

Thinking critically about neglect

Webinar from the Neglect Learning Event Series 2022

Dez Holmes from Research in Practice presents *Thinking critically about adolescent neglect* and explores issues of stigma, shame and inequality, and what this means for practice.

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On behalf of Child Protection Committees Scotland, I'd want to welcome you all to the webinar this morning. We had about 600 people expressed an interest in coming along today and we've already got in 450 online. So that's a brilliant number. Thank you all for coming along. And thank you, particularly to Dez Holmes from Research in Practice, who is going to lead our session this morning. And so any further ado, I think the best thing is to hand over to Dez to take us through the session. So thank you very much Dez.

Thank you, Susan. Hello, colleagues, lovely to be here. My name is Dez Holmes, and I run a charity called Research in Practice. And I'm really, really pleased to be invited to come and talk to you folks. And we're going to be focusing on thinking critically about neglect

So Research in Practice is a proudly independent, even more proudly, not for profit organization. And we help people, particularly colleagues across England, and who work in Wales, people who work with children and adults and communities to use evidence in their work. But when we talk about evidence informed practice, we conceptualize that as drawing on robust, relevant research and data. We also see professional expertise as an important source of that evidence base. And thirdly, crucially, we see people's lived experience as a valid

and important source of knowledge. So we're often think about triangulating different sources of evidence. And although we mainly work with members across England, all of our stuff, and much of it is freely available, is on our website. That's it from me to know more about the organization I come from. Given that we're going to be spending some time together, thinking critically about neglect, it's not for me to cover the basics. You'll be aware I'm sure, all of you, of the definition set out in the Scottish Government, certainly around the persistent failure. That's important. It's persistent failure. It's rarely a sort of one off incident, there's a kind of chronic, persistent nature to neglect. And it's largely judged around the degree to which it causes impairment. You'll know that. You'll be aware, I know in your different roles, that there are all different manifestations of neglect, you can see medical neglect, or nutritional neglect, emotional neglect, which is particularly tricky to identify often, physical neglect, and lack of supervision and guidance, education, neglect. And an example that often gets less attention, but I am going to spend a little bit of time on today is the notion of societal neglect, where the needs that families have - children and families, but also families themselves - are not met by society, by the state. And I think that gives us a different angle to think about the structural nature of neglect. And it matters enormously, of course, and you will all know this because you're skilled, knowledgeable professionals, it matters because the impacts of neglect can be really serious. This is from some work that Debra Allnock did for us a few years ago. And we were looking at the early impact and medium term impacts and some of the long term impacts. The word I want to really highlight to you is potential. Not every child or young person will always go on to experience these impacts as a result of neglect. It's not causal, it's not neat, it's not linear. That's why we need skilled professionals like you doing the thinking. So really, really important that we avoid that kind of reductive notion that $A + B$ always equals C , but some of the impacts that the research suggests can come through early on in a child's experience of neglect, with things like changes to how our body responds to stress. You can see evidence of things like low self esteem, negative self representations, some difficulties in forming some relationships, being withdrawn or conversely, coming across as aggressive and impulsive. Often these are behaviors that might be identified in early years settings or school settings. You can see how difficulties in forming social relationships and difficulties in regulating behavior would often be really pertinent to those colleagues working in education. In the medium term, some of the research picks up on issues - and I don't love this language, I have to say - violence and delinquency - there's a term - but that sense that often, difficulties in behavior becoming more serious symptoms, which are often associated with

ADHD, although I'm being very careful there not to say it causes ADHD. Some of what the research refers to is personality disorders, although again, I think the world is changing and there's a growing movement to really dissect, interrogate and challenge that kind of language. Some children and young people are more likely to come in conflict with the law, often in relation to things like violent incidents and aggressive behavior. And again, that relationship conflict - difficulties in establishing healthy functioning relationships can come through. For some children, sometimes. I cannot stress enough that we must avoid the tick box approach, these are potential impacts and every child and young person is unique. And in the longer term, some of the impacts that the research highlights can be relevant for young people, but also right through into adulthood could include difficulties with our mental health, difficulties managing anxiety, really serious mental health issues like suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, reliance on substances, what the research calls 'risky sexual behavior', and again, I would want to critique that little bit. 'Risky' is highly subjective. And we seem not to apply quite the same moral standards around people's sexual and romantic behaviors to celebrities, as we do to single mums, for example. So just a need for some critical thinking there around the subjectivity. It's really important that we somehow hold in our minds *both, and*. It is both important that we pay attention to these potential impacts, that we understand how neglect might play out in a child, young person or indeed parents life. And we must be really, really careful to avoid deterministic labeling, stigmatizing or blaming practice. That's easy for me to say, isn't it? Hold the *both/and* mindset, it's actually very hard for professionals across the multi agency partnership to do. That's why we need space for critical thinking, good supervision, good peer support.

I want to take us away from some of that more traditional research now and draw on some really cracking work that was done by the University of Stirling with Action for Children a few years ago. And they engaged young people to understand what neglect feels like what, what is neglect through a child's eyes. And they have quite different lens on it, nothing that would contravene the definition. But I would say richness that perhaps is missing sometimes in policy, legislation or practice discourse. They talk about putting on a pretense covering up your feelings, you know, you have friends, and that can help, but you don't really want to tell them, you don't burden your friends with what you're going through, so you try not to talk about it too much, being laughed at by your friends. But you blame yourself you don't blame your parents, you know, being laughed at about not having the right stuff. Not being clean enough, or having the equipment you

need or the right clothes, that kind of thing. Not being able to concentrate in school, because things are bad in your life. And then you get told off. Isn't that an interesting way to reframe some of the professional language of difficulties with behavior in the school setting, I can't concentrate, I can't concentrate on what it is I'm supposed to learn? Because life so awful. And then I'm getting told off about it. And before you know that I've got the aggressive behavior labels. Before you know it, I'm not even in a school setting anymore. I just think it's really important that we hear this through children's voices. Often young people and children talk about not knowing what was happening at the time, it was when I look back, and I realize it shouldn't have happened. Or feel that you have two families, your parents are in one family and then you and your brother, you and your sister in the other this sort of splitting. And the one that I thought was particularly poignant. At the end, a young person who says love is a doing word, I think from memory. The quote went on to say words to the effects of in my mum had the feeling of love, but she couldn't do the doing of love. And the nuance, the painful, exquisite nuance of that. Sometimes as professionals, especially if we don't have personal experience of neglect, or finding parenting difficult, we can fall into the trap of it being this is about poor parenting, a failure of parenting, they don't care for their kids properly. And actually, what this young person really highlights is that there's two sides to love. There's the feeling, and the being able to enact that feeling well. And there are lots of reasons why we might not be able to enact it. It doesn't mean we don't have the feeling of love. And crucially, it doesn't mean that kids don't love their parents. So some real nuance in that I find it quite helpful in challenging some of the professional jargon that I've developed over my career. And the word neglect itself is a tricky one. We did some work, going back to 10 years probably now with a small group of local authorities in England who wanted to understand the role of early health and family support in addressing neglect and one of the local authorities involved in this project, went out on the streets, went and did some kind of vox-popping around their local shopping centers asking members of public you know, do you know what neglect is? Would you know what it looked like? What would you do if you encountered it? And actually, what they found interesting is the general public had a pretty good understanding of what neglect looked like in sounded like. They were much less confident what they should do about it. Very, very few members of public felt inclined to, to run to social services straightaway, which I think is interesting and presents a challenge for all of us there. But one of the other things that really struck me - it wasn't even a key finding - this little sub finding that stayed with me for years, was how many of the professionals said, Oh, we don't use the word neglect with the

families we're helping. So you'd have families who said, Oh, yeah, I'm being supported by you know, Dez and her team, because Jack's behavior in school is bad, or because, you know, I've been struggling a little bit, you know, since my partner left or whatever framing they had, but the professionals on paper, were supporting one of the categories of neglect, or because the referral had been made on the basic of neglect. And whilst I can understand that, that need for professionals to want to frame their input in a way that could resonate with families and not be rejected, I also think it shines a light on some of the dissonance, because if a family doesn't know why we think we're involved in their lives, are we really doing consent driven, rights based, honest, relational work with them? And the word neglect does sound a little Victorian, he always makes me think of sort of, Gin Alley times, you know, it often comes hand in hand with other, in my view, really unhelpful words like disheveled and unkempt. And it has just a very Victorian feel to it. So this thing about language here, which, hopefully we'll have a little chance to discuss with each other when I have finished ranting at you about the research, to really think about how the the language, the framing, the way the research is presented, can create some disconnect in the values driven practice that we all aspire to, where we work alongside families - that we do with them, and not to them. And that brings me then to this notion of societal neglect. In particular, I'm drawing attention to some work which although it focused on social work, my view is it applies across a multidisciplinary basis. A very, very good piece of work - a huge body of research, actually, across the four nations. The Child Welfare Inequalities Project led by Paul Bywaters, now at Huddersfield. And they found - and this will be a shock to no one, of course, because professionals been saying this for decades. They found a very, very clear relationship, I would say, an irrefutable relationship between poverty and child welfare. Poverty makes you poorly. Poverty makes parenting even more difficult. Being poor, and poorly makes parenting very, very hard - I was going to say impossible, but that's not fair of me at all. Very, very hard to get right all the time, every day. What they found in their work was that practitioners were often reluctant to name or acknowledge poverty and inequality in their work, partly because, you know, of course, and rightly so, many poor families don't harm their children. Yes, absolutely true. And partly because of a sort of coyness, a desire to not stigmatize and blame. But what that then meant, and I think this quote from Kate Morris, in the same kind of big research project is spot on. She talked about how poverty is there and has become the wallpaper of practice. It is too big to tackle. And it's too familiar to notice. We don't want to shame people. We don't want to be reductive and assume that, you know, poverty causes child

maltreatment and, and blame all poor families. And so we won't mention it at all. It's too tricky, it's too awkward. And actually, that's really problematic, because poverty is I would say now, unarguably, a contributory factor. And so what Morrison and colleagues highlighted was that there is a real need for social work to engage with it. And I would actually argue that everyone needs to develop the confidence to discuss and identify and talk to families about poverty, in a non-stigmatising humane way. And in fact, it might even be that some professional groups are better placed to do this than social workers. Social workers in the audience will know by virtue of being a social worker, some families will find it very, very hard to trust you. But a teaching assistant that they like at their kids primary school, with the right support, just might be the person who can unlock that conversation in a relational, respectful way. We have to find ways of talking about this. It's not acceptable to have an issue that's too big to tackle too familiar to notice, and yet places so many families in precarious positions. We need to I think, keep pushing for a much more grown up conversation. Poverty in public health and child protection, absolutely connected in so many ways and neglect is just one of the very, very clear manifestations of that. Poverty makes you poorly, being poorly makes you more likely to be poor. Being poor and poorly makes parenting, as I say, very, very difficult to get right. When Gardener did her review, there was very clear evidence from her and Rostad - Families living in poverty are 40 times more likely to be referred to the child welfare system. There is a very clear correlation found repeatedly in research between poverty and wider issues that can affect parenting capacity, things like domestic violence and abuse, mental ill health, substance misuse issues. Bywaters, again as part of Child Welfare Inequalities Project, identifying that within England children in the most deprived 10% of small neighborhoods were 10 times - more than 10 times - more likely to become looked after by the state, or be subject of a child protection plan than children the least deprived 10%.

And intersectionality really matters here, poverty and disadvantage and ethnicity and disability in gender interact in quite complex ways. We know that poorer young women, especially those with care experience, can be particularly exposed to abusive and violent relationships, which in turn, of course, is correlated with poor mental health, which in turn can be correlated with neglectful parenting, it is not a radical or difficult or incendiary political point to make to say that poverty is a public health and a child protection issue. It's simply the facts. And these conversations are getting easier. I've really observed the sea change in the last 5 - 10 years, and I would say, Bywaters and colleagues work has really led that sea

change, we have to forget the politics, you have to focus on the people and be brave enough to say actually, there are issues in society, which are demonstrably driving issues of child maltreatment, we have to be brave enough to say that, that's not to excuse parents for the changes that they can make in their lives. It's not to label all people experiencing inequality. It's to be honest, intersectional and astute to the wider structural factors here.

And I think that that notion of really understanding deeply, and being family and child centered in our work, really chimes with the 10 principles of intensive family support that are set out in The Promise and I have to say, colleagues, I frequently spend my time looking at what you guys are up to North of the border and feeling very, very jealous of the good work you're doing. I think the premise set out in The Promise is one that I would warmly welcome. This notion of family support being holistic, relational, thinking about the whole family system, really leaning into the relational power that we have, focusing on therapeutic work, absolutely emphasize that non-stigmatising approach and being patient and persistent, a focus on rights, including, of course, a child's right to be with their family, the right to family life, you know, it's not the 1800s, we're not just rescuing disheveled children from their feckless poor parents, or at least we shouldn't be if that's our mindset, I'd suggest we aren't in the right sector. Thinking about that community based, responsible approach and really working with families' assets in that strength based empowering way. And of course, offering flexibility - avoiding that box taking approach where the protocols and the threshold documents dictate professional judgment. So I thought there was a real congruence actually between this emerging working in Scotland and what the wider literature says particularly around that kind of structural, social welfarist understanding. And to pick up on that point about non-stigmatising, a really clear example of where we've got that wrong over the years is in relation to the so called toxic trio. Vernacular that was very, very popular for some time is now falling out of favor, I think a good reason is the idea you'll be very very familiar with it - the toxic trio was a term coined to try and articulate the these three particularly pertinent features of domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance use. The researchers who originally co-identified this for their work looking at serious case reviews, and offered a much more nuanced and in careful framing. But, you know, doing what we often do in our sector, we love a strap line and a bit of shorthand and before you knew it became the toxic trio, the toxic trio, well actually when you think much more critically and there is some very, very good work - I've included the link at the bottom now - by Guy Skinner and colleagues just a year or two ago. The evidence

base is very, very weak around that so called toxic trio. There's a real lack of precision and detail and depth. There are no answers coming through from good quality research about how prevalent these three factors are in combination or how many children are or aren't experiencing abuse and neglect as a result. There is very little consideration, if any they would argue, of the causal mechanisms of how X causes Y, either theoretically or empirically. So either based on theory or based on scientific results. There is very little definition, so you know, 'Oh we definitely find mental health being an issue in this family'. And the only evidence being that one worker said, Yes, I believe mom has or mom told me she gets depressed and actually, that's not robust enough to dictate a whole policy approach. So Skinner and colleagues offered a really robust, really thought provoking critique of this approach. And even without that brilliant work, they did, just the fact that parents themselves say this is insulting. This is offensive language. And let's just break that down a bit. Toxic trio, what's toxic about the abuse, I suffer? If I am a victim, survivor of domestic violence, how does that make me toxic, how is my mental ill health, somehow making me toxic? Now, that was never the intended meaning, but that's how it feels to some of the parents consulted as part of this work. So really staying alert to the power of language and the almost tidal pull sometimes that can drag practitioners, however well intended, into a space where they are I think blaming or stigmatizing or shaming families. And none of us ever came into the job to do that. So we have to force ourselves to carve out space, to think more deeply to reflect, to lean into the humanity in the complexity of this work. Because it's not enough to simply say, if we make good protocols and toolkits and threshold documents, the work will be done well.

All those things matter and they matter hugely. But really what we need is what Jane Barlow calls structured professional judgment, the right kit, good quality tools based on proper robust evidence, that in the hands of skilled practitioners with space to think critically, and the kind of supervision and CPD and support around them, that allows them to really hold on to their values, their humanity. Because if we only rely on the toolkits, we're going to miss a trick because actually the toolkits are made by humans. And the toolkits have biases and blind spots baked into them, sometimes, even the really, really good ones. And so I picked on a really good one here, very popular and very well regarded, you get assessment tool. There are lots of different variations, and it's continually being improved, actually so, so credit to the colleagues involved in that. But there is a variety of aspects of this very popular and as I say it is one of the best if not the best regarded neglect assessment toolkit or approach. It highlights what good non-

neglectful parenting would look like. And it's all stuff we'd agree with, until you take a step back and try and apply an equalities lens to it, you really try to focus on equity and equality and diversity and inclusion. And then you spot the biases, the blind spots are baked in. So for example, this tool suggests that we, you know, we would want to see the child's hair being clean and brushed daily and who, who doesn't want clean hair, right? But that bit about brushing your hair daily, when I think about some of the children I love most deeply. And one of them has got huge, enormous, gorgeous Afro and the other one's got cornrows. And actually, there's a deeply, deeply Anglo centric understanding of brushing children's hair daily is what good parenting looks like. Whoops. It made me think of someone who recently had her toddler, he is a little black boy. And there was an outbreak of Hand Foot and Mouth, you know, one of those horrible things a little kiddies gets in the nursery, and she he went on all the NHS websites and local did a Google search, trying to understand what it looked like and all the pictures were white children. So how do you know what to worry about with that particular skin condition? When there's just this blind spot baked in this assumption is Anglo centric assumption, riven throughout our public services sometimes. This neglect assessment tool, you know, invites us to, you know, make sure that there are kitchen utensils present and that we can see evidence of home cooking and of course that's a really good thing, isn't it? Of course it's a good thing to be doing home cooking and having a functioning kitchen so your family can eat well. But if you've just placed me in a bedsit. If you have just placed me in a bedsit because my home was frankly not habitable, maybe I've got a Breville sandwich toaster and a microwave and if I'm lucky, a kettle. Does that mean that I'm a neglectful parent? Or does that mean that societally my needs can't be met and I can't therefore meet my children's needs. Were told to check that the parent or carer regularly reads stories to the child. And that, of course, is a lovely thing to do, what lovely thing to be doing. And of course it's an indication of some really good loving, and educationally aware parenting, but it does rather require the parent carer to be able to read or read in English. Again, we've got some assumptions built in. We're told to check that the family can sit and eat together. And that indeed would be a nice thing. Well, I say that's not always those are my family, you know, it is a nice thing. But you've just placed me in a domestic abuse refuge. And we don't have a table. There's four of us in this one room. We're told to check the age appropriate toys are available. And of course, that is a good thing. But it does rather require me to be able to afford those age appropriate toys. Or depending on how I reached your local area, or indeed your shores, whether I brought the age appropriate toys, whether they were my priority. We're told that

children should be supervised, which is, again, broadly a good thing. But I'm working three jobs right now. Because I can't cover my living costs on what the state is able to provide me with. So which one am I going to get in more trouble for? Not being able to feed my kids and keep the heating on or not being able to supervise him because I'm at work? Because that's the choice that some parents are facing. And we're told, of course, to check the parent carer is supporting homework. And again, that's a really good thing. But I suppose what I'm struck by is during some of those particularly tough parts of lockdown when everyone had their kids at home, how able we all felt to joke on social media that we couldn't do our kids Key Stage Two maths. How much permission we gave ourselves, to not be good at doing the homework and the homeschooling and how, how fairly, we apply that same levity to the families involved in our system, our professional systems. So it's not a critique of the tool. I think the tool, as I say is a very, very good tool. But even the very best evidence tools need to be in the hands of thoughtful practitioners who take that deliberate equalities oriented lens supported by good boss, or good team who help you think carefully, there's a couple of links at the bottom that might be useful if this is something that really strikes a chord with you. The first one there is a knowledge briefing that the fabulous Professor Claudia Bernard wrote for us about how we can more deeply understand the experiences of Black, Asian, and other minoritised children and families. And the second link there is from the British Association of Social Work, where they produced a guide to anti-poverty practice. Both really, really helpful and full of thought provoking ideas about how we can spot the blind spots and the biases that are sometimes baked in into the way we work. And I would say they are particularly relevant when we're thinking about neglect. Just briefly, I want to talk about the neglect of older children and teenagers because I think it's an area where we have particularly to think quite critically. Often the neglect of older children can go unseen. There was a very, very useful piece of work done by Ofsted with a small group of local authorities in England, and I wonder how these messages would play out for you colleagues in Scotland. What they found was that with teenagers - the report is called 'Growing up neglected' by the way, there's a link at the bottom of this slide. They found that with teenagers, there were all sorts of issues where their neglect previous or current expressing neglect, were being overlooked. And were often very, very preoccupied as professionals with their presenting behavior. So the issue was his school truancy or her aggression, or her offending behavior in the community. And it was like it was obscuring, or undermining our curiosity about what had happened before, about thinking about their life within the home or their early childhood experiences. And whilst Ofsted

really entered the complexity, in identifying and intervening, they really, really pushed us to think more deeply. And it can be really tricky with teenagers, you know, with 'littlies', as I think they're called in the academic literature, you know, with tots, there's a little bit of you know, you can weigh them and you can count their teeth and stuff. But with teenagers, there might be all sorts of ways in which those more obvious markers of neglect wouldn't be visible to us. They may indeed, and let's think back to those quotes from young people before, they may indeed be not recognizing it themselves, or overtly trying to obscure what's happening in their family home. They don't want their parents being blamed, for example. They don't blame their parents, they still love their parents, they think their parents love them. All of that stuff can add complexity to how we think about neglect of all the children. Crucially, we have to stop being wholly distracted by the presenting behaviors. And they did a whole piece of work where they looked at serious case reviews, now called Child safeguarding practice reviews down here in England, and they looked at how older young people were affected. There was a significant minority where there'd been a suicide of that in person prompting a serious case review and they studied seven of them over a two year period, all of them had experienced enduring and significant neglect. Sometimes you can find that, for example, older children spend more time away from a neglectful home. And so then we become focused on things like offending behavior, exploitation. And we, we don't, I guess we don't see the kid behind the behavior that would be perhaps the simplest way of putting it. So a real need for critical thinking, and a really important role actually for, for our colleagues in early years settings in some of our universal health settings, who might often be engaged with a family, you know, around antenatal care or babies and toddlers, for them to really feel empowered and confident about being curious about the teenager that comes in and out of the house whilst you're there working with little ones, really trying to think about that whole family. It's that holistic system that sets out The Promise. And one of the big mistakes we make, of course, is we assume these young people are resilient. This came through in this series case review analysis. Similar to what we sometimes see in relation to sexual exploitation. This idea that adolescents who are seen as aggressive or feisty - I hate that word feisty, I think it's really gendered - and they were seen as challenging and robust and that they were unable to seek help. They were frankly seen as a bit of a pain in the backside. And that really correlates with this insight from a young person. In some work that the Children's Commissioner in England did a few years ago. This young person said they saw me as functioning fine. Thought I was coping, they ignored me completely. We need to think really critically about what we believe resilience is.

Vulnerability is not the opposite of being a bit mouthy. We need to be really critically minded and how we see teenagers. And we also might want to think quite critically about whether they want to be described as victims of maltreatment of vulnerable children. We've got to work with this stuff on their terms in their language. And that requires real courage, I think and nuance from practitioners. Don't worry about this complicated looking diagram, there won't be a test. But I suppose I really wanted to foreground why we at Research and Practice think that thinking about adolescent neglect is a neglected issue. It was a piece of work. It's a hypothesized model. It's a belief or a set of hypotheses here drawing on evidence about how neglect might increase some young people's vulnerability to things like exploitation. In particular here we look to sexual exploitation. And putting it quite simply, we can see these theoretical and sometimes empirically demonstrated links and sometimes the research is pretty clear, or a little bit, you know, suggestive, that neglect can drive unmet emotional needs, unmet physical needs, attachment difficulties or problems forming relationships, for those young people that we talked about that. You can see then these developmental impacts where a young person might have low self-esteem or poor emotional regulation, some of the behaviors that then are linked to those - thrill seeking or prioritizing the needs of others, wanting to please other people, you know, having difficulty discriminating threatened danger. So there's kind of a knock on effect of different needs and adversities that can emerge developmentally for a young person behaviorally. We see some of these sometimes for some young people, you know, issues like becoming ensnared in drug use or running away from home, perhaps because the home doesn't feel like a safe and warm and welcoming place to be. All of these things do not cause sexual exploitation. But they could they can and could make the strategies that some sexual exploitation perpetrators engage in, be that much more effective, if you like. So, you know, if I've experienced neglect over a period of time, and I have difficulties forming relationships, I might think, quite a low sense of self-worth, I might be quite isolated, and I might prioritize the needs of others and want to please them and seek that affirmation, well you can see how for someone who was seeking to exploit me, that sort of befriending strategy or tricking me into thinking in a romantic relationship, you can see how that galvanizes those strategies. Or perhaps me young person who's grown up with very little, I have materially found myself without, I might also have difficulty detecting threats and discriminating between what's dangerous, and what's not dangerous and have difficulties solving problems. I might find myself drawn into all sorts of criminal behaviors, partly because I want to get the stuff I've never

had. And partly because I want to be part of something, I want to belong. When of course, we know that many perpetrators will engage young people in things like drug debt bondage will encourage substance misuse in order that they can then create drug dependency in order they can then be further exploited. Or they might offer me things they might entice me with things that I've never had, meeting some unmet needs of mine, both emotional and material, and make me feel like this is the attachment. This is the relationship I was seeking. So really understanding how neglectful experiences can have a multitude of quite complex and interacting impacts. So we absolutely must avoid what we sometimes doing in public services and human services of categorizing - this is a CSE case, these are our gangs kids, or that is separate to our neglect work - because actually the issues are often connected and interact in quite complex ways. So again, real critical thinking needed. Some of the things that make this work so difficult and why we're so I guess, grateful for having skilled thoughtful practitioners like yourselves is, it's really hard to do this stuff. The nature of neglect being chronic makes it difficult, you don't get it's kind of one off blue light incidents, that can trigger a response, you don't often get that kind of crisis moment, it is hard to identify it especially, you know, with children who are nonverbal, for example, or, as I say, young people whose behavior has come to obscure or we've allowed it to obscure our judgment. We don't want to pass judgment on parents, and often doesn't occur in isolation. There is also some it makes it tricky, the Daniel Glaser picks up on, which I think is really well made point that for professionals, we face this linguistic and conceptual dilemma, we want and need to protect children from harm, but we are rightly reluctant to label or blame caregivers and you see that sense of either or - I'm either protecting kids, or I'm treating the family and the parents respectfully - and we have to make this *both/and*. It's *both/and* not either or.

One of the ways in which we can start to really think about our practice in this area comes through from Peter Sidebotham and colleagues work again, in a serious case reviews. And they talk about trying to develop models and cultures of working, that account for the complexity and in the ambiguity, the *both/and* ness of this stuff. They talk about, and I really like this cloverleaf diagram on the Venn diagram fan, that kind of combining authority, empathy and humility. So authority, not authoritarian, but working with authority, that confidence and competence that good professionals bring. Where the professional can adopt a stance of curiosity and challenge, but from a supportive base. Families deserve to have professionals who know their stuff, that they use that power carefully.

Empathy, this sense that the centrality of the rights and needs of the child, of course, is held front and center. But we're also being sensitive to the needs and views of parents, whilst not colluding with those parents. That's complex. That's complex work. And importantly, that sense of humility, recognizing our limitations, knowing what we don't know, acknowledging what we don't know where we're imperfect, and using our skills and strengths and continuously trying to hone our craft, I guess. Authority, empathy, humility, the sweet spot in the middle there, research suggests is where we can really make a difference in this territory. And there's loads of stuff that makes your jobs even harder than they already are. You know, we see this kind of unfounded optimism sometimes comes through research, Professor Munro talked about this, this idea that, you're working with this chronic neglect and ongoing needs being unmet. And then one day, the kitchen floor has been mopped, and 'Oh fantastic, right, we will change your assessment now. We'll close the case and there are signs for optimism'. I'd also wonder if there's not some unfounded cynicism: those kinds of families, that part of town. Both of those don't help us in doing purposeful, ethical work. And researchers pick up on that relative judgment stuff. This came through in that work the Bywaters did around child welfare inequalities - relative judgment, where a professional might feel like, well, compared to my last school, the kids here are okay. Or compared to my case load previously, this lot are doing fine. Well, compared to the last call out I've just done, I wouldn't say this house is particularly bad. You know, you get that sense of relative judgment rather than is this good enough for this kid? And you will see that confirmation bias. When the system or some of the conversations around you have set you up to believe something about a family, we have to work really hard as humans not to just keep finding evidence to confirm that we're right. That can happen a lot we've got to really check ourselves. That is why supervision is so important. Get that start again, syndrome. Again, the research picks on this a lot. Every new baby or new house move or new partner or new school, new worker, we start over again. And we lose that sense of chronology, we lose the child's story, the cumulative impacts of these experiences over time. We hear again and again in the research that some of the things that can make it difficult to work well in this space - lack of information, lack of time, lack of good quality feedback, lack of space to be reflective, lack of resilience amongst workers, and I would say, all those things are probably true for families as well. Families don't have more space to reflect than professionals. So they're not dissimilar challenges being faced by families and those who serve families. Some research picks up on the idea of decision fatigue. I remember reading a quote once, I think it was in some work by Jones, where a

social worker, I believe, possibly an early help worker said something like, 'Yeah, by four o'clock on a Friday, I can barely choose what kind of tea bag I want, never mind make a complex decision about a family. There's something about that exhaustion that can come around decision making and endless assessment and review. And, you know, do we call this in to engage social care? Is this reaching threshold? Do we need to get police involved, all of that stuff? And sometimes that can lead to avoidance. Some researchers pick up on practitioners avoiding the decision making: 'I'm going to stick with the drift because that's what I can do right now'. It's really important that we hold the *both/and* mindset. It is both crucial that professional judgment is valued and enabled. And if we only rely on that clinical professional judgment, we'll get it wrong, because we're fallible. I can remember reading somewhere, again, it might have been Jones, or it could have been Jane Barlow, that an individual professional's judgment is no more likely to be correct than tossing a coin, which is slightly more correct than football pundits, by the way who get it wrong more than half the time, I understand. We are fallible as human beings. That's why we need that structure and professional judgment - the right people with the right kit - we need both. And of course, that structural systemic inequality that affects so many of our communities and wider society. We hear a lot about the endemic mistrust, you know, families not trusting particularly social workers and, and often police colleagues as well, that's coming through very, very clearly in England at the moment around some particular police forces. I would argue maybe that mistrust works both ways. Are there some professional groups where we have fallen into endemic mistrust of families, where we think our job is about surveillance and scrutiny and catching them out? I've certainly worked in some teams where that was the mood music. What helps us as practitioners do this work well, is that structured professional judgment, good quality tools underpinned by good quality research being used in tandem with good quality relationships and good quality reflection. The right kit in the right hands. When we work properly in partnership with families, and that doesn't mean we've ticked the wishes and feelings box or we did invite mum to the meeting. It is properly getting alongside families, the way we say things, what we say and how we say it, and applies to senior leaders as well. Because for senior leaders and, and service leaders, the tone of voice you take, the way you breathe, can influence the mindset of a service. So when you roll your eyes and say, oh god, yeah, I know that postcode. Oh, that family. Good luck with them. I used to work with Nan, we are inadvertently, at least I hope it's inadvertent, contributing to an othering - an us or them with families. The research, there is particularly good stuff around goal attainment scaling, for example, absolute clarity, what are we aiming for? Why

does it matter that we aim for this? How do we get there. And that being really clear for parents, carers and often for children as well. And alongside that clarity, the space to adapt as things change as new knowledge comes to light as relationships deepen. So clarity and adaptability being harnessed together there. Really good quality CPDs, peer support, a space where professionals across the multi agency network can reflect together and combine their skills. I think it's incredibly important that we don't think that reflective supervision is something that is only important for social workers or, you know, some allied health professionals. My personal belief, and it is one of my soapbox issues, if you work with people in pain and you do it properly, it's going to hurt some days. And that is true whether you are a teacher, a head teacher, a special education needs coordinator, police officer, social worker, early help worker, sports coach, I don't care what your job title is, if you are working with people and these people are in pain, you're going to get hurt, and the right to have a space where you are challenged and nurtured, to think about your feelings. To think about how you think about your feelings, to process the emotional impact of this work is absolutely essential. We've got to think about decision making processes, not just auditing cases, and auditing timelines, and things, but how do we come to these judgments? What helps us? What helps us in our supervision, our management, how do our strategic leaders model the very best of the practice we hope to see with families? How do we show that sensitivity? Staying alert that professional desensitization? How do we spot when our coping mechanisms are not healthy? Because, you know, endlessly making jokes about how we can't wait for a big glass of wine at the end of the day. It's not healthy. Because if one of the parents we were working with endlessly made jokes about how they have to drink to get through the day. I think we'd note that down, wouldn't we? It would be in a report before the end of the week. Managers, senior officers and school leaders have a really important role in just staying alert to the risks of their staff becoming desensitized, getting into some of that unhelpful sometimes unconscious defense mechanisms and coping mechanisms. We have to create a system in which we are absolutely alert to, and tenacious in addressing, harm facing children. But we do so in a way which holds on to our humanity, in a way which encourages hope for ourselves, and for the families we serve. Because a life without hope, well that's not a life. And the way we do this, of course, and many of you will be doing this brilliantly already I know, is we try to honour the principles of relationship based practice. Relationship practice comes from kind of psychotherapeutic and social work. But actually some of the most relationship based practice I've had the privilege of seeing has been done by schools, beat offices, early help workers,

learning mentors. It is everybody who can be relational in their work. I'm drawing her in a fabulous work of people like Gillian Ruch and Danielle Turney, they talk about the starting point is you recognize humans are complex, our relationships are complex, we are messy, volatile, unpredictable, people. We're an odd species, you know, that's your starting point. Life's messy. When we're relationship based in our work, we understand that actually anxiety is a perfectly natural response to distress. You come knocking on my door telling me I'm not a good enough, mam. I am likely to demonstrate a fair degree of that distress and uncertainty. In fact, I'm Welsh, I'm probably going to be really gobby and rude. I'm the kind of person who you would end up going: highly uncooperative, failure to cooperate, presents as hostile, yes, damn straight, because I'm scared, I'm scared, you're going to have my kids off me. That's the fear. That is the primal fear. And it won't matter actually how strengths based you are in your language. While here is you think I'm not a good enough mam. Being relationship based in our word means acknowledging that upfront - anxiety is a natural response. And the feeling of anxiety can drive all sorts of behaviors which are unhelpful: hostility, aggression, swearing, all the rest of it that workers shouldn't have to put up with but often do. But if we can understand that those behaviors are underpinned by fear, that gives us a different lens. relationship practice, acknowledges this work is complex, unpredictable, uncertain, $A + B$ does not always equal C . And there's a flowchart or a toolkit in the world that can replace a skilled, sensible, well supported professional using good evidence based tools. We use our sense of self and our intuition in this work, we recognize that actually, the past affects the present, affects the future. And that is as true for ourselves as professionals, as it is for the families we serve. It's about attachment theory to an extent and I've got some critique on attachment theory. But that that kind of central premise that we have to contain people, we have to hold them in times of difficulty and struggle. That's how we understand people. That's how we help people. It's a body of practice, which really highlights that awareness of unconscious processes, defense mechanisms, if we can understand them, and regulate our own emotion in the face of them, that can help us form more effective relationships, because relationships are the key. Relationships are both the vehicle for an intervention and very often they are the intervention in its own right. And families say that again and again, families will talk 20 or 30 years after they've last worked with someone and they'll still talk about, you did have this one teacher actually who I really liked. She was really sound. She looked after us. She came to all the meetings. Or do you know what actually yeah, there was this one, there was one police officer and he picked me up several times. I was always running away, but

he was always really, he was really kind to me. He never told me off. You know, these stories from citizens about how they remember how we make them feel. Even if they disagree with what we do and the decisions we make. They always remember how we make them feel.

Because it's not as simple as just you know, being helped is it? Particularly when we think that, as a parent, I could be not meeting my children's needs. Not because I don't like or love my children, but because I can't afford to meet all of their needs because I didn't have my own needs met because I myself carrying trauma, because the housing I live in, is not fit for purpose. Because I don't know what nutritious food looks like, because I'm really scared of schools, and he doesn't go to school. And you know, I don't even wake up in the mornings because I barely sleep at night. All of these things, which, of course, would make us absolutely rightly want to act and intervene because that child's having their needs neglected. If you come at it, from a point of view of 'Dez, doesn't love her kids, and we're here to help her children achieve their outcomes'. I can't be your partner in that. You've got to recognize that sometimes all of us have quite a difficult relationship to the notion of help. We might be thinking all sorts of things - I don't trust you, I'm feel ashamed, I'm scared, I'm really, really scared. You're going to take my kids off me, you're going to hurt me like everyone else has hurt me in the past. I don't want somebody blaming me. I don't want I don't want this intervention. There are lots of reasons and some of them very valid actually to reject help. That doesn't mean that that doesn't mean that a person can't be a partner in their child safeguarding. I'm often reminded that when you strip it all back and you kind of get down to the absolute brass tacks of it. This this quote from Bronfenbrenner is a real a real North Star for me. Bronfenbrenner was the king of the ecological perspective big into systems and how every layer of our ecosystem affects us. And Bronfenbrenner allegedly said this back in the 70s 'To develop normally a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational, emotional relationship with the child'. Or in layman's terms, someone's got to be crazy about the kid. That's number one first, last, always, someone's got to be crazy about the kid. And I love that quote, I love it for its simplicity. And I find it really powerful and, and it's about love, which I think is a four letter word we don't use enough in human services. But also, I like it because it makes me have to think critically, because my first response is: Yeah, yeah, I'm that person, I can think about, you know, when I used to have a real job with real kids, I used to think I was that person sometimes. And I was wrong. Because that's, that's not the job in hand. The job is

not to be the only person who's crazy about that kid. The job is to help that kid, have as many people as possible in their life who are crazy, forgive these the word crazy, it was the 70s. My job is to make as many people as possible, not only have the feeling of love, but be able to do the doing of love. And I'm very unlikely to achieve that. If I'm positioning myself as an expert professional with top down power, who cares about your kid more than you do. Most people love their kids a great deal. They have the feeling. They can't always do the doing. But if we see ourselves as walking alongside them, high support, high challenge, high expectation, with tenacity and persistence, and patience, and always, always balancing that sense of purpose around the child's wellbeing, but holding on to our humanity and striving for a sense of hope, then, you know, I think we can help an awful lot more kids feel like plenty of people are absolutely crazy about them. So I hope that's offered a little bit of space to think a bit differently about neglect. I know you know a lot about neglect, but trying to come at it from a slightly different angle. There's some stuff on our website that you can access. I hope it's been useful. I think maybe Colin's with us now. So I'm going to stop ranting I don't know what time it is. This is really nerve racking. And there might be some debate. This is why I like to pretend you're all throwing flowers and boxes of Milk Tray me because it's a bit lonely in my attic.

I can see Colin I can see that sign. So great. We're on Hi there.

I was reminded by Susan that my only job was really to introduce Dez and I kind of failed in that. But by way of introduction, I was also going to set a context because everybody's heard my name bandied about in absentia, but essentially I do chair Glasgow's Child and Adult Protection Committees and also Chair Child Protection Committee Scotland subgroup on child neglect and CPCs Scotland has developed and adopted a policy framework called Child Neglect in Scotland: Understanding Causes and Supporting Families. The framework is built around three key pillars structural, strategic and operational. A previous seminar held pre COVID disruptions, held in late 2019, focused on structural issues, looking at poverty and inequality with what I would call a seismic presentation from professors Brid Featherstone, and Kate Morris. We also the strategic perspective, from Mike Burns of Glasgow, who talked about transforming Children's Services, and that role of integrated children's service planning. We continue the policy framework, we're looking at research and practice but with undoubted implications for a strategic approach to the ICSP. And this is what I think we've heard from Dez today. Being a kind of proverbial child of the 60s going back and using words like

love, humanity, hope et cetera, I think, put me back in touch with some of the fundamentals of why I came into social work. And I think it's something that the reframing the rethinking, that Dez has taken us through, I think, has put us all back in touch with some of these fundamentals that we do tend to lose. And it really resonated, that talk about assessment tools or neglect toolkits, or graded care profiles, as they're all called. Certainly in Glasgow, we've been really working hard to make these asset based, to see them through the prism of poverty and inequality, and to take into account some of these biases that Dez has been talking about today. But as I said, my main task was to introduce Dez, which are failed in, but I was therefore able to appreciate Dez, because I was able to hear the full presentation and to say, I was impressed is putting it mildly. It has, as you would expect, generated quite a number of questions. So my next role is actually to try to coordinate some questions. And Susan has been gathering some of these questions and they do go across because as I said, Not only has Dez put us in touch with some practice fundamentals, but some of us on the call are also responsible for integrated children's service planning. So it's about how can we see that in a strategic context? And also how can we acknowledge some of the structural issues, thereby? So the first question is actually, it's in the theme that Dez has been looking at in terms of use of language and some fundamentals. It says, do you think we should continue to use the word neglect? Or should we look at alternative words or phrases to describe a child at risk of harm due to physical and emotional needs not being met?

I mean has the word neglect itself become a stigma?

I mean, I'm trying to resist the urge to speak out of turn. There is nobody listening.

I don't have to do the jobs you do, so it's dead easy, isn't it? From the luxury of my attic to go Oh, yes, change the world. And so I'll try to be measured. I suppose with any language we use. The first question we should ask is, is this helping? Does the word neglect enable us to do the thing we're trying to do? And if it doesn't, scrap it, she says rather glibly. And of course that doesn't mean it would be easy, there would be all sorts of issues, wouldn't there? You see it now, people who insist on saying Bame, even though we've repeatedly been told it's not helpful, because it takes you know, half a second less to say Bame than to say Black, Asian, Minoritized. So you can imagine the furore if you say, actually, we're going to try and say what it is on the tin, not neglect. We're going to say it's, you

know, the child's needs not being met in these ways. You'll get all sorts of resistance. But is it helping? And what would families say?

I think to be fair in Scotland we've found some sight of the Girfec refresh, and it almost avoids the word neglect in the whole refresh and talks about child well being. And the concept of where the child might be on that spectrum of well being. And again, I think the emphasis has to be asset based. There has to be a positive approach and I think what's incumbent on us is to work with families to see how can we help address through family support, and other means, some of these gaps in a child's well being.

I totally agree. I mean, I'm a bit absolutist on this. If you find yourself having to use different words for families, because they wouldn't like the words you use behind closed doors, change the words you use behind closed doors. We should be able to speak about this stuff, as if the kid was present. We should. We should write as if the child is reading it. And if we can't (child or parent actually) and if we can't, the chances are we're using language that our multi agency partner doesn't understand either. Because that's the other benefit. If you really strip it back and say what you mean in language you can feel proud of and it's defensible. It might do wonders for multi agency, communication and misunderstandings as well.

Okay, so the next question kind of takes us back into some of these structural inequalities. And it's in a time when pressures on family incomes are rocketing, how can we mitigate the impact of poverty when any fiscal response from government is likely to be limited?

I mean, colleagues, I'm conscious, I'm being recorded. And I'm conscious that although we both feel the impact of a Westminster Government, and you have some different opportunities available to you, north the borders, so I will remind myself that I'm being recorded, and I will try not to swear. So local politicians, of all different political persuasions, tend to be driven by a different moral purpose, they tend to be pretty passionate about their patch and care about their people. So my first point is and as a note to self, Dez, do not lump all politicians in the same basket. There are all sorts of levers for change and different approaches. Secondly, in the absence of being able to undo some, in my personal view, deeply, punitive, unhelpful, and frankly, discriminatory public policies, which are making poverty worse, in the absence of being able to do that, The least we can do as professionals is not make it worse ourselves. Some of the stuff in that BASW anti-

poverty guide is I mean, it's sort of depressingly simple, actually. When you say to a parent, you have to come to this meeting. And the money they'll use on the bus fare is money they could have bought themselves and their children lunch with, we've made it worse. Is there food? Could there be fruit on the table in a meeting? How much does it really cost a large local authority to a bowl of bananas on the table for meetings? How hard would it really be given we put a man on the moon to not make parents keep their receipts to the bus tickets, so they can reclaim the £2.50 three weeks later, by which point the meter's already needing another coin? This is not beyond the realms of what's possible for us. Is it that hard to do proper outreach? Is there any reason why we can't hold some of these meetings near their homes? Is there any reason why we can't enable and in fact, I would say give explicit permission to some of our professionals to do meaningful anti-poverty relief work. I had a really interesting conversation with a local authority in England who said that during COVID, they were seeing some professionals accessing hardship funds, accessing food banks, and how worrying that was. And it is very worrying. But it's also a real kick up the backside, because if we are suddenly using the services that they needed, maybe we will start to address some of the baked in stigma associated with things like food banks, and poverty relief funds, because we are We there is no Us and Them. We are We and but for the grace of God, frankly, it's very easy, I think, for us to think Well, I would never get to neglect my child. Well, actually, we're all of us. What, three square meals away from a riot? We need a bit of empathy.

Yeah, it's, again, someone who came up in the the kind of welfare rights and welfare benefits etc, either. It's quite interesting that some partnerships are now beginning to look at income maximisation and reintroducing some of these services.

Direct giving, a universal basic income. It turns out, Colin, and we'll be shocked by this. When you give more families money, they don't spend on big tellies and tattoos, they tend to spend it on their kids. And I would say the fundamental reason why we don't do more of this pretty well evidenced and interesting kind of stuff around out giving is because there is a political ideology that says they are the reckless, feckless poor. Yeah. And we so fight it. Fight it on the attitudinal level, because the evidence stacks up. This is about prejudice.

Yeah. As we're talking there is another kind of rider question come in. And so it says, they agree on the demonstrable association between poverty and child

neglect. But can you guys give examples of how this message has been aired in the media without being interpreted as a causal relationship?

Media per se, I know there's been, as I say, in the English areas that that we're working in the work of Bywaters and Kate Morris and the Brid who we know very well and adore. And it's really starting to land, local areas, local partnerships in England. I mean, it makes such sense, doesn't it? Professionals have been saying this forever, but not being able to have the language to say it in a nuanced and sensitive way. And I think that's what his work has done. I don't hold out much hope of national media being able to land nuanced thoughtful messages, because that's not their strong suit, is it that doesn't sell papers. But local media, I think is different. And I think that particularly for local partners, the more you can establish and maintain productive adult relationships with your local media, the more you can influence this narrative being generated. I do think there's something and I hate this sort of celebrities will solve it approach. But there is something about how Marcus Rushford has done more to raise public awareness of struggling parents than any professional strategy document I've ever seen. And so again, I just I wonder how we can lean into the hearts and minds stuff. People that public absolutely have the capacity to show empathy and humanity to families who are struggling. We have to distinguish for them. For people who aren't, you know, necessarily as knowledgeable as us, we have to help them see that, that not all children who are having their needs not met, are in families who don't care for them, families who don't, you know, who want to hurt them. There is this idea isn't the Child Protection is all sharp end, horrible, you know, deliberate, deceptive harm to children. And of course, that is just a tiny, tiny, tiny tip of the iceberg. We do need to educate the public differently on this. And particularly when you think how many huge proportions of children who tragically then go on to become very seriously hurt or killed. They didn't have any social care involvement, but most of them had neighbors. So the more we can build that kind of public education approach, because blah, blah, takes a village and all that.

To be fair Child Protection Committee, Scotland have yesterday that we've just had a very successful media campaign, public awareness campaign on neglect, especially through social media and the response has been absolutely fantastic. But just moving it back to some more practice based issues. And obviously, for many of the interest in working with, with adolescents was particular so the question is, when so many parts of our system focus on changing the teenagers

presenting behavior, what advice do you have for workers advocating for young people within hostile systems? That's not loaded at all.

Whoever that person is I think we'd be mates in real life. So it is starting to change, glacially slowly but nationally it is starting to change. We are just starting in recent years to shift away from what I would often think of as the rescue/reform seesaw. We like to rescue little ones. And then they turn about 12. And then we switch, we sort of flip into reforming them. To reform their behavior. We're going to send them on classes, we're going to address their aggression, and actually neither of those are particularly helpful mindsets. And some of the work I think has been done around things like sexual and criminal exploitation, this very painful and important acknowledgement that actually these kids are victims. However they present that has started to change the narrative. And so there's a bit of a wave to ride there. I think crucially, for local partnerships. It's about recognizing the talent and skills you've got. You will have some fantastic – I hope you still have some left, there's not many left in England unfortunately due to austerity. You're going to have some fantastic youth workers, community development workers, people who are used to doing advocacy roles. You'll have people who've worked in residential care people who foster teenagers, people who get this stuff. And they need to be round the table alongside those who are experts in child protection or strategy development or law enforcement, you know, parity of expertise, parity of respect. Partnership working is a bit like safeguarding. It's a verb, not a name. It's not the meeting you go to, it's a mindset where everybody is bringing something to the table. And I think some of these skills and talents and the theoretical knowledge that underpins them is already held amongst your crew, they just might not be getting much time on the platform.

Okay, and on a similar vein, the next question is: By adolescence, many young people want to maintain relationships, but have more insight, that being at home is not nurturing. Should we be better at listening and if supports over time, are ineffective, how might we address that?

I'm not sure if I answered the question, but I think there's something back there: where teenagers show us that home is not a safe or nurturing or loving environment for them. Are we good enough at listening? I suspect we probably aren't. And I don't think the solution is let's take more teenagers into care. When the state takes your kids off you that ought to be a last resort. And we need to be

doing everything humanly possible to avoid it. And I'm not sure we always are with teenagers, I think we sometimes... I mean, teenagers themselves can be ambivalent, like all of us, because they're humans, you know, they might simultaneously feel that they don't want to be disloyal to their mam and dad, and they don't want to be put in an institution or sent to live with strangers, and know that home is not a good enough place for them. Truly deeply listening to those young people and understanding how we can better their circumstances seems more important to me than almost anything else in this work with teenagers facing neglect. There's a deeply entrenched binary mindset that can sometimes be evident where we either leave them to it because they're teenagers, and they're not really engaging with services, quote, unquote, or we would come into care where their outcomes may not be better necessarily. And I think that's not helpful at all. It's quite interesting to me that in some parts of Scandinavia, they have this concept called *samvær**, where you have shared care. I think Denmark does really well, where you never actually lose parental responsibility, or you very rarely lose full parental responsibility. But you might not have your child live at home with you, you might be allowed to do pizza on a Friday night, or take them for a haircut, you don't get to go into the Ed Psych meeting school because you actually you lost those entitlements. A much more graduated flexible and nuanced understanding of what the state and the family need to do in harmony. We are deeply binary, I think, in the UK, you're in or you're out. And we don't always call that right, frankly, in both directions.

Okay. Somebody is asking about social work training and they say one of the core principles was social workers as agents of social change. I remember these Days. Do you think this is realistic currently in child protection practice? So that's how do we continue to be agents of social change in a child protection practice?

I'm not an expert on social work education in Scotland. And so I'll defer to colleagues on this call who know better. Certainly I would observe in England and Wales this sort of almost endless oscillation, this pendulum swing between you know, it's not a professional profession. It's about being an activist. And it's a political role, then no, no, actually, it needs to be professionalized you need to have a degree and stuff, and this kind of swinging back and for we've lost our humanity, or we've got no academic background, and it does sometimes, you know, from the outside feel a little bit like developing the brand identity, to use a really grotesque term, might be useful. Do we know what it is and what it's for? Are we all agreed what social work is for? Because I'm not convinced we are. And I

would say, and this is not about social work, I think it's about any work with people. When you work with people, it's political. Don't apologize for that. Not party political, of course, but you can't work with people and at the intersection of society and humanity and it not to be political. So we need to be grown up about that and name it and operate with some thought in that space. And I think it'd be helpful not just think about the training but actually the how do we advertise things like social work, same with foster care, I would argue actually, if we keep presenting it as a, you know, posh ladies in crinolines rescuing babies from their chimney sweep parents, which it hasn't traveled too far away from sometimes as it when you look at some of the narratives, you know, we shouldn't be surprised when these colleagues join us and then feel horrified by what they're actually asked to do. I think we need to set up social workers, family support workers, you know, people in human services, to understand that sometimes they're not just protecting children from their families, they're protecting families, the worst excesses of the state, or from the perils of an unequal society. And if you're operating in that really nuanced space, you need a really good gaffer bluntly, you need a thoughtful, experienced, brave leader, you need a bit of their cover to work in that way. I hate using military language, I hate using frontline, for example. But actually, you do need a bit of air cover to do that work well. I don't think we should apologize for this being political work. I think we should lean into it quite deeply. And I also think that it's not just about social work. Social work is one essential part of this picture. There are other professional groups who might have a little more leeway, that more flexibility a little more space to, to move. Good, let them, you know. We're a partnership. That means if I can't do something, and you can, or the police can't speak out on something, but the youth service can good. We are meant to be an orchestra. We're all playing different instruments, we have all got our own minds, we all have different tastes in music, that's grand. The role of a partnership and the strategic leadership in that is to orchestrate, so we can lean into each other's spaces when we need to. I mean, I live in hope there will be a time when social work will be you know, honoured for what it is, which is a political and person centered profession. But I understand thats very hard to do on the ground right now.

Excellent. Political and person centered that's something that we should all aspire to. That kind of brings us to the end of the questions, Dez, and I would just like to apologize to everyone and to thank Susan for stepping in so well at the beginning. Thank Dez for her presentation. There's one, not so much a question that's come in, more a comment so I'd like to finish on this. The person says that as a child

line counselor, children and young people want to be safe, heard, believed and loved. They want someone to be crazy about them and to love them. Thanks Dez, love this presentation. So there you go.

I would like to echo these sentiments on behalf of Child Protection Committees Scotland. Thank you so much for kicking off this series of four and I would urge participants to look out for our next session and to join us. And thanks again, Dez. Hopefully you will enjoy the rest of your week, not in your attic.

It's been a real pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

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* For a definition of samvær, see this research from Janet Boddy, where she explains it nicely on page 12:

[http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/74877/1/_smbhome.uscs.susx.ac.uk_dm50_Desktop_Boddy%20Family%20Issues%20\(revised%20accepted%20version%20290318\).pdf](http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/74877/1/_smbhome.uscs.susx.ac.uk_dm50_Desktop_Boddy%20Family%20Issues%20(revised%20accepted%20version%20290318).pdf)