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## Unlocking the potential

Video can be a powerful tool when working with hard to reach parents. Carry Gorney outlines how a different approach was developed for use by Brent CAMHS

I watch Magda playing with her four year old son Yuri on the video screen and press the record button. Their heads are almost touching, each of them absorbed in building the Lego model. I hope Magda will turn her head and look at Yuri's face. She does, he turns at the same moment, and their eyes lock in a gaze of love and understanding.

Magda, from Belarus, wanted help because she lacked positive feelings towards Yuri. Overwhelmed by his difficult behaviour, just the sight of him made her feel stressed. She had caused bruising to him in the past, and was worried it may re-occur.

Magda had been tearful when acknowledging that some of the difficulties between them might relate to her negative feelings. She alluded to difficulties in her own childhood and asked for psychological

help for them both. This was the third session.

### VIDEO FEEDBACK

I edit the images for Magda to watch herself parenting - a clip lasting 60 seconds in which she is following her child's play, notices his pleasure and holds eye contact with him. Choosing what to view and what to discard lies at the heart of this work. Video captures the unexpressed lying beyond words. The edited video will be the focus of our conversation.

Magda arrives alone the following week to view the tape. I know the scene with the Lego will surprise her because she often describes Yuri's restlessness. I run the video and she watches herself creating a safe space for her little boy to explore his game and so increase his confidence.

Although Magda is quick to acknowledge Yuri's ability to play on the screen she is keen to describe the difficulties they have experienced since the last session. I pull her back to the clip, commenting on her skill in playing alongside Yuri. I ask her how she knew what to do and replay the tape a couple of times before she admits that she is doing something good. It's even harder for her to acknowledge her own strengths, than recognize Yuri's.

I ask her to name what she did - eventually she says "being patient". I ask

her if anyone was patient with her as a child and she mentions her grandmother. We discuss her memories before thinking about times when she could continue being patient with Yuri.

As we replay the tape she smiles at the



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moment where they meet each other's gaze.

### THE PROGRAMME

Magda and her son were part of a year's pilot programme initiated within Brent CAMHS called *Seeing is Believing*. Video recording and guided viewing were used to promote parenting skills by increasing sensitivity and ability to respond to cues. The programme urged parents to see their own and their children's strengths and consider their child's perspective through self-observation on video. The parent was

given a DVD of video clips as a documented memory.

The intervention emerged from an identified gap in Brent CAMHS, where some parents appeared unable to engage in or benefit from traditional parenting groups e.g. Webster-Stratton or Positive Parenting Programmes. These treatments of choice for very young children with behavioural problems (NICE guidelines) build on the relationship between parents and children; however, when the bond is problematic, parenting groups are not always sufficient. Parents' experiences have been fragmented, and they need to build confidence in their parent-child bond before engaging in services.

We worked with 21 families, described as hard to engage in CAMHS. Participants included teenage mothers, parents from minority groups, many with limited English; mothers with post-natal depression, with mental illness or with a

learning disability; and disaffected fathers. These families benefited from intensive,



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short-term work, creating new stories about their relationship, with a clinician who films and witnesses the family's strengths.

The process of observing oneself communicating effectively is an empowering experience.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

First, parents identified changes they wished to see. Subsequent sessions alternated between filming the parent and child playing and the parent returning alone to view the tape. Edited clips showed where parents had responded in a positive way to the child's action or initiative using both verbal and non-verbal communication. We filmed in the home, in children's centres and in the CAMHS clinic.

Descriptive statistics and service-user feedback showed positive and large improvements in parent-child relationship. Parents in a focus group reported:

- increased confidence in managing their young children
- increased insight into their children's behaviour
- surprise at their ability to develop positive relationships.