

ASW Support Group for Adoptive Parents

History - This support group came out of the Covid crisis. Many parents all over the world were struggling with changes to the environment, fears and school disruptions and closures. Veronica came up with the idea to run an online group to help adoptive parents and foster carers relax by teaching them relaxation techniques they could also share with their children. This was such a great success we ended up running two groups of over 15 parents a week for 6 weeks! We followed this up with a similar zoom type session to help with strategies for going "Back to school post Covid". Again this was taken up well and we ran two groups a week for 5 weeks each. We also started to incorporate a relaxation in at the end of the session to help parents decompress and de-stress. The parents were the ones that suggested a Support Group and so the model for the current support group was born.

Description of the group - We start with a check in where every parent gets to speak, to off load and say what they are going through that month. I then present a subject relevant to adoption for discussion. We then have a group discussion and the members of the group often help each other. They gain confidence and hope from others in the group who have previously been going through a difficult time and are now in an easier moment. Also vertical grouping of children's ages means parents can offer support and help to each other if they have been through similar issues in the past. We end the group a short 15 minute relaxation to help them de-stress for those who wish to say.

The funding for this group over the last 18 months has enormously helped around 40 parents. The fact it is an online group means parents don't need a babysitter and the relaxation is in their own home so they finish the group relaxed and with no need to travel home. There is a relaxed feeling in the group where parents may have to put a child back to bed or attend to something and this is all done with great boundaries. Often parents coming to the group with headphones and no camera and typing their comments in the chat box so they can still participate even though they may be attending to their children. This aspect has been a great strength of the group.

Lastly this is an amazing set of parents who are now working together to help each other through common difficulties. Their strength and resilience for such complex issues can as a facilitator bring tears to my eyes, especially when I witness them coming through such difficult issues. It really is a great honour to work with such amazing parents doing such a great job.

December 2020- The adopted child and xmas/holiday season

Xmas can be a complex time for adopted and traumatised children and poses us as adoptive parents with many dilemmas. How do we handle Father Christmas and all it's complications around being truthful and real that adopted children often need? What if children become stressed over wrapped presents? How does the extra stimulation and excitement affect our children? How do we handle teens and peer pressure during the xmas period? This week I will highlight a few areas and we will all help each other through understanding and experience.

January 2021- Challenging behaviour

In January we will look at challenging behaviour. This subject was popular on the last course, so it is a chance to look at strategies to help challenging behaviour either for the first time or work on them further for those who have started to use them. We will also look at the concept of passive awareness to help those who have started to use these strategies.

February 2021- Challenging behaviour continued

No March Session

April 2021- The adopted child and parent and feelings of rejection

Feelings of rejection comes up a lot in the world of adoption. Children often reject not only things that may seem negative, but also things that seem positive. This can be so difficult when as parents we are trying so hard to make life feel good for them. Parents can also feel rejected and this can be very hard to hold and lead us to feel alone, frustrated and in despair. Children project negative traumas and feelings onto their adopted families causing all kinds of chaos and dramas. This week will give us a chance to share some of our experiences, hear a little from Bay about why some of this is necessary for their development and also when to recognise when you need to draw a boundary and also touch upon how negative projections against us triggers our own emotional vulnerability and how to cope with that.

May 2021- Developing Resilience

In my years as a psychotherapist I have noticed over and over again a strange magic ingredient that helps even very traumatised people come through and heal their experiences. Many where they find love or joy in their lives through relationships, work, pets and their environment. I used to wonder why one person could do this and another found it so hard until I started to look further into why this

was. This ingredient is psychological resilience. Its an inner resource that despite everything means we have a strength inside to come through adversity.

“Psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.

This week we look at what resilience is, how we develop resilience and trying to spot the resilience in our children so we can build on those resources and help them feel affirmed by them.

June 2021- Polyvagal Theory

"The Polyvagal Theory started with the work of Stephen Porges. It provided us with a more sophisticated understanding of the biology of safety and danger, one based on the subtle interplay between the visceral experiences of our own bodies and the voices and faces of the people around us. It explains why a kind face or a soothing tone of voice can dramatically alter the way we feel. It clarifies why knowing that we are seen and heard by the important people in our lives can make us feel calm and safe, and why being ignored or dismissed can precipitate rage reactions or mental collapse. It helped us understand why attuning with another person can shift us out of disorganized and fearful states. In short, Porges's theory makes us look beyond the effects of fight or flight and put social relationships front and centre in our understanding of trauma. It also suggested new approaches to healing that focus on strengthening the body's system for regulating arousal."

Whilst there is much discussion on the in's and out's of how polyvagal theory works in attachment theory - or how they sit alongside each other, there is no doubt in my mind that understanding how the evolutionary path to the way we perceive and process safety and danger is central to understanding how to parent a traumatised child. Therefore it's very helpful to understand this theory for an adopted parents tool box.

No July or August

September 2021- Transitions and Change

Transitions and change deeply affect adoptive children on all levels. Somatic reactions they may be experiencing during transitions can lead to acting out and behaviours as they often are not mature or self aware enough to understand or process them. Transitions and change affect attachment patterns and disrupt routines and the external stability that adoptive children often depend on. In this session we will look at how transitions affect us all and pool ideas for helping each other. We will finish with a short relaxation at 9pm for those who wish to stay.

October 2021- Guest speaker adult adoptee

In this session we invite a guest adult adoptee to speak a little about their experience of adoption, how it affects their life and how they have managed and also answer your questions. We hope it will be an informative discussion.

November 2021- process guest speaker and recap of topics

Recap of topics this year and a chance to talk process the guest speakers talk.

Next sessions planned

Tuesday 14th December 2021 - Christmas, holidays and how to help reduce the stress and increase the joy

Tuesday 25th January 2022 - Celebrating Adoption

Tuesday 22nd February - The adopted child and shame

Tuesday 22nd March - Subject to be decided