CoramBAAF Conversations | The secure base model transcript

00:00:00 Ellen Broome

I'm Ellen Broome, managing director of CoramBAAF.

00:00:03 Gillian Schofield

And I'm Gillian Schofield. And I'm emeritus professor of child and family social work at the University of East Anglia.

00:00:15 Mary Beek

And I'm Mary Beek. And I'm an honorary research fellow at the School of Social Work at the university of East Anglia.

00:00:16 Ellen Broome

So nice to have you here today at Joe and Mary and really excited to hear you talking about your new book or your new edition of your book. And I'm really thank you so much for for joining me today.

00:00:28 Ellen Broome

I'm gonna go to you first, Joe.

00:00:30 Ellen Broome

Could you tell me a little bit about what the secure base model is and how did it come?

00:00:35 Gillian Schofield

About hey, well secure base model is a a practical therapeutic caregiving framework. It's based on theory and research, and it's been designed to help practitioners, foster carers and adoptors.

00:00:48 Gillian Schofield

To build positive relationships and and improve outcomes for for vulnerable children.

00:00:54 Gillian Schofield

The model was first developed about 20 years ago, when Mary and I were trying to make sense in our research of what the more successful foster carers were offering to children. So we we turned to classic attachment theory in the work of Mary Ainsworth and Ainsworth back in the 1970s identified caregiving qualities that helped infants build secure attachments.

00:01:14 Gillian Schofield

And we applied these to our foster care research.

00:01:17 Gillian Schofield

And went on to develop the findings into a therapeutic model that's relevant not only for infants but also older children and young people. So I think that was the big contribution really to look at attachment theory across the age range and we'd be able to work with and develop the model over the years, including training materials and and these practise guides, we chose to focus on the term secure.

00:01:38 Gillian Schofield

Base because in attachment theory, a secure base is provided for a child through a relationship with one or more caregivers, which provides a reliable safe.

00:01:47 Gillian Schofield

Haven and reduces the child's anxiety, thus becoming a secure base for exploration that promotes security, confidence and competence, and and resilience. So I think it's important to to note that the real evidence of success is is not the child being able to seek comfort from a caregiver. It's what that relationship enables the child to do.

00:02:07 Gillian Schofield

And try new activities, play and education.

00:02:10 Gillian Schofield

And so forth.

00:02:12 Gillian Schofield

So insecure base model we've got five care giving dimensions and each promote a key aspect of children's development and that allows practitioners and caregivers to focus on and set goals for promoting children's strengths and addressing their difficulties and the five dimensions are represented by a star diagram that shows how the dimensions.

00:02:32 Gillian Schofield

Work together and interact.

00:02:34 Gillian Schofield

And these dimensions need to be understood, of course, in terms of the child's history, behaviour, age and stage. So a core understanding of child development is very valuable in implementing the model and in particular what we've called the caregiving cycle, which shows the interaction of the caregivers thinking and feeling and behaviour and its impact on the child's.

00:02:55 Gillian Schofield

Thinking, feeling and behaving.

00:02:56 Gillian Schofield

Behaviour, and that underpins how the five dimensions are, are presented for practitioners and for and for caregivers. So the first dimension is availability, helping the child to trust, and this focuses on the

caregivers ability to convey to the child's strong sense of being physically and emotionally available to meet their needs, both when they're together.

00:03:17 Gillian Schofield

And when they are apart part, which is also very significant when the caregiver can do this consistently and in a range of circumstances, the child, whatever their difficulties, previously, begins to learn to trust that their needs will be met warmly, consistently and reliably.

00:03:33 Gillian Schofield

And as our anxiety is reduced and overtime the child gains the confidence to explore the world, safe in the knowledge that care and protection is there if needed. So this is at the heart obviously of the secure based concept. The 2nd dimension is also absolutely key to the model, its sensitivity helping the child.

00:03:52 Gillian Schofield

To manage their feelings and sensitivity here means a caregiver having the ability to think about.

00:03:59 Gillian Schofield

And to value and what this child is thinking and feeling, and how that might be affecting their behaviour. So again, using that caregiving cycle to understand what's going on for the child and how you understand that in their mind, but also the caregiver needs to reflect on how the child makes them feel and how that affects their behaviour.

00:04:19 Gillian Schofield

And again, that's a very important element in the cycle of availability sensitivity and and the others.

00:04:26 Gillian Schofield

So sensitivity is a key dimension. So as our research and others have suggested, carers who are good at tuning into the child's thinking and feeling sometimes talked about as reflective, caring, seeing the world from the child's point of view, and helping the child to see the world from other people's point of view. They're often also good.

00:04:46 Gillian Schofield

Of understanding a child's need, for example, for contact with their birth family, or how to help a teenager find an activity that will make them feel successful. So although it has a rich history in attachment theory and research, this concept has sense.

00:05:00 Gillian Schofield

Liberty at the heart of it is this idea of tuning into and being interested in the mind of the child and the Third Dimension, acceptance, building the child's self esteem, tackles a common and fundamental problem for children from troubled backgrounds. So acceptance is about accepting the child.

00:05:18 Gillian Schofield

For who they are.

00:05:19 Gillian Schofield

Even when the child needs help.

00:05:21 Gillian Schofield

For difficult behaviours to change so that they can become accepted by others.

00:05:26 Gillian Schofield

But it's also about finding something to love and value in the child, and I think we found this so powerfully when we were interviewing foster carers, even when they were describing children who had very significant difficulties, they could find something, something to love in the child and helping the child then to feel pride in themselves, and also for the child to discover that they can both love.

00:05:47 Gillian Schofield

And be lovable as well as cope with setbacks, and I think this is also very important. It's not just about building self-esteem through praise. It's enabling children to manage when they're not chosen from the football team or when they don't get invited to a party.

00:06:02 Gillian Schofield

Or when other people are just better at things than they are, and sometimes children with low self esteem really struggle struggle with those feelings and the 4th I mentioned cooperation helping the child to feel effective, that builds on self esteem as it's about helping a child who may have previously felt powerless to make choices within safe boundaries.

00:06:22 Gillian Schofield

Feel confident and effective and that can start with infants enjoying choosing what they like to eat and feeding themselves to older children, enjoying being able to play on their own as well as playing and negotiating.

00:06:34 Gillian Schofield

With others and for teenagers, a tricky one this, but obviously it's about being appropriately independent for their age, while also feeling enough trust. Really thinking of the availability dimension to seek comfort and to accept help and support. So it's a very important dimension in terms of caregivers accepting that it's not all about.

00:06:55 Gillian Schofield

Being in control actually, even from the early stage of a placement, it's about.

00:07:00 Gillian Schofield

How you can enable the child also to work with you to work together and then finally this 5th and file the mention which Mary and I added to the attachment theory dimensions is family membership helping the child to belong and for children in foster care and adoption. This may mean will mean belonging often to more than one family, often to different communities.

00:07:21 Gillian Schofield

So the idea of belonging is to cut an underpinning concept in permanence. So it's a key element in all successful care and giving. But as I say, especially in permanent placement as it reflects the significance of a sense of belonging as part of a child secure.

00:07:36 Gillian Schofield

Place the feeling that you have a family to go back to through childhood and in adulthood. Whatever happens. Whatever your your problems is also about establishing an identity. So I think the overall message of the model is that all these dimensions work together, but also that a number of relationships and identities can contribute to a child's secure base reducing.

00:07:56 Gillian Schofield

Anxiety and promoting security and resilience. So I think attachment theory is sometimes criticised for being so specific about 1 or maybe 2.

00:08:05 Gillian Schofield

Givers, whereas I think with the secure based concept and the model itself, it widens that out to thinking about what other relationships can can provide for children, whether that's at school or an extended family and so on. So it comes from attachment theory, but it develops from it. I think that's probably the main thing to say.

00:08:26 Gillian Schofield

Thank you so much.

00:08:27 Ellen Broome

Joe, I'm very fascinated to hear about that.

00:08:29 Ellen Broome

Sort of finding.

00:08:30 Ellen Broome

That you are.

00:08:31 Ellen Broome

Lovable by someone else loving you and sort of building that resilience, really, really interesting. Could you tell us a little bit more about how it's used by professionals in practise?

00:08:42 Gillian Schofield

Yeah, well, we found over the years really that the secure based model can be used by individual practitioners who find it very helpful in their work or by teams, perhaps fostering.

00:08:51 Gillian Schofield

Teams adoption, adoption teams, who who choose to to work with it particularly.

00:08:56 Gillian Schofield

But more broadly, implementation by local authorities and also by agencies has been a very effective and more strategic approach to incorporating the model into systems, procedures and documentation. So implementing the model often means ensuring, for example, that a framework for supervising.

00:09:16 Gillian Schofield

Foster carers or for supporting the doctors.

00:09:19 Gillian Schofield

Could include looking at each dimension to think about how that's working for them, and and that often benefits from a more systemic approach. But on the other hand, as we've said, individual practitioners can use it for themselves. And then I think beyond that, the best way to think about using the model is to focus on the different stages of the child's journey through.

00:09:39 Gillian Schofield

Basement. So the model provides A framework through these dimensions of assessing the child's development and needs, which could be at while the child is still in their birth family, or perhaps in a current foster placement where a care plan is being developed.

00:09:54 Gillian Schofield

So it can be used in care planning obviously, but also in court reports, and courts have reported finding that very helpful really to have a a framework that focuses on development and and the needs of the child and then the model can also be used for assessing the current or prospective care give us capacity to meet a child's needs.

00:10:15 Gillian Schofield

So that can be done as part of the initial assessment of care carers and the doctors. It can be where a child is in placement and it can be thinking about where the child might best be placed in the future.

00:10:27 Gillian Schofield

So it can help with thinking about short term carers where the goal might be to return the child home or make a move to a kinship long term, foster care adoptive placement. What are their carers capacities for being wholehearted in their care for the child in that period, but also being able to enable the child to move and then the obvious?

00:10:47 Gillian Schofield

Consequence of having good assessments of the child and appropriate assessments, good assessments of prospective carers matching a child with a foster carer or adoptive family, because it puts together the child.

00:10:59 Gillian Schofield

Developments and matches it thinking about all. For example, the child's capacity to trust with the caregivers, capacity to support and accept perhaps a child who has a very different set of qualities and

and identity to to themselves. So that's also very important. Then once in placement the the goals for the child.

00:11:20 Gillian Schofield

And be thought about with the caregiver.

00:11:22 Gillian Schofield

So those might be quite formal goals, for example, discussed at A at a looked after children review, but they may also be goals for the child discussed with a an A doctor where the child is about to be.

00:11:34 Gillian Schofield

Placed you know.

00:11:35 Gillian Schofield

Where are the areas of this child's development that are going to need particular care in the early days, for example, and then, once the child has been in place?

00:11:43 Gillian Schofield

For a while, it may be about thing.

00:11:44 Gillian Schofield

Thing about how you celebrate progress, it may seem that you're feeling very stuck with a a little baby, but then the baby starts to look to the carer for on the adopter to for comfort or to enjoy a toy. So those goals that then become a very important part and the framework allows you to do that and divide up the different elements of the child's development.

00:12:05 Gillian Schofield

And then finally think about supporting the caregivers journey as well as the child's journey. So from the point of approval through possibly for foster care as it might be, annual reviews for doctors, it might be again thinking about how at the early stages of placements are going.

00:12:21 Gillian Schofield

How can they think about what the strengths are, how well it's going, and what support the caregivers might need into the future? So I think at every stage, every stage of the child's journey, which I think is still a helpful concept, it's important to think about the different ways in which sharing a common language, common understanding of dimensions.

00:12:41 Mary Beek

Would be.

00:12:42 Ellen Broome

Helpful. Thank you so much. Jill. I think it's really.

00:12:43 Ellen Broome

Interesting. And they're quite.

00:12:44 Ellen Broome

Unused. It's quite an unusual model in that way that it can be applied both sort of strategically across, say, a local authority with frameworks, but also really applied in the day-to-day assessing and working with and and for a caregiver to think.

00:12:58 Ellen Broome

Am I meeting this child's range of needs in these dimensions? I.

00:13:01 Ellen Broome

Think it's it's.

00:13:02 Ellen Broome

Really interesting and and unusual. I think models for that. Thank you for that. So the reason we're here today is that Columbia for obviously publishing new editions of the secure based practise guides, one for social workers and one for foster carers and adopters. Can you tell us a little bit about the changes over the past?

00:13:19 Ellen Broome

Is that have contributed to these new additions and why we've come to having new additions and why they're necessary?

00:13:25 Gillian Schofield

1st, it's important to say that the core and secure based model the five peg giving dimensions and the links to developmental outcomes has stood the test of time very well. So we hear from practitioners who've used the model for years over time and practitioners.

00:13:39 Gillian Schofield

Covering the model for the first time, and I guess you would hope that would be the case because it draws on such classic attachment theory and and research and also to our placement research.

00:13:50 Gillian Schofield

But what was really valuable for Mary and I with these second editions was to be able to use feedback from practitioners about where language and examples may need to be updated. So we've adapted some of the wording of the caregiving approaches. We've included reference to trauma, for example, which?

00:14:09 Gillian Schofield

You know, as a, as a a way of thinking about safeguarding and the the long term developmental consequences of abuse and neglect. And we we felt that was valuable to do that.

00:14:21 Gillian Schofield

And we've adjusted some elements of how we talk about family membership and birth family membership. I think, you know, given the renewed emphasis on the importance of acknowledging children's birth, family history and so on, and in other matters in terms of the, the, the language, we also needed to adjust gender pronouns. So I think that was also a.

00:14:41 Gillian Schofield

A way of updating the text for for for the current sort of climate and and the way we we we talk about children and growing up. We also made sure that the new additions were consistent with the 2nd edition of the Attachment Handbook for Foster care and adoption. First came out in 2006, published by BAF and had a second edition in 2018.

00:15:01 Gillian Schofield

And that is a more in depth look at aspects of the caregiving approaches and so on. More theoretical, but it also we wanted to make both of these publications.

00:15:11 Gillian Schofield

Consistent with each.

00:15:12 Gillian Schofield

Another, and that's just finally, we've also added some key references that relate to other new and linked work. That's one of the best examples would be the UEA model for moving children from foster care to adoption, which has been relatively recently published by Core and bass, draws very much on the secure based material, so we've also looked for consistency.

00:15:32 Gillian Schofield

Between those two publications and referenced the the moving to adoption publication in these new additions.

00:15:40 Gillian Schofield

So not major changes to the core model, but I think important changes and additions to the text which we hope people will.

00:15:46 Ellen Broome

Find helpful. Thank you so much, Jill. And I mean language is one of those things that you perennially perennially kind of.

00:15:51 Ellen Broome

Have to update.

00:15:52 Ellen Broome

This if if things move and change and and and you have to reflect that to to make sure it's relevant. So thank you so much for that, Jill.

00:16:00 Ellen Broome

There, if I can come to you now in the guides, you explain the sort of caregiving strategies associated with the five dimensions of the secure base model that that you mentioned earlier, which kind of helped to develop security and resilience for a child or a young person.

00:16:14 Ellen Broome

Can you give some examples of these strategies?

00:16:17 Mary Beek

Yes, yes. So just to focus on one of the caregiving dimensions and availability providing availability, which helps children to build their trust, a very useful strategy, a very basic but very helpful strategy, particularly for babies.

00:16:34 Mary Beek

And younger children is to.

00:16:36 Mary Beek

To provide a very predictable daily routine around getting up meal times, bath times, pay times so that the child knows what to expect as they go through their day. Talking through that routine, helping, helping the child to know what's going to happen next, or helps the child.

00:16:57 Mary Beek

To begin to trust in their environment.

00:17:00 Mary Beek

Begin to trust that their caregivers are going to be there for them, that they're going to be reliably and consistently and safely looked after. Those routines are are really important for all children, and as they get a bit older, perhaps into middle childhood, then sometimes a picture chart can help pinned up onto the fridge and something that the child can.

00:17:20 Mary Beek

Actually see to help them predict what's going to happen next in, in their world, and that can also be helpful when the routines have to change because the it's obviously sometimes at weekends and.

00:17:32 Mary Beek

The days things have to be different, and so children need to be able to understand and adapt and adjust to that as well. Another strategy within this availability dimension is to to demonstrate availability. I think Jill mentioned it even when the caregiver is apart from the child and some children find it.

00:17:52 Mary Beek

Very hard, perhaps when they're at school.

00:17:54 Mary Beek

Or away from the foster or adoptive family to hold in mind. And remember that those adults are still there for them and thinking by them, and we will be there for them on their return. And so a strategy that that can help with that perhaps is something like a message in a lunch box or perhaps to work with the school.

00:18:15 Mary Beek

Again, Jill mentioned, you know, it's really important that the whole network of the child is brought into this. This hearing secure, providing elements of this secure base. So you might work with the teacher and ask them to reassure an anxious child that.

00:18:34 Mary Beek

While the caregiver will come to pick them up at the end of the day and and just help them to hold in mind that that predictable available care and then all of the secure based dimensions are important, all through children's middle childhood and well into the teens and late.

00:18:53 Mary Beek

Themes, and so it's important to think about how the caregiver can demonstrate that kind of available.

00:18:59 Mary Beek

City, even to teenagers who are obviously leading much more separate lives from outside the family. Some of us find it very helpful to to set aside and plan for a special time with a a young person, perhaps A at special outing, that they would enjoy, or an activity that they might share.

00:19:20 Mary Beek

But something that allows that one to one focus time and energy on the young person, some young people, of course, are are more resistant to that. And so caregivers often find ways of being unobtrusively available to them, perhaps using a car journey or a dog walk, or simply.

00:19:40 Mary Beek

Being around at a time when they they sense that the young person might just want to to chat and talk about about things with them. So that's three examples of working with children in this availability dimension.

00:19:55 Ellen Broome

Thank you so much, Mary and I.

00:19:56 Ellen Broome

Think your reflections there of the dog walk with the unobtrusively. There the sort of thing around in the background, slightly unobtrusively as a parent or a caregiver. I think that's that resonates. And I think a lot of parents and and will recognise that type of strategy if we can move on. One of the practise guides.

00:20:17 Ellen Broome

Promoting attachment and resilience was written with foster carers and adoptions in mind. Can you?

00:20:22 Ellen Broome

Talk a little bit.

00:20:22 Ellen Broome

About how parents and carers can best use to secure base model to offer support.

00:20:27 Ellen Broome

And sensitive care for children. Obviously, we're talking here about children who would have had very difficult backgrounds or potentially very traumatic experiences in their in their earlier lives.

00:20:37 Mary Beek

Hmm. Yes. Well, one thing to say is that the model can be very affirming, I think for for us to carriers and a doctors because.

00:20:47 Mary Beek

As you've seen from the examples you know, these are very much everyday moment by moment caregiving approaches and when lost to care. As the doctors hear about the model. Perhaps for the first time, they often feel.

00:21:01 Mary Beek

Well, we're doing a lot of that already and that's great. We're we're really pleased to hear that, that that is the case. But often once they have that framework in their minds and and understanding of of the theory behind it, it helps them to, to build on what they're doing already. That's to do a bit more of it.

00:21:21 Mary Beek

Perhaps type of things in a slightly different way from a slightly different angle and to I I think it builds confidence to try a bit more.

00:21:31 Mary Beek

Knowing that what you're doing already is actually very helpful to to the child and an example of of that that I can give comes from a foster father. He spoke to me during a training session and and he had found the cooperation dimension, this promoting effectiveness, helping the child.

00:21:53 Mary Beek

Feel effective promoting choice.

00:21:56 Mary Beek

And a sense of agency, he'd found that to be really helpful with a child that he and his partner were looking after, this little boy had some very challenging behaviours, particularly around meal times. And he would throw his food and shout and get down from the table and refuse to eat.

00:22:16 Mary Beek

And meal times were really difficult, but the foster father had noted that when they went to his parents for Sunday lunch, these behaviours were much less apparent. So.

00:22:25 Mary Beek

He he had a think about what was happening here and it occurred to him that his parents had a different way of serving food. They used vegetable dishes for the food in dishes and the children. Everyone helped themselves to what they wanted. And with that cooperation, effectiveness, sense of agency in mind. He tried it at home.

00:22:46 Mary Beek

And and meal times were much calmer when the child was able to to help himself to choose what he wants.

00:22:52 Mary Beek

To eat rather than having a plate full of food put in front of.

00:22:56 Mary Beek

Him. So just.

00:22:57 Mary Beek

A very simple tweak in the family routine in that situation was was actually very helpful to that.

00:23:04 Mary Beek

To that career.

00:23:04 Ellen Broome

Kara, thank you so much, man, it's.

00:23:06 Ellen Broome

All about finding what works for that child, isn't it about adapting whatever it is you're doing to that individual child and sort of working out what what they need and how they can receive it, isn't it?

00:23:16 Mary Beek

Absolutely. And the secure based framework gives caregivers an anchor, I think to make those adaptations from.

00:23:24 Ellen Broome

And something about holding.

00:23:25 Ellen Broome

It in mind, doing a bit more of, you know, not slightly from a slightly different angle I.

00:23:30 Mary Beek

Think to really. Really.

00:23:32 Ellen Broome

Way and think about it, just sort of to wrap up our conversation looking forward to be really interested to hear what contribution do you think that the secure based model can?

00:23:42 Ellen Broome

Make to future.

00:23:43 Ellen Broome

Good practise in fostering adoption and kind of ensuring that children fulfil their potential.

00:23:49 Gillian Schofield

Well, I think yeah, it's that's.

00:23:51 Gillian Schofield

We're always at a time.

00:23:52 Gillian Schofield

Challenges for foster care and adoption, but we do seem to have some specific challenges at the moment in in all sorts of aspects, so it's so important that when we're worried about recruitment or matching, whatever that we don't forget, that we still need this model at the heart of it all, which is about the.

00:24:07 Gillian Schofield

Quality of the caregiving.

00:24:09 Gillian Schofield

And how we can empower caregivers to feel confident, foster carers, under doctors in taking on troubled children. And actually I think that that is such an important element to give people the tools that they that they can use. And I think there is examples have have really highlighted how it is about the ordinary everyday caregiving and that.

00:24:29 Gillian Schofield

Or, although we hope that you know specialist therapeutic support and services and so on are available.

00:24:34 Gillian Schofield

For what people need to understand is actually that the everyday care that they're giving is so is so powerful and that the framework that they can feel confident in and can also share with professionals and practitioners. So if they need that support or indeed with with other foster carers and adoptive parents as well, so or.

00:24:54 Gillian Schofield

Foster carers can share with schools. I think the fact that you've got something that's.

00:24:58 Gillian Schofield

That breaks down if you like parenting into terms and dimensions that that are very practical and understandable, and and there's a good source of communication. So I think it continues to develop. We have gone into other areas of schools and residential care, but at the heart of it for foster care and adoption, it's it's.

00:25:18 Gillian Schofield

You know the quality of family life can so much be improved, where caregivers feel confident in the care that they're giving, and children are bound to thrive when when that's going to be the case. So we we continue to be available to support agencies at times and.

00:25:37 Gillian Schofield

We look forward to seeing how it gets used and developed in the future.

00:25:40 Ellen Broome

Thank you so much and thank you so much.

00:25:42 Ellen Broome

May I think.

00:25:43 Ellen Broome

You said that it is definitely a time of challenge and we know that children coming into care have more needs and more complex needs sometimes these days, so the quality of that caregiving that they get the the everyday, the quantity, or as well as quality.

00:25:57 Ellen Broome

Of of care is really, really important and I think the secure based model gives you such a I mean, I reflect as a parent myself.

00:26:04 Ellen Broome

That these are things that I'd want to hold in mind and that I'd wanna think about to make sure that my own children and I think that's all care givers, are trying to do, isn't it? Adapt it for their own children that they're looking after.

00:26:14 Ellen Broome

I think it's really, really interesting and I've really enjoyed our conversation today. So thank you so much, Jill. Thank you so much, Mary. I think it's been a really nice conversation and thank you for coming today and sharing.

00:26:24 Ellen Broome

Your thoughts with us and thank you for updating those practise guides so that professionals and practitioners can use them. Thank you Sir.

00:26:31 Ellen Broome

Thank you.