

# "Case Reflection"

## A guide

### (N. Behringer 2022)

#### 1. introduction

When thinking about cases, one can first ask what "a case" really is. Gerspach (2021) understands it as narratives of significant processes from professional contexts that represent life-practical facts in need of treatment and worthy of treatment. A case can be a person, a family, a situation, a group, a programme or an entire institution. There are very different answers to the question of how casework and case understanding are to be organised, resulting in a variety of forms of work. Mentalization-focused case work aims at exploring, naming, understanding and, in a certain way, developing the inner psychological states of all those involved in the interaction by working out anti-precipitant ideas of reaction and understanding. At the same time, it is about understanding and enduring non-success in everyday pedagogical life (Flad, Schneider & Treptow, 2008) and, in the sense of the mentalizing attitude, about enduring non-knowledge. The central question is: How can relationship dynamics be understood in a mentalizing way?

The psychodynamic concept of transference and counter-transference represents points of reference. A transference process is "the unconscious repetition or revival of acquired, internalised and inwardly modified relationship patterns in the current interaction and situation" (Stemmer-Lück, 2014, p. 90). Processes of this kind take place in all interpersonal relationships. Transferences in the pedagogical relationship involve not only the children, young people and parents, but also the professionals, so that a transference space unfolds between all participants. Bittner (2010) understands transference processes as a "ping-pong game of mutual unconsciousness". The term transference refers to a complex process in which the young person's inner relationships with the professional are staged and, in a sense in the here and now, "transferred". In transference, the young person interprets new experiences on the basis of previous experiences and learning processes.

Countertransference, on the other hand, are the (unconscious) reactions on the part of the professional. They manifest themselves as impulses, emotions, attitudes and fantasies, such as concern, exhaustion, helplessness, anger, disgust, guilt, confusion, which arise as an "unconscious reaction to the transferences and thus allow conclusions to be drawn about the content of the transferences" (Gerspach, 2018, p. 25). In pedagogical work, the perception of countertransferences should be used constructively, because it enables deeper insight into the inner and outer world of young people (Stemmer-Lück, 2014, p. 90f.). They can be analysed on the five levels of body/sense, thinking/cognition, experiences, fears and wishes (Boessmann & Remmers, 2018) and are part of the mentalisation-focused case discussion.

Mentalization-focused case discussions do not have to be led by external supervisors, but they need a moderator (from the team/college) who addresses the different dimensions of

case understanding, recognises and names mentalizing intrusions and stimulates mentalizing processes through reflection questions.

Behringer (2021) was able to show empirically that in case discussions there are conditional factors for successful mentalizing and those for failing mentalizing, which should be taken into account when conducting mentalizing-focused case discussions. Successful mentalizing can be promoted in particular by stimulating self-reflection and reflection on relationships or by deepening the exploration of reflection processes that have already begun. Mentalizing self-disclosure, the explicit stimulation of multi-perspectivity or successful mentalizing of other professionals also require mentalizing in the team. A child's primary teacher or the class teacher can stimulate the mentalizing of other professionals by providing supplementary/deepening information on relationship dynamics. Failure to mentalise is primarily caused by conflicts between two (or three) professionals, strong affectivity in the here and now of the case discussion and by young people addressing offenses and boundary violations. Interruptions of strongly affective topics through concrete understanding function as a regulation mechanism of threatening affectivity on the team level.

Mentalizing slumps can be interrupted and mentalizing can be stimulated again by successful mentalizing of affective less "affected" professionals ("mentalizing bridge") or explicit reflection questions. Behringer (2021) has derived the following guiding principles for mentalisation-focused case discussions from the empirical analysis of conditional factors:

- Mentalisation-focused case discussions need leadership.
- Mentalizing needs a firm, safe and open space.
- Mentalizing is contagious: Successful mentalizing of colleagues (especially self-disclosure) has a positive effect on stimulating or returning to successful mentalizing.
- Inner-focused mentalizing first - mentalizing the relationship level second.
- Affectively "difficult" topics (e.g. farewells) require a targeted moderation of mentalisation-stimulating questions.
- When talking about experienced transgressions and insults, the "unaffected" professionals promote a mentalizing climate.
- The reference specialist is a "superhighway" for successful mentalizing: The "mentalising" professional (facilitator) should not be the reference professional.
- Longer speech parts of a professional (2 to 2.5 minutes) enable extensive mentalisation processes.
- Awareness of one's own "stress triggers" is indispensable for successful mentalizing.
- Clarified responsibilities and a clear, reliable leadership style are fertile ground for successful mentalizing.
- Team cohesion under stress limits has a positive effect on mentalizing.
- Unresolved team issues inhibit mentalizing.

- Non-mentalizing (not to be confused with mentalizing failure) is a self-regulatory mechanism of the team.

## 2. guide for mentalization-focused case discussions (Behringer, 2021)

### Guideline for a mentalization-focused case discussion (Behringer 2021)

the view from outside

- how are the parents of the young person doing with us? how are they doing with their child? how does the world currently look from their eyes?
- How does the world look right now from the young person's point of view?
- How might the other young people in the group feel about the young person right now?

### Guideline for a mentalization-focused case discussion (Behringer 2021)

Entry	The view inwards	the view on the interpersonal level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is each professional like here?</li> <li>• Who presents a case?</li> <li>• Impulse lecture (15 min) e.g. on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentalizing and attachment</li> <li>• Mentalizing and stress</li> <li>• Transference/countertransference</li> <li>• mental disorders</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection on counter-transference: what does the young person trigger in me?</li> <li>• With whom am I identified?</li> <li>• Reflection of own wishes, fears, challenges, limits</li> <li>• What does this have to do with me as a professional? When is my stress level increased?</li> <li>• Are there parallels to other cases or entrenched patterns of interaction?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing the relationship with 3 terms</li> <li>• Scenic understanding: which relationship desires are enacted?</li> <li>• What underlies the negotiation and interactions?</li> <li>• Actively ask for different perspectives</li> </ul>

## Guideline for a mentalization-focused case discussion (Behringer 2021)

### the view from outside

- description of the relationship by the colleagues with 3 terms
- What motives underlie the behaviour?
- Which relationship desires are hidden and can be recognised by them?
- Putting yourself in the other person's shoes
- Critical reflections from the outside:
- Where do the colleagues see challenges and difficulties?

### the look at the team level

- working with young people as part of a team:
- Different roles, intentions, views, attitudes
- Does the current theme represent a general team theme? (e.g. dealing with hierarchy, parting)

### Conclusion and implications

- what remains misunderstood, irritating?
- what do we still not find an explanation for? what new aspects have been added?
- What are the consequences for pedagogical action (role play)?

### 3. impulses for practical application and practice

The application of the guideline for mentalisation-focused case discussions should be practised with the participants in several units in order to be able to implement the process, the mode-rationing with the different dimensions and the derivation of implications for concrete pedagogical action. In particular, the role play at the end of the case discussion proves to be fruitful for practice and deepens the process of understanding - despite the expected initial resistance. Case studies from the participants' practice are most suitable for the humanisation-focused case discussion. If no concrete case studies can be provided, cases from the literature can also be used. There you will find, for example, the following case vignette on the topic of "crisis intervention" with reflection questions that stimulate mentalisation and are suitable for use in the trainings (Walter, 2020, chapter 6.4):

Part 1: Mirjam is 16 years old and has been living for a year in a residential group for young people run by the statutory youth welfare service. One afternoon Flora, another resident and friend of Mirjam, comes to the social worker on duty, who has only been working here for three weeks, and says "Something's wrong with Mirjam, she ran into the bathroom and locked herself in. She's doing something." When the social worker arrives at the bathroom door, she hears Mirjam crying and breaking glass. Another specialist is on duty in the residential group upstairs. Other group members gather excitedly in front of the bathroom door and speculate relatively loudly about what is going on inside.

Questions:

- Who might be having a "crisis" here?
- What are the emotions of the different people involved?
- What first possible courses of action can you think of for the social pedagogue?
- What are the goals of action and why?

- How do you deal with heightened emotions of your own (fear, anger, sadness, joy etc.)?
- How do you react to the heightened emotions (fear, anger, sadness, joy etc.) of others?
- Where or how did you learn your repertoire of coping skills in the course of your life?
- What kind of crises have you dealt with in your life and what helped you?

Part 2: In the meantime 45 minutes have passed. After some time, Mirjam was persuaded by Flora to come out of the bathroom. Mirjam has cut her forearms with broken glass and has meanwhile been taken to the doctor by her colleague. According to Mirjam, her crisis was triggered by a fight with her boyfriend, who threatened to leave her. An agitated Flora is now sitting in the social worker's office and wants to talk ...

#### Task:

In small groups (3-5 people), improvise the conversation situation between Flora and the social worker. (You can also change the gender of the characters). Distribute the roles and, if necessary, take a few minutes to think yourself into the role. Then start the conversation without any further pre-talk. The other people in your small group serve as observers. Note to the players: Don't forget to breathe and remember "failure light-hearted" in German: „Scheiter heiter!". Try to be in the conversation for at least 10-15 minutes. End the exercise after 20 minutes at the latest and evaluate it together with the observers.

Suggestions for evaluating and reflecting on the exercise:

- How did the conversation develop?
- Which moments or reactions (in yourself or your counterpart) were unexpected and surprised you in some way?
- Which processes of improvisation can you recognise in the conversation?
- To what extent did methodological ideas (e.g. from crisis intervention or other methods) flow into the design of the conversation or not?
- What assumptions did you draw on in shaping your role?
- What assumptions did you draw on in shaping the conversation?

The reflection of transference and counter-transference and the concept of scenic understanding can be practised in the group on a trial basis using the MentEd films (see Erasmus+ teaching films). In addition, dialogues from feature films or series are suitable for experiencing the procedure in mentalisation training. Suitable examples are episodes from the ARTE series "In Treatment".