



STRUCTURE

- Why this research is important
- Gaps in the literature
- Key findings
- Conclusions
- Limitations



CONTEXT

- **Steep increase** in children looked after (CLA) rates since 2008
- Highest level reached in 2023 – 83,840
- **Decline** in resources/services and a significant widening of inequalities
- **Poorer outcomes for CLA** - educational attainment, social relationships, health and wellbeing
- **Distress and trauma** suffered at the point of entry into the care system
- Locally – practitioners had no training or guidance. ‘Going with the flow, hoping for the best’

MESSAGES FROM RESEARCH

- Very **little research** within the UK/and international context on best practice to reduce distress and trauma for children at the point when they come into care.
- Removing a child from their family is perhaps the most **emotionally charged practice events** (Mills, 2012).
- Very limited training for practitioners.
- A need for evidence-based approaches

MESSAGES FROM RESEARCH

- Importance of **planning**. ‘planned removed’ - significantly less stress than ‘acutely removed’ children. Same trend identified for reported stress.
- **Knowledge about an event** seems to decrease the degree of observable stress in children
- **Trauma-informed:** services should be familiar with the literature on trauma and stress
- Children who suffer abuse - limited capacity to cope with a stressful event.

Source: Baugerud & Melinder (2012)

MESSAGES FROM RESEARCH

- Different approach to working in **partnership** with families.
- If they are offered the chance to be other than “failed” parents, they might not have to fight so hard to maintain their identity as a good parent.
- Opportunity to take responsibility for their actions can help parents to move beyond a position of “blindly following orders.”
- Instead of focusing on the parents' **lack of understanding**, focus on what they actually understand. Give parents the opportunity to show professionals how they have made sense of their situation.

Syrstad, E., & Slettebø, T. (2020).

CCIOC MEETINGS

- A multi-agency Child Coming Into Our Care (CCIOC) meeting prior to the placement of any child in the care of the Local Authority.
- Chaired by a Team Manager.
- Representatives from health, education, Police, CAFCASS, CAMHS and the prospective carers.
- Parents if they are able to support the process.
- Aim: information sharing and planning to reduce the trauma children suffer at the point they enter care

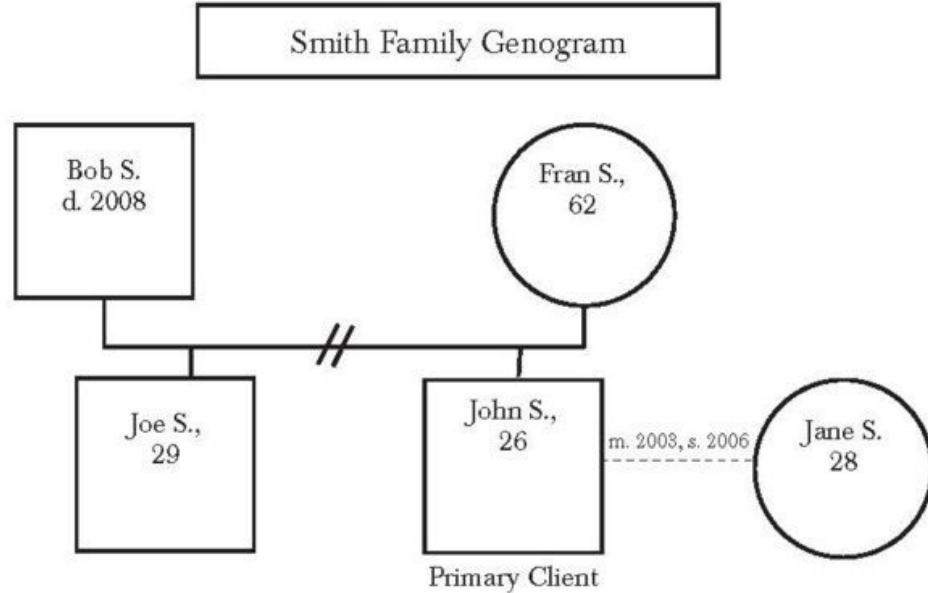
KEY PRINCIPLES OF CCIOC

- Preparation
- Child Safety
- Partnership Working
- Being Trauma Informed
- Ongoing Family Relationships
- Information Sharing
- Support for Practitioners
- Appropriately Resourced



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Using a genogram identify family members who can support the child coming into care short-term and long-term.



Examples:

- Parents preparing a bag of clothes, toys and **essential items** for the child
- Parents helping to design the **narrative** for a child as to why they are coming into our care.
- Family providing a **transitional object** (child's preferred toy)

METHODOLOGY

RQs

- What are the experiences of practitioners involved in CCIOC meetings?
 - What are the participants' views on the potential benefits, or otherwise, of using this approach?
 - What are the strengths of this approach and how it could be improved?
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- 17 semi-structured virtual interviews
 - Sample included: social workers, managers, foster carers, Children's Guardians, placement officers, mental health professionals.
 - Collaborative thematic-analysis

TRAUMATISING
SAD STRESSFUL EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING
TRAUMA PRESSURE SADNESS SENSITIVE EMOTIONAL
ANXIETY PROVOKING UNKNOWN TRAUMATIC
CHARGED

FINDINGS – SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

We understood the literal physicality of what had just happened at the family home because it had been explained to us what was going to happen, why it was going to happen, [...] And as a consequence, that enabled us to talk to the young person when he arrived in a much more tuned in way. (Foster Carer)

We were able to open the door and just strike the right chord.

We were able to answer questions straight away.

Our ability to empathize with that young person and their emotions I think was supercharged essentially by that meeting. (Foster Carer)

FINDINGS – SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

It gave me ideas on how to speak to the child about the process as well [...] It can be really difficult to know what to say to a child [...] But in this meeting we were able to think about what is the narrative we're gonna give to the child and all the professionals agree on that narrative, which meant that the child is getting the same message.
(SW)

So it's always gonna be really upsetting and a tricky situation for a child to come in care, but just making sure that the network are doing that in the best possible way, I think [...] I think that helps contain the child's emotions. (SW)

Findings

First time I've heard it [reducing trauma] specifically addressed. (CAMHS Manager)

We were able to dig right into the detail.

It's one thing reading on a report that a child can become physically and verbally abusive. It's a very different thing to have a conversation with somebody. (FC)

We were all on the same page (SW)

We were actually able to take time to explore the process in more detail to answer any questions. Again, filled me full of confidence. Because it felt like every stone was turned.

My preparedness thanks to the information I've been given enabled me to keep that child safe (FC)



Partnership with family— transitional objects

‘The school had a good understanding of the family network and was able to tell us about an older sister that they felt was really mature and able to support. [...] made sure that she was present, and she used transitional objects. So the child was crying, kicking, screaming and hitting his head, saying that he wasn't coming with us. [the sister] went upstairs and got a gold crucifix and airpods and she gave that to him and immediately he calmed down. [...] she had shown him that actually, it's OK and you can go along with these people and it will be safe [...] immediately he calmed down and took those two things along. And on the journey to the placement, he was holding them’.

Findings – interprofessional working

gets you to sort of slow down and pause and take time to really consider the child or young person's individual needs. (SW Manager)

I think the biggest thing was **having a plan**. I think a lot of the time we know we need to remove a child and place them in foster care or whatever the provision is. But like we're under such stress, [...], and deadlines and so many things to do that sometimes there isn't a plan in place and we're kind of just going with the flow, hoping for the best. But this meeting allowed there to be like a really clear plan. So I know who to contact, who was gonna be with me, who could support with what. (SW)

Findings – impact on practitioners

feel like it's a shared responsibility [...] feel probably a bit less pressure on me as a social worker to to try and kind of organise it all to think about the narrative and the language that we're using for the child (SW)

The profession is like very busy and sometimes you don't have time to stop and think. I think it helps me to really reflect on my decision making, made me really reflect on this individual child and this individual child's needs and what needed to be in place to meet those needs. I think it gave me an opportunity to like access support and ask questions from the professional network so that I felt supported to actually carry out the removal. (SW)

CONCLUSIONS - 1

- Meeting contributed to better emotional and practical support for the child on the day; potentially reduced the trauma.
- **Child-centred planning** – holding the child in mind; known likes and dislikes.
- **Consistent narrative** from those around the child.
- Getting the **whole picture**. What happened. A better understanding of the child's needs and how to meet them; different perspectives from different practitioners involved in the child's life;
- More **detailed plans**; practicalities and physicality. clarity about roles and what needs to happen.



CONCLUSIONS - 2

- **Trauma-informed multi-agency approach**; information sharing; feeling valued by the professional network;
- Shared responsibility; working as a team. **But** also – agency's own agenda
- SW often feeling alone. Busyness as avoidance strategy
- SWs- more supported, 'contained', confident, valued, better prepared.
- CCIOC - opportunity to stop, slow down and reflect. Space for difficult feelings.
- Difficult to use in an emergency



LIMITATIONS

- Small sample, limited generalizability
- Self-selected
- Based on practitioner's perspective – children's and parents' voice missing
- Difficult to measure reduction in trauma

REFERENCES

Baugerud, G.A. & Melinder, A. (2012). Maltreated Children's Memory of Stressful Removals from Their Biological Parents. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 26 (2). p.pp. 261–270.

Mills, S. M. (2012). Unconscious sequences in child protection work: case studies of professionals' experiences of child removal. [Http://Dx.Doi.Org/10.1080/02650533.2011.562603](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2011.562603), 26(3), 301–313.

Syrstad, E., & Slettebø, T. (2020). To understand the incomprehensible: A qualitative study of parents' challenges after child removal and their experiences with support services. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(1), 100–107. <https://doi.org/10.1111/CFS.12662>