

Emotional and social withdrawal

Amsterdam 2016

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Emotional withdrawal

Emotionally withdrawn individuals

- Do not take part and involve
- Are physically present , emotionally ,absent‘
- Build a virtual wall around the own person
- May observe carefully what happens without participation
- Questions are not answered at all or only evasively

Social withdrawal

- Children/adolescents avoid contact or make a strict selection of the people they communicate and spend time with
- Can be combined with emotional withdrawal

Result of withdrawal for the withdrawn person

- Reduced or absence of interactions and communication
- Creates distance virtually or real, puts the person in a special position and certain isolation. This position/ isolation can be
 - a wished result
 - a form to express personal needs
 - the only possible way to interact due to psychological troubles.

Result of withdrawal for the others

- Creates feelings of
irritation
helplessness
worries
anger
frustration.
- The person that want to be in touch with the withdrawn person experience the 'power' within the relationship as unbalanced

Additinoal characteristics

- Withdrawal is related to how the child/ adolescent perceives and experiences a certain situation
- Does not necessarily correspond to the adult's evaluation of the same situation
- Often involved is the feeling of:
Loss of control
Conviction that own self-efficacy is low or absent

Additional characteristics

- Withdrawal occurs in many different context
- May develop over a long time or within a few days
- There are no specific causes
- Support can be given to
the person that withdraws
parents
caregivers and teachers

Withdrawal

- An adequate, healthy reaction to certain situations
- A coping strategy
- A strategy to gain control
- A symptom of psychological troubles

Anna

12 years old girl

Sometimes withdraws emotionally and socially when situations seemed to become difficult for her. Claims that she does not feel at ease.

Shows this behavior mainly at home, rarely at school. Refuses to talk about the issue.

Parents feel they loose impact on Anna, are angry and determined not to tolerate this behavior anymore.

Withdrawal an adequate reaction

- It is helpful to consider withdrawal to some extent as an adequate and healthy reaction to cope with certain situations.
- It is important to give children space and time to sort out their feelings
- Give them the chance to learn how to articulate their needs

Sort out things

- What do I need?
- What do I want?
- What do I have to do, in order to get, what I need?
- How do I ask for support?

Enhance the development of

- Readiness to take up responsibility for own well being
- Competence to shape relationships
- Strength to deal with frustration
- Train flexibility to cope with the fact, that one often does not exactly get, what one hoped and asked for

Lisa

7 1/2 year old girl.

Before vacations was very active, well integrated in class, 'leader' of the group, many friends.

Actual situation at school: does not participate in group work anymore and does not share activities with classmates during recess. Observes everything carefully. Interacts well with teachers. Classmates complain about Lisa.

At home no change in the behavior. Teachers are unsure on what is going on and how to react.

Withdrawal a way to cope

Sometimes withdrawal is a strategy to gain control, in the sense:

‘If I have no impact on what is going on I control at least my reaction to the given situation.’

The wish behind: I withdraw , gain control and influence with my reaction how things develop.

The 'message-surprise cake'

The messages were:

- It is your turn to decide what we are going to play
- Say the worst three words you know
- You may give us three commands
- Guess what the girl next to you has in her pocket
- Ask one of us to do you a favor
- Cross the room like a penguin

Nenad

10 years old, lives with his aunt since 1 year because his parents died. Emotionally withdrawn since last 6 months.

Intelligent boy, liked to read and play football

Actual situation: Seems to be upset, expresses no complains and no wish. Does not answer to question concerning his well being. Answers most of the time I don't know. Attends school regularly without active participation, withdraws as often as he can, does his homework, keeps the rule.

Common reaction to withdrawal

- The temptation is big to make all sorts of assumptions
- Risk that these assumptions are taken as facts and interventions are based on these assumptions and unilaterally constructed
- Problem solving attempts
- Loss of the thinking: it can be this or the other way
- Loss of SF attitude

Keep in mind

- Withdrawal is a form of cooperation!
- Withdrawn individuals have many competences!
- Focus on the child's strength and give appreciation
- Withdrawn persons can be successfully reached in a different way than through conversation

Beyond talking

- Spread a positive rumor
- Communicate per sms, e- mail,
- Create situations in the therapy context where the child experiences self-efficacy, control
- Initiate situations where the child has the opportunity to feel useful

Nenad juggles its way back to life

- Teaches me how to juggle
- Allows me to tell the teachers that he knows well to juggle
- Teacher spreads the rumor that the school is attended by a juggle artist
- Nenad gets the opportunity to give a juggling course at his school

Withdrawal a symptom

- A sign of:
psychological troubles/illness,
retardation,trauma
IT/ drug addiciton
praepsychosis
- reaction to mobbing,
cultural clash

Lukas

17 year old adolescent

In second year of his apprenticeship to IT specialist.

Actual situation: since two weeks socially and emotionally withdrawn. Did not go to work several times.

Parents and teachers are worried and fear Lukas could commit suicide.

Suicide

- Suicide can be looked at as the most extreme form of withdrawal
- To talk to somebody that wants to commit suicide means to talk to somebody that conceptualize her/his actual situation in the way that to kill her/himself is an option-may be the only option this person can think of at the given moment.
- It is very important to take serious this perception and give the idea space!

Talk to a suicidal adolescent

- Explore the client's point of view
- Talk about the possibility to commit suicide and value this option
- Explore the advantage of being dead
- Invite the child/adolescent to elaborate additional options

Co-construct versus prevent

To elaborate additional strategies
to the one to commit suicide
is something completely different
from holding back somebody to kill
her/himself!

Prevention

- Many children and adolescents experience suicide prevention as additional problem to the one they already have
- They do not feel heard and taken seriously

They might be right: most adults that want to prevent suicide use a lot of energy for the prevention and less to listen and look through the client's eye.

Wording to address suicide

- It seems to me that your situation has reached the point where you can't cope anymore and you might think to commit suicide is the best option
- I can imagine that there are times, when many difficult things happen at the same time and to commit suicide becomes the best option to think of

Wording to address suicide

- I just wonder how you could cope up til now with all these difficulties? It seems to me you are a very strong adolescent, yet for every human being there are limits. In recent times how often did you think, I can't anymore, I give up?
- I get the impression you struggle to keep your emotional balance since a long time . Somehow it seems to me there is no energy left and you wish to be dead and not have to face all the difficulties anymore

Explore the advantage of being dead

- Suppose you decide to commit suicide, what will be better?
- What relief will that bring to you?
- What other advantages will that have?
- What will you not have to struggle with anymore?

Explore copying strategy

- How did you deal with all those difficulties up til now?
- How did you manage to stay alive up til now?
What helped to keep going?
- What would other say, how you managed?
- What else?

Find differences

- When was it last time the difficult situation you are in was a tiny little better to cope with?
- Where have you been? What did you do at that moment?
- What would others say when and where they saw you in a slightly better situation?
- How will you realize things start to be better?

Become active

Interventions have to be well prepared because we can not expect cooperation. It is more likely to be perceived as somebody who disturbs. It is helpful to have clear ideas on the personal reasons the intervention is based on:

- Worries and concerns about the child's, adolescent's development
- Anger and frustration because the child/adolescent does not show confidence
- Care about the need of a social group (class, club members)

Become active

- What is going on, when things are o.k.?
- What needs to change from the care giver's, teacher's, my point of view?
- What is negotiable, what not?

Prepare the intervention

- What am I interested in as intervening person?
- What information would I like to gain and for which purpose?
- What information do I want to give?
- Talk to withdrawn children/adolescents as experts of their life! and partners not somebody you primarily have to give support
- Show interest in their point of view from the not knowing stance

Structure of the conversation

Actual situation:

- Explore the actual situation, especially the withdrawal from the not knowing stance
- Summarize what you hear and give credits for the shown copying strategy

Structure of the conversation

Preferred situation:

- Explore the preferred future from the child's and your point of view
- Inform what needs to happen that you can say things are o.k.
Inform about not negotiable items the child/adolescent has to meet.
- Elaborate a clear picture of the preferred future
- Start to co-construct concrete steps to this future

Helpful to construct first steps

- Explore in details what other difficult situations the child/adolescent has mastered before
- Which of the child's competences and strengths could be helpful in the actual situation?
- Suppose somebody would give the child helpful support: who would that be? And what would this person do?
- What else can the child think of?

Suicide some figures and facts

- Most of children/adolescents' suicides/suicide attempts emerge from an immediate crisis
- In comparison adults more often balance the facts of their life and then commit suicide
- The rate between suicide attempts and suicide is with children/adolescents around 25:1

Suicide some figures and facts

- Male adolescents commit 2-3 times more often suicide than female adolescents
- Female adolescents express 2-3 times more often suicidal thoughts than male ados
- 10% of all human beings in Europe show at least one suicide attempt during their life