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From Infant Observation to Parent-Infant Therapy. How we apply our experience of Infant Observation to the therapeutic work with parents and their children.

Saturday, April 20, 11:30 a.m. / Kleiner Festsaal / Parallel session A1

Abstract:

In the *first part* of the paper, I will describe the special implication of the setting of Infant Observation (E. Bick) from a psychoanalytic approach: We learn to observe closely the “language” of the baby, the movements of the body, the facial expression, the form the baby makes contact with the object (mother, father, observer). In the seminar group we learn to connect these descriptions with psychoanalytic theory and define hypotheses about the development of the inner world of the infant. We learn to register the impact of the observation on the emotions of the observer, to see the baby as a “subject”, which attracts our full attention, and to describe the observation in a detailed way. - In the *second part* I will analyse the impact of Infant Observation on the technique of parent-infant therapy:

- Providing a psychological holding – babies respond to the gaze of the therapist who tries to feel their way into their mind in the same way as a parent does in embodied parental mentalisation. When the infants feel emotionally held, they sense that the therapist’s mind is available to help contain and process their feelings.
- We communicate with the baby as a person. Therapists try to understand and talk directly to the baby putting into words what is going on from moment to moment in the therapy room. We try to put into words our observation about the gesture, the gaze, and the play to make the child and the parents understand what the child is expressing.
- We give interpretations by describing what happens in the session, how the child can address the problems the parents are talking about.
- Pleasurable playfulness. As we understand the play of the child as a form to express their emotions, their problems, and their wishes, we can respond to these expressions. We see the joy of the children, which feel understood, their joy, their sadness, their fear. When a therapist relates to them, this conveys a potential of playfulness which may ease painful or despairing feelings.

All these dimensions help to be able to help the family system in a few sessions.

Keywords: Impact of Infant Observation on the ability to observe, the inner observer, parent-infant psychotherapy, technique, metaphor

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