

# Family Relationship Influences on Children's Mental Health: New Research, Emerging Themes, Future Opportunities

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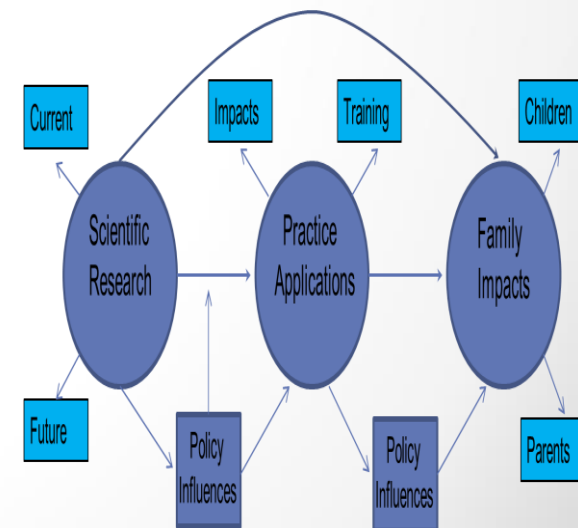
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# Introduction and Overview

- **The Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice**
  - Overview and Introduction
  - What we are, what we do, who we are
- **Some examples of Sussex Rudd Centre research, practice and policy impacts**
  - Highlighting how family relationships impact child mental health: Revisiting the developmental interface between nature and nurture
  - Promoting improved support for adoptive parents and children: The importance of programme evaluation
  - Informing policy and practice: Translating research into real-world applications
- **Future opportunities and next steps**
  - Opportunity to transform front line services for vulnerable youth and families through evidence-led practice, training and capacity building

# Sussex Rudd Centre

- **Central Mission (Scientific Research)**
  - To establish a research intensive Centre aimed at improving outcomes for children, parents, families
  - To implement a programme of research that will look at the major challenges facing children and families in transition, with a focus on the specific challenges faced by adoptive parents, children and families
- **Interdisciplinary Model (Practice Applications)**
  - To promote and engage the strengths of an interdisciplinary science and practice model
    - Psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, genetics, medicine, social work, law, education, prevention science, and other disciplines
  - To engage and develop world-leading data resources to address questions of relevance to families, parents, children, practitioners, policy makers
- **Bottom Line Objectives (Family Impacts)**
  - To improve outcomes and life chances for youth of all ages in the UK and internationally
  - To transform front line services aimed at supporting vulnerable youth and families through evidence-led practice, training and capacity building

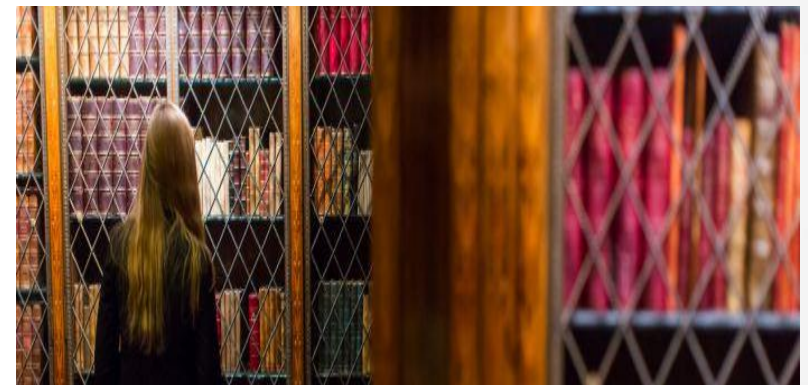


# Sussex Rudd Centre Staff

- Core Centre Staff
  - Prof. Gordon Harold (Director)
  - Mrs. Carmel Stevenson (C. Admin.)
  - Dr. Ruth Sellers (ESRC Future Leaders Research Fellow)
- Research Staff and Students
  - Dr. Maja Rodic (ESRC Research Associate)
  - Miss Amelia Smith (PhD)
  - Miss Victoria Simcock (PhD)
- National/International Partners
  - Researchers (UK, US, NZ, others)
  - Practitioners (nat./intl.)
  - Policy makers (nat./intl.)
  - Rudd Centre Amherst
- Steering and Advisory Group
  - MR, AT, NM, JS, MB, LL [policy]
- University of Sussex
  - ESW, BSMS, (Law, MPS, Centres)

# Sussex Rudd Centre Activities (2014+)

- Research Grant Awards (>£700k)
  - ESRC, DfE, DWP, EIF, Welsh Government, Barnardos, HRC NZ
  - ESRC Future Leaders Fellow
- Academic/Scientific Publications
  - 30+ publications (international)
    - *Child Development, JCPP, JAMA Psych, Prevention Science, others*
  - 2 books and 3 book chapters
    - Practice and policy focus
- National/international knowledge exchange and impacts
  - 50+ local, national and international presentations, seminars, workshops, keynotes, training workshops (e.g. social work)
  - DWP, DfE, DoH, PM office, Welsh Govt., Scotland, Ireland [AFG+]



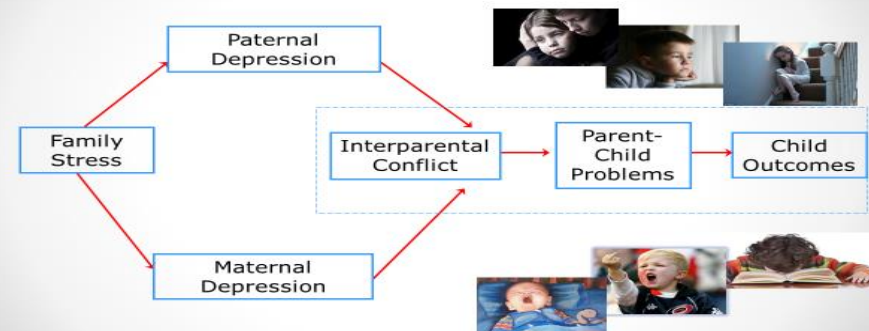
# **Some Examples of Sussex Rudd Centre Research, Practice and Policy Impacts**

# Family Influences on Child Mental Health

- Mental health (UK and international)
  - Depression (internalising)
  - Conduct problems (externalising)
  - Social competence
  - Academic attainment
  - Physical health
  - High risk groups (in-care, transition)
- Medical/social care/production
  - England: £105.2 billion; Scotland: £8.6 billion; N. Ireland: £2.8 billion; Wales: 7.2 billion
  - Overall prevalence similar in England and Scotland, 25% higher Wales/NI
- What family factors affect children
  - Family stress (poverty/econ press)
  - Adult/parent mental health
  - Parenting behaviour/practices
  - Inter-parental conflict, DV
  - Family transitions (Sep-divorce, children/families in transition, e.g. adoption, foster care, others)



## A Family Process Model of Child Mental Health

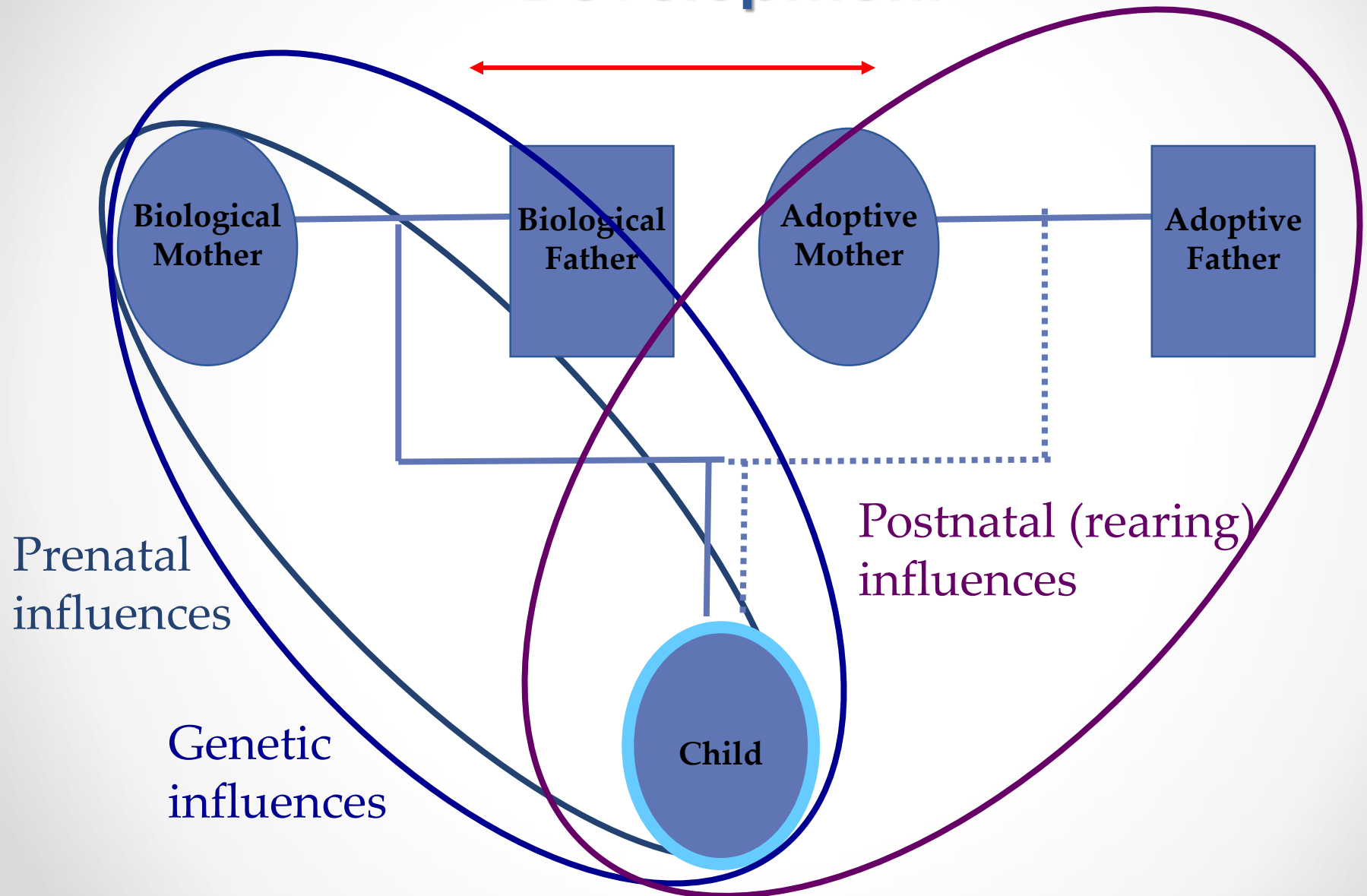


# Challenges to Past Research

- Salience of the family environment ?
  - Predominantly conducted with biologically related parents and children
  - Limited examination of maternal AND paternal influences on outcomes
- What if it is all in the genes?
  - Associations between parental behaviour (e.g. parenting) and child behaviour is BECAUSE children share genes with their parents??
- Disentangling genetic factors from rearing environment factors
  - A challenge of research design
  - Twin (CoT), Sibling, Adoption, others



# Disentangling Early Influences on Development



# Early Growth and Development Study (Adoption at Birth Design)

## Sample

- 561 sets of adopted children, adoptive parents, and birth parents
  - Sample retention: Adoptive family = 90% Birth parent = 92%
  - Families assessed at child age 9-, 18-, 27-months of age; ongoing assessments at 4.5 years, 6 years, 7 years, 8 years, 9 years
  - Present sample included 341 linked families assessed at 27 months, 4.5 years, and 6 years
- Nationally-representative sample of families who made domestic infant adoption placements in the United States between 2003-2009

## Method

- Videotaped Observation – adoptive families
  - Child temperament, parent-child interactions, marital interactions video recorded in the home during 3-hour home visits at each wave. Coding for these tasks is on-going
- Questionnaire – adoptive parents
  - Couple relationship, parent-child relationship, symptoms of depression and anxiety, family economic conditions, styles of family interaction, parenting style, children's emotional and behavioural well-being, child sleep problems
- Questionnaire – birth parents
  - Couple relationship, diagnosis and symptoms of psychopathology, drug use, economic conditions, life stress, temperament

# Cardiff In Vitro Fertilization Study (An Adoption at Conception Design)

- Children born through *in-vitro* fertilisation (IVF)
  - 20 fertility centres within the UK (1 in US)
    - 888 families
      - Homologous IVF N = 444
      - Sperm donation N = 210
      - Egg donation N = 175
      - Embryo donation N=36
      - Gestational surrogacy N=23
  - Families who had a live birth (1994 – 2002)
    - Children aged between 4 – 10 years (mean = 6.80 yrs, SD=1.23)
    - Demographics (family income, parent education, ethnicity)
    - Present sample included children aged 5-8 years old ( $m = 6.49$ ,  $sd = .85$ )
- Genetically related versus unrelated groups
  - Genetically Related
    - Mothers (N=546): Homologous, sperm donation, surrogacy
    - Fathers (N=531): Homologous, egg donation, surrogacy
  - Genetically Unrelated
    - Mothers (N=160): Egg and embryo donation
    - Fathers (N=173): Sperm and embryo donation

# **How Family Relationship Influences on Children's Mental Health**

## **Highlighting the Role of the Inter-Parental and Parent-Child Relationships on Child Development/Mental Health**

Harold, G. T., Leve, L. D., Sellers, R. (2017, in press). How Can Genetically-Informed Research Help Inform the Next Generation of Interparental and Parenting Interventions? *Child Development* [Special Section: Developmental Research and Translational Science: Evidence-based Interventions for at-risk Youth and Families].

# UK IVF and US Adoption Study

- Inter-parental Conflict

- Self report of hostility towards spouse
  - IVF & EGDS: Behaviour Affect Rating Scale (mothers,  $\alpha=.89/.88$ ; fathers,  $\alpha=.91/.90$ , Melby et al., 1993)



- Parent-Child Relations (Hostile Parenting)

- Mother & Father report of hostility toward child
  - IVF & EGDS: IYFP Ratings Scales (mother,  $\alpha=.70/.82$ ; father,  $\alpha=.75/.80$ , Melby et al., 1993).



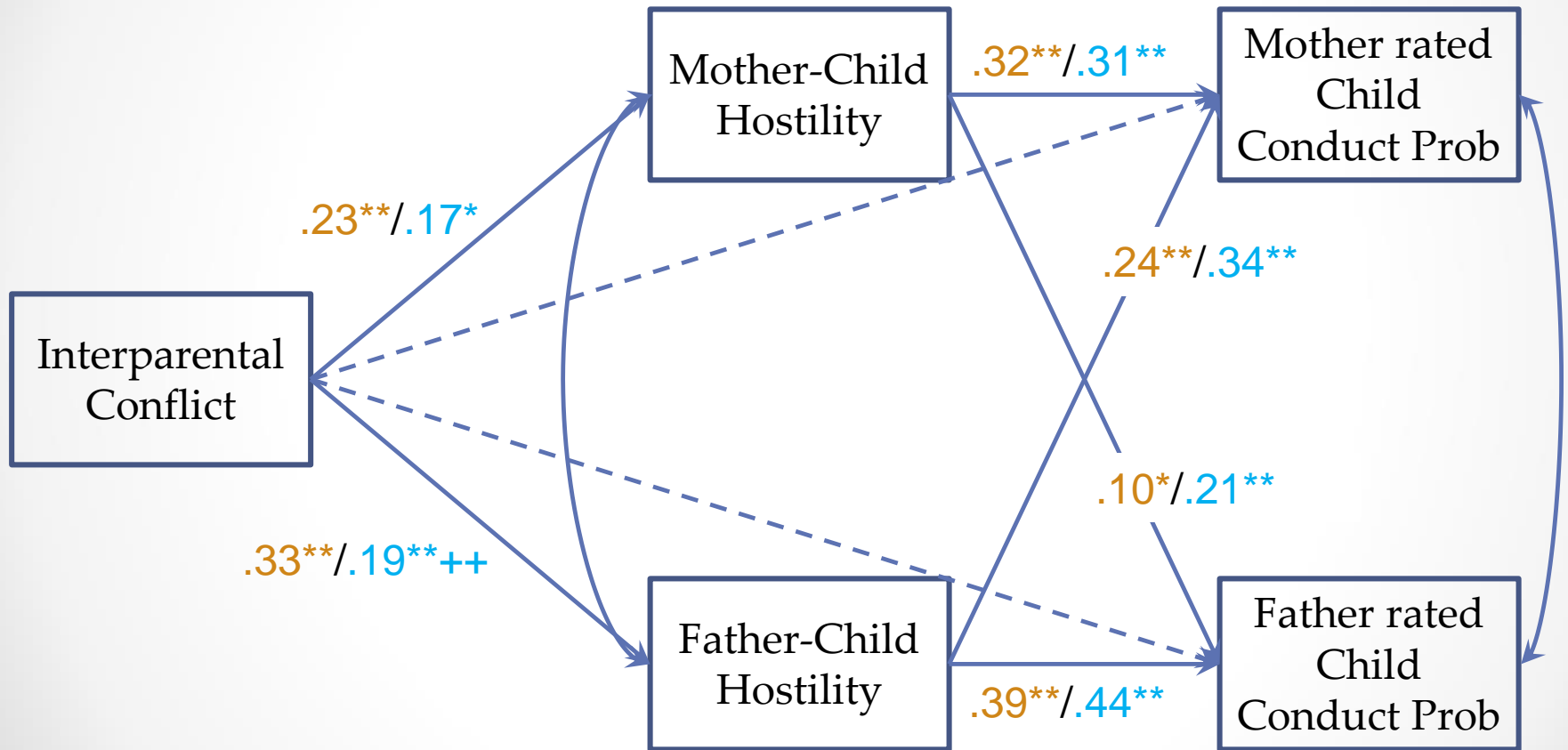
- Child Conduct Problems

- Mother & Father report of child externalizing behaviour
  - Cardiff IVF: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (mother,  $\alpha=.80$ ; father,  $\alpha=.78$ )
  - EGDS: Externalizing subscale, Child Behaviour Check List, (mother,  $\alpha=.88$ ; father,  $\alpha=.90$ )



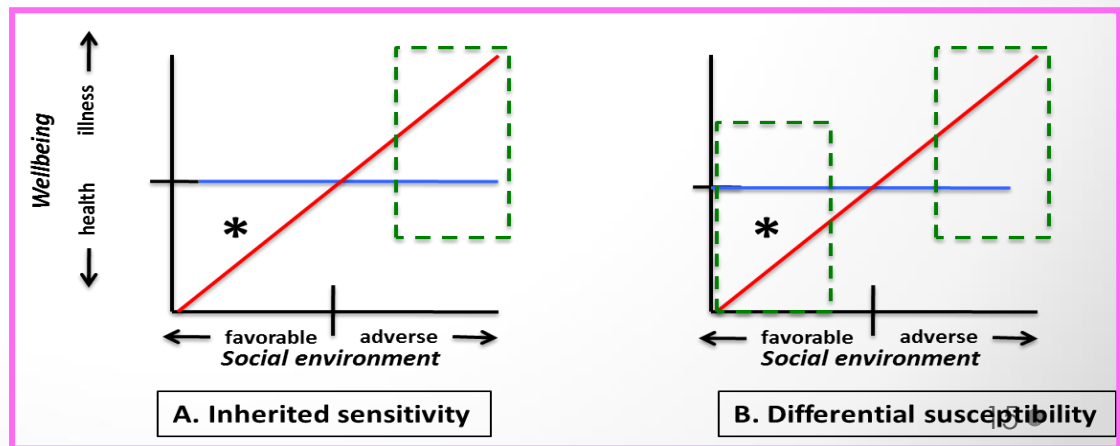
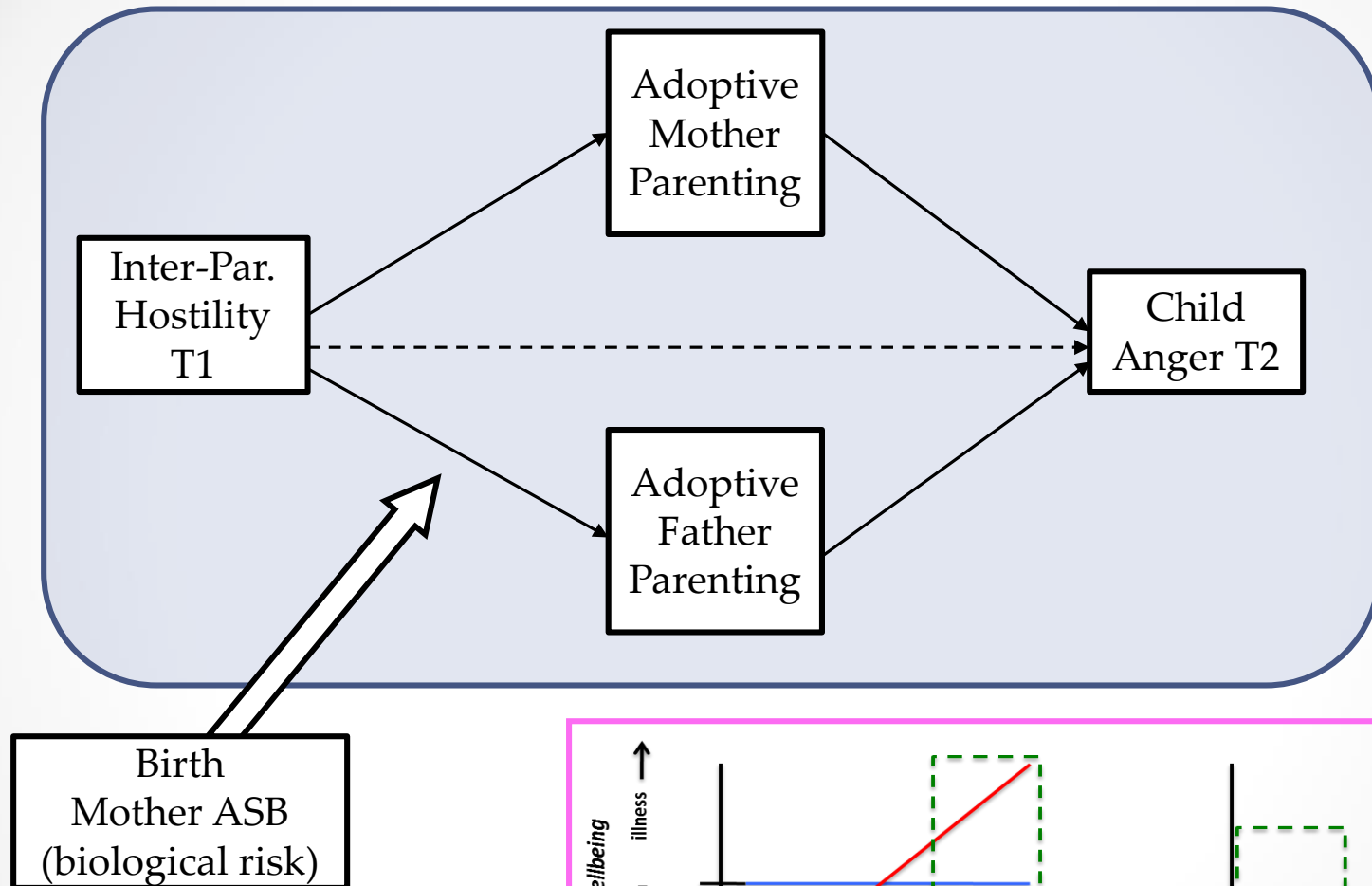
# Family Process and Child Conduct Problems (IVF-H / EGDS)

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$



Harold, G. T., Leve, L. D., Elam, K., Thapar, A., Neiderhiser, J., Natsuaki, M., Shaw, D., Reiss, D. (2013). The Nature of Nurture: Disentangling Passive Genotype-Environment Correlation from Family Relationship Influences on Children's Externalizing Problems. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(1), 12-21.

# Rearing Environment (Nurture) and Child Genetic Susceptibility (Nature) (Rhoades, Leve, Harold, Neiderheiser)



# Summary and Considerations

- Family relationship influences on children
  - Inter-parental conflict affects children's behaviour problems through disrupted mother-child and father-child relationships
    - Confound of passive rGE controlled
    - Inter-parental conflict as context may have greater disruptive influence on father-child compared to mother-child relationship
    - Children at high genetic risk may be more susceptible to negative rearing environments; ALSO more responsive to positive rearing environments
    - Adoption, IVF, foster-care, step-parent (professional roles)
- Implications for intervention
  - Supporting adults/parents early in 'transition' (e.g. becoming a family) significant and sustained outcomes for children (inter-parental, mother, father engagement, child outcomes)
  - Utilising research evidence to inform 'targeted' interventions
  - Promoting and improving service and support for parents and children in an adoption context

# The AdOPt Parenting Programme

- Supporting adoptive parents and children
  - AdOpt programme (UK trial)
    - Post Legal-Order
    - Child age 3-8 years
  - KEEP Foster care programme
    - University of Oregon (Fisher et al.,)
  - Focus on post legal-order
    - 'Becoming a Family' /Transition relevance
  - National Implementation Service (NIS), DfE Innovation Programme funding
- Theory based programme
  - Social learning theory, neuroscience
  - Specifically adapted from KEEP for adoption context application



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## An evaluation of the AdOpt parenting programme

**Research report**

**December 2016**

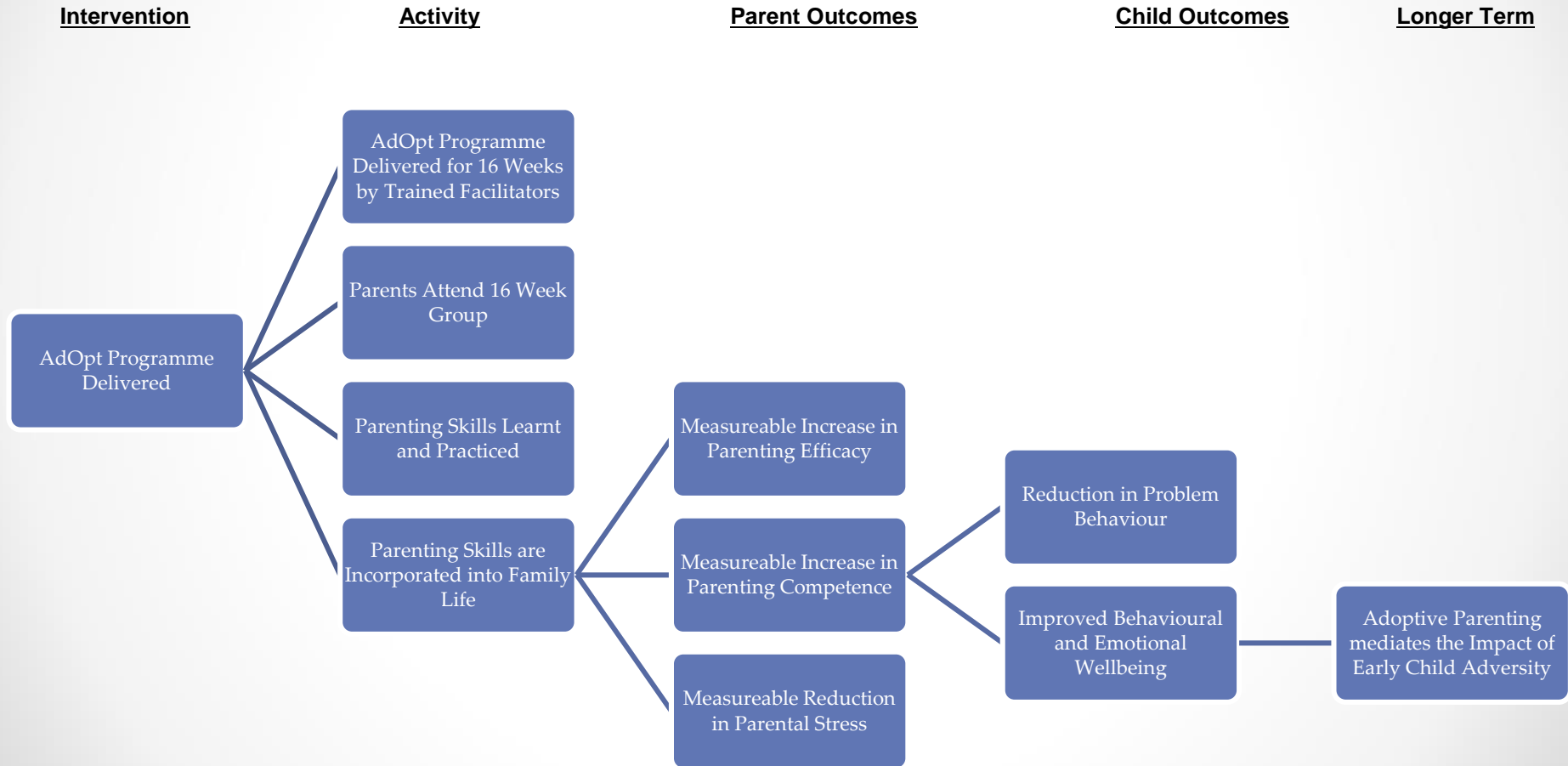
**Professor Gordon Harold, Professor Gillian  
Hampden-Thompson, Dr Maja Rodic and Dr Ruth  
Sellers**

**Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption  
Research and Practice**

**School of Psychology/School of Education and  
Social Work, University of Sussex**

# AdOpt Parenting Programme

## Theory of Change Underpinning AdOpt Parenting Programme



**Translating research into Practice**


**Promoting Evidence-Led Policy Decision Making**

**Sussex Rudd Centre Contributions**

# Bridging the Research-Policy Interface

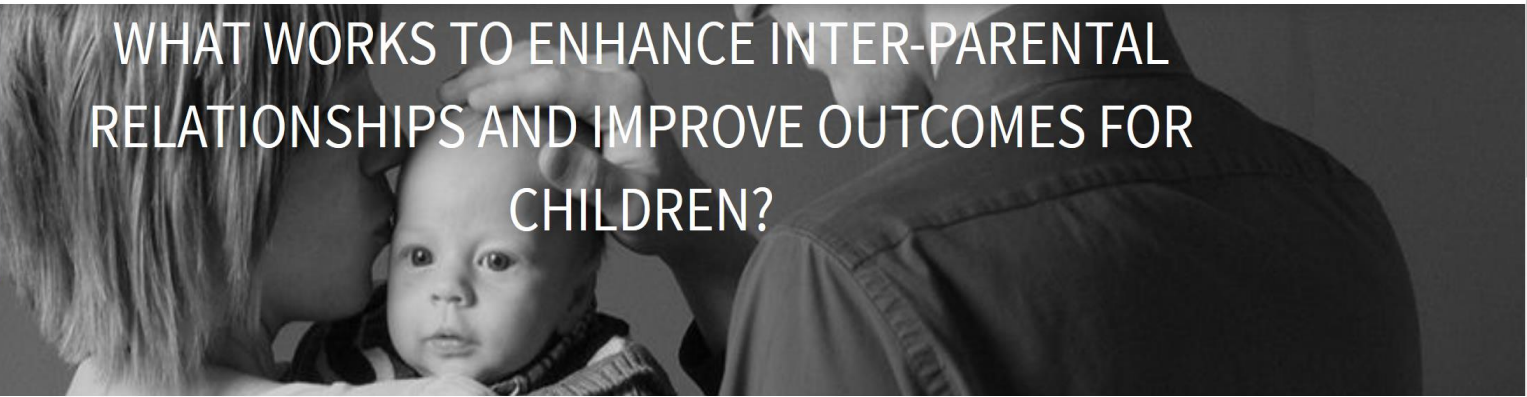
- Highlighting the role of family relationship influences on children 's mental health
  - Inter-parental relationship; Parent-child relationships
  - Utilising a complement of novel research designs
- Implications for practice and policy
  - Evidence-based guidance as to intervention focus
  - When do we target, who do we target, what do we target?
  - Salience of family relationship influences on children
    - Irrespective of genetic relatedness
- Practice and policy implications
  - Informing intervention targets through carefully designed research
  - Supporting children (and parents)
    - Emphasising the importance of the rearing environment (IPC+Par)
    - Promoting resilient children by promoting and supporting resilient parents (helping children by helping parents)
    - Early prevention versus late intervention (cost benefits)
    - Interrupting intergenerational cycles (mental health, relationships)

# Sussex Research to 'Life Chances'



EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

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## WHAT WORKS TO ENHANCE INTER-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN?


Our assessment of programmes that aim to enhance the inter-parental relationship and improve outcomes for children shows that many of these need more testing

The Early Intervention Foundation have carried out a review of 'What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children' for the Department for Work and Pensions.


The review has been led by Professor Gordon Harold, an expert on the role of the family in children's psychological development, and Dr. Ruth Sellers from the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice at the University of Sussex.

Key findings include:


- » The quality of the inter-parental relationship, specifically how parents communicate and relate to each other, is increasingly recognised as a primary




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### What Works To Enhance Inter-Parental Relationships and Improve Outcomes for Children?



Search the web and Windows

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# The Challenge of Research Translation

- Recent reports on child and adolescent mental health
  - Depression and anxiety, Self-harm, Suicidality, others
  - Children in care (prevalence of mental health problems); Mental health 'tsunami'
  - Symptoms and signals present BEFORE clinical disorder
- Importance of early identification
  - Building capacity among Front Line specialists/practitioners
  - Promoting evidence-led capacity to work with vulnerable youth, parents and families EARLY
    - GPs (medicine), Schools (Education), Practitioners (Social Work)
    - Psychology – (1) science/evidence (2) intervention/prevention models
- University of Sussex Children and Families Professional Development and Training Programme ("Training the Trainers")
  - Building capacity through early front line training (adoption, foster care, 'risk')
  - Sussex Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice/University of Sussex
    - 3 senior researcher/academic posts (child, youth, family focus)
  - Interdisciplinary programme (Psychology, Social work, Education, Medicine, Law)
    - Undergraduate/Postgraduate training, CPD, internships
    - Reliably/robustly/accurately assessing 'risk'; referring for support; Policy
  - Promoting transformational change for children, parents and families in the UK (and internationally)

# Sussex Rudd Centre – Next Steps

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## Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice





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The Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice is a newly established research Centre located in the School of Psychology, and partnered with the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex.

The Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice was established with the core purpose of promoting understanding through the implementation and real-world application of rigorous research that focuses on illuminating the particular support needs and challenges facing children, parents and families in an adoption context. While the Centre has at its core a



Andrew & Virginia Rudd (left, centre) and Gordon Harold (right)

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