



NEURODEVELOPMENTAL PARENT-INFANT
PSYCHOTHERAPY AND MINDFULNESS

Complementary Approaches in Work with
Parents and Babies

Maria Pozzi Monzo



Neurodevelopmental Parent-Infant Psychotherapy and Mindfulness

This innovative book explains and introduces the use of mindfulness in therapeutic work with parents and babies, covering issues such as feeding, crying, sleeping and relating, as well as other developmental challenges which affect family life, as practiced in both clinical sessions and in the home.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 introduces: (1) what parent-infant psychotherapy is, its origin and evolution; (2) mindfulness, which consists in paying attention in a purposeful way in the present moment and not judgements; and (3) the development and maturation of the brain and nervous system and how they are affected by the environment in utero and after birth. Part 2 then goes on to explore a range of topics such as parental mental illnesses, immigration, dislocation, loss, guilt, substance misuse, abuse, post-natal depression, congenital malformations and the role of fathers. It describes how these factors impact the parental relationship with, and the healthy development of the infant, drawing from relevant research to demonstrate the effectiveness of parent-infant psychotherapy and mindfulness.

The practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy aided by mindfulness is a useful intervention for distressed families with infants, while a mindful approach to oneself and one's baby can ease parental anxiety and free-loving capacities. *Neurodevelopmental Parent-Infant Psychotherapy and Mindfulness* is an essential resource for clinicians and researchers working on parent and infant relations and will also appeal to curious new or future parents.

Maria Pozzi Monzo, born in Italy, trained in London at the Tavistock Clinic, BPF/BAP, where she now lectures. She has worked in CAMHS, PIP-UK and is currently at the School of Infant Mental Health. She is also a trainer in parent-infant psychotherapy in Italy and Switzerland. Her many publications include *The Buddha and the Baby* (2015). She was winner of the Los Angeles, Frances Tustin Memorial Prize in 1999.

“Maria Pozzi Monzo’s many decades of personal meditation practice are clearly providing inspiration in her work as a parent-infant and child psychotherapist. The integration of these two fields offers a unique and valuable contribution to both disciplines, which is to be celebrated.”

Ajahn Brahmavara

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I dedicate this book to my dear brother Antonio, who left us too early to be able to read it.



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Foreword

I am honoured to have the opportunity to write a few words about Maria Pozzi Monzo's latest book.

As a layperson, as it were, I have first of all been able to learn easefully and accessibly about the pioneers and the current thinkers in the international field of child-infant psychotherapy.

Maria Pozzi Monzo then gives an overview of the mindfulness field which offers a full account of our current understanding and appreciation of the benefits of the many simple techniques that enable deepening awareness of the link between mind and body, leading to relaxation and well-being.

Having this wealth of information, we learn about the brain, its development in the first years of life and the effects of mindfulness practices on brain development. We learn how influential our early experiences are in setting the patterns of a lifetime and how mindfulness practices in parents can enable deep and lasting changes in early conditioning for both parents and infants. This complex area of knowledge is offered skilfully to add a further layer of appreciation for our human experience and the benefits of awareness, the mind observing the mind.

We are then privileged to be introduced to a number of case studies looking at areas of: struggle in pregnancy; early days of parenting a baby; the effects of bereavement within the family on parents and young ones; assisting the heroic struggles of parents caring for infants while afflicted with mental illness; supporting the coming to terms with and caring for a child with severe congenital disability; exploring the powerful role and influence of the father. These topics give much information and there are references to other books and resources to enable further exploration of these important areas of psychotherapeutic work with parents and infants.

The final chapter gives great hope for our shared future, as we see the resourcefulness of the human mind in its ability to let go of painful patterning and reconfigure, with professional guidance and personal effort, to more healthy and happy ways of relating. It is moving to read case studies where the lives of infants and their carers are transformed by skilful intervention and good intention at this most important time of development.

Maria Pozzi Monzo is an expert in this field and her writing is imbued with thirty-five years of hands-on experience. She conveys this in an accessible way in a book that resonates with loving kindness and compassionate interest in the many ways in which we human beings can both lose sight of our innate, peaceful presence and interconnection and can be helped with the right mix of love and methodology to re-establish these strengths and qualities in our parenting.

Maria Pozzi Monzo's many decades of personal meditation practice clearly provide inspiration in her work as a parent-infant and child psychotherapist. The integration of these two fields offers a unique and valuable contribution to both disciplines, which is to be celebrated.

Ajahn Brahmavara

Foreword

Maria Pozzi describes this book as a “writing project”. She writes about her cases. And she asked the parents involved to read the pieces she wrote about them. How refreshing! This feedback gives her writing project surprising depth. Equally surprising, she attributes much of the [largely] successful outcomes of these cases to an approach called “mindfulness”.

The straight forward title says it all. Dr Pozzi has given us a gem of a book about why and how mindfulness can be used in therapy sessions to better align our patients’ brains and relationships and redirect development towards better outcomes. In the introduction and in each of the following ten chapters she begins with quotes from Eastern masters and ends with case presentations, with the general and the specific sandwiching a solid history and development of the relevant chapter concepts.

Her argument is straight forward. She asks us to:

- consider parent-infant psychotherapy and mindfulness offered to families in distress (Introduction) and the factors that shape the personality of the infant: epigenetics, temperament, neuropsychology, attachment style, defensive style, and sociocultural factors.
- consider parent-infant psychotherapy (Chapter 1) and Brafman’s three “axioms”, Winnicott’s “knot”, Trad’s “previewing”, and the impact of Bowlby’s “attachment”, Berg’s “inner guide” and Norman (et al.)’s innovative way of creating strong emotional “links” as a bridge of transference between non-verbal infants and the analyst.
- consider mindfulness (Chapter 2) and “mindfulness-based cognitive therapy” as a way to reach, connect and balance the internal and real world workings of both head and heart, with Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) applied to anxiety and fear, OCD, major depression and suicidality, borderline personality disorder, ADHD, PTSD, people suffering with psychosis and those managing chronic pain.
- consider the infant’s brain and nervous system (Chapter 3) – with the usual host of brain parts (neurons, prefrontal cortex, amygdala, etc.) and lesser known parts as well (insula, mirror neurons) – and how the brain picks up

bodily emotions and translates them into thoughts and how mindfulness can bring changes to its functioning.

- consider pregnancy (Chapter 4) and how mothers can experience Raphael-Leff's "rebirth" and how their emotional state can produce cortisol, when under stress, which passes through the placenta and affects the birth weight of the baby.
- consider parents' guilt (Chapter 5) – unbearable, persecutory or reparative – in working with severely damaged babies.
- consider immigration (Chapter 6) dislocation and loss, Freud's distinction between melancholia and mourning, Bournes and Lewis's "replacement children", and mindfulness as a way to contain restless distress and focus the mind on breathing and bodily sensations rather than on thoughts.
- consider mental illness (Chapter 7) and abnormal parenting's effect on the architecture of the brain (hyper-vigilance, for example) and how mindfulness can be used to establish "ordinary parenting".
- consider disabilities (Chapter 8) and if parents could ever imagine their child in a wheelchair, blind, with profound learning disability, and growing into disabled adults totally dependent on others ... and how these babies self-regulate so that parents no longer feel they are being rejected.
- consider fathers (Chapter 9) – internalised or otherwise – and how they are entangled in the eyes and lives of mothers and infants and how mindfulness can "de-charge" parents to see their baby in a neutral and benevolent way.

And lastly, Dr Pozzi asks us to:

- consider breaking the cycle (Chapter 10) with the help of analysis (now parent-infant psychotherapy) whereas Klein describes, "a child begins to show stronger constructive tendencies, [...] changing relations to its father or mother, or to its brothers and sisters, [...] and a growth of social feeling" (Klein, 1933, p. 255).

Presented in a straight-forward style, these are the arguments Dr Pozzi asks us to consider. She is asking us to consider mindfulness as a "shortcut" to better results. Why? She tells us straight up: "to allow [parents] to see the baby as a separate being, as a little person with his or her own mind". This is her core objective. She tells us how to do this, given the forces set against us (these forces against us are her chapter titles: pregnancy, guilt, dislocation and loss, mental illness, and disabilities). These forces set up destructive cycles too strong to be broken ... or can they? Can we re-write what John Byng-Hall calls "family scripts"?

Dr Pozzi wants us to see therapy as an opportunity. And she argues that therapists have a commitment to continually offer better therapy. We must nudge our therapy into better outcomes without abandoning what we know and what experience has shown us to be effective. Over the years, therapy has become multi-disciplinary, more focused and intensive, and therapy now aims to reset

the line of development in such a self-sustaining way that the client/family continues to improve even when the formal part of therapy is over. In parent-infant work, therapy becomes an intervention. In my own career focus on at-risk situations – in the books I’ve written, the clinic I’ve started (the first in the UK), the school I founded (also the first in the UK) and in the charity I founded – I’ve seen that the most effective interventions can never be too early. And the most effective way to intervene early is to work through relationships to reconnect the child with the family and vice-versa. This is the essence of parent-infant psychotherapy. Working through relationships is what distinguishes parent-infant psychotherapy from all of the other applied psychologies.

In this “writing project”, Dr Pozzi shows us that mindfulness can be a useful element of a multi-disciplinary strategy. Although mindfulness is not easy to do – directing breath, observing baby, themselves and the stream of thoughts and feelings flowing through their mind – the practice of mindfulness provides a structural framework on which progress can be made:

- it is concise – allowing therapists access to the affective world of a child where they can be transformation agents.
- it connects – emotional experience to biological processes.
- it integrates – the rediscovery of ancient wisdom (head/heart), it can help to increase one’s awareness of the destructive effects of one’s addiction and that a possible relapse is transitory and not fixed for ever and ever.
- it is a guide ... DBT (Dialectic Behaviour Therapy), MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) ... all of these derivative therapies help participants to become aware and to disengage by responding differently to their negative, ruminative thoughts and feelings that may propel them even further into depression.
- it fuses – bringing the multi-disciplinary work into a therapy unit.

Best of all,

- it is interesting.

Perhaps like me, you’ll realise that this “writing project” has been written by someone at the top of her game, a perspective from the pinnacle. In no small sense, this is a biography of sorts, the author’s professional life condensed to conclusions supported by a chain of logic stretching from the brain’s inner workings to mountaintop transcendence. But in another sense, this is a guide for therapists – shorter than a handbook but not quite a map – which is useful in connecting-the-dots and navigating the interacting landscapes of neuro biology and development, mental health, early intervention and family wellness ... and the power of getting the therapy right.

I’ve always admired Maria Pozzi as a good therapist. This “writing project” is her latest offering showing she is an innovator and good thinker as well. She brings to her writing insight (e.g. she describes “real friends were her churning