

Therapeutic Work with Emotionally Unintegrated Children

What are the causes of a child not achieving emotional integration?

- Not good enough parenting in the first year of life.
- Lack of bonding and attachment between mother and baby.
- Lack of primary maternal preoccupation.
- Lack of support for the mother to be preoccupied with her baby, from father and/ or extended family.
- Parents who have been emotionally deprived and abused themselves and consequently are unable to parent their own children.
- Instead of the baby's feelings being contained by the mother, they are returned in an amplified form eg. the baby panics and also picks up the panic in the mother.
- Social conditions (housing and unemployment) - preoccupation with survival may affect parenting skills.

What is it like to live with an unintegrated child?

- Panic rages whenever frustrated.
- Disrupts functioning groups
- Seeks merger in wild, excited, anti-social mobs.
- No concern for others.
- No sense of guilt or capacity to make reparation.
- Hyperactive - an inability to quietly enjoy an activity, even watching TV
- Poor sense of time and space
- An inability to play.
- An inability to communicate feelings. These are often 'acted out' in wild, anti-social behaviour.
- Verbally and physically aggressive.
- Unpredictable, irrational, unable to reason.
- Poor self-preservation, from poor personal hygiene to suicidal feelings.

What sort of environment does an unintegrated child need to be in?

- He needs highly individualised care, a facilitating environment, which can be flexible to meet his particular needs in contrast to an environment which insists that everyone is treated the same in order to be " fair" .
- A safe and containing environment.
- Adults who are committed, interested, involved and genuinely care.
- Sufficient authority in grownups - everyone needs to live within boundaries and to be aware of the limits.
- Enough space - personal space e.g. their own room and social space/ territory belonging to the group.

How may he get better?

- Begins to trust in a reliable grownup.
- Can allow himself to be dependant, maybe for the first time.
- Can begin to be depressed rather than living on a hyperactive high.
- Signs of regression, being younger than his years e.g. a wish to go into small containing spaces like a box, cupboard or sleeping bag.
- Begins to find some excitement in food e.g. looks forwards to special food from his focal carer, about which he may feel legitimate excitement rather than delinquent excitement from stealing.
- Begins to play - fantasy play, an imaginary world in a sand tray - symbolic communication.
- Having good and complete experiences - building up a more positive internal world and memory bank to counteract previous traumas. These could be exciting and/ or small activities, like making a go-kart with a grownup, or cooking something and eating it.
- A growing ability to communicate feelings and with feeling, which reduces the need to act out.