

**Training attended:** First year of Core Training in Attachment-Based Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (AB-ISTDP)

**Dates:** February 2025 – November 2025; 10 full days; working towards

**Venue:** British Psychological Society, 30 Tabernacle Street, London and Remote

**Trainers:** Dr Sharon Lewis, Chartered Clinical Psychologist; Dr Robert Neborsky, Psychiatrist and Professor; Lina Kaoud, Psychodynamic Psychotherapist

### **Role and Hope for the training**

I am a qualified Clinical Psychologist working in an NHS Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). There is a high demand for therapeutic interventions for young people with increasingly high risk and complex presenting problems. Finding the balance between efficacy and efficiency is an ongoing challenge. Furthermore, there is increasing prevalence of young people who have tried various therapies within the service, but continue to experience distress and problematic symptoms.

My clinical experience and observations drew me to AB-ISTDP. An evidence-based experiential psychodynamic approach that actively addresses psychological defenses and anxiety to help young people process painful and conflicting feelings. I hoped that by engaging with the core training, I would be further equipped to help young people with enduring experiences of distress and trauma and offer a therapeutic approach that strives to reach the core of issues efficiently.

### **Summary of Training**

Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (ISTDP) is a brief, emotion-focused therapy that draws on the principles of psychodynamic and attachment theory. It was first developed by Habib Davannloo, to actively address resistances to change so that symptom-relief could be achieved in as short a time-frame as possible. There is strong research evidence base that is ever increasing, reflecting ISTDP's clinical and cost-effectiveness compared to standard existing therapies offered in the NHS.

The training uses video recordings of therapy sessions in individual and small group supervision across the year. Training days consist of both lectures and group supervision, as well as role plays. The use of video recording reflects the approach's emphasis on detailed attention to the young person, and enhancing the clinician's ability to analyse and implement appropriate intervention moment-to-moment. There is a focus on developing therapeutic alliance as well as emotional-engagement, that is achieved through systematic assessment and evaluation of treatment.

Core components of the therapy include collaboratively establishing emotional problem, monitoring unconscious anxiety, interrupting maladaptive defenses that perpetuate distress and intensifying somatic experiences of emotions so that they can be processed. In doing so effectively, symptom-reduction follows.

### **Application of training**

This first year of AB-ISTDP training has impacted several areas of my work in NHS CAMHS. In terms of my direct therapeutic work with young people, the theoretical training on the course provided me with insights into the factors that lead to resistance in the therapeutic work. The use of video-recordings in supervision to analyse specific techniques in response to the person's reaction, has honed by sensitivity to the internal workings of a distressed mind and become more confident in disrupting maladaptive coping mechanisms.

I have also found AB-ISTDP useful when thinking about and responding to broader systemic processes within CAMHS, including supervision and team dynamics. Specifically, when reflecting on challenges and conflicts that can occur within, and between teams, under a highly pressurised political and financial climate.

I am most grateful for the Foundation PSA in generously funding this first year of training. It has greatly benefited my development as a psychologist dedicated to working with young people; and I believe it has also benefited the young people who engaged with this therapy, as well as my service in having this specific approach on offer.