

THE FOCAL-PLAY THERAPY WITH CHILDREN AND PARENTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Chirico Ilaria (1) , Salvatori Paola (1), Trombini Elena (1)

(1) Department of Psychology, University of Bologna

The “Focal Play Therapy with children and parents” (FPT-CP; Trombini & Trombini, 2006, 2007; Trombini, 2010, 2011) has been developed to involve parents in the treatment of their children. The first phase of FPT-CP consists of 6 sessions oriented to the promotion of the therapeutic alliance (TA) with parents. Most of research investigated TA in individual psychotherapy; whereas there is a lack of studies on the therapeutic alliance of parents involved in their child’s psychological treatment.

The present study aims to investigate whether the first phase of “FPT-CP” has beneficial effects in terms of the alliance with parents, parenting stress and quality of parent-child interactions. A multi-method approach was used to collect data at two time points (Time 1: 1st session; Time 2: 6th and last session) from 9 parental couples and their children ($M_{age} = 3$ years) with eating and/or evacuation disorders. TA was assessed using the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI; Lingiardi, 2002), a specific measure for individual psychotherapy and the System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances-self report (SOFTA-s; Friedlander & Escudero, 2002), a measure of TA in conjoint therapy. Parenting stress was assessed using the Parenting Stress Index- Short Form (PSI-SF; Abidin, 1995). Furthermore, changes in parent-child interactions were evaluated through the Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, 2008).

Results showed that caregivers’ and therapist’s alliance increased significantly from Time 1 to Time 2. Specifically, mothers reported higher scores on the WAI *Goal* and SOFTA-s *Emotional Connection with the Therapist* scales, while fathers’ ratings increased significantly on the SOFTA-s *Safety* and *Total* scores. Though there were no significant changes in fathers’ PSI-SF ratings, mothers reported significantly reduced stress scores in the *Difficult Child* and *Total* scales of PSI-SF. Clinical implications of the study will be discussed.