

Summary report from Theraplay level one training supported by funding from FPSA

I had been encouraged by colleagues working with looked after and adopted children with complex histories of trauma and attachment difficulties to train in theraplay techniques. These are practical techniques based on play and are targeted at improving relationships for children and young people with their carers.

The ideas around theraplay are based on early infant- caregiver attunement and attachment. It supports the neurodevelopmental needs of the developing child in having attuned and responsive care from the primary caregiver in helping to establish important neural pathways in connection, empathy and co-regulation of affect.

Theraplay was developed in the USA to provide support for deprived and traumatised children and carers. It was specifically designed to be pleasurable for both child and carer and to be easy to teach and support. It is designed to be low cost and not to require specific professional training but to be useable and accessible to make maximum use for all. The techniques are adaptable for all age groups.

I have struggled particularly to work with traumatised adolescents who struggle to self regulate and are not safe with close relationships. I was looking for ideas and practical suggestions about what I could do to help both the adolescent and their carer be able to address the gaps in their caregiving prior to coming into care/ adoptive families.

The training was really energising and stimulating. It involved a lot of group work and small group work. It was great fun to be able to play and try out ideas and techniques and to think about the teenagers we work with and the specific issues they struggle with. The course was very well put together with clear evidence for using ideas and techniques. It was attended by a variety of professionals including psychologists, social workers, teachers and foster carers. It was very helpful to come away with lots of ideas, to watch lots of video footage of the techniques being used with children and to try out theraplay techniques on each other whilst thinking about the children we work with.

In conclusion it was an inspiring and encouraging week in which there was lots of fun and support as well as hopefulness generated about what was possible to do to help address the gaps and sensitive areas in a traumatised young person's development. I came away inspired to use the ideas with the young people and carers I work with and to think more about progressing the training by using their free supervision slots online. I would really recommend it and think it fits well with Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy techniques.

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