

**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 'developmental' or 'early life 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 very much part of our expertise.

**Typical difficulties families present with**

The **Children** and **Adolescents we work with** have more often than not experienced severe and chronic trauma prior to their adoption. They may have 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 be very taxing too. 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 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 Some children are withdrawn or socially awkward; others can be overfamiliar with strangers.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 who and where they are, and whether and they can have contact with them one day. 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. The ongoing challenges often result in feelings of dismay, frustration and isolation. Some parents have resorted to unhelpful parenting strategies and others feel like giving up. When parenting as a couple, parents may find that their responses to challenging behaviours vary significantly. Parents usually wish to receive **help with understanding** their children and their own responses. They also want to receive **more effective and satisfying parenting strategies**. They all hope that family harmony will increase for all family members.

## Referrals, fees & funding

Referrals can be made by parents, social workers, other professionals. PAC-UK will write a letter requesting funding to local authorities (who will then apply to the Adoption Support Fund), 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** too, usually 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 chronic trauma (i.e. abuse, neglect, attachment breaks) within their primary relationships. They therefore need to experience and 're-learn' in a one-to-one manner that their new parents are safe and can keep them safe. Parents are supported to playfully engage with their child, as well as hear and empathically contain their individual child's most disturbing memories, feelings and thoughts, whilst also attuning to their individual 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 if needed.

## Initial consultation and assessment

To explore the presenting difficulties an initial **parent consultation** will be 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 a range of in depth 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/s only assessments** are available for parents who are seriously 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 **standardised psycho-diagnostic measures** (regarding IQ, various developmental levels, trauma, attachment, adoption and parenting, as well as ADHD, Autism and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome screening). **Projective methods** include the Story Stem Assessment Profile, Sandplay. **Play methods** include the Theraplay MIM assessment, and **semi-structured interviews** include ASI (Attachment Style Interview) and PRI (Parent Role Interview). In addition some of **our own creative methods** may be used; these include the arts, film and documentary footage and certain communication exercises. Child/Adolescent Sensory Processing and Educational assessments may be included too.

## Intensive Therapeutic Parent Work

### Aim

Parenting a previously traumatised child can be extremely challenging and it can trigger parents' own issues around adoption, attachment, loss, trauma and self-regulation. 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.

The issues that parents bring will in part determine the therapeutic process. Approximate figures re number of sessions are given below, followed by typical issues addressed and methods used.

### Number and length of sessions

We are likely to suggest a series of 4 to 16 sessions of 90 min. Further series of sessions may be recommended. The sessions usually take place on a weekly basis, at our London Office, with one therapist (though on occasions we will recommend 2 therapists). However, variations on this are possible.

### Typical issues addressed & methods used

Sessions are carefully prepared and likely to include the following:

- ❖ parents may be 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 may be asked to fill in some **standardised psycho-diagnostic measures** regarding their current psychological 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 **Somatic Experiencing**, parents 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;
- ❖ the **NVR** (Non-Violent Resistance) approach may be taught;
- ❖ therapeutic **parenting strategies** are taught and supported:
- ❖ **home tasks** may be given (such as undertaking certain activities with each other and the children, listening to a parenting CD, looking up therapeutic parenting strategies online, reading therapeutic children's books with their children, 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, theraplay/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 throughout. PAC-UK's intensive therapeutic family work therefore assumes the presence and commitment of at least one positive attachment figure, and only one child in the family is worked with intensively at any one time.

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 are likely to suggest 12 to 16 sessions of 1.5 hours each. Further series of sessions may be recommended. The sessions usually take place on a weekly basis, at our London Office, with one therapist (though on occasions we will recommend 2 therapists). However, variations on this are possible.

### 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 likely to 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 processing and integration**;
- ❖ 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, drama, play, 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;
- ❖ **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 therapist 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 and adoption related issues, about therapy.

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

**Family focused:** all families - traditional, same sex and single parents, religious - are welcome; children/adolescents and their 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:** our interventions are informed by Theraplay®, NVR, DDP, EMDR, play therapy, somatic experiencing, creative therapies, other.

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

**PAC-UK also has:**

- a dedicated **Advice Line**
- a specialist **Education Service and Advice Line:** Tel 020 7284 5879 Wed & Thu 10.00am–12.00pm (excl school holidays)
- 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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PAC-UK is a member of CASA (Consortium for Adoption Support Agencies).