Listening with the Parents
Developing group work programmes to help families parenting children with developmental trauma experience
Kim S Golding

Overview
• Groupwork as collaborative
• Development and evaluation of Nurturing Attachments Programme
• Development and evaluation of Foundations for Attachment Programme
• Listening to Parents – running the groups with the DDP principles

Collaboration
• ‘Nurturing Attachments’ and ‘Foundations for Attachments’ are parenting programmes which explore DDP-informed parenting to help children who have experienced developmental trauma.
• These are delivered through groupwork with groups of 12-15 parents and at least two group facilitators.
• Collaborative model. Professional expertise is unique responsibility of group facilitator, whilst expertise about the individual child is responsibility of those caring for or working directly with the child.

“Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories. Listening for them is something more acute than listening to them. I suppose it’s an early form of participation in what goes on. Listening children know stories are there. When their elders sit and begin, children are just waiting and hoping for one to come out, like a mouse from its hole.”

Eudora Welty (One Writer’s Beginnings)
Collaboration

• Use of this expertise is a collaborative process.
• The group programmes aim for this collaborative process which combines teaching, advice and guidance with listening and responding to the group members’ unique experiences of their children.

‘Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much’

Helen Keller

Groupwork Programmes

• Different from training because of the focus on collaborative working. The facilitators are offering their expertise (the content of the programme); the parents are offering their expertise (their experience with their children).
• Together this provides a rich exploration which influences how everyone understands the children and considers how to parent them.

Groupwork Programmes

• The group facilitators facilitate a shared experience of reflection, exploration and discovery guided by the structure of the groupwork programme.
• Group facilitators teach, guide and advise within the context of the group members parenting experiences.
• As within DDP generally, the relationships are primary and the content secondary. Each is important, but without the relationships the exploration of content will be less helpful.

Groupwork with Parents

• Group members, including the group facilitators, are open to listening to each other.
• This provides an affective as well as reflective exploration of parenting the children. The joint A-R dialogue allows the group materials to be used in a way which guides the parents in their parenting whilst guiding the facilitators in their support to the parents.
• This is a much more intersubjective process than training, where those receiving the training are more passive.
Groupwork with Parents

- The facilitators lead the group, using the structure provided by the programme. The group responds, which influences the facilitators in what they do next. Thus groupwork allows a ‘follow-lead-follow’ process.
- Facilitators are alert to the emotional communications from the group and will respond with PACE; making this explicit so it provides modelling as well as emotional support.

Nurturing Attachments
The story so far

Kim S Golding

Where It All Began

- 2000: First Group – Incredible Years Programme (Webster-Stratton)
- Social learning theory and parenting pyramid with positive relationship at its base.
- Adapted for foster carers to explore issues relevant for looked after children – led by group members.
- 7 experienced foster carers – ‘teaching grandma to suck eggs’

Where it All Began

- We discovered that we spent a substantial amount of time talking about trauma and attachment. Carers needed something more regulatory based than behaviourally based, with more focus on emotional connection.
- DDP and PACE (Dan Hughes) provided a model to achieve this.
- This planted seeds for the Fostering Attachments group
Fostering Attachments Group

• 2001: We recruited another group of experienced foster carers, provided them with a four week training in Attachment Theory and then met monthly.
• We asked them to join us for as long as felt useful. 14 foster carers signed up for this and 9 continued to the end!
• I wrote the content between sessions, pace was set by the foster carers.

Fostering Attachments Group

• We therefore developed the programme together over 18 months. A collaborative venture with my psychological expertise and their parenting expertise, informed by the DDP model.
• This led to the development of the House Model of Parenting and an 18 session programme.
• We went on to deliver this to many groups of foster carers and later adopters and kinship carers.

The House Model of Parenting

Evaluation

A range of small studies carried out between 2004 and 2011
• Satisfaction consistently high; Understanding and confidence improves
• Stress levels and ability to be mind-minded changed variably between studies
• Participants reported changes in the behaviours of the children but not always reflected in SDQ scores
• One study included a comparison waiting list group, demonstrating positive change being attributable to the intervention with significant improvement in confidence, competence and self-efficacy in the parents and carers.

See larger diagram at end of handout
Evaluation

Highlighted need to pay more attention to:
- Reducing stress
- Increasing mind-mindedness in the parents
- Helping parents find effective ways to support behaviour whilst continuing to increase attachment security for the children.

Further Development: The Nurturing Attachments Group

- 2012: Further development.
- I maintained the format and the House Model of Parenting, with some development of content guided by the evaluation, our experience and what group members told us.
- This led to the publication of the Nurturing Attachments Training Resource in 2014.

Changes in Nurturing Attachments

- A more practical focus on parenting earlier in module one.
- Increased attention to explicitly developing parents’ skill in being mind-minded, using reflective diaries.
- Increased focus on self-care, and understanding of self with the aim of reducing stress.
- More attention to supporting the behaviour of the children whilst maintaining an emotional connection with them.
- More attention to the parenting attitude of PACE throughout the programme.
- Some thought to children’s struggles outside of the home, in friendship development and at school.

Bringing it all together

2016 Evaluation of the Nurturing Attachments Group
The Study

- An evaluation of Nurturing Attachments across four geographical sites led by Adoptionplus and supported by DfE funding.

This included:

Summary of Results

- Most parents were caring for children who were late placed and who had complex and overlapping difficulties.
- Post-training, parents reported increased confidence in their own parenting and statistically significant positive changes in self-efficacy and in their capacity for reflective functioning.
- Adoptive parents identified more children as having greater emotional and peer difficulties and fewer with symptoms of conduct disorders (Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire).

We conclude:
- Improved reflective functioning, particularly curiosity, led to a better understanding of their child’s behaviors and thus an increased recognition of emotional distress.
- Group work is an important part of a wraparound package of support during childhood and adolescence.
Does the programme provide increased support?

Yes.
• High level of satisfaction with increased level of support the group offered.
• Goals for attending were met.
• Safe and non-judgemental environment.
• Increased feelings of empowerment and taking care of self.
• Liked length of the group so gained support over time.
• Built hope for the future.

“When I had to share my stories as well I found that quite difficult. I’m quite a private person. So for me to share information that goes on in my household was quite difficult for me… but they brought that out of me. I felt comfortable enough to share my experiences in the group so they could help me…they provided the support I needed”

Does the programme provide increased support?

But:
Partners not attending seen as disadvantage.
Mixed groups (age and stage) could reduce sharing.
Some would have liked this group earlier in their adoptive journeys.
Occasional guilt at needing support.

“One thing that is difficult at home is that R. (partner) hasn’t been. I can’t explain it like you do. I try to explain it to him and I see him sit there with this glassy look in his eyes. It’s really difficult then when you try and put it into action with the children, because he has not been here.”

Does the programme increase understanding?

Yes
• Reported increased understanding although not clear from knowledge quiz.
• Understanding linked to development of parenting skills.
• Flexibility to parent differently and to continue to adapt this as child grew and developed.
• Saw this as an ongoing process beyond the lifetime of the group.
• Hope that this would reduce feelings of hopelessness and frustration.

“It was the experience in learning all of the theory behind it and all of the diagrams, the booklet, course literature that we got, actually that’s like our Bible so we get it out and we’re like ‘OK, this is where we lapsed’. And then it lets us understand a lot more what is going on in his head”
Does the programme increase confidence?

Yes

- Linked to a clear goal and motivation for attending the group.
- Increased confidence in parenting skills.
- Linked to theoretical knowledge and understanding.
- Confidence to meet new challenges in the future.
- Increased self efficacy – increased belief in own abilities.

“I have become more confident in my decisions, for example in saying ‘no, we’re not going to do that’ and just sticking with it instead of getting talked out of it or anything”

Does the programme increase capacity for emotional regulation and reflective functioning?

Yes

- Group members reported improved capacity for regulation and reflection.
- Increased reflective functioning on RFQ, with significant increases in curiosity.
- Increased understanding of child’s behaviour.
- Reported improved relationship with child.
- Increased attunement with child and ability to help child to regulate.
- Changes to SDQ ratings with reduced conduct problems but increased emotional distress - ? Changed perceptions of the children.
- Enabled them to use the PACE attitude.

“I have noticed that he’s regulating, deescalating much more quickly”

“It’s also helped me to, instead of going from 0 to 100 mph straight away, now I can, you know, step back from it”

“It’s given me the insight to better know my children, and to look behind why they might be behaving in a certain way”
Does the programme increase child’s security in the family over time?

- Unlikely to see over life-time of the group.
- Important to note that:
  - The group work programme is only part of the support adoptive families need.
  - It can be a turning point for some families.
  - Many families will need this support as part of a package which includes individual parenting support and therapy (DDP) involving the whole family.

“100% impact. I can cope, notice changes and support my son.”

Foundations for Attachment: The Prequel

Identified need for:

- Giving families the best start possible.
- Shorter programme for more families to access.
- Introductory.
- Suitable pre-placement and earlier in the parenting journey.
- Can be a platform for later doing the intensive Nurturing Attachments group for those who want to go further.

“I shall weep when it is over. It’s just been wonderful. I feel so lucky because my whole start has been, well we got D in October. We had started here. I just feel I have had the best start I could possibly have.”

“it’s really opened my eyes to a different way of being, um, a different way of doing things, but also a different way of being with people...it’s been really life changing for me that course...on every sort of level I'd say, you know with my adopted child, with my biological child, with my relationships”

Foundations for Attachment

- The programme is designed around three modules of two sessions per module. This can be delivered in 6 half days (3 hours, including a break) or 3 full days.
- DDP informed programme based upon the Dyadic Developmental Practice model developed by Dan Hughes (2009, 2011).
Foundations for Attachment

- It introduces parents to four significant challenges of parenting children whose capacity to emotionally connect with parents has been compromised.
  - The child experiencing blocked trust.
  - The child fearing intersubjective connection within reciprocal relationships.
  - The child experiencing high levels of shame.
  - The child miscuing their attachment needs through a pattern of expressed and hidden needs.

Aims

- Gain an understanding of the challenges and explore ways of building emotional connections with the children which can increase trust in reciprocal and attachment relationships leading to increased attachment security and reduced levels of shame.
- Understand how to provide support for behaviour alongside building these connections.

Aims

- Explore the dangers of blocked care when caring for children with blocked trust and understand the importance of looking after yourself.
- Understand the significance of exploring your own attachment history when caring for children with attachment difficulties.

Foundations for Attachment Model

See larger diagram at end of handout
Pilot Evaluation

- Piloted across 8 sites with over 100 participants.
- Foster carers, Adopters, Birth parents and Residential carers
  - Increases knowledge (statistically significant)
  - Increases self reported skills and understanding (statistically significant)
  - High level of satisfaction and achievement of goals.
  - Self-efficacy, well-being, and reflective functioning: small changes in the right direction
- Many parents who have engaged with FfA want to go on to Nurturing Attachments

Listening to Parents

Running the group sessions using the DDP principles

“I feel it has given us permission to feel bloody awful and to feel that you can go on and have an awful time, and lose it, and not feel embarrassed. I’ve felt at other times really stupid and I haven’t found that difficult here at all. You can be really honest and say you are finding things tough and know that no-one is going to judge you for that. It’s helped me accept more really, not be so hard on myself.”

Intersubjective – Safe and Secure

- We need a secure base to provide a sense of safety.
- From a foundation of safety we can explore.
- Intersubjectivity allows us to do this exploration together, enriching the exploration.
- The experience that one person is having, while relating with the other person, influences the other person’s experience and vice versa.
- Reciprocity influences the joint experience of the exploration.
Intersubjective – Safe and Secure

- Group facilitators need to attend to the safety of all group members.
- Group members are welcomed and nurtured – choice of environment, availability of refreshments, even being provided with a folder for handouts conveys interest in the group members.
- The session content lends structure and key points are conveyed during the three-hour session but the relationships are prioritized over this group content.
- Facilitators work hard to establish intersubjective connections with all group members, taking the time to get to know them.

Intersubjective – Safe and Secure

- Facilitators allow lots of time for group members to talk, and listen deeply to what they are saying.
- If safety is lost and intersubjectivity weakens, as noticed when group members become more controlling, defensive or withdrawn, the facilitators work to re-establish safety and intersubjective connections.
- Teaching mediums such as PowerPoint and lectures are used minimally, or not at all, as these reduce the intersubjective connections being made.

PACE – Open and Engaged/Co-Regulating

- An attitude of playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.
- An attitude of PACE makes it easier to initiate and maintain intersubjective experiences.
- This maintains an open and engaged stance, reducing defensiveness when things get challenging.
- The open and engaged stance communicated through PACE provides co-regulation as emotional arousal increases.

PACE – Open and Engaged/Co-Regulating

- Group facilitators strive to remain open and engaged with group members.
- Defensive, withdrawn or controlling group members are responded to with PACE.
- Co-regulation is provided through this PACE attitude and affect matching, as group members become confident to communicate their experience.
PACE – Open and Engaged/Co-Regulating

• If a group member needs support in a way that might be disruptive for the rest of the group, a co-facilitator will meet this member individually.

• When appropriate group facilitators notice the use of PACE within the group so that PACE is modelled.

• If a group facilitator does become defensive and responds in a non-pace way he will take care of himself and then make this transparent to the group as a learning experience.

PACE – Open and Engaged/co-regulating

• Facilitators listen with an open and engaged attitude, providing co-regulation as difficult experiences are shared.

• This allows group members to share difficult experiences and to experience the support of the group as they tell their individual stories.

• For example: in module two, session six, the focus is on the importance of looking after ourselves.

• As we explored the importance of social support, the group members start to share experiences of social isolation.

• Time is allowed to listen to these stories.

Example of the stories (edited)

Adoptive Mum One: “I find it quite hard to talk to my friends, even close friends, about R’s issues because I have been judged and because people don’t understand everything that is going on with her. They will say: ‘Can’t you just tell her to do it? If you tell her to do it won’t she just do it?’ ….. And it is so bad at the moment. This is the time I really need to talk to someone. I find I don’t really have anyone that isn’t judgmental.”

Adoptive Mum Two: “I must admit I’m with you. You might talk to close friends, you can see their eyes start to glaze over, and you think – you’re just not with me because you just don’t get what I’m saying.”

Adoptive Mum Three: “A lot of what I am probably describing – the very, very common thing that’s said: ‘Oh all kids are like that.’ It’s kind of just dismissive. And I think, well I’m not going to continue because you just dismiss everything that I might be feeling or concerned about.”

Storytelling & Co-creation of Narrative

• Exploration is a process of noticing and understanding.

• Narratives (stories) are constructed to make sense of this experience.

• Storytelling shares these stories, leading to further shared stories.

• This co-creation of stories enhances exploration and increases understanding.
Storytelling & Co-creation of Narrative

- Storytelling is a central part of delivering the programmes.
- Listening to each other is an important part of the groupwork experience.
- Whole and small group work helps the group members to engage with the material. Discussion and reflection provides opportunities for them to relate this to their experience. They are helped to share this experience within the group.
- Group members are encouraged to share their own stories. Facilitators add to these stories in a process of co-creation.

Storytelling & Co-creation of Narrative

- Group members gain increased understanding of their own experiences as well as their children's experiences.
- Psychological understanding is conveyed using storytelling rather than lectures when possible.
- The world is explored in new ways, creating new meanings from within the relationships.

Storytelling – An Example

- The use of storytelling is an important part of the group experience from facilitators and group members.
- For example, module three, session two, aims to deepen understanding of PACE.
- At one point, we are exploring Curiosity in PACE. The facilitator shares stories of children joining their adoptive families. Fear and anxiety are hidden as the children express how well they are fitting in.
- These stories help the group members to understand the value of curiosity about the inner lives of these children, even when not expressed.
- A group member responds with her own story of her daughter joining the family.
- This allows all group members to explore their fears of having failed and how there might be a different story, discovered through curiosity, about why the children may struggle.

Group Facilitator’s Story (edited)

"We were helping a little girl transition to her adoptive home. We knew if she met a new male that she would very quickly cuddle him and tell him how much she loved him. This was a pattern she did to keep herself safe with men. We had to tell the adoptive dad this. This little girl was straight in his arms and he was saying: “Oh, it was lovely. We clicked straight away.” And we had to say this wasn’t true. It’s a pattern she does because you are a stranger. When 2-3 months later he saw her do the same thing with her uncle, visiting for the first time, it didn’t come as such a shock because we had warned him. Otherwise he could have been devastated at this time."
Group Member’s Story

Adoptive Mum: “I am thinking, with L., she can be like that. We thought everything was hunk dory because we didn’t have somebody like you saying to us this isn’t right.”

Group facilitator: “And what’s that like, when everything seems alright, and suddenly it isn’t? What do you think?”

Group members: “That you’re failing” “What have I done wrong?”

Group facilitator: “Yes, that it’s me.”

Adoptive Mum: “We’ve had years of it. Because she was 11 months. She came and was, like you say, she was meant to be with us and everything seemed really good. It’s gone on for years because we didn’t know that there was a problem with this. The last two years, really, then it all started to unwind.”

Affective-Reflective Dialogue

Follow-Lead-Follow

- Conversations have affective and reflective elements.
- The affective conveys emotions and the affective experience of these.
- The reflective is the content which gains new meanings through the A-R dialogues.
- All contribute, alternating between initiating and responding within these A-R dialogues.
- Within the rhythm of the conversations each follows the other, and leads in turn.

The storytelling tone allows facilitators and group members to talk together both affectively and reflectively. Understanding is enriched through affective experience.

Follow-lead-follow allows the facilitator to notice where group members are as they describe their experiences, linking this to the course content for that session. In this way group members experience being understood.

Lead-follow-lead allows the facilitator to introduce theory, parenting ideas and practical advice and guidance. Group members discuss and explore these ideas with facilitators continuing to link to the session content.

Therefore the facilitators lead group members into deeper understanding, through engagement with the content.

As the group members respond to this; the facilitators follow again. Time for discussion and reflection deepens understanding for all.

In this way, the group facilitators set a rhythm to the telling which allows multiple stories to emerge.
Affective-Reflective Dialogue and Lead -Follow-Lead
An Example

- An example of the use of A-R dialogue and lead-follow-lead by the facilitator occurs in Module two, session one - exploring the importance of developing a secure base for the children.
- This conversation occurs at the beginning of the session when the importance of secure base has been noted by the facilitator (lead). The group begin to tell stories of their children rejecting them and expressing longing for birth mother. The facilitator leaves the session plan in order to listen deeply (follow). She then leads into thinking about how to respond in a way which increases security.

Example from Group Session (edited)

Group Facilitator: “Attunement, do you remember, is that emotional connection when you are showing you are understanding the emotion that the child is experiencing.”

Adoptive mother: “I could have done with that this morning. T. hated me. She didn’t like me. She was going to break my heart and she could do it and she was going to do it. Just trying to manage all that on the way to school with her in the back of the car. And then it just came out. ‘I really miss my birth mum’. It’s like it suddenly hit her and she’s just grieving her little heart out.”

The facilitator then follows this example to lead a discussion about children’s deep longing for their birth mother, and how this makes sense in evolutionary terms, it’s a biological drive. This leads the group members into some increased acceptance when their children appear rejecting of them, thus increasing the child’s security with them.

Gentle Challenge

This also provides an opportunity to guide the group in response to one group member who has responded to her child in a way which reduces security. Safety and trust is needed to allow gentle challenge at times.

Example (edited)

Adoptive Mum (in response to another mother talking about her child saying that she was sick of living with them): “My son’s said that a couple of times. And I’ve just said well, I tell you what, you go and think about that and we’ll talk about it tomorrow and if you still feel the same we’ll get in touch with, you know, and you can leave here. If that’s what you feel.” (Mum then goes on to talk about helping her son to understand his birth parents and what happened to him and how her son recognised that they wouldn’t have looked after him if he had stayed with them).

Group facilitator: “So that led you into a bit of life story work, which is really helpful. Be just a bit cautious about giving too much responsibility, if he comes to you and says: ‘I don’t think I want to live with you anymore and you say if you still feel like that … You are almost saying it’s your decision.”

Adoptive Mum: “Well, it is isn’t it?”
Group facilitator (with empathy): “Well no, as a parent it isn’t. We make decisions for our children, don’t we?”
Adoptive Mum: “I told him we didn’t want it, obviously…”
Group facilitator: “I would go further than that. I would say: ‘I feel it is in your best interest to stay here because I want to love and care for you until you are grown up. Because that is a really strong message about ‘I want to keep you safe.’”
Adoptive Mum: “But his anger is so intense…”
Group facilitator (with empathy): You can say: ‘Wow I can see you are really feeling mad about this right at this minute, but I’m your Mum and I keep you safe. You’re best here.”
Adoptive Mum: “Last time he did it and I said that, as he got to the door, in a tiny voice: ‘I don’t want to go. So I went and lay on the bed with him.’
Group facilitator: “Wonderful.”

Communication

- Prioritizing relationship over content means noticing when group members are emotionally overwhelmed.
- Facilitators can talk with, for and about group members, providing regulation for the whole group.
- Listening and talking is shared amongst all group members and facilitators.

And sometimes we are Playful!

- Content (including teaching, offering advice and guidance and modelling) is delivered within the context of this group experience.
- Ruptures in relationship occurs between group members and between group members and facilitators.
- Facilitators take responsibility for ensuring ruptures are repaired when they occur.
- There is room for fun and laughter within the sessions.
- Often this occurs spontaneously.
- Sometimes it is created by the facilitators.
- For example, in module 3, session 5 we are focused on thinking, feeling and behaviour and how these are connected.
- We notice how stories we tell ourselves can lead to different thoughts, feelings and behaviour when the facilitator pretends there is a broken chair in the room. This leads to a lot of laughter as the group members share their different reactions of worrying that they are going to be hurt, feeling angry that the chair wasn’t taken out, worrying that they could look foolish, knowing that this was just the group facilitator kidding.
- This allowed us to think about the children and how the behaviour might appear the same, but the story underneath, their inner experience can be very different. It is important to be curious and understand the story.
‘I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.’

Mother Theresa
The House Model of Parenting

P11, summary report
Foundations for Attachment Model