

Sensory Attachment Interventions (SAI)

I am an Occupational Therapist working in a CAMHS Intellectual Disability Service. Prior to moving to CAMHS my professional background had been in adult mental health, so the learning curve into a new clinical population was enormous - but it was finally taking me in the direction I had wanted to travel for a long time.

In order to serve our young people and their families and support networks to the best of my ability, I wanted to understand in more depth the challenges they faced. The FPSA have helped me to do this by funding me to attend several modules on the Sensory Attachment Interventions (SAI) course, for which I am extremely grateful.

The training consisted of 2 foundation modules (both 3 days in length) which introduced the model of practice and the theoretical impact of developmental trauma and insecure attachment on an individual's sensory processing (module 1), and an introduction to attachment informed practice (module 2).

Follow up modules included the Just Right State (over 6 days), an introduction to assessment and interpretation of the Sensory Arousal Attachment Physiological Profile (SAAP) Questionnaire (over 4 hours), and a Trauma Informed Approach to Touch (over 2 days).

All the training was delivered online but had experiential and discussion elements to enhance our learning. It was delivered by a variety of experts including the course author and founder of SAI, Éadaoin Bhreathnach (M.Sc.) Consultant Occupational Therapist and Attachment Counsellor; Helen Johnson, social worker and specialist in attachment and adoption services; Chris West (BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy, PGDip Sensory Integration) and specialist in adoption services; and Claire Pemrick BA (Hons) and specialist in adoption support services.

Although the course facilitators have a wealth of experience in adoption support services, this did not limit the scope of the training to this population, and children and young people of all backgrounds and with a range of developmental trauma, experiences of abuse or neglect, and attachment styles were considered, helping me reflect on the best use of my growing knowledge, and its application in my practice.

In particular, the course has made me consider how the trauma for our children is not restricted to abuse or neglect or a consequence of a parent's own attachment style and response, but also as a result of attachment difficulties arising from early NICU experiences or requiring additional/medical care as babies and infants, or as a result of their intellectual disability or neurodiversity and their difficulties being able to understand the typical world around them and emotionally connect with others.

It has also helped me understand the implications of the family experience, and how a parent's attachment style may have a bearing on the child's, and how it is important for the parent to feel nurtured, empowered, regulated, and able to engage in self-actualisation, in order to support their child through the therapeutic process.

With this in mind, I have used the theoretical underpinnings from the course to inform my initial assessment, developed my understanding of neuroanatomy and sensory integration, and consider attachment and trauma in all aspects of my work. I am currently in the process of developing an

OT focused sensory/SAI pathway within our team to enhance the therapeutic offer we are able to deliver to our young people and their families.