

Developing a Carers “Tool Box”

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“Connected” We Move Forward

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In this session....

- Developing the Carers Toolbox program
- Key findings from the first round
- Implications of these...
 - for further development of the program
 - for policy

How it came together...

Foster Carers Assoc of Tasmania [FCAT]

- Developmental trauma training
- Carers asking FCAT for '123 Magic' training
- My experience of teaching '123 Magic'
- Meeting with Carers to further develop my brief

The brief

1. A training experience Carers will enjoy
2. Tools to help calm Foster children with complex trauma issues
3. Develop methods acceptable to OOHC
4. Must factor in...

Carers rarely know a child's trauma history

Children frequently move between Carers and a number of Respite Carers

5. How to do

“in the best interests of the child” ?

Help them feel as safe as possible as quickly as possible in new placements through...

- *shared values*
- *shared language*
- *shared methods*

Key findings - feedback from Carers

- supportive, empowering and helpful
- very enthusiastic for more training to learn how to hold on to the core ideas especially when stressed
- specific training needed for Carers of children with eg Autism, FAS, ABI
- add more information on self-care and therapeutic supports for Carers

Key findings – what I learnt

- We seem stuck in an old Pathologising model
- There is an attachment theory DOUBLE BIND
- There is cumulative harm in the current system from systemic deprivation

In my “fur” it feels like dis-connection, stress, fear, sadness - at every level

Session 1: Moving from Alarm to Calm

- Children are “brain borrowers”
- The two pillars: relationship & self-regulation
- More responsive Less reactive
- 123 is about “Learning to STOP!”

“Time In” NOT “Time Out”

Sensory Processing activities

No emotional dumping

Session 1: Understanding rage

- Distress becomes rage when:
 - my needs are not met
 - others consistently make their needs more important
- Emotional dumping: rage projected onto others
- A hurt child learns how to do rage – but not how to stop
- If the child learns how to stop – they can learn how to feel

Session 2: Emotional 'Safety First'

- Behaviour as defence or release?
- Noticing my triggers
 - Restorative practice questions
- Thought creates mood
 - Parent, Adult, Child
- Difference is OK
 - Auditory – Visual – Kinesthetic

Session 2: Three Dilemmas

1. IN or OUT - Belonging versus Detachment

Am I part of this family, or not?

Do I fit in?

Do I allow myself to join and belong?

2. UP or DOWN - Control versus Submission

Who's in charge... you or me?

How much control do I need over others?

How much control do I allow them to have over me?

3. NEAR or FAR - Intimacy versus Isolation

How close will I let you come?

How much pain and vulnerability will I reveal?

Do I let myself really care?

Session 2: Three Dilemmas

- Secure attachment depends on resolving these dilemmas
- Not resolving them impacts on the capacity for emotionally intimate relationships throughout life
- Emotionally traumatised children do not know how to resolve the tension that pulls from each end of these 3 dilemmas
- Their tension is expressed as anxiety, anguish and uncertainty
- Defensive behaviours are used to manage the distress when unable to resolve the tension
- The dilemmas remain unresolved throughout life, unless I can resolve the tension inherent in the question
 - *can I allow myself to be vulnerable?*

Session 3: All behaviour has meaning

- Connecting with our own experience as a child
- Noticing OUR assumptions re THEIR behaviour
- Connecting - the child isn't "*doing this to me*"
- Supporting the child's search for *their* meaning
- Reframing *their* story of who is to blame
- Helping the child feel connected *everywhere*

Session 3: Therapeutic Carer

Holding in a safe place until it is safe to feel the pain

- No authoritarian labeling, shaming, punishing
- Knowing what is *OK* and *Not OK* behaviour
- Talking about traumatic events safely
- Compassionate accountability
- Active-reflective listening
- Being *safe with the pain*

Session 3: More Responsive, Less Reactive

NOTICE the feelings triggered in me

INTERRUPT my usual reaction pattern

CHOOSE to respond not react

ENGAGE with the feelings with empathy

RESPOND with intention to connect

Feedback – stuff to keep

- 123 worked at first *but then they started to count me!*
- Learning to Respond not React
- Importance of holding boundaries
- Noticing my own emotional triggers
- Learning children are “brain borrowers”
- Learning about Sensory overload and different personality types has changed everything for me!
- Magic Love Links “invisible elastic” is really helpful!
- Good to have the children’s behaviour normalised

Feedback – stuff to add

- Case studies make it easier to understand the issues
- more please!
- Training needs to be ongoing - develop our own DVD
- It takes a bit of effort to get your head into gear with this way of thinking - I need it to be repeated and repeated and repeated.....
- More about self care and therapeutic relationship...
YES PLEASE - I need one!

Feedback from OOHC and CAMHS Workers

- Helpful to have statements about a traumatised child's behaviour as a triggered reaction pattern, not manipulative or naughty.
- Helps Carers feel *"I am not responsible for the child's behaviour, it comes from the child's experience"*.
- I was thrilled Carers and staff jointly participated in a training that was thought provoking and insightful.
- It has supported Carers to stay calm and maintain boundaries even when strongly challenged.

Implications for policy

A key to good fostering is well-trained, valued and skilled foster carers:

- who are included in a Care Team of professionals surrounding the child
- who support each other within a Therapeutic Care based system

The Legislative context

The *Tasmanian Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act* has the stated objective of:

...providing for the care and protection of Tasmanian children and young people who are at risk of abuse or neglect in their family unit, ***in a way that will maximise their ability to reach their full potential***

...and providing *for the sharing of information relevant to the best interests of a child.*

The Legislative context

yet...

“we do not know what the child’s trauma history is and we are not included in the decision making”

The Double Bind!

On the one hand...

Neurobiological research and theory tells us the absolute imperative for children is to experience secure attachment if they are to:

- develop healthy relationships
- maximise their ability to reach their full potential

The Double Bind!

On the other hand...

...when a child is placed I am told

“don’t become attached”

and if a child is becoming attached to a Carer the child can be taken away, put in another placement and not allowed to have contact with me, and I am told...

“it’s because they are becoming attached”!

The Root Problem

We work to support a child's attachment to a parent who probably has never had, and does not know how to form, a secure attachment

... and so we assign both the child and society to yet another transgenerational round of insecure attachment and all that goes with it.

And the solution is...

Fostering
Secure
Attachment

If we allow for and support a child's need, and birthright, to form secure attachments and to internalise what it means to be in a secure attachment environment with at least one person

it does not stop them developing secure attachments with others,

rather... it enhances their capacity to form secure attachments.

Thank you !

to

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Foster Carers Toolbox!

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