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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

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)

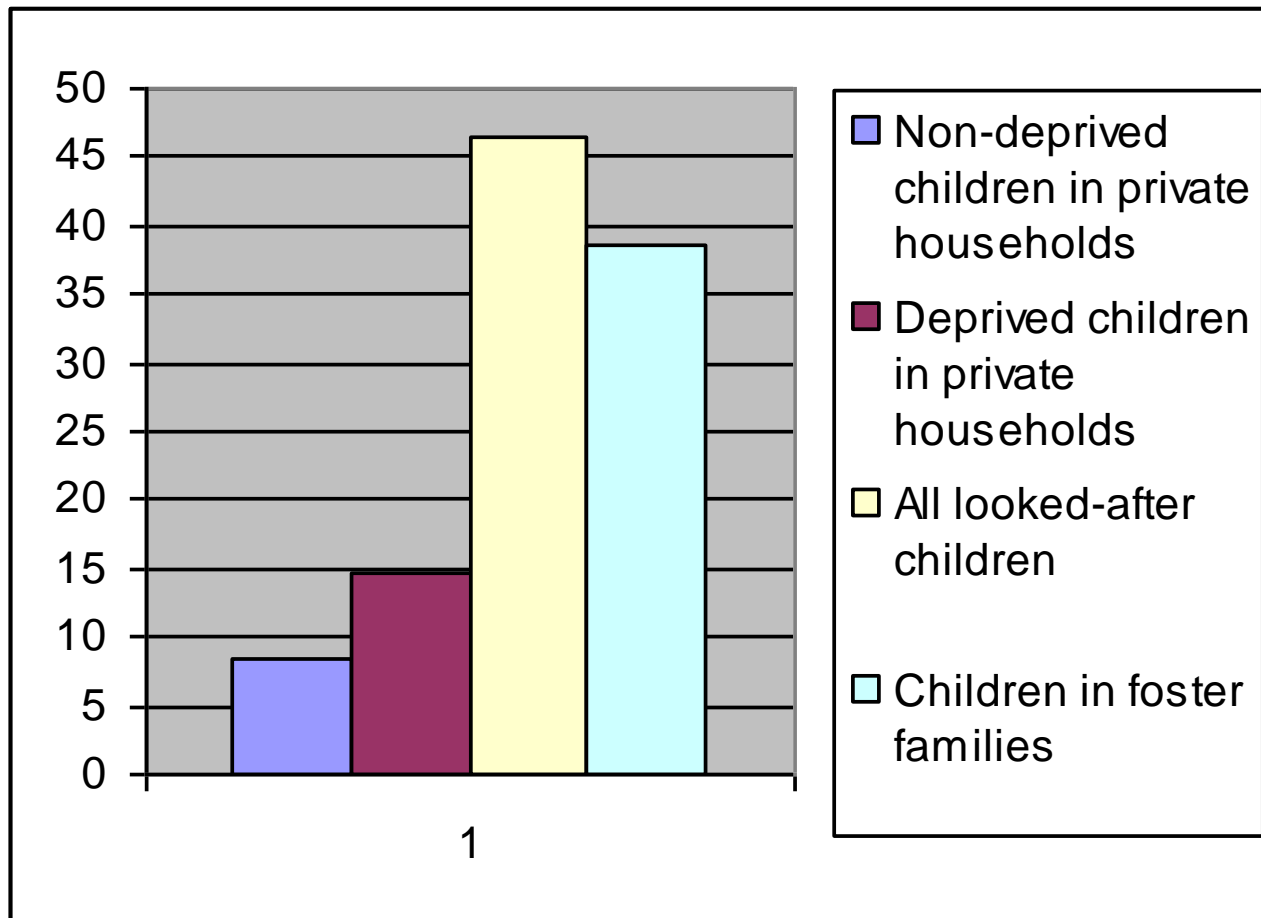
Adoption...'the knowledge will hurt them.

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:



Data source: Ford et al (2007) Psychiatric disorder among British children looked after by local authorities: comparison with children living in private households. Br J Psychiatry 2007;190:319-25

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

	Secure	Avoidant	Ambivalent	Disorganised
Adopted Children N=468	47%	12%	10%	31%
Non-adopted children N=2,104	62%	15%	9%	15%
Children in Institutions N=181	11%			73%

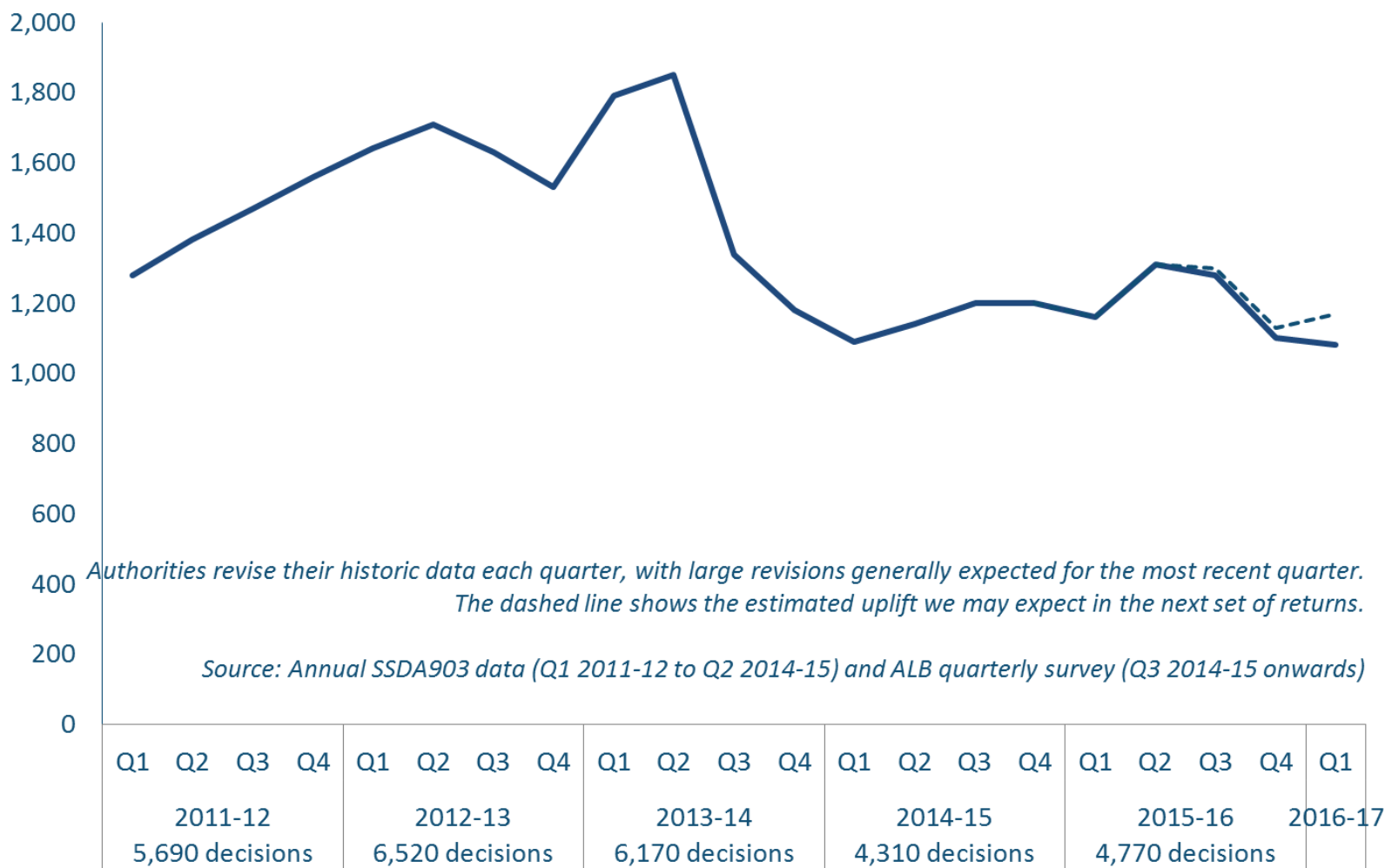
Van den Dries (2009)

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)

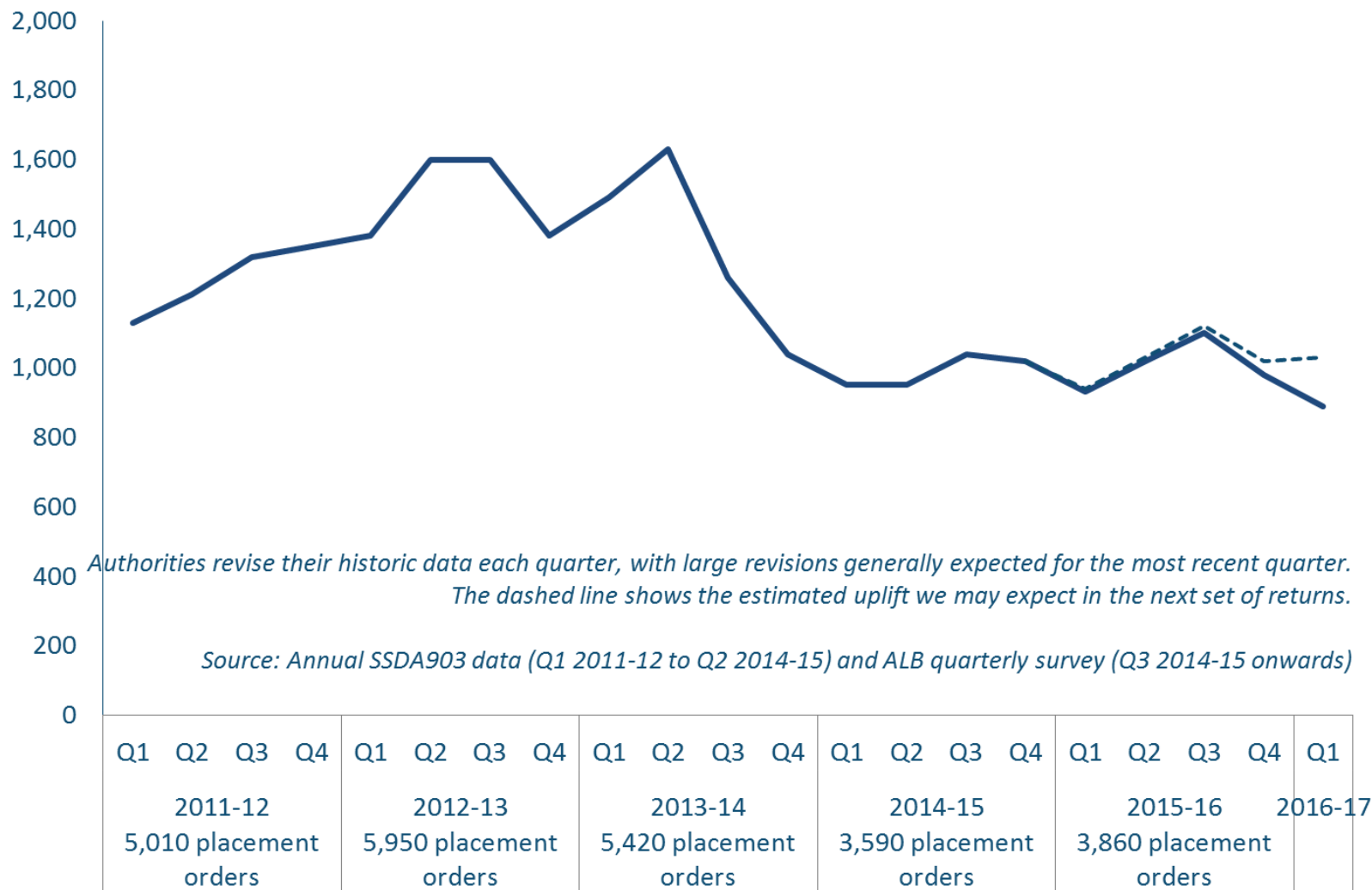
Local Authority Plans

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



Authorisation to Place for Adoption

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



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

Family placement as an intervention

- 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

Children and Social Work Bill - Clause 8

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 –

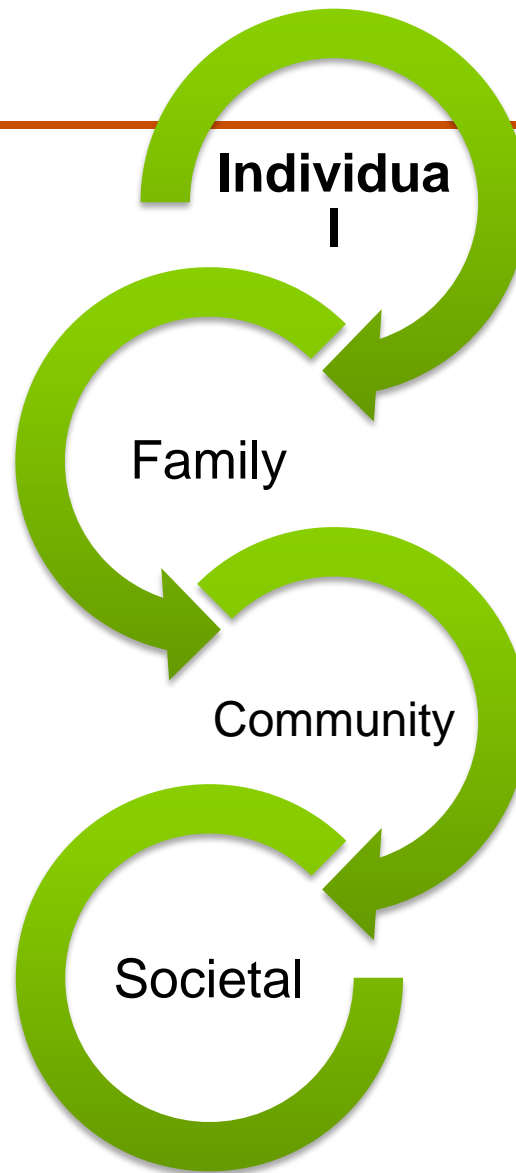
1. the impact of the ***consequences of maltreatment***
2. where these issues are identified and specified in the local authority's plan as to the '***developmental recovery***' of the child throughout their childhood
3. The expected ***outcomes*** from that intervention

***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.



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 learn
and change in
response to 'new'
circumstances**

**Capacity to embed
what is learnt in
social groupings**

**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.

Adaptation – growth and development – reflects a multi-factorial, interacting and dynamic set of factors.

**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

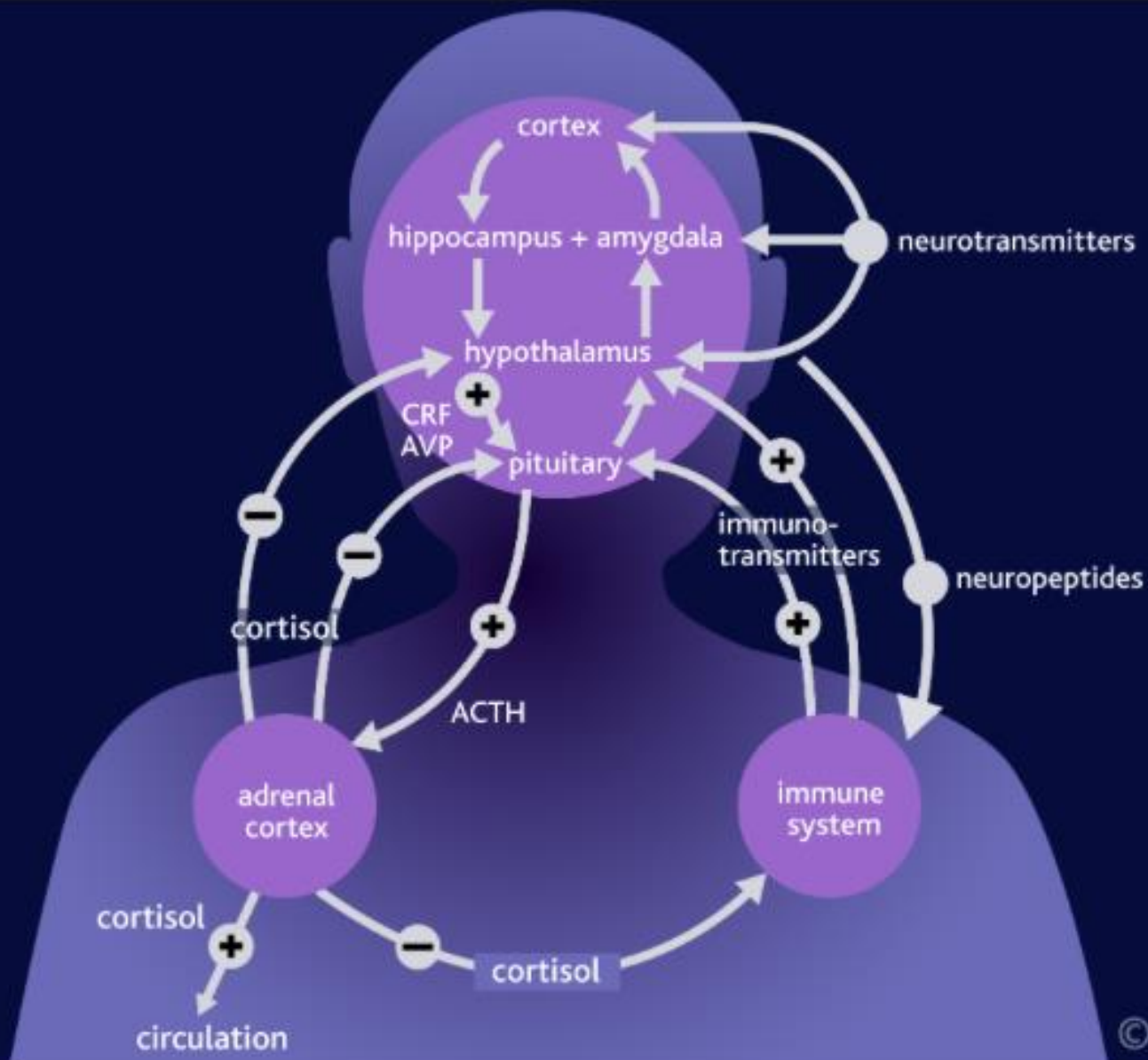
**Human Beings *survive* and *adapt* because
they form close and meaningful
relationships with each other to a degree
that most other species do not**

**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.



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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.