Working With Adopted Children and Families

ttc
the therapeutic consultants

We provide multi-disciplinary assessments for adoptive families to try and make sense of and understand the complex histories of adoptive children and the ways that their histories have affected their current functioning. From the referral we will work to put together a team of the right professionals to help untangle complex backgrounds and think about the best ways that the child and the family can be supported.

The core of our assessments are done by a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist. Their particular training is one that allows them to find ways to understand the internal world of children and adolescents, the conflicts and dynamics in their minds, the attachment patterns and the pictures that they have of people and the of the world and how it works. This helps to gain a starting point of what is working within their psychological make up and what is not. Very often adoptive children have had traumatic and abusive early childhoods and at the very least they will have had broken attachments. The way that they function may well be in a response to these traumas and abandonments and will need careful help to help them to learn to trust in stability and to function in healthy ways once again.

If the issues are particularly tangled then we might well ask for the assistance of a child psychiatrist who will help to understand if there are any neurodevelopmental issues (such as ASD or ADHD) that might compound the psychological difficulties. They will also help to clarify whether there are any issues of risk or of more significant, diagnosable mental health problems which would need careful treatment and possibly medication.

Working with adopted children and families

Assessment for Treatment

Families often come to us having already had assessments that indicate child psychotherapy would be a helpful way of working. In these cases we start with a much shorter assessment, not of the whole child and family but just to understand the best way of working. This usually takes the form of:

- an initial consultation with parents
- three sessions with the child
- a review with the parents in which we set out the treatment plan.

Treatment

Most of our work is carried out by child psychotherapists as their training is specific to understanding complex issues in childhood. They are trained to be highly attuned and to observe carefully in order to build a detailed picture of the internal world of children and adolescents. From these understandings they can help the child to know themselves better, to understand the behaviour which is adapted to a different, much more traumatic time in their lives and come to have more trust in the stability and safety of their new adoptive homes.

Adoptive children very often struggle with attachment issues and develop defensive ways of dealing with people that prevent them from making positive relationships. For this reason it is a fundamental principle within TTC that attachment issues are best managed with a team approach that works with both children and parents. Child psychotherapy often helps children and adolescents learn how to modify their pictures of attachments so that they are more flexible and relationships are viewed more positively in their minds. However, the quickest way to support relationships within the family is to work with parents alongside the child and therefore this is usually a part of the treatment plan that we suggest.

Sometimes the negative patterns that adoptive children create are so strong that adoptive parents find themselves in the confusing and distressing position of being drawn into negative patterns with their children. These dynamics are entirely unconscious and therefore cannot be understood with plain logic, leaving families confused and eventually hopeless.

It can sometimes be uncomfortable for adoptive parents to also be asked to think therapeutically about themselves and their own families of origin. It can feel counter-intuitive, like you are looking in the wrong place for answers as we know that the significant trauma is in the background of the children. However, our own attachment patterns, fears and worries dictate the way we respond to children. Adoptive children need really finely tuned, adaptive responses that repair the traumas and abandonments that they have experienced. This is not just parenting but highly attuned parenting that is, in itself, therapeutic.

Length of work

Child psychotherapy is not a short-term way of working. It does not modify behaviour or deal with the symptoms but instead looks quite a long way below the surface at the patterns of thinking and belief that have developed due to the traumatic experiences and broken attachments that adoptive children have experienced. This can take many months to fully understand and many more to start to build the kind of relationships that allow children and adolescents to begin to trust in more positive, reparative experiences with their therapists and their adoptive families.

For this reason TTC tries hard to keep the treatment plans within the ASF budget so that work can continue throughout the year and into the next financial year without break if needed.

Contact us
T: 07900 608608
E: admin@therapeuticconsultants.co.uk
W: www.therapeuticconsultants.co.uk