

**Intensive Assessment + Therapeutic Support  
for Adoptive Families  
&  
Families with  
Permanently Placed Children & Adolescents**



**A specialist therapeutic service**

PAC-UK's Child & Family Service offers a specialist therapeutic service for families with adopted or permanently placed children/adolescents. We have particular expertise in providing consultation, assessment and therapeutic services to families whose children experienced 'complex trauma' (i.e. early life, chronic abuse and emotional neglect that took place within the child's primary caregiving environment) as well as attachment breaks and other traumas prior to their adoption/permanent placement. Working with minority ethnic children/young people and multi-racial families is also part of our expertise.

**Typical difficulties families present with**

The **Children** and **Adolescents we work with** have more often than not experienced very poor care and/or abuse in their birth homes and they are likely to have been separated from at least one, but often more than one foster family (whom they may have been very close to). For a young child none of these experiences make sense; it just leaves them confused, broken hearted, angry and unable to regulate themselves. They **can therefore present as** impulsive, hyper-active, defiant and aggressive; their emotional responses vary between highly reactive and flat/detached; they can appear as depressed and they may self harm. Most children/adolescents we work with find transitions difficult and persevering in new activities or reaching new goals can seem impossible. They struggle with friendships and can alternate between wanting to be close to their adoptive parents/permanent carers/family and rejecting them, or even being abusive and violent towards them. Some children are withdrawn or socially awkward; others can be overfamiliar with strangers.

Most children and young people who attend sessions at PAC-UK **wonder about their birth parents, siblings and other birth relatives**; they question whether and when they can have contact with them. **Identity issues** are very common and have an important additional dimension in children and young people who are transracially adopted or who are part of a multi-racial family.

The **parents** who attend PAC-UK have tried to reach and support their children in many different ways but have run out of ideas and energy. They often feel frustrated, disheartened and isolated. Some parents have resorted to unhelpful parenting strategies and others feel like giving up. When parenting as a couple, parents may find that their reactions to challenging behaviours vary significantly. Parents usually wish to receive **help with understanding** their children and their own responses to them. They also want to get help with staying calm in the face of crises and with **more effective parenting strategies** with regard to specific issues. Ultimately, most parents wish that their family life improves, both for their children and themselves.

## Referrals, fees & funding

Referrals can be made by parents, social workers or other professionals. Fees are provided on request. PAC-UK will write letters requesting funding to local authorities, health insurance or other potential funding bodies. Private funding is welcome too.

## Overall therapeutic approach

PAC-UK's Child and Family Service actively involves parents in most of their therapeutic family work. Therapeutic parent sessions will take place first. The subsequent therapeutic family sessions involve **parent/s and one child** at any one time, though family sessions with siblings may be included at the beginning and/or the end of the sessions. This is based on the premise that most of the children we work with have experienced trauma within their primary relationships (abuse, neglect, attachment breaks). They therefore need to experience and 're-learn' in a one-to-one manner that their new parents are safe and will keep them safe. Parents are supported to hear and empathically contain their child - including their most disturbing memories, feelings and thoughts - whilst also attuning to their child's need for clear and safe boundaries. Even where children have not experienced major traumas, the support of parents in sessions is essential with regard to enhancing the child's/adolescent's relationships within the family. The length of PAC-UK's therapeutic family sessions (90 min) allows for some individual time for child and parents.

## Initial consultation and assessment

To explore the presenting difficulties an initial **parent consultation** is offered to parents. This may be followed by a **family consultation**. Recommendations with regard to some practical parenting strategies and other actions parents can take will be made. These sessions are often followed by recommendations with regard to further assessments and therapeutic interventions.

## Comprehensive assessments

To assess a family's presenting difficulties in more depth a range of assessments are available at PAC-UK, such as a comprehensive **family** assessment, a **parent-child interaction** assessment, assessment of **contact** needs/arrangements or a **viability** assessment. **Parent only assessments** are available for parents who are greatly struggling in their parenting and/or within their relationship as a parenting team (in two-parent families). Parent assessments with regard to particular issues are also available **pre-adoption/pre-placement**.

Our **assessment methods** include reading of all relevant background information, interview and family observation, a range of questionnaires and psycho-diagnostic measures, projective methods (such as **Story Stems, Sandplay**), art and play methods (**Theraplay MIM**), semi-structured interviews (**ASI** Attachment Style Interview, **PRI** Parent Role Interview) as well as some **creative methods** using the arts, film and documentary footage and communication exercises.

Additionally, **specialist assessments** can be carried out, such as: Child/Adolescent Developmental assessment (including IQ and Cognitive assessment), Foetal Alcohol Syndrome screening, Sensory Integration assessment and Educational assessment.

## Intensive Therapeutic Parent Work

### Aim

Parenting a previously traumatised child can be extremely challenging and it can trigger parents' own issues around self-regulation, attachment, loss, trauma and adoption. The aim of PAC-UK's intensive therapeutic parent work is to address the parents' own issues with regard to their impact on their daily parenting, as well as support them in developing parenting skills that are suited to their particular child's needs. The ultimate aim is to **strengthen parents in their function of 'secure base' for the child** and **become 'therapeutic' parents**, so that their child can feel increasingly safe in their attachment relationship to the parents and their other issues can be addressed.

Approximate figures with regard to number of sessions are given below, followed by typical issues addressed and methods used.

### Number and length of sessions

We may suggest anything between 6 and 16 weekly sessions of 90 min. The sessions may take place with one or two therapists, depending on the presenting issues.

### Typical issues addressed & methods used

Sessions are carefully prepared and may include the following:

- ❖ parents are asked to fill in a **questionnaire** about their own upbringing, major life events, current family life and hopes and expectations around adopting their child;
- ❖ parents are asked to fill in some **standardised psycho-diagnostic measures** regarding their current functioning (including attachment), and in particular their parenting strengths and vulnerabilities;
- ❖ using the **arts** (painting, miniature figures, letter writing, etc.) as well as **EMDR** (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) and **AIT** (Advanced Integrated Therapy) or **SE** (Somatic Experiencing) parent/s are supported in **addressing some of their personal life** stories relating to attachment, loss, trauma and self-regulation;
- ❖ where there are two parents, they may have some **separate sessions** to address certain issues individually;
- ❖ parents are introduced to and practice a **communication technique** that will help them communicate their thoughts and feelings whilst **being a 'secure base' for each other**;
- ❖ parents are supported in exploring what **changes they need to make** in their daily lives to meet the challenges of being 'therapeutic' parents; **NVR** (Non-Violent Resistance) may be used;
- ❖ therapeutic **parenting strategies** are addressed and supported with **resources**;
- ❖ **home tasks** will be given (such as undertaking certain activities with each other and the children, engaging with parenting CD, reading handouts, articles, etc.)

## **Intensive Therapeutic Family Work**

### **Aim**

The overall aim of intensive therapeutic family work is to **enhance family life for both the child and the parents**. The specific aim is to reduce the emotional charge and debilitating effects of the child's exposure to complex trauma, whilst supporting the formation of 'corrective' experiences that will lead to **improved self-regulation, attachment and the development of competencies (i.e. behaviours, skills and interests)**. Strengthening the child's sense of **adoptive, cultural and ethnic identity** is integral to this process.

After working on **stabilising** the child through sensory work, therapy/developmental play and **emotional literacy work**, the aim is to help the child/adolescent **process their early life traumas and attachment breaks**; this is done with a number of different methods (see below). The child/adolescent is emotionally supported by their adoptive parents/permanent carers. PAC-UK's intensive therapeutic family work therefore assumes the presence and commitment of at least one parent (or carer). Usually one child in the family is worked with intensively at any one time (unless the parents can make several trips a week to our offices).

The issues the child/adolescent brings and their way of engaging with us will in part determine the therapeutic process. Approximate figures with regard to number of sessions are given below, followed by typical issues addressed and methods used.

### **Number and length of sessions**

We may suggest between 16 and 48 weekly sessions of 90 min. The sessions take place at our London offices (occasionally other locations) with one or two therapists, depending on the presenting issues.

### **Typical issues to be addressed & methods used**

Parents are usually prepared for intensive therapeutic family work by undertaking intensive therapeutic parent work first (see previous page).

Intensive family sessions are carefully prepared and include the following:

- ❖ the child is **helped to feel safe and regulated** in PAC-UK's therapeutic space;
- ❖ the child is supported in their **sensory awareness of themselves and their surroundings**;
- ❖ parents and child are introduced to and supported in **theraplay** to help bonding and regulation;
- ❖ the child practices **identifying, naming, locating, expressing and bearing feelings** in self and others;
- ❖ the family is supported in investing in the child's development of **their strengths, interests** and involvement in community;
- ❖ the child is supported to process and integrate past traumatic experiences through **art, sand play and possibly EMDR and DDP** (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy)
- ❖ specific methods are used to **help a child who dissociates**;
- ❖ the child is supported throughout to **use their parents and other trustworthy adults as safe bases**;
- ❖ the function and dysfunction of their **behaviours will be addressed**;
- ❖ the child is helped to explore and positively develop their **adoptive, cultural and ethnic identity**;
- ❖ parent/s are **supported via telephone/email** between sessions as necessary;
- ❖ the family's **strengths and achievements** will be celebrated.

### Report & network meeting

A **summary report** of our assessment and/or intensive therapeutic work is written at the end of the assessment and/or intervention. After this, a **network meeting** is arranged to discuss assessment results and/or review progress of the intensive intervention. A network meeting usually includes the parent/s, the commissioning agency, the therapists from PAC-UK, and any other relevant party.

### Monitoring of progress & outcomes

Pre- and post-intervention **standardised questionnaires** with regard to emotional, behavioural and attachment difficulties and parenting are used. Parents and children/adolescents are also asked to give qualitative feedback on the effect of the therapeutic work. Where needed additional **network meetings** are scheduled to review progress and aims.

## Additional Aspects of Parent & Family Intensive Therapeutic Work

- ❖ regular telephone/email liaison with social worker/other professionals (as needed)
- ❖ telephone/email liaison with school (as needed)
- ❖ home visits where necessary

- ❖ regular internal case discussion
- ❖ external specialist supervision
- ❖ ongoing training for staff

### ❖ support for the child's/adolescent's school

The challenges faced by teaching and support staff can be overwhelming when trying to support and teach previously traumatised children. PAC-UK provides training sessions in schools at a relatively low cost. PAC-UK's dedicated Educational Service offers additional education and school related services. Please contact [education@pac-uk.org](mailto:education@pac-uk.org)

## PAC-UK's Child & Family Service

**Professional, qualified and informed:** about children and families; about trauma, attachment, adoption, and about therapy.

**Sensitive and supportive:** with all parties in the family.

**Family focused:** all families are welcome (traditional, same sex and single parent, faith minded, disabled); children/adolescents and parents are fully involved in the sessions.

**Racially and culturally aware:** enhanced by our multi-cultural and multi-racial team.

**Directive with empathy:** core issues are addressed pro-actively and sensitively.

**Team work minded:** committed to working together with parents and professionals.

**Multi-modal:** theraplay, EMDR, DDP, NVR, AIT, SE and creative therapies involving art, music and movement are effectively combined.

**PAC-UK provides other, less intense Child & Family Services**

**PAC-UK also has:**

- a dedicated **Advice Line**
- an specialist **Education Service**
- a wide-ranging **Counselling Service** for adults who were adopted or long term fostered as children and for birth parents and other birth relatives
- an extensive **Training Programme** for professionals and for adoptive parents.

**Please visit our website**  
for details on the full range of  
our adoption/permanent placement support services:  
[www.pac-uk.org](http://www.pac-uk.org)

**Please contact our Advice Line**  
**020 7284 5879**

Monday, Tuesday & Friday 10.00am - 4.00pm  
Wednesday & Thursday 2.00pm - 7.30pm

**email: [advice@pac-uk.org](mailto:advice@pac-uk.org)**

London office enquiries: tel 020 7284 0555

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