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Margaret
Mahler

Psychological Birth

- Based on the principle that an infant's biological and psychological birth do not occur in unison.
- Psychological birth takes place over a period of approximately three years and is referred to as the separation-individuation process.

Separation-Individuation

- Involves the child's achievement of separate functioning in the presence of and with the emotional availability of the mother (Mahler 1963).
- Separation and Individuation are perceived as two interrelated processes:
- Separation- the child's emergence from a symbiotic fusion with the mother (Mahler 1952).
- Individuation- those achievements making the child's assumption of his own individual characteristics.

Mahler's Sub-phases

- 5 phases of the separation-individuation process.
- Symbiosis
- Differentiation
- Practicing
- Rapprochement
- Individuation

Phase One: Symbiosis

- This is where there appears to be no perceptible gap between the mother and baby.

Phase two: Differentiation

- The baby begins to recognise that there are parts of itself that are different.
- Observable behaviours are body exploration and looking.

Phase Three: Practicing

- Where the child begins to practice behaviours that come with development, e.g. walking and talking
- Behaviours that seem to be repeated many times are appropriate to this stage

Phase four: Rapprochement

- The child experiments with increasing physical and emotional distance between itself and the parent, but still with regular and consistent checking back.
- Measurable behaviours are things like the distance that is tolerated without visible anxiety and the number of times that the child returns to the parent.

Phase Five: Individuation

- Involving the ability to be separate and away from the primary carer with no obvious anxiety.
- This stage can be observed in the child that happily leaves the primary carer to undertake another activity either alone or with another.

How does Mahler's theory relate to people with learning disabilities.

- The early symbiotic stage may be interrupted by hospitalisation or initial rejection.
- The practicing subphase may be hampered by disability or lack of opportunity.
- The rapprochement subphase if reached is extremely dependant upon cognitive and physical skills. This would have an impact on those with profound learning disabilities, in particular those who do not have the skills to control their environment.
- If they have an additional physical disability they may not be able to move around to control distances'.

Pat Frankish

- Taking these factors into account, Frankish has inferred that, particularly with people referred to her displaying extreme anxiety, the phases had not been traversed.
- Based upon this, she attempted to answer the question as to whether it is “possible to provide therapy which will be a corrective experience and allow emotional and personality development to occur?”

Case Study

- Indirect use of an emotional development theory to assist a very complex challenging woman to achieve self control: behavioural outcomes and staff support.

Sarah

- In 2005 a 37 year old woman with severe intellectual disability was provided with a single person service in her own bungalow.
- She was assessed as having an emotional development age of approximately one year.
- She was very demanding, could be aggressive and self-harming, and did not engage in much purposeful behaviour.

Prior to the move

- 5 staff to restrain
- 3 waking staff available
- Highly medicated
- Not able to share
- No eye contact or touch
- Severe injuries to others
- Self injurious behaviour.

Mahler's model in practice

- Mahler's model of emotional development was used to identify which stage, (differentiation, practicing, rapprochement and individuation), of development Sarah had reached.
- Sarah was assessed as being in the practicing phase.
- The staff were trained to understand the theory and were supported to tolerate the demands.

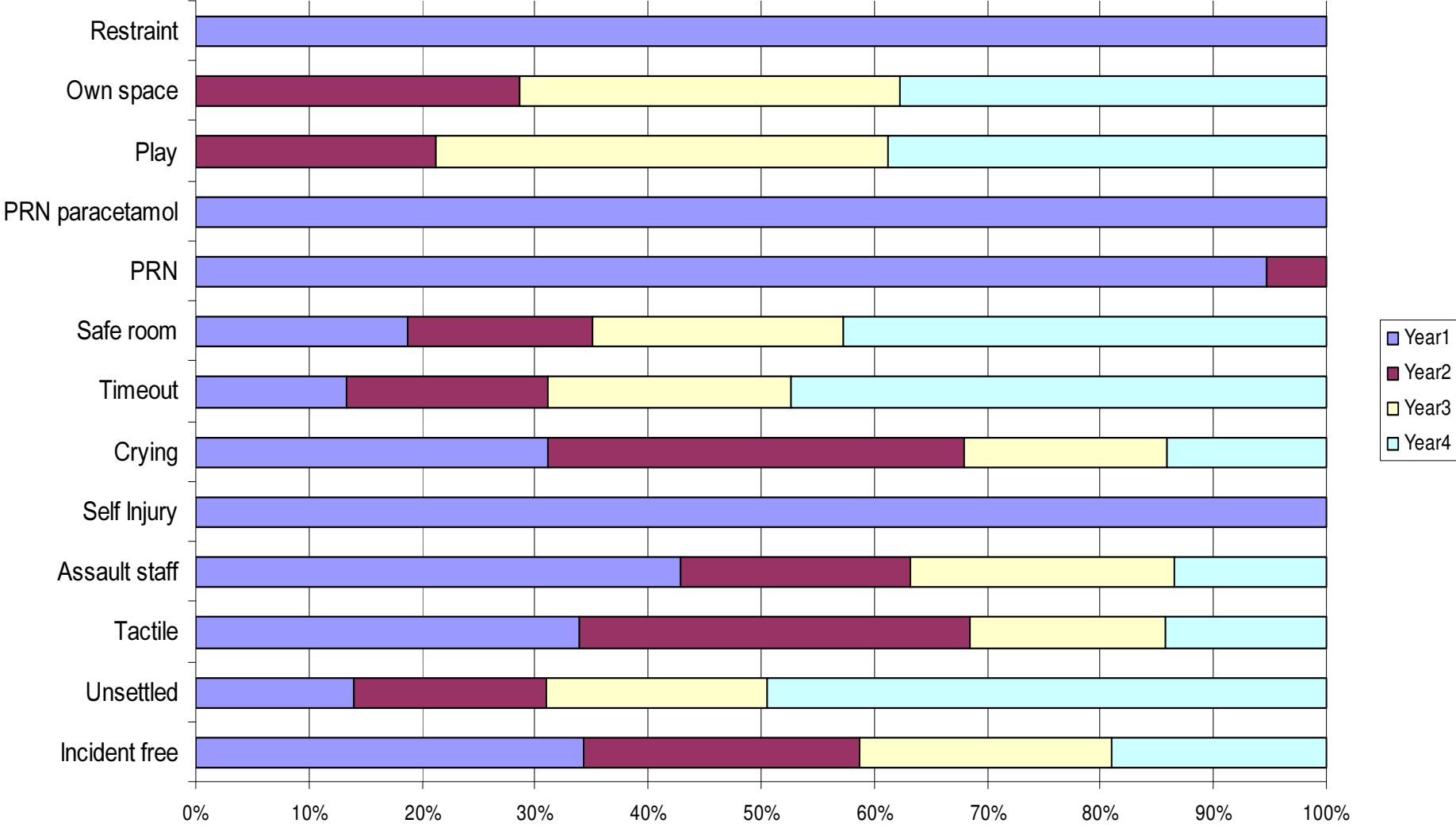
Staff Support

- Support staff were trained to provide an environment which would nurture emotional development with the aim of increasing this to the stage of personality integration and hence, a state of reasoning, i.e. from practicing to rapprochement.

Data Collection

- Daily 10-30 minute charts were used to collect the data.
- The following information was recorded:
- Number of incidents
- Crying
- Restraint
- Use of Safe room
- Time out
- Tactile contact
- Play
- Self injurious behaviour
- Unsettled
- Settled
- Assault Staff

Yearly averages



Observations

- 40 minute observations have been carried out intermittently to determine the stage of development that Sarah has reached.
- The observations show that Sarah displays no symbiotic behaviours, a massive reduction in differentiation and practicing behaviours and a large increase in rapprochement behaviours. With the majority of behaviours being rapprochement behaviours

What the results mean

- Sarah has developed further into the rapprochement phase and there has been a distinct increase in explorative and purposeful behaviour, as well as times of self control. This therefore shows real results from using therapeutic environments, and a method of working based on Mahler's developmental model, to aid development of people with learning disabilities.

Positive outcomes

- 1:1 support staff with additional member of staff when required
- 1 staff on at night
- Moderately medicated
- 2/3 way interaction
- Shares accommodation with 2 other tenants
- Initiates tactile and playful behaviours
- No serious injuries
- Periods of self control.