Effective Intervention for Tourette's Syndrome

Children with Tourette's syndrome (TS) have motor and vocal tics, which often require professional attention. Although tics may respond favorably to pharmacological intervention, many children do not tolerate medication well and have negative side effects. A recent project conducted by Jessica E. Woods, Ph.D., now a post-doctoral fellow at May Center for Education and Neurorehabilitation in Brockton, Mass., evaluated habit reversal (HR) as a treatment approach with a 10-year-old child who had TS and frequent vocal and motor tics.

The child was taught several self-management strategies during therapy sessions conducted at a pediatric specialty clinic. With treatment, he learned to detect his tics with greater accuracy, relax when tense, monitor tic frequency, and perform an alternative response each time he demonstrated a vocal and motor tic. The child's mother documented the effect of treatment by recording how often tics occurred at home. This therapy approach resulted in near elimination of tics without medication. He maintained this following treatment. The findings from this study add to a small amount of existing literature showing that children with TS can acquire self-control skills that effectively reduce tics outside a clinic setting. This case has been submitted for publication (Woods, J. E., & Luiselli, J. K. [2004]. Habit Reversal Treatment of Vocal and Motor Tics in a Child With Tourette's Syndrome).

Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of GAD

Children who have Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) have excessive worry and distress, often related to performance at school and “perfectionistic” thinking. Other clinical issues may also be of concern. In a case study conducted by Sarah W. Whitton, Ph.D., at the Fernandes Center for Children and Families, a partnership between May Institute and Saint Anne's Hospital, a 7-year-old girl who was diagnosed with GAD and specific phobia (fear of vomiting) received successful cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT). Her developmental history was significant for excessive worry, pervasive anxiety, and complaints of stomach discomfort. Her fear of vomiting had resulted in eating inhibition and weight loss. Treatment focused on teaching her behavioral skills to mediate anxiety (distraction, relaxation), correcting misattributions about physiological sensations, reducing anxiety-inducing self-statements, and eliminating reinforcement of somatic symptoms in the family system. A self-report on the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) before and after CBT documented clinically significant changes in anxiety. Treatment also eliminated stomachaches.
and the child was able to gain weight. At termination, the girl no longer met diagnostic criteria for GAD and specific phobia. A post treatment evaluation revealed that clinical improvement was maintained. This case has been submitted for publication (Whitton, S. W., Luiselli, J. K., & Donaldson, D. L. [2004]. Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Vomiting Phobia in an Elementary-Age Child).

May Institute Experts Share Research Findings

More than a dozen May Institute experts recently presented their research findings at the 25th annual Berkshire Association for Behavior Analysis and Therapy (BABAT) conference. BABAT provides psychologists, special education teachers, specialists, and administrators with information on the most recent assessment techniques and behavioral intervention practices for individuals with disabilities and behavioral disorders.

May experts presented their findings on behavioral consultation to public schools, teaching early learning skills to children with autism, and application of applied behavior analysis (ABA) in brain injury rehabilitation. In addition, May professionals chaired a panel discussion on ABA and special education.

May presenters and moderators included: Kelly Allen, B.A.; Stephanie Barney, B.A.; Kristin Bono, B.S.; Jane Carlson, Ph.D., BCBA; Lauren Christian, B.A.; Meredith Cochran, M.A.; Gretchen Creesy, M.S.W.; Deidre Donaldson, Ph.D.; Mary Doyle, M.Ed.; Jennifer Flaherty, M.Ed.; Katherine Gilligan, B.A.; Jaimie Hoover, B.S.; Sara Huber, B.S.; Amy Kane, M.Ed.; Erin Leichman, B.A.; James Luiselli, Ed.D., ABPP, BCBA; Lauren Mercincavage, B.A.; Gary Pace, Ph.D., BCBA; Jeffrey Skowron, Ph.D.; Amy Slyman, M.Ed., BCBA; CarrieAnne St. Amand, M.S., BCBA; Melissa Stafford, M.Ed.; Jennifer Steele, M.A.; and Christina Vorndran, M.A.

Recent Publications


Cognitive-behavioral treatment helped eliminate stom-achaches in a 7-year-old girl with GAD.