

BUBBLE WRAPPED CHILDREN

How social networking is transforming the face of 21st century adoption



HELEN OAKWATER

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INTRODUCTION AND PERSONAL PRE-FRAME

This book was not planned; it simply demanded to be written. Others encouraged me to voice the unspeakable, the shadow side of adoption and dispel the “happy ever after” illusion by highlighting the needs of maltreated children and those who parent them.

“Getting” trauma

After two decades in the adoption world I have realised it’s quite simple. Until you or anyone else, “gets” trauma, i.e. really understands and appreciates the lasting damage trauma does to a child, you don’t “get” the need for adoption support and therapeutic reparenting. My intent in this book is to help readers “get trauma” and understand its impact on children, because it’s the key to transformational thinking and making adoption work long term. When people “get trauma” their focus, behaviour and decisions change: it’s the light bulb moment. This applies to government ministers, parents, social care, mental health and education professionals.

Since the end of the 20th Century when Prime Minister Tony Blair spotlighted adoption, I have watched and listened to government minister after minister make changes in adoption: some good, others less useful. None “got trauma”. The Adoption Bill in 2002 gave adopters a right to an assessment for adoption support, but, ludicrously, no right to that support. Yes, we’ve diagnosed your thirst, but won’t give you a drink. As we are now on the verge of another wave of government led modifications to adoption, I hope this book will be a useful tool in the forthcoming discussions and political lobbying.

Why now?

In 2010 a number of my friends, colleagues and acquaintances in the adoption world suddenly experienced their adopted children being reconnected to their birth family via Facebook. Me too. My children received an unexpected email via Facebook from a birth parent just before Christmas 2009.

My reaction was the same as other adoptive parents, a rollercoaster of intense emotions in tandem with a desire to be strong and supportive for my children. The repeated phrase I’ve heard from adoptive parents is, “it feels like a slow motion car crash”. I concur. Battering and bruising, yet you hold onto the wheel and try to steer to a safe place; simultaneously experiencing your own upheaval while watching and trying to assist in your child’s turmoil. Yes it’s messy.

After my initial horror at the devastation social networking brought to adoption families, I now believe it could be the catalyst for positive transformation, but only if decision makers “get trauma” and the long term effects of child maltreatment. Adoption planning must embrace this truth. Although not formally structured in this way, what the book offers is partially a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of adoption today.

Why me?

Despite being an adoptive parent for two decades and for big chunks of that time holding professional roles in the adoption world, I was rocked by the events that occurred within my own family. It threw me off course for many months and had far reaching personal consequences. I say this simply so that adopters in a similar position will not feel they are alone when their reactions overwhelm and surprise them.

For a number of years I've contributed articles to the *Adoption UK* magazine including two during the spring 2010 highlighting the impact of Facebook on adoption. In December 2010, I released the eBook, *Facebook: Adoption Destabilizer*. This led to speaking at conferences, delivering training, media interviews, conversations and unsolicited emails from adopters telling me their sad stories. I was witnessing a totally unexpected factor explode in the adoption world, its shrapnel takes many forms and is still landing.

My credentials for writing this book include:

- Δ being an experienced adoptive parent of 3 children,
- Δ several years attachment based therapy with the children at Family Futures
- Δ former membership of two Local Authority Adoption Panels
- Δ former membership of the Governments Adoption and Permanence Task Force.
- Δ various roles within the charity Adoption UK including two terms as a trustee
- Δ two year part time post graduate course in Attachment and Adoption with Family Futures
- Δ ten years teaching in secondary schools
- Δ being an NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) Coach and Trainer

In parallel with the learnings gleaned from parenting my own children, my personal growth path was enhanced by NLP. From my first day on a Neuro-Linguistic Programming training course, in 2002, my world changed for the better. NLP offered models, principles and a style of thinking which empowered me and explained my children's behaviour. NLP subtlety pervades this book. NLP is based on modelling excellence, pattern detection, rapport, sensory acuity, noticing differences, behavioural flexibility and focuses on well formed outcomes. My experience with coaching clients has shown me that much trauma can be released and converted into empowering learnings. My intent is to bring hope, insight and some transformational tools into the adoption world.

Metaphors, models and pictures

Metaphors are frequently used in NLP; they are processed in the right brain and unconscious mind which enable you to receive a message or learning from a "non-telling" route, similar to parables, fables and fairy stories. Metaphors are used throughout the book; the title "Bubble Wrapped Children" conjures an image in your mind.

I offer some specific established models used in psychology, business and the 'self help' world. These combined with the new scientific advances in brain mapping offer new ways to better understand maltreated children and their abusers. Even though models are useful because they are visual, logical and give a framework for thinking, it doesn't make them 'right'. However it does assist in encouraging reflective practice, alternative ways of looking at a situation and can provide valuable calibration tools.

One picture is worth a thousand words; or as my mentor Michael Grinder would say "Go Visual". I have. Graphics litter the text, visual language is heard throughout and I also hope to provoke emotional responses. My proudest moments as a member of the Adoption Task Force occurred after I delivered a very brief presentation to Local Councillors, one confessed; "I don't mind admitting, that woman made me cry".

*I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel.'*

Maya Angelou

Extracts from BUBBLE WRAPPED CHILDREN:

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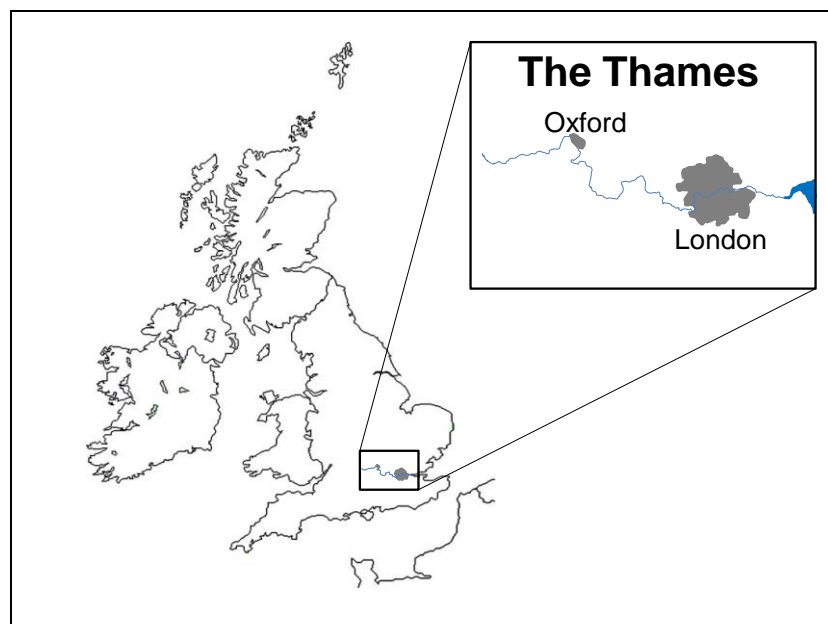
Yes, I want you to feel while reading this book, to laugh, maybe cry, get angry but be touched, deeply touched; because adoption, child maltreatment and trauma are about living, breathing people; it's not an academic exercise, it really, really matters. Oh, and I use quotes a lot too.

Metaphors and book structure

The book structure keeps at its core the most important thing: the child. The child should always be at the centre of any care planning, parenting strategies and decision making.

The child is at the heart of this book which roughly follows the child's path as he ages and gets taller, yes ages and gets taller, because the word "matures" is not appropriate for traumatised children. Fortunately for most children their ageing and maturation go hand in hand. Rather like a small river heading towards the sea, their life starts gently flowing, initially narrow and shallow, then widening, deepening yet fundamentally running in the same direction with occasional eddies, rocks and whirlpools. As the child approaches the open waters of the sea and approaching adulthood, the now wider river, is affected by the sea tide hence there is some in and out, undulating flow, a metaphor for the turbulent often muddy waters of adolescence.

For a maltreated child it is different. Their river is more like the Thames, the longest river in England with over 20 tributaries, frequent backwaters and its meandering path, includes numerous bridges, islands, and some tunnels. On the outskirts of west London at Teddington Lock its character changes dramatically. It becomes tidal, flowing in and out, twice daily. The tidal Thames is like adolescence for traumatised children, it keeps going up and down, backwards and forwards at a rapid rate, with massive changes in height of between 5 and 7 metres over 12 hours. Teddington Lock is metaphorically the start of adolescence. The Thames flowing through bustling London gets deeper, muddier and frequently changes direction, the volume of water immense. Eventually it reaches the wide expanses of the Thames Estuary, which despite feeling like the sea, is still part of the river. The sea is still miles downstream.



I hope this lengthy Thames metaphor will stop some of the "all children do that" attitude which ignorant adults bring to the subject of adoption. Yes, if all child development and parenting is like a river. Which one do you want to navigate, sail or swim down? Which are the easy ones and which the biggest challenge? What would you need for that journey?

Maltreated children have many extra components and challenges throughout their lives. Mucky tributaries adding to the complex flow of their lives. These complexities and contributory factors are reflected in the book's structure, which is intended as a map and travel guide for each readers own unique journey. There are certain fixed points linked to children's development stages and offshoots related to parenting which warrant deeper exploration. Just like navigating the Thames, you can picnic in Oxford, pause for tea at historic Windsor Castle, at Westminster get the big global picture aboard the London Eye or indulge in candy floss on Southend Pier. In the final section we set sail into the uncharted waters of future adoption practices, mindful of reefs, wrecks, undercurrents and squalls and suggest where some navigation buoys must be placed and preventative lighthouses built.

Boundaries

Readers will find some topics shallower than others. Bubble Wrapped Children concentrates primarily on children's needs, the birth parent perspective and wider ramifications of Facebook intrusions. Although the adopter's perspective and parenting traumatized children each have a separate chapter these are explored in greater depth further in "Making Sense of Nonsense" the book I was writing before social networking exploded into adoption in 2010. The adolescent adoptee perspective is not included as a specific component in Bubble Wrapped Children, simply because it's too early to draw any meaningful conclusions from ongoing events and recent reconnections.

My intent with both books is to shine a light into some of the dark, unlabelled places which exist in the world of adoption and fostering world and for children neglected and abused in their infancy. Both books place the reader into the shoes of each player, to gain insight into their world, their perspective and challenges. With this knowledge decision makers and professionals will hopefully be empowered to make robust decisions quickly.

"The greatest gift we can offer each other is the framework in which to think for ourselves"

Nancy Kline

Housekeeping

All the anecdotes and stories in the book have been anonymized by changing key identifying features and I am deeply grateful to those who generously shared their experiences. My children lead independent lives and do not share my surname, so their identity is protected.

I have used he/she/they to refer to individuals as seemed appropriate, to create an easy read. No deliberate political correctness or gender balancing. Similarly simple neutral names are used so readers can create a child in their minds eye.

Because adoption is my primary knowledge base I have kept the book inside the adoption arena even though many of the issues raised and recommendations apply equally to children in foster care. Children in long term foster care often have complex, ongoing contact arrangements with their birth family. These are not addressed in Bubble Wrapped Children.

Within this book I have taken a multidisciplinary approach, sourcing and referred to material from many others; accrediting them each time for two reasons. Firstly honouring the sources sits comfortably with my values of integrity and honesty. Secondly some readers will want to return to the original texts for further information.

Please consider the content of this book as pieces of a jigsaw which you can add to your existing picture and framework. Chapter Zero provides the framework for unfolding the issues, the edges of the puzzle. My starting point in Chapter One is where the spotlight should always be focused, on the child. What happens to a child before s/he is adopted.

This book is the map, not the territory. I hope your journey is enlightening, your inner landscape is transformed and as a result of reading Bubble Wrapped Children you will contribute your small piece to the transformation of adoption.

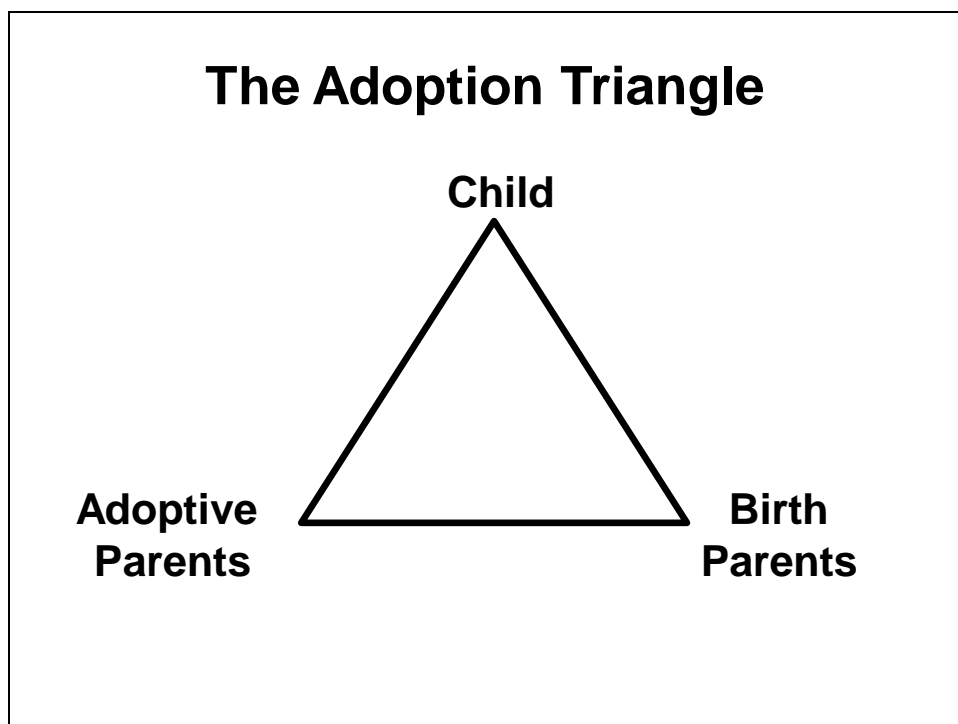
*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”.*
Margaret Mead

Take Good Care

Helen Oakwater

London
November 2011

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CHAPTER ZERO

If you think adopted children are safe from an approach by the birth family they were removed from, think again. Social networking has blown that protection sky high.

Facebook allows you to search for anyone and email anyone. Anyone you know, anyone you want to know, anyone you once knew or complete strangers. Present, past and future connections can be made via the web. Relationships can be formed or rekindled. Identities can be faked, lies told, history rewritten.

Adopted children are being connected to their birth families via Facebook. Some children have actively searched for birth family members; others simply received an email in their Facebook inbox which explodes in their face.

Hello, I am your father. I have been searching for you ever since you were stolen by social services. You look beautiful. I love you so much.

darlin son i am so hapy coz iv found u ere I bin lokin for ages plse rit bak coz uv bin told lies bout me i always luvd u n nevr stopd thinkin bout u b gr8 2 c u.

Messages like these, some in normal English, some in ‘text speak’, are retraumatising adopted children. Adoptive families are being blown apart. Several adopted children have left their adoptive parents and moved back in with their birth parents, sometimes within days of reconnecting. Other teenage adoptees have been completely thrown by the unwanted contact: their schooling, relationships and mental health have suffered. Some did not sit exams, others dropped out of college or university because they were so destabilised.

The two emails above might look innocuous. However the birth father in the first is a known paedophile. The second is a mother who had 6 children removed by social services due to her alcohol abuse, chaotic lifestyle and her lack of empathy. She simply could not see the pain she inflicted on a succession of children and the damage done to them. Her circumstances and attitude have hardly changed since the children were removed yet she still grieves for them. The Chapter “Still Screaming” considers the birth parent perspective in depth.

In one case the birth parent reconnected easily because the child was a “Facebook friend” to a member of an old foster family. In the other example the birth parent simply typed in the child’s first names and their date of birth then trawled through the photographs displayed on Facebook.

Children can legally register on Facebook at 13. Teenagers now access the internet via their mobile phones not just computers, so it is impossible for parents to monitor or control. You can have several Facebook accounts. Curiosity will motivate searching. It always has and always will.

So far many of the reconnections via Facebook have caused much confusion, pain and sorrow, because they have been built on lies, delusions and false hope. The participants, whether willing or shocked, have been unprepared and unsupported. Preparation and support are the keys to successful post adoption contact, whatever form it takes.

Instant connection

Until a few years ago post adoption reunions were initiated by an adult, sometimes using an intermediary service which offered counselling and approached all involved with sensitivity and respect. Now technology allows reconnection within hours of searching. There is no time to reflect, no mediation, no safeguards or supervision. Whoever makes the first move, the other person's circumstances and situation are completely unknown. Is this a good time? Do they have mental health issues, exams, drug problems? Have they just split from a long relationship? What support do they have? How will those around them feel about this contact? How fragile and vulnerable are each of the parties involved? How will the adoptive parents feel and react? Will they even know? What will happen afterwards?

Reasons for adoption: now and then

Celebrity adoptees share joyful reunion stories and promote adoption. Recently there has been a spate of TV programmes and articles where adult adoptees in their 40's, 50's and 60's have been reunited with their birth mothers, fathers or siblings. There is a public and media appetite for these 'feel good' adoption stories, where often an underlying message is that blood is thicker than water. The honeymoon period is public, but the long term outcomes undisclosed. This reinforces the public notion that adoption equals relinquished babies, whereas for the last few decades the adoption process has occurred because the state intervened and removed a maltreated child from his toxic parents. Subsequently a Judge, after examining copious evidence agrees with the Social Service's recommendation that the birth parents do not have the capability, or the future capacity to learn how to parent this child adequately. These parents did not "give up" their child, he was forcibly removed because their parenting style was abusive, neglectful or deeply inadequate. Chapter Four details some measurable skills, characteristics and traits including empathy, emotional intelligence and executive functioning thinking skills whose absences inhibit their parenting capacity. These models also serve as useful analytical tools for professionals.

Maltreatment, wiring, trauma and bubble wrap

What is the consequence of infant maltreatment? What imprints do abuse, neglect and chaos leave on a child? Great technological leaps this century offer evidence which support older anecdotal findings.

Thanks to the advent of brain imaging, we know that neurons which fire together wire together. So a child raised in a calm, secure yet stimulating setting will have a brain wired differently to that of a child deprived of maternal care living in a chaotic, scary environment. An infant's brain forms thousands of new neural connections every second. More are formed in the first year of life than at any subsequent time. We also know the brain is 'plastic' and in the right circumstances parts can be 'rewired'.

Another scientific and technological leap within this century, is our knowledge of brain functioning which offers hope for healing trauma. Awareness of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has grown, mainly due to affected soldiers returning from war zones receiving sympathetic media and movie coverage. The symptoms listed include flashbacks, sleep difficulties, anger outbursts and a general 'dysfunctionality'.

The impact of trauma on the adult brain is recognised, however the impact of trauma on child's developing brain is not widely acknowledged, tricky to classify yet profound. The superb research, including brain scanning, undertaken by Dr Bruce Perry at the Child Trauma Academy unarguably proves that maltreatment inhibits normal infant brain development. In Chapter Eight the proposed DSM classification of Developmental Trauma Disorder is explained and by integrating this with Chapter Two, how children's needs change with time, readers can get a deeper understanding of the impact of early trauma on children and its disturbing legacy.

Many adopted children suffered terribly before placement. Their world was terrifying, chaotic, unpredictable; an unsafe place where adults could not be trusted or failed to shield you from harm. These children protected themselves by hiding their true feelings, shutting down emotionally, being compliant or aggressive or both. Their observable behaviour often seems to make no sense. Metaphorically they wrapped themselves in bubble wrap for safety, a fantastic protection strategy; but it warps their view of the world and it distorts our view of them. Gently removing the bubble wrap, layer by layer, is the complex task adoptive parent's face for many years, including during adolescence.

Adolescence

Teenagers rebel; it's part of their job description. They experiment with their identity, habits, clothing and relationships. Secrecy is normal. They often reject many of their parent's values creating conflict and confrontation. Some behaviour is due to the changing brain chemistry and hormone fluctuations; adolescence is both a physical and psychological passage.

During adolescence the brain has a burst of activity and fresh growth, so the potential to rewire and prune existing circuits is huge. It is a fantastic healing opportunity for adopted children, particularly those who received appropriate therapy and support in middle childhood. Unexpected contact via Facebook can, and does, severely sabotage this healing opportunity, because the child becomes retraumatized.

All the family r lookin forward to seeing u at cousin veronicas wedding next week. We will meet you off the train and have a great party.

That message was posted publicly on the Facebook page of Ann an adopted teenager. All her virtual and real 'friends' read the comment, leading to difficult questions at school, forcing the disclosure that she had 'another family' and her squirming at the insensitive, yet common, question, 'why did they give you up?' Fortunately, she tearfully confessed to her adoptive parents about the wedding reunion plan, which involved a 250 mile train journey for a party with the entire birth family including those who had abused her. Her adoptive parents are picking up the pieces from that incident and now understand that the regular interactions with her birth parents and siblings caused Ann to be particularly uptight and aggressive. For several months Ann's healing was suspended because her birth family were 'in her face' and retraumatizing her.

Birth families offer an escape route for a vulnerable rebellious teenage adoptee who is frequently in conflict with his boundary holding adoptive parents. They encourage cooperative, considerate behaviour, schooling and responsible living. Birth families offer something different, which is far more alluring and also feel strangely familiar.

Processing the past: the body keep score

Trauma is stored within the body; sensory memories are held at a cellular level. As trauma expert Bessel Van Der Kolk MD, Director of the Trauma Center in Boston nutshells “the body keeps score”. Maltreated children have sensory triggers that reconnect them to unconscious memories from their brutal past. That’s why for many adopted children linking to their birth family stirs up old, oddly recognizable, sensations plus a high voltage cocktail of positive and negative emotions.

By learning what happened to them in their early life, children can begin making sense of their inner world. Robust life story work which deals with the gruesome facts, not just the nice stuff is crucial and will protect them during adolescence and in later life. Appropriate therapy to process the trauma associated with maltreatment is essential. Ongoing, facilitated, direct contact may be the vaccine which protects them from future contamination via social networking.

Looking beyond now and towards the 2020’s, we know adopted children will be able to reconnect to their birth family well before adulthood. These children will benefit hugely if they are more resilient, and knowledgeable about themselves. The adoption world must change some existing practices and introduces therapeutic work in mid childhood or earlier. Waiting until inevitable problems explode in adolescence is daft and not cost effective. Brain plasticity makes early intervention strategies a no brainer for both child protection and therapeutic interventions.

Contact

Contact in adoption has always been a complex issue. The reasons underlying searching and reconnection need addressing. Facebook is just the search engine, the root causes include grief, loss, identity issues, teenage rebellion, curiosity and to make sense of ourselves. Big, emotionally charged stuff. When is contact good? What circumstances make it ‘bad’? How can it be most effective? Should it be face to face or via a third party letterbox? Should it change with time? One of the biggest and most difficult questions, “What does contact do?” has numerous answers, varied opinions and conflicting research. That question pervades the book with a dedicated chapter focusing on the purpose, structure and outcomes of high quality contact.

Even though direct face to face contact between a child and the birth parents is currently unusual; ongoing, indirect ‘letterbox contact’ via a third party is often set up. This may be an exchange of letters and photos once or twice a year. Sometimes it is just one way, the adoptive family share information and photos about the child with specified members of the birth family. It is monitored and safe. However some birth parents have scanned pictures and placed them on their Facebook pages; occasionally with a request to “help me find my little princess”.

One feature worth noting is the viral nature of many of these reconnections. Within days of the first message, text or call, adopted children are linked to siblings, aunts, grandparents, uncles and birth parents and their new partners, often inundated with messages, requests and guilt laden emotional outpourings. Anecdotal evidence is that teenagers tell their adoptive parents months after the metaphorical horse has bolted when the stable door is swinging sadly. However, by then, there’s lots of manure around.

Things will never be the same again

Social networking and technological advances will fundamentally change the shape of adoption and particularly contact. Because the issues raised are unique to this decade and only surfaced in 2009, radical rethinking is required. Knowing that with just one click, unsupervised direct contact between adopted teenagers and their birth family could happen via Facebook, the adoption world must review its current and future practices to pre-empt the issue and implement damage limitation strategies.

Technology is galloping ahead; imagine combining face recognition software with a programme that predicts how a toddler will look at 17, throw in geographic location data and after a few hours on the web an individual is 'found'. The choice then is whether to connect honestly, stalk, monitor, ignore or link using an alias.

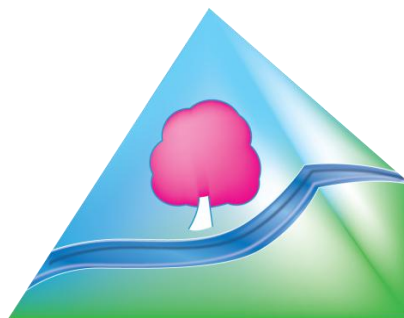
Facebook was only launched in 2004, yet now has a membership equivalent to the fourth largest country in the world. Most people, especially teenagers and young people, obtain their information via the internet. . The world has shrunk; hyperlinks, clever algorithms, instant connections and digital technology transform our behaviour. Adoption practices must adapt to accommodate the constant technological advances and the changing needs of adoptive families by tackling root causes not symptoms.

Adoption is being transformed by social networking and it's unstoppable. The new Timeline functionality on Facebook raised fresh issues, challenges and opportunities for adoption and fostering. Will the changes be healthy and positive or hurtful and destructive for those affected? This book seeks to address that dilemma and answer the 'why', 'what' 'how' and 'what if' questions. There are useful theoretical models offering new perspectives, plus fresh insights, solutions and practical ideas for parents and professionals.

Threat or opportunity?

If all those involved in adoption face up to the reality and ramifications of contact via social networking we can harness the learnings and transform the impact of Facebook on adoption from a threat to an opportunity. However without radical changes in adoption support and a massive increase in the availability of decent therapeutic interventions, social networking could destroy thousands of existing adoptive placements while current and future prospective adopters are being set up to fail.

Yes, it really is that dramatic. Yes, it really is a crisis. And, yes, in conjunction with other proposed changes in the adoption world it is a fantastic opportunity to transform adoption and heal maltreated children. But, only if we all have the courage to face up to what is beneath the bubble wrap.



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CHAPTER ONE:

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE A CHILD IS PLACED FOR ADOPTION?

Children placed for adoption are unique because their legal relationship with their birth family was severed by the state. The children central to this book are those who have been removed from their birth families by Social Services, against their parents' wishes. There was serious concern for the child's welfare because their birth parents could not keep them safe and nurtured. For a range of reasons, explored later, these parents consistently failed the child. Although it does happen, nowadays it is rare for a child to be relinquished at birth.

Currently less than 5% of children within the UK care system are placed for adoption. This may, to some readers, appear a very small number, but many children within the care system are older, have continuing links with their birth family or may be in care for short periods. Government statistics tell us that 54% entered the care system in 2010/11 because of abuse or neglect. In March 2011 there were 65,520 Looked After Children in England, of whom 74% were in foster care.

There are many families who benefit and learn much from the support and assistance of Social Workers, enabling them to parent their children better and keep them within the family. Sometimes Social Services involvement is ongoing, with children staying in foster care for weeks, months or years. Most return to their birth parents completely or for big chunks of time so there is regular contact with their birth families. Sometimes respite care used at short regular periods to give the family a break.

In an ideal world all parents would be good parents. In the real world most parents are, to coin Winnicott's phrase, 'good enough', while some are inadequate, a few are toxic. It's the role of Social Services to detect the inadequate and toxic parents, and provide support, education, supervision while frequently assessing the adults. Determining whether these adults have the capacity to change is part of the Social Worker's role. This is a tricky business which can take considerable time. Fortunately many parents are able to step up and learn how to be better parents. However a few are not: their children are being maltreated and suffering, with no likelihood of change in the foreseeable future. The longer they stay with their birth families the greater the damage. These children need to be removed quickly.

Deciding that a child should be removed from their birth family is a difficult decision for all involved. The fundamental role of Social Services is to support families and keep them together. An individual Social Worker may have invested much time, energy and effort in keeping a family together, so to recommend the removal of the child can, for some, feel like a personal failure. This is compounded by the huge case loads faced by all Social Workers in under resourced departments. This results in drift and delay for many children for whom there was insufficient time to map out the child's inner landscape and everyday life experience. Like others, I have sometimes witnessed dreadful social work practice which stemmed from ignorance, over optimism, inadequate training, and poor supervision. Blaming individuals is inappropriate and pointless, the system needs transforming. Excellence does exist; it can be modelled and replicated.

"I look around the world and see excellence and I want to share it"

John Grinder

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The decision making process in adoption

In essence the local authority recommends that, based on the evidence they have assembled, a child should be adopted because their birth family are unable to parent them to an acceptable level. This evidence, plus further reports are presented at court where the judge decides whether or not the child should be placed for adoption. Sounds simple in principle; however, the devil is in the detail. The process is complex; evidence is acquired from historical data, psychological assessments, expert witnesses, medical advice etc. Various reports are written, scrutinised internally and subsequently reviewed by the local authority adoption panel, an independent group with wide ranging adoption experience who 'support, defer or disagree' with the "best interest is adoption" recommendation. All these papers and reports, the size and weight of several phone books, form part of the Court proceedings.

Our court system is adversarial rather than inquisitorial: the intent in the criminal court being to establish proof "beyond reasonable doubt", while in the civil court, where adoption cases are heard, it is to determine "the balance of probabilities". It is a binary decision; the battle is to beat the other side, which makes adoption proceedings lengthy. On the one hand you have the Local Authority wanting to remove all parental responsibility from the birth parents, on the other hand the birth parents who don't want to lose their child. The judge considers the evidence from children's guardians and CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) officers plus both sides' legal arguments before making a decision. However proceedings are often adjourned and delayed as one side disputes an expert's report (often psychological assessments) and request yet another report from a different expert. This often takes months, so yet more drift and delay for the child who has already spent months or even years in foster care which can compound the damage already done.

Why are children removed from their birth families and subsequently adopted? What evidence is required? What has happened to them?

Overarching principles and reasons for child's removal

Parents who consistently and repeatedly fail to meet their child's needs and are unable to put the child's needs ahead of their own, now or in the foreseeable future are at risk of having their children removed by the local authority.

When the child is initially removed, Social Services must state the reason for removal. Although frequently only one category of maltreatment may be listed, it is often a combination of factors. The maltreatment categories below are taken from "Working Together to Safeguard Children", published in 2010 by HM Government, DCFS.

"Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development.

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse".

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The chart below gives specific examples of reasons children are permanently removed from their birth families due to maltreatment, the possible impact on the child and suggestions for the beliefs children may then form about the world and themselves.

Classification	What was done to them Some examples & experiences	What it did to them The child's interpretations & possible beliefs formed
Emotional Abuse	Berated, insulted, compared unfavourably to others, ignored	<i>I am wrong, bad, worthless. They want me dead. I should not be alive, I'm not wanted</i>
Physical Abuse	Beaten, thrashed, burned, used as ashtray, hit with chair/stick/hand/belt, locked in cupboard	The world is a dangerous place, <i>I am bad & powerless,</i>
Sexual Abuse	Violated, Raped, forced to watch or participate in sexual acts	Destroyed innocence. <i>I can't trust anyone</i>
Neglect	Unfed for days, nappies not changed, no toys, no interaction with adults, left alone for hours, unwashed, no play,	No self concept. <i>I don't matter, life is hopeless, I am helpless &/or rage filled. Do I even exist?</i>
Chaotic environment	Lots of different carers, locations, broken promises, frequent moves, squalor	No safe or secure base. <i>I am terrified.</i>
Trauma	A combination of events and experiences that felt life threatening or overwhelming to the child	<i>I am going to die. I must disappear</i>

This chart demonstrates some of the difficulties of defining child maltreatment and its subsequent effect. Often you can't tell for years the true and lasting impact of the maltreatment on an individual child and the only person who really knows what the child experienced is the child himself. Professionals will see snapshots of the child's life, but will not see or know the entire story. Only the child records a full sensory movie film of every waking moment while the professionals have the equivalent of occasional single still frames of the film from which to assess and make sense of the child's life. The same is true for us all; we are the only people who know exactly what happened to us and how we have made sense of those experiences. You are the expert on you, your life experiences, how you felt at the time and how you feel about them now.

Neglect

We know that 70% of children placed for adoption were removed because of known abuse or neglect. Please note the significance of the word "known". One extra point is worth flagging here. The category of 'neglect' is sometimes difficult to prove, causing debates and disagreements, particularly in Court where Judges want concrete evidence. This can contribute to delays in decision making. If we consider neglect through a child's eyes it may be a useful reframe. Hunger involves a physical and emotional experience, and in extremis the feeling you might die. Physical sores from unchanged nappies could be viewed as physical abuse; ignoring and not talking to an infant is emotionally painful. To some neglect may sound a weaker, less damaging category than abuse, yet the opposite is true. Think back to the Romanian orphans.

"If you have to choose between abuse and neglect; choose abuse, it does less damage"
Greg Keck

I first heard Greg Keck use that phrase in the mid 1990's to a room full of adoptive parents. There was a silent thud as our collective chins hit the floor. He explained that if you were being abused at least another human notices you, with neglect you may feel you don't exist. All present were deeply shocked. Many of us had been told by our social workers "it's all right, they weren't abused, just neglected". I have used that phrase and expanded on the explanation to many groups; they too are shocked, yet all comprehend its significance. I hope the judiciary will soon.

Trauma - overview

A child stores all his sensory experiences including the traumatic memories associated with abuse, neglect and chaos. Psychological trauma (referred to throughout the book as 'trauma') is generally defined by two conditions. An individual, adult or child, experiences either:

- Δ overwhelming emotions which they are unable to integrate
- or
- Δ a feeling they might die

If an individual can manage and integrate the feelings, resulting from a negative experience, it fails to be 'traumatic'. Obviously an adult can process these difficult feelings better than a child.

An infant uncontrollably screaming with rage, sobbing with fear, or frozen with anxiety has emotions that are overwhelming and traumatic. If there is no comfort, they feel they might die. Any prolonged episode of unresolved, overwhelming negative feelings constitutes childhood trauma and includes:

- Δ Neglect
- Δ Hunger
- Δ Emotional & psychological abuse
- Δ Physical abuse
- Δ Persistent or unalleviated pain
- Δ Chaos
- Δ Sexual abuse
- Δ Witnessing Domestic Violence – especially on the primary caregiver

Repeated trauma distorts the physical, emotional, psychological and social development of that child. The issues arising for maltreated children compared to those of 'normal' children are considered in the next chapter.

One event: multiple perspectives and creation of sensory memories

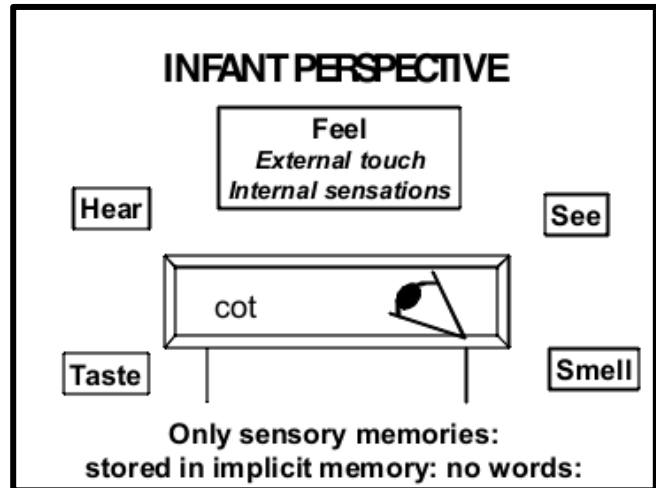
The theory and written descriptions of maltreatment are one side of the story; however the sensory experience and the perceptions of each participant is another. Let's view "one event" from several perspectives and notice the sensory elements.

Imagine the scenario. A neighbour has reported another loud, violent fight and items are being thrown. Adults are shouting, screaming "I'll kill you", children are crying, dogs howling. This family has been being "known" to the Police and Social Services for years. The children are on the "at risk" register, and had odd periods in respite foster care. It is decided by police and social services that these children need to be "rescued" from their alcohol abusing parents immediately.

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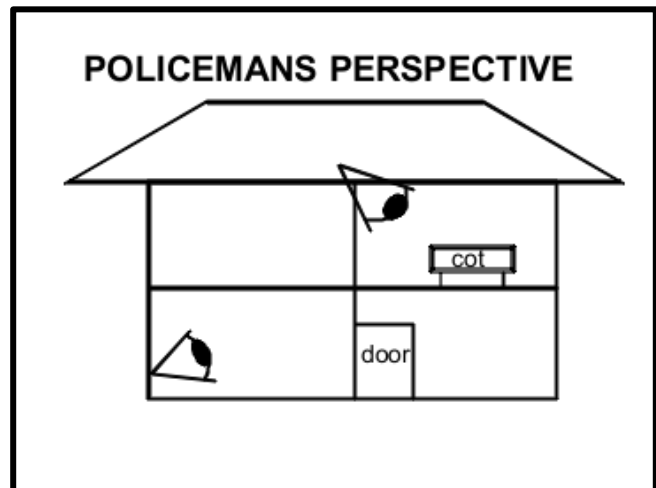
Through the baby's eyes

Baby Tim is in his cot, hearing the screaming, his mother sounding terrified, an enormous crash, his father raging again. He smells his own sweat and faeces, the stale urine, feels the thin yellow blanket, crinkled and crackly with stale milk. Tim bites his finger nails, the metallic taste of blood somehow reassuring and eases the hunger pangs. In the shadows through the bars, he sees the urine soaked mattresses his sisters sleep on. The intermittent blue lights outside throw strange scary shadows on the wall. Tim hears the thumping of someone running up the stairs, light pours in as the door opens; a big man looks down at him, disgust on his face. Tim sniffs a strong odour, his heart races, while terror stiffens his entire body as the man's hands move towards him.



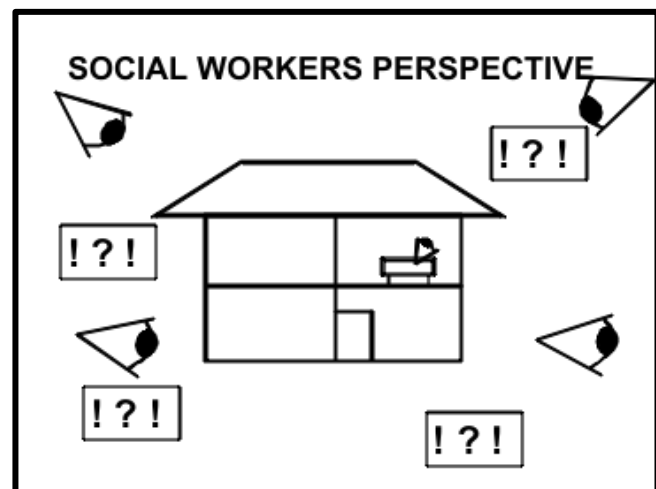
Through the policeman's eyes

The rugby playing policeman fresh out of training has never seen such squalor. He has a nephew the age of this baby, but his nephew is not covered in sores, lying in his own excrement. The room has three putrid mattresses, is bereft of toys or clothes with dog shit on the floor, yet at least four children sleep here. He gags picking up the soiled infant. With outstretched arms he carries the stinking baby downstairs into raucous chaos. The aggressive drunk parents are being arrested, the father pinned to the floor by his colleagues. The same colleagues who earlier had teased him about his over enthusiastic use of Calvin Klein aftershave.



Through the social worker's eyes

As the Duty Social Worker, Clare never quite knew what her shift would involve. Police breaking down a door and eventually bringing out four children under five after their parents had been taken away was more challenging than usual. The helicopter focusing its search light on the house was useful, but had also attracted spectators and the press. A local reporter was demanding to speak to her. Clare didn't know how to handle them or what she would do with four filthy hysterical infants at 2am on a cold, wet November night.



Through the neighbour's eyes

Mr and Mrs Average were both relieved and concerned by the night's events. Living next to that family had been like walking on egg shells. When sober they were just about ok, but drunk there was no reasoning with them and no peace. The Averages felt so sorry for the children, which is why they called the police, but feared revenge from the drunks later. They often felt guilty about ignoring the children's cries – their grandchildren were the same age, but what else could they do? The helicopter and police seemed well coordinated; there were so many of them. The ambulance crew were treating a policewoman and one of the parents. It made the TV dramas seem quite tame.

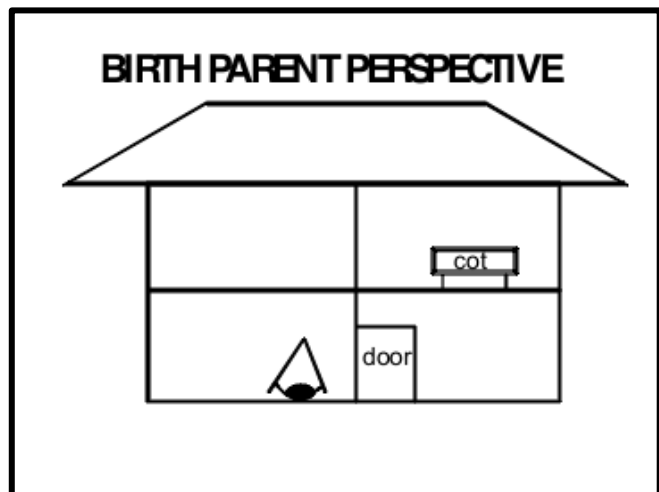


Through the birth parent's eyes

Birth Father likes a drink and hates being disrespected. The kids irritate him and only the baby is his offspring.

Birth Mum likes having a strong man around the place, she enjoys partying with him and friends at home or in pubs or clubs.

Neither remember much about the event, except that this night was different because police and Social Services took the kids away, despite their attempts to stop them. Alcohol and the red mist of anger make the event almost impossible for either of them to recall.



Each of the participants had a different perspective, experience and memory of this event. For the baby it was totally sensory. So many sensory triggers would be associated with that traumatic removal. The smell of Calvin Klein aftershave, blue flashing police lights, a look of disgust on the policeman's face (interpreted as I am bad). Biting fingers till they bleed gives comfort, stale urine is familiar.

"The senses are the ministers of the soul"
Leonardo da Vinci

In Tim's file or Child Placement Report, this episode would probably be recorded on a chronology as something like "emergency removal from home". A single line, maybe two; nothing which records the scale or emotional impact of the event. Yet we can see that emotional abuse, chaos, domestic violence, neglect, pain and hunger are incorporated into this one scenario.

Readers who think this is a gross exaggeration, you are partly right. Helicopters make the graphic more dramatic. However the rest is utterly realistic and repeated regularly throughout the UK and beyond.

So ten years later when Tim's behaviour is aggressive and his adoptive parents are trying to get some therapeutic input, this event is just one of many. Its impact on him is unknown by all. He has no conscious, explicit memory of it; yet the unconscious, implicit memory of it haunts him and helps drive his current angry behaviour.

Tim's needs for comfort, food, nurturing, safety and sleep were not met that night, or on many others.



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CHAPTER TWENTY

THE BIG PICTURE, A NEW MODEL AND A MINDSET SHIFT

"The real art of discovery is not to visit new lands, but to see existing lands with new eyes."

Marcel Proust

This is the exciting bit; the part where we can turn the threat into a great opportunity. Clearly social networking is transforming adoption as we know it and will continue to do so. By recognizing the adoption process as a complex system with many components which vary with time we can start to address the underlying issues and the causes rather than tinker with symptoms.

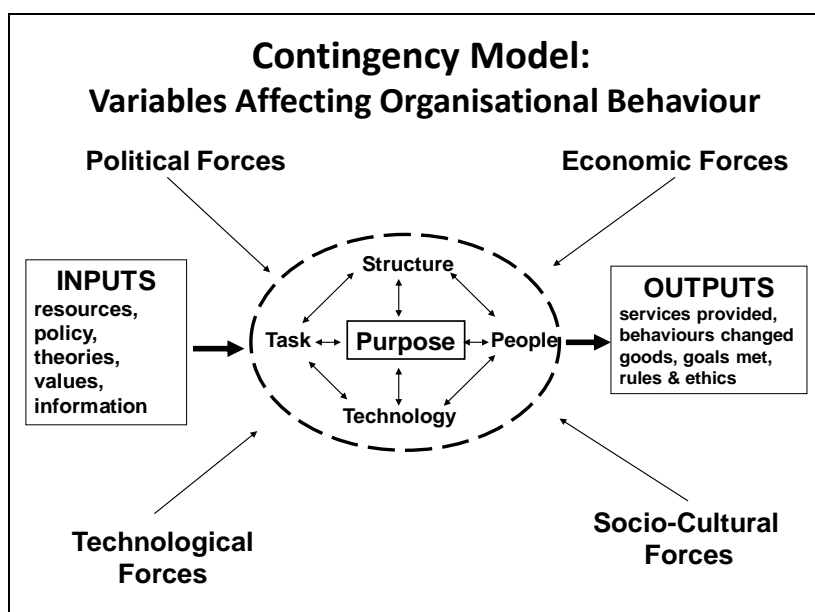
Systems

A system is a set of interconnecting parts which function as a whole. A heap is a collection of parts. This is not the place to attempting to explain the complexities of the adoption system or the heap of things which make up adoption. While at all stages the intent should be to fulfil an individual child's needs; the processes, procedures and requirements before, during and after adoption are different. Various organisations are involved some statutory, others voluntary. Local Authorities, national and local government, charities, family systems, pressure groups, courts, schools and health services are involved. "Adoption" is a hugely complex system and attempting to pinpoint specific areas affected by social networking is futile. Stepping back and looking at the big picture gives far more clarity because you, the reader, have specific expertise and knowledge in your operational area so can identify the factors most relevant to you. Metaphorically you can "join up your own dots" and ask your own "what if" questions to predict possible future scenarios and issues in your field.

Systems thinking is seeing beyond what appear to be isolated and independent incidents to deeper patterns. Looking at the big picture the "adoption system" is a mass of national, regional and departmental systems in various organisations with differing structures, objectives, assessment procedures, rules, standards, regulations and operational practices: a maze of overlapping interrelated systems and heaps, where wheels move within bigger wheels. Impossible to define, so another model which offers the reader some distance from their own personal position and the opportunity to scan other horizons is useful.

Contingency model

The theoretical model below is used to understanding organisational behaviour. Based on the work of H. M. Carlisle, it offers an approach which recognises that organisations have internal and external forces affecting them. The model can be applied in many areas and offers food for thought. Although "adoption" is not a specific organisation as such, applying this model can offer a different perspective on factors affecting adoption, particularly the external forces, which include social networking, political change and austerity measures. It also graphically demonstrates the interrelationship of the components and the need for systems thinking rather than trying to tackle various individual heaps.



Remember models are never perfect or ‘right’, just helpful. The contingency model can be applied widely as a method of noticing and acknowledging complex change. It can serve as a useful tool to diffuse the inevitable emotional reaction stemming from any organisational change. It can be applied to teams, Local Authorities, individual departments, schools and even individual families. For instance just imagine which components are changed within a family when a baby is born. Pause. Now reflect how the components of that family system are affected when months or years later that child is removed.

The ‘Outputs’ can be used to measure success, which might be customer satisfaction, targets met, evidence of goals achieved, maybe influencing, educating, healing or changing behaviours. Comparing Output to Purpose can sometimes reveal areas within an organisation which don’t buy into that common Purpose, because their perception of company purpose and values conflicts with their day to day experience. A classic example is organisations with mission statements which generate wry laughter in their staff.

Organizational External Variables	General Examples	Examples relating to Adoption
Political	Acts of parliament Legislation, Law reform Training for social workers, teachers, Rogue politicians Changes of Local or National Government	Adoption & Children Bill 2002 Social worker training Introduction of Special Guardianship Changes in regulations Serious Case reviews
Economic (Including all types of scarce resources)	Recession, inflation, resources, banking, financial constraints, budgets	Adoption support Funding for therapy Local authority budget constraints
Socio- Cultural	Changing values in society, attitudes, educational opportunities, Civil unrest, press and TV influences	No longer relinquished babies. Impact of drugs and alcohol on foetus and parenting capacity. Media campaigns
Technological	Scientific and technical advances and their applications. Growth of knowledge and innovations	Social Networking, brain imaging, mobile phones. Teenagers more knowledgeable than parents. Information accessible anywhere anytime

Extracts from BUBBLE WRAPPED CHILDREN:

How social networking is transforming the face of 21st century adoption

Internal Organizational Variables	General Examples	Examples relating to Adoption
Purpose	What does the organization do? Why does it exist? What business are we in?	Removing child from abusive and neglectful parents. Place child with approved, trained and supported adoptive parents.
Technology	Tools, equipment, hardware, software	National adoption register for matching
Structure	Shape of organisation, hierarchy, span of control, geographic location, decision making, integration, coordination, relationships, management, leadership	Possibility changing adoption panels from being run by individual local authorities to regional panels National Guidelines & Standards Adoption Parties
Task	Activities people engage in. Roles, responsibilities, assigned functions	Manage budgets, manage people, support others, lead, make policy, Completing CPR & other reports
People/players	Infinitely varied in age, sex, education, intellect, training, aspirations, values, motives, experience, beliefs, interests	Adoptive, birth and foster parents. Social workers. Various levels of decision makers, including Government Ministers, Judges, family support workers, Heads of Children's Services, Therapists

The old model

Facebook has shattered the existing adoption model, which assumes that the vast majority of adopted children will have no direct contact with their birth family until adulthood, and remain with their adoptive parents who will continue to be their 'main' set of parents in adulthood. The vast majority of adoption decisions including choice of placement, contact and support plans are based on this premise. Thanks to Facebook the birth family are unexpectedly back in the lives and faces of adopted children. That is now a fact. It will continue. Children being placed for adoption yesterday, today and tomorrow will be impacted by this technological advancement, and other inventions we can't yet imagine, envisage, dream or even fantasize about.

So an external technological force is shattering the current adoption model. However while the spotlight for the media and politicians is on the emotionally charged 'front end' of adoption, the placement of children: the later stages, the consequences of maltreatment, trauma and the challenge of parenting hurt children remains in the shadows. It's glaringly obvious that the spotlights aperture must widen to incorporate the entire life span of the child.

Adoption as a lifelong issue and legacy of trauma

Adoption is a lifelong state. Loss, trauma, confusion, mixed messages, families with conflicting values, identity, heritage are all issues which cycle and resurface at different stages throughout an adoptees life. The complications during adolescence have been addressed earlier. However during mid childhood between about 7 and 9, as cognitive thinking skills develop, fresh questions are raised, then in early adulthood intimate relationships, sex, and parenthood all bring extra questions, the revisiting of earlier beliefs and values and more curiosity. Medical and genetic questions raise another set of problems. The adoption process does not stop when a child is placed with a new family, but the media glare and public interest fixates on the "creation of a new family" stage. Neither want to hear about the trauma triggered behaviour, sexual abuse disclosures, poor attention span or self harming because it fails to sell newspapers. The legacy of trauma is the elephant in the living room.

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We must step back, then back again yet another few steps to view the entire length of a child's life before making decisions. What do we want them to be doing or thinking when they are 10, 15, 20, 30 or 40? What do they aspire to? What beliefs do they have about themselves and the world? Transformation takes time. The beliefs of an infant with the poor attachments listed in Chapter Two will modify over time with therapeutic reparenting, appropriate therapy, good support at school and within the community. There are no quick fixes, but some strategies are better than others.

To inoculate children from sudden destabilising social networking contact and avoid surprises and explosions later, they must from an early age know the outline facts about their lives, the fundamental truth jigsaw pieces. This can only happen if we update the core principles of adoption, redesign the framework and structure within which they operate and change our mindset.

Back to basics: fundamental principles

Let's just for a moment ask ourselves: what do we want for maltreated children who can no longer live with their birth families? I think the answer includes:

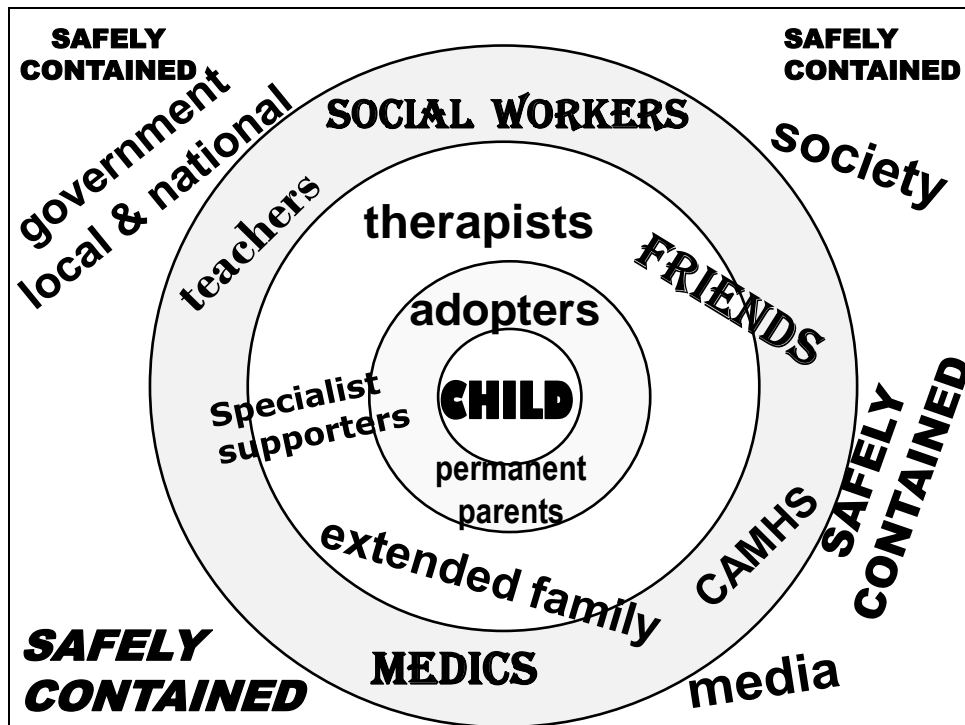
- Δ Permanent replacement adults who can offer a life time of stability, healing and security to a child
- Δ Adults who can consistently therapeutically reparent the child, teenager and young adult
- Δ A safe space to process the painful jigsaw pieces of their life history and to construct a coherent narrative which heals their pain and repairs their damaged psyche.
- Δ An environment which permits a maltreated child to develop an updated belief system, encouraging positive self esteem, an internal working model which integrates the past, provides robust internal resources and offers a hopeful, joyful, interesting, option filled future.
- Δ A realistic view of their birth family which might include some well structured and meaningful contact
- Δ A strong community which embraces the child and his "permanent parents".
- Δ A cohort of legislators, educators, legal and social care professionals who "get" trauma.

Permanent parents

Children need "Permanent Parents": parents with whom they will live until adulthood. Whether this is through the legal route of adoption, fostering, special guardianship or some other legal framework, is secondary to the need for true "permanence" i.e. the same home and nurturing adults for all their childhood and beyond.

Permanent Parents of maltreated children need support, help, ongoing training and nurturing because for decades they live with and manage very difficult challenging behaviour.

The diagram below gives a sense of the various sets of individuals and organisations needed to support parents who have to safely contain the child while the bubble wrap melts. Some will be involved with the child and family directly, others form part of the necessary infrastructure. The diagram may look messy, but it's an accurate reflection of the varying levels of intimacy required at different times by those who support each individual traumatised child; highlighting the complex nature of adoption and fostering.



Please remember that even though this book has focused on adopted children, which is my primary knowledge base, many of the same principles, dilemmas, problems and challenges apply equally to children in Local Authority Care (LAC), most of whom are fostered. The big issue is the legacy of trauma; the legal status is a minor factor.

Opportunity with new model and mindset shift

Any new model has to start from where we are, not where we wish we were. Massive redesigns, restructuring organisations, adding more or less layers of management, new standards, and codes of conduct or other structural adjustments may or may not be appropriate. I am certainly not offering or suggesting new structures or reorganizations, while these may occur, they are beyond the scope of this book.

I am suggesting a new mindset, one in which the legacy of trauma is fully spotlighted, acknowledged and these learnings integrated at every level, in every decision and throughout the entire system. My formal recommendations are listed in Part 4. If healing trauma becomes a core objective, the transformation of adoption will be positive.

A new mindset would add the following to existing adoption models and processes, easily fitting with some of the new ideas and proposals for changes in adoption practices being considered by central government.

- Δ Ongoing access to high quality therapy for all adopted children from early childhood to early adulthood, so they can process 100% of the truth about their early life,
- Δ Ongoing robust support for adoptive families, before, during and after adoption
- Δ Facilitated contact organised between the adopted child and birth parents using a skilled third party
- Δ Recognition by all those who touch the lives of traumatised children that these children have complex needs which sometimes require counter intuitive management and strategies
- Δ Independent support for birth parents

Extracts from BUBBLE WRAPPED CHILDREN:

How social networking is transforming the face of 21st century adoption

The last word

We have reached the end of our journey, you have a mixture of metaphors and models floating in your head, several partially completed jigsaws and hopefully both a curiosity to learn more and a desire to apply your new learnings to the life of at least one adopted or fostered child.

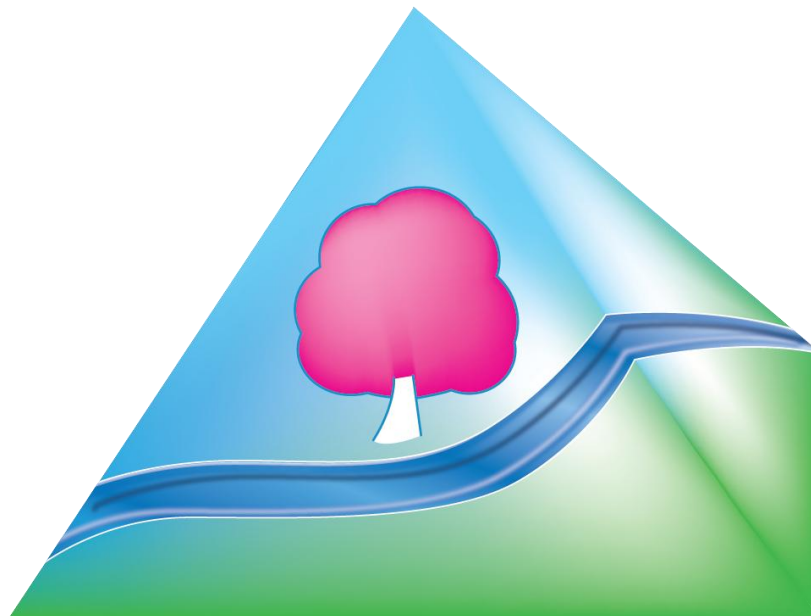
You can't step into the same river twice, so you may find that rereading the book, or dipping into some chapters again is useful. We did meander. Also as we established in Chapter Six, learning is an active process. For learning to occur you need to do something, reflect on it, draw conclusions, plan the next steps, then do something, reflect, theorise, plan, do, review, conclude and so on repeatedly. Revisiting any of the models and ideas in this book with your updated knowledge, will result in fresh perspectives and new unknowns.

Understanding and overcoming the legacy of childhood trauma is a fierce challenge for all involved and requires huge courage from all participants. It constitutes a major part of Making Sense of Nonsense, my next book.

Our desire must be that traumatised children learn new ways of being, thinking and behaving, build a solid sense of self and develop a more empowering belief system. Surely we as responsible adults should lead by example and face up to the truth that trauma pervades adoption. If we do, Facebook has done us a huge favour shattering the existing model. If we don't, adoption as we know it, will die a slow death.

Do we have the courage to "get trauma", modify our model, shift our mindset and so transform adoption? I hope so.

"Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the judgement, that something else is more important than fear"
Ambrose Redmoon



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PART 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

*“It takes a village to raise a child, a town to raise a challenging child
and an entire city to raise a traumatized child”*

Helen Oakwater

1. Independent counselling for birth parents

Birth parents who have lost children to adoption need an independent counselling and support service. Currently the local authority involved with the removal of the child offer such support, which contaminates them in the eyes of the birth parent. This service could be regional or national, staffed by suitably trained counsellors, therapists or coaches, rather than social workers. Unjustly social workers are frequently perceived as perpetrators by birth parents and for interventions to be effective the client must trust their practitioner.

2. Provide cameras for police and social workers

Professionals should either be provided with specific cameras to record scenes or encouraged to take photographs with their mobile phones and facilities to download the pictures in the office. These photographs should be kept for 18 years. They would be invaluable for 100% truth life story work.

3. Speed up the entire adoption process: damage limitation

The drifts and delays within the UK adoption system are well known and systemic change is needed. This is currently being reviewed, so I will not address it here, but simply remind readers that drift and delay impacts the neuro-sequential development of the child. Delay increases the damage to the child and reduces the time for restorative therapeutic reparenting.

4. Improve adopter preparation and provide high quality ongoing training

Prospective adopters already receive training before they are approved. That should be compulsory between approval and the placement of their child and be accessible until the child reaches 21. The culture of continuous learning and curiosity should pervade adoptive parenting. The technological advances in brain scanning and the developing knowledge in trauma resolution should be proactively shared with all adopters and foster carers.

5. Support adopters to provide therapeutic reparenting for their children

- Δ Adopters need continual, robust, integrated support from the time of placement until the child is 21, from Education, Health and Social Services.
- Δ Adopted children lose their LAC (Looked After Children) status and the accompanying ‘privileges’ when adopted. Due to their early experiences they are still children who “LACK”, hence should keep those educational, social and health benefits
- Δ Adoptive families need specialist attachment and trauma trained therapists to help deliver 100% truth telling and organise facilitated contact during early, middle, late childhood, adolescence and early adulthood.

6. Educate therapists in trauma, trauma triggered behaviour and a range of healing processes

Therapists working with adoptive families must understand the impact of infant maltreatment and trauma. Therapists working with adoptive and foster families must be trained in the resolution of trauma, the power of truth telling and how to facilitate effective, empowering contact.

7. Provision for facilitated contact

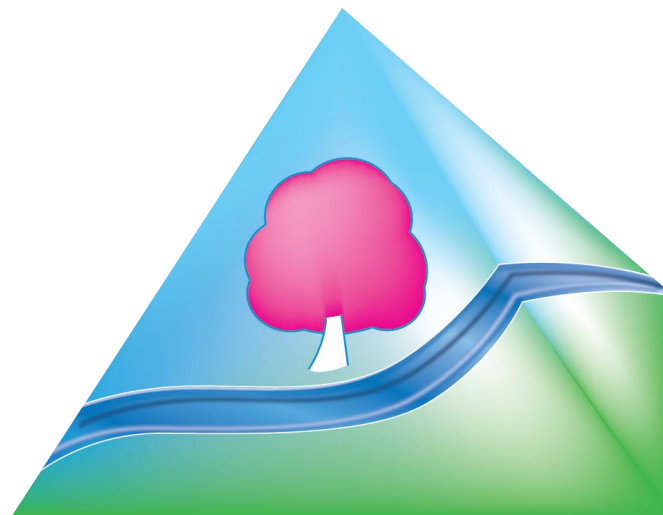
This is a tricky one, because face to face facilitated contact may not be a realistic objective for all participants, especially when unsupervised social media fulfils many of the superficial objectives for children and birth parents. However wherever possible it is the preferred route and should be encouraged, facilitated, with all corners of the adoption triangle being supported.

8. Invite Facebook to acknowledge the situation and offer significant funding for healing

While Facebook can't possibly be held responsible for how its members use their site, it can step up and recognise its corporate responsibility for the unintended consequences that social networking has reaped on adoption. Of course they didn't cause the problem, but they have the funds and technological knowhow to make a massive positive contribution to the adoption and fostering world, maybe by funding structured, facilitated contact.

The recommendations above result from my thinking and link purely to the content of Bubble Wrapped Children.

The following page has the Executive summary/key policy recommendations from Adoption UK's Supporting Adopters published in October 2011 which relate to wider issues in the adoption world and are reproduced in full with kind permission. I agree with them all.



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SUPPORTING ADOPTERS: published by Adoption UK: October 2011

Educational issues for adopted children

Adopted children should have the same status as looked after children in relation to their educational need, including:

- Δ Priority in the school admissions systems.
- Δ Entitlements to additional support under the statementing system.

Recruitment of adoptive parents

- Δ Make recruiting adopters a national priority that is implemented nationally, rather than implemented locally; e.g., consider the possibility of a central recruitment agency for potential adopters who are unable to have their interest in adoption considered due to their local agencies exercising “local discretion” because they are only looking for adopters who can meet the needs of local children.
- Δ Positively and continuously promote adoption as a positive option.

Joint working

- Δ Better joint working between social services, education and health departments, focusing on providing improved adoption support services to families.

Children’s needs to be central – early intervention

- Δ Departmental policy frameworks to put children’s needs (as understood from a trauma perspective) at the centre of the decision-making process.
- Δ Using model of early intervention, based on a “child in need” approach, rather than child protection.
- Δ Early multi agency support/intervention systems to be triggered at 20 weeks’ gestation for “vulnerable parents” where one or more risk factors identified.
- Δ Ongoing multi-agency work support and intervention, both with those children identified in the womb, and those who come to the system’s attention after birth or at a later age.
- Δ Greater use of concurrent planning and fewer moves for children in the care system.

The full report is at www.adoptionuk.org

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