

Helpful picture-books for children with mentally ill parents

An ongoing qualitative research project

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Abstract

When parents get mentally ill, their children have lots of questions and concerns. What will happen with their mother or their father? Do they have to blame themselves, if one of their parents isn't feeling well? It is important to tackle these children in their uncertainty and to help them to find answers. This could be with child-friendly media, for younger children for instance with a picture-book. The (psychological) burdens for children in this situation should be shown in text and pictures.

Aim of the project and research question

The goal is to create a list of criteria for picture books to inform children of mentally ill parents about their parents' illness and to help them in their daily lives. This list will be roughly divided into aspects of content, illustration and linguistics.

Methods

Besides an interdisciplinary literature review and expert interviews with psychotherapists for adults (parents) we conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with 6 to 12 years old children with a mentally ill parent (various disorders). This happened in combination with co-viewing the German picture books «Fufu» from Eggermann & Janggen (2013) and «Was ist mit Mama los?» (What is going on with Mum?) from Blazej (2008). Additionally one parent filled in some questionnaires (socio-demographics, FKV and KINDL-R). The qualitative analysis was done according to Mayring with the application MaxQDA.

First findings

Psychotherapists for adults seem to have little experience in working with picture books with the children of their clients – mostly because they don't feel competent enough to work therapeutically with children.

First results from the interviews with children show that they wish for a happy end in the book, in which a sense of hope is conveyed. But they also want to be informed about the cause and the course of the illness and the treatment possibilities. The different characters feelings should be shown. In this context, it is important to help the children understand that they are in no way responsible for their parent's mental illness.



Eder, S., Rebhandl, P. & Gasser, P. (2013)



Blazej, A. (2008)

Boy, 11 years old is giving advice to the mentally ill parent in the book:

"I think she worries about her daughter and feels bad. Then I would say: You don't have to be sad and worry about her, she is a nice girl. I think she understands what you are dealing with and it is important that you can rest and recover now... And the most important thing now is that you are getting better."

Boy, 10 years old about the book ending:

"Yes, the happy ending. That the dad gets out of the therapy, that they do not only dream about the picnic but actually do it... because dreaming and thinking positive are no long-term solutions."



Tilly, C., Offermann, A. & Merten, A. (2012)

Girl, 10 years old about her father's illness:

"It is an illness, that is not going away by itself. You have to get treatment. And it is getting worse and worse and that's why it is good if you recognize it early. It is an illness that is coming from the brain. It is nobody's fault. It is an illness you can get like you can get the sniffles but it is not infectious like the sniffles..."



Eder, S., Rebhandl, P. & Gasser, P. (2013)

Literature

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