**British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology**

**One-day conference**

Touch: trust, timidity and taboo in professional care for children and young people, who have been rejected, neglected and abused

***Date*:** Friday 10th February 2017

***Times*:** 09-30 to 16-30 (Registration 9.00-9.30)

***Venue*:** BPS London Office, 30 Tabernacle Street, London. EC2A 4UE

**Conference costs:** £50 including lunch and refreshments

**Speakers:** Prof. Francis McGlone, Prof. Heather Piper, Dr Laura Steckley, Dr Tony Mancini, and Dr Sean Cameron

Objectives for the day:

1. To consider the latest research on ‘affective touch’ and its place in professional child care.
2. To clarify the issues around recommended practice guidelines and/or current perceptions on the employment of touch in schools, children’s homes and foster/ adoptive family homes.
3. To discuss safeguarding issues for both young people and their carers.
4. To decide whether the ‘touch taboo’ issue is one on which the BPS and the DECP should take a more robust and positive stance.
5. To draft a series of principles and guidelines concerning touch in childcare and educational contexts.

**Additional Information on the DECP Day conference on**

**Touch: trust, timidity and taboo in professional care for children and young people, who have been rejected, neglected and abused**

***The issue:*** For six decades and more, practitioners and researchers in child care have recognised the importance of close relationships in supporting children in care and enhancing their wellbeing. Today, however, an over-concern about abuse has created a major tension between showing physical affection and warmth and providing a high level of safeguarding for children and young people.

There is an urgent need for clarification of the confusion experienced by many teachers, residential and foster carers, when it comes to touching children and young people in their care, whether it is to show affection, give confidence or reassurance, or to increase or prevent the child from inflicting hurt on herself/himself or others.

Piper and Stronach (2008) have illustrated this uncertainty by the contrasting perspectives of two school head teachers.

Perspective 1: *We are a nursery school As such it is vitally necessary to establish warm, supportive relationships with young people – so staff are encouraged to touch, cuddle and hug our children.*

*If the day ever dawned and we were not allowed to be affectionate and give physical support to our under-5s, I would definitely close the nursery and it would be a day of great sadness and portend ill for the development of these children (*page ix*).*

Perspective 2:  *All members of staff are instructed not to be alone with a child. Key members of staff are sent on restraint training. (You) must have an open door, adult witness. When restraining do not touch with thumb, lead more than push. Calm the children verbally, using body language. Do not allow the child to sit on your lap or lean against you* (page ix).

Although there are indications that the practice culture, resulting from Perspective 2 may be changing, timidity, hesitancy and anxiety still exist among residential careers, foster and even adoptive parents with respect to affective touch and the children and young people in their care, who are likely to have been deprived of such positive experiences in their previous home lives.

***The Applied Psychology perspective:***Many child and educational psychologists would support the following statements:

* It is appropriate for teachers, carers and other adults working with children to use touch in a positive and professional manner in their everyday work.
* Conveying warmth and approval can take many forms from praise to touching. Comforting a distressed, frightened or hurt child can involve a continuum of normal adult reactions ranging from quiet words, a hand around a shoulder or even a warm and sustained hug.
* While the individuality of children’s reactions to different types of adult warmth needs to be recognised, most children in most situations are likely to react positively to what they judge to be genuine adult empathy, affection, approval or admiration in its various forms.
* Touch deprivation/touch taboo rules are likely to be harmful to the psychological wellbeing of children and young people in general, especially those children who have suffered rejection, abuse or neglect in their families.
* Guidelines which recommend bland, neutral or distancing professional behaviour should always be challenged by applied psychologists.
* While physical contact should be a conscious, self-aware, reasonable and justifiable response by any adult where intentions are explicit to the young person, there are occasions when a spontaneously warm and caring adult reaction is not only appropriate but essential.

*As researchers and applied psychologists, we should be keen for our learned society (The British Psychological Society* and *the Division of Educational and Child Psychology) to take a positive stand on the importance of touch and to draw upon well-established Psychological theory, past and current research and within safeguarding guidelines, to make a declaration that there is a psychological and biological need for touch for all children, but especially those who have been rejected, neglected and abused.*

Programme for the day

Conference title**: Touch: trust, timidity and taboo in professional care for children and young people, who have been rejected, neglected and abused**:

Venue: **BPS London Office, Tabernacle Street, off Old Street. EC2A 4UE**

Date: **Friday the 10th of February 2017**.

Times: **This conference begins at 09-30 and ends at 16-30.**

What we hope to do… our objectives for this conference

* To consider the latest research on ‘affective touch’ and its place in professional child care.
* To clarify the issues around recommended practice guidelines and/or current perceptions on the employment of touch in schools, children’s homes and foster/ adoptive family homes.
* To discuss safe guarding issues for both young people and their carers.
* To decide whether the ‘touch taboo’ issue is one on which the BPS and the DECP should take a more robust and positive stance.
* To draft a series of principles and guidelines concerning touch in childcare and educational contexts.

**Programme**

**09-00 Coffee and chat**

***09-30 Welcomes, introductions and overview of the day***

 ***09-45 Keynote: The Touch that matters most:* Prof Francis McGlone,** Liverpool John Moore University

***10-30 Questions and Comments:* chaired by Julia Hardy,** Chair, DECP Committee.

***10-45 Keynote: Touch in educational contexts: Professional dilemmas.* Professor Heather Piper,** previouslyManchester Metropolitan University

***11-15 Questions and Comments:* Chaired by Julia Hardy**

***11-30* Refreshments and comfort break**

***11-50 Keynote: Considering Touch in residential child care.* Dr Laura Steckley,** University of Strathclyd*e*

***12-35 Questions and Comments:* Chaired by Sean Cameron,** Director, Pillars of Parenting Social Enterprise

***13-00* Buffet Lunch.**

**13-40** ***Keynote: Understanding and managing false allegations of abuse.* Mr Tony Mancini,** Director Psychology Support, Sheffield.

**14-25** ***Questions and Comments***

**14-40** ***Principles and practice guidelines group assignments:*** chaired by Sean Cameron

**15-00** **Refreshments and comfort break**

**15-20 *Sharing and learning session*:**chaired by Sean Cameron

**16-00 *Final comments and future aspirations*:** chaired by Julia Hardy

**16-15** **End of conference**

**Something to think about…**

*The touching of children in professional settings is no longer relaxed or intuitive and primarily concerned with responding to the needs of a child. It has become a mind-body split of children and adults controlled more by fear than caring.* Piper and Smith, (2003), (page 891).

*The commonly practised, hands-off procedure in professional childcare is a form of ‘psychological abuse’* Cameron and Maginn (2009), (page 125).

There is a need for clarification of the confusion which is rife in child care and which concerns physical contact with children and young people, whether it is to show affection, celebrate success, give comfort, provide reassurance, or to prevent a young person from hurting themselves or others.

*References:*

Cameron, R S and Maginn, C (2009) *Achieving Positive Outcomes for Children in Care*. London: Sage.

Piper, H and Smith, H (2009) Touch in Educational and Child Care Settings: dilemmas and responses. *British Educational Research Journal*. 29(6), 879-894.

Piper, H and Stronach, I (2009) *Don’t Touch: the educational story of a panic.* London: Routledge.

*Sean Cameron and Julia Hardy, 15-10-16*