

Solihull Approach for Fostering and Adoption: Evaluation Project

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD



S O L I H U L L A P P R O A C H

Why is carer training important?

- Approximately 70% children enter local authority care for reasons of abuse and neglect (Department for Education, 2013).
- Without the right support, such adverse early experiences can put looked after children at higher risk of psychological and behavioral difficulties.
- Carers of children who are struggling to manage the impact of developmental trauma are more likely to experience high levels of parenting stress.
- Therefore it is important that foster carers have the right knowledge, skills and support to meet the specific psychological needs of children they look after.
- 'The Solihull Approach' parenting course was adapted to include additional knowledge and skills for fostering and adoption, now commonly referred to as SAFA (Solihull Approach Fostering and Adoption) training.
- The 12 session course provides a framework to encourage foster carers to think and learn about children's internal worlds, make sense of behaviour and carer-child relationships, as well as aiming to provide structured reflection, increase confidence and peer support with the aim of reducing stress.
- A pilot study was undertaken as the first stage of a larger evaluation project to answer two primary research questions: (1) Is the Solihull Approach training course effective for Solihull's carers? And (2) is the Solihull Approach course acceptable to Solihull's carers?

Time Table of SAFA Training	
Session	Topic
1	Introduction and coming together as a group
2	Brain development and developmental trauma
3	Containment
4	Reciprocity and the 'dance' of interaction
5	Attachment theory and styles
6	Understanding what's underneath behaviour
7	Different parenting styles
8	Play and spending time together
9	Rhythms and sleep
10	Self-regulation and anger
11	Communication and attunement
12	Reflection and celebration

'Reflecting has made me recap and process the importance of the course'

'Absolutely fabulous! Real learning and change. Thank you!'

Methods

- A questionnaire-based, mixed methods pre-post design is being employed to gather both semi-structured qualitative feedback and psychometric data.
- The pilot data was collected over two SAFA training courses, which were facilitated by a psychologist and a social worker for Solihull MBC mainstream foster carers (15 participants completed the pilot study).
- Data collection occurred at the beginning of the training course (session 1) and at the end of the training course (session 12), while session-by-session feedback forms were also completed by carers.

"Sharing with other carers to help learning, real life"

"Thought provoking discussion over the whole 12 sessions"

'How to approach situations in a differing manner, and thinking more about what we do'

Questions? Contact:

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Key findings from the pilot study

- **Reduced carer stress** – Overall carers' parenting stress index scores significantly reduced from the start to the end of the SAFA course. At the beginning of the initial pilot study the carers' scores fell on average above the 85th percentile, considered the threshold for clinical concern. At the end of the course the average stress score for parents had dropped below the clinical threshold. This change in scores was statistically significant.
- **Reduced impact of children's emotional and behaviour difficulties** - Overall, carers' Strengths & Difficulties questionnaire ratings of the impact of children's emotional and behaviour difficulties, i.e. the chronicity, distress, social impairment, and burden to others linked to these difficulties, significantly reduced from the start to the end of the course.
- **Improvement in the valence of carers' unguided descriptions of their foster child** – A carer mind-mindedness measure showed a significant overall increase in the proportion of statements carers made when describing their child that were coded as positive, as opposed to neutral or negative. When carers made reference to children's internal states (mind-mindedness), more of this was in a positive way at the end of the course, compared to the start.
- **Encouraging peer support** – One of the primary aims of the SAFA course is to encourage participants to relax and share their experiences with the peer group. Session-by-session feedback data indicated that the majority (97%) of carers who experienced the course rated it as 'great' in this regard.
- **Identifying positive change** – Another aim of the Solihull Approach Foster Carer Training is to encourage foster carers to be reflective regarding their foster children and how they can improve their caring in future. The data indicates that the course is successful in fulfilling this aim with the majority (81%) feeling that the course was 'great' in this regard.
- **Improvement in understanding and relating to foster children** – Carers rated their understanding of their child's difficulties and their ability to form a relationship with their child as improved from the start to the end of the course. Furthermore when asked how helpful they felt the course was in helping them to understand their child better the majority of carers (84%) agreed that the course was 'great' in this regard.
- **Overwhelmingly positive carer feedback** – a small selection of carers' comments in response to open questions about the course on feedback questionnaires are shown in green boxes.

What's next? Now that the pilot phase is complete, a larger evaluation project is underway. Data is being collected from four additional SAFA training courses for Solihull foster carers, including family and friends carers. The complete dataset will soon be analysed, with a full research report to follow.