

# MODULE 1 PUPPETS



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## WHAT ARE PUPPETS?

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Here is the  
PUPPET!



# PLAY THERAPY WITH PUPPETS

- ❓ **Play therapy with puppets** is a form of play therapy that involves **the use of puppets** by mental health professionals for **diagnostic and therapeutic purposes**.

- ❑ The **puppet** is an **inanimate object** that is **manipulated** by human action so that it moves and **appears to be alive**.
- ❑ Puppets are useful because they allow the child to be spontaneous, are easily manipulated and naturally lend themselves to a process of self-expression.
- ❑ Playing with the puppets creates an atmosphere of free expression that absorbs the child. The child tends to identify with the characters involved in the puppet play and projects his feelings and interpersonal conflicts within it.

# BACKGROUND



- ❓ It wasn't until the **1930s** that mental health professionals began to explore the **value of puppets** with children.
- ❓ The first pioneers were **Adolf Woltmann** and **Loretta Bender**, who used puppet shows to assist the children in psychiatric hospitals to freely express themselves and find solutions to their problems through **projection processes and identification with puppets** (Bender & Woltmann, 1936; Woltmann, 1940).
- ❓ The puppet **shows contained plots based on themes or conflicts commonly experienced** by children, such as sibling rivalry or the expression of aggression.

# BACKGROUND

- ❓ These children were asked to **provide solutions** to conflicts and to the problems expressed by the puppets, then **used as a basis for the therapy**.
- ❓ The **goal** of puppets was precisely to help all these children to reveal what had been hidden with the formation of symptoms and with the help of a therapeutic alliance, to bring about positive changes in their lives.
- ❓ This offered the intrinsic psychological security of the disguise, so the child felt confident that he was not revealed (or punished for) the secrets.
- ❓ Finally, it was quite clear that the child brought out **real feelings** within a **fictional story**.

# CURRENT USE OF PUPPETS



- ❑ Today puppets have become a **common practice** in **child psychotherapy**.
- ❑ Puppets are tools **effectively used** throughout the **human life cycle**, from childhood to old age.
- ❑ In addition, parents and professionals believe that puppet play is useful for children in **medical field, educational field and domestic environment**.

# PUPPETS

- ❑ This technique is so widespread with children, it helps them **to express their feelings**, to reconstruct events such as anxious and fearful events, to act a **more adaptive behaviors** and to **overcome inhibitions**.
- ❑ Puppets take on different shapes, sizes and colors.
- ❑ Puppets allow children to be very creative in acting in a drama or expressing an interaction.

- ❑ Through disguise, the puppets promote **imaginary play** while preserving children from shame, guilt and humiliation.
- ❑ Since they **provide easy access to children's imaginations**, puppets are useful in the playroom (Schafer, 2003).
- ❑ To increase the deeper value of puppet play, it is necessary an **empathic therapist** able to well understands non-verbal communication, along with a **large assortment of** aesthetically pleasing **puppets**.

# USE OF PUPPETS IN CBPT

- ❑ In the context of cognitive behavioural play therapy (CBPT) the puppets are inserted both **in the assessment phase and in the intervention phase** (Knell, 1993a, 1993b, 1999; Knell&Beck, 2000).
- ❑ Thanks to Susan Knell, the development of CBPT reveals that it is possible to use cognitive strategies with children, if the treatment is adapted to be developmentally sensitive in accordance with the needs of the children.
- ❑ While the methods of cognitive therapy can be communicated directly to adults, it may be necessary to pass them on to children indirectly through play.

- ❑ Children's thoughts, feelings and relationship problems find through puppets a **safe environment to be expressed**.
- ❑ Children experience a **sense of control and expertise** which help them to recognize and communicate feelings and thoughts which could still become the basis of maladaptive behaviours.
- ❑ Finally, children **enjoy** working with puppets and creating a show with them. For this reason they are a very successful tool in treating children.

- ❑ In most cases of CBPT, puppets are used as a means to provide specific cognitive and behavioural interventions, mainly through **modelling and/or role-playing**.
- ❑ In fact, most of the techniques in CBPT are applied through modelling, for example, using a puppet, a doll or stuffed animal to demonstrate appropriate social skills to children. Another example about modelling with puppets could be insert it into a positive reinforcement shaping intervention during a social skills training (Knell, 2009).
- ❑ In particular, puppets can model the use of cognitive strategies such as contrasting rational beliefs and developing positive affirmations.



- ❑ Through the puppet, the child can be in other person's shoes or he can watch what happens to another puppet.
- ❑ Playing with puppets is a powerful form of play adapted to many combinations and possibilities. The child easily identifies with puppets and their problems and therefore he is able to make suggestions and to think with appropriate problem solving strategies.

# **In cognitive behavioural play therapy, as in play therapy generally, according to Schafer and Drews, puppets are used because they allow children:**

- ❑ to cope with stress in small doses (which improves resilience);
- ❑ to develop the ability of self-calm and self-regulation;
- ❑ to break the cycle of secrecy and denial;
- ❑ to correct thoughts and cognitive distortions;
- ❑ to encourage affection expressions;
- ❑ to facilitate the discovery of coping skills to find a solution for evolutionary functioning;
- ❑ to reduce anxiety;
- ❑ to increase problem solving skills;
- ❑ to increase self-esteem and self-efficacy;
- ❑ to improve caring relationships beyond therapy;
- ❑ to enable children to give meaning to life experiences.

# TYPES OF PUPPETS



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There are **different** types of puppets:

- 1. Hand puppets**
- 2. Finger puppets.**
- 3. Shadow puppets**
- 4. Muppets**
- 5. Mannequins**

# WHICH PUPPETS ARE USED IN CBPT?

- ❓ In CBPT are used:
  - HAND PUPPETS
  - FINGER PUPPETS

# HAND PUPPETS



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- ❑ **Hand puppets** are **very versatile** and can be used from the age of 3 and it includes a **wide range of puppets** that are worn right **on the therapist's hand**.
- ❑ Hand puppets are very convincing **in their movements** and are capable of **greater aggressiveness and expressiveness** (Bender & Woltmann, 1936).

# HAND PUPPETS



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## Subtypes:

- ❑ **Glove puppets:** they are little more complex, with an internal division for the fingers which allows independent manipulation of the puppet's arms and head.
- ❑ **Puppets with a movable mouth:** they have a movable mouth that is manipulated by the hand of the puppeteer to facilitate self-expression.

# FINGER PUPPETS

- ❑ They are small puppets that fit **on a finger**.
- ❑ It is **the easiest type** of puppets to use **with a children**. Possono essere facilmente riposti e un bambino può sostenere un'intera famiglia di personaggi sulle dita di una sola mano. They give us the possibility to structure stories that include different members, for example of a family, and it is possible to insert all of them on a single hand.
- ❑ These are very light, comfortable, highly portable puppets, relatively inexpensive and easy to use from early childhood to old age.
- ❑ They are the **simplest, most versatile and popular type** of puppet.





# SELECTION OF PUPPETS FOR THE PLAY ROOM

# SELECTION OF PUPPETS FOR THE PLAY ROOM

- ❑ In general, it is best to show a diverse **collection** of **15-20 puppets** (Carter & Mason, 1998).
- ❑ An **insufficient** number will **not provide** a sufficient range of **expressions** and **too many** puppets could **overwhelm** the child.
- ❑ Personaggi umani (agente di polizia, dottore) **Figure di fantasia** (strega, bravo fata, diavolo, supereroe)

A basic collection must include: **realistic family figures** (mom, dad, two children), wild and domestic animals (wolf, dog, mouse), **human characters** (police officer, doctor) and **fantasy figures** (witch, fairy, devil, superhero).

# IN THE CHOICE, RECOGNIZE THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE PUPPETS



- ❑ The puppets in their standard collection should **include symbols** that are part of a child's life, such as a good fairy for a willing woman, or they should **symbolize internal personality characteristics**, such as a mouse for shyness etc ...

# MORE USEFUL PUPPETS



A **recent survey** of American play therapists has compiled a **list of puppets** that have proven most helpful in their practice (Schaefer, 2017):

- ❑ **Dragon** (it expresses frightening and traumatic experiences)
- ❑ **Turtle** (it is often chosen by shy children who want to hide themselves from social situations)
- ❑ **Family** (it describes family interactions)
- ❑ **Shark** (it expresses aggression and feel protected)
- ❑ **Bird** (it flies and easily avoid danger)
- ❑ **Dog** (it arouses comfort and care)
- ❑ **Dinosaur** (it expresses power and protection)
- ❑ **Alligator:** with the mouth that opens and closes with the zip (it express oral aggression by angrily devouring anything in its path)
- ❑ **Snake** (it express power and aggression)
- ❑ **Magician** (he has magical powers to improve things in his life)

# THE USE OF PUPPETS IN THE CBPT

PUPPETS ARE INSERTED IN THE GAMES ROOM AND USED IN:

- ❑ ASSESSMENT PHASE
- ❑ INTERVENTION PHASE
  - *BOTH IN THE UNSTRUCTURED PLAY PHASE*
  - *THAT IN THE STRUCTURED PLAY PHASE*

**THERE WILL BE SPECIFIC LESSONS ON THESE  
TOPICS**



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