

The background of the book cover is a dense layer of autumn leaves in various shades of brown, green, and yellow. A large, circular arrangement of bright yellow leaves is centered in the upper half of the cover.

Fostering Good Relationships

**Partnership Work in Therapy with
Looked After and Adopted Children**

Miriam Richardson and Fiona Peacock
with Geoff Brown, Tracey Fuller,
Tanya Smart, and Jo Williams

FOSTERING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

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On behalf of the United Kingdom
Council for Psychotherapy

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016 by Karnac Books Ltd.

Published 2018 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781782201519 (pbk)

Edited, designed and produced by The Studio Publishing Services Ltd
www.publishingservicesuk.co.uk
e-mail: studio@publishingservicesuk.co.uk

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank those who have supported and encouraged us during the writing of this book. We would like to thank family members, colleagues, supervisors, and others who have inspired us, read drafts, and kindly critiqued our writing. In particular, we would thank the children, young people, and families who have taught us so much over the years. Their courage and resilience are true inspirations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Geoff Brown began working in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in the 1980s, since when he has taken a special interest in the assessment and treatment of young people with mental health problems arising in the context of childhood abuse trauma. Initially influenced by the ideas of Donald Winnicott, he trained as a psychoanalyst (Jungian) before becoming Consultant in Adolescent Psychiatry at Simmons House, an adolescent inpatient unit linked to University College Hospital, London. In 1995, he moved to St Andrew's Hospital, Northampton and took a leading role in the development of the adolescent service there, applying his experience of treating young people in a therapeutic milieu to the care and treatment of adolescents in a secure setting. For the past seven years, he has worked in a small team providing an in-reach mental health service at a local authority secure children's home.

Tracey Fuller is a UKCP registered Child and Adolescent Psychotherapeutic Counsellor. She has many years of experience of working therapeutically with children; including working with a looked after children's service, working with the NSPCC, and working as a school counsellor in numerous primary and secondary schools. Tracey has

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Fiona Peacock is a BACP Senior Accredited Counsellor, Certified Theraplay® Therapist and Trainer. She is also in training as a Theraplay supervisor. For twenty years, she has worked as a counsellor in various educational settings and in CAMHS. Currently, she teaches at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, and runs a private practice providing a generic school counselling service and delivering a highly specialist service for looked after and adopted children. This work is usually commissioned by local authorities and often delivered in educational settings.

Miriam Richardson is a UKCP registered Systemic Psychotherapist who worked for nearly ten years with CAMHS, initially in a community psychotherapy project, and then as lead clinician with a specialist looked after children service. During this time, she maintained a small private practice with colleagues, offering therapy mainly to adult couples and families where there were mental health concerns. Since leaving CAMHS in 2008, she has developed this independent practice to include work with looked after and adopted children. She tutored for the KCC Foundation on the MSc programme in Systemic Psychotherapy at the University of Luton/University of Bedfordshire, and for the Institute of Family Therapy's Agency Based Training programme. She is a registered systemic supervisor.

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Jo Williams is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work. She attained the Diploma in Social Work in 2006, the Post Qualifying Childcare Award in Social Work in 2007, a Bachelor of Arts in Child and Adolescent Studies in 2008, and an MA in Social Work Leadership and Management. She has twenty-two years' experience of working with children and vulnerable adults, initially in residential settings, and as a qualified social worker and manager within local authority statutory services since 2005. Jo's role within Children's Services was to provide services to adoptive families, children placed with Special Guardians, looked after children, and children with disabilities. Multi-agency working has been a key driver for Jo in supporting children and their families to achieve good outcomes, along with an interest in facilitating attachment in permanent placements.



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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The UKCP book editorial board is proud to have facilitated bringing this important book to publication. Miriam Richardson and Fiona Peacock and colleagues, although they come from different modalities and disciplines, take a holistic, connected approach to fostering and adoption and their implications with an emphasis on the most important key to best practice in this field, which is relationship. They have collaborated in a way that will therefore be of help to everyone involved in the complex task of trying to reduce or alleviate the harm looked after children and young people risk experiencing. With its preventative, harm-minimisation focus, this book presents practitioners with clinical and theoretical perspectives geared to helping such children avoid being permanently scarred by the often traumatic circumstances which prompt the provision of alternative parenting. Family and child psychotherapists, psychiatrists, social workers, and counsellors, as well as parents and foster carers, will find the wide range of perspectives in *Fostering Good Relationships* helpful because the different chapters consistently and seamlessly complement each other by privileging relationship itself. In this way, they all shed welcome light on the experience of children being formally looked after, first and foremost for the child her or himself, but also for her/his

responsible parents and for the involved professionals. Thus, the pragmatics of effective partnership in both the fostering and adoption process are presented with clarity, compassion, and respect for the unique narratives of the children and families involved.

Caroline Clery
Consultant Systemic and Family Psychotherapist
UKCP Book Editorial Board

FOREWORD

Fostering good relationships: partnership work in therapy with looked after and adopted children

Glenda Fredman

Early into the [first chapter](#) of this book I was wondering if I had the grit to stay the course. I was confronted with statistics that make for grim reading, such as “there are now more children in care than at any time since 1985”; “forty-five per cent have a diagnosable mental health concern” and “therapeutic services are under-resourced”. I was faced with shocking accounts of the developmental trauma experienced by children needing local authority care due to family breakdown and the impact of relational trauma on these children’s emotional development and ability to establish trust with adults, especially professionals. However, not long into my reading I was drawn in by the passion of the six authors of this book who had formed themselves into a “community of practice” to share their experience and learning with each other and the reader to improve collaborative therapeutic services for looked after and adopted children.

The writing of this book mirrors the sorts of interprofessional and interagency relationships the authors aspire to and try to create, modelling the process of working in partnership they describe. Their writing was clearly the product of a collaborative project whereby they have created a community of practice. Writing in partnership, not only with each other but also with parents and children, they include

the voices of those “living the real experiences”, the foster parents and the children looked after, whom, in research interviews, they ask for help to guide us to inform and improve our practice and partnership with foster parents and children. Throughout, they use a language of appreciation and respect that avoids jargon which helped me, as their reader, to feel immediately included and connected.

The authors together make up a multi-professional and multi-disciplinary group of practitioners that we might find working at one time or another with children and young people who are looked after or adopted. They include a psychiatrist, social worker, individual therapists, and family therapists who incorporate psychodynamic, systemic, attachment, narrative, counselling, and play approaches into their practice. Although legislation and national policy require key childcare agencies to work in an integrated way, these authors note that this is not always happening. At the time of writing this book, the structure of specialised, diagnosis-led clinics in Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH) services has led to fragmentation of service provision and the loss of a holistic view of children in their social context, reducing opportunity for partnership between social and mental health professionals. Despite some changes, multi-professional teams are still rare and the majority of work with looked after and adopted children still takes place in non-integrated teams.

This book starts from the position that an attuned network of adults involved in the child’s life can offer a secure attachment base to counter some of the noxious effects of relational trauma suffered by so many looked after children. Thus, the authors embrace the system around the child as an opportunity to co-create a different and potentially reparative attachment experience and they explore ways in which involved adults can together become a “caring system” that has a therapeutic impact on the child. Reminding us that a child is raised in more than a dyadic relationship, they go beyond the mother–child dyad to include all the people contributing to a child’s care. They acknowledge the challenge of practitioners working together, recognising that the way that we do this will have an impact on the child. Therefore, this book focuses on ways forward for this sort of joined-up working and joint action that makes possible “good enough” attachment experiences for the child.

A system and network approach with its focus on people in relationship to each other lies at the heart of this book which foregrounds

collaboration, co-ordination, and inclusion. Throughout, the authors place the child at the centre and highlight practices of dialogue and joint action to enable people to meet, talk, and respond to each other to transform relationships. Recognising the challenge of frequent professional changes in services for looked after children, they emphasise that responsibility cannot rest with just one person and that all the adults involved in the child's life, in a professional or personal capacity, need to work in partnership to fulfil the role of "parent". Hence, they offer ways to include not only foster parents, but also involve birth parents in the child's network, noting that they continue to have a powerful impact on the child's emotional development into adulthood. They also recognise the valuable, yet often neglected, potential of the partnership between the fostering family and the birth family and attend to the experiences and contributions of the other birth and looked after children living in the fostering family.

The authors offer a useful review of models of partnership working, including the "protective shield" and the "ring of confidence" where the child is at the centre and those around the child communicate to offer protection. Recognising that partnership work happens in diverse ways, with participants contributing different skills and experience, they offer a lovely visual metaphor of the "parachute game" that incorporates the richness of what a child needs from their network: the child at the centre of a secure base (parachute) where adults (in the network) each hold one part of this base that connects to a part of the child's overall experience; the adults continuing to move while keeping the child in focus; showing their ability to change positions and step in and out of each other's positions and perspectives, no one taking the place of another person, all keeping the child in a supportive and empowering cocoon.

The importance for the child of having a coherent narrative of their life to make sense of the complexity, confusion, and contradictions they might have experienced is a thread that runs through this book. Much of the work presented aims to help the child in care collect, construct, and tell stories of their life to contribute to the development and enrichment of their sense of self as a young person "worthy of love and dignity, with a future to live for".

This book is about managing, tolerating, and working with difference and contradiction. We see how the authors do this so elegantly in

many different contexts through fostering collaborative relationships and dialogue. They demonstrate how they create a respectful spirit of “generous offering” with each other, acknowledging with respect and appreciation that they have different perspectives from each other. There were times when some of the ideas grated with my preferred positions. However, in the same way that the authors approach uncomfortable or confusing complexity in their work with children in care by tolerating, or even “dwelling”, in the uncertainty as part of the process, not moving too quickly to decisions, valuing many different perspectives and working with tensions and differences, I found myself being able to sit with their different and sometimes challenging perspectives, consequently learning and creating so many new ways to go on.

What came into relief for me were the unique and creative ways in which the authors weave developmental, attachment, and narrative theories into creative relational and systemic practices. I came away with a wealth of gifts for practice like the “attachment wall”—a place where adults looking after the child can write on sticky notes all the things a child might need at different developmental stages to develop “well”, then consider together whether they feel the child has received “enough” and, if not, remove the note to a different part of the wall where they can contemplate how they can help the child catch up on missing experiences. I will also make use of the sensitive child-focused explanation of the impact of stress and trauma on brain function and emotional dysregulation and look forward to holding “wondering conversations” with teams around the child about how we can make positive contributions to “big T” and “little t” effects of change and challenge. I envisage creating timelines with young people and the adults who care for them where we might juxtapose “official stories”, personal memories, anecdotes from others, as well as imagined or wished-for stories. I will especially take away from this book that all of us who interact with the child participate in the process of collaborative life story work and we can all contribute to the weaving of meaningful life enhancing (or not) narratives by sharing and witnessing memories, photographs, and stories to enable continuing conversations that contribute to the child’s positive sense of their own identity.

This book is about different kinds of holding: holding the child in a safe cradle of hope and support; holding stories that contribute to a

positive sense of identity; holding in mind the early trauma; holding the worry; holding a listening space for the child's voice to be heard and holding the people together in a parachute of partnership so they can come together around the common and specific purpose of looking after the child. In [Chapter One](#), the authors say "celebrating the work we strive to do well gives it value, and is a political act that helps to counter the 'relentless assault' from our critics". I celebrate these authors for sharing their stories of good practice and hope, and propose that, as readers of this book, we go on to form "communities of practice" of our own where we can share our learning from, and add to, the repertoire of these stories.