



## Systematic feedback in counselling with children and young people: A relational approach

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Thanks to: BACP, Polly Bennett, Patricia Joyce, Anne O'Herlihy, Kathryn Pugh, Paul Revell and Dave Stewart

## Background

- Increasing expectations for therapists – both with adults and children – to evaluate the outcomes of their work
- CYP-IAPT: Monitoring of outcomes on session-by-session basis is key principle of therapeutic training and practice

## Aims

- To explore the use of systematic feedback (or 'feedback informed therapy', FIT) from a 'relational' therapeutic perspective: e.g., humanistic/psychodynamic/integrative
- Suggest that it can enhance – rather than impede – our approach

## What is systematic feedback?

## Systematic feedback

- The *integration* into therapy of *validated* methods that invite clients, on a *regular* basis, to assess their wellbeing (*outcome feedback*), or experience of therapy and the therapeutic relationship (*process feedback*)



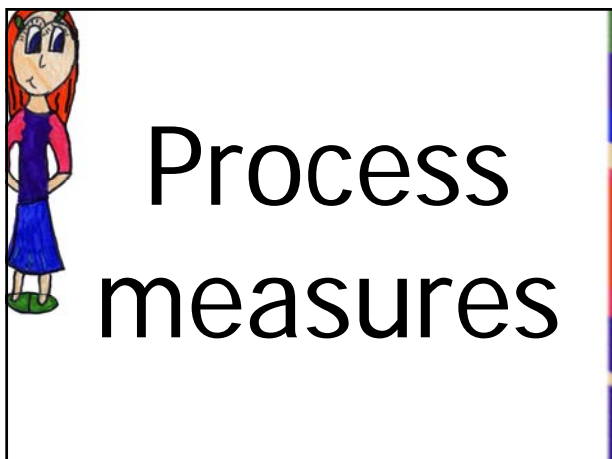
## Outcome measures

Strengths and  
Difficulties  
Questionnaire  
(SDQ)

Child  
Outcome  
Rating Scale  
(CORS)

Young  
Person's  
CORE  
(YP-CORE)

Goal-based  
Outcome  
Record  
(GBOR)



Child Session  
Rating Scale  
(CSRS)

## Young Person's Therapy Personalisation Form

(in development, Tricia Joyce)

### What I want from therapy (Joyce & Cooper, 2013, draft only)

How would you like your therapy to be? On each of the lines below, please make a line to show us what you would like from your counsellor. A score of 5 means you really want more of the thing at the end of the line, a score of 1 means you want it a little bit more.

I would like my counsellor to:

1. Use more art and play things:	5	4	3	2	1	Just right for me	0	1	2	3	4	5	Use less art and play things:
2. Give me more advice	5	4	3	2	1	Just right for me	0	1	2	3	4	5	Just listen to me
3. Talk more to my parents/carees about what's going on for me	5	4	3	2	1	Just right for me	0	1	2	3	4	5	Talk less to my parents/carees about what's going on for me

## Using systematic feedback: A case example

- 'Time4Me' primary school counselling service
- Goals for counselling agreed at assessment with child and family
- Weekly use of 'Child Outcome Rating Scale' and 'Child Session Rating Scale' to assess progress and personalise therapy



Barnardo's Northern Ireland

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## Measures are wholly integrated into practice

'Joanne' was referred because of anxiety. At the beginning of the first post-assessment session she completed the CORS measure which totaled 22 out of 40 and this was added to the CORS graph. The therapist noted a drop in the 'school' domain score compared to the initial assessment. On pointing this out, the child replied that she was getting increasingly anxious in class, especially in relation to maths. Following this discussion the child indicated a wish to complete a sand-tray picture. The therapist followed the child's preference for a play-based intervention, suggesting a theme of 'what worry looks like'. In future weeks the child continued to engage with sand-tray work, but also responded well to psycho-education offered by the therapist which focused on strategies to minimize and manage worry. Joanne consistently indicated on the CSRS that she was happy with how the work was progressing.

Photo: Peta Bennett

(Dave Stewart)

Examples of using outcome and process feedback measures

[www.minded.org.uk](http://www.minded.org.uk)



Counselling MindEd

e-learning to support young healthy minds

# Why we're wary

## Concerns that...

1. Meaningless – only articulates most superficial, symptom-level experiencing
2. Takes time away from 'deeper' therapeutic work
3. Clients will experience it as de-humanising -- complex pain and life circumstances turned into numbers: Buber's I-It relationship rather than I-Thou
4. Sets external, normative expectations for the therapeutic work and change
5. Focus of therapy becomes 'doing' rather than 'being'

## Facilitating a meeting at relational depth...

[Letting go of techniques is important] "for a number of reasons. First, if we try to implement a technique, our attention is likely to be on what we are doing *to* our client and its outcome, rather than on the particular human being actually present to us. In other words, our relationship with the client is no longer immediate, but mediated by certain plans and actions. Second, if we relate to our clients through techniques...we are less likely to be open to them as the unique human being that they are, but will be looking for particular responses and outcomes from them across particular dimensions. And third, the more we are relating to our clients in a technique-based way, the more we lose *our* own naturalness, spontaneity and uniqueness and start to relate in formulaic and rehearsed ways. This, again, reduces the possibility of an immediate and direct human encounter." (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, pp.117-118)



## So why use systematic feedback?

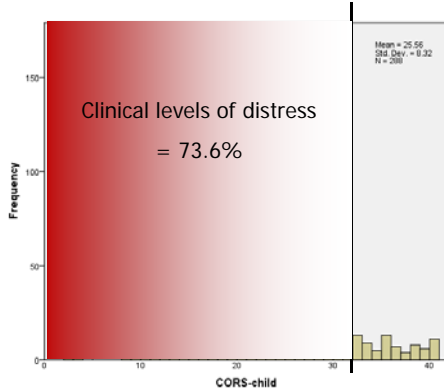
## Children seem to get more out of therapy when used

## Enhancing outcomes

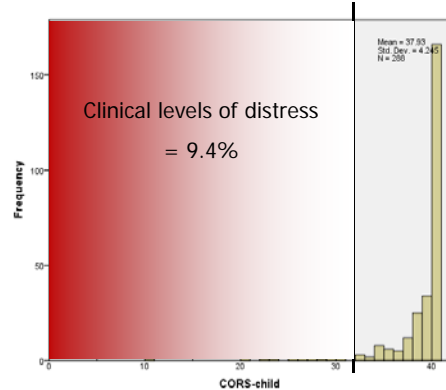
- In adult therapy field, use of systematic monitoring has now been established as a proven means of improving clinical outcomes
- Emerging evidence that has same effect in therapy with children and young people



### Time4Me: Start of counselling



### Time4Me: End of counselling



## Time4Me Outcomes

- 56.8% clinical improvement on parent/carer-rated SDQ
- 7% clinical deterioration
- Large 'effect size' from beginning to end of counselling: 0.99

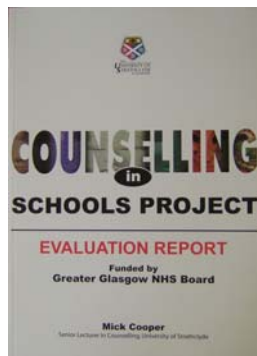


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**Children  
more  
likely to  
like it  
than not**

## Children's experiences

- Study of young people's experiences of using YP-CORE
- 8/12 said it was fine
- 3/12 said it was beneficial
- 1/12 said it was one of the most helpful aspects of the counselling
- 0/12 said it was unhelpful or intrusive



**Can help  
children  
focus on  
what they  
want to  
change...**

**...and how  
much change  
they are  
making**

*It supports us to feel more in control of its direction – to understand when things are working, when things are not and what we can do about it.*

(Young person from YoungMinds' Very Important Kids Group, CYP IAPT)

= Empowering

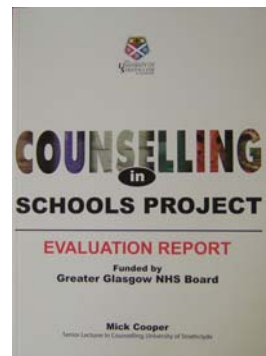
*[It] makes us feel like this is more of a shared experience between us and the clinician... like we're in this together.*

(Young person from YoungMinds' Very Important Kids Group, CYP IAPT)

Can help children to express how they feel

## Accessing feelings

- *'The counsellor gave me a questionnaire of how I was feeling today...and that just made me think about what I was actually, like, feeling.'*
- May also be easier to write down feelings than say them to someone
- Cf. creative/projective methods: a 'third space'

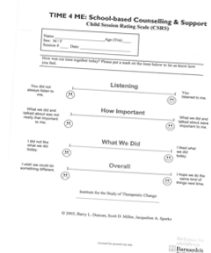


Can help children to express how they feel **about counselling**



## Overcoming deference

- Power dynamic in therapeutic relationship can make it very difficult for children to say to counsellors things they may not be happy with
- Process feedback tools may make that easier
- Provides opportunity for client's 'voice' to be heard
- Can give client sense that their views are important



**= Empowering**

**Helps therapists  
adjust and improve  
their approach**

## **Beyond intuition**

- As therapists, our 'intuitive' sense of what clients need is not always right
- Feedback provides opportunity to genuinely hear – and respond to – wants and preferences of client
- Allows us to tailor our approach to unique individual client

**Provides evidence  
for an approach or  
service**

## **The need for evidence**

If relationally-orientated counsellors do not gather evidence on the effectiveness of their work, these approaches may not be commissioned or available in years to come

**Next  
steps**

Free CPD training at [www.minded.org.uk](http://www.minded.org.uk)



## BACP CYP PRN

[www.bacp.co.uk/schools/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/schools/)



## Need for further research

- What do clients find helpful and unhelpful in using systematic feedback methods?
- When are measures helpful and when not?
- Can we develop measures that will be particularly beneficial to clients; and which are most consistent with relational ways of working?

## Summary

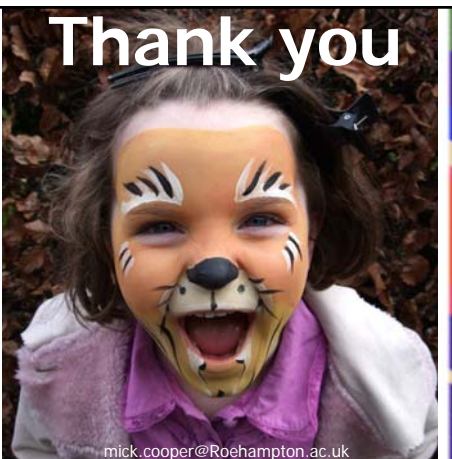
Incorporating systematic outcome and process feedback into therapy is not a 'magic bullet', nor is it right for every client. But, overall, it seems to be one of the most effective ways of enhancing clients' experiences of therapy: relational or otherwise. It is not a substitute for collaborative relational working. Rather, it has the potential to facilitate such a practice by helping clients to become active agents in their own change process, and by providing a medium through which they can communicate more honestly their thoughts and feelings to their therapists. This can then help therapists tailor their practice more closely to the unique individual child: personalising, rather than de-personalising, the therapeutic encounter.

# Thank you

For more info, google:

'A Practical Guide to Using Service User Feedback & Outcome Tools to Inform Clinical Practice in Child & Adolescent Mental Health'

(ed. Duncan Law)



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