

Book review

Creative therapies for complex trauma: Helping children and families in foster care, kinship care or adoption

Edited by Anthea Hendry and Joy Hasler
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2017
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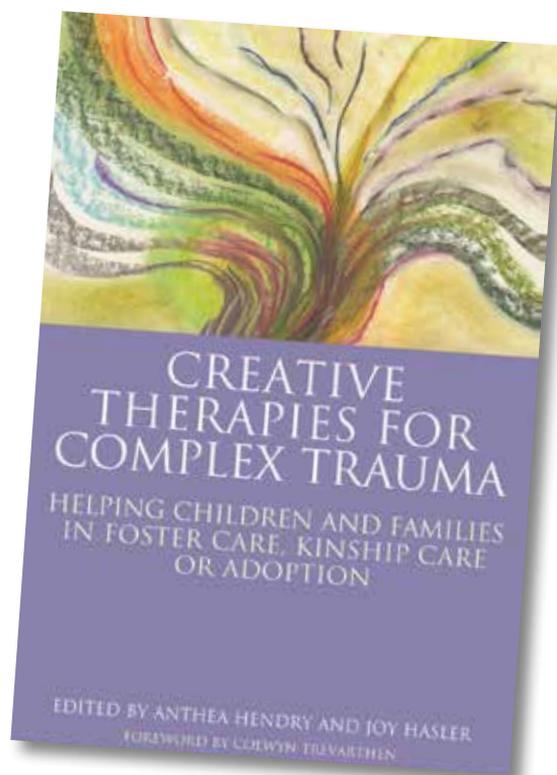
Reviewed by Kate Richards

Creative therapies for complex trauma: Helping children and families in foster care, kinship care or adoption, edited by Anthea Hendry and Joy Hasler, guides practitioners through the knotty landscape of working with children who have experienced chronic trauma.

This is the first substantial text to present an integrated approach to creative modalities for the assessment and treatment of children living in out-of-home care. Grounded in neurodevelopmental theory, it demonstrates the unique role of art, music, dance, drama and play-based interventions. Whilst preceding texts have addressed the area of arts therapies and trauma, Hendry and Hasler grapple with the contemporary field of practice, wherein creative therapists use a holistic approach, incorporating individual, dyadic and family therapy, as well as child-focused carer work, therapeutic education models and participation in multidisciplinary care teams.

This book represents a maturity of creative therapy practice that takes a flexible response to this decidedly complex field. As the authors explain, trauma for these children has often occurred within the relationship to primary caregivers, and in chaotic and harmful home environments. The persistence of frightening experiences early in life shapes the body and the mind, instilling an internalised sense of fear and mistrust. Sarah Ayache and Martin Gibson capture the way therapy with this particular cohort can unfold: “The overwhelming trauma spills out in a jumble of mess and confusion, metaphor, gesture, transference and projection that is highly emotive and challenging to make sense of” (p.225).

A foreword by Cowlyn Travarthen (2017, pp.7–11) heralds a message about the need for healing through hope and a belief in the opportunity for relationships with interested others, as a way to overcome the painful aftermath of neglect and abuse. He warns against fixed beliefs about causality between trauma and damage to the brain,



encouraging an open mind to both theory and each client's inherent capacities.

Structurally, this book is organised into three parts. The first, ‘Mapping out the territory’, describes the foundation of theories underpinning clinical approaches that are detailed in subsequent chapters. Franca Brenninkmeyer (2017, pp.22–41) addresses the diagnostic criteria of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, attachment theory, and the symptoms of complex trauma. Hendry follows, detailing developmental brain theories of Bessel van der Kolk, Dan Siegel, Bruce Perry and Allan Shore. She also explores interventions that utilise the care system around the child, including Developmental Re-Parenting and Dan Hughes’ Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. Brenninkmeyer emphasises the system of adults nurturing each child is a crucial mechanism for change. This collegial ethos is shared by Janet Smith (2017, pp.58–75) who accentuates the vital component of supporting foster and kinship carers as “therapeutic parents” (p.59). Smith does well to lean into the complexity of finding acceptance in the gap between expectations and the reality of caring for a traumatised child. She wisely

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