

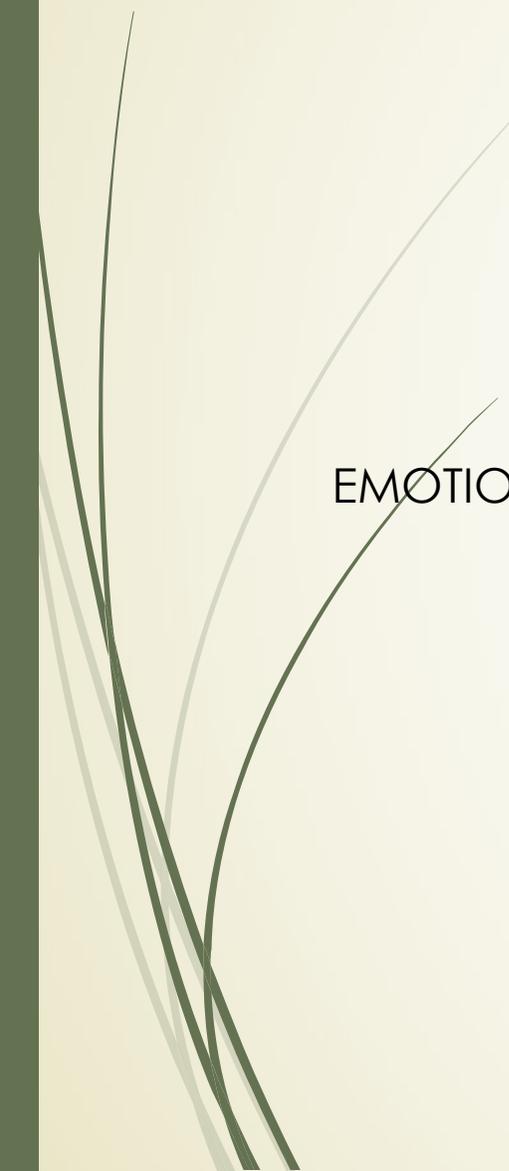
Bearing unbearable circumstances in social care; creating a space to think and to feel

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INTEGRATED PRACTICE STORIES – ME AND THEM – US

THE PRIMARY TASK?

EMOTION IN PRACTICE

EMOTION IN ORGANISATIONS

THE UNCONSCIOUS: ANXIETY AND DEFENCES

PSYCHIC RETREATS



Integrated practice stories – imparting key messages about human development across the life span

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Emotion in relationship-based practice



The capacity for empathy, reliability, warmth, knowledge and genuineness are the foundations of practice but they are not omnipresent and require nurturing (Preston-Shoot and Agass, 1990).



‘Our task as workers is to know ourselves well enough, so that we can disentangle the influence of others upon ourselves, and us upon them, and make sense of how their anxieties, conflicts, and distress are being communicated’ (Cooper, 2018; 27).



Bearing unbearable circumstances in social care;
feeling as communication



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Relationships shape who we
are (Triesman, 2017)

Relationships 'continue' to
shape who we are (O'Sullivan,
2018)



What's this got to do with self care?



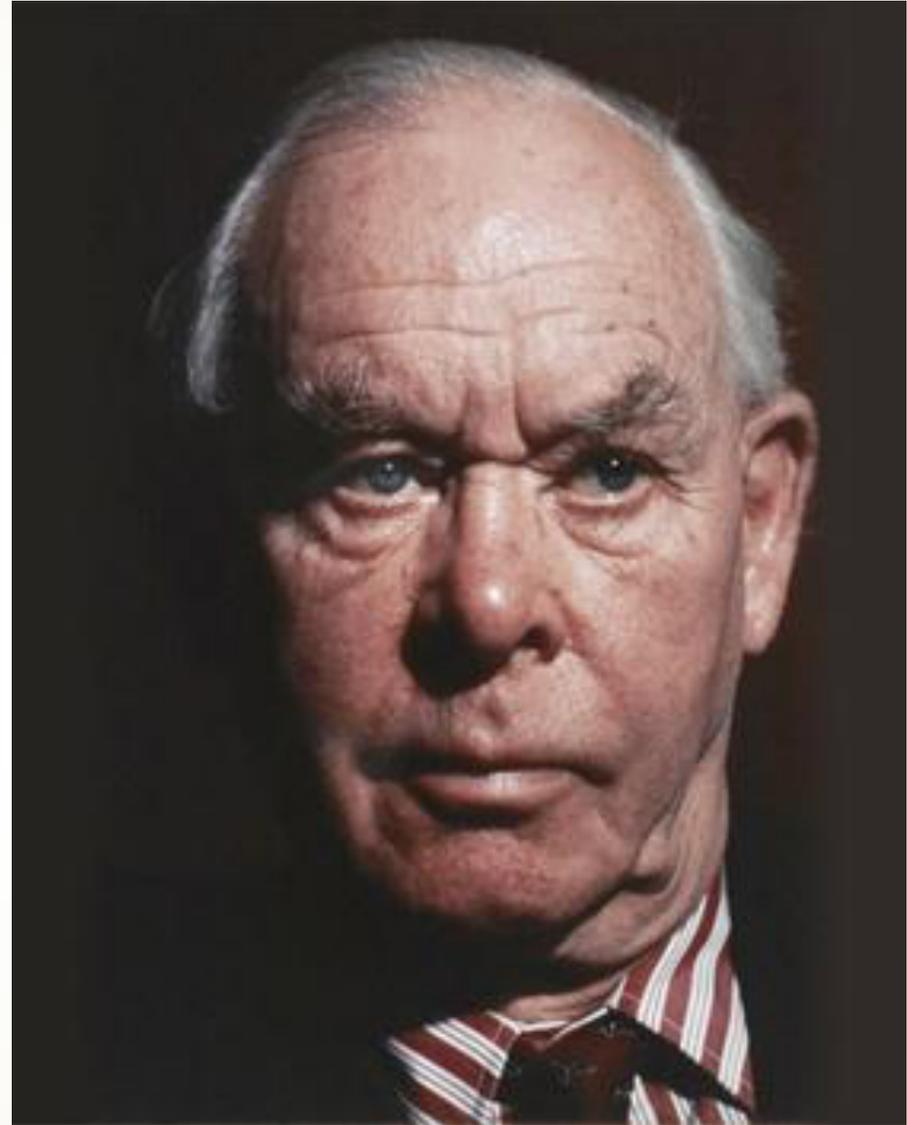
In order to connect with you I have to connect with something within myself that knows that feeling.



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What happened to
you and how does
that continue to
impact upon your
life and how you
function today?





'Some of the deepest relational experiences can offer the greatest thought and ideas' (O'Sullivan, 2019)



Developing a Reflective Capacity

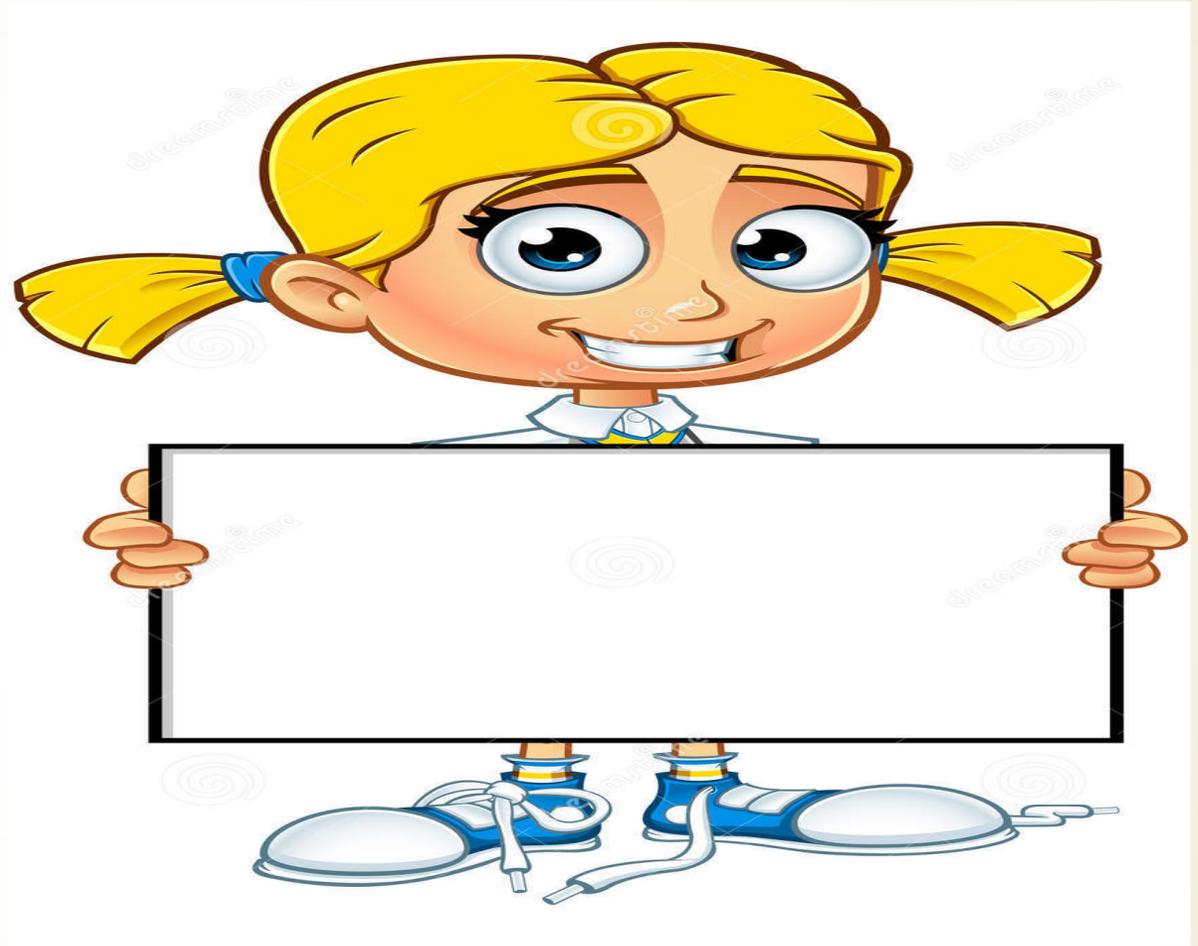
‘There is a hatred of having to learn by experience at all, and a lack of faith in the worth of such a kind of learning’ (Bion, 1960, 89).

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The
unconscious,
anxiety and
defences





Preparing to Relate

As Individuals we must make sense ourselves of our own experiences, if we get the sense that these experiences are already '*worked out*' '*thought about by others*' positioning us in particular ways, we will be less inclined to think for ourselves. – **This is true also for the parents and children we work with**

- ▶ Individuals have deeply held personal feelings and experiences that human work can trigger.



The primary task and its link to self care

- ▶ What is my primary task? (Rice, 1965, Gould et al, 2001, Roberts and Obholzer, 1994, Ruch and Murray, 2011)
- ▶ What does it mean for the person I am working with?
- ▶ What came before me? What will come after me? – my working context
- ▶ What came before this task in my own professional and personal life and what is happening now in my life?



From Primary task to Primary Risk (Hirschhorn, 1994)

- What is the primary risk in an organization?
 - What is the primary task and how does our way of working relate to this task? And/or what is the primary risk that shapes the social care workers experience?
- 



The working environment

Issues of anxiety and defensiveness



In some cases what is going on inside the child, between the child and their parents, foster family or residential team and in the worker or caregivers themselves can interpenetrate and dynamics at one level can affect and can be mirrored at other levels.

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Emotions in Organisations: Disturbance or Intelligence?

‘Alertness to the emotional undertow of organizational life can be a powerful source of information for managers and leaders’ (Armstrong, 2004, 11).

‘Every organization is an emotional place. It is an emotional place because it is a human invention, serving human purposes and dependent on human beings’



How families and workers approach the task of relating to one another at an individual, group and organisational level is related to their earlier experiences, and, in the present day 'working' climate in which they 'meet' (O'Sullivan, 2018).

Their interpersonal communications are also often reflective of the organisational climate (Armstrong and Rustin, 2015).

These patterns of communicating are intensified and reinforced by anxieties associated with fear of separation and death, and fear of blame on behalf of all members across systems. In an effort to manage this threat, organisations, the families and the workers develop defensive strategies (O'Sullivan, 2018).



Expectations of work and what can be achieved

- ▶ The impossible task (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994, Huffington et al, 2004).
- ▶ These expectations are often unrealistically high, driven by conscious and unconscious guilt about how our society treats its most vulnerable (Bower 2005, Powell and Scanlan, 2016).

The difficulties in meeting these expectations can touch on powerful *feelings* in ourselves. This is often felt as both a fear that we might not be able to help but also an anxiety about causing damage (Menzies, 1960).



Katy and the Hockedy family

Telling it like it is...



WORK DISCUSSION (RUSTIN AND BRADLEY, 2008)



*Katy and the *Hockedy
Family



The Hockedy Family and Jasmine Hockey an infant

- ▶ The dynamic interplay between primary task related anxiety and secondary persecutory anxiety (Copper & Lees, 2015, O'Sullivan, 2018).



Persecutory Anxiety and Defences

- ▶ Cooper and Lees might consider this example as ‘precisely the replacement of concern (albeit anxious concern) for the [baby] by a dominant anxiety for the survival of the professional self’ (2014; 244).
- ▶ Katy’s fear is that the baby will die but the anxiety associated with this fear is initially less known to Katy and is instead experienced as something that is about to happen to her in the face of the possibility of Jasmine dying.



Psychological Demands

‘ the inner psychological world of the individual practitioner’ (Dwyer, 2007; 50)

The organization becomes a useful target for holing onto some of the intense anxieties associated with Katy’s task (Woodhouse and Pengelly, 1991).



Psychic Retreat (Steiner, 1993)

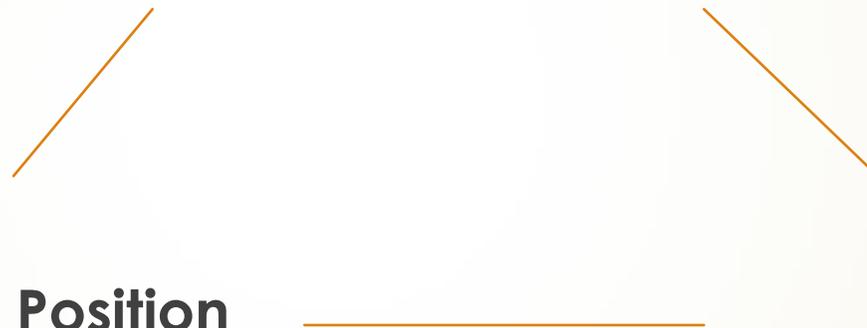


Steiner 1993

RETREAT (Borderline Position)

Paranoid-Schizoid Position

Depressive



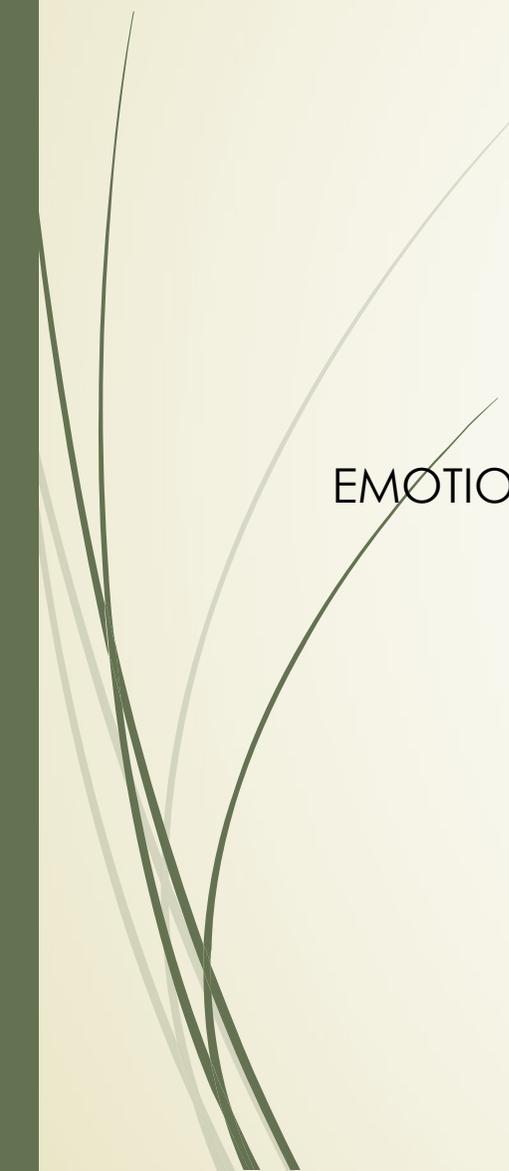


Psychic Retreat

In situations where fear for the professional self prevails, anxiety which is persecutory in nature increases and the use of defensive practice will grow (Lees, Meyer, & Rafferty, 2013; Munro, 2010).



Concluding thoughts



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Bearing the unbearable

- ▶ Work with children and/or families where abuse, neglect, deprivation, trauma and disability are present has the potential to create unbearable levels of anxiety for a worker and their organization
- ▶ The manifestation of anxiety and its accompanying defences plays a central role in the work



Bearing the unbearable

- ▶ Defences – distancing, denial, preoccupation
- ▶ Anxiety and Defences remain in the absence of a space in which to think
- ▶ Defences can sometimes become embedded in the worker and the organization (Cooper and Lees, 2015, Menzies Lyth, 1988, Ruch and Murray, 2011).
- ▶ Without adequate containment in which to make sense of these experiences the worker risks responding in unhelpful ways to the child and parents or not responding at all (Ferguson, 2011, 2017).



Creating Space to Think and to Feel

‘As workers in busy, hard-pressed front-line services, we do have a lot of other people in our minds, and many anxieties of our own but these matters are not the service user’s problem’ (Cooper, 2018).

‘Just discharging difficult feelings and thoughts does not usually lead to better understanding of the meaning of it all’ (Cooper, 2018; 26).

Relationships, Resilience and Self Care

- Relationships are at the heart of practice and of humanity – in this way they are always going to be both **personal and professional**.
- Valuing the importance of relating in a thoughtful and safe way as leading to good outcomes for children, parents and humanity is essential.
- To do this effectively a **good understanding of our own relational history and current ways of relating is essential**
- A strong containing supervision/support structure that pays attention to process and as well as task, and doesn't shy away from the emotional aspects of relating that are always present is essential.



Thank you

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