

Chris Taylor Solutions: Training in attachment and trauma

Level 3 Programme Outline

Attachments, Trauma and Recovery

Aim

The programme aims to develop foster carers to provide high levels of support and enriching relationships for fostered children who have experienced early trauma and help make sense of their often fragmented and traumatic past, whilst safely managing behavioural difficulties.

Context

What is a trauma? Traumas are events involving threat or danger. They do not have to be actually violent; the perception that something terrible could happen can be enough to make the event traumatic. Traumas may be directly experienced, witnessed or happen to a close loved one. Although not all bad experiences are traumas, many events faced by children who are fostered or adopted may be traumatic, including child abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, serious accidents or natural disasters, and the violent or sudden death or loss of a loved one. Children react in different ways, but many will show behavioural and adjustment difficulties that are chronic, complex and intractable. Disturbance will often find expression in extremes of behaviour likely to require more specialised and intensive resources, with high levels of extra support built in.

Understanding how a potentially traumatized child experienced a traumatic event is the first step in determining how best to meet the child's needs in the immediate and longer-term aftermath. The context and sequence of acquiring knowledge and understanding is important for those working "hands on" with young people with complex and enduring needs. It is important for them to know what to do, but also why they are doing it.

Outcomes

- Understand developmental trauma / attachment trauma and the impact on child development and mental health and well-being
- Nurture attachment through understanding and responding to the impact of trauma on carer-child relationships
- Recognize developmental variation in trauma related symptoms and the meaning of a traumatized child's behaviours
- Understand and promote the development of empathy



- Apply the guiding principles for attachment and trauma-informed care, including co-regulation
- Develop strategies to manage controlling behaviours effectively
- Develop and promote structured activities that allow emotional expression, self-awareness and recovery
- Be equipped to anticipate and respond to trauma triggers, trauma-reactive behaviours and trauma re-enactment

Programme structure

The programme is interactive and experiential, helping foster carers apply theory to practice. It is structured on the principles of active learning, including self-directed learning, learning through practice, case-based “learning in context” and small group interaction. This method is an evidence-based approach to developing clinical skills and provides learners with opportunities to

- Examine and try out what they know
- Discover what they need to learn
- Develop practice skills needed and practice these skills in a controlled learning environment
- Reflect on what skills are needed
- Recognize and develop strengths
- Improve communications skills
- Become more flexible in processing information and meeting obligations

Session 1: Introduction and context

The first session provides an over-view of the programme, including aims and learning objectives, and explain its interactive and experiential nature.

Individual learning goals are established work is done to establish participants as a working and collaborative group.

Using video tape and discussion the impact of caregiving on child development is explored. Caregivers are asked to identify what is missing in sub-optimal care and the impact of these deficits. This activity leads onto revisiting Attachment Theory, including how through nurturing and enriching relationships that provide opportunity for more secure attachments, foster cares and adopting parents are part of the solution for trauma.

The final part of the first section is an opportunity to consider some of the attachment and trauma related issues that participants have identified so far for their children. A workshop approach allows participants to reflect on existing skills and to re-examine their present conceptualization of their child's difficulties and strengths.

Session 2: Understanding trauma

This session begins by relating back to the material used throughout the first day to define different types of trauma (single event, multiple event, developmental, emotional, attachment) and examines the emerging evidence from neuroscience to understand the physiological impact of early trauma.

Ideas about the impact of traumas are then explored in small groups, and a full group discussion. This provides opportunity to consider the emotional, physical, physiological, psychological, behavioural and social changes that can result from early trauma and are often bewildering for caregivers. Topics include hyperarousal, hyperkinetic behaviours, emotional dysregulation, dissociation, controlling behaviours, anti-social behaviours such as lying and stealing, and self-destructive behaviours. Links are made back to the material on attachment, and the role of internal models of attachment in both triggering and recovering from trauma is explored.

Having made the links between past trauma and current presentation explicit, the basic principles of recovery work are introduced, focussing initially on a four-phase model.

In the final part of the day the concept of resilience is introduced. Taking an attachment-theory perspective, this is an opportunity to revisit personal strengths as well as to consider how the child and caregivers sit inside wider systems. There is a final workshop activity to help participants think about how to promote resilience.

Session 3: Working for recovery

Using video material and group discussion, this session begins by revisiting attachment and early trauma, with an emphasis on support and recovery through nurturing and containing relationships.

Small groups then work through case studies to think about the developmental impact of early trauma.

The basic principles of attachment-informed caregiving are introduced, and working groups return to their case study material to suggest how these principles might be applied in the case study. These suggestions are explored more in a large group session.

The role of emotional literacy is examined, and participants have opportunities to use some emotional literacy resources that they can use with their child.

The final part of the day is used to discuss how attachment-informed principles might apply to individual fostered/adopted children. As well as allowing developmental and temperamental differences to be discussed, this process allows participants to examine and try out what they know, reflect on what skills are needed, and recognize and develop strengths.

Session 4: Phases of recovery

The focus of this stage is on where the child is now, allowing carers to plan their support in a way that is attuned to the child's present predicament and their development and progress. Participants learn how different psychologically informed approaches can be applied through the social environment to help a child regulate.

The essential aspects of stabilization are examined. There is a focus on attunement and co-regulation, and understanding the function of behaviour. Participants work on structured environments, boundaries and consequences, and are provided with some effective behaviour management approaches that are informed by attachment theory and current understanding of best-practice for trauma recovery. Participants are encouraged to think about their own approach to their child's difficulties and develop these by drawing on the material presented so far.

Some straightforward techniques to build a secure attachment with carers are practiced and participants are given the opportunity to think about directive and non-directive approaches.

The next part of the session considers the role of foster carers / adopting parents in the integration phase. There is an emphasis on going at the child's own pace and in understanding the role of other therapeutic services. Carers are helped to support a child through trauma re-enactments. The use of a "third object" for communication is explained and practiced.

The remaining two phases in the recovery process are examined in the final session of the day. This includes thinking about how new-found skills are applied in a wider environment, building self-esteem and self-efficacy, and preparing for the future beyond care. Links are made back to the systemic model for resilience and there is opportunity to discuss case material.

Session 5: Helping skills

The final session provides opportunities to practice some helpful approaches to support trauma recovery and nurture attachments. Working with summaries of case material, and taking into account different levels of development and variations in attachment patterns, participants will become familiar with and practice: empathic listening skills, assertive communication, and steam-valving,



techniques to build healthy attachments that are informed by Theraplay ®, and mentalizing.

The next part explores some helpful creative techniques for developing attunement, promoting emotional regulation, increasing self-expression and emotional literacy.

The final part of the programme will be an opportunity to reflect on the learning through the programme, assessing to what degree learning goals are met, and developing a practice development plan for participants. There will be final opportunity to think together about how the ideas in the programme apply in practice-based examples. Participants will also be asked to evaluate the programme content, delivery and teaching methods.