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BEST-Foundations: A family-based attachment-focused intervention treating emotional disorders in children

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Emotional disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are pervasive disorders that have roots in early life. While emotional disorders are more prevalent in adolescence, research indicates that symptoms present much earlier. Identifying early modifiable risk factors provides a window of opportunity for intervention that is currently largely overlooked. Despite strong evidence demonstrating highly co-morbid symptoms, interventions have often treated anxiety and depression in isolation. The current intervention addresses the need for trans-diagnostic interventions for treatment and prevention of emotional disorders in children. BEST-Foundations have been developed to target modifiable risk factors associated with emotional disordered symptomatology in children aged 3-11 years. The intervention includes all family members and is designed to address three aims: to improve symptoms of emotional disorders in children; to increase parental confidence and knowledge; and to improve overall family functioning. The 10-session intervention draws on theoretical principles of attachment theory and family systems, includes components of psycho-education, and builds on the empirically-supported BEST program. BEST-Foundation is currently being piloted and will employ a mixed method study design to analyze data. A case-series analysis will be employed to assess change over time, as well as within and between participant comparisons. Qualitative methods will be utilized to gain insight into the participants' experience and meaning of the intervention, and researchers' observations of participants' interactions. Preliminary results appear promising, and a larger randomized control trial is planned post-pilot, to determine efficacy.

Biography

Michelle L Benstead is currently completing her PhD at Deakin University School of Psychology, Melbourne Australia. She was awarded a Youth Mental Health PhD Scholarship through Australian Rotary Health/Motto Fashions Rotary Club of Richmond. Her research interests center around child development and mental health, with a focus on attachment, reflective function and family interactions. She is currently in the process of writing up papers associated with her research and has co-authored papers.

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