

Session 7:

Voices From the Start: Using Infant Experience to Shape Better Care and Family Support





Blackpool Council

Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Embedding the Infant Voice in Whole-Family Domestic Abuse Intervention

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Emotional safety



The themes we'll be discussing could be difficult or triggering, so check in with yourself throughout.

It's okay to pause, breathe, step away, or switch off your camera if you need to protect your emotional safety.

Your wellbeing comes first.

Today's discussion

- Babies are profoundly affected by domestic abuse (DA), yet their experiences often remain unheard in both practice and policy.
- The For Baby's Sake Trust was established to change this by addressing DA and intergenerational trauma within the first 1001 days.
- Embedding the infant voice within trauma-informed, therapeutic interventions can break cycles of DA, strengthen attachment, and improve early years outcomes.

Our vision

A world where babies and children grow up free from the harm of domestic abuse.

Our mission

To provide and promote therapeutic, trauma-informed support that breaks cycles of domestic abuse and gives babies the best start in life.



The scale of domestic abuse

1 in 5 children in the UK experience domestic abuse, often when still in the womb.

1 in 3 parents have experienced a partner using abusive behaviour towards them.

40% of parents who experienced domestic abuse said it occurred during their baby's first 1001 days from pregnancy until the baby's second birthday.

1 in 3 parents who experienced domestic abuse said they didn't know where to begin to look for help. Only 10% received professional help at the time.

Around

187,750 babies

are present at police callouts for
domestic abuse annually, in England

Approximately

50,000 babies

are referred to Children's Social Care in
England each year with DA as a factor

The focus on ages 0 - 2



The first 1001 days are crucial to a baby's life

Experiencing domestic abuse impacts life chances for babies and children. Evidence suggests that exposure pre-birth and until the baby's second birthday can have the greatest impact.

30% of domestic abuse begins or escalates in pregnancy

Interventions at this stage can prevent years of abuse and harm. Offering support during pregnancy and in the early years can harness parents' motivation to protect and care for their baby and make the changes necessary to give their child a good life.

90%

of babies in our programme achieve their one-year developmental milestones

96%

reduction in severe levels of domestic abuse across our families

2/3

of families avoided escalation into care proceedings or stepped down below that threshold

Newborn Behavioural Observations and Video Interaction Guidance

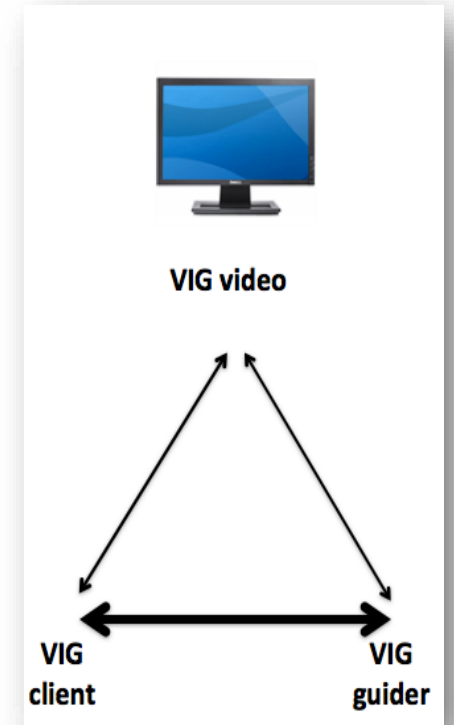
Key assumptions on which the NBO are based:

- Infants are social beings ready to communicate
- Babies communicate through their behaviour
- Infants' communication is **not** random

Why does VIG work?

Sharing moments of attunement while experiencing attuned dialogue:

- Encourages sensitivity to the baby
- Opens the client to start thinking about themselves, their child, their relationship and the possibilities for change
- Promotes attunement, empathy and emotional regulation. It maximises the release of oxytocin to assist in achieving change in helping parents become more sensitive and attuned to their baby or child's emotional needs
- Enhances reflective function & enhances mind-mindedness
- Inspires hopefulness and joy, even in contexts of disadvantage



Attachment focused parenting



- Children need to feel a sense of safety, security, belonging, and to be understood.
- Attachment-focused parenting regulates emotions by soothing distress, creating joy and encouraging calm.
- Offers a secure base from which to explore the world.
- Provides a foundation from which all future relationships are based.
- Feelings of safety result in healthy self-awareness, empathy, trust & an eagerness to learn.
- Encourages the use of PACE – playfulness, acceptance, curiosity & empathy.
- Enables parents to perceive their children beyond any challenging or concerning behaviours.

The inner child module

The Inner Child module is the therapeutic core of the programme and reconnects us with the often-wounded element of ourselves: the child within, the first original self – fragmented, alone and confused.

This is where we can begin to discover the root of our fears, insecurities and sabotaging life patterns and start the process of embracing, understanding and healing our inner child.



Keeping babies in mind



- Understand the different ways babies and children communicate, including non-verbal cues.
- Always hear and include the child's voice in assessments and arrangements.
- Use a range of communication methods depending on the child's needs.
- Consult with other professionals to understand the voice of the child, including what they have observed and understood.
- For babies, tools such as the Newborn Behavioural Observations (NBO) System or Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) can be used to interpret their needs, vulnerabilities, and responses.
- Use direct observation of babies and young children by a range of people and make sense of these observations.
- Do not assume you know what a child may think or feel – every child is different!
- Building relationships with families, spending time getting to know them is the most important way to hear and understand their voice and views.

In conclusion

- Centring the infant voice transforms both individual family outcomes and wider early years systems.
- Embedding baby-centred practice within multi-agency DA responses is critical to breaking intergenerational cycles of harm.
- Early years' strategies and commissioning frameworks must adopt trauma-informed, infant-led approaches to ensure that every baby's voice is heard and acted upon.



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Thank you