

Preface

“There is nothing more practical than a good theory.” (Lewin 1952)

“Each investigator begins with the paradigm of choice and discovers its inadequacies.” (Patterson 1982)

This book is for providers and trainees (infant and early childhood mental health therapists, home visitors, pediatricians, nurses, and other early interventionists) who advise and guide parents of infants, toddlers, and young children (0–8). The goal is to help providers address concerns about the parent-child relationship, the child’s emotional development, and the child’s behavior problems. This book provides a framework for early interventionists to incorporate the most recent research on behavioral and attachment approaches to parenting into their practice. There is a particular emphasis on addressing the types of concerns most likely to bring families to the attention of providers—conflictual parent-child relationships, harsh parenting or maltreatment, and child conduct problems.

Over the past 50 years, two different theoretical models have guided parenting advice and intervention—behaviorism and attachment theory. Each of these models has spawned rich programs of research and staunch supporters. These two traditions have also led to sometimes conflicting recommendations regarding how to best respond to infants/young children and sometimes conflicting views of “positive parenting”. With an increasing focus on research-informed interventions in work with families, these traditions have also led to competing claims regarding research support for various positive parenting approaches.

I speak both behaviorism and attachment theory. Although this sounds silly, there is some truth to it. Behaviorism and attachment theory have their own terminology which complicates communication between researchers and therapists in these two traditions and makes it difficult for providers to evaluate competing viewpoints.

As a clinical child psychologist whose interest in the field of infant and early childhood mental health began in the 1970s, I came of age as a parent-child therapist/researcher during the growth of interventions based on behaviorism and attachment theory. I find value in both theoretical orientations. My clinical training includes training in behavioral interventions for disruptive behavior, behavioral interventions for anxiety disorders, parent coaching interventions, and interventions

based on attachment theory. My research incorporates concepts from social learning theory, attachment theory, and temperament theory.

The goal of Part I is making research about behaviorism and attachment theory more accessible to providers. Chapter 1 provides an overview of how behaviorists view parent-child interactions and outcomes research on evidence-based behavioral parenting interventions for young children with disruptive behavior and families at risk for maltreatment. There is a particular emphasis on outcomes research for the behavioral parenting approach I have been disseminating for the past decade, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). Chapter 2 provides an overview of attachment theory and outcomes research on interventions based on attachment theory. There is a particular emphasis on attachment theory-based approaches that influence my framework for working with families of young children. Chapter 3 summarizes some of the areas of disagreement between these two traditions and begins to explore how the two theories may complement each other.

Part II is the “to do” part of the book. The goal of Part II is providing therapists with a framework for integrating behaviorism and attachment theory when coaching parents of young children. If you’re more of a doer, you may want to dive into Part II of the book first and read the earlier chapters only as questions arise about theory, assessments, or methodology. (Of course, if you’re a doer, you’re probably one of those readers who skips the preface.) Chapter 4 lays out the rationale for using parent coaching to address problematic parent-child interactions and a framework for incorporating attachment theory and research into parent coaching. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 discuss tailoring parent coaching to different patterns of attachment.



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Parent Coaching

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