Marte Meo Parent Coaching

Image-based parent coaching according to Marte Meo with a 3 year-old child who has communication difficulties • Lasting development support in an ordinary familial daily life

1. Current Situation
Sonja's mother is concerned: Sonja is now 3 years old and still barely talks. She says single words, but those only very quietly and mostly in an inarticulate way. Sonja is an only child. When her mother had to run household chores, she hardly plays on her own, but only sits around and looks at her toys. On the playground in front of the apartment building, Sonja watches the other children play, but does not talk and play with them.

Sonja's mother wants her child to learn how to speak and to play both on her own and together with other children. She has already let her child be medically checked: in the somatic sense (the bodily side) everything seems to be ok with Sonja. Sonja’s mother is a single parent: the father left the family when Sonja was half a year old. The mother herself does not talk a lot and rather quietly, and also hardly looks at the Marte Meo therapist when she does so. Altogether, she seems to be worried and insecure, even scared at times.

She has heard about the Marte Meo Parent Coaching(): before she will have her daughter medically examined once more, she wants to try whether she can support her daughter Sonja in her development and in her role as a mother in the daily life at home using Marte Meo().

2. How Does The Image-Based Parent Coaching According To Marte Meo Look Like In This Situation?
At first the so-called »diagnostic film according to Marte Meo« is made: usually, recordings are done at the family's home; normally, the Marte Meo therapist films it. But sometimes, the parents also bring the necessary films along (Aarts, 2009, 2011).
Sonja’s mother, however, prefers that the films are recorded during the counselling sessions. As soon as mother and daughter are warmed up(1) filming starts. At first a so-called free situation according to Marte Meo: Sonja is playing with Lego bricks and the mother sits in a comfortable position opposite her on the floor, looking on as her daughter plays. This sequence of interaction is now filmed for approximately 10 minutes. Afterwards, a short film of a so-called guided situation according to Marte Meo(2) is made: mother and daughter are playing Pairs together.

Afterwards the Marte Meo therapist explains to the mother that they will first watch the films, then evaluate and prepare them for the first image-based coaching session according to Marte Meo (which is called the Review). The mother understands that she is supposed to come to the next session on her own and that it will only take about half an hour. She will see chosen images from both filmed sequences accompanied by the correspondent information regarding what Sonja can already do and where the mother already supports Sonja in such a way that Sonja can develop well and on her own strength. Also, she will learn which Marte Meo elements she as a mother can enforce in order to concretely and easily support Sonja in her linguistic development as well as in her abilities to play on her own and with other children in daily moments of interaction at home (Aarts, 2009; Eggenschwyler and Loosli, 2011; Isager, 2009; Niklaus, 2009 and 2010).

3. Preparation For A Marte Meo Coaching Session (The So-Called »Review«)

From this two different interaction moments, an evaluation is made, following the video interaction analysis according to Marte Meo (Aarts, 2009, 2011) regarding Sonja’s state of development in her communication skills in the emotional, social and linguistic fields in the filmed moments of interaction with her mother. Here, it becomes clear that the first two short films (the so-called diagnostic film according to Marte Meo(4)) are used as an evaluation tool (Aarts, 2009; Bünnder, Sirringhaus-Bünnder and Helfer, 2009).

Based on the Marte Meo diagnosis(4), it becomes apparent that Sonja has not yet learned to name what she is doing in a specific moment with words or sentences respectively. To recognize one’s own actions and to be able to name them is an important development step for a child, making it possible to catch the attention of others and thus create a place for itself in the peer group. According to the Marte Meo method, Sonja therefore requires very concrete and short sentences from the person opposite her, in this case the mother, concerning the things she is doing while playing. In the Marte Meo language we call this: Sonja is in need of words for her concrete initiatives of action in the free situation.

One can also see in the film how carefully the mother trains her eyes to be where the child’s attention is resting. But at the same time, the mother’s face seems worried in most of the film sequences. There is only one scene in which the mother smiles while she follows her daughter’s activity with her eyes. And a particular interaction takes place when the mother smiles and Sonja looks up in the exact same moment. Thus, the effective and best images for the first Review with the mother are chosen.(6)

4. First Review

The Marte Meo therapists shows the mother the chosen images with the short scenes of interaction, demonstrating what her daughter is already able to do well in regard to her concerns (linguistic development and playing on one’s own and together with other children) and how exactly the mother is already supporting her in an effective way. Thus, several short sequences are played in which Sonja takes Lego bricks and proceeds to gradually build a tower onto the board of them. The mother understands now that she supports her daughter in her self-confidence and her self-efficacy when she follows her daughter’s initiatives for actions with a smile on her face. The mother also witnesses the situation in which Sonja is looking up to her and they are smiling at one another. In addition, she gets the information that Sonja can now only profit more from her mother’s presence: Sonja knows for certain that what she is doing in that moment is important to her mother, that she as a person is important to her. And in the moment, in which both are smiling at one another, sharing their happiness, her daughter’s self-confidence and self-efficacy is strengthened with a lasting effect (Aarts and Hüther, 2008; Niklaus, 2010). Moreover, she supports Sonja in being able to play on her own by doing that.(7)
In leaving the Marte Meo counselling, the mother states with an articulate voice that she would already feel more secure. Up until then, she had always thought that she would do many things wrong, because Sonja's father (her ex-husband) would criticise her. But she says that she would now be able to see that her child is able to play on her own better than she had initially assumed.

The mother now has the task to watch her daughter while she is playing with a relaxed posture and a friendly face every day for ten minutes, if the opportunity arises (without any time pressure). Again, the Marte Meo therapist shows her the good images of how she is following her daughter’s initiatives for actions with a smiling face.

5. And How Will This Marte Meo Counselling Continue?
After 2 weeks, the mother comes again, together with Sonja. She reports calmly and confidently that Sonja would play more often and for longer periods of time on her own than before. She also tells that Sonja would know a few more words than before. The mother seems more relaxed and calmer than in the first session.

Now another film is recorded in the counselling centre: this time only in a »free situation«, that is to say while Sonja is playing with Lego bricks and the mother looks on.

The subsequent analysis of this film shows that Sonja already displays more initiatives for actions compared to the first film and that she talks in one and two-word sentences more often – that is called in the Marte Meo language »to name her initiatives for actions with words« (Aarts, 2009, 2011; Niklaus, 2010). Moreover, Sonja looks up to her mother more frequently and shares her happiness in playing with her.

It is also apparent that the mother now consistently follows her daughter’s initiatives with a relaxed and friendly face. In one interaction, one can see how Sonja takes a red Lego brick out of the box. In that moment, the mother says: »Ah, you are taking a Lego brick out of the box.« »Best first image for the working point below.«

In another interaction, one can observe how Sonja looks at the mother and says: »Lego ha.« And the mother answers with an affirmative tone: »Ah, you are holding a Lego brick.« »Best second image for the working point below.«

The mother learns that when she specifically supports her daughter’s self-perception and linguistic development that Sonja then learns to speak better and thus also to name herself. She comes to understand that this is an important social skill for Sonja, needed in order to get attention in a group of other peers on her own strength and thus will be able to learn to play with them (Isager, 2009; Niklaus, 2010).

In the subsequent review, the Marte Meo therapist shares the mother’s happiness about her daughter’s progress that can be seen in the film sequences. And she also shows her precisely what she as mother has contributed to Sonja making these improvements since the first meeting (Isager, 2009; Niklaus, 2010). It is nice to observe how the mother slowly gains self-confidence and self-efficiency in her role as a mother. The next task (»next working point« for the mother, see Aarts, 2009) is then to specifically name Sonja’s initiatives for actions with words, whenever Sonja does not do that on her own and it is possible to do so for the mother. For clarifying the working point, the Marte Meo therapist therefore shows her the best first image, as described above.

Moreover, the mother also finds out that when Sonja says some words (without any incentive) that she can then, as it is shown in the second best image clarifying the working point, repeat the words Sonja has uttered and also afterwards tell her the whole sentence in an affirmative tone (e.g.: »Lego brick ha, ha, ah. You are holding the Lego brick.«)

But the mother also learns how important it is that she uses the second person singular every time and for example says: »You are picking the Lego brick up.« Thus, Sonja learns to distinguish between the »I« and »you«: an essential step in the linguistic and emphatic development of a child (Aarts, 2009; Aarts, 2002; Isager, 2009).

From the neurobiological perspective, this means that the concrete initiatives for actions of the child can be saved in a better way in the premotor cortex as a plan for actions, given they are supported with the mother’s concrete and light voice and in the second person singular. Since the mirror neurons for action and language seem to be partially identical, the action is immediately connected to the child’s speech centre (Broca’s area in the brain) (Aarts and
Hüther, 2008; Bauer, 2006). This means that the child receives development support for the conscious planning of actions, self-perception and speaking by its mother in this very moment. Simultaneously, the child receives support for the development of its empathy; self-confidence and self-efficacy are strengthened further. All of this happens during ordinary situations at home. How important the learning of interactions is from a neuro-biological point of view is described in various publications of secondary literature (Aarts and Hüther, 2008; Bauer, 2006; Braun, 2004; Braun, 2006; Hüther, 2007; Niklaus, 2010; Spitzer, 2007).

And so it continues step-by-step, with a subsequent film and review. However, the mother has in the meantime purchased a camera and brings the films from home, where she records them.

And for the third review, the mother wants to bring Sonja’s father along to the image-based parent coaching since he is interested in what he could pay attention to at the visiting weekends, so that his daughter can develop further in such a positive way. She reports that he had noticed that her parental role as a mother is more confident. This compliment for her as a mother after all the difficult moments of communication before, during and after the divorce from her ex-husband, Sonja’s father, touches and pleases her very much: she shares her happiness about that with her Marte Meo therapist. Such moments of sharing happiness, which are effective for the mother and for the therapist as moments of recharging energy, Maria Aarts refers to as »Happ-Happ«, another Marte Meo element (Aarts, 2009).

The father accompanies the mother to the next Marte Meo parent coaching. At the end he says to his ex-wife: »I’m impressed by how you support our daughter Sonja in her development! Until now, I always thought you as mother were overwhelmed with the education of her. Now I can see, how well you are coping. That really calms me.« The mother’s facial expression reveals her joy, although she does not say anything in that moment.

Already after another 6 weeks, the mother proudly reports that Sonja is now able to play more than half an our on her own, that she would occasionally come to her and would share her joy about something she had crafted or built with her. That she is now able to speak in whole sentences and talks in an articulate way, often in four or five-word sentences.

Furthermore, that two days ago, the mother of a girl (Anita) from the neighbourhood had asked whether they could play together some time, since Anita would like to play with Sonja. This incident pleases the mother especially, because her daughter Sonja is obviously able to make friends on her own. And since she herself has felt rather lonely in the neighbourhood so far: now the two women have arranged to meet up for a coffee while the children play together. That is why the mother then thinks that she does not need any further counselling sessions.

6. Concluding Remarks
It appears that this Marte Meo parent coaching in reference to communication has brought about many changes on several levels: Sonja has been able to develop her communication with her mother and her father as well as with children of the same age. She speaks more and also does this in a more articulate way. She is in the process of developing essential social skills that will help her to make friendships one her own and to find a place in a group of peers for herself.

The mother is establishing relationships and therefore also communication with other mothers in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, Sonja’s mother now also communicates with the Marte Meo therapist in a more self-confident, calm and articulate way.

In the communication between Sonja’s mother and father, there have also been promising changes that can contribute to support their daughter’s development in a lasting manner (Hawellek, 2008; Hawellek and von Schlippe, 2007).

[Herzogenbuchsee, March 6, 2012]

Annotations:
(1) An article about Marte Meo was published In the BVF-Forum in December 2010 (Krauer, 2010).
(2) Marte Meo translates as: On one’s own strength. The Marte Meo method was developed by Maria Aarts in the Netherlands in 1976, and is nowadays used by many various professionals in the most diverse social professions worldwide, in almost 40 countries, and further developed in the international network of Marte Meo (Website: www. martemeo.com) (Aarts, 2009; Niklaus, 2010).
The image-based parent coaching according to Marte Meo can be used in a pedagogic, preventive and/or therapeutic way (Aarts, 2009; Baeriswyl-Rouiller, 2008; Bünner, Sirlinghaus-Bünner and Helfer, 2009; Eggenschwiler and Loosli, 2011; Niklaus, 2009 and 2010).

(1) This is a so-called Marte Meo Element (MME): Maria Aarts calls this »Coffee, Cookies and the Dog« (Aarts, 2009).

(2) Both the free and the guided situation according to Marte Meo are described in detail in an article that can be downloaded from http://www.therese-niklaus.ch/Marte%20Meo%20Artikel%202009.pdf (Niklaus, 2009). [Internet September, 2013].

(3) This is a so-called Marte Meo Element (MME): Maria Aarts calls this »Coffee, Cookies and the Dog« (Aarts, 2009).

(4) Both the free and the guided situation according to Marte Meo are described in detail in an article that can be downloaded from http://www.therese-niklaus.ch/Marte%20Meo%20Artikel%202009.pdf (Niklaus, 2009). [Internet September, 2013].

(5) How exactly such a Marte Meo diagnosis is made, how the effective and best images for the next review are chosen, and how such an image-based Marte Meo coaching is conducted can be learned in a very practice-oriented way by means of case study supervisions in a Marte Meo training for Marte Meo therapists (see www.martemeo.com, and http://www.therese-niklaus.ch/30012.html).

(6) How the effective and best images are selected and shown in an image-based Marte Meo coaching, in connection with the so-called Marte Meo information, can be read up by means of a concrete case study, which is described in the book »Mir fällt nix ein – Marte Meo Kommunikationstraining« (Nothing Comes To Mind – Marte Meo Communication Training) and shown in the accompanying film (Aarts & Rausch, 2009).

(7) In the article »Explaining the efficacy of Marte Meo from a neurobiological perspective«, this is described and explained step by step. English edition: Therese Niklaus Loosli, »A Case Study On Prevention: Explaining The Efficiency Of Marte Meo From A Neurobiological Perspective«, Marte Meo Magazine 2011, Article 04E. German edition: »Ein Fallbeispiel aus der Prävention: Die Wirksamkeit von Marte Meo neurobiologisch erklärt«, Marte Meo Magazine 2010, Article 04G. See the website of Marte Meo International Marte Meo Magazine 2010, www.martemeo.com (Niklaus, 2010). [Internet September, 2013]

(8) This film is now called the subsequent film (Aarts, 2009).

Bibliography

zine/interdisciplinary-experiential-education-ba-
coon/2011/all/
magazine/neurobiology/2011/all/

**Authors & Further Information:**

**THERÈSE NIKLAUS LOOSLI** | Systemic solution- and resources-orientated counselling practice; MD specialist FMH for paediatric psychiatry and psychotherapy; Couple and family therapist and systemic therapist SGS; Marte Meo Therapist and Marte Meo Licensed Supervisor; Supervisor, coach and organisation developer; University lecturer [Photo top]

Wysshölzlistrasse 36
3360 Herzogenbuchsee | Switzerland
Tel./Fax: (+41)-(0)62-961 93 09
E-mail: beratungspraxis@therese-niklaus.ch
Website: www.therese-niklaus.ch

**MARIA AARTS** | Director Marte Meo International; Founder of the Marte Meo method

Molenveld 20
5611 EX Eindhoven | Netherlands
Tel.: (+31)-(0)40-246 05 60
E-mail: aartsmaria@martmeo.com
Website: www.martemeo.com

© 2013, Therese Niklaus Loosli & Maria Aarts | Aarts Productions

This »MARTE MEO Magazine« article is copyrighted. The moral right of the author has been asserted. 

For information, mail to the publisher: aartsproductions@martemeo.com

**Translation:** Lucy Harries, 2013.

First publication in German language in »undKinder«, No. 87, June 2011, p. 31-36, to be downloaded from the homepage of the *Marie Meierhofer Instituts für das Kind*, Zürich, Switzerland: http://www.mmizuerich.ch/shop/_undkinder_.html [Internet October, 2013]

**Way of Citing:**

Therese Niklaus Loosli & Maria Aarts, »Marte Meo Parent Coaching«, Marte Meo Magazine 2013, Art. 13E, p. ...