

Book review

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adoptionfostering



Supporting the Mental Health of Looked After and Adopted Children by Karen Aldred and Helen Rodwell (2018) London: CoramBAAF. 165 pages. £16.95. ISBN 978 1 910039 717

Reviewed by **Martin Gilbert**, Senior Learning and Development Officer and approved mental health professional, Birmingham, UK

This book is written for social workers supporting children who are being looked after or who are in the process of being or have been adopted.

The authors begin by introducing the reader to a mode of work they have developed known as the Child Attributes and Past and Present Experiences (CAPPE) matrix, which sets out to demonstrate how workers should consider child attributes alongside past and present experiences against a backdrop of areas to consider within practice. Individual resilience, risk and family issues, life events and environmental factors, together with family and carer tips and pointers, are shared. The book offers early evidence as to why looked after or adopted children may be at an increased risk of mental ill-health. Its main drive is to identify how early experiences and trauma can impact on mental health and well-being. The authors place a heavy emphasis on psychological support, a perspective I found particularly useful. As a mental health professional who teaches social workers on a regular basis, I find that a real focus on diagnosis is often what is requested by staff.

This book will aid social workers and other relevant professionals to locate the back story so to speak; it will help them to identify the reason for the potential behaviours (the distress). Recognising the diagnostic criteria is of course critical, but in my experience too high a focus on diagnosis can create apathy in staff. Belief that there is little or nothing that can be done represents a fatalistic outlook that is not the message portrayed here. The text takes a practical look at how practitioners can seek to understand the past and address the present. Indeed, the authors acknowledge where diagnosis can be helpful and where it might not.

There are many helpful reminders about the importance of attachment and the book constantly refers back to the internal working model. I found this to be especially useful as I want to raise the point that many social workers in adult services may not have such awareness – they will often see the distress in adulthood so it is a timely reminder to them about some of the origins of mental ill-health.

The book moves on to discuss a wide range of mental health conditions that may be experienced by children and young people. The summaries are brief and identify the type of behaviours that may be apparent in what I would consider to be the most common and

significant mental health conditions. These include psychosis, depression, anxiety, self-harm, sleep difficulties, eating disorders and conduct disorders (not exhaustive).

There is an overview of service provision that identifies the types of services on offer together with acknowledgment of the relevant laws, NICE guidelines, various websites and suggested further reading. The book also provides useful references throughout. These are not substantive, which may well encourage busy practitioners to follow the recommendations selected by the authors. Importantly, the book recognises when staff should seek the additional support offered by services such as CAMHS, an issue I address regularly when teaching social workers who are uncertain of what support they can or should be providing.

I would be happy to recommend this very practical guide. The CAPPE model is a useful tool and I believe it would aid any social worker to think about how a presentation could be the result of earlier distress or trauma. My only additions would have been some references to the experiences of young people where stigma and discrimination are prevalent (such as LGBT); also suicide is mentioned briefly but is a continuing concern, and it would have been useful to have some mention of the social pressures currently faced by young people, including issues such as social media. That said, I will be happy to show this book to the staff I work with and teach in the future.