

1. **Lassri, D., Luyten, P., Cohen, G., & Shahar, G. (2016). The effect of childhood emotional maltreatment on romantic relationships in young adulthood: A double mediation model involving self-criticism and attachment. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 8*, 504-511. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000134>**

### **Abstract**

Objective: Despite growing recognition of the importance of childhood emotional maltreatment (CEM) on the development of psychopathology, very few studies have addressed its impact on adult romantic relationship functioning, particularly among otherwise relatively well-functioning individuals. In an attempt to further elucidate the mechanism underlying the negative impact of CEM on romantic relationships, we tested an integrative mediational model linking CEM to romantic relationships through the impact of CEM on the development of self-criticism and adult attachment. Recent work in this context suggests that while self-criticism concerns broad cognitive-affective schemas related to achievement and failure, attachment avoidance assesses the expression of these broad schemas in close relationships (Luyten & Blatt, 2011; Sibley & Overall, 2008, 2010). Method: This hypothesized mediational model was examined in a sample of young adult undergraduates (N = 99, 85 female), using structural equation modeling. Results: The mediational model was in large part supported. Attachment avoidance, but not attachment anxiety, fully accounted for the mediating role of self-criticism in the relationship between CEM and romantic relationship satisfaction, even when controlling for the potential role of concurrent levels of posttraumatic stress disorder severity. Conclusions: Understanding the long-term psychological dynamics related to CEM and identifying mediating vulnerability factors—self-criticism and attachment avoidance—might have implications for both the assessment and treatment of individuals with a history of CEM, particularly as effective interventions to address self-criticism and attachment issues are available.

2. **Hertzmann, L., Target, M., Hewison, D., Casey, P., Fearon, P., & Lassri, D. (2016). Mentalization-based therapy for parents in entrenched conflict: A random allocation feasibility study. *Psychotherapy, 53*, 388-401. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pst0000092>**

### **Abstract**

To explore the effectiveness of a mentalization-based therapeutic intervention specifically developed for parents in entrenched conflict over their children.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first randomized controlled intervention study in the United Kingdom to work with both parents postseparation, and the first to focus on mentalization in this situation. Using a mixed-methods study design, 30 parents were randomly allocated to either mentalization-based therapy for parental conflict—Parenting Together, or the Parents’ Group, a psycho-educational intervention for separated parents based on elements of the Separated Parents Information Program—part of the U.K. Family Justice System and approximating to treatment as usual. Given the challenges of recruiting parents in these difficult circumstances, the sample size was small and permitted only the detection of large differences between conditions. The data, involving repeated measures of related individuals, was explored statistically, using hierarchical linear modeling, and qualitatively. Significant findings were reported on the main predicted outcomes, with clinically important trends on other measures. Qualitative findings further contributed to the understanding of parents’ subjective experience, pre- and posttreatment. Findings indicate that a larger scale randomized controlled trial would be worthwhile. These encouraging findings shed light on the dynamics maintaining these high-conflict situations known to be damaging to children. We established that both forms of intervention were acceptable to most parents, and we were able to operate a random allocation design with extensive quantitative and qualitative assessments of the kind that would make a larger-scale trial feasible and productive.

- 3. Target, M., Hertzmann, L., Midgley, N., Casey, P., & Lassri, D. (2017). Parents’ experience of child contact within entrenched conflict families following separation and divorce: A qualitative study. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, 31, 218-246.**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02668734.2016.1268197>

### **Abstract**

Child contact arrangements with parents following separation and divorce are strongly endorsed for children in both public policy and law where safe, but can be difficult to sustain. Entrenched high-conflict post-separation relationships between parents can cause substantial emotional risks to children as well as impacting severely on parents’ mental health. This paper describes a qualitative study, aimed at examining parents’ experiences of contact arrangements post-separation, undertaken within a mixed methods random allocation study of therapeutic outcomes for parents in entrenched conflict over their children. Two established semi-structured interviews with 22 parents were jointly subjected to thematic analyses.

A thematic analysis across interviews revealed three main themes: 'Dealing with contact evokes extreme states of mind' for parents; when speaking of contact, the child is 'everywhere and nowhere' in the parents' minds; 'the hardest thing about contact is dealing with my ex-partner'. These findings indicate the immense strain children and parents are under and shed much light on the desperate states of mind for parents, particularly the anxieties driving relentless child contact disputes. This paper may contribute to the understanding of parents' experiences of contact arrangements post-separation, potentially providing important information which can inform best practice for professionals working with this population.

4. **Hertzmann, L., Abse, S., Target, M., Glausius, K., Nyberg, V., & Lassri, D. (2017). Mentalization-based therapy for parental conflict- Parenting Together; An intervention for parents in entrenched post-separation disputes. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, 31*, 195-217.**  
**<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02668734.2017.1320685>**

### **Abstract**

High-conflict relationship dissolution has been shown to cause substantial emotional risk and psychological harm to children's developmental outcomes. Parents in chronic post separation conflict who repeatedly use the courts to address their disputes are by nature difficult to engage in therapeutic services. This paper describes the theoretical and practical key elements of a mentalisation-based therapeutic intervention, *Mentalization-Based Therapy for Parental Conflict – Parenting Together (MBT-PT)*, that has been developed in order to address some of the unique challenges that these parents and the professionals working with them are facing. Specifically, the intervention aims to reduce anger and hostile conflicts between parents and mitigate the damaging effects of inter-parental conflict on children. The implementation procedure of the MBT-PT intervention among parents in entrenched conflict over their children, in the context of a random allocation pilot study, is briefly described. Next, the MBT-PT intervention is exemplified using clinical examples, followed by potential implications concerning practice and policy for professionals working with this population of parents.

5. **Lassri, D., Luyten, P., Fonagy, P., & Shahar, G. (2018). Undetected Scars? Self-criticism, attachment, and romantic relationships among otherwise well-functioning childhood sexual abuse survivors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 10, 121-129. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000271>**

**Abstract**

Background: Studies have consistently demonstrated the negative impact of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) on intimate relationships. The majority of studies have focused on revictimization in at-risk or clinical samples, with very few addressing the impact of CSA on otherwise well-functioning adults and even fewer investigating the psychological mechanisms involved. To fill this gap, this study focuses on the effect of CSA on “normative” (nonviolent) romantic relationships in otherwise well-functioning young women, and the mediating role of personality dimension self-criticism and attachment in this regard. Specifically, we investigate whether self-criticism and attachment avoidance mediate the relationship between CSA and romantic relationship satisfaction, while also examining the potential reciprocal associations between these variables. Method: The hypothesized mediation model was examined in a 2-wave, 6-month, cross-lagged longitudinal design, using structural equation modeling. Participants were 59 well-functioning (psychologically, socially, occupationally) young women drawn from an earlier study that purposefully oversampled for CSA survivors. For the purpose of the current study, data from women who had been either sexually abused by a familiar perpetrator ( $n = 30$ ) or had no history of sexual trauma ( $n = 29$ ) were included. Results: Consistent with expectations, self-criticism mediated the association between CSA and romantic relationship satisfaction over time. In addition, a scarring effect of romantic relationship satisfaction on attachment avoidance was demonstrated. Conclusion: Findings suggest that CSA may lead to elevated levels of self-criticism, which in turn may be linked with reduced satisfaction in romantic relationships, setting in motion a vicious cycle involving relationship satisfaction and attachment avoidance.

6. Redfern, S., Wood, S., Lassri, D., Cirasola, A., West, G., Austerberry, C., Luyten, P., Fonagy, P. & Midgley, N. (2018). **The Reflective Fostering Programme (RFP): background and development of the approach.** *Adoption & Fostering*, 42, 234-248.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575918790434>

### **Abstract**

Looked after children represent a vulnerable group in society, many of whom are exposed to maltreatment, particularly in the form of relational trauma, prior to placement with a foster family. Challenging behaviours can place foster placements at risk and looked after children often confront the possibility of placement breakdown. A carer's capacity to retain a robust understanding of the children in their care as autonomous individuals with needs, feelings and thoughts can be important in enabling them to respond more effectively to the worrying or disruptive behaviour they may encounter. The Reflective Fostering Programme (RFP) is a new group-based programme aiming to support foster carers of children aged 4–11. This innovative development follows calls by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and other organisations to help improve outcomes for children in care by improving resources for their carers. The RFP is rooted in evidence drawn from the field of contemporary attachment and mentalizing research, which indicates that children who have a carer high in reflective functioning tend to have more favourable outcomes in terms of social-emotional well-being. It also draws on the evidence that looking after a child who has impaired capacity to mentalize as a result of early relational trauma affects the carer's capacity to mentalize and respond sensitively to the child (Ensink, et al., 2015). This article sets out the rationale for the RFP, outlines its key elements and concludes by indicating future service implementation and a planned feasibility study examining this approach.

7. **Reuven-Krispin, H\*, Lassri, D\*, Luyten, P., & Shahar, G. (In Press, 2020). Consequences of Divorce-based Father-absence during Childhood to Young Adult Well-being and Romantic Relationships. *Family Relations* (\*equal first authorship contribution).**

**Abstract**

Objective: To explore the implications of father absence due to divorce on young adults' well-being and romantic relationships. Background: Studies have demonstrated the negative implications of father absence, a common consequence of divorce, on children's development. However, previous research has not systematically compared complete vs. partial father absence. Method: Thirty-eight and 41 young adults who, as children, experienced complete ( $n = 38$ ) or partial ( $n = 41$ ) father absence were compared to 40 participants in a father-presence control group. Results: Compared with controls, young adults in the partial father-absence group reported higher psychopathology and maternal overprotection, and lower maternal care, romantic intimacy, commitment, and passion. Under elevated maternal care, the partial-absence group reported lower dyadic adjustment and consolidated sense of identity. Participants in the complete-absence group reported higher self-criticism and maternal overprotection, and lower maternal care than controls. Conclusion: Partial father absence might have particularly pernicious consequences for young adults' well-being. Implications: Clinical and public policy implications are discussed herein.