

patch

Step Away **from** Blame Model

When we ask for help...

because our children cannot manage the trauma they suffered,
because their anger and rejection drive towards reaction,
because their emotions are mixed up jigsaw pieces and we need help to put them back together,
because we want our children to have the support they need to thrive,
because we want our children to live life in a way that is safe for them,
because we face complex challenging situations that leave us broken,
because we are victims of domestic abuse within our own home.

So why are we blamed?

Julie Selwyn highlighted in her report that (1) "parental concerns were not taken seriously and/or felt that they were being blamed by professionals for their child's difficulties". This was in 2014, (and) it is now 2024 and it is noted that the issues remain.

Parental blame is inadequate, unlawful and oppressive. Parental blame is harmful and ignores the passage of the child, which should be in central view. Parental blame is easier (that) than problem solving, easier than change, and easier than using a different lens.

Professionals, parents, and families are outraged at the use of parental blame. Whether this presents as:

- a family in crisis due to adoption breakdown,
- complex issues due to a child's disabilities,
- SGO breakdown,
- acquired neurodiversity due to other incidents in the child's past,
- Emotional harm caused by poor parenting by birth parents,
- Child's difficult behaviour due to inadequate parenting by birth parents,
- Child is out of parental control because of their birth parents/neglect.

Blame is sought but why?

Does Legislation Seek Blame?

When looking at the relationship between the LAW and adoption breakdown there is very little that gives a clear overview of how to navigate the issues, and therefore, a path has been paved to suit the ones driving. Of all the laws in the land there is no law which deals with the specific issue of adoption crisis, disruption or breakdown.

S20 of Children Act 1989

Every Local Authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of—

- (a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;
- (b) his being lost or having been abandoned; or
- (c) person who has been caring for him being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.

S31(2) of Children Act 1989

A court may only make a care order or supervision order if it is satisfied—

- (a) that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and
- (b) that the harm, or likelihood of harm, is attributable to—

(i) the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him; or

(ii) the child's being beyond parental control.

These pieces of legislation lack any indication of a necessity to link the issue(s) with a deficiency in parenting, and there's no requirement to demonstrate fault.

Adrian Pidduck, (2) who highlighted through use of case law, it is not necessary to prove parental fault to establish a child is beyond parental control and who states "it is immaterial whether this is fault of the parents (of) or the child". Adrian also notes the view of Sir Stephen Brown who stated, "Quite simply this child is beyond the control of his parents. It is extremely sad. It is not a case of apportioning blame".

In 2015, Nigel Priestley and Samantha Sanders (3) made note about the use of Section 20 by LA's being a power play. "This is being seen increasingly in adoption cases whereby families are left without adequate support in order to prevent a potential disruption. Adoptive children often have significant issues which arise from the neglect and/or abuse suffered within their birth families. Sadly, many adoptive parents find out too late that their children are beyond their control and have no alternative but to ask the local authority to find an alternative placement for them".

So, If it's not the Law, is it Social Workers?

Social work is a role where the central focus is to ensure the wellbeing and safety of children. Social workers have a duty to investigate situations in which there are concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing. When a child is in crisis due to early life trauma, the crisis or challenging situation will be viewed as their safety and wellbeing maybe compromised and the child may be suffering significant harm or at risk of significant harm. Then there is likely to be a period of assessment, information is collected and analysed to ascertain the needs and risks in a child's life.

Social workers, for the most part, deal with issues where there are substantial parental factors such as domestic abuse, parental mental health, parental substance misuse, and also environmental issues such as poverty and deprivation, poor housing, and other

stressors. The focus being on identifying where parents' behaviours may have contributed to the impairment of their child's health or development. This is very much focused on the parent's journey and their history, the adult behaviour and the parenting capacity. When working to consider risk and need in a child's life attributing blame to a parent is the default position. The focus is fundamentally on the need to safeguard the child from parental issues.

Within the Child and Family Assessment Triangle there is scope for highlighting history of the parent, and developmental factors for the child, but the author of the report only needs to write what they want to see.

Social Work is a machine, the majority of social workers work the way they are programmed. Social workers are led to see through the same lens, the lens of those that came before them, set in history.

Being blamed is a power tool of professional hopelessness (this is not my phrase, I read it somewhere but it has stuck with me). Blame is used because of a gap. A gap in understanding, in knowledge, in process, in policy, in law, in practice. Or at least in all these things being brought together.

The paperwork task alongside the trend/default position to find reason, causation, and blame is a protected stance as it is so embedded in the history of social work.

This is not to lay blame on social workers, as social workers do not come across adoption crisis very often and won't have had specific training on how to assess, consider or view this complex issue. Within social care whilst there is training on early life trauma and the impact of trauma, this is as with a lot of the training provided, informative, and beneficial but only goes so deep.

There does need to be change however, and whether this change comes because social work assessments and practise are focused on the main thoroughfare, and this means that there is a massive blind spot for children who have:

- Suffered trauma,
- A disability or have acquired neurodiversity,

- Been removed from birth family,
- Have complex behavioural issues,
- And more.

The mission is to find culpability, if the cycle is set to focus on fault, then fault will be found. This leaves little inference or pull to see any part of any story in a different way. This has become “the social work danger zone”, the programme is set and therefore it runs, and runs.

The missing element is simple.....

There is no set process for social workers to follow, there wasn't for their managers when they were social workers and so there isn't now. Practise can't change itself. The same conversations go round and round. Blame isn't right, it's unlawful, oppressive, it's breaking what's not broken, and so on.

But if the foundations to managing adoption crisis have never been laid, they cannot be formed. It's impossible.

The(se) following all have a procedure, or a written process to follow with a fancy map to follow, which has been written and created by experts, who are both knowledgeable and selected:

Homeless protocol,

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child,

Pre-Birth Protocol,

Early Permanence planning,

Child Sexual Exploitation Procedure.

Adoption Crisis Protocol

This procedure or protocol requires collaboration from psychologists, psychotherapists, adopters, adoptees, social workers and other professional experts to ensure a

comprehensive approach. Without a well-defined protocol, social workers cannot effectively navigate crises involving adopters and adoptees. There has to be a high provision of education on how to manage crisis, how to step away from blame culture, and how to work with adopters and adoptees in distress. (And) A crucial part of this protocol needs to be aimed at prevention of crisis.

Step away from BLAME.

Ideas

Impact map the trauma in the early days, as a standard requirement.

Crisis meetings,

Respite breaks the cycle,

Partnership with parents needs to be evidence,

Safeguarding in perspective,

Acknowledge the trauma history,

More recognition around child to parent violence / emotional abuse from child to parent,

Trauma Impacts on the Whole of a Child,

Nationally delivered, as we should all have the same access to the same provisions,

Trauma In Pregnancy/ In Early Life can lead to acquired neurodiverse issues with development and functioning,

(A) One professional at a time,

Consider the child's Whole View,

MA working accountability not suitability,

Child's advocate,

Adopters impact and experience,

Keeping the door open – parenting at a distance,

Understand Trauma,

Disruption is not the same as

Treat rather than wait,

Relinquish.

1. **Beyond the Adoption Order:** challenges, interventions and adoption disruption
Research report April 2014 Julie Selwyn, Dinithi Wijedasa, and Sarah Meakings
- University of Bristol School for Policy Studies Hadley Centre for Adoption and
Foster Care Studies
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74b507e5274a3f93b4825b/Final_Report_-_3rd_April_2014v2.pdf
2. **Beyond Parental Control** – Requirements for a finding CHILDREN – PUBLIC
LAW - 28 FEBRUARY 2023 Adrian Pidduck

<https://becket-chambers.co.uk/articles/beyond-parental-control-requirements-for-a-finding/>
3. **Adoptive Parents and the Misuse of Section 20** by Adoption Legal Centre
in Adoption Breakdown, Adoption Legal Centre, Adoption process, Nigel
Priestley, Samantha Sanders posted December 8, 2015.

<https://adoptionlegalcentre.co.uk/2015/12/adoptive-parents-and-the-misuse-of-section-20/>