

Funded for: Year 2 of a MSc in Attachment Theory, Research and Practice

Venue: University of Roehampton, London & Zoom

Length: 1 year part time (approx. 4 days per month during academic year)

Date completed: 26th July 2023

I am a Senior Social Worker currently working in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Dublin, Ireland. I work with young people and their families where the young person is presenting with moderate to severe mental health difficulties. The majority of my career to date has been spent working with young people who present with emotional and behavioural challenges, many of whom were looked after children.

As my career has progressed, my interest in attachment, family systems and complex trauma deepened. The children I was working with were frequently pathologised through the use of diagnostics, receiving labels such as 'Oppositional Defiant Disorder' 'Conduct Disorder' 'Borderline Personality Disorder' 'ADHD' and so on. As I worked with their families and got to know their histories, patterns began to emerge for me. I recognised that the majority of these children had experienced many adversarial childhood experiences (ACES) and complex trauma, and many were experiencing ongoing relational difficulties and environmental stresses that I felt strongly were contributing to their distress. As I learned more about the impact of complex trauma on the developing brain, I was hungry to learn even more so I could pass on this knowledge on to the parents and carers of the teenagers I was working with. As such, I enrolled in the Attachment Theory, Research and Practice Masters in University of Roehampton.

The second year of this course (which was generously partially funded by the FPSA) focused on the following modules:

- Assessing and Understanding Attachment, Caregiving and Mentalising in Adults
- Coding and Forensic Application of Assessments
- Assessing and Understanding Attachment in Children
- Research Methods
- Formulation of Treatment Plans and Intervention.

The modules were mainly presented by Dr. Ben Grey with guest lectures from respected academics such as Rudi Dallos, Steve Farnfield and Andrea Landini. Through these modules I learned about the application and coding of the Meaning of the Child Parent Interview (MOTC) and the Child Attachment and Play Assessment (CAPA). I am now a fully reliable coder of the MoTC and am working towards reliability in the CAPA.

In terms of the practical application of this learning into my every day work with children and families, I can now confidently use attachment theory to help with formulating cases and planning interventions. I can administer the MoTC interview with parents which has been an incredibly illuminating tool in working with children and families. I have found that this course has given me a language to speak with colleagues and also families around what might be going on for a young person. I can now put words and theory behind previous 'hunches' or 'intuition' that might have guided my work. It has allowed me to bring a systemic and trauma-informed lens to my multi-

disciplinary team, through which we can view mental health challenges. We have also created an attachment and trauma pathway within our service, where I can administer attachment assessments and use attachment theory in cases that might be particularly complex. Further, I have created a simple booklet for families and professionals entitled 'My Baby and Me: Understanding Your Child and Moving Toward Better Relationships' which provides some simplified information about attachment, trauma and neurobiology and how early attachment relationships might create a blueprint for current behaviour in a child.

This training has truly been transformative to my career and identity as a mental health practitioner. I have really noticed a difference in the quality of work (particularly psycho-education) I am able to provide to families, caregivers and stakeholders in a child's life. I have received very positive feedback from parents following blocks of parent support work. I am far more confident in my contributions to case discussion and formulation in team meetings. I have been able to provide consultation to others on my team where there are questions around attachment.

I am so grateful to the FPSA for providing the funding for me to complete this training. I would encourage any professional with an interest in attachment and trauma to consider this course, or any of the shorter courses available through Family Relations Institute or the Cambridge Centre for Attachment.