A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MENTALIZING

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Mentalising is defined as the ability to imaginatively try to make sense of people’s actions in terms of what might be going on in their minds: What they might be feeling, thinking, and what they might need, desire, believe or hope… “

“The opposite of mentalization is to interpret actions in a mindless way…..i.e. in ways that do not take account of mental states.”

(Bevington, Fuggle, Cracknell and Fonaghy, 2017)

Mentalising: The least novel yet the most profound human capacity
Mentalizing Spectrum

High Performance → Effective → Ineffective → Low Performance
MENTALIZING AND NON-MENTALIZING – AN EXAMPLE – BOSTON 24/7
Ingredients of Good Mentalising
“The Other”

• Curiosity
• Other’s minds are opaque – cannot be read like a book
• Non-compulsive contemplation and reflection
• Perspective taking
• Capacity to trust
• Give and take

Ingredients of Good Mentalising
“The Self”

• Self-inquisitive stance
• Narrative continuity – my story – coherence
• Internal conflict awareness
• Awareness of affect impact
• Belief in changeability
• Humility
• Taking responsibility
Ineffective Mentalising
Content Indicators of ineffective mentalization

1. Focus on external factors – school, the neighbourhood, poor training, lack of support

2. Focus on labels – lazy, stupid, self-destructive, controlling, short-fused

3. Pre-occupation with rules “Should and Should Not”

4. Absence of content (paucity of thought as in depression)

5. Blaming others
Style - Indicators of ineffective mentalization

1. Excessive detail to the exclusion of thoughts and feelings – nothing is prioritised – hard to determine what is important

2. States of mind do not get inserted into the narrative. “The humanity of others is missing from the narrative”.

3. Untested / unfounded assumptions begin to be made about mental states of others, “I know she didn’t phone because she was annoyed.”

4. Absence of perspective taking

5. Certainty / literal thinking
ORIGINS OF EFFECTIVE MENTALISING ARE ROOTED IN EXPERIENCES OF SECURE ATTACHMENT
Why mentalizing really matters: Learning about learning, and Epistemic Trust


