

CoramBAAF Conversations | Working with children who have experienced neglect transcript

00:00:00 Jo Franics

Hello to everyone listening. I'm Jo Francis CoramBAAF's publishing manager. And today I'm talking to Vicky Sharley and Alison Rees. about their new practice guide working with children who have experienced neglect. This is a new book in CoramBAAF popular good practice guide series. Vicki is a senior lecturer in social work at the University of.

00:00:21 Jo Franics

And a registered social worker. And Anderson is a professor of social work at College of University and also a registered social worker. And as you'd expect from this book, they both have a strong professional interest in looked after children and neglect.

00:00:37 Jo Franics

Vicky and Allison, your new book explores child neglect. How common is this in children and looked after children in particular?

00:00:47 Vicky Sharley

Well, that's right, Joe. You know it is very common, but whilst it's common it, it's also actually difficult to quantify how many children have suffered or you know are suffering from neglect. But day you know data estimates that it's around, you know around one in every ten children in the UK it's a real challenge.

00:00:58 Jo Franics

OK.

00:01:07 Vicky Sharley

Often because.

00:01:09 Vicky Sharley

It's difficult to identify and recognise and neglect as a sort.

00:01:12 Vicky Sharley

Of a concept you.

00:01:14 Vicky Sharley

Know and also on top of that a child or young person or the family may not wish to share their experiences of what they're going through, or they may go further with lengths to hide them. But you know, despite the challenges.

00:01:29 Vicky Sharley

Is actually considered the most common form of.

00:01:31 Vicky Sharley

Child maltreatment here.

00:01:32 Vicky Sharley

In the UK.

00:01:34 Vicky Sharley

With it's it's you know.

00:01:35 Vicky Sharley

Half just over half of children on child protection plans or on child on the child protection register.

00:01:44 Vicky Sharley

Are on there.

00:01:45 Vicky Sharley

For child neglect, if we're thinking about, you know, numeric terms, that's sort of just over about 29,000 children.

00:01:52 Vicky Sharley

In the UK.

00:01:54 Vicky Sharley

In in 20 twenties there's a lot.

00:01:56 Jo Franics

That's an astonishing number. It really is.

00:01:59 Vicky Sharley

Particularly in relation to those children who are looked after, you know what? We also know that the majority of children who are looked after are so around about 60% are in care because of abuse or neglect. And of course, those children in care would have previously been children.

00:02:16 Vicky Sharley

Receiving child in need services or those on child protection plans or the register.

00:02:24 Jo Franics

I can see that it's. It's clearly a very significant issue throughout the UK and it can be easy to think we know what neglect is, that we'd recognise that if we saw it. But your book has taught me otherwise. What are we actually talking about when we say neglect? And I know this is more complicated.

00:02:45 Jo Franics

And it might seem.

00:02:47 Vicky Sharley

Yes, exactly. I think we all have our initial ideas when we we hear the word neglect what we think neglect is we think about maybe dirty homes or detritus. We think about poor living environments for children. Children not having enough clothes, maybe lack of hygiene. But when we actually stop.

00:03:07 Vicky Sharley

To think more clearly, in practise, you know, how do we define what neglect is? I think we need to think a little bit deeper.

00:03:16 Vicky Sharley

You know our ideas of neglect. They can. They can tend to be subjective. They're drawn from, you know, the societies we're in, our ideas, our assumptions, and they tend to be rooted to experiences of, you know, how we were parented in our childhood, or maybe therefore, how we go on to parental care for children.

00:03:36 Vicky Sharley

In our lives as adults.

00:03:39 Vicky Sharley

And this this raises further questions about, you know, what to each of us.

00:03:43 Vicky Sharley

As you know, individuals or you know in our professional lives, what do we deem to be adequate care? What do we?

00:03:50 Vicky Sharley

Think is good enough parenting.

00:03:53 Vicky Sharley

Some of us have grown up not wanting for anything, being very comfortable.

00:03:58 Vicky Sharley

Other others of us.

00:04:00 Vicky Sharley

May have had much more challenging childhoods where we've lived experiencing poverty or adversity, maybe inadequate parenting ourselves and all these things feed into you know what we understand neglect to be alongside our values, our ethnicities, our differing cultures and class gender. It's, you know, all those sorts of things.

00:04:21 Vicky Sharley

This all creates a very individual lens about the way we as individuals see and recognise what neglect is and what inadequate parenting or care is. So you know, this book really starts to take time to unpick the conceptual complexity of neglect.

00:04:39 Vicky Sharley

And offer some strategies that may help professionals or carers, students, maybe even, to reflect upon their own ideas of what they think. Neglect to be for the you know, to inform their work with children.

00:04:53 Jo Franics

Again, which of course is extremely important for all social workers who are coming into contact with.

00:04:58 Jo Franics

This now from what you've said, I can see neglect. It's hard to identify an evidence for social workers, and I know obviously you had contact with many social workers and others when you were writing this book. What sort of difficulties have they had around this?

00:05:14 Vicky Sharley

Yeah, that's right. We did. You know, we talked to a lot of practitioners and students about their experiences.

00:05:21 Vicky Sharley

But because there is often such, you know, wide-ranging differences between different practitioners, understandings and definitions of neglect.

00:05:29 Vicky Sharley

You know, this does lead.

00:05:30 Vicky Sharley

To the identification of neglect, maybe in the first.

00:05:33 Vicky Sharley

Instance being quite.

00:05:34 Vicky Sharley

Quite challenging and I'd say that I don't just mean you know, those differences between those in.

00:05:41 Vicky Sharley

Specific professional settings and background. Sorry professional settings and backgrounds. There's also real significant difference.

00:05:50 Vicky Sharley

Is of what is believed to constitute neglect across different teams within the same local authority organisations, so we don't just see it cross difference across professional discourses. We see it really differing within the same local authority and within the same social work team sometimes cause.

00:06:10 Vicky Sharley

You know, these are personal experiences that we've been talking about today.

00:06:15

I think you.

00:06:16 Vicky Sharley

Know in addition, Joe to the identification of neglect.

00:06:21 Vicky Sharley

It can also be more challenging to sort of evidence and admission of care or parenting rather than, say, you know, evidence and actual Commission, such as an instance of physical or sexual abuse, where there's something that happens, there's an instance, you know, it's, you know, if something.

00:06:26 Jo Franics

Right.

00:06:38 Vicky Sharley

Happens at a moment in time.

00:06:39 Vicky Sharley

Time for neglect. You know, some of the key challenges for practise is that because it's the most prevalent form of mild treatment, with severe and lasting, sometimes tragically fatal effects for children, being able to confidently articulate our observations and thoughts.

00:07:01 Vicky Sharley

You know, often tuition tuition at times.

00:07:04 Vicky Sharley

Will be more difficult than we first thought.

00:07:08 Vicky Sharley

And you know the challenge of evidencing whether or neglect whether or not what we're seeing is neglect, whether it's inadequate and whether it's fluctuating over periods of of time where parents or carers are making improvements at some points and then at other points, you know, things are not going so well.

00:07:29 Vicky Sharley

You know that that's the real challenge there. So. So this book, you know, what we're doing is we, we we've drawn upon practitioners experience.

00:07:38 Vicky Sharley

Where they share their strategies about the importance of monitoring the care of children, overtime, recording, clear and detailed chronologies that can help identify patterns in children's care, how they're parented. Is it consistent? And that helps us really think about, you know, what the appropriate.

00:07:58 Vicky Sharley

Level of support to offer the child should be congruent with thresholds for intervention, but also to make sure that child receives the right care and the support at the time they need it most.

00:08:10 Jo Franics

Alright, thank you very much for that. Yeah, I I can see it's it's the monitoring, it's overtime as it's not just one instance is it.

00:08:20 Vicky Sharley

That's right. It's often not. It can be a single instance, but it's often over a period of time.

00:08:27 Jo Franics

So looked at the children, they may have been neglected in their early lives when they're with birth, families are now bearing foster care or in kinship care, or they've been adopted. So how might this early neglect affect them later on, when they're in a new family?

00:08:45 Alison Rees

Jo and I've I've written mostly around this and most of my.

00:08:49 Alison Rees

Research has been.

00:08:50 Alison Rees

Looking at sort of different interventions with children who've experienced neglect, I think the most important thing is that they're individuals and that we can't know how each individual child is going to respond.

00:09:05 Alison Rees

He was going to have been affected and and is that each one is an individual, but might be lacking in trust of adults because they haven't had their basic needs met or consistent care.

00:09:24 Alison Rees

Children may be less confident and about communicating with others about talking in school, even about having friendships, because often if you've been in a neglectful situation, you may not have attended school regularly, or you might not have been felt able to bring.

00:09:43 Alison Rees

Men's home because their home conditions were such that they felt embarrassed. Some things almost have to be learned again in the new set.

00:09:52 Alison Rees

Getting some children may have some developmental delay in that they haven't met their normal milestones, and that also may impact on them. So I think it a range of a range of ways it may impact on.

00:10:12 Alison Rees

Children and but but each one will be individual and it's about getting to know the individual child and understanding their perspectives.

00:10:24 Jo Franics

I can say I can say.

00:10:26 Jo Franics

So you say in the book that multi agency working is really key when we're talking about neglect. So for instance, social work, health and education, but we know this can be hard to do. So what do you feel is going wrong with multi agency work here?

00:10:46 Alison Rees

Vicky, would you like?

00:10:47 Alison Rees

Me to start. Or would you like to respond?

00:10:49 Vicky Sharley

First, I could say a little bit, so if that and then you know, we could do.

00:10:54 Vicky Sharley

It together, Allison.

00:10:58 Vicky Sharley

I mean, I think it's really difficult to say that there's this one key factor that impacts upon the success or you know the effective delivery of multi agency.

00:11:07 Vicky Sharley

I think that's the biggest, trickiest question to me. There are many, many factors.

00:11:13 Alison Rees

But when we are.

00:11:14 Vicky Sharley

Working with neglecting a multi agency or into professional setting.

00:11:19 Vicky Sharley

This brings an added layer of complexity. We talked about our individual, professional, societal, cultural lenses, you know, meaning that that responding to neglect. Then again, across agencies creates even more challenges of practise because we're sort of looking at those organisational and professional lenses, you know on top of that.

00:11:40 Vicky Sharley

This is a complex area of practise in this book Allison and I have dedicated.

00:11:45 Vicky Sharley

A whole chapter.

00:11:47 Vicky Sharley

To this topic, you know to really.

00:11:48 Vicky Sharley

Give us space to talk about its importance.

00:11:51 Vicky Sharley

And unpick some of the practical challenges. You know, how do we communicate ideas across agencies, but also, you know, some of the more psychological challenges, like as individual practitioners, our ability to understand, make sense of information in our minds that shared with us.

00:12:11 Vicky Sharley

Receive it.

00:12:12 Vicky Sharley

Share it again at with others.

00:12:15 Vicky Sharley

So you know the chapter we've we've sort of presented in.

00:12:19 Vicky Sharley

The book.

00:12:20 Vicky Sharley

It focuses upon the importance of working with colleagues in universal services, particularly there's sort of an emphasis upon schools and there's significant role. You mentioned there about, you know, social work with education or health. So we we look at social work with universal.

00:12:39 Vicky Sharley

And we draw out some key messages from my own research, actually, in terms of working into professionally with schools and think about, you know, can we offer some helpful, useful kind of ideas and thoughts about ways which we can all as practitioners work more effectively across organisational boundaries?

00:13:02 Vicky Sharley

Allison, you know.

00:13:03 Vicky Sharley

Is there some something else you'd like to?

00:13:04 Vicky Sharley

Add to that.

00:13:05 Alison Rees

I I suppose it's about the importance of sharing information and not assuming that everyone else knows the same as you and and you know Vicky was talking earlier about really looking at a family over a long period and understanding them and seeing that wider landscape and that sharing of information is really, really important.

00:13:25 Alison Rees

So that everybody is aware of the situation and how it's changing and how it's fluctuating.

00:13:32 Alison Rees

And I suppose in terms of interprofessional working for me, one of the big things is that foster carers are often not listened to or not seen as part of that interprofessional working. They're all there is. And then there's the other professionals. And I've done quite a lot of research with foster carers, and they've often.

00:13:52 Alison Rees

Felt really outside of the loop and the patient sharing and yet they're the very people who were spending all the time with the children and probably know them best. So for me, bringing the foster care into that in into professional working relationship and that team around the child is really important.

00:14:10 Jo Franics

Are there any other particular good practise examples you'd?

00:14:13 Jo Franics

Want to share I mean.

00:14:14 Jo Franics

This is clearly a really key area.

00:14:16 Alison Rees

Yeah, well, I was involved in an evaluation of fostering well-being, and that was a programme which did training with social workers, have education.

00:14:30 Alison Rees

And foster carers altogether and listen to the voices of young care, experienced people and foster care.

00:14:39 Alison Rees

And that joint training really bought foster carers and more of a level playing field with the right, and it started to build trust and get to know each other and then afterwards foster carers felt much more confident and in fact much more.

00:14:58 Alison Rees

Listened to and much more and communicated with as part of that team. So I think training people together can be really important and getting to.

00:15:09 Alison Rees

Know each other.

00:15:11 Jo Franics

Absolutely. I mean as you say, if a child is in foster care, it's the foster carer. He's spending the most.

00:15:16 Jo Franics

Amount of time with them after all.

00:15:18 Alison Rees

Absolutely. And yet they're often not sort of given all of the information, they're not often not part of those meetings which were happening between social workers and education and.

00:15:31 Alison Rees

How for example?

00:15:33 Jo Franics

Now your book has a chapter on Aces, adverse childhood experiences, and I'm sure many listeners are familiar with these. I know the Aces perspective is quite popular these days.

00:15:46 Jo Franics

But in the book.

00:15:47 Jo Franics

You argue the aces. It's not necessarily the best way of.

00:15:51 Jo Franics

Thinking about neglect?

00:15:53 Alison Rees

No, I think I'm quite can be quite cynical about aces.

00:15:59 Alison Rees

In that I think they have.

00:16:01 Alison Rees

The potential to be quite deterministic and suggest that if a child has experienced certain things, then their future lives.

00:16:12 Alison Rees

Will be impacting negatively and that they won't be able to achieve and that really gets me it's. It's not particularly scientific.

00:16:23 Alison Rees

And study the Aces approach in the house. For example, maybe if you've had a parent in prison and this will impact you in later life, but it doesn't, it doesn't think about how long the parent was in prison and whether there's any sort of waiting associated with that, or which parent it was.

00:16:44 Alison Rees

Range of different factors and none of them are weighted, so it's really just sort of putting a lot of things into a bag and saying this will have, you know, mean poor outcomes for you as an adult.

00:16:56 Alison Rees

But and as we know, lots of people who have experienced abuse and neglect go on to successful lives and.

00:17:07 Alison Rees

To you know.

00:17:08 Alison Rees

Really contribute to society. So what worries me is that deterministic aspect of it. That might mean that we have.

00:17:17 Alison Rees

Lesser expectations and aspirations for our child.

00:17:22 Jo Franics

No, absolutely. Now your book, it has a lot of information about different approaches to use when you're working with children who've been neglected, such as therapeutic parenting. And I'm sure this section of the book will be very useful for practitioners and parents and carers out there.

00:17:40 Jo Franics

There are few approaches that really seem to make a difference to children and families when there's neglect in the child's past.

00:17:48 Alison Rees

Well, I think again, it's about a very.

00:17:51 Alison Rees

Individual approach and listening to the child.

00:17:55 Alison Rees

And getting to know the child and understanding the things that negatively impact them, but also what they're really, really interested in. And so for me working with a child, listening to the child and harnessing any interests.

00:18:14 Alison Rees

Abilities, capabilities that they've got is really important to help that child develop.

00:18:21 Alison Rees

So there were lots.

00:18:22 Alison Rees

Of different strategies and I talk about pace in particular.

00:18:27 Alison Rees

About way of being when working with the child about being playful, accepting, having empathy for that child. So it's very much about, I suppose, a gentle.

00:18:41 Alison Rees

Sensitised and individualised approach to working with children and one particular.

00:18:49 Alison Rees

Model that are not in case video interactive guidance and a couple of studies about that and it's a very non intrusive intervention of working with between a child and a parent to try and improve.

00:19:08 Alison Rees

The parents responsibility to to the child, and certainly if if that's something of interest to.

00:19:16 Alison Rees

You it's worth.

00:19:16 Alison Rees

Reading about and there is a whole section.

00:19:18 Alison Rees

About that in the book.

00:19:21 Jo Franics

Right. Thank you very much to the previous it's been a very interesting interview and it is a fascinating book. Do you have any final messages for social workers when it comes?

00:19:31 Jo Franics

To this subject.

00:19:33 Vicky Sharley

I think you know one message which I think is if I was looking back upon my own professional experiences in practise for me, one of the most important things when.

00:19:45 Vicky Sharley

You know, working with neglect in any context is the importance of opportunities for reflection, whether that's within one to one supervision with your manager, whether it's peer supervision, whether it's creating sort of a community of practise with members of your team or across agencies.

00:20:05 Vicky Sharley

These but spaces and places to be able to really start to discuss what neglect means to you as an individual practitioner. You know what? What things inform the way that you see neglect some of the things we've talked about today. There's this sort of social norms.

00:20:26 Vicky Sharley

Some of the spaces and places different.

00:20:30 Vicky Sharley

So you so we can start to open conversations and understand, you know, do we have a shared meaning of what constitutes neglect within whatever organisation we sit within and you know?

00:20:45 Vicky Sharley

How that might connect to ensuring that?

00:20:49 Vicky Sharley

We put in place.

00:20:50 Vicky Sharley

Appropriate levels of support for the children and families that we're working with.

00:20:55 Alison Rees

Yeah, I would agree with that completely, Vicky. And I think that space for reflection is important because I think if you have worked in child neglect for a long period of time, you can also almost become a bit desensitised to it. It can become more, more.

00:21:15 Alison Rees

Seen as normal and it's quite important that you stand outside and think about, you know, what kind of levels are acceptable and what kind of levels of care would you want for your own children? And as corporate parents, it's quite important.

00:21:30 Alison Rees

That we remember that.

00:21:32 Jo Franics

That's fascinating. Thank you very much to both of you again for coming to talk to me today. Obviously, we would encourage people to buy the book. There is a great deal more information in the book about neglect, about parenting approaches and everything else that Vicky and Allison have been talking about today. Thank you very much once again.