



## **Therapeutic Parenting- An Overview-**

### ***Evidence and research***

**Therapeutic Parenting** is the name commonly given to describe a style of parenting which is based on the pioneering work, research and clinical experience of some of the most eminent names in the field of child psychology: Dan Hughes, Dan Seigel, Margot Sunderland, Sue Gerhardt and Kim Golding to name a very few.

**A full summary of the evidence base for DDP, which underpins Therapeutic Parenting was published by the British Psychological Society, Summer 2014. [“Dyadic Developmental Practice \(DDP\): A framework for Therapeutic Intervention and Parenting”](#) briefly describes the model before discussing the range of ways that DDP is influencing practice in the UK. The evidence base is contained within the publication, which is also available online. (See bibliography below)**

Therapeutic Parenting techniques have evolved over the last decade as technology has allowed us to literally see and understand the brain better. As the field of neuroscience has given us greater understanding into the structure of the developing brain (from conception onwards) together with how this structure uses sensory input and experiences enabling the individual to build a picture of their world and how to approach it in order to survive; so there have been rapid changes and developments in effective strategies to parent children who have suffered developmental trauma and who are only able to connect to the world in a stressed and fear-based way. From early 2000, Dan Hughes together with like-minded therapists and scientists across the world developed the first ideas of attachment-based relational strategies which used John Bowlby’s seminal work on attachment, extended and informed by new information about neuroscience and the role of attachment as an architect of the infant brain. Thus, over the last 12 years, we have seen the emergence of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, (DDP) and strategies such as PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) as well as Brain-Based Parenting and nurturing techniques such as Theraplay, Mindsight, and connection which have fed into a rich resource base which encourages parents to put the relationship first, creating an emotional attachment which gradually allows the child to learn new ways to understand the world and start to engage in a positive way. This is **not** to say that the parent becomes the therapist, however.

Therapeutic Parenting works alongside therapy or stands alone, but the relationship remains that of a parent and child.

### **Flexible, Specific and Appropriate**

Carers engaging in Therapeutic Parenting techniques are empowered by learning strategies, narratives and responses which they are able to incorporate into a personal “toolkit” which they then use appropriately to meet the specific needs of their children. It is a responsive rather than a didactic approach giving information and suggestions - “tools” - which are then selected according to the current needs of the family.

### **Developmental Awareness**

As a result of therapeutic studies and clinical observations, as well as the observations of adoptive, foster families and birth parents where there has been developmental trauma (such as neglect, abuse, repeated hospitalisations, in-utero addiction, etc) it has become apparent that the physical age does not necessarily correlate to the emotional social or cognitive age of the child or young person. Often, stress will mean a regression to behaviour of the developmental age. This is sometimes hard to accept, but we can think of it using the metaphor of a foundation on a house. Attachment provides the secure base enabling optimal growth of the child. If the attachment foundation is inadequate or absent, the resulting structure will be shaky and insecure until it is underpinned. In the child’s case, this happens within the context of a secure and loving environment where they are supported to develop new ideas and adopt new strategies. However, this takes time, patience and endless repetition to be effective, as learning needs to be scaffolded and supported in very small steps.

### **What Age can benefit from Therapeutic Parenting?**

Therapeutic parenting happens naturally in a household where there is commitment and connection with the infant – because essentially it is the bonding that takes place leading to attunement and co-regulation and the predictable events that occur that builds the secure base that allows a child to (by around age 3-4) to manage standard parenting and discipline. Therapeutic parenting is an approach which focusses on the child and their experience to recreate the early attuned relationship. There is **no age** which is inappropriate for this approach.

### **Standard Parenting Approach and the Traumatized Child**

As stated previously, in a house where “good enough” parenting is taking place, there is a commitment and connection to the child. The new born is at the centre of the carers’ world. Their mutual delight in the discovery of each other leads to a close bond where the child is regulated by the adult, experiences love, safety, comfort and has their needs met.

Life is **predictable**, and adults are **predictable**, and the world is wonderful. In this case, standard parenting choices such as reward charts, illogical consequences, time out, naughty step etc work **because the relationship remains intact and secure**. The child has developed a self-image based on (mainly) positive feedback and his world has a predictable structure and rules. After a disruption, the relationship is repaired, and the security of the child; although shaken up; returns to a relaxed and happy state.

By contrast, the traumatised child has had no predictability, has no feeling of attunement or comfort, and faced with standard parenting will default to a highly stressed and dysregulated state where all their worst fears about themselves as an awful unlovable child are true. A different strategy is necessary to reach out to these children and enable them to experience connection within a secure relationship. These strategies – PACE, structure, routine, predictability and empathy – are the essence of Therapeutic Parenting.

For further information about Therapeutic Parenting please contact:

The National Association of Therapeutic Parents

[www.naotp.org.uk](http://www.naotp.org.uk)

[enquiries@naotp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naotp.org.uk)

## Bibliography

[Dyadic Developmental Practice \(DDP\): A framework for Therapeutic Intervention and Parenting](#)

This is a publication of the Division of Clinical Psychology Faculty for Children, Young People and Their Families. The review's mission is to promote and share good quality clinical writing and research within the field of child, adolescent and family clinical psychology by publishing annual themed editions expressing a range of views and ideas and research around a pertinent topic. The authors of this paper are all Chartered/Registered Psychologists, Therapists and DDP Practitioners and Consultants who either work in the NHS or Independent Practice.



[Edwina Grant](#), [Geraldine Casswell](#), [Julie Hudson](#), [Kim S. Golding](#), [Pam Tower](#)

Publisher: British Psychological Society; No 2 Summer 2014 ed. (Sep 2014)

ISBN: 2052-0956

Becker-Weidman, A & Shell, D (2005) *“Creating Capacity for Attachment - Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy in treatment of Trauma-Attachment Disorders”*

Cozolino, L (2006) *“The Neuroscience of Human Relationships”*

Hughes, D (2006) *“Building the bonds of Attachment”*

Hughes D (2009) *“Attachment Focussed Parenting”*

Hughes, D & Baylin J (2012) *“Brain Based Parenting – the neuroscience of caregiving for Healthy Attachment”*

Gerhardt, S (2004) *“Why Love Matters”*

Seigel, D (2011) *“Mindsight”*

**Naish S 2016** *“Therapeutic Parenting in a Nutshell”*

NATP Ltd t/a The National Association of Therapeutic Parents

B3 The Priory, Long Street

Dursley, Gloucestershire

GL11 4HR

[www.natp.com](http://www.natp.com)

01453 519000

Company registration number 10705603

Recognised Organisation of Centre of Excellence in Child Trauma

## NATP 41 JM and SN Therapeutic Parenting – An overview

NATP Ltd t/a The National Association of Therapeutic Parents

B3 The Priory, Long Street

Dursley, Gloucestershire

GL11 4HR

[www.naotp.com](http://www.naotp.com)

01453 519000

Company registration number 10705603

Recognised Organisation of Centre of Excellence in Child Trauma