Protecting the child's protective systems: promoting resilience-based foster care

UCL, London 28 March 2017

Tony Mancini practitioner psychologist, Psychology Support & Focus Psychology

Psychology Support is a specialist freelance consultation support, training and therapeutic service - set up by Tony in 2006 - for **fostering services and LACYP practitioners in education and social care**.

Tony is an associate educational psychologist with **Focus Psychology**, a community focused holistic psychology service for **schools** in South Yorkshire and the Midlands.

Raymond Stratford, (Headteacher 1963 – 1989)
St Osyth C of E Primary School, St Osyth, Essex

The '**engines of resilience**' are **common** and **ordinary**, **interactive** and **developed in relationships**.

Ann Masten (2014)

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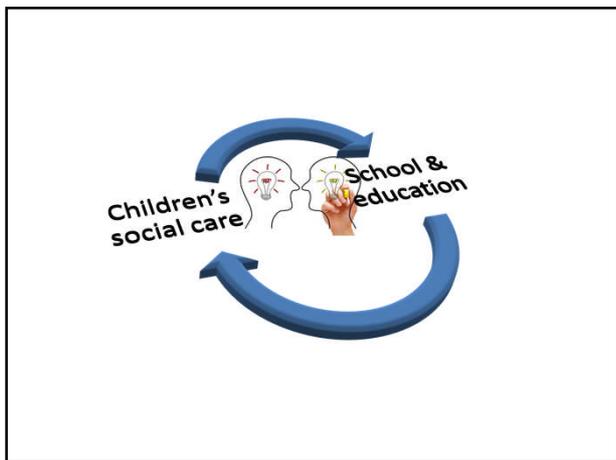

Educational psychologist, Barnsley LA
Associate lecturer at University of Sheffield & Sheffield Hallam University

Head of KS4 SLT, Hagley Park High School, Rugeley, Staffs

Pastoral Head of Year, Woodlands Community School, Derby

Learning Support (SEN) Teacher, Noel Baker School, Derby

Toy
Demonstrator

Parrot Show Host

Bingo
Caller

Sea Lion
Trainer

#playfulness ☺
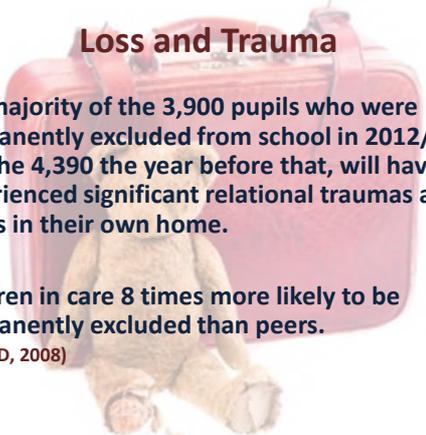
Children's social care

School & education

Support for Foster Care

Nearly 64,000 children live with almost 55,000 foster families across the UK each day.

This is nearly 80% of the 81,000 children in care, away from home, on any one day in the UK.

(Fostering Network, March 2017)

Loss and Trauma

The majority of the 3,900 pupils who were permanently excluded from school in 2012/13, and the 4,390 the year before that, will have experienced significant relational traumas and losses in their own home.

Children in care 8 times more likely to be permanently excluded than peers.
**(OFSTED, 2008)**

Judy Sebba & colleagues (2015)
Rees Centre, Research in Fostering & Education, University of Oxford, University of Bristol

The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data

What are the key factors contributing to the low educational outcomes of children in care in secondary schools in England?

How does linking care and educational data contribute to our understanding of how to improve their attainment and progress?
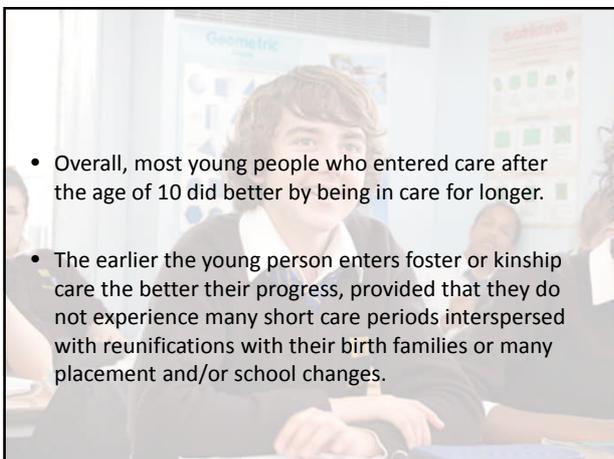
- Overall, most young people who entered care after the age of 10 did better by being in care for longer.

- The earlier the young person enters foster or kinship care the better their progress, provided that they do not experience many short care periods interspersed with reunifications with their birth families or many placement and/or school changes.
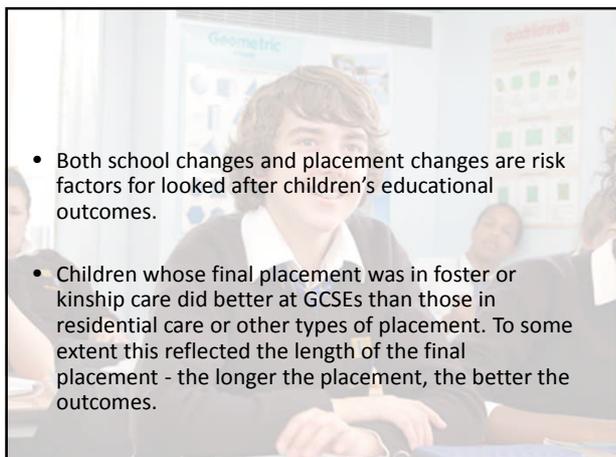
- Both school changes and placement changes are risk factors for looked after children's educational outcomes.

- Children whose final placement was in foster or kinship care did better at GCSEs than those in residential care or other types of placement. To some extent this reflected the length of the final placement - the longer the placement, the better the outcomes.

The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data

- The findings suggest that care generally provides a protective factor.

Foster carers more likely to provide stable placements, if they:

Enjoy being with children

Are firm but flexible

Are emotionally resilient

Communicate openly and honestly

Are amenable to outside support

Berridge, D. (2000) Placement Stability, Quality protects Research Briefing No. 4 London: Department of Health.

Major threats to foster carer resilience

- **Placement Instability**
- **Rock & colleagues (2015)**

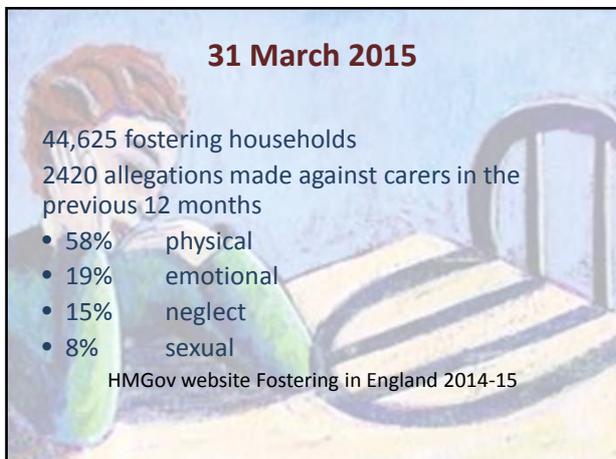- **Allegations of abuse**
– **Sinclair, Gibbs & Wilson (2004)**

After the Storm there is a Rainbow

Sources of Stress for Foster Carers: the Research

- Breakdowns or disruptions to placements
- Allegations
- Relationships with birth parents
- Family tensions
- Disagreements with social services
- A lack of support
- Dissatisfaction with system
- Pressure of scrutiny by SWs, agencies, birth parents, schools...
- Lack of available and quality professional support

- *Survey of 950 foster carers by the Social Work Research & Development Unit, University Of York (2000)*
- *'Foster carers: why they stay and why they leave' by Ian Sinclair and others (2004)*
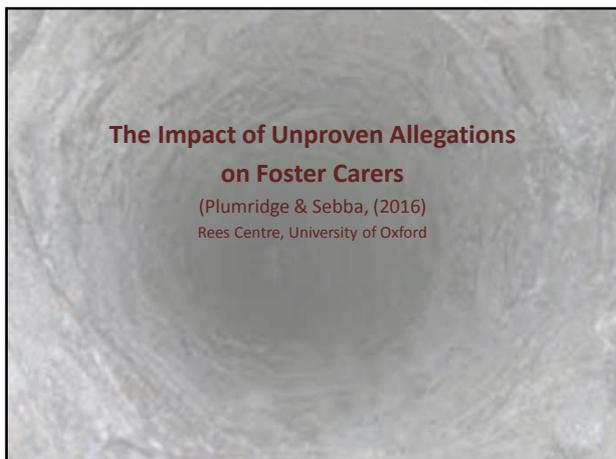
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31 March 2015

44,625 fostering households
2420 allegations made against carers in the previous 12 months
- 58%   physical
- 19%   emotional
- 15%   neglect
- 8%   sexual
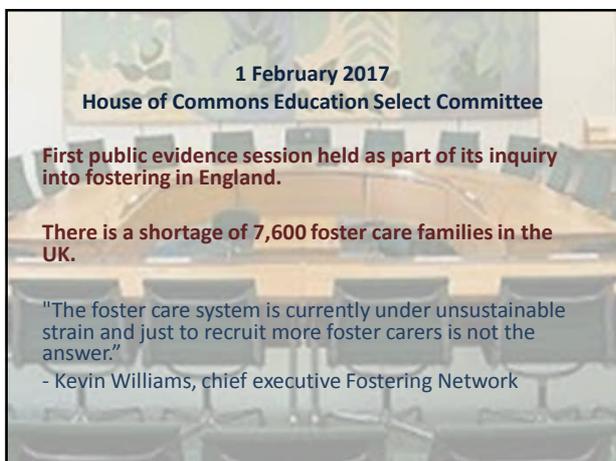   HMGov website Fostering in England 2014-15

**The Impact of Unproven Allegations
on Foster Carers**
(Plumridge & Sebba, (2016)
Rees Centre, University of Oxford

Foster Care - major threats, obstacles, challenges

What is my role as a foster carer?

- **Closeness vs Distance**

- **Treating child as a family member vs
Treating the child as 'someone else's property'**

**1 February 2017
House of Commons Education Select Committee**

First public evidence session held as part of its inquiry into fostering in England.

There is a shortage of 7,600 foster care families in the UK.

"The foster care system is currently under unsustainable strain and just to recruit more foster carers is not the answer."
- Kevin Williams, chief executive Fostering Network

My service, Psychology Support, aims to:

- Help foster carers and practitioner meet the varied and sometimes complex needs of children and young people in care.
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of foster carers and those practitioners who working with a child.
- Enable resilience of foster carers, family members, and those working closely with a child.
- Help overcome the many obstacles and challenges that come with providing care for and working with a child in foster care.
- Support the crucial early phase of a child's placement in foster care.
- Support the process of planned and unplanned endings to a a child's placement.
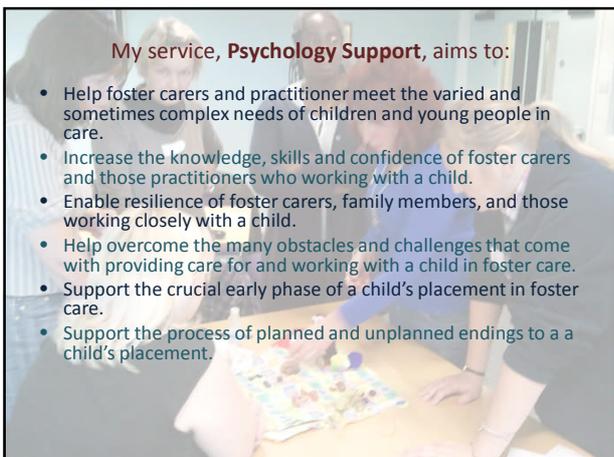
Psychology Support, aims to:

- Strengthen attachment security and trust for a child in the foster care relationship.
- Help support, maintain and strengthen a child's school or college placement – e.g. working collaboratively with classteachers, SENDCos, designated teachers, LACYP support staff, social workers and Virtual School.
- Enable foster carers to feel listened to, valued and supported in their efforts to make a difference for the child in their care.
- Support foster carers with important transitions for a child – e.g. starting or changing school and college, planning transition to adulthood, 'Staying Put' arrangements for care leavers.
- Maintain or improve the stability of a child's foster placement.
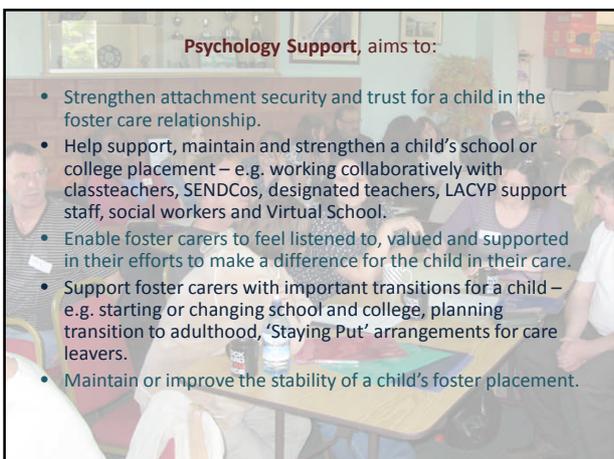
More specifically, support for the challenges and pressures of foster care:

- Supporting a child to adjust to being part of a foster family
- Improving relationships between a child and members of the foster family
- Learning new specialist care routines for a child with an impairment, medical condition or additional support needs
- Responding to difficulties with toileting, bedtimes, sleep, eating, and other self-care issues
- Working through the emotional turbulence of caring for a child who is distressed due to loss, trauma and abuse

Support for the challenges and pressures of foster care:

- finding the best ways of caring for a child who shows resistant or reactive behaviour to new expectations and discipline
- making sense of a child's sometimes confusing and/or self-defeating behaviour
- identifying and responding to the attachment needs of a child who struggles to feel trust and security in adult care relationships
- knowing how to respond most effectively when a child places themselves at risk of harm, including self-harming, unsafe sexual activity, drug and alcohol misuse
- managing the emotional strain a child may experience before, during and following contact with birth family members

- coping with an allegation or complaint made against the carer
- increasing confidence in skills and identifying strengths when the carer feels they are not making a difference or things are going wrong
- managing feelings of sadness and loss when a child moves on to another foster home, adoptive parents or returns to birth family; or the sense of failure or regret when a placement ends prematurely

Resilience is…

The kinds of things we need to **make happen**
(e.g. events, parenting strategies, relationships, resources) to help children manage life when it's tough.

Plus ways of **thinking** and **acting** that we need ourselves if we want to make things better for children.
(Aumann & Hart, 2009)

Prof. Angie Hart, University of Brighton

Psychology Support for foster carers

Resilience Building & Enabling:

- **A 'Relational Model of Resilience'**
- **The Resilience Framework for Adults**
- **Hart, Blincow & Cameron (2012)**

www.boingboing.org.uk

Resilience Framework (Adults) – Copyright Hart, Blincow & Cameron (adapted from original) www.boingboing.org.uk

SPECIFIC APPROACHES	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
	Good enough housing	Find somewhere to belong	Make work & learning as successful as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
		Help understand place in the world, & that others may face similar situations		Being brave	
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences (eg peer support)	Engage mentors	Identifying & solving problems (reduce self blame and guilt)	Promote understanding of others
	Being safe	Keep relationships going (eg educator /support partners/carers/family)			
		The more healthy relationships the better	Map out career or life plan	Putting on rose-tinted glasses (reframing/reappraising)	Help the person to know her/himself
	Access & transport	Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope		Fostering their interests	
	Healthy diet	Get together people the person can count on	Help self-organisation	Calming down & self-soothing (support reflection, not feeling overwhelmed by illness)	Help the person take responsibility for her/himself (self-advocacy)
		Responsibilities & obligations			
	Exercise and fresh air	Focus on good times and places	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster talents
	Enough sleep	Make sense of where the person has come from		Lean on others when necessary	
		Predict a good experience of someone or something new	Develop life skills		There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Leisure & work occupations	Make friends and mix		Have a laugh	
NOBLE TRUTHS					
	ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT		ENLISTING
	Interpersonal skills, empathy	Interpersonal skills, trust	Ongoing support issues		Self (eg not passive), family, friends, mental health professionals, GP

Resilience Moves: Coping

- **Identifying coping resources**
- **Understanding stress process**
- **Identifying and solving problems**
- **Emotion-focused coping: emotion self-management, calming and self-soothing**
- **Openness to support from others (social support)**
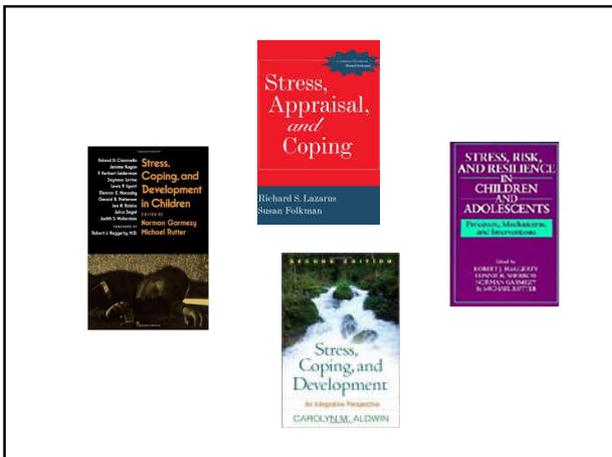
Stress and Coping in Foster Care

- a person **perceives a threat** from certain aspects of their environment   - *stressor*

- which causes a **negative psychological and physiological response**   - *strain*

- and the **behavioural response** directed to reducing these stressors and strain is…   - *coping*

Things that affect the way we perceive stress

- Uncertainty
- Unpredictability
- Uncontrollability
- Self-confidence – in our abilities to manage the event
- Irrational, false, and distorted beliefs about ourselves or the stressful event or situation

Coping with Stress

Types of coping

1. **Problem-focused (approach) coping**

2. **Emotion-focused (avoidant) coping**

3. **Positive appraisal**

4. **Meaning-focused coping**

Coping Skills

Problem-focused coping

is aimed at reducing the demands of the stressful situation by:
  1. Confronting the problem
  2. Increasing the resources for dealing with it
  3. Planful problem solving

People use problem-focused approaches when they believe the demands of a situation to be changeable and open to influence (controllable).

This typically involves removing /altering the stressor, planning ways of resolving the situation, seeking advice or help from others in changing the situation.

Emotion-focused coping

is aimed at controlling the emotional response to the stressful situation by:
  1. Self-medication, comfort eating, exercise, meditation, self-harm, other addictive behaviours, etc
  2. Distancing
  3. Avoidance
  4. Accepting responsibility or blame
  5. Taking control over the expression of feelings
  6. Seeking social support from others
        .

13

Positive Appraisal

- PA is the reframing of a situation to see it in a positive light.
- It involves changing the way a stressful situation is seen.

Positive reappraisal has been significantly and independently associated with increases in positive emotions and reduced stress.

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ABC
14

Meaning-focused coping

Involves:

- Searching for meaning in adversity.
- Drawing on personal values, beliefs, and goals to change the *meaning* given to and *personal response* to a stressful situation.

Five types of control to reduce stress

Behavioural control - the ability to take action to reduce the impact of a stressful event; reducing intensity or shortening its length.

Cognitive control - the ability to use our thought processes to alter the impact of a stressor (e.g. a rethinking of the way we see a stressful event).

Decisional control - an opportunity to choose between courses of action when confronted by something stressful (e.g. choices, involvement in decisions).

Informational control - involves being able to gain information about a stressful event (e.g. its potential consequences).

Retrospective control – affecting a person's beliefs about things to do with the stressful event after it has occurred (e.g. being briefed).

Emotion-Focused Coping: Social Support

Social support is being close to others and confiding in others as a resource for coping with stress.

People with social support tend to have the belief that they are cared for, loved, and valued as part of a social network that will provide support in times of need accompanying stress events.

Social support is known as a positive force which makes a person less susceptible to stress in the first place (i.e. preventative).

Social Support Resources

People who are important to you:
- People who give you *emotional support*
- People you *socialise with*
- People who *help you out* with *practical problems*
- People who *help you out financially*
- People who *give you advice and information*

good friends are like stars.
you don't always see them, but you know they're always there!

(old saying)

Social support can be given by:
- expressing empathy, caring and concern towards the person;
- expressing positive regard for the person by offering encouragement and valuing their ideas, thoughts and feelings;
- providing direct assistance, when a person finds a task too problematic;
- giving advice, guidance, and feedback on how a person is doing;
- providing opportunities for a person to be one of a team or part of a group with shared interests and activities.

Resilience Moves: Learning

- **'Learning the Child'**
- **Developing skills, gaining knowledge and understanding**
- **Highlighting personal strengths, skills acquired, achievements**
- **The reflective practitioner**

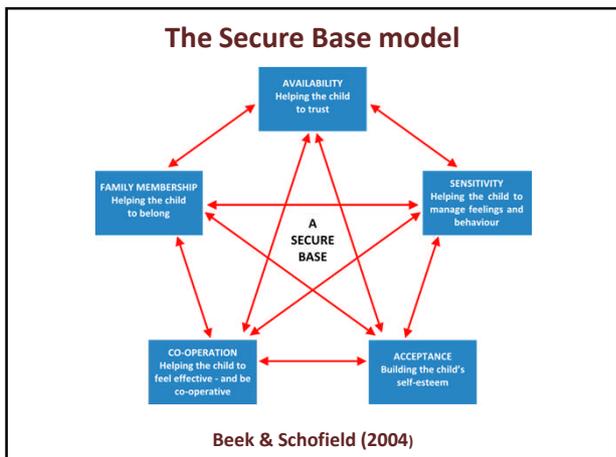## Resilience Moves: Core Self

- Learned optimism
- Trauma & attachment awareness
    - intersubjectivity
    - mind-mindedness or reflective function
    - biopsychosocial basis of trauma
  (body responses, shame, protective mechanisms,)
- Secure Base Model of Foster Care
- 'Embracing vulnerability', accepting and living with uncertainty and unpredictability

A Secure Base

A child or young person who is able to seek **comfort and security** from an **attachment figure** has the advantage of feeling safe to explore their world and in doing so develops confidence, competence and **resilience**.

Sroufe , L. A. , Egeland , B. , Carlson , E. and Collins , W. A. (2005)
The development of the person: The Minnesota study of risk and adaptation from birth to adulthood,
New York: Guilford.

This is the essence of the **Secure Base Model**.

The Secure Base model

AVAILABILITY
Helping the child to trust

FAMILY MEMBERSHIP
Helping the child to belong

SENSITIVITY
Helping the child to manage feelings and behaviour

A SECURE BASE

CO-OPERATION
Helping the child to feel effective - and be co-operative

ACCEPTANCE
Building the child's self-esteem

Beek & Schofield (2004)

Availability- helping the child to trust

Jenny (placed at 6, now aged 14) who came from a background of severe neglect and sexual abuse and continued to be very challenging, liked to say goodnight to her foster mum every night just before going to sleep, even if this meant ringing her foster mum on her mobile if her foster mum was out for the evening.

Sensitivity - helping the child to manage feelings and behaviour

I think Jenna (9) spent so long in self defence and looking after herself that she never learned to look at things from any one else's point of view. She missed that out when she was little.

And even things like stories. When you say, 'what do you think is going to happen next?' or 'why is that person thinking that?' she hasn't got a clue, she doesn't follow the motives of what people are doing, or how they are feeling. So we do a lot of story reading together and I talk it through.

Using an experiences book : making it safe to think and remember

- Paula (8) couldn't remember or didn't want to remember what happened this morning or yesterday or last week and couldn't anticipate 'next week'. So we started to do an Experiences Book together - each day writing down what had happened and her feelings about it. This helped her to reflect on the shape of each day and the immediate past and build her capacity to remember.

Acceptance - building the child's self-esteem

Rob (11) loves his fish pond. Now he's in charge of his own and he's totally reliable in that department. We encourage him all we can. We say 'Rob's the top pond man'. He gave his talk at school on goldfish and got top marks.

Co-operation- helping children to feel effective

We try, actually, never to tell Salim (7) to do anything. It's a matter of phrasing it differently, so that you are not triggering his feelings of threat. So, instead of saying, 'Please wash your hands before you have a sandwich' we might just say 'Would you like to come and have a sandwich after you've washed your hands?' or 'We'll have a nice long story time if you brush your teeth quickly'.

Family membership – Helping the child to belong

We always say – from the moment you walk through the door, you are part of us. No matter how long you're staying or how many other families you relate to, you are part and parcel of our family, the same as everyone else who lives here. We say it and we show it to them as well.

Resilience Moves: Belonging

- **Support networks: building trusting relationships with and gaining support from 'others who know'**
- **Commitment to family membership**

Elaine & David's story

Resilience Moves: Changing the Odds

- Resilience can involve challenging adversity not just coping/avoiding it.

- Strengths/resources people have to 'change the odds' and challenge the source of a problem.

- Self-advocacy & confidence to challenge:
    - learn to cope with.
    - work round or avoid
    - challenge/change (e.g. stigma among professionals – "Just a foster carer")

The 'engines of resilience' are common and ordinary, interactive and developed in relationships.

Ann Masten (2014)

tonymancini@psychologysupport.co.uk

Psychology Support