecting of the child or uncomfortable with closeness
- The child adapts by avoiding closeness and emotional connection to the parent

Ambivalent / Resistant Insecure
- The child experiences the parent's communication as inconsistent, unreliable and at times intrusive
- The child develops a sense of anxiety / ambivalence about whether they can depend on their parent
- This creates insecurity in the parent-child relationship

Disorganised attachment (Main & Solomon, 1990; Siegel, 2012)

- Child experiences the parent's behaviour as overwhelming, frightening and chaotic
- Confusing for the child as they are biologically predisposed to seek comfort from the parent at times of distress, but their parent is causing the distress
- Seen in cases of child maltreatment and neglect, substance dependence & severe mental health difficulties

Does Triple P address attachment?

Triple P is developed from research based on
- Cognitive and behavioural therapy
- Social learning theory

Attachment-based programs (e.g., Circle of Security)
- traditionally derived from psychodynamic theory and interpersonal neurobiology

It has been argued that parent training programs such as Triple P ignore the attachment relationship (e.g., Coyne, 2013)

But is this true?

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

First set of strategies are aimed at developing good relationships between parents and children
Quality time
- DVD: *"time that's special to your child is time when your child approaches you. At this time stop what you're doing and pay attention to your child"*
- frequent brief periods of time at child's indication
- consistent with the idea that parents provide a secure base from which children are free to explore (Circle of Security)

Affection
- Encouraged at a level that both parents and children feel comfortable

Talking with children

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

Teaching strategies (modelling, incidental teaching, ask-say-do) encourage independence with the support (i.e., safe secure base) of the parent
- Require the parent to watch over the child and assist where needed, whilst at the same time encouraging exploration
- Incidental teaching encourages parents to tune into the moment their child may be ready to learn or looking for information, thereby encouraging parents to respond to the child's needs

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

Encouraging desirable behaviour
- Scott & Dadds (2009) argue that programs based on social learning theories may sometimes not work because reward strategies (descriptive praise, behaviour charts) are attachment neutral, while discipline strategies (e.g., time out) are attachment rich.

Triple P addresses this by →
- Rewards suggested as time with children / special activities preferred over materialistic rewards.
  - menu of rewards provided including activities such as excursions with parents e.g., going for a walk, to the beach / park / grandparents, reading stories, making cakes, doing chores together, dress-ups, make-up, etc.

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

Managing misbehaviour
- Problem child behaviour (e.g., destructive behaviour, not following a parent's request, aggression) can impact on a parent's feelings towards their child
- Strategies such as setting clear ground rules, using directed discussion for rule breaking, giving clear calm instructions and backing up instructions with logical consequences
  - provide parents with non-aggressive means to manage children's behaviour
  - assist children to learn more appropriate ways of behaving
  - assist parents to remain calm

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

Managing misbehaviour
- Episodes of non-compliance can be a risk point for parents to be angry towards their child or maltreat them.
- Quiet time and time out provide a brief break in the parent's interaction with their child to allow the parent and child to calm down before the parent next engages with the child to assist them to follow an instruction.
→ They assist to avoid the use of coercive and aversive interactions between parents and children which are damaging to the parent-child attachment

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

Managing misbehaviour
- Parents are advised that if they remove attention for problem behaviours, they need to continue to pay attention to good behaviours
- i.e., time out only works if time in is positive and plentiful
- Quiet time and time out are not indicated when a child is purely upset or distressed
  - only for significant non-compliance or aggression
  - last resort strategies that should phase out

Triple P strategies that address attachment issues

Negative attributions for children's behaviour are a risk factor for parents becoming angry with children and losing control
- "he's doing this on purpose"
- "she'll never change"

→ *Addressed in Triple P through*
- Prompting parents to consider more helpful explanations for their child's behaviour through discussing the causes of children's behaviour (levels 2, 3, 4)
- Discussing parenting traps in Pathways Triple P (level 5)

What does research suggest?

Improved parent-child attachment (as measured by the Parenting Relationship Questionnaire) observed following Pathways + Group TP intervention (Wiggins et al, 2009).
- Effect seen in terms of attachment, involvement and parenting confidence.
  - also led to reduction in blameworthy and intentional attributions for child behaviour
  - use of more positive parenting strategies (reduction in laxness, verbosity and overreactivity)
  - reduction in externalising behaviour problems

What does research suggest?

O'Connor, Matias, Futh, Tantum & Scott (2013)
Parents receiving the Incredible Years programme + a reading programme and demonstrated improvements on outcomes targeted on:

- *social learning theory,* i.e., child centred parenting (e.g., praise, commenting on the child's activity)
- *attachment* (defined as sensitive responding to the child)
  - parent shows awareness of the child's needs and sensitivity to his or her signals,
  - promotes the child's autonomy,
  - adopts the child's psychological point of view
  - physically or verbally expresses warmth toward the child).

What does research suggest?

- Researchers suggest that frightened or frightening behaviour is predictive of disorganised attachment (Main & Hesse, 1990)
- van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg (2003) commented in a review of attachment based treatment programs that no study focused on addressing disorganised attachment specifically
  - → TP has demonstrated evidence in reducing maltreatment and use of coercive / negative parenting strategies (i.e., frightening behaviour) and therefore arguably, disorganised attachment (e.g., Prinz et al., 2009; Sanders et al., 2014)

What are the differences in attachment oriented programs?

Emphasis on the interactive mental states of the parent and child

- Argument that TP does not consider the emotions of the parent or child
- Parent state of mind (i.e., anxieties that a parent experiences around attachment needs that arise in the parent's relationship with their child)
  - e.g., Circle of Security "shark music"
  - Miscuing of the child
- → *Level 5 Pathways, Enhanced, Family Transitions* assist parents to manage their emotions around their child, although not necessarily attachment focused
- → *Flexibility vs fidelity in the delivery of the program:* if parent-child relationship is problematic clinicians spend more time on this
- → Emotional behaviour routine in Teen TP

What does research suggest?

Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Juffer, F. (2003). Less is more: Meta-analyses of sensitivity and attachment interventions in early childhood. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*, 195–215.

- More positive attachment outcomes found in studies using specific behavioral techniques
- Programs focused on increasing sensitive maternal behaviour rather than programs designed to change mental representations

What are the differences in attachment oriented programs?

"Mind blind" cf. mentalisation / mind mindedness

- Attachment security is predicted by mind-mindedness, i.e., the parent's attention to the intentional state of the child and use of language that reflects this (Meins, 2003)
- Securely attached dyads have greater frequencies of emotionally rich language and autobiographical elaboration (Labile & Thomson, 1998; 2000).
- → *TP asks parents to formulate child behaviour*
- → Adding an emotion enhanced component to Group TP led to little extra benefit *(Salmon et al., 2014)*

What are the differences in attachment oriented programs?

Being with vs time out
→ Key difference

- Argument that young children can not learn to self regulate without help from an adult

- Quiet time and time out are not indicated when a child is purely upset or distressed
  - only for significant non-compliance or aggression
  - last resort strategies that should phase out

What are the differences in attachment oriented programs?

Video Approach

e.g., Circle of Security, Video Interaction Guidance

→ but this does not fit with the population approach adopted by TP

Neurobiology

- Attachment studies focus on attunement and co-occurring changes in parent and child brain functioning
- What about attachment beyond infancy?
  - role of SLT programs such as Triple P in brain functioning?

Neurobiology

→ Functional and structural changes in brain seen in child maltreatment
  - maltreatment is associated with region specific reductions in grey matter density (DeBritto et al., 2012)
  - functional reactivity in regions implicated in threat detection and response (McCrory et al., 2011)
  - stress system activation at lower thresholds than others (Shonkoff et al., 2005)

  Taken from McCrory & Viding, "Does crucial development only occur in the first two years of life?" Presentation to the Early Intervention Foundation (Nov, 2014) and Harvard Centre for the Developing Child

→ TP associated with demonstrated reductions in child maltreatment (e.g., Prinz et al., 2009), and therefore, arguably, brain functioning

Conclusions

Programs based on social learning theory (such as Triple P) and attachment based programs have been derived from different ideological perspectives and include different techniques, BUT

- there are likely more similarities than differences
- both are intended to
  - build the relationship between parents and children
  - reduce the use of coercive or negative management strategies by parents
- Triple P targets risk factors for child maltreatment (i.e., "frightening" behaviour on behalf of the parent) and is therefore arguably reducing the risk of disorganised attachment

Thank you for your attention

Questions or comments?