

# An approach to children in public care that 'Does exactly what it says on the tin'

By Colin Maginn



What if children's services had to describe accurately what they do? Like food labelling does. Such childcare labels could be revealing, for example: *'To maintain professional boundaries, staff in this children's home do not hug children'*. Or how about *'All staff are trained in the A.A.T.I.C.C. model of childcare.'*<sup>1</sup> The first one is honest but harmful to children, the second one fails the accuracy label test, most people would not know what A.A.T.I.C.C. is, and it does not say what they do.

The three words 'Emotional Warmth Parenting', tells a child precisely what to expect from the adults and states accurately to the adults in the parenting role, how to behave, that is, to be sensitive to the child's emotions, warm, kind, loving and protective while providing for the child's physical needs.

The 'Emotional Warmth Parenting' approach uses an *Authoritative Parenting Style*, is *Attachment-led*, *Trauma-informed*, encourages *Self-management* behaviour while explaining *challenging behaviour* and is *Strengths-based*.

## Authoritative Parenting Style

Diana Baumrind's (1991)<sup>2</sup> research showed that an authoritative parenting style offered the best chance of long-term parenting success. This is achievable by following two basic principles to inform and reflect on parenting decisions- showing interest, sensitivity, and responsiveness to and for the child and having high but realistic expectations of a child's learning and behaviour.

## Attachment-led

The idea that 'attachment styles' are fixed is challenged by Dr Patricia Crittenton's (2006)<sup>3</sup> 'Dynamic Maturational Model of Attachment'. Optimistically for children in public care, her research shows how children adapt and change (dynamic) with experience and that they learn and grow in response to new situations and people (maturation). Given time, children respond to and attune with their new, kind, responsive, emotionally warm person in the parenting role.

## Trauma-informed

A child who has experienced trauma and abuse from adults will be slow to trust other adults. What may appear as challenging or disruptive behaviour may be testing behaviour, as the child tests adults to see if they are safe and predictable. Responding to the child with sensitivity, kindness, understanding, and responsiveness and consistency is likely to reassure the child, and helps with building trust.

## Self-management and challenging behaviour

Helping the child develop flexible thinking and self-control, builds their executive function (i.e. emotional regulation, problem-solving and planning), encourages self-management of behaviour and decreases self-defeating behaviour. To better understand and manage challenging behaviour, consider these five questions:

1. What need is the child or young person communicating with this behaviour?

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<sup>1</sup> Made up for this article, to make the point 'A.A.T.I.C.C.' Attachment Aware Trauma Informed Child Care

<sup>2</sup> Baumrind, D. (1991) 'The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use', *Journal of Early Adolescence*, **11**, 56-95.

<sup>3</sup> Crittenden, P. McK. (2006) 'A Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, **27** (2), 105-115.

2. Is there anything triggering the behaviour?
3. In what situations does the behaviour occur most frequently?
4. What circumstances encourage the behaviour?
5. Is there a missing skill that would reduce the need for the behaviour?

Finding the answer to these five questions can indicate which factors maintain unwanted behaviour and point to practical ideas to reduce or eliminate it.

### Strength-based

Developing and using children's strengths is powerful because we are almost always successful when we use our strengths. Even more empowering for children is helping them find and use the hidden strengths. Peer-reviewed research by Alex Wood and his colleagues<sup>4</sup> confirms that using our strengths builds self-esteem and improves long-term well-being.

### It's a privilege

Emotional Warmth Parenting enables good parenting decisions and choices for the child in care. By finding the best in children and looking for their strengths, we switch from a problem-focused approach to one which is positive, develops and uses strengths and is optimistic about the future.

This is not just wishful thinking; research shows that this approach can make the positive difference for the child or young person in care (see Cameron 2017<sup>5</sup> and Cameron and Das 2019<sup>6</sup>).

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### The new book 'It's a privilege..'

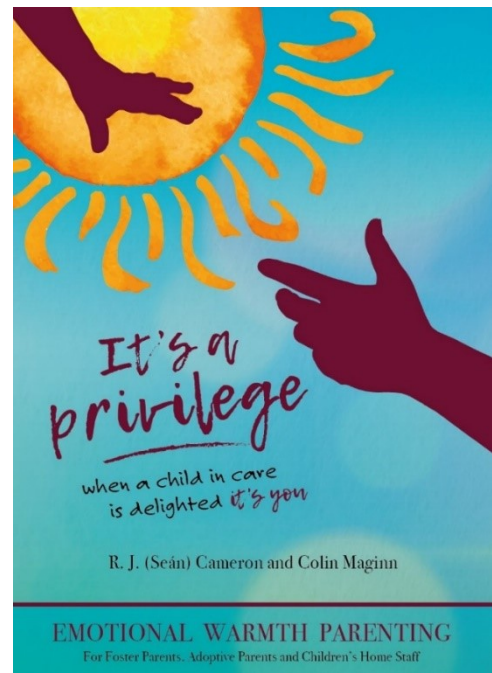
Dr Sean Cameron and Colin Maginn provide a detailed account of the Emotional Warmth Parenting approach in their new book entitled: *It's a Privilege - when a Child in Care is Delighted it's You* (2021). They are joint directors of the 'Pillars of Parenting' a company set up to improve children's lives in public care.

The paperback is available from:

[www.pillarsofparenting.co.uk](http://www.pillarsofparenting.co.uk)

Also available on Amazon Kindle:

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Its-privilege-delighted-Emotional-Parenting-ebook/dp/B08XDFVMWM/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=rj+sean+caMERON&qid=1615308766&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Its-privilege-delighted-Emotional-Parenting-ebook/dp/B08XDFVMWM/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=rj+sean+caMERON&qid=1615308766&sr=8-1)



<sup>4</sup> Wood, A. M., Linley, P.A., Maltby, J., Kashdan T.B. (2011) 'Using personal and psychological strengths leads to increases in well-being over time: A longitudinal study and the development of the strengths use questionnaire.' *Personality and Individual Differences* 50 (2011) pp 15-19

<sup>5</sup> Cameron, R.J. (2017). 'Child Psychology beyond the school gates: Empowering foster and adoptive parents of young people who have been rejected, neglected and abused', *Educational and Child Psychology*, 34 (3), 74-96.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron, R.J and Das, R. (2019) 'Empowering residential carers of looked-after children: the impact of the 'Emotional Warmth' model of professional childcare'. *British Journal of Social Work*. (2019) 49 (7), 1893-1912