

Why do children become hyperactive?

A workshop summary.

The central questions of my workshop were:

- What is hyperactivity in the context of bonding and trauma?
- What can constellations of the intention show about hyperactivity?
- Who am I, and how do I work with this method?

I have been working as a social worker, trauma counselor and trauma educator in my own practice since January 2012. I work with traumatised people, and from time to time also with their adolescent children. The theoretical basis of my work are multi-generational psychotraumatology and bonding theory, while the methodic basis is the constellation of the intention.

Ever since my first semester in social work at the Katholische Stiftungsfachhochschule München (university of applied sciences) in 2001, I have been intensively studying the areas of constellation work, bonding and trauma. My main focus is to understand why people feel, think and act the way they do. During my learning process, I also encountered the topic of hyperactivity: I was an academic assistant in two constellation seminars on hyperactivity which were held by Franz Ruppert. The results are summarized in my thesis “hyperactivity, bonding and trauma” and in the article “hyperactivity and ADHS” (Ruppert/ Freund: Praxis der Systemaufstellung, 1/2007, 74-81) [*both in german language only*]. However, at that time symbiotic trauma and the constellation of the intention were not yet known.

In my workshop introduction I underlined the crucial role of the concepts of symbiotic trauma and the constellation of the intention in order to understand hyperactivity and to treat it therapeutically.

This extension and deepening of multigenerational psychotraumatology lead to a new explanatory approach of hyperactivity. It contrasts the much quoted explanation of genetic disposition, which I think provides no logical explanation of the real cause of hyperactivity:

If a mother is traumatised and has not yet resolved her trauma which is therefore split off in her psyche, then her child suffers from a symbiotic trauma in bonding to his traumatised mother. The symbiotic trauma causes extreme stress in the child. His physical unrest, inattention and impulsivity are immediate reactions to the traumatised mother. More specifically, the child reacts to

- the trauma of the mother – her trauma feelings and trauma energy, and
- his existential sense of bereavement due to the emotional absence of the mother whose psyche is split.

Because a child with his natural needs depends on the mother and her feelings, it has no choice but to get entangled with the mother and her trauma. And vice versa: A mother with a split psyche depends on the neediness of her child. She needs her child in order to resist her own trauma. A traumatised mother seeks for protection, stability, comfort, security and rest in her child. In addition, she also seeks to discharge their burdening feelings like fear, rage, hate, guilt, grief and shame, while the child unconditionally tries to protect, hold, comfort and stabilize the mother. The hyperactivity of a child is an external expression of this symbiotic entanglement.

In the reorientated constellation of the intention, now these symbiotic entanglements in their individual forms show up more clearly. Based on a comprehensive knowledge of entanglements and a detailed understanding of their causes, mothers and children can undo their detrimental symbiotic entanglements. "Understand" in this context means understanding on a cognitive, emotional and physical level.

There are basically two types of constellations for hyperactivity issues:

- constellations done by mothers and fathers of hyperactive children
- constellations done by hyperactive adolescents and adults themselves

The subsequent constellation process impressively confirmed the introductory theoretical remarks. It was a living example of a constellation process on hyperactivity and inattention:

Summary and interpretation of the constellation process:

Mrs. A was born in 1952. She described herself as physically hyperactive and heavily mentally inattentive. She said that she had learned how to deal with her physical unrest: her hobby was dancing, where she could act out her restlessness very well. However, she could hardly deal with her inattention. Especially, it was impossible for her to pay attention to herself and her issues over a longer period. When I asked her about her parents, Mrs. A replied that they were both traumatised from the war. Her older sister was suffering from an eating disorder. She phrased the following intention: "I would like to get rid of this inattention and to be able to refocus my attention on myself instead."

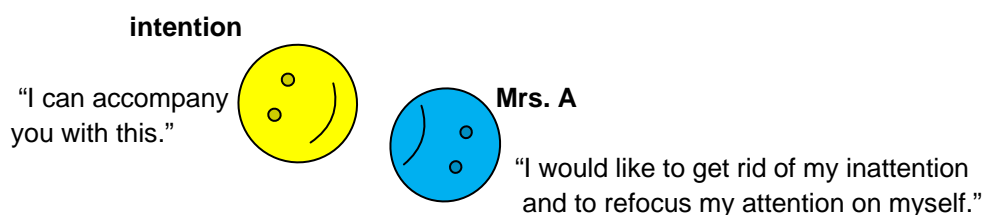


Figure 1

When Mrs. A became more and more restless in contact with her intention, I suggested to her to choose one representative for this restless part and one for her mother.

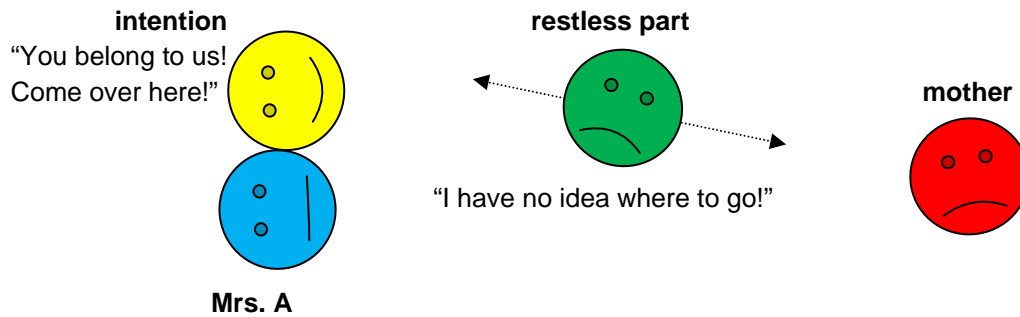


Figure 2

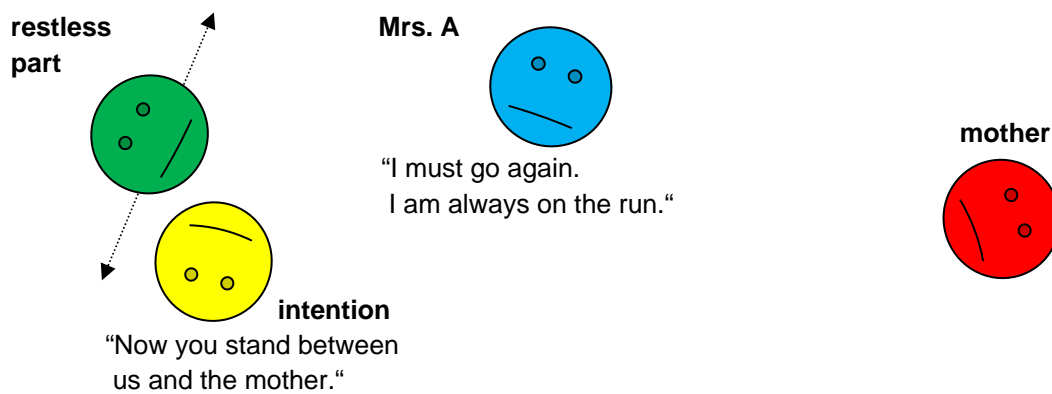


Figure 3

So far during the process, either Mrs. A or the restless part were alternately drawn towards the mother. Thus, I suggested to Mrs. A to choose an additional representative for the part who protects the mother. Mrs. A agreed.

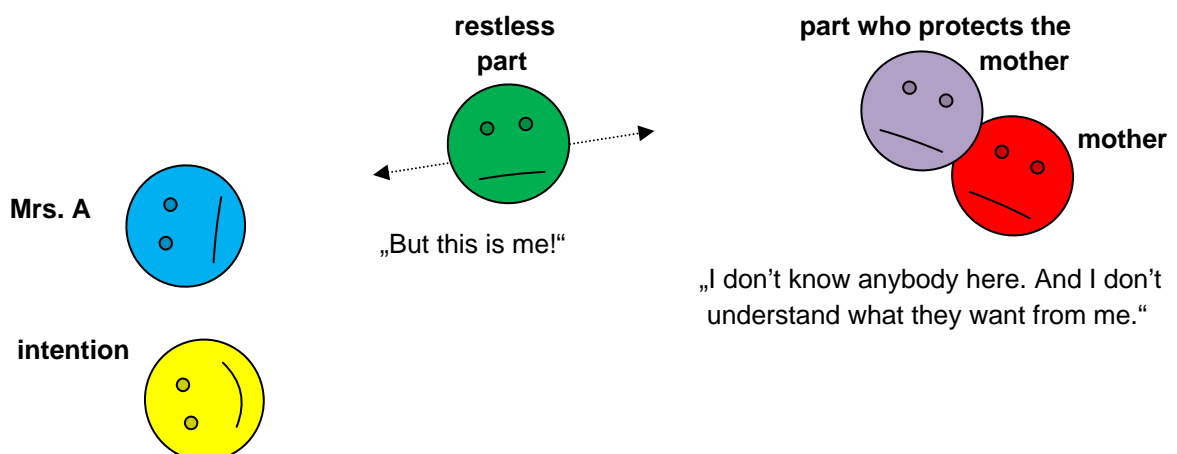


Figure 4

Mrs. A confirmed the attitude of her mother: "This is how she is in real life." Mrs. A always felt that she had never been seen. I asked which traumatic experiences of her mother she knew. Mrs. A reported that her mother suffered from intense hunger during the war. In addition, the mother had a bad relationship to her own mother. Thus, I suggested to Mrs. A to choose a representative for the mother's mother and one for the experience of hunger.

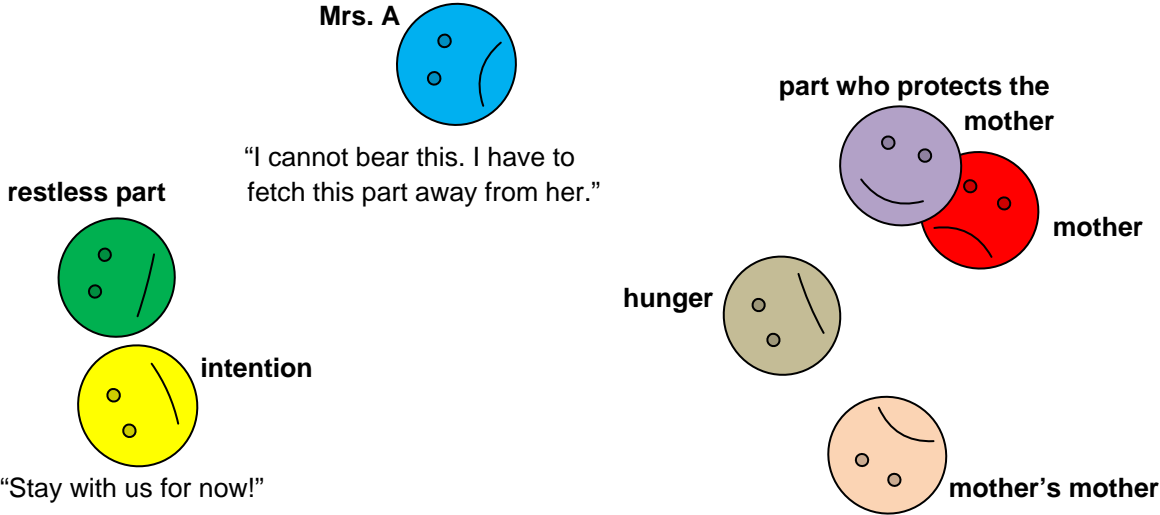


Figure 5

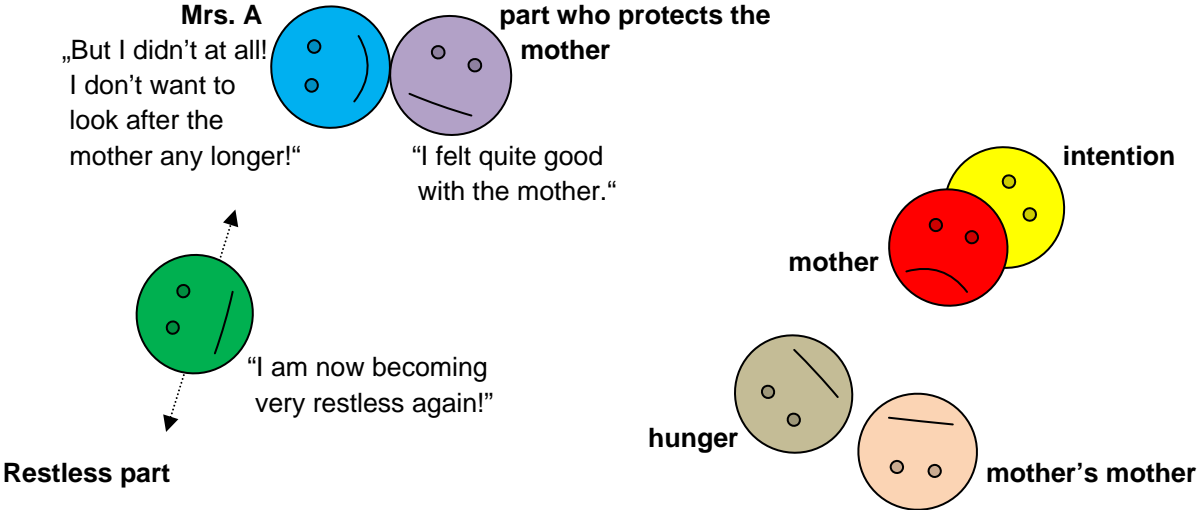


Figure 6

Mrs. A reported that she had tried all her life to look after her mother. But despite all efforts, her mother would never see her and her needs. Therefore Mrs. A said, from now on she only wanted to look after herself. I argued that there was still one part of her standing right next to the mother, which was her intention. Mrs. A firmly replied that she could not accept this.

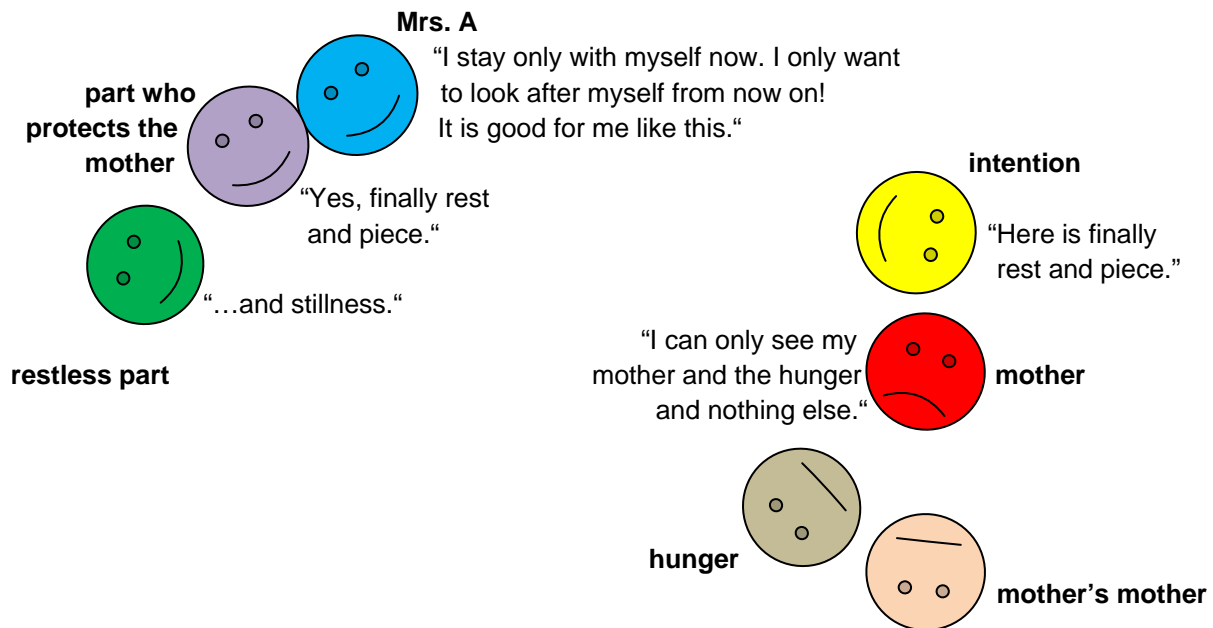


Figure 7

The intention became more and more symbiotic with the mother. Only when Mrs. A repeated several times her decision to only look after herself from now on, she got back in touch with her intention. "Now I feel released from a heavy burden."

At this point, Mrs. A's intention - to get rid of her inattention and to refocus her attention on herself - was fulfilled: Her wish to get rid of the symptom of inattention came out of a survival mechanism. The inattention is the cause of Mrs. A's problems. The original problem was the contact with her mother who was traumatised from the war. The constellation process clearly showed that one part of Mrs. A was always in service to her mother in order to help, support and protect her. The restlessness and inattention are both reactions to the emotionally absent mother and her trauma energy. They enable Mrs. A to stay in touch with her mother emotionally and also to endure this contact.

The solution for Mrs. A would be to free herself from the symbiotic entanglement with her traumatised mother. (This would require Mrs. A to phrase a corresponding intention.) Only then Mrs. A will be able to refocus her attention on herself. The final scene of the process – the relief of Mrs. A and her parts who feel rest, stillness and peace –

must be understood in this context. The relevant question was asked by one workshop participant: whether it was actually Mrs. A or her mother who needed rest and peace. As long as Mrs. A is symbiotically entangled with her mother, she cannot distinguish her needs from the needs of others. Mrs. A agreed: "Yes, that's correct. Actually I don't know what my needs are."

The workshop ended with a discussion round. In the vivid discussion several fundamental questions were raised, such as:

- How can we help hyperactive children whose parents are not willing to pay attention at their own trauma?
- What is the role of the father in this context?
- Do hyperactivity symptoms change over the lifetime of an affected person?
- Do all children of a traumatised mother become hyperactive? Why are there differences between siblings?

Christina Freund