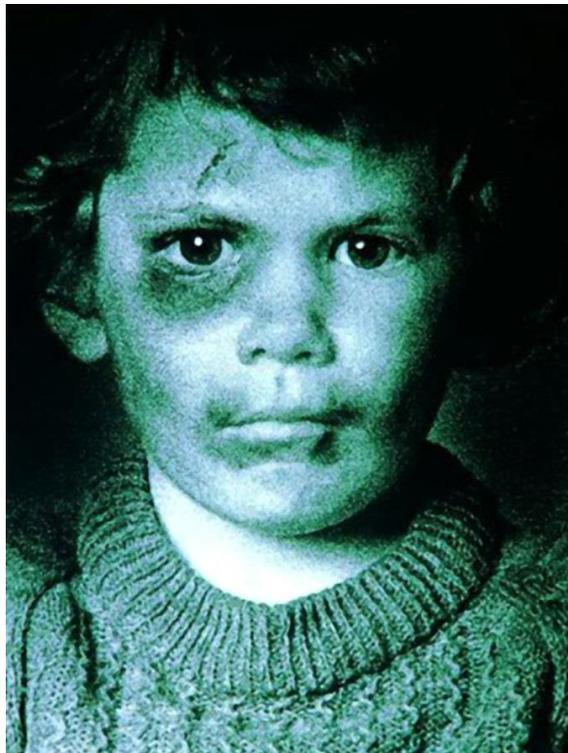




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The impact of Significant Harm Fact Sheet





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Most children placed for adoption today have been removed from their birth families because of “significant harm”. The significant harm they have suffered causes significant harm to their subsequent development.

- Brown and Ward (2013) in their extensive review of literature on the impact of maltreatment on child development and outcomes, highlight the long term developmental, social, emotional and attachment related difficulties linked to maltreatment.
- A consensus exists based on longitudinal studies of mental health outcomes for children adopted from public care, that for maltreated children who are adopted there remains a risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties (Rushton, 2004; Tarren Sweeney, 2010).
- Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) highlights that these can impact long term outcomes across the life span, including: health, social prospects, mental health difficulties, criminality and violence. (Bellis, Hughes, Hardcastle, Ashton, Ford, Quigg & Davies 2017).
- Results from the research carried out by Dejong, Hodges, & Malik (2016) suggest that whilst adoption is a protective factor for children who enter the care system, it is clear that adoption by itself is not a sufficient intervention for early childhood adversity.
- Rushton (2007) reports that on the whole, studies show largely successful outcomes for adoption from care but that a significant proportion of adoptions disrupt, with that percentage growing for late placed children.
- Selwyn, Wijedsa and Meakings (2014) in their study into adoption disruption found that a quarter of adoptive parents reported major hardship in caring for children with multiple and overlapping difficulties and that this group of children presented with substantial levels of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties across the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 2001).



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- Given the increased risk for mental health diagnosis, a significant percentage of children adopted from care also exhibit continued difficulties in educational performance, and behavioural and emotional difficulties into adolescence and adulthood (Brown, Waters & Shelton, 2017, Gore & Langton, 2017).
- This impacts on family functioning and if untreated has a financial burden on society (Conti, Morris, Melnychuk & Pizzo 2017); Knapp, Scott & Davies, 1999).
- Often children adopted from care can meet criteria for the diagnosis of one or more mental health disorders but often they go undiagnosed and/or do not receive treatment for these (DeJong, Hodges & Malik, 2016, Woolgar & Baldock, 2016).
- A review of outcome studies and the efficacy of therapeutic interventions for looked after and adopted children, highlighted that current evidence does not point to the long-term efficacy of interventions that can otherwise demonstrate effectiveness with children living with their birth families (McCullough, Gordon Jones, Last, Vaughan & Burnell, 2016). One reason for poor outcomes for otherwise efficacious models of intervention developed for the 'normal' population may be that they do not explicitly address the neurobiological and neurophysiological impact of profound and enduring maltreatment from time of conception through to removal into care on child development. Evidence points to a significant effect of adoption itself on parenting stress (Haris-Willer, Granger, Gurney-Smith, 2016; Nadeem, Waterman, Foster, Paczkowski, Belin & Miranda, 2017) and a neurobiological impact of parenting children who are traumatised and who struggle to reciprocate, resulting in 'blocked care' (Baylin and Hughes, 2016; Hughes and Baylin, 2012).

- A recent review of brain imaging studies (Teicher and Samson, 2016) points to the impact of maltreatment on various areas of brain development including the hippocampus, amygdala, cortical areas and corpus collusum, often during sensitive periods of development, and the effect this can have for memory, language, motor and somatosensory functioning and regulation.
- Neuro-Physiological Psychotherapy (NPP), (Burnell & Vaughan, 2014; Vaughan, McCullough & Burnell, 2016) is a model that considers the impact of maltreatment on the child's developing somatosensory systems and on the developing attachment system and behavioural responses. In this approach the attachment system is seen as both a biological and a social one, organised around achieving proximity to the caregiver (safety) and a cognitive, emotional one that develops an inner working model or representation of others and how they will act towards them. Research evidence mentioned above, shows this to be an effective treatment approach.

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Family Futures is a not-for-profit, independent Adoption Agency specialising in the assessment and treatment of developmentally traumatised children. Rated Outstanding by Ofsted and with an international reputation as a centre of excellence, we provide pre- and post-placement assessment and treatment services to adopted, fostered and special guardianship children and their families throughout the UK. Our training programme for professionals and parents disseminates our research and clinical practice.

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