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# “What is Holding and What is Hugging in Social Pedagogical Work? – About Responsibility and Code of Ethics”

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# Holding and hugging

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# What is holding?

- Winnicott
- The concept of holding was first introduced by a British pediatrician and psycho-analyst called Donald Winnicott. In his eyes holding is based on the physical relation between a mother and her child. A child does or doesn't feel safe in its mother's arms. The arms are presumed to be a prolonging of the developing fetus held in the uterus

- Winnicott has enlarged holding to the total emotional and physical environment, created by the mother, and the mother's capacity to hold the child in her thoughts and react intuitively on the needs of her child

# What is hugging

- *A hug a day keeps the aggressions away...*
- Benny Lihme: *“It’s so fucking boring...\*”*
- Hugging is the alternative to Holding
- *“...hugging may some time take some time”*
- *“...hugging is not holding”*
- *“...hugging is communication”*
- *“...hugging is love and understanding between people”*

*\*)based on interviews with social pedagogues and youngsters in the private institution Solhaven*

# Martha Welch

- Winnicott has inspired child psychiatrist Martha Welch to develop a method called Holding therapy, which she presented in her book *Holding Time (1989)*. It gives advice - according to its subtitle - *How to Eliminate Conflict, Temper Tantrums, and Sibling Rivalry and Raise Happy, Loving, Successful Children*

- The aim of Holding therapy is to develop a bond, trust and a feeling of security between an adult and a child. The purpose of Holding therapy is that the adult sets limits and restraints the child, placing him/herself as a physical barrier.

- Welch writes: *I have found that the responses of parent and child in holding usually go through a specific sequence: 1: Confrontation; 2: Rejection and 3: Resolution* [\[1\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) *Holding Time* (1988), p. 25

# Therapeutic Crisis Intervention

- What kind of help and how it is given make a crucial difference between the Young Person's learning from experience or being set back.

- One of the principle purposes of control and discipline is to enable Young People to develop inner controls, so in time they learn self-control, establish feelings of worth and self respect and are motivated towards improved behavior. It is recognized, given the reality of the problems of the Young People in care, that there may be an occasion where extreme forms of behavior are shown.

# The main purposes of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention:

- Preventing crisis from occurring
- De-escalating potential crisis
- Effectively managing acute crisis phrases
- Reducing potential and actual injury to children and staff
- Learning constructive ways to handle stressful situations

# Physical restraint:

- All other approaches must have been considered or exhausted before resorting to physical restraint. Physical restraint may be defined as the limitation of a person's ability to move freely in their environment, impaired by another person or persons. While as social pedagogues we can understand the reasons for distress, anger and acting out, certain behaviors are deemed unacceptable. However, it is important to note that it is the behavior which is unacceptable and not the Young Person.

# Physical restraint of a Young Person should only be used when,

- The young persons' actions pose a danger to themselves.
- The young persons' actions pose a danger to others.
- It is good professional practice following an incident of physical restraint to resolve the issues that started the incident, and each episode of physical restraint must be formally reported and recorded.

# Holding as a restraint method

- As time passed holding was less and less used the way it was intended by Winnicott. Holding is now more than ever used as a restraint or “use of force” method. In practice it’s less about holding the child’s emotional and physical environment and more about using your force to get the child to calm down.
- This process can be quite brutal and have a reversed effect on the child, as you’ll read in the next paragraph “Children’s experiences”.

# When to use restraint?

- The youngsters who were consulted felt, though, that restraint was used way too often, in situation where severe damage, both material and human, weren't happening.

- Staff should be able to differ between “messaging around” and real fights. Restraint should also only be used as a way of comforting the child when it has a rough moment or to help it to regain control of it self and not as a punishment.

# How the children feel when they are restrained.

- A lot of youngsters said that they didn't know what restraint was, how it was done and when it was used before it actually happened to them. This made them panic even more because they had no clue what was going on. It is the youngsters' opinion that they should be made aware of the use of holding and restraint when they get admitted. They feel that it should be made clear in which occasions it can happen, why and how.

- Another important point regarding the experience of being restrained is linked to past experiences. A lot of youngsters who are in secure units or psychiatric wards are there because of sexual and/or physical abuse. For these youngsters it can be really hard and confronting to be held or restrained. This will, obviously, bring back memories which will heighten the anxiety and anger. This will result in the youngster fighting even more to get out of this situation and that will eventually lead to an even longer restraint

# How restraint should be done

- Something everyone agreed on was that it shouldn't cause any pain. If restraint causes pain the children don't see it as restraint anymore but as physical abuse. The same reason was given if being restraint stopped you from breathing

- Again they point out that ALL staff should be properly trained to do restraint without giving pain or get the youngsters even more agitated. Another reason why staff should be trained is that youngsters learn to get out of restraint after it happened a few times

# Alternatives given by the youngsters

- give a chance to calm down before restraint would be used, talk to them in a nice and proper way, give the youngsters space, provide them a “safe room” where they can calm down. The youngsters also feel that everyone’s action plan should mention how this individual should be dealt with if he loses control

- The implication of physical punishment is always, no matter how mild a form is being used, that physical violence will “change” a child, or will motivate him toward a more social approach to life, people and values. Sometimes it is admittedly meant to be a “behavior stopper” only, but even then pedagogue can show the enormous price he pays for such a technique in terms of its poisonous by-products, even should the surface goal be achieved

# Legal aspects and supervision

- There are some articles which impeach the right to use any form of physical restraint. Especially in article 19: *States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.*

- Staff may be authorized to restraint children with no advice on appropriate techniques or training. Given this lack of clarity Children's rights maybe breeched and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called for a review of practice. There are also risks for staff, who want to be clear about what they can do and cannot do when using physical intervention with children.

# Danish Legislation

- When using holding as a restrain method in institutions designed for residential accommodation for children and young persons, the law e.g. in Denmark is quite clear: *Restraint (...) shall be used only if absolutely required in the given situation. Holding can only be used if (i) there is an imminent risk that the person may cause substantial injury to him-/herself or others, and (ii) it is absolutely necessary in the given situation.*

- If the institution uses holding to restrain a child or a youngster, the institution is obligated to make a report about what happened. *(4) Any forcible measure taken shall be registered and notified by the facility to the municipal council of the municipality of location in respect of the facilities supervised by the municipal council, cf. section 148 a below, and to the regional council in respect of the facilities supervised by the regional council, cf. section 5(7) above.* Though reporting after every restraint situation is obligated in the legislation, it doesn't happen as often as it should.

# Inspections

- All the reports made by institutions (concerning e.g. Holding situations) go to the inspectors, who look into them in order to make conclusions and take further measures. For example if the holding numbers in some institutions are getting too high or if the same youngster has been held alarmingly often, the inspectors take a closer look on what is going on. They try to find out, if there is something wrong with the methods the institution uses, and to give guidance about alternate methods because, again, the goal is to use holding and other kinds of restraining as little as possible.

- The inspectors have the right to give warnings or even to take away the institutions license to practice. There was for example one case where staff members forced a youngster to go shower with her clothes on to show her who is in control. That particular institution was ordered to apologize the girl, it was given a serious warning and a request to change their practices.

# Ethical Considerations

- The use of physical restraint is an emotive subject, especially when that restraint is carried out by adults on children. Indeed from our research we see the validity of using restraint at all is sometimes contested. What is clear is that whatever position is agreed answers have to be provided to the practical issues faced by residential staff in managing the challenging and violent behavior of some of the young people they work with.

...thank you for  
your attention