



Therapy for children with histories of trauma and neglect.

Written by Sarah Dillon ©

Triangulation is a very significant risk when working with children who have a history of trauma. I have learned this the hard way!! A number of years ago, I had to 'legally' report a disclosure of assault by the foster parent which I knew was completely untrue! Although I stated my concerns, the investigation understandably had to go ahead causing major disruption and distress for all involved. The foster parents resigned, and the child had to move home after living with these excellent parents for over six years! Since this incident, I have NEVER and would NEVER work alone with such a child again. The risk greatly outweighs any positives of working alone with a child who has a trauma background. Also, the child needs a healthy attachment relationship with their caregiver and unmet developmental needs to be met in order to heal. The therapist CANNOT provide this. The role of the therapist is firstly to help the parent/carer to understand why the child behaves in the way they do and in particular, the role of shame. They are also supported in understanding and diluting their own internal triggers in relation to the child and to embed their understanding of Therapeutic Parenting. I use this analogy, let's say I needed a new arm as I'd lost one. I go to a lovely therapist and she gives me a leg. I've still got a new limb but certainly NOT the one I need. The parent/carer becomes almost a co-therapist outside of the actual sessions.

Any direct work with the child is in the presence of the carer/parent. The aim of the therapy is to help the child feel heard and understood, develop a narrative for their trauma and access their carer for comfort and co-regulation. It is this attuned intersubjective relationship which regulates the child enough to begin to rewire their brain. DDP with Theraplay and EMDR combined is in my opinion (and many others), an amazing therapeutic

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approach which has been significantly successful for children with a history of trauma and or neglect. Anything else may help the child to develop their emotional vocabulary and self-awareness but will NOT heal their trauma. This requires years of Therapeutic Parenting as the foundation with the therapeutic intervention as support.