

Meeting summary

Health Special Interest Group

Practice Conversations

The role of neurodevelopmental issues in care experienced children

30 October 2024, 1.30-3pm, MS Teams

Presenter: Dr Matt Woolgar, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, National Adoption & Fostering Service, South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

Matt introduced the [National Adoption and Fostering Clinic](#), a one-stop assessment shop which disentangles complex presentations using biopsychosocial formulations and an openness to the full range of mental health issues. He described some of the mechanisms by which professionals can refer to the clinic for second opinions or complex assessments for any care experienced children and young people from infancy to 18 years.

Matt presented data highlighting the role of neurodevelopmental issues in care experienced children. This included how the focus on 'attachment and trauma' in the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for adopted and Special Guardianship Order children may inadvertently mask neurodivergence in what are often complex presentations.

A wide-ranging discussion followed. Here is a selection of questions put to Matt:

- At what stage do you carry out genetic testing and is this a pre-requisite to referring to a FASD service?
- Children are often living in chaotic circumstances and homes. Do these factors, and the timing of where the child is on their journey in the care system, influence the outcome of the assessment? Should we be concerned by over diagnosis? Should more thought be given to the timing of assessments?
- What are your views on the Coventry grid, to try to tease out ASD from attachment issues?
- Birth parents with a mental health diagnosis are more at risk of children being removed from their care. What do we know about neurodivergence in birth families? Are there significantly elevated rates of ADHD/ASD?
- The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund is available to support trauma and attachment interventions. Research indicates that multiple types of issues stem from early adversity which are not all trauma and attachment related. What are we doing at a higher system level to challenge this and advocate for all adoptive families' needs?
- Do colleagues think that care experienced children need a specialised neurodevelopmental service? Is there a similar service for adults? All these issues are significant in the care-leaver population.



- The commissioning model needs to change. Improved, integrated neurodevelopmental pathways for children in care need to be commissioned which enable services to work more collaboratively. How can we use these discussions and pull together research evidence for influencing commissioners?