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# Fostering Attachment Group Summary of Research

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The Nurturing Attachments Training Resource describes a group work programme that is designed to provide support and guidance to adoptive parents and the range of parents and carers of children who have experienced trauma and attachment difficulties. The training resource includes theoretical content, process notes, and a range of activities supported by photocopiable reflective diary sheets, activity sheets, and handouts.

This provides a programme based upon Attachment Theory and an understanding of relationship development and the impact of trauma on children's development and security. This theory is linked to the 'House Model of Parenting' which aims to help parents to develop their parenting skills matched to the emotional and behavioural needs of the children. Parents are encouraged to manage behaviour but within the much broader context of building trust and security with the children and enhancing their development.

This provides a coherent set of ideas for therapeutically parenting the children in a way that nurtures security of attachment and therefore resilience and emotional growth. Practical suggestions are offered but these are grounded in theory so that parents can develop a deeper understanding about what they are trying to achieve, and can be flexible in the way they use and adapt the ideas being discussed.

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## Summary of Research

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A range of evaluation studies have been carried out using the original Fostering Attachments Group as summarised below. These research studies have been run both within the team where it was originally piloted and by other practitioners within the UK who have adopted the materials within their own services. These research findings suggest that it would be beneficial to pay increased attention to reducing stress and increasing mind-mindedness in the parents and to helping parents find effective ways to manage behaviour whilst continuing to increase attachment security for the children. These findings have been taken into account in the revisions of the programme prior to its publication as The Nurturing Attachments Training Resource.

Although these evaluation studies are all small in scope together they provide a compelling picture of the efficacy of the group work programme. Satisfaction with the group work programme is consistently high; understanding and confidence improves; whilst stress levels and ability to be mind-minded change variably between studies. Participants report changes in the behaviours of the children but this is not always reflected in SDQ scores. The one study which included a comparison waiting list group demonstrated positive change being attributable to the intervention.

An initial evaluation has now been carried out using the revised manual (Tipper, 2013), and a further evaluation is underway.

### **1. Golding K & Picken W (2004) Group work for foster carers caring for children with complex problems. *Adoption & Fostering*, 28,1, 25-37.**

#### **Outcome measures:**

*Carer Questionnaire*

*Satisfaction questionnaire*

*SDQ*

N = 7 Foster Carers

Routine, practice-based evaluation. Carers reported improved understanding, confidence and ability to relate to their foster child upon completion of the groups. Additionally carers rated difficulty of the child as less upon completion of the groups. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction and a better understanding of the children in their care. The discussions within the group sessions reflected good understanding and an ability to use ideas and techniques that we were exploring within the group sessions.

Improvements in the children were reflected in changes on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Peer problems, hyperactivity problems and total difficulties were significantly less following the group. This is revealed in moderate to large effect sizes.

We have compared the results of this evaluation with a comparison group of 10 children in the 9 – 12 year age range (5 boys and 5 girls). The carer for these children completed a SDQ at two intervals between 14 and 31 months apart. During this time period carers received a routine service and no group training. These questionnaires showed small improvements in pro-social behaviours and peer difficulties. Total difficulties did not change and conduct difficulties worsened. No differences reached statistical significance. Improvements were rated on a symptom checklist, but this did not reach statistical difference. Symptoms remained high following the group intervention.

**2. Laybourne G.; Andersen J & Sands J. (2008) Fostering attachments in looked after children. Further insight into the group-based programme for foster carers. Adoption & Fostering, 32, 4, 64 -76**

**Outcome measures:**

*Carer Questionnaire*

*Parenting Stress Index*

*Relationship problem questionnaire*

*SDQ*

N = 7 foster carers.

Carers reported high satisfaction and increased understanding of the needs of the children. Statistically significant decreases in post programme scores on Parenting Stress Index (Total stress and parental distress but not for the difficult child subscale). Decreases in total difficulties, conduct difficulties, hyperactivity and peer problems on SDQ but did not reach statistical significance. Decrease in scores on Relationship Problem Questionnaire and Carer Questionnaire post intervention but did not reach statistical significance.

**3. Gurney-Smith B.; Granger C.; Randle A. & Fletcher J. (2010) In time and in tune. The Fostering Attachments Group. Capturing sustained change in both caregiver and child. Adoption & Fostering, 34, 4, 50 – 60**

**Outcome measures:**

*Carer Questionnaire*

*Satisfaction questionnaire*

*SDQ*

*Mind-mindedness task*

*Parenting stress index*

*Expression of feelings in relationship questionnaire*

N = 13 foster carers and adopters.

Data collected pre- post- and at 3 month follow-up. The group was rated highly for satisfaction and sustained improvements were found in the caregiver's understanding and the perceived difficulties of the child. Significant positive and sustained changes were found in specific behavioural difficulties named by the caregiver, the child's hyperactivity and in the caregiver's mind mindedness when they perceived a break in the relationship with their child.

#### **4. Wassell S. (2011) Evaluation of an attachment theory based parenting group for Foster carers and adoptive parents**

##### **Outcome measures:**

*Carer Questionnaire*

*Satisfaction questionnaire*

*SDQ*

*The self-efficacy scale of the Parenting Sense of Competence Questionnaire*

*Parenting stress index or Stress Index for Parents of Adolescence*

*This is my baby interview*

*Mind mindedness task*

N = 25 foster carers and adoptive parents

Twenty five participating foster carers and adoptive parents were allocated alternatively to either Group 1 (n=11), which attended the first scheduled programme, or Group 2 (n=14), which remained on a waiting-list for six months before attending the second programme. To investigate the programme's effect on the outcome measures, participants were assessed pre-, post-, and eight months following invention. To assess the stability of outcome variables when receiving no intervention, the attendees of Group 2 were assessed over their waiting-list period.

All participating carers were highly satisfied with their attendance at the group. The carers' sense of competence and confidence significantly improved immediately and eight months following intervention. This change was not observed over the waiting-list period. Sense of self-efficacy was found to improve eight months following, but not immediately post-intervention. Sarah concludes that the intervention appears affective at improving carers' sense of competence and confidence, but not at improving carers' perception of their foster /

adoptive child, their stress levels or children's emotional, behavioural or relational functioning.

The intervention did not have a uniform beneficial effect on carers' Mind Mindedness, stress levels and children's wellbeing. Where group trends did not support the intervention's efficacy, it was noted that a few individual carers and children did show reliable change. This suggests the intervention may have been more effective for some families and not others.

## **5. Windsor and Maidenhead, England (Green, H. Healthy Minds Team, 2011).**

### **Outcome Measures**

*Parenting Stress Index*

*Semi-structure interview*

N = 6 (five adoptive parents, one foster carer)

This team evaluated the programme when it was delivered to five adoptive parents and one foster parent. There were statistically significant decreases in post programme scores on the Parenting Stress Index. These changes registered on all the sub-domains as well as total stress levels. These changes represented a change from clinically significant levels of stress before participation in the group to not clinically significant stress levels after the intervention. These changes were statistically significant with medium to large effect sizes. Thus the decreases in scores were meaningful and noticeable at a real world level. A semi-structured interview was undertaken with the participants. They all felt that they had established a new approach to their parenting whilst 4 families reported improved confidence in their parenting ability; 5 families reported improved relationships with their children; 3 families reported an improvement in their children's behaviour; 4 families felt there was an improvement in the household atmosphere and 4 families experienced improved placement stability.

## **6. Anne-Marie Tipper (2013) Does PACE as part of 'Nurturing Attachments', a psycho-educational course for the carers of Looked After Children, enhance the parenting and understanding of children who have experienced attachment trauma?**

*First evaluation of the revised manual (Nurturing Attachments Training Resource).*

N= 14 foster carers

### **Outcome Measures**

*Carer Questionnaire*

*Post course questionnaire and semi-structured intervention*

*Impact questionnaire (16 week follow-up)*

This study explores and evaluates the efficacy of the therapeutic parenting model, PACE, delivered within The Nurturing Attachments groupwork programme.

Grounded theory was used to explore changes in the foster carers acceptance and management of complex or challenging behaviours the children and young people displayed and the impact the change of approach yielded.

Carers reported a good understanding of the children prior to beginning the group, and this was maintained following attendance at the group. However following the group the carers reported having an increased understanding of how the children's difficulties related to their early experience. The majority of carers reported increases in confidence, improvements in their relationship with the child, and found the children less difficult to care for. There was a high satisfaction with attendance at the group. Seven foster carers had attended both the Nurturing Attachments Group and Fostering Changes. Satisfaction was highest with the Nurturing Attachments Group.

It was concluded that PACE, when delivered as part of a psycho-educational programme which supports understanding of attachment and trauma enhances the understanding and parenting skills of foster carers whose children have experienced attachment trauma.

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## Additional References

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