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Meeting the emotional needs of children with challenging behaviour and developmental disabilities

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology
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ABSTRACT

Research on the utility of combining behavioural interventions with emotion-based components of intervention for children with developmental disability and challenging behaviour is limited. The current study aimed to gather empirical evidence identifying the importance of considering emotional and motivational needs in addressing behavioural difficulties in children with developmental disabilities. The four component model (Meyer & Evans, 1989) for intervening with challenging behaviour was utilised as the theoretical framework for this study, with each component being addressed in four single case designs. The four children and their families involved in this study were; Simon (aged 12), William (aged 5), Lily (aged 5) and Hohepa (aged 15). Results across baseline, intervention, and three- and six-month follow-up assessments indicated the difficulty in determining which component was most significant in creating change in challenging behaviours. However, the results consistently indicated benefits for each child through involvement in this study. Interviews with parents at three- and six-month follow-up also provided information on the benefits of this study, including improvements in their child’s behaviour and benefits for themselves as parents. This research provides support for the four component model and implies the utility of adding an emotion-based component to behavioural interventions when working with such children. Future research would benefit from increased sample size and time periods to continue to document the utility, or otherwise, of this mode of intervention.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ............................................................................................. i  
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ....................................................................... iii  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS** ................................................................. iv  
**LIST OF FIGURES** ........................................................................... vii  
**LIST OF TABLES** ............................................................................. viii  
**FOREWORD** ..................................................................................... ix  
**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION** ....................................................... 1  
  - Current Study .................................................................................... 1  
  - Overview ......................................................................................... 1  
  - Aims ................................................................................................ 1  
  - Importance of Emotional Knowledge ................................................. 3  
  - Parents as a mechanism for providing emotional knowledge ............. 5  
  - Family Therapy ............................................................................... 7  
  - Emotional Needs: Inclusion in Therapy ............................................... 9  
  - Cultural Considerations .................................................................... 11  
  - The Interaction of Culture and Emotional Needs ............................. 12  
  - The Four Component Model ............................................................ 13  
  - Challenging Behaviour: An Outline .................................................. 15  
  - Developmental Appropriateness of Challenging Behaviour ............. 16  
  - Factors Associated with Challenging Behaviour ............................... 17  
  - Biological Risk Factors ................................................................. 17  
  - Environmental Risk Factors ............................................................ 18  
  - Protective Factors ........................................................................... 19  
  - Individual Resilience ....................................................................... 19  
  - Family Factors and their Contribution to Resilience ....................... 19  
  - Community Factors and their Contribution to Resilience ............... 19  
  - Developmental Disability: An Outline .............................................. 20  
  - Human Development ...................................................................... 20  
  - Developmental Disability .............................................................. 22  
  - Specific Developmental Disorders .................................................. 22  
    - Asperger’s Syndrome ................................................................. 22  
    - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ....................................... 23  
    - Developmental Delay/Disability caused by Hypoglycaemia ......... 23  
    - Angelman Syndrome ................................................................ 24  
    - Smith Magenis Syndrome ......................................................... 24  
    - Emotional Deficits in Developmental Disabilities ....................... 25  
  - Family Impact .................................................................................. 25  
  - Factors Associated with Developmental Disability ......................... 26  
    - Factors that influence developmental disability ......................... 26  
  - Links between Challenging Behaviour and Developmental Disability 28  
  - Conventional methods for Intervention .............................................. 30  
    - Early Intervention ........................................................................ 30  
    - Inclusion ..................................................................................... 31  
    - Necessity of Widespread Involvement in Treatment ....................... 31  
    - Behavioural Methods and Models ................................................. 33  
    - Functional Assessment and Positive Behavior support ................ 33  
    - Specific Behavioural Intervention Techniques ................................ 35
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Simon’s behaviours, targeted to increase, across the study ....64
Figure 2 Simon’s intervention behaviour ........................................ 65
Figure 3 Simon’s behaviour means, by target behaviour .................. 66
Figure 4 William’s behaviours, targeted to increase, across the study ...83
Figure 5 William’s behaviours, targeted to decrease, across the study ...84
Figure 6 William’s intervention behaviour ....................................... 84
Figure 7 William’s behaviour means, by target behaviour ................. 86
Figure 8 Lily’s behaviours, targeted to increase, across the study .......101
Figure 9 Lily’s behaviours, targeted to decrease, across the study ......102
Figure 10 Lily’s intervention behaviour .......................................... 102
Figure 11 Lily’s behaviour means, by target behaviour ..................... 105
Figure 12 Hohepa’s behaviours, targeted to increase, across the study 123
Figure 13 Hohepa’s behaviours, targeted to decrease, across the study 123
Figure 14 Hohepa’s intervention behaviour ..................................... 124
Figure 15 Hohepa’s behaviour means, by target behaviour ...............126
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Positive behavioural interventions and emotion-based intervention techniques 38
Table 2 Simon’s Baseline, Intervention and Follow-up coded behaviours (% of time) ... 64
Table 3 Simon’s behaviour means, by target behaviour, across the study .................. 66
Table 4 Simon’s CBCL Problem Scale Categories across the study .......................... 68
Table 5 William’s Baseline, Intervention and Follow-up coded behaviours (% of time) . 83
Table 6 William’s behaviour means, by target behaviour, across the study ............... 86
Table 7 William’s CBCL Problem Scale Categories across the study ....................... 87
Table 8 Lily’s Baseline, Intervention and Follow-up coded behaviours (% of time) ....101
Table 9 Lily’s behaviour means, by target behaviour, across the study ....................104
Table 10 Lily’s CBCL Problem Scale Categories across the study ..........................106
Table 11 Hohepa’s Baseline, Intervention and Follow-up coded behaviours (% of time)...
122
Table 12 Hohepa’s behaviour means, by target behaviour, across the study ............126
Table 13 Hohepa’s CBCL Problem Scale Categories across the study ..................128