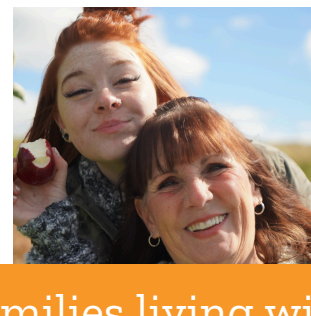
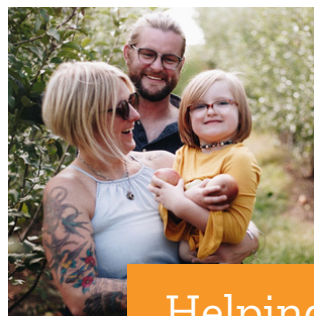




## Adoption & Special Guardianship Services for Commissioning Authorities and Agencies



Helping children and families living with trauma.  
Nurturing attachment. Transforming lives.

# Introducing Families Empowered

Children and their families are always at the heart of our work. With warmth, understanding and expertise, we offer effective, attachment-focussed therapeutic interventions and training services to transform the lives of children and families living with trauma.

## Driven by dedication and experience

Families Empowered is led by Deborah Sharratt, Director of Therapeutic Services and company founder.



Deborah is a DDP Practitioner (becoming certified) and holds an MA in Advanced Social Work. She has over 25 years' experience across children's services, with a specialism in fostering and adoption.

At Families Empowered, Deborah has built a team of skilled practitioners, with an extensive shared background in social work and children's services and immersed in the principles of an attachment-focussed therapeutic approach.

We are proud to be recognised as an 'Outstanding Provider' of Adoption Support Services by Ofsted (March 2023).

## Nurturing therapies for families in trauma

Our therapeutic services are informed by the principles of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy), developed by clinical psychologist, Dan Hughes, alongside research in neurobiology.

DDP is a family therapy model that was developed for the treatment of children who have experienced abuse and neglect and who demonstrate ongoing problems related to attachment and trauma.

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that helps a child to feel safe and is based on how nurturing parents connect with a very young infant. All interactions within the therapeutic relationship are based on PACE.

“ We work with families to help them develop insight, build resilience and strengthen relationships – transforming family life time and again. ”

Deborah Sharratt

“ Simply thank you. We found the whole experience enriching, challenging and useful. Deborah is very professional, wise, kind and empathic – not always an easy combination to find in professionals. ”

Adoptive parent

### Flexible, reliable and responsive

We focus on building trusted and supportive relationships with all our clients, whether they are service commissioners or service users, with an emphasis on reliability, flexibility and responsiveness.

We understand the parameters and challenges within social care and work collaboratively with our commissioners to develop effective, timely and tailored service proposals that represent excellent value.

Our services can be offered in person, online or a hybrid model combining the best of both.

“ I have worked closely with Families Empowered on one of my most challenging and complex cases and they have offered such amazing support to both the family and to the professional network. ”

Senior Social Worker, Hertfordshire

### Transformative care

‘Life changing’ is how our families have described our support.

From therapeutic groups and individual interventions to bespoke training for parents or social work professionals, Families Empowered never lose sight of what matters most: the children and families we can help through nurturing attachment and rebuilding trust to transform lives.



## Meet the team



Liz Stirrat

Therapeutic Practitioner



Jo Hines

Therapeutic Practitioner



Sonya Harris

Therapeutic Practitioner



Anne Cunningham

Therapeutic Practitioner



Hilary Walshe

Therapeutic Practitioner



Lucy Watt

Integrative Counsellor



Anna Harris

Therapeutic Practitioner



Tara Davey

Administrator



## Therapeutic services

Our attachment-focussed therapeutic services are based on the principles of DDP and PACE parenting, and aim to build trust and create a sense of safety for the child.

We provide individual, family and group therapeutic interventions, all of which are ASF-compliant. Services can be offered either in person or online for flexibility and convenience.

Identifying which therapeutic intervention will most benefit the child and their family isn't always straightforward. Our experts are always on hand to help you determine the best approach.



DDP-Led Family Therapy

Theraplay®-Informed Therapy

Early Placement Support:  
Attachment-Focussed Therapy

Psychodynamic Therapy

Therapeutic Parenting Support

Therapeutic Life Story Work

Direct Work with Children

Nurturing Attachment Groups



## DDP-Led Family Therapy

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, developed by Dan Hughes, is based on an understanding of attachment and intersubjective relationships.

An initial meeting with parents and guardians would identify the structure of the sessions, focusing on working with the adults first before introducing the children to the therapeutic space.

This intervention is ideally suited for parents or guardians:

- who are struggling with challenging behaviour or to connect with their child
- are deemed by their social worker to be in blocked care\*
- where there are clear indications of childhood trauma
- where there is risk of placement breakdown.

\*Blocked care describes a reactive parenting style focused on a child's most adverse or negative traits. It happens when a parent/guardian is constantly stressed or overwhelmed, triggering their survival-brain or limbic system to react.

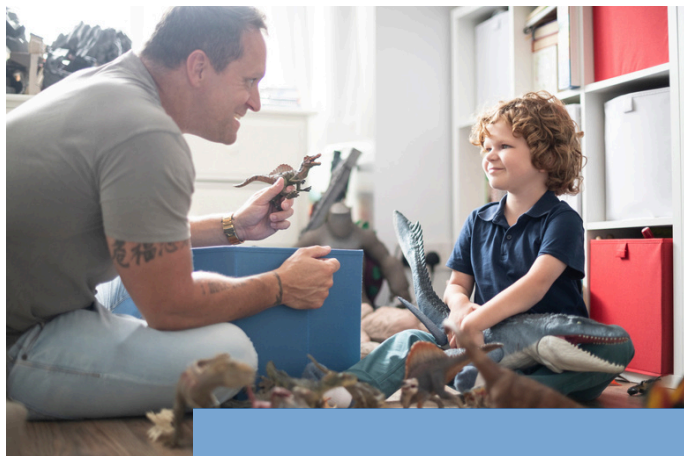
## DDP-Led Therapy support can include:

- Initial consultation with parent/guardian and referring social worker
- Completion and discussion of the Thinking About Your Child form at the beginning and end of the intervention
- A minimum of 20 family therapy sessions
- Midpoint and/or final consultations with the family and referring social worker
- Attendance at additional meetings if required
- Written report/s by therapist at the mid and/or end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations in the final report
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.

“As a family in crisis, the therapist responded to our needs immediately and held us as a family throughout. We were able to understand the issues and develop strategies which we use today.”

Adoptive parent



## Theraplay®-Informed Therapy

Theraplay®-Informed Therapy is a fun and engaging child and family therapy for building attachment, self esteem and trust through natural patterns of play.

It is based on a playful, healthy interaction between parent and child and focuses on the four essential qualities found in parent and child relationships: engagement, nurture, structure and challenge.

Theraplay®-Informed Therapy is ideally suited for families where

- parents or guardians feel disconnected from their children,
- where bonding and attachment between is noticeably impaired,
- where there are clear indications of attachment difficulties or
- where there is a risk of placement breakdown.

## Theraplay®-Informed Therapy support can include:

- Initial consultation with parent/guardian and referring social worker
- MIM assessment by therapist
- Completion and discussion of the Thinking About Your Child form at the beginning and end of the intervention
- A minimum of 20 therapy sessions, including review sessions with parent
- Midpoint and final consultations with the family and referring social worker
- Attendance at addition meetings if required
- Written report/s by therapist at the mid and/or end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations in the end report
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.

The therapist will undertake a Marschak Interaction Method (MIM) assessment prior to the start of the therapy, which will highlight the needs of the family and provide better focus to the Theraplay®-informed interventions.

Theraplay® is a registered service mark of The Theraplay® Institute, Chicago, IL, USA

## Marschak Interaction Method (MIM) Assessments

The Marschak Interaction Method (MIM) is a structured technique for observing and assessing the overall quality and nature of relationships between caregivers and child/ren, using the four key qualities Theraplay has identified: structure, engagement, nurture and challenge.

The assessment will evaluate the caregivers' capacity in the following areas:

### STRUCTURE

Set limits and provide an appropriately ordered environment

### ENGAGEMENT

Engage the child in interaction while being attuned to the child's state

### NURTURE

Meet the child's needs for attention, soothing and care

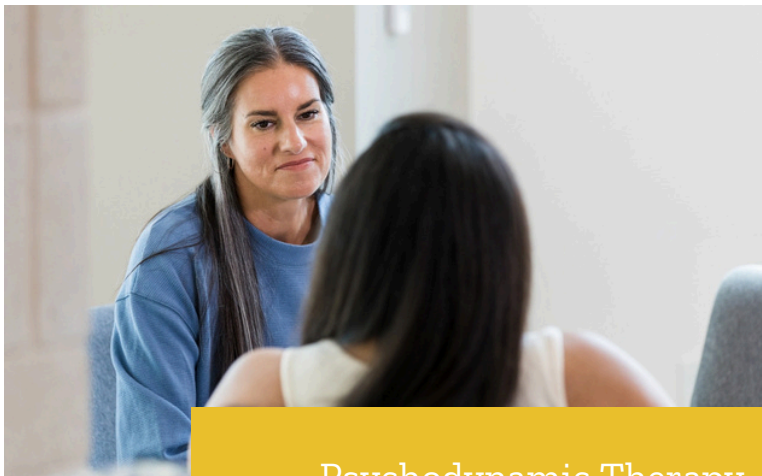
### CHALLENGE

Support and encourage the child's efforts to achieve at a developmentally appropriate level.

The child's ability to respond to the caregivers' efforts is also assessed.

The MIM is usually completed prior to the start of Theraplay® but can be a stand-alone assessment to inform planning for other therapeutic interventions.





## Psychodynamic Therapy

Psychodynamic Therapy aims to bring the unconscious mind into consciousness, helping individuals to experience and understand their true, deep-rooted feelings in order to resolve them.

It takes the view that our unconscious holds onto painful feelings and memories, which are too difficult for the conscious mind to process.

Psychodynamic Therapy is ideally suited to parents and guardians who have their own issues of loss or childhood trauma which is impacting on their ability to meet the needs of their child.

This is an in-depth therapy offered as a minimum of 20 sessions. The therapist would offer the referring social worker a midpoint consultation and may sometimes recommend further sessions.

## Psychodynamic Therapy support can include:

- Initial consultation with parent/guardian and referring social worker
- Completion and discussion of the Thinking About Your Child form at the start and end of the intervention
- 20 therapy sessions
- Midpoint and final consultations with the family and referring social worker
- Attendance at additional meetings if required
- Written report/s by therapist at the mid and/or end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations in the end report
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.

“It's a chance to offload in a safe space and be listened to – with your thoughts and feelings reflected back to you with sensitivity. It helps you take ownership of the direction you want to go in.”

Adoptive parent



## Therapeutic Parenting Support

Our individual therapeutic parenting support follows the format of a Nurturing Attachment Group.

It helps parents and guardians to understand therapeutic parenting using PACE, developed by Dan Hughes, and the House Parenting Model, developed by Kim Golding.

These sessions aim to build confidence in parenting a troubled child therapeutically in order to support the child as they learn to trust adults again.

This is a 20-session complete therapeutic programme which includes the 'Thinking about my child' questionnaire and discussion sessions to open and conclude the programme.

## Therapeutic Parenting Support can include:

- Initial consultation with parent/guardian and referring social worker
- Completion and discussion of the Thinking About Your Child form at the beginning and end of the intervention
- 10-20 therapeutic sessions
- Midpoint and final consultations with the family and referring social worker
- Attendance at additional meetings if required
- Written report/s by therapist at the mid and/or end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations in the end report
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.

“

Even though the PACE dialogue seems long, it's worth the investment of time for the outcome and benefits to the relationship.

Adoptive parent

”



### Early Placement Support: Attachment-Focussed Therapy

Early placement support is designed for new adopters and guardians in the early weeks and months following placement, when the risk of breakdown is higher.

It helps parents and guardians to link childhood trauma and children's behaviour, whilst understanding their own triggers and how they impact on parenting. It explores blocked care and advises on preventative strategies.

In later sessions the practitioner helps parents and guardians to develop a therapeutic mindset through understanding and implementing PACE.

This is a 22-session intervention, including the 'Thinking About Your Child' questionnaire and review sessions. The final report may identify recommended ongoing support for the family.

### Attachment-Focused Therapy support can include:

- Initial consultation with parent/guardian and referring social worker
- Completion and discussion of the Thinking About Your Child form at the beginning and end of the intervention
- 10-20 therapeutic sessions
- Midpoint and final consultations with the family and referring social worker
- Attendance at addition meetings if required
- Written report/s by therapist at the mid and/or end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations in the end report
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.

“

I was able to develop clear reflection, build inner resilience and repair the emotionally broken pieces within us so that each of us can live a joyful life.

”

Adoptive parent





### Therapeutic Life Story Work

Understanding our identity is the way we define ourselves. For children who are living in alternative families their life history is often fragmented, leaving them lost, with a confused identity and no sense of belonging.

Therapeutic Life Story Work from Families Empowered helps children to talk and learn about their life experiences with the help of a trusted adult.

We work carefully to support children in the creation and acceptance of their own unique narrative.

This powerful intervention follows the Richard Rose model but with a specific attachment focus: we underpin our work with Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and model the values of PACE throughout.

### Life Story Work Therapy support can include:

- Initial consultation with the parent/guardian and referring social worker
- Extensive intervention preparation and information gathering
- Completion and discussion of the Thinking About Your Child form at the beginning and end of the intervention
- 16 sessions of therapeutic support
- Midpoint and/or Endpoint consultations with family and social worker
- Attendance at addition meetings if required
- Written report end of the intervention, with analysis and any recommendations
- Creation of a unique Life Story Book the child is fully happy with – provided in hard copy and electronic format
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.







## Direct Work with Children

Our direct work with children enables us to build relationships carefully and give them a safe, therapeutic space to talk about big feelings and difficult emotions.

Underpinned by Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and using the values of PACE, we support children to express themselves and help them to make sense of their world.

We use a variety of tools to support our work, for example: storytelling, drawing and other creative activities, work with puppets, games and worksheets to explore emotions.

We are able to support children who are struggling with a range of feelings such as anger, anxiety and sadness, which they may be left with following relational trauma, abuse, loss, and separation.

## Direct Work with Children can include:

- Initial consultation with the parent/guardian and referring social worker
- In-person Introduction Meeting with child with parent/guardian
- 1 parents/guardians session, including the Thinking About Your Child form at the beginning and end of the intervention
- 10 -20 sessions of therapeutic direct work
- Mid and/or end point consultation with social worker and parents/guardians
- Written report by therapist at the end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations
- Attendance at additional meetings if required
- Feedback questionnaire completed by family and shared with the commissioning team.

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family.



## Nurturing Attachment Groups

Nurturing Attachment Groups (NAGs) are therapeutic intervention group programmes (developed by Kim Golding) designed to support, guide and build insight for parents and guardians of children who experience attachment difficulties following trauma and abuse.

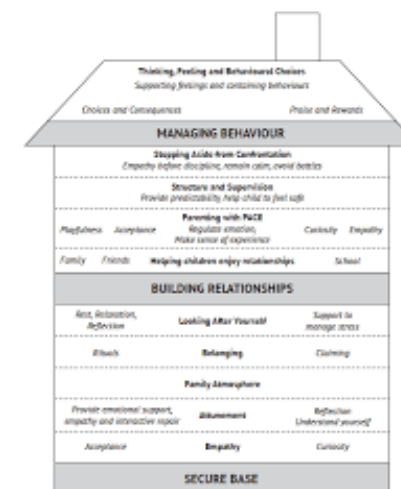
Based on attachment-led research, and underpinned by DDP and PACE, we translate theory into real-life through practical discussion, videos and therapeutic activities.

Participants value sharing experiences and ideas in a safe space with others who may understand what they are going through in a way that family and friends are not always able to. The groups provide a social aspect for families who can often feel isolated.

The groups can be oriented either to special guardians or adoptive parents for greater relevance and support.

The course is delivered across three modules of six weeks and follows Golding's 'house model of parenting':

- Exploring a safe base
- Building relationships with PACE
- Managing behaviour



Once enrolled, each group member has access to support, guidance and consultation from their therapeutic practitioners during the 18 weekly sessions.

Effectiveness and impact is measured through session feedback forms, end of module reports made by the lead therapeutic practitioner and a 'Thinking about Your Child' evaluation at the beginning and end of the programme. These are shared with commissioners.

“ This group is amazing. It's been really helpful and has led to positive changes in my parenting and the development of my children. ”

Adoptive parent



## Nurturing Attachment Group (NAGs) Programme Outline

The NAGs programme is delivered across 18 sessions, split into 3 thematic modules of 6 sessions. Each module runs in a 6-week block within the school term and is followed by a short break.

Each group can hold a maximum of 12 participants.

Sessions are 3 hours duration with a 15 minute comfort break.

“ Just a big thank you for giving me the tools required to gain insight into a child's world and helping me, my boys and my home to be much calmer and happier. ”  
Special Guardian

The programme includes:

- Onboarding: telephone introduction with each participant to learn more about them and address any concerns ahead of the programme start
- 18 sessions across 3 modules exploring attachment theory, therapeutic parenting, PACE, mind-mindedness, neurobiology, rebuilding trust, resolving blocked care and understanding and managing behaviour.\*
- Module handbook and reflection diary
- Optional weekend 'partner' session (one per module) for those unable to attend the weekly programme. These will cover key insights of each module to facilitate wider family support
- Evaluation and reporting, including feedback forms, end of module reports and 'Thinking About Your Child' questionnaire.

\*For a full summary of programme content please contact us.



## Training services

Families Empowered have developed attachment-focussed, specialist training for adopters/special guardians and social work professionals.

Delivered with a therapeutic approach, our training services offer effective and targeted support for families and professionals.

Training sessions can be delivered both in-person and online for maximum flexibility.

Each session is fully evaluated to provide feedback and quality assurance for commissioners and our team.



Therapeutic Mindset

Blocked Care

Introduction to  
Attachment Theory

Transitions and Endings  
for Children

Managing Challenging  
Behaviour with PACE)

Therapeutic Life Story Work

Play Techniques to Support  
Therapeutic Parenting



## Developing a Therapeutic Mindset

1 day / In person or online

This training course is suitable for adopters and guardians who are either in assessment or who have an imminent or very recent placement with a child or children.

It gives an introduction to PACE, a therapeutic model of parenting, and an overview of early childhood trauma.

The adopters and guardians will learn how developmental trauma affects the child's emotional and social development and behaviour and gain insight into the therapeutic interventions they can use with the child.



## Understanding and Recovering from Blocked Care

1 day / In person or online

This training course is suitable for adopters and guardians at any stage of development or experience.

The course offers adopters and guardians a reminder of the trauma history and loss of the children who come into the care of adopters and guardians and how blocked trust and blocked care develops.

The training will look at the connectedness of the brain and body, which guides emotional and physical responses, using both the 'bottom up/top down' theory of brain circuitry and the Polyvagal theory of the role of the amygdala and the hippocampus in connecting the brain to the heart.

Adopters and guardians will gain an understanding of blocked care and how it affects a well-meaning carer, as well as looking at how to prevent and recover from blocked care.

## Introduction to Attachment Theory

1 day / In person or online

This training course is suitable for adopters and guardians at any stage particularly where they would like to develop a better understanding of attachment.

The course covers Attachment Theory and its links to child development and neurobiology, looking at the factors which may contribute to the development of a secure or insecure attachment and how this impacts on emotional, cognitive and social development.

Parents and guardians will learn how a deeper understanding of Attachment Theory can be used in the adoption of a strengths-based, non-labelling and non pathologising approach to caring for children and how attachment theory helps us to understand the experiences of both children and adults.

## Transitions and Endings for Children with Relational Trauma

1 day / In person or online

This course is suitable for adopters and guardians at any stage and is based on the work of Kate Cairns and Eileen Fursland, through the lens of a DDP and PACE approach.

We will explore the effect of change and consider the impact of endings, transitions and micro transitions on children who have experienced early relational loss and trauma.

Parents and guardians will build their knowledge and understanding of the behaviour of traumatised children and how it may affect the chances of successful transitions or positive endings. We will also examine the ongoing impact on caregivers.

Parents and guardians will be supported to increase their confidence in helping children to manage transitions and endings using a PACE-based approach.



## Managing Challenging Behaviour (PACE with Discipline)

1 day / In person or online

This training course is suited for adopters and guardians at any stage of development.

Parents and guardians will understand how to use PACE to get closer to their child and manage behaviour.

They will gain a deeper understanding of how early life relational trauma can impact on the developing maturity of the child and to respond to their child based on emotional maturity and not chronological age.

We will explore how to use structure and supervision to manage behaviour, learn techniques to de-escalate anger (the volcano model) and how to understand and respond to coercive patterns of behaviour.

## Therapeutic Life Story Work

1 day / In person only

This course is based on the work of Richard Rose but with a DDP-led approach. It is offered in-person only due to the interactive nature of the training.

Adopters and guardians will explore ways to address difficult issues from the past with traumatised children, build confidence to understand triggers, support a framework for meaningful therapeutic Life Story Work and how to use this work as a source of information for a child when considering challenging stories from their past.

The training will also support parents and guardians in their ability to try non-verbal and creative arts to help children express difficult and complex feelings.

## Play Techniques to Support Therapeutic Parenting

1 day / In person or online

This training course is designed for adopters and guardians who would like to learn more about developing attachment, self esteem and trust through natural patterns of play.

Therapeutic play techniques were developed for families where parents or guardians feel disconnected from their child. It is based on a playful, healthy interaction between parent/guardian and child and focuses on the four essential qualities of engagement, nurture, structure and challenge found in parent/carer and child relationships.

Parents and guardians will discover how to use therapeutic play techniques to build connections with their child, how to recreate positive baby experiences for children who missed out on early loving care and how playful and responsive care can help their child build a secure attachment and positive view of themselves and others.





## Contact Us

Our friendly, professional team is here to help with all enquiries. For further information about any of our therapy or training services, please contact Wendy Edgell.



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