

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy for Toddlers (PCIT-T): Evaluation of an attachment-based parenting program

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Parent Child Interaction Therapy for Toddlers (PCIT-T) is a new attachment-based parenting intervention designed to meet the specific developmental needs of children aged 12-24 months with disruptive behaviours (e.g., Kohlhoff & Morgan, 2014, Girard et al., 2018). The program is based on the assumptions that (i) disruptive toddler behaviour is a sign of emotional dysregulation, (ii) the parent-toddler attachment relationship is the vehicle through which the child's capacity for emotion regulation develops, and (iii) the toddler period is a time of rapid neuronal development and so is an opportune time for early intervention. PCIT-T is an adaptation of the evidence-based PCIT program used with older children, and involves live coaching by a therapist from behind a one-way mirror during parent-child play sessions. The program aims to improve positive parenting skills (with a particular focus on emotion regulation for both parent and child), child behaviour and the quality of the parent-child relationship.

In this presentation we will report results of a recently completed wait-list controlled study examining outcomes of PCIT-T in a sample of 54 families with toddlers, referred to the Karitane Toddler Clinic in South Western Sydney. Outcomes were assessed at baseline, post-treatment/post-waitlist and 4-months post-treatment. Results showed PCIT-T to be associated with significant improvements in child behaviours assessed using the Child Behaviour Checklist (Achenbach, 2000), parent skills and child compliance assessed using the Dyadic Parent-Child Interaction Coding System (Eyberg et al., 2010), parental sensitivity and other attachment-related parenting behaviours assessed using the Emotional Availability scales (Biringen, 2008) and infant attachment pattern assessed using the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP; Ainsworth, 1978). Qualitative feedback was also positive, adding further weight to findings. Overall, results of this study suggest that PCIT-T is an effective early intervention program, associated with parental satisfaction and positive outcomes across both attachment and behavioural domains.