

# What about playing with dad!

## Quality indicators to assess father-child activation relationship during play period



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### INTRODUCTION

The father-child activation relationship theory developed by Paquette (2004) serves as a complement to Bowlby's attachment theory to better understand the impact of fathering on child development (Paquette et al, 2021). Men tend to encourage children to take risks, while at the same time ensuring the latter's safety and security, thus permitting children to learn to be braver in unfamiliar situations, as well as to stand up for themselves. The Risky Situation (RS) is a standardised procedure designed to assess the father-child activation relationship (Paquette et Bigras, 2010). The coding grid allows parent-child dyads to be classified into three categories : under-activated, activated and over-activated relationships.

### HYPOTHESIS

As the activation relationship is developed primarily through physical play, it should be possible to assess the father-child activation relationship during play period.  
**Goal** : to determine play quality indicators to assess the father-child activation relationship during play period.

### MATERIALS & METHODS

- 2 minutes of father-child play were systematically recorded **after the RS**, so in a room where no toys were available to promote physical play, and conducted with **60 dyads with children aged 36-60 months**.
- Fathers were asked to **play with their child as usual** to maximize the ecological validity of the study design.
- Video were coded by the main researcher and a researcher assistant by considering many **play quality indicators defined to classify father-child activation relationship into the same three categories than those obtained with RS**.



### RESULTS

#### CODING GRID OF ACTIVATION RELATIONSHIP

- Seven indicators were selected including (see table 1) :
- **Four indicators** to describe the **child's behaviours** : responsiveness, focus of interest, joy, seeking comfort
  - **Three indicators** to describe **father's behaviours** : stimulation, regulation and control.

Table 1. Coding grid of activation relationship during play period

CODING GRID OF ACTIVATION RELATIONSHIP			
	UNDER-ACTIVATED	ACTIVATED	OVER-ACTIVATED
RESPONSIVENESS	<input type="checkbox"/> No or few criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> A lot of criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> No or few criteria
JOY	<input type="checkbox"/> No or few criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> A lot of criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> No or few criteria
FOCUS OF INTEREST	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on environment
SEEKING COMFORT	<input type="checkbox"/> Seeking comfort	<input type="checkbox"/> Not seeking comfort	<input type="checkbox"/> Not seeking comfort
STIMULATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Without any risk	<input type="checkbox"/> With risk	<input type="checkbox"/> Without any risk
REGULATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Adjusted to child emotions	<input type="checkbox"/> Adjusted to child emotions	<input type="checkbox"/> Not adjusted to child emotions
CONTROL	<input type="checkbox"/> Father controls the situation OR child controls the situation while lack of initiation of father	<input type="checkbox"/> Father controls the situation, considering at the same time initiations of his child	<input type="checkbox"/> Father controls the situation in a coercitive way OR child controls the situation
SCORE			

#### PROCESSUS OF VALIDATION



- **Categories obtained with these two procedures** (RS and coding grid) were compared until a **concordance of 72%**.
- The **inter-rate reliability** of the measure was very high : **90% agreement**.
- Videos for which **categories** obtained with the two procedures were **not concordant (28%)** were recoded by the two main researchers of the study and the **rater agreement was 98%**.
- **Two reasons** explains the differences obtained with the two procedures:
  - 1) when children were too much distressed to play OR
  - 2) when fathers didn't respect the setpoint (e.g. : they don't play with their child).



### CONCLUSION

This methodological study permits to elaborate an easy observational grid for clinical and psychosocial workers to assess the father-child relationship during short play period, when they meet parents at home. Furthermore, analysis allow to specify the conditions of application of these observational indicators. The implementation of this evaluation grid within the Youth and Family Services Department of the integrated University Health and Social Services Centre - Sherbrooke University Hospital Centre (Sherbrooke, Quebec) permitted to offer vulnerable fathers support adapted to their expectations and specific characteristics (Ducieux et al., 2016; Ducieux, 2024).