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– *Difficulties in the area of communication and language, autistic spectrum disorders.*

Presentation

Play and language are the themes treated in this volume. Both are examined from the point of view of their primary communicative function in the relationship between the infant and his caregivers. The aim of the book is to reach a deeper understanding of the development of the infant's mind, of the meaning of parenthood and of the crucial function of the relationship with the caregiver for the infant's psycho-physical development. Play and the learning of verbal language are tightly interwoven. From the very beginning of life, both play and language have an intense communicative and relational value. We have become increasingly aware that the infant not only needs a human context, in which it is cared for in an emotionally syntonic atmosphere, but also that this context must offer the psycho-physical environment for the realization of his primary need to form relationships and to create links right from birth.

It is in this intense emotional atmosphere of primary relationships that play and language originate and it is in this relational network that the child's sense of identity is formed.

The first chapter is an invitation to readers to observe the complex physical games and listen to the precocious pre-verbal languages of young children they come in contact with.

To adults who are willing to observe the activities and listen to the vocalizations of a young child without preconceptions, all the richness of their internal world will appear and they will be amazed by the precocity of development of the infant's mind.

Nevertheless, the relationship between young children and adults does not always evolve in a harmonious and reciprocally creative way. The present volume also investigates the factors that can obstruct the growth of the relationship between infants and related adults. There are infants who show signs of withdrawal from the relationship in the first months of life, and whose development therefore slows down or stops.

Children who do not receive emotional and mental nourishment from primary relationships are at risk of developing an autistic spectrum disorder.

The second part of the first chapter introduces readers to the main signs of emotional withdrawal by children who risk the onset of autistic isolation. From the moment that not only play and language, but also the whole personality of the infant evolve in a relationship, the psychoanalytic approach not only considers the symptoms, but always sees them as signs of an underlying distress which is often rooted in the emotional and relational sphere.

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Subsequent chapters, introduced by reflections on language and play and also on the obstacles that can oppose their harmonious development, open a window on the function of the relationship in psychoanalytic work, through brief descriptions of stories of children in psychotherapy.

The second chapter puts play at the heart of the creative process of the infant's mind. It shows that in cases where suffering is present, play, together with storytelling and drawing, can contribute, within the psychoanalytic relationship, to set the creative capacities of the child in motion and to open the way to more harmonious development.

The third chapter describes short psychotherapeutic interventions with young children who have suffered traumas of various kinds and show symptoms of the autistic spectrum that involve the play and verbal language area. Not all symptoms of the autistic spectrum however are the expression of profound autism. It is shown that a psychotherapeutic intervention at an early age may prevent the situation becoming worse and bring the child back to communication and relationship.

The fourth chapter introduces readers to the to the early preverbal mother-infant relationship and shows the importance of early intervention in cases of withdrawal from the relationship.

The fifth chapter explores the stages of language development and identifies its musical and rhythmical origins in the prenatal communication of the unborn child with the maternal voice.

The newborn child, when first meeting its mother, is already born with protolinguistic competences. In passing through the stages of language development a connection is established between the quality of the experience of breastfeeding and weaning and the vicissitudes of the development of verbal language.

A significant link is suggested between international adoption and the child's possible later language disorder.