

Psychomotor interventions for mental health Children & adolescents

A movement- and body-
oriented developmental
approach

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Boom

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Preface

A handbook of psychomotor interventions specifically focused on developmental problems: what the reader can expect.

A little boy, his father and the psychomotor therapist are walking outside in the playground. A line of six wooden poles form a kind of stairway, with the shortest at one end and the tallest at the other. The little boy hesitates; does he dare get onto the shortest pole? Does he have the courage to then make his way to the tallest one? His father helps him to get on the first pole but when the child reaches out for more support, the therapist encourages him to make his steps unaided and use his arms for balance. When he reaches the tallest pole, the boy's father, who is very eager to hold him and get him on the ground, is asked not to help the boy but to take a step back so that the boy can jump. Then, although anxious, the boy jumps and finds himself at first in the air and then in the arms of his father.

This sketch comes from a presentation by a psychomotor therapist demonstrating how they work with both children and parents to increase self-esteem and cope with stress and anxiety. The example shows the importance of experience-based learning. It also emphasizes the strong relationship between gross motor development and psychosocial functioning, especially in children. It illustrates how exercises and physical activity can help them develop self-confidence and a positive attitude towards their body. In the sketch, the psychomotor therapist shows how they create a challenging context for behavioural exploration while providing incentives, support and safety.

This handbook is the result of a wish to describe state-of-the art psychomotor therapy as it has developed up to now in the Netherlands and Flanders. Thus, the focus is on psychomotor therapy targeting problems in children, adolescents and other individuals with (neuro)developmental disorders. Together with its associated volume, the handbook on *Psychomotor interventions for mental health: Adults*, we have provided a comprehensive overview of movement- and body-oriented interventions used by psychomotor therapists. The aim is to integrate theoretical, empirical and practice-based knowledge.

The first chapter provides the reader with an outline of psychomotor therapy in a developmental context. The role of the psychomotor therapist, the essence

of their professional training and a general view of the concepts used in psychomotor interventions aimed at developmental problems are discussed. The historical and theoretical background that forms the foundation of this specific form of psychomotor therapy is laid out with separate sections on different theories about (early) motor and (neuro)psychological development as well as, for example, recent insights on embodiment. The chapter ends with an overview of the instruments used for assessment and treatment evaluation.

The next chapters target psychomotor interventions for different populations. Four chapters are devoted to psychomotor interventions that can be used in neurodevelopmental disorders, with specific chapters on people with (mild) intellectual disabilities, children and adults with autism spectrum disorder, children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and children with developmental coordination disorder. In other chapters, the psychomotor approaches used with children and adolescents with attachment disorders, eating disorders, depression, trauma and those with a high risk for psychosis are described. The book ends with a chapter on psychomotor family therapy, a system-oriented and transdiagnostic approach that combines insights from system therapy and psychomotor therapy.

Using case descriptions, practical examples of diagnostic tools and therapeutic exercises, the authors have tried to make this handbook useful for both students and trained psychomotor therapists. Since it illustrates the methods applied by psychomotor therapists, it can also be of interest to colleagues and other professionals working in the same domains. For each of the main target groups, information is also given on epidemiology, aetiology and standard treatment. The theoretical base for each approach is sketched and the empirical evidence supporting it is outlined.

This book is not the first handbook written from the perspective of the importance of movement-based interventions for psychosocial development in children. In 2005, De Lange and Bosscher, and again in 2010, De Lange edited books in Dutch on psychomotor therapy where several authors described interventions for children. With this new handbook, we hope to not only update these publications but also add to the international discourse. However, readers will detect the influence of regional practice since all but two of the authors work in the Netherlands and Flanders. Very recently, Thimme and colleagues (2021) published an extensive reader (*Lehrbuch*) in German, which describes the foundations for a movement-based approach to children's mental health. It is our hope that our handbook and its German counterpart will increase the knowledge base and international recognition of these interventions in individuals with developmental problems.

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