

GROWING A GARDEN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA: APPLYING THE ACT MATRIX TO THE BEHAVIOURAL PARENT TRAINING

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INTRODUCTION

In 2017 and 2018, IESUM in partnership with Fondazione IRCCS Ca' Granda Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico delivered Child Training and Parent Training interventions in an outpatient child and adolescent psychiatry service, in Milan, Italy.

Behavioral Parent Training (BPT) is considered a gold standard treatment for children with externalizing disorders. Clinical observations pointed out that even when parents have learnt «what to do», they are triggered by difficult emotions and caught by verbal stories that maintain dysfunctional behaviours and reduce the implementation of new strategies. **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** is a valuable intervention to address this issue.

The **ACT Matrix** is a way of looking at experience and organizing it according to two criteria: to distinguish the world of the five senses from the internal experience; to discriminate actions to get away from unpleasant internal experiences and actions that lead toward who or what is important for us.

The Matrix is an effective way to deliver ACT in clinical and training settings and can be really helpful in parenting: parents have the chance to sort their real life experiences and to notice from time to time what controls their behavior.

AIMS

This intervention has two main aims:

- ✓ Increasing **psychological flexibility of the parents**: recognizing values as parents, becoming aware of internal obstacles that trigger unworkable behaviours, noticing behaviours that are working in moving toward the valued direction.
- ✓ Increasing **effective actions in parenting** in recognizing and addressing the problem behaviours and increase the positive opposite.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were identified by their case manager and evaluated by IESUM team

38 children aged 6 to 13 years, with externalizing problems (ODD, ADHD and other disorders) were involved in child training groups.

Their **55 parents** were engaged in **12 parent training groups**. They were 15 single parents and 20 couples, 35 females and 10 males, 45 Italian and 10 other nationalities.

METHODS

The program was designed by IESUM team. It is based on Parent Management Training (Kazdin, 2005) and the six steps of ACT Matrix (Polk et al., 2016) and includes ACT metaphors.

The intervention was delivered in **12 weekly sessions of 90 minutes each**.

Groups were formed according to participants' social and clinical characteristics such as age, abilities, difficulties, needs.

Each group was conducted by a **psychoterapist**, trained and experienced in behaviour analysis and ACT and specifically trained in the use of the ACT Matrix.

MEASURES

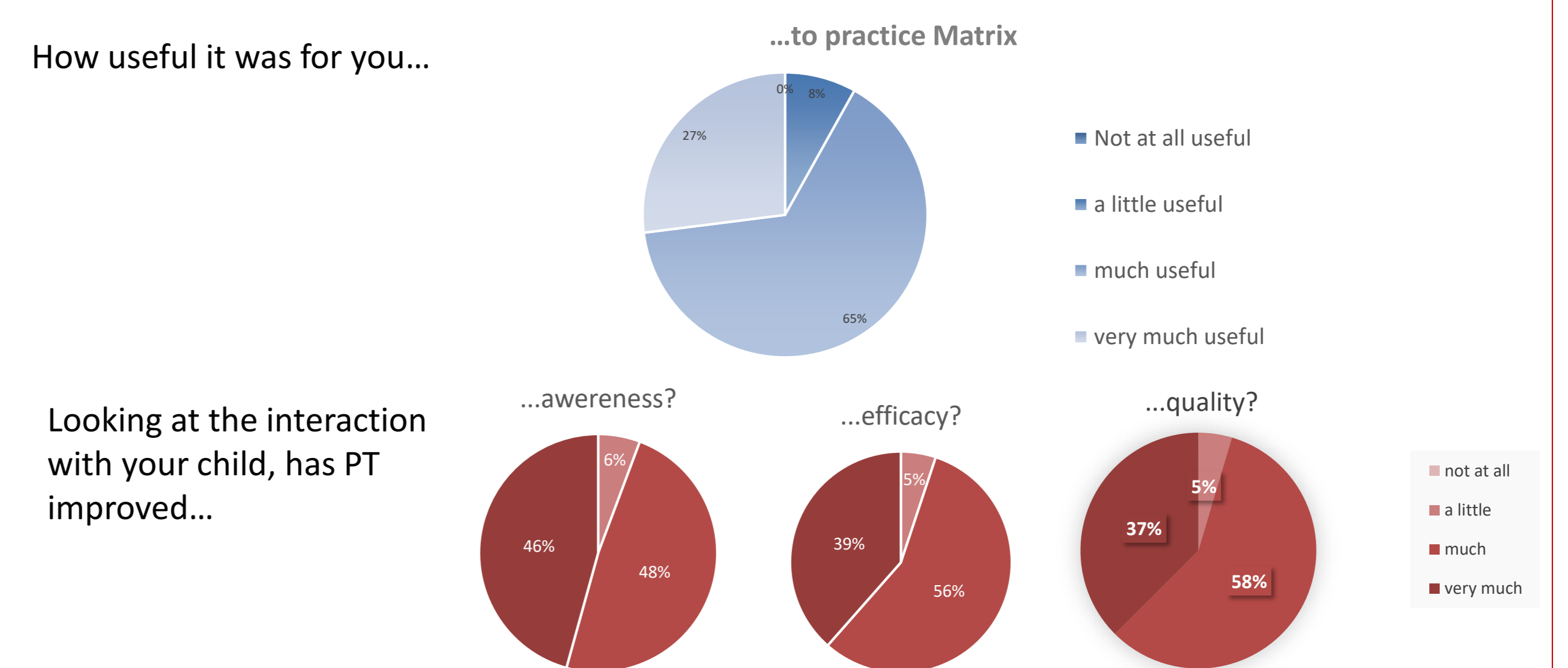
The following questionnaires were administered to participants pre and post intervention:

- ✓ **Parenting Scale (PS)** Italian translation. The questionnaire has 30 items and uses a 7 points likert scale to assess parenting behaviours. The score is organized in 3 scales: Laxness, Overreactivity, Verbosity and higher score indicates less efficace behaviour.
- ✓ **Parental Acceptance Questionnaire (6-PAQ)** Italian translation. 18 items measure the 6 ACT processes in parenting. Higher score indicates less psychological flexibility.
- ✓ A satisfaction survey

RESULTS



How useful it was for you...



OBSERVATIONS

Some advantages brought to the BPT by the Matrix have been noticed:

- ✓ Setting a **common thread** among sessions and various contents
- ✓ Working for everyone: it is easily understood and transdiagnostic
- ✓ Promoting **perspective taking** toward the sons (the child has his own Matrix)
- ✓ **Normalizing failure**, and making it an opportunity to become more flexible
- ✓ Creating an **empathetic and non-judgmental attitude** in the group

High level of participation has been registered:

- ✓ Parents were present in 10 sessions on average
- ✓ 2 couples and 1 single parent dropped out

CONCLUSIONS

A group intervention that combines ACT Matrix with the BPT seems to be effective in increasing **psychological flexibility** and **parenting ability** in parents of children with externalizing problems.

It is also likely that ACT approach improves personal involvement and sense of inclusion reducing stigma and drop out.

Results encourage further investigation about the use of the ACT Matrix to promote parenting skills across different conditions and settings.

	BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS	METAPHORS	ACT Matrix
1	INTRODUCTION	Getting lost in a forest The two mountains	The Matrix
2	Problem behavior and positive opposite	The garden and the gardener's job	Your values as a parent in the Matrix
3	The function of behaviors in context	Preparing the ground and watering	Away and toward moves
4	Using antecedents and making requests	Preparing the ground	Workability of the away moves
5	Positive reinforcement	Watering the good seeds	Stuck circle The man in the hole
6	Emotional validation		The hooks
7	Ignoring and paying attention	The weight scale of attention	What happens when you bite a hook
8	Rules, routine, tracking	The map	Verbal aikido
9	Token economy		The tree of actions and qualities
	Modeling and shaping		Self compassion in parenting
	Cost response and punishment	Preventing bad seeds from growing	Speaking to myself in the past and the future
10	SUMMARY		The Matrix goes on

Riferimenti bibliografici

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