Intro to Mentalization Based Treatment

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Mentalizing: Keeping the Mind in Mind

What makes mentalizing harder?

- High emotional arousal
- Close attachment relationships
- Insecure attachment styles
- Fixed core beliefs
- Past experiences
- Being too far along any of the poles of mentalizing (next section)
Poles of mentalizing

**Automatic**
- Reflexive
- Quick
- Not thought out
- Often quite emotive

**Controlled**
- Slow
- Thinking before speaking
- To the point
- Less emotive

**Self**
- Entirely focussing on yourself
- Judging things as your fault
- Looking at your own emotions, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, reasons etc

**Other**
- Entirely focussing on the other person
- Judging things as ‘their’ fault
- Looking at others’ emotions, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, reasons etc

**Affect (emotions)**
- Emotion-based mental states
- Focus on feelings, desires, needs

**Cognitive**
- Thought or ‘logic’-based mental states

**Internal**
- Focus on yours’ or others’ thoughts/feelings/emotions
- Assigning intent on others
- Projecting
- Using intuition

**External**
- Focus on factors in the external world/expression
- Making judgements based on body language/tone of voice/eye contact
- Not considering what is going on internally for someone
Emotional intensity -> Mentalizing ability -> Appropriate Interventions

As emotional intensity increases, it becomes much harder to mentalise and a less challenging approach is required so as not to further increase emotional intensity and decrease mentalizing (see below).

If pushed/challenged when emotional intensity is very high, it is possible that a ‘switch point’ will be reached, pushing someone to the extremes on the poles of mentalizing and making people more fixed in their views. This can push people in to a ‘non-mentalized mode’.

3 Non- Mentalizing/Pre-Mentalizing Modes

1. Teleological
   - Only actions are real
   - Only the physical world matters
   - Judging someone’s internal world/thoughts/feelings by their actions alone
   - Believing your thoughts/feelings are only real or valid if ‘proven’ by actions
   - Believing only physical action will improve things

2. Pretend Mode
   - Convinced that what you think is true/your feelings are reality
   - Disconnected from emotions
   - A ‘safe place’ to be – hides a lot of traumas and distress
     ➢ Can be a way of the brain protecting itself with a pseudo-mentalised version of reality (can appear as if mentalizing)

3. Psychic Equivalence
   - Rigid, fixed thinking
   - What you believe is fundamentally right – no acceptance of alternatives
   - The opposite to Teleological: your Internal is true no matter the External
   - Challenging in Psychic Equivalence makes things worse
   - Approaching someone in psychic equivalence with empathy can help reduce the rigidity of their thinking, lower around & even bring them out
   - Can occur when we feel misunderstood
Basic Emotions

All mammals have 7 basic emotions:

- For survival
- Can learn to suppress them
- Can be hard to identify and distinguish from each other
- Might be able to identify them using physical sensations
- If we can’t recognise the emotions we experience it can be hard to control our responses

Feelings vs. Emotions

- Although often used interchangeably, in MBT ‘feelings’ are different to ‘emotions’
- Emotions = what was discussed in the previous section
  - e.g. anger, fear, joy
  - also include newer, ‘social’ emotions such as guilt & envy
- Feelings = physical sensations, experienced in the body
  - e.g. shaky hands, increased heart rate, high or low energy
- Feelings can be used as signals to identify emotions... BUT...
- Feelings can be easily misinterpreted
  - e.g. shakiness could indicate anxiety, excitement, fear or anger
- Feelings and their related emotions are experienced differently for everyone
Attachment Styles

- Everyone has an attachment style which affects how they relate to others and react to different scenarios in relationships.
- Although initially developed in early childhood, others experiences along the way affect your attachment style as an adult.
- There are 4 attachment styles, including 1 secure and 3 insecure:
  - **Secure**
    - Have trusting, lasting relationships
    - Tend to have good self esteem
    - Are comfortable sharing feelings with partners and friends
    - Seek out social support
  - **Anxious-Ambivalent (insecure)**
    - Reluctant to become close to others
    - Worry that their partner doesn’t love them
    - Becomes very distraught when relationships end
    - May exaggerate emotions
    - Seek a high level of intimacy
  - **Anxious-Avoidant (insecure)**
    - May have problems with intimacy
    - Invest little emotion in social and romantic relationships
    - Unwilling or unable to share thoughts and feelings with others
    - Don’t trust the intentions of their attachments
    - Desire a high level of independence
  - **Disorganised (insecure)**
    - No set pattern
    - A combination of the other styles

- Although the culture that we grow up with informs which style we have, this is not fixed and can be worked on and changed through MBT’s use of a ‘mentalizing culture’

A Mentalizing Culture

- Promotes a secure attachment which facilitates mentalizing abilities
- Encourages and facilitates frequent discussions about people and why they behave the way they do
- Holds discussions about experiences with the principles of:
  - open-mindedness
  - minimal certainty
  - curiosity
- Encourages curiosity about our own and others’ minds

➤ MBT Groups and 1:1 sessions provide a crucial Mentalizing Culture in which all of the elements discussed can be worked on safely & effectively