
Subtle Touch Therapy for Children

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Abstract

Touch therapy was effectively combined with movement-based techniques in therapeutic projects at the juvenile detention center for boys (children and adolescents), who had been adjudicated for delinquency. Including the body therapeutically helped to reorganize their confined physical energy, which manifested in tumultuous ways. Initially, the boys were extremely agitated and resistant to group activities. Gentle touch strengthened their therapeutic bond, facilitated emotional resignification, and transformed their feelings of rebellion, distrust, and rivalry in an environment of cooperation and trust. In this process, these boys engaged in therapeutic group techniques instead of bullying and physically acting out.

Similar projects were run in group homes and orphanages for younger children, who were taken in due to abandonment, negligence, or abuse. In these cases, Subtle Touch sequences helped transform aggression and helplessness into a positive caretaking experience, an attitude of receptiveness and hope, de-escalation of traumatic experiences, enhancement of attachment, and psychological and motor development.

In Subtle Touch therapy (Sandor, 1969), including the Calatonia, the child receives a series of touches in a passive state, generally in a prone or supine position. The touches are mostly extremely light, at specific points of contact: the soles of the feet and hands, the back, the legs and arms, the abdomen, the face, and the head. The touches take the form of small circles and strokes, gentle pressure or contact, which are delivered with hands, soft brushes, leaves, water drops, or puffs of air, engaging the children in a play-like activity.

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