

Course: MSc Attachment Theory, Research and Practice (year 2 and 3)

Venue: University of Roehampton. Hybrid delivery, London in-person and Zoom.

Length: Part-time, approx. 4 days/month during the academic year. I had initially planned to complete over 2 years, but deferred to complete over three, due to changes in personal circumstances.

Date completed: October 2024

I am a social worker currently working in the National Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service, an NSPCC and Oxleas Health Trust partnership based in London, UK. I work with young people and their families where a young person has displayed harmful sexual behaviour, and am part of a new service being developed, delivering a whole-family approach to sibling sexual harm. Prior to this I have worked with children who have experienced sexual exploitation, children involved in youth offending services, and in maternity, paediatric and emergency social work in a large Australian teaching hospital. During my career I have observed that many people interacting with social services have histories of adverse childhood experiences, and that often problematic behaviours can be understood as maladaptive attempts to get their needs met. I enrolled in the MSc Attachment Theory, Research and Practice to learn more about the impact of attachment on people's developmental trajectory, and how attachment theory can be used to understand the function of people's behaviour, and support change and recovery. Having undertaken a short course in Attachment, Neurodevelopment and Psychopathology, I was keen to deepen my understanding of how attachment, trauma and neurodevelopment intersect to impact people's lives, and how this understanding can support formulation and intervention to obtain best outcomes for service users.

The final modules of the course (which the FPSA grant contributed to funding) included; Understanding and Assessing Attachment, Caregiving and Mentalising in Adults, Understanding and Assessing Attachment in Children, Research Methods, and Dissertation. These were primarily taught by Dr Ben Grey and Dr Fan Zhang, with visiting lecturers such as Andrea Landini and Rudi Dallos. The course allowed me to learn and apply concepts of attachment theory and strengthen my formulation skills. I was also able to obtain coding reliability for the Meaning of the Child procedure and am working towards reliability in coding the Child Attachment and Play Assessment. I have learned how to deliver the Adult Attachment Interview, which has been invaluable in my work, supporting our team to understand generational patterns in families, and explore the representations that shape a person's parenting and caregiving.

This training has had a significant impact on my practice. It has supported me to develop more comprehensive formulations for individuals, families and systems, identifying the self-protective functions of behaviour, and enabling a cause, rather than symptom-centred intervention to be identified. As I am involved in delivering parent work, and training and consultations to other professionals, this has also enabled me to support others' awareness of the meaning behind people's behaviours, which has elicited increased compassion and understanding towards children and adults accessing these services. Significantly, the course has also developed my understanding of sensory needs, and how these intersect with

attachment. Consequently, I have recommended sensory assessments for several young people I've worked with, which have offered insights and strategies that have been of great benefit to the young people receiving them. The training has deepened my commitment to a systemic approach to my work, particularly investing in work with parents to understand the context a child is responding to, and similarly, how the relationship with the child evokes specific behaviours in the parent/carer. I now include more dyadic and family system goals, in recognition of the mutual impact of family members on each other. I have been able to share my learning with colleagues, other agencies and services, service users, and students (through my involvement as a social work teaching consultant at a local university).

I would strongly encourage any professional with an interest in attachment and human behaviour to undertake this course, although sadly the Roehampton course is ending. Training could be pursued via the Family Relations Institute or the Cambridge Centre for Attachment or Training: CAPA