

Infant-Family Case Study 3.



Tracy and ten weeks old Annie (not true names) were referred to a PIP team by her health visitor concerned about their lack of interaction and eye contact. The PIP therapist and health visitor began with a joint visit, and continued to work together.

The pregnancy had been difficult and she was sick and in pain from almost the moment that she had conceived. While pregnant she had been the victim of rape. It had been a traumatic birth, with twenty hours of labour after being induced before she was given a rushed Caesarean.

Tracy had found the whole birth experience extremely upsetting and it still preyed on her mind. She developed post-natal depression and, although on medication, she often became extremely miserable and found herself crying when alone. Tracy had no social network for support and spent long solitary hours in her flat.

To begin with she had a violent partner who later left. Although frugal, she was struggling to live on benefits, Eventually, with encouragement from the PIP therapist and health visitor, she was able to go to her local children's centre where she received a lot of skilled support.

Tracy said that there were many times when she did not feel close to her daughter and did not understand her. She openly wanted to be different from her own mother and once engaged became keen for help.

Tracy's mother had abandoned her and her siblings to her father just before her second birthday. On one visit an aunt was present and she recalled how Tracy had been severely neglected by her mother from birth onwards, badly fed and clothed, ill and uncared for.

After her mother deserted the family her father was her sole carer until she was taken into care at age eight after sexual abuse (with father's collusion) from a neighbour was uncovered. She was placed in a children's home, before being fostered at eleven. When Clare was in foster care she had suffered from anorexia and depression, but had no professional help. Tracy still felt unsafe everywhere and frequently had panic attacks when venturing outside.

The therapist met with Tracy and Annie in the home on a weekly basis and initially the aim was to unpack the issues from Tracy's past in an attempt to see how her traumatic childhood was affecting her immediate relationship with her baby. Annie's tendency to avoid looking at her mother was marked, but Tracy did not seem to notice this.

Tracy tended to rely on noisy toys to amuse or distract Annie and was frequently intrusive to a degree that Annie experienced as overwhelming. Tracy was convinced that she alone was not good enough to meet the needs of her baby, perhaps because her own needs had been dismissed when she was of a similar age.

Thus she was extremely anxious about other people passing judgement on her, and when this did occur (a social worker said that her flat was dirty) she was devastated. Annie continued to avoid eye contact with her mother and at the same time Tracy

was finding it hard to be attuned to the everyday needs of her child. The therapist suggested using video so Tracy could see herself and Annie from the outside. The video feedback was used to reinforce positive aspects of interaction between Tracy and her baby and was also an opportunity to encourage her to think about what might be going on in Annie's mind.

Tracy came to realise that she was finding it hard to understand what Annie wanted or needed and this was linked back to her own early experiences with her mother, who seemed to have not thought about Tracy at all, and how in many ways Tracy had to re-invent mothering for herself. The therapist and health visitor began to see a distinct change in what occurred between Tracy and her child.

Most importantly, Tracy was more attuned and relaxed with Annie so that a benign circle of interaction came to be established. They enjoyed reading and playing together. The appointments were reduced in frequency by the time Annie began to walk. Mother and daughter seemed pleased with each other and themselves, and Annie had developed into a standard issue cheerfully showing-off toddler who was immensely full of herself. On follow up a year later all was going well and they continued to attend the children's centre and take advantage of what was on offer there.