WAYS OF WORKING SYSTEMICALLY WITH FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

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How do we understand it?

Life scripts:
Gender scripts

A relational issue
An intergenerational issue

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What does it do to relationships?
a context of fear, mistrust and anxiety

- Paralysis through fear
- Undermining of intimacy and love
- Creating emotional distance, dissonance with family beliefs and wish for emotional connection
- Displacement of attachment needs
- Break down in communication
- Lack of trust
- Building resentment
- Denial/minimisation

“Violence is so terrifying, destructive and shameful to everyone involved (including the therapist) that there is a universal temptation to dissociate oneself from it completely”

(Goldner 1999: 331)
Effects of domestic abuse on adults

- Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, agoraphobia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Homelessness and unemployment
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Long term health conditions
- Poverty
- Debt
Effects on children: pattern of brain activity as combat soldiers

- Children exposed to family violence show the same pattern of activity in their brains as soldiers exposed to combat (5/12/2011)
- In the first functional MRI brain scan study to investigate the impact of physical abuse and domestic violence on children, they found that exposure to family violence was associated with increased brain activity in two specific brain areas (the anterior insula and the amygdala) when children viewed pictures of angry faces (research by UCL and the Anna Freud Centre, London)
Effects of violence on children: noticing

- Ability to trust adults
- Difficulty in learning – lack of concentration
- Ability to manage and express anger
- Emotional self-regulation (self control)
- Somatic pain, symptoms
- Repetitive play
- Low self esteem
- Poor school performance
- Hyperactivity
- Lack of interest
- Signs of anxiety
What do we do?
How to help children

- Noticing any change in mood and behaviour
- Give them a chance to talk about family life
- Reassure them that help is available for them and their family
- Develop trust so they can start sharing their worries
- Explore and express their feelings safely
- Share educational material to help them understand – answer their questions
- Help them understand when they are safe or not, identify warning signs in their body
- Positive male and female relationships e.g. role models
Risk, responsibility and collaboration (Vetere and Dowling, 2005)
Risk assessment: exploring...

- Context of violence
- Type of violence, frequency and intensity
- Views about power and control in relationships
- Children as witnesses or perpetrators
- Intergenerational patterns
- Isolation versus Family support network
- Ability to reflect, empathise, take responsibility
- Motivation to change

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Info gathering & analysis

- What information do I need?
- How do I make connections?
- How do they fit together?
- What is missing?
- How do I make sense of it?
A CIRCULAR ANALYSIS OF RISK

Analysis as an ongoing circular process

Info-gathering → Analysis → Decision-making → Info-gathering
SAFETY FIRST: ASSESSING & MANAGING RISK IN THE WIDER PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

The risk management pyramid

Shared info

Other Services/Police

Prof Network therapist

Personal network

Family

Break secrecy and isolation

Shared risk
A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY INTEGRATED APPROACH

Youth Support Teams

Police

Adoption Team

School

CAMHS

Personal Support network

NVR therapist
Working with & within professional systems

A systemic mapping out of professional influence around the child

Clarity about your professional role

Multiple perspectives

Multiple definitions Of the problem
Include everybody’s opinion in your analysis!

The team around the child

Complexity

Connections between systems

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Domestic violence and abuse: different layers of context & interventions

Police

Professional support Network

Personal Support Network

Family

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Interventions: Safety in the sessions

- Individual versus joint sessions
- No violence contract
- Safety planning: identify triggers, self-awareness
- Home Safety rules and strategies e.g. “time out”
- Seeking agreement in the room on how to communicate with each other
- Explore patterns of interactions and communication – circularity
- Help recognise escalation – develop de-escalation skills
- Working in collaboration with others
- Sharing info
- Reviews
CONTENT VERSUS PROCESS

- Collecting information (content) as well as paying attention to clients’ internal world e.g. way of communicating (Process)
- Noticing body language or change in tone of voice
- Taking an observer position i.e. a bird’s eye view and create a reflective space
- Asking about the underlying text e.g. what is going on for you right now?
- Using this information to inform further questions (back to content)
SYSTEMIC TOOLS
Gathering info and exploring with clients

- **Family genograms** e.g. focus on descriptions of relationships, intergenerational patterns of abuse, stories & ideas about being a parent, attachment needs

- **Time line** with a focus on sequence of events and recurrent themes about relationships e.g. helping/protecting/abusing/feeling safe & secure/fear & danger/comforting

- **Attachment focused interview** with focus on nature of relationships, attachment figures & childhood experiences, 5 words to describe & related memories, loss & separation, abuse & abandonment, comfort when in danger, fear or distress

- **Family scripts** e.g. similarities & differences about own upbringing & experiences of domestic violence, abuse, gender stories about power and relationships

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Assess clients’ ability to take Responsibility

- Commitment to professional help and safety
- Ability to acknowledge, reflect and engage in problem solving and change
- Signs of progress/change: breaking patterns of behaviour which may have led to escalation
- Understanding of the effects of violence on others, partners and children
- Ability to emphasise with the victims
Our practice:
what is your role?
How do you position yourself?

WALKING AHEAD…..
WALKING ALONGSIDE…..
WALKING BEHIND CLIENTS
WALKING AHEAD.....

- Safeguarding role and need to protect children and vulnerable adults to ensure their safety

- Safety first: risk assessment to ensure family safety

- Being transparent with the process of decision-making & share it with honesty
WALKING ALONGSIDE

- Showing curiosity e.g. interest & respect for young client’s views, experiences, opinions & values
- Share own thinking and discuss possibilities within their frame of reference – help clients to find their own solutions
- Discuss & negotiate ways of working together e.g. modelling respectful communication
- Being aware of own triggers, personal/professional assumptions and admitting own mistakes (self-reflexivity)
- Identify and validate people’s resources and coping strategies (solution focused approach)

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Standing behind position
(White & Epston, 1990)

- "the therapist’s posture of supporting persons from behind rather than from ahead"

- "The therapist consistently endeavours to identify with the position at which the person was previously and maintains a cautious attitude, so as not to catch up too quickly with developments in the person’s life. This enables the therapist to be ‘caught off-guard’ by these developments and counters the possibility of getting ahead of the person and thus contributing to a disempowering distinction. ...As the person experiences himself/herself as more successful, the therapist can afford to be less concerned about the likelihood of getting ahead of him/her”.

- "The therapist can achieve this standing-behind position posture by taking up a position at the “base line”, against which all of the changes in the person’s life can thrown in to sharp relief.”

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Safe Uncertainty
Barry Mason (1993)

- A way of thinking about and responding to risky situations
- Similar to “not knowing” position – exploring & finding out
- Understanding too quickly can leave us in a position of ‘premature certainty’, where we stop using curiosity and ask questions
- Need for balance in ‘owning’ our areas of knowledge and expertise, i.e. being an expert or acting to protect with maintaining an open and curious stance to explore
- ‘Observer-dependent’ position: we are part of the system which we observe
ANY SUCCESSFUL STORIES TO SHARE?

Planting your seed

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Signposting


www.riseuk.org.uk
http://thehideout.org.uk/children/home/
