

CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS: AN ACT-ORIENTED GROUP TRAINING FOR CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL DISORDERS

Marta Schweiger*, Francesca Pergolizzi** & Paolo Moderato*

*IULM University and IESCU M

**IESCU M

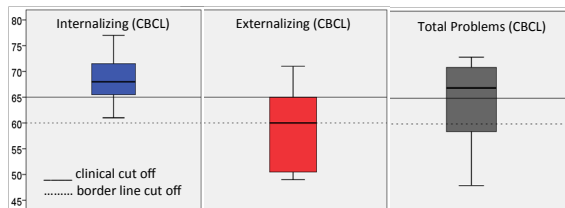
INTRODUCTION

The poster illustrates sample, methods and results of a group training with children with internalizing emotional disorders. The main goal was to help anxious, sad, withdrawing and impulsive children to **increase their psychological flexibility**. The intervention is designed on a model of emotional competence consistent with a **functional-contextual perspective**, based on the **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy** hexaflex and including some procedures of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (Schweiger & Moderato, 2013).

PARTICIPANTS

Characteristics of the sample:

- ✓ **12 Children** (4 females and 8 males)
- ✓ **Age 8-11** (mean age: 10)
- ✓ Diagnosed by a child mental health service near Milan (Italy)
- ✓ **Emotional disorders** associated with different psychopathological diagnosis (Specific Learning disability, ADHD, Stuttering, Anxiety disorders)
- ✓ **Clinical** (10 children) or **border-line** (2 children) score in the **Internalizing** scale (anxious-depressed + withdrawn-depressed + somatic complaints) of Child Behaviour Checklist - CBCL (Achenbach 2001)
- ✓ Are not receiving psychological or pharmacological treatment
- ✓ Normal IQ and normal score at Test of Emotion Comprehension -TEC (Pons & Harris, 2000)

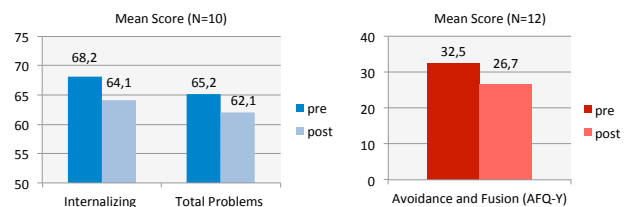


In the group Internalizing and Total Problems distributions are different from Externalizing distribution (Non-parametric Friedman test, N=12, p < .01)

PROCEDURES

Children, divided into 2 groups, received a **10 sessions training** (90 minutes each) through exercises, games and creative activities within a **metaphorical framework**. The training protocol is described in the table below. Revised Anxiety Multidimensional Scale – RCMAS 2 (Reynolds & Richmond, 2012) Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth - AFQ-Y (Greco, Lambert e Baer, 2008) were administered to children and CBCL was administered to parents pre and post intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



Pre-post training comparisons:

- ✓ Significant **reduction of Internalizing and Total Problems** in the group after the training, assessed by non-parametric Wilcoxon signed rank test (p<.05)
- ✓ Significant **reduction of avoidance and fusion** in the group after the training, assessed by non-parametric Wilcoxon signed rank test (p<.05)
- ✓ 2 children with clinical internalizing problems and 1 child with border-line internalizing problems achieve **normal score post intervention**
- ✓ 1 child with clinical internalizing problems achieves border-line score post intervention

Data show that this ACT oriented group training can be effective and efficient to increase psychological flexibility and reduce internalizing symptoms in children with emotional problems. Results encourage further research on a larger sample.

	METAPHORS	GOALS	EXERCISES	ACT PROCESSES
1	Know your boat	Know each other and promote self-awareness	Everyone choose the image of his boat, personalize and describe it Communalities and differences in the group (game)	Self as context, acceptance
2	Be a fleet together	Create the group and promote prosocial behaviors	Establish and subscribes rules of the group (behavioral contract) Create a name, an emblem, and a motto for the fleet	Values, committed action
3	Observe the waves	Recognise emotional antecedent	Draw on a fabric events and situations that make you feel unpleasant emotion and then wave it Pick an emotion and tell your partner a specific situation in which you felt it	Defusion, acceptance
4	Deal with seasickness	Get in contact with physical sensation	Find out your physical sensations (mindfulness exercise) Draw your body and represent sensation and emotion where you feel it (creative activity)	Acceptance, self as context
5	Drop the anchor	Promote the ability to stop and notice	Describe what you see around without judgment (game) Use your five senses while eating a fruit and moving (mindfulness exercises)	Present moment, acceptance
7	Use the compass	Find things that makes happy in the long term	Create islands with things you like, desires, objectives Regroup islands and create a compass that indicates useful direction	Values
8	Steer toward your island	Promote the ability to choose behavior instead of react	What is and what is not behavior (game) When a wave arrives, drop anchor, look the compass and then choose behavior (role playing)	Present moment, committed action
	Don't care the seagulls	Observe thoughts and words that stop you	Write on balloons your unpleasant thoughts, worries, bad words people tell you Experiential games with the balloons	Defusion
9	Signal with flags	Be able to get help from your context	Express your emotion and ask for help to peers and adults (role playing) Thinks that works with unpleasant emotion (brainstorming)	Self as context, committed action
10	Be the captain	Putting all together	The "snake and ladders" game of the sea Delivery of diplomas to captains	All processes

Children's quotes at the end of the training:

«I discovered that everyone has difficult emotions when sailing the sea»
«I feel I can make true friends»

«Hurtful memories are not stopping me anymore»
«I learnt that a good captain has to be patient, courageous and creative»

«I really loved that we played!»
«It was beautiful to draw feelings»

REFERENCES

- Achenbach, T. M., & Rescorla, L. A. (2001). *Manual for the ASEBA School-Age Forms & Profiles*. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Research Center for Children, Youth, & Families.
- Greco, L.A., Lambert, W. (2008). Psychological inflexibility in Childhood and Adolescence: Development and Evaluation of the Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth. *Psychological Assessment*, 20, 2, 93-102.
- Schweiger M., Moderato P. (2013). REBT e ACT: un modello di intervento sulle abilità emotive. In P. Moderato (Ed.) *Cent'anni di comportamentismo. Dal Manifesto di Watson alla teoria della mente, dalla BT all'ACT*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

CONTACTS

martaschweiger26@gmail.com

www.iescum.org www.act-italia.org



ACT Italia
the Italian Chapter of the Association for
Contextual Behavioral Science

UNIVERSITÀ
IULM

IESCU M
ATTIVITÀ EDUCATIVE PER LA SPINA
DEL COMPORTAMENTO UMANO