



*Through windows of opportunity: a neuroaffective approach to child psychotherapy*

Marianne Bentzen and Susan Hart  
Karnac 2015  
ISBN 978-1782201588 £24.99

I loved this book from beginning to end. It is not exactly easy reading but it is a fascinating book with so much to inform our practice with children, and I think it should be on the reading list of all courses offering training to work therapeutically with children.

The book is based on a two-day conference titled 'The quest for the non-specific factors in psychotherapy with children', which explored the process of change and repair in child psychotherapy, specifically in relation to neuroaffective developmental psychology.

What I appreciated most about this book is that it gives us the scientific evidence in terms of neuroaffective developmental psychology that shows what many of us have believed for years – it's the relationship that heals. The authors state: 'It is the reciprocal emotional attunement between the therapist and the child that mediates the treatment, and the only intervention capable of healing inadequate attachment is the establishment of an attachment that is based on adaptive emotional attunement.'

The importance of working systemically is also highlighted and supported by reference to the neuroscience behind what many therapists already believe, namely that

we need to work with parents as well as children to be most effective.

The triune brain is described in much more detail than I have previously seen, which I found informative and interesting. If you are looking for sound scientific facts, this is definitely the book for you.

The theory described in the book has profound consequences for the way we conduct therapy with children and their carers. For example, it highlights the dangers of attempting to use forms of therapy that children are not able to engage in because of the developmental deficits within their brain, including play therapy, and also the need to meet parents in their zone of proximal development.

Much of the book consists of therapists Peter Levine, Jukka Mäkelä, Haldor Øvreeide and Eia Asen discussing the way they work through commentary on video recordings of sessions with children that were shown at the conference, linking the theory to practice, which I found helped me to think about my own child clients in a similar way.

And finally, from the foreword: 'Sometimes children are angry and withdrawn or sad and defiant [...] To help we have to find ways that "follow the child" in order to restore the natural creative optimism and sense of fun.'

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Grief and Trauma in Children

AN EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENT MANUAL



ALISON SALLOUM

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*Grief and trauma in children: an evidence-based treatment manual*

Alison Salloum  
Routledge 2015  
ISBN 978-0415708296 £21.99

This book is well written and has an excellent body of research that offers evidence for this model of working with grief and trauma in children. The model offered, called Grief and Trauma Intervention (GTI), is written for 7–12 year olds. While the book is from the US, I believe that it would translate well for use in primary schools in the UK.

As counsellors, we can feel concerned about how to proceed with a child who has suffered a great deal of both loss and trauma at an early age. Young clients may have witnessed violence or met the death of a close family member through illness, murder or suicide. My experience is that there is a great deal of wanting to protect children in our culture by not talking about a traumatic incident or a death. Children are often not allowed to visit graves, go to funerals or talk about a dead relative. This book will help counsellors to approach these losses, enabling children to process what has happened in a manner that is safe for both the child and the counsellor.

The treatment intervention outlined is not specifically written for counsellors. It is better suited to groups of children and has a 10-session approach, more like lessons than counselling. In a one-to-one

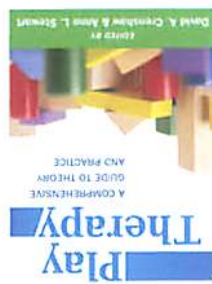
counselling relationship, I would pick and choose from the resources provided and perhaps offer one or two worksheets where a child can identify 'A scary thing that happened' or 'I really miss...' – some other worksheets, such as 'After the disaster', could be used if relevant to a particular young client.

In a group situation, going through the 10 sessions may be very helpful. It's vital that, as Salloum suggests, the whole manual is read and absorbed before delivery. The notes in each session offer a lot of help and give insight into the GTI model. Children, for example, are encouraged to rely on the group for support rather than on a clinician. There are times when what is called a 'pull-out' session – an individual one-to-one session – would be counterproductive, yet in some specific circumstances, a pull-out session is more suitable.

We are advised to be aware of the child's clinical notes. In this way, the book may not fit with a counsellor's experience. When I am counselling in a school setting, for example, it is highly unlikely that I would have access to clinical notes. Because of this difference, the GTI model should be used with care, recognising the particular role a counsellor has and that a referral to CAMHS and/or GP may be more appropriate if a child is traumatised. I particularly liked the way vicarious traumatisation is addressed in the context of self-care for the practitioner. It is too easy to presume that we will not be affected by children's experiences of grief and trauma. If we understand how our young clients' events may affect us, and take good care of ourselves, it will enable us to be more present and enabling in the counselling room.

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## *Play therapy: a comprehensive guide to theory and practice*



David A Crenshaw and Anne L Stewart (eds)  
 Guilford Press 2015  
 ISBN 978-1462517503 £46.99

Crenshaw and Stewart have asked each of 36 respected therapists to distil their knowledge and clinical experience into 20 pages or less, and gathered the results into one hardback volume. In the first two sections there are clinical examples to bring to life the theoretical background to the model of therapy under discussion. So whether you look up the chapter on using an attachment framework in play therapy in 'Part 1: Play Therapy Theories and Approaches', or on working with adolescents in 'Part 2: Clinical Applications of Play Therapy', you will find illuminating examples, some of which may well resonate with your own experience in the therapy room. In Part 3, 'Research and Practice Guidelines in Play Therapy', the various authors write with clarity, using illustrative examples where appropriate.

One of the pleasures of Part 1 is that you start to find new connections and contrasts between different approaches, leading to exciting ideas and possibilities for your own practice. Kestly, on sandtray and storytelling, for instance, writes about 'metaphor and the divided brain' (p165) and 'the hand-mind connection' (p167). Part 2 deals with specific issues such as grief, sexual abuse, and anxiety; also with specific groups such as children in foster care, the homeless and those in military families.

Part 2 also deals with specific diagnoses – so if you are wondering about ASD, ADHD, or anxiety, there is a chapter for you. The book includes extended case examples.

A thread running through most chapters in Parts 1 and 2 is of many explicit references to the fields of neurological and attachment research of the last 15–20 years, which now underpins our thinking about, for instance, developmental trauma. The final section of the book deals with ethics and empirical research, among other things. Some of the chapter on ethics was rather US-specific in its terms of reference, but the principles are universally applicable. A highlight for me from Part 3 was Seymour and Crenshaw's chapter, 'Reflective Practice in Play Therapy and Supervision', which addresses the hard-pressed therapist with compassion. Crenshaw writes in the first person and with great clarity about empathy, wholeheartedness, vulnerability, genuineness, courage, self-care, humility and compassion, and presents them as 'internal disciplines for reflective practice' ... easy to forget but essential to practice' (p486).

Whether you are new to working with children and young people, or well established in your practice, whether trained as a play therapist or as a counsellor/psychotherapist using play-based approaches, I recommend this volume for its breadth, depth, readability and grounding in research.

**Nina Rye** is a director of Connections, and a registered play therapist, play therapy supervisor and counsellor.