

**PAC-UK Child and Family Service**

## **Assessment & Therapeutic Service**

for  
**Adoptive Families**  
**Special Guardian Families**

other families with  
permanently placed **Children & Adolescents**



**PAC-UK**



### **A specialist therapeutic service**

PAC-UK's Child & Family Service offers a specialist therapeutic service for families with adopted or otherwise permanently placed children/adolescents. We have particular expertise in providing consultation, assessment and therapy to families whose children experienced 'developmental' or 'early life complex trauma' (i.e. early life, chronic abuse and/or 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. Addressing general adoption issues and questions, as well as adoptive identity challenges is of course part of our expertise too.

### **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, hyperactive, defiant and aggressive; their emotional responses vary between highly reactive and flat/detached; they can appear as depressed and they may self-harm. Many 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 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 Some children are withdrawn or socially awkward; others can be overfamiliar with strangers.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 part or part of a multi-racial family in other ways.

The **parents/carers we work with** 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/carers have resorted to unhelpful parenting strategies, and others feel like giving up. When parenting as a couple, parents/carers may find that their responses to challenging behaviours vary significantly. Parents and carers 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

Adoptive parents, special guardians, other carers, social workers, and other professionals can make referrals. PAC-UK will write a letter to the family's Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) requesting funding; the RAA then applies to the National Adoption Support Fund (ASF), or other potential funding bodies. Private funding is welcome too.

## Overall therapeutic approach

PAC-UK's Child and Family Service actively involves the parents/carers in their therapeutic family work, where possible. Therapeutic **parent/carer sessions** will typically take place first. The subsequent therapeutic **family sessions** involve **parent/s/carer/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 intervention). 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/carers are safe, and can keep them safe. Parents/carers are supported to playfully engage with their child, as well as hear and empathically contain their individual child's 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/carers in sessions is essential with regard to enhancing the child's/adolescent's relationships within the family. However, for some children and adolescents, **individual sessions** will be most appropriate and will therefore be offered.

## Initial consultation and assessment

To explore and undertake an initial assessment regarding the presenting difficulties, an initial **parent consultation** will be offered to parents/carers. Recommendations with regard to some practical parenting strategies will be made, as well as 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 may be 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 or Carer/s only assessments** are available for parents/carers who are seriously struggling in their parenting and/or within their relationship as a parenting team (in two-parent families). Assessments with regard to particular issues may also be available **pre-adoption/pre-placement**.

Our **assessment methods** include reading of all relevant background information, interview and family observation, as well as questionnaires. **Play methods** may include the Theraplay MIM assessment. 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 via involving a third party provider.

## Intensive Therapeutic Parent/Carer Work

### Aim

The aim of PAC-UK's intensive therapeutic parent/carer work is to support parents and carers in developing therapeutic parenting skills that are suited to their particular child's needs. A range of practical ways of addressing the daily parenting challenges will be explored, practised and reviewed. Parenting a previously traumatised child can be extremely challenging and it can trigger parents' and carers' own issues around attachment, separation, loss, trauma and self-regulation. Some of these issues may need to be addressed too, to help parents'/carers' understand their own reactions to their children. 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 and in their attachment relationship to the parents.

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

### Number and length of sessions

We will suggest one or more sets of anything between 4 to 22 sessions of 60, 75 or 90 min. The sessions usually take place on a weekly basis at our offices, or online, with one therapist. However, variations 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;
- ❖ using the **arts** (painting, miniature figures, letter writing, etc.) parents are supported in addressing **the most pressing of the family challenges** as well as **some of their personal life** stories relating to attachment, loss, trauma and self-regulation;
- ❖ 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, as well as their child**;
- ❖ a range of other practical **therapeutic parenting strategies** are taught and reviewed; **changes parents/carers need to make** in their daily lives, to meet their child's needs will be addressed;
- ❖ the **NVR** (Non-Violent Resistance) approach may be taught/consolidated;
- ❖ parents are supported in gaining confidence and practical skills in addressing **adoption related questions** and **feelings** their child may have;
- ❖ with two-parent families, some **separate sessions** for the parents may take place to address certain parenting issues individually.
- ❖ **home tasks** may be given (such as undertaking certain activities with each other and the children, listening/watching parenting audio/video clips, reading up on therapeutic parenting, reading specific 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, healthier attachments, 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. (Blaustein, M. and Kinniburgh, K. (2010) - Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents. New York: Guilford Press.)

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 history**, incl. traumas and attachment breaks. This process will also help the child to **develop a more coherent Life story narrative** and **sense of identity**. A number of different methods will be used (see below). Where possible, the child/adolescent is emotionally supported by their adoptive parents/carers throughout the intervention. PAC-UK's intensive therapeutic family work therefore assumes the commitment - and presence in the sessions - of at least one parental attachment figure.

The issues the child/adolescent brings, and their way of engaging with us, will in part determine the therapeutic process. **For some children individual sessions are needed and will be offered**. Approximate number and length of sessions are given below, followed by typical issues addressed and methods used.

### Number and length of sessions

We are likely to suggest 8 to 22 sessions of 60, 75, or 90 min each. Further series of sessions may be recommended. The sessions usually take place on a weekly basis, at our offices, or online, with one therapist. However, variations are possible.

### Typical issues addressed & methods used

Parents are usually prepared for intensive therapeutic family work by undertaking some therapeutic parent work first.

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/carers and child are introduced to and supported in **Theraplay® informed games** 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 function and dysfunction of the child's **behaviours will be addressed**;
- ❖ the child is supported to process and integrate **past traumatic experiences** through **art, play, EMDR and DDP informed practice** (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy)
- ❖ the family is supported in addressing **adoption related questions, beliefs and feelings**;
- ❖ the child is helped to explore and positively develop their **cultural and ethnic identity**;
- ❖ the child is supported throughout to **use their parents/carers as a safe base**;

### **Report & network meeting**

A **summary report** of our comprehensive assessment and/or intensive therapeutic work is written at the end of the assessment and/or intervention. A **network meeting** is arranged to discuss assessment results and/or review progress of the intensive intervention; a network meeting usually includes the parents/carers, the family's social worker (or commissioning agency), the therapist from PAC-UK, and any other relevant party.

### **Monitoring of progress & outcomes**

Pre- and post-intervention **questionnaires** with regard to emotional, behavioural and attachment difficulties, as well as parenting are used. Both parents/carers and children/adolescents are asked to give feedback on the therapeutic intervention. Where needed additional **review meetings** may be scheduled to revise/adjust the direction of the therapy.

## **Additional Aspects of Parent & Family Intensive Therapeutic Work**

- ❖ regular telephone/email liaison with parents/carers
- ❖ telephone/email liaison with social worker/other professionals (as needed)
- ❖ telephone/email liaison with school (where appropriate)
- ❖ home visits where necessary
  
- ❖ regular internal case discussion
- ❖ external specialist supervision
- ❖ ongoing training for staff
- ❖ awareness and training around safeguarding

## **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/carers 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/carers and professionals.

**PAC-UK's Child and Family Service also provides:**

- **EAP: Enhancing Adoptive Parenting programme:** a 10 to 15 x 1.5 hrs parenting programme
- **EIS: Early Support Intervention:** a short intervention for new adopters/carers
- **NVR (Non Violent Resistance):** groups for parents/carers whose children present violent, aggressive, destructive behaviour: 10 x 1.5 hours, plus follow-up
- a specialist **Education Advice Line (for London, Essex, Suffolk and Thurrock)**

**In addition, PAC-UK offers:**

- a dedicated **Advice Line**
- a **counselling service for adults who were adopted (or long term fostered) as children**
- a **counselling service for birth parents and other birth relatives**
- a **training programme for professionals and for adoptive parents**

**Please visit our website**  
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