

Guest editorial

Basically, we all want the same for the children and young people with whom we work. It is not only a particular set of circumstances we strive for, but a set of attitudes which prepare children and young people to go forward into adulthood with personal resources which empower them to live hopeful and satisfying lives. We want young people leaving care settings to be able to make choices which keep them safe and provide opportunities for meaningful inclusion in society. Attachment theory and resilience models provide us with invaluable signposts in terms of how we organise our systems and support plans for vulnerable young people, in the full range of care settings, to achieve these goals.

In essence, attachment is the capacity to form and maintain close relationships and is often used to describe the early parent-child relationship. For Bowlby (1988), the role of the parent or care giver is 'in essence...one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene only when clearly necessary' (p.11). We know that for many young people who are looked after away from home, this was not their experience from early care givers and attachment difficulties are therefore frequently evident. Greig et al. (2010) have recently highlighted how the empirical and clinical literature that has grown up around attachment attests to the power and practical usefulness of the theory. Recent literature has helped explain the different ways these difficulties are manifested and authors provide a range of strategies for avoidant, ambivalent/resistant and disorganised attachment (for example, Bomber, 2007; Delaney, 2009). The last decade has also witnessed the development of a number of models of intervention, underpinned by attachment theory, and aimed at 'shifting problematic or at risk-attachments toward more adaptive developmental pathways' (Marvin et al., 2002, p.108).

Research around resilience is also of particular practical relevance to our interventions with vulnerable young people. Masten (2001) defines resilience as 'good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation and development' (p. 227). Resilience is not a personality characteristic but is best regarded as the outcome of dynamic processes that do not eliminate risk and stress but allow the individual to deal with them effectively. The focus for all of us planning to support vulnerable young people within care settings should be not only on protective factors and on risk factors at the level of the individual young person but also at the level of the environments and systems which we develop within our care settings. As Toland and Carrigan (2011) have recently argued, there is a need to shift the balance from vulnerability to resilience, either by decreasing exposure to risk factors, or by increasing the number of available protective factors, or both, in a two-pronged attack (p. 95-106). Resilience has influenced the development of intervention programmes to help promote positive outcomes particularly for young people who are looked after away from home, such as the Framework for Assessment and Intervention for Resilience [FAIR] (Scottish Government and South Lanarkshire Council, 2007). It is beyond the scope of this journal to research the exact links between attachment and resilience theories but we do know that there is a connection. As well as developing areas of social competence and

engagement with peers, we know that resilience is optimised when a child or young person has a secure attachment and positive relationships with at least one competent adult.

In this special edition of the journal, dedicated to attachment and resilience, we hope we have selected articles that will raise awareness, shift paradigms, explore applications of attachment theory and resilience models and generate strategies within a range of care settings, both national and international.

I very much hope you find the work of our authors stimulating and informative, and that the improvement agenda, which drives us all, is furthered by the publication of this special edition.

Elizabeth King

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