

ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Book Review by Sally Goldstraw

**Therapies for Complex Trauma:
Helping Children and Families in Foster Care, Kinship Care or Adoption**
Edited by Anthea Hendry & Joy Hasler

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This book offers an overview of the research into complex trauma and the valuable role of creative therapies in supporting recovery for children. While it is intended for those working in foster care, kinship care or adoption, it is also useful for those working in other fields of trauma where children remain with parents. It will be of immense benefit for new creative therapists but can be thought provoking for those who have been working in the field for a considerable period of time.

The first chapter provides a succinct overview of the history of post-traumatic stress disorder, complex and developmental trauma definitions. Despite the common use of these terms, children's experiences of complex and developmental trauma have remained largely outside the diagnostic realms of the DSM and the ICD. Experienced practitioners will appreciate the terse nature of this chapter as a way of staying up to date with changes to diagnostic criteria that are slowly including the experiences of children who have been exposed to complex trauma. The author provides a good overview of the seven inter-related domains of impairment in children as defined by the national Child Traumatic Stress network (NCTSN) being; attachment, biology, affect/emotional regulation, dissociation, behavioural regulation, cognition and self concept. The authors provide some hope that children's experiences are gradually being integrated into DSM and ICD diagnostic classifications.

In the era of neurobiological research, the abundance of literature can be difficult to decipher and integrate for those who work at the coalface in the fields of complex trauma. Chapter Two provides an overview of contributions of key researchers such as Allan Schore, Dan Siegel, Bruce Perry and Bessel van der Kolk that contribute to the development of Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP), the Neurosequential Models of Therapeutics (NMT) and the Attachment Regulation and Competencies (ARC) model. It is a well-written overview that would be beneficial for those who are new to this field for understanding the often overwhelming information that informs effective practise in the field of childhood trauma. This chapter also explores three therapeutic implications for caregivers. The first conceptual implication is of 'developmental reparenting' which encourages carers to provide the nurturing appropriate to the developmental stage of the child rather than their chronological age. The second concept addresses the importance of including carers in

therapeutic work with children. Finally the debilitating impact of 'secondary trauma' which may be a direct result of caring for highly traumatised children is discussed. The authors spell out the need to provide greater resources and support to foster or kinship carers and adoptive parents who, despite good intentions, often struggle to form relationships with traumatised children. I found the discussion of how holistic care teams and the creative therapies can contribute to the needs of the child very affirming. All too often, professional differences, competing funding structures, and lack of adequate resourcing, prevent workers from developing a team approach for the benefit of their young clients.

In exploring clinical applications of the creative therapies for complex trauma, the assessment model used by Catchpoint, a UK adoption agency, is discussed. That organisation developed a comprehensive assessment method based on existing research into attachment and developmental trauma, utilising information from the home, school and clinical settings. I found this a refreshing look at assessments that was holistic, strengths-based and utilised a wrap-around therapy team approach. Another model of assessment created by Family Futures, an independent adoption agency in London, also provided valuable resources. One was a visual representation of developmental trauma that is used to help children and caregivers understand how early trauma can be at the root of all the branches of the child's development. Their assessment and treatment model called Neuro Physiological Psychotherapy (NPP) utilises the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics, developmental re-parenting and multidisciplinary approaches, including the creative therapies. They include a useful summary to assist clinicians understand how trauma, attachment and identity are linked to different areas of the brain and the required therapeutic focus and interventions for both children and caregivers.

Different creative therapeutic modalities such as art, drama, music, play and dance movement are explored in further chapters. The chapter on art psychotherapy challenges us to shift the focus from individual therapy with children into attachment focused and systemic dyadic work with caregivers. It describes three possible needs-led and flexible interventions, illustrated by case studies. The first is child-led with carer as helper or witness; the second a joint engagement approach and the third employs a co-construction of a coherent narrative approach. The chapter on

music therapy describes the multisensory and whole brain aspects of music-making. It includes a list of helpful principles for therapists as well as some specific music therapy activities for families. The drama therapy chapter provides examples of techniques such as the six-part story method, family journeys and the advantages of working collaboratively with other modalities such as art therapy. The chapter on play therapy and EMDR, or bilateral stimulation, ensures that repetitive play or 'looping' is not strengthening or reinforcing of trauma-related neural pathways or entrenching trauma-based behaviour. The authors of this chapter provide clear arguments for this position using case studies. Dance moment therapy is explored as an integrative experience of mind, body and emotions. This is well illuminated through use of case examples, highlighting the way the moving body can alleviate disrupted attachment behaviours and assist children to obtain a sense of belonging within their families.

The final two chapters include school-based approaches. Given the hours children spend at school, this is an often overlooked resource of therapeutic potential by those in the health and welfare sectors. It explores the challenges for children who attend both mainstream and specialist schools. There are a number of vignettes that illustrate alternative ways for schools to support children with complex trauma. While helpful I did find these chapters disappointing. It assumes that all schools are willing to adjust their learning environment to serve the needs of children with complex trauma. In my experience, this is the exception rather than the rule, and would have appreciated advice in working at a systemic level to spearhead change in the most resistant schools. The book ends rather abruptly and would have been strengthened by a summary of the key points on the strengths and contributions made by the creative therapies within traditional multidisciplinary teams.

This book was accessible and I was stimulated to think about ways of employing different creative modalities into my own workplace. As a grant writer, I also noted that this book could provide necessary background material for funding applications that validate the incorporation of creative therapies into treatment interventions for traumatised children. It is a book I will keep on my shelf and can imagine it becoming dog-eared over time as I use it to reference the value of creative therapies

to government and other funding bodies who struggle to understand that healing childhood trauma requires more than medical intervention.

Biography

My name is Sally Goldstraw and I manage Van Go, a pilot project of creative therapists who provide mobile therapies to children who have experienced complex trauma as a result of family violence. I am an art therapist employed by WRISC Family Violence Support in Ballarat, Australia. In addition, I am a sessional lecturer in the Masters of Art Therapy program at La Trobe University, Melbourne.