Original article

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Dialectical behavior therapy for children: A pilot study of skills training groups for parents

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Abstract

Background: Dialectical behavior therapy for children (DBT-C) has been developed to treat children with severe emotion regulation disorder, and the intervention is aimed at both children and parents. The aim of this study was to evaluate treatment outcomes for children, using parental reports on their child's behavior difficulties, after participating in DBT-C parenting skills training groups. As far as we know, no studies, international or national, have previously explored treatment outcomes of DBT-C parenting group intervention.

Method and results: The sample in this within-group study was parents of 23 children aged 8–14 years (Mdn =11 years, 74% boys) under treatment in mental health care for children and adolescents (BUP). The pilot was part of a quality development project in an outpatient clinic. The main outcome measures was the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI), where we compared parent-reported behavioral symptoms in the child before and after the intervention, in addition to the extent to which parents experienced the behavior as problematic. Parents answered a questionnaire which measured the degree of perceived benefit of the intervention. The results showed a reduction in the frequency of behavioral difficulties in the child (t(21) = 5.127, p < .001) and the parents experienced the behavioral difficulties to a lesser extent as a problem (t(19) = 2.714, p = .014).

Conclusion: Subject to the small sample size and missing control group, this pilot study provides evidence that DBT-C parenting skills groups can reduce behavioral difficulties in children with an emotion regulation disorder. There are few studies on DBT-C, and our results pave the way for further research on the treatment method. Future studies should include better control of the internal and external validity, include measures of treatment effects from multiple sources and evaluate changes in the treatment targets at multiple time points. In addition, effects of the previous and parallel treatments, as well as follow-up, should be examined.