

“The way we move together”

The consideration of Parental Embodied Mentalization as a framework for addressing dyadic misattunement within the context of medical trauma, persistent oral aversion and artificial feeding

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Infants have a remarkable capacity to detect the intentional signals expressed through the form and intensity of their parents' movements and modify their attentional bodily displays in response. A parent's capacity to comprehend their infant's experience may be expressed through their whole body movements as well as in a verbal narrative.

The multi-modal nature of parent-infant interactions will be illustrated by a clinical case. Videos of feeding interactions will be used to discuss the concept of embodied mentalization and the development of self. The qualities of the movement patterns in the videos will be examined.

The infant is highly vigilant to the intentional stance communicated through the movements of others, both as an adaptation to the intrusive and painful medical procedures he has experienced and to the misattuned actions of his distressed mother.

The signalling of the infant is met, repeatedly, by mismatched violations of his agency. In defence the infant demands, as best he can, that others recognize he “owns” his mouth and body. He withdraws and turns away in protective avoidance.

His mother's lack of resolution to the medical diagnosis creates a spiralling intensity in her interactions. Overtime the dyads' interactions become mutually recognized but constraining. The way in which shared observation of videoed non-verbal movement sequences may access a less tightly controlled, implicit level of parental representation will be discussed. It may allow the parent to become aware of previously unconscious bodily sensations and reactions and thus potentially, to lapses in mentalizing.