

Title: Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) – Level One

Venue: Family Futures, Islington.

Dates: 13–16 October 2025

Trainers: Dr Polly Nugent, Clinical Psychologist (Days 1–2) & Dr Sarah Kildea, Clinical Psychologist (Days 3–4).

Attendee/Role: Clinical Psychologist, Southwark CAMHS Carelink (CAMHS for Looked After and Adopted Children)

This training offered an introduction to DDP as an approach for working with children who have experienced developmental trauma, abuse, neglect, and disruptions to their attachment, with an emphasis on working together with children and their caregivers.

The training covered the theoretical basis for DDP, including ideas from attachment theory, intersubjectivity, the neurobiology of trauma, and understandings of shame. We explored core principles of DDP practice, such as connect and chat, follow-lead-follow, storytelling, using an attitude of PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy), and communicating with, for and about the child. These principles were presented as relational ways of helping children and their caregivers feel safer, more understood, and more open to sharing their inner world. We also learnt about working with parents and carers and how to prepare them for joint work with their children.

Training methods included some presentation with PowerPoint slides, though mostly the sessions involved more experiential opportunities to learn through group discussions and reflections, experiential exercises, role-plays, video and audio demonstrations, and trainer modelling of the DDP principles.

I thoroughly enjoyed the training and found it very thought-provoking. I noticed Polly and Sarah worked hard to create a warm, supportive, and relationally safe training space, which I found made it possible to fully engage with the material and reflect deeply. I would describe DDP Level One as quite an experiential course, where the trainers modelled a PACE-ful stance throughout, helping me feel the approach as much as understand it. For instance, I really noticed how their use of tone, slowing down, and curiosity with individual attendees in even the smallest interactions.

The content of the course has been extremely applicable to my role working in a CAMHS team for looked after and adopted children, where I regularly see and experience the impact of disrupted attachment relationships. I have found the guiding ideas in DDP around attunement, reducing shame, and prioritising the relationship over problem solving deeply relevant for creating safety and security in my therapeutic relationships. In my work with carers and parents, I have been regularly bringing myself back to some of the key principles I learnt such as PACE and connection before correction, which I have found especially useful in moments where my relationships with carers have felt strained.

I would strongly recommend DDP Level One to anyone supporting children who have experienced developmental trauma and their carers/families. It is an approach that feels naturally compassionate and human, as well as provides practical ideas and principles to guide conversations. I left feeling more motivated and hopeful about what is possible when we keep connection at the centre. I intend to continue my DDP development through Level Two training in future.