Therapeutic Parenting –
Is this a helpful concept in Adoption?
The Changing Nature of Adoption

- Solution to the problem of inheritance
- Solution to the problem of illegitimacy
- Solution to the problem of infertility
  - ‘perfectly healthy children’ adopted by ‘perfectly respectable’ couples
- Solution for special needs children
  - Disabled, minority ethnic children
- Solution for children in care removed by the state and sanctioned by the courts
Parenting in Adoption

- ‘Love is All’
- ‘Secrecy’ – ‘Start Again’
- Could adoption work for ‘high risk groups’?
  - Disabled children
  - Children from black and minority ethnic communities
  - Abused children
  - Older Children
  - Sibling Groups

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In the adoptees I have studied, their development and relationships to the adoptive mothers were clinically indistinguishable from blood kin children up to the time they were told of their adoption. After the disclosure, the children’s behaviour, thought contents and relationships showed dramatic changes… a toddler doesn’t need to know he is adopted, he needs to know he belongs.

(Weider 1978)
Adoption…’the knowledge will hurt them.

Maintain the secret. Tell older siblings that -

‘the family is playing a game and that no one is ever to know the secret.’

Weider, 1974
Children with at least 1 ICD-10 diagnosis:

Prevalence

Using the CBCL, in a sample of 3803 maltreated children age 2 - 14 in the USA, 47.9% were identified as having a clinically significant disorder.

Burns et al., 2004
# Meta analysis of attachment in adopted children

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Avoidant</th>
<th>Ambivalent</th>
<th>Disorganised</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adopted Children</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>N=468</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td><strong>Non-adopted children</strong></td>
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<td>N=2,104</td>
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<td>15%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td><strong>Children in Institutions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>N=181</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>73%</td>
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Van den Dries (2009)
Adoption is a successful intervention that leads to remarkable catch-up in all domains of child development…Adoption documents the astonishing plasticity of human development in the face of serious adversity and subsequent drastic change in child rearing circumstances

(Juffer and van Ijzendoorn, 2005)
Local Authority Plans

Number of new ADM decisions in each quarter since 2011-12

Authorities revise their historic data each quarter, with large revisions generally expected for the most recent quarter. The dashed line shows the estimated uplift we may expect in the next set of returns.

Source: Annual SSDA903 data (Q1 2011-12 to Q2 2014-15) and ALB quarterly survey (Q3 2014-15 onwards)
Authorisation to Place for Adoption

Number of new placement orders granted in each quarter since 2011-12

Authorities revise their historic data each quarter, with large revisions generally expected for the most recent quarter. The dashed line shows the estimated uplift we may expect in the next set of returns.

Source: Annual SSDA903 data (Q1 2011-12 to Q2 2014-15) and ALB quarterly survey (Q3 2014-15 onwards)
The Act of Creation

- There isn’t a more significant professional responsibility than creating a ‘family for life’ for a child
- It creates both opportunity and risk because of its life long impact on the child and the adopter/s
The Act of Creation

- Involves a powerful act of separation and feelings of loss
- Certainty is an illusion
- Prediction more an art than a science
- Exercising discretion and professional judgment, core to effective practice.
The nature and consequences of maltreatment

- Genetic risk factors
- Pre-birth adversity
- Exposure to threatening and/or anxiety provoking adults
- Neglectful parents
- Multiple carers
- Trauma, separation and loss
• Life long intervention
• Grafts a child on to a new family tree
• Stability and permanence
• The strengths, capacities and vulnerabilities of the adult carers
• The impact of the past on the present
Interventions to support family placement

• The nature of the problem?
• Complexity of child’s history including the ‘unknown’
• Interventions with whom - child/adopters/carers/family
• The problem of a shared language – children’s services/CAMHS
• Adoption specific interventions or a generic service
The Enormity of Change for the Child

Family Context
- The emotional atmosphere of family life
- Expectations of intimacy and belonging
- Beliefs about commitment and the concept of ‘forever’

Identity
- As an adopted child grafted on to a new family tree

Social Context and Culture
- Class
- Culture, Ethnicity and Religion
- Education and Participation

The Past
- Birth parents, Grandparents, Siblings
- What happened to me?
- Why was I adopted?
Normative Challenge of Adoptive Family Life

- Family Making from a Family Life that has broken
- Co-construction of a family life – child and adoptive parents, siblings, grandparents
- Interactive, Relational world of development
- Creating and sustaining are complex tasks
- Powerful forces are at work that both enable and disable the conditions that are necessary for child development
Normative Challenge of Adoptive Family Life

- Communicative Openness (Brodzinsky)
- Understanding the child’s (painful/disturbing) history
- Acceptance of the child’s hesitation/anxiety/lengthy period of adjustment
- Responsiveness to curiosity
- Ability to seek help early
- Adaptability in parenting expectations and style
In section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders), for subsection (3B) substitute —

“(3B) For the purposes of subsection (3A), the permanence provisions of a section 31A plan are —

(a) such of the plan’s provisions setting out the long-term plan for the upbringing of the child concerned as provide for any of the following —
Permanence Provisions

(i) the child to live with any parent of the child’s or with any other member of, or any friend of, the child’s family;

(ii) adoption;

(iii) long-term care not within sub-paragraph (i) or (ii);

(b) such of the plan’s provisions as set out any of the following -
Predictive Issues

(i) the impact on the child concerned of any harm that he or she suffered or was likely to suffer;
(ii) the current and future needs of the child (including needs arising out of that impact);
(iii) the way in which the long-term plan for the upbringing of the child would meet those current and future needs.”
An ‘Outcomes Intervention’

To address –

1. the impact of the *consequences of maltreatment*
2. where these issues are identified and specified in the local authority’s plan as to the ‘*developmental recovery*’ of the child throughout their childhood
3. The expected *outcomes* from that intervention
What is the state of our knowledge – ASSESSMENT INTERVENTION OUTCOMES that allows us to address the legal responsibilities as identified in Clause 8?
Key Issue

For the individual practitioner, local authority and the court, each case has to be decided on the specific circumstances of the child and their circumstances – what has happened, what is currently happening and what may happen.

Research (is largely) based on the analysis of the significance of a range of interacting factors as they apply to the group being studied as a whole.
Individual

Family

Community

Societal
We must assume… that the very impressions which we have forgotten have nevertheless left the deepest traces in our psychic life, and acted as determinants for our whole future development.

Freud 1910
'Prolonged deprivation of the young child of maternal care may have grave and far reaching effects in his character and so on the whole of his future life'.

'Good mothering' was almost useless if it was not available in the first few years of life.

*Bowlby 1951*
The developmental pathway over the lifespan

‘turns at each and every stage of the journey on an interaction between the organism as it has developed up to that moment and the environment in which it then finds itself’

Bowlby, 1973
Our interest is not simply in the question of whether early attachment predicts outcome or even how strongly it predicts it, but in the complex developmental processes in which attachment experiences work with and through other experiences in the course of development.

Sroufe, 2005
Cumulative risk model

- the accumulation of risk exposure and ‘dose’ within the context of – relationships, parenting, family, community and society
- early risks are reinforced, maintained or amplified by subsequent risk exposure
Human Species
SURVIVAL AND ADAPTABILITY

Capacity to make relationships and form social groups

Capacity to embed what is learnt in social groupings

Capacity to learn and change in response to ‘new’ circumstances

Capacity to teach and to learn from each other
Human Beings *survive* and *adapt* in the context of the experience of relationships, parenting, family life, community and society.
But each of these contextual factors can be a source of tension, disagreement and conflict including abuse and neglect.

Basic survival strategies are embedded in each of us.

New people and opportunities can re-formulate those survival strategies

But

New people and opportunity can also be experienced as an-going source of threat
How do we respond to threat?
Primary Physiological and Psychological Responses to Threat

- **Fight** — repel the threat by attack
- **Flight** — the urge to run — can be physical or psychological
- **Freeze** — acting dead

Instinctive responses where the primary purpose is survival
Human Beings *survive* and *adapt* because they form close and meaningful relationships with each other to a degree that most other species do not.

Trust is key to making and sustaining relationships.
But

People can be a source of threat that requires individuals – adults and children - to develop survival strategies.

And this may mean significant compromise and adaptation in the heightened anticipation of threat and the need to control it.
Therapeutic Parenting

- The Adoption Support Fund
- £20M a year for therapeutic interventions for the child.
- A range of interventions within scope
- The evidence base is poor for most
- The assessment framework that identifies the core issues for the child and family is controversial and poorly developed
Therapeutic Parenting

- The mechanisms at play that underpin the child and family’s adaptation and compromise to threat are beginning to be understood.
- But there is some way to go in incorporating this into direct interventions.
But we do know that the creation of the moment by moment experience of FAMILY LIFE driven by love, sensitivity, commitment, predictability and delight can be transformative. It has taken generations of experience to establish this and it cannot be forgotten.