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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Jan Horwath's grandchildren Oscar, Toby, Milly and William and her son Luke – he knows why; and to Dendy Platt's wife Jan, to his children Deborah and Robert, and his grandchildren Daniel, Lily and Florence.

# 1

## Introduction

*Jan Horwath and Dendy Platt*

### Background

This is the third edition of *The Child's World*. It is a completely rewritten and expanded edition, yet remains committed to the core assessment principles set out in previous versions. The core principles are that:

- practitioners should recognise the lived experience of children and view assessment as part of an ongoing, dynamic process that leads to positive child-centred outcomes reflected in quality changes to their daily lives
- effective assessment requires an ecological approach and a recognition of the contribution that practitioners from different disciplines make in understanding the world of the child and their family
- engaging children and families in the assessment process is the first step to establishing a meaningful working relationship with them that is most likely to lead to change
- it is important to build on strengths whilst recognising difficulties and understanding that each family is different
- practice should be grounded in evidence-based research and practice knowledge that should be used to inform professional judgement.

We are aware that the working context has changed significantly over the last 20 years since the first edition of this book was produced (see Chapter 2). To ensure that we address the expectations placed on practitioners in current practice, we have broadened the scope of this edition. We recognise that safeguarding in the 21st century means both protecting children from harm and preventing that harm from recurring, or from happening in the first place. We have therefore focused not only on the assessment task and process for children with significant care, support and safeguarding needs, but also on vulnerable children and families requiring early help. Similarly, public and professional awareness has grown in recent years regarding different manifestations of child maltreatment, and we have been concerned to include relevant new topics in this

edition. They include child sexual exploitation, trafficking and online abuse and are topics only recently subject to research, policy and practice developments.

## **Our approach**

Given the expanded nature of the book, two editors became necessary for this edition, and Dendy Platt joined Jan Horwath, who was the sole editor of the two previous editions. As editors we are keen that this resource book is user friendly. We want it to support assessments that are not overly ambitious, bearing in mind the resource constraints on workers, but lead to positive outcomes for children and young people. To ensure that we achieve these aims we consulted with practitioners, managers and students from a range of disciplines. Drawing on their views we seek to the following:

- Provide a guide to assessment for anyone in contact with children and families who, because of their role, may be involved in or lead an early help, child in need or child protection assessment. In using these terms, we acknowledge that different terminology is used to describe assessments across the range of organisations. The key point for us, however, is to make the content relevant to low-key assessments at a preventive level, as well as all the way through to complex assessments that contribute to court or children's hearing processes where removal of children into the care system is under consideration.
- Recognise the pressures on practitioners and managers dealing with complex and challenging situations routinely. The structure of the book is such that, apart from the three chapters on assessment task and process (Chapters 2–4), each chapter stands alone so that the reader can use the book as a 'go to' resource for initial advice and suggestions on specific topics.
- Draw on up-to-date policy, research and practice developments to provide practical but evidence-based advice as to how this knowledge should inform practice in the current working environment.
- Ensure that specific guidance, tools, etc. are included with suggestions as to how they should be used as an aid to inform professional judgements. We do not want practitioners just to look for tools or questionnaires that simply offer a convenient assessment vehicle or a shortcut to careful, child-centred thinking. Rather, by reading about the various tools and assessment approaches in the context of a chapter as whole, practitioners can use them with appropriate analysis and professional judgement.
- Recognise that effective assessment practice is underpinned by multidisciplinary working. We have attempted to pay attention to what practitioners from different disciplines can contribute to assessments as well as the part played by

practitioners leading the assessment. We have tried to avoid the use of jargon and abbreviations in the text. Our view is that the use of such terms is not the basis of good practice; rather, it can be alienating to both families and practitioners from disciplines who are not familiar with the terms.

- Address issues of diversity. This is arguably our greatest challenge. In preparing this book we have remained aware of the increasingly diverse groups within society, the ways in which some minority groups are marginalised and the hostility encountered by others. All chapters contribute in different ways to addressing these issues.
- Offer practice examples. We have provided a case study that runs through Chapters 3, 4 and 11. Our aim is to do more than give our view on what practitioners should do but also demonstrate how we believe it should be done – for example, by providing a chronology, genogram and assessment of what needs to change. Other authors have also found innovative ways of enabling practitioners to apply theory to practice, such as an exchange between a child and a worker (Chapter 6) and quotes from service users.

We not only consulted with practitioners regarding our approach, but we also had practitioners and students from different disciplines undertake peer reviews of the chapters, alongside academics involved in research and teaching. We hope that this process means that the book is relevant to current practice and the content is applicable to those completing assessments in a diverse range of child and family settings.

## The political context

The first edition of *The Child's World* was produced in 2000 to support the implementation of the English and Welsh *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DH, DfEE and Home Office 2000). Since then there have been significant changes in the political context (see Chapter 2). For example, since the 2010 edition was prepared, the devolved governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have consolidated their positions and developed policies with more distinctive differences from those in England. Consequently, throughout this edition, we have identified policy and legislative requirements relevant to all four UK nations. Some chapters, however, may emphasise legislation in one or another of the four nations, depending on the expertise of the authors concerned.

Irrespective of the relevant nation, our approach to assessment in this book is driven by good practice rather than policy, and key messages (e.g. about the role of assessments or specific topics such as child sexual abuse or assessing parenting) are widely applicable irrespective of jurisdiction. There are many common policy themes in the assessment

of children and families, both in the UK and in countries beyond our borders (subject, of course, to adjustments for cultural differences). These themes include the economic and social costs of populist and neo-liberal political ideologies, the effects of economic austerity on resource allocation, as well as specific approaches to children and families (e.g. for early help or removal of children into the care system).

Publication of the present edition coincides with a widespread return to populist, often neo-liberal, politics in several countries across the world. The ideology of neo-liberalism means an increase in free markets, growth in inequalities and privatisation and deregulation of public services, all of which are having a disproportionate impact on the poor. Populism accompanied by neoliberalism can lead to the apportioning of blame to vulnerable groups for the problems in society. These are the very groups with which this book is concerned.

Whilst it has been argued that the Brexit vote and the growth in populism have been driven partly by economic insecurity and disenfranchisement of society's least powerful members (Goodwin and Heath 2016), these developments have been accompanied by increased immigration in Europe arising from political instability in the Middle East and Africa. In the UK, these conditions have set the scene for growing public intolerance of difference, and in particular of immigration. Indeed, a perceived threat from immigration is believed to have been a contributory factor affecting the referendum decision to leave the European Union (Abrams and Travaglino 2018), and there is evidence of an increase in racist incidents following the vote (Burnett 2017). Many families coming to the attention of services will have personal experiences of intolerance – for a wide variety of reasons, including homelessness, reliance on benefits, mental health problems and racial difference or immigration status (see also Chapter 30 for a discussion of intersectionality where factors such as these interact).

In the context of immigration, there may be limited grounds for some optimism. Sympathies have grown recently for individuals affected by the current Conservative government's 'hostile environment' for immigrants. The recent scandal of the 'Windrush generation' is one example, whereby the general public voiced concern about Caribbean immigrants who were encouraged to come to the UK after the Second World War and have been found decades later to have 'inadequate' identity-related documentation. In some cases, individuals were even threatened with deportation (*The Week* 2018).

Linked to the neo-liberal political climate, severe austerity measures have been in place since the financial crisis of 2009. In the UK, economic growth was more or less stagnant from the time of the referendum decision to leave the European Union in 2016 (Office for National Statistics 2018) and into 2018. Future economic health in the UK and elsewhere is extremely uncertain, given the challenges, for example, of negotiating the country's departure from the European Union and the threat of protectionist policies from the United States. Against this background, there have been significant cuts to

welfare services and changes to the benefit system, and poverty rates amongst children have again been rising after falling for several years in the early 2000s (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2017; see also Chapter 28).

At a time when the demand for services is rising because of the increased pressures and stresses placed on vulnerable families, a recent report commissioned by the Children's Commissioner in England demonstrated a 60 per cent decrease in funding for preventive services, such as children's centres and youth services, between 2009/10 and 2016/17 (Kelly *et al.* 2018). This decrease is already putting pressure on local authority services for children with more complex needs, for which demand has been increasing; and a report by three UK charities highlighted the likelihood of a £2 billion funding gap for local authority children's services in England by 2020 (Action for Children, National Children's Bureau and The Children's Society 2017). Thus, whilst overall spending on children (excluding health care) has increased since 2000/01 (Kelly *et al.* 2018), there have been significant decreases in the support for children with whom this book is concerned. The effects of these changes on vulnerable children and families are potentially huge and are unlikely to be helped by future economic uncertainty. Indeed, applications for care orders are now at record levels in England and Wales, a situation that is widely regarded as unsustainable (Family Rights Group 2018; Munby 2016; see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the focus on child protection versus family support).

The implication of all this is that child welfare practitioners are working within a context of widening adversities affecting children and families, adversities that make it increasingly difficult for many child welfare clients to overcome difficulties in their lives without support. At the same time, that support is being withdrawn through the imposition of neo-liberal political and economic policies.

## The practice context

The effects of the political, economic and social context on the practicalities of child welfare service delivery are likely to include:

- increasing numbers of referrals for help and support
- staffing reductions, including the loss of immigrant staff working in relevant services, particularly in the National Health Service
- increasing levels of staff sickness and burnout
- high staff turnover levels in public services, and use of agency staff to fill vacancies
- insufficient resources
- staff training and development being marginalised in cost-cutting exercises
- increases in the numbers of children entering the care system, children who might have been supported at home if early help services were more widely available

- increases in specific social problems such as knife crime and mental health problems
- pressures of frequent reorganisations of services as they attempt to do 'more with less' (i.e. achieve better delivery with fewer resources).

Partly as a response to these pressures, practitioners are subject to attempts to order their worlds by applying timescales and targets to a wide range of activities. Whilst some moves have been made to reduce the rigidity of timescales (Munro 2011; see Chapter 2), organisational bureaucracies continue to regulate the activities of professionals and increase the time they spend in front of screens rather than with families by employing computerised systems that track the completion of work with individual children and issue reminders to complete each step within its required time frame. The potential benefit of these approaches is to reduce delays in responding to a child's developmental needs, but it is equally necessary to balance such rigid requirements with the needs of children and families and the availability of resources needed to fulfil them. Indeed, a survey by the British Association for Social Workers (BASW) suggests that social workers spend close to 80 per cent of their time working on computers or completing paperwork, while only 20 per cent is spent in direct contact with children and families. This has led to the launch of the '80-20 campaign' in partnership with the Children's Commissioner seeking to reverse this trend (BASW 2018).

Against this political and economic background, we have produced a book on assessment whose fundamental purpose is to describe and support practice that leads to positive outcomes for children and their families. We make no apology for this approach. It is quality practice that enables professionals to sustain relationships with people living in poverty, to apply principles of fairness in the way that services impinge on children and families, and to work sensitively with the range of cultural, religious, economic, educational and social diversity in modern society.

There are nevertheless some limitations on what can be covered, and it is important that the reader takes into account that it can be too easy to look for a 'quick fix' to a practice problem, or to be too eager to adopt a simplistic solution. The following are examples of such pitfalls:

- It may be tempting to believe that there is some standardised assessment questionnaire or tool that will give 'the answer' in terms of assessing an aspect of a child's situation such as risk of harm. The reality is very different. Structured decision-making tools, as they are sometimes called, are often developed on the basis of statistical analysis of research data, and by definition, therefore, will not necessarily be applicable to every relevant individual child. Tools of this kind can be extremely useful within their limitations; indeed, there is evidence that mathematically based (i.e. actuarial) risk assessment instruments produce better

results than clinical decision-making alone (van der Put, Asink and Boekhout van Solinge 2017). However, actuarial instruments should be used *alongside* good professional judgement rather than as a substitute for such judgement. Based on current research, they cannot examine the breadth and entirety of a family's situation, and risk assessment instruments in particular have limitations with respect to needs assessment (van der Put *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, actuarial instruments can only make a partial contribution to case planning – that is, in determining when and how to intervene (Schlonsky and Wagner 2005; van der Put *et al.* 2017) – and they should therefore only be used together with other assessment methods and always subjected to careful analysis as the assessment progresses. Indeed, there is evidence that practitioners find using professional judgement difficult – and it is because of this that we have focused in this book on how to undertake good analysis, and on ways of understanding children's situations. There is also evidence of practitioners failing to apply structured methods as they were intended (Macdonald *et al.* 2017), and we acknowledge that this is a problem – for the developers of such methods, for the organisations delivering services, and more importantly for the children and families with whom they are used. It can often be the case that such methods are simply too time consuming to be used fully, and future work on assessment methodologies must address these difficulties.

- There is ongoing controversy about the use of methods that assess the risk of long-term harm by examining the accumulation of adverse events in a child's life. This approach has been developed particularly from research into adverse childhood experiences (Bellis *et al.* 2015). The research has been very valuable in explaining the effects of child maltreatment on both physical and mental health throughout the individual's life. However, in the context of child welfare services, where it is necessary to explore and respond to the nuances of a child's situation, simply adding up a number of predefined adverse experiences is a clumsy approach to complex family problems. Our position is that this kind of method should be avoided. We think that practitioners in the child welfare field (such as family support workers, health visitors, teachers and social workers) should be taking a thoughtful, individualised approach to the needs of children; applying careful thinking to the information they collect; and drawing conclusions that are based on a fair and transparent balancing of information, weighed up against professional knowledge and understanding.
- Dangers have also been identified regarding the temptation to take a deterministic view of children's futures, based on emerging understandings of neurological development or other new and 'appealing' scientific developments. Again, we would wish to take a balanced approach to this issue. We accept

that understanding a child's development is valuable; we would never reject the importance of using knowledge of child development from psychology – nor from other disciplines that have contributed to this knowledge. What we do reject, however, is the misuse of such knowledge to arrive at simplistic conclusions. It is unacceptable, for example, to state – or even to imply through careless use of language – that a child who appears to have a disorganised attachment style is doomed for life. Similarly, to set a rigid timescale for a child's problems to be 'fixed', a timescale that it is claimed can be derived from science as if applying a standard yardstick to the child's future development, is a misuse of that knowledge base. In both of these examples, the issues (of attachment, and of timescales) are aspects of assessments that practitioners often need to grapple with. However, the 'science' is more nuanced than is portrayed in these examples; attachment problems are not a death sentence, and timescales are not fixed by some divine developmental scale. Applying the knowledge base requires practitioners to weigh up the information they have, and to use careful and considered professional judgement. As Shemmings and Shemmings argue in Chapter 17, attachment difficulties are not irreversible, even though they may become more difficult to change as time goes on. And as Platt and Riches show in Chapter 11, estimating so-called children's timescales involves a judgement about the length of time needed for the child's needs to be addressed, the difficulties that may be ongoing whilst necessary changes are made, and the help that can realistically be offered within a reasonable time frame.

- A further pitfall is the tendency to marginalise the value of multidisciplinary working, perhaps due to time pressures set out in procedures. Effective assessment practice requires a collaborative approach across disciplines and is a point that is emphasised in many chapters in this book. Yet failure to share information and contribute to assessments continues to be a common finding of serious case reviews. There are several reasons why this may occur. Whilst the message that safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility underpins government guidance across the UK, the statutory requirement to have local safeguarding children boards in England has been removed. In its place, the three key agencies responsible for safeguarding – health, social care and the police – are now the relevant safeguarding partners and 'should agree on ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others; and implement local and national learning including from serious child safeguarding incidents' (HM Government 2018, p.73). Whether this gives the unfortunate message to other agencies that they no longer need to engage at a strategic level and ensure their systems and processes promote multidisciplinary working remains to be seen.

It is all too easy for hard-pressed practitioners to focus on gathering information from those workers who they can contact easily. This can be a particular issue in terms of completing assessments within a time frame of 15 working days for initial child protection conferences. When this occurs, information that can make a significant difference to decision-making may not be considered at conference. Also, practitioners who are involved in assessments infrequently may be unsure as to what information is required of them. Finally, there can be a temptation to prejudge the contributions that practitioners or organisations can make to an assessment. For example, as discussed in Chapter 16, educators are well placed to provide information on much more than school attendance and educational attainment. Yet, if the social worker leading the assessment just asks questions about attendance and attainment, then other valuable information held by the school may never be accessed. The school staff, in turn, may believe that all that is required of them relates to attendance and attainment, and they may focus on this alone in any subsequent assessments. Finally, many professionals such as GPs or dentists may only see children and their families for a limited time away from the home setting and may be under the impression, as was the GP in the Baby P case, that other professionals are better placed to act on concerns regarding the care of the child or contribute to an assessment.

The authors of Chapters 3 and 8 address many of these issues and consider ways in which they can be managed.

## Overview of contents

This new edition of *The Child's World* is divided into five parts, loosely structured in line with the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DH *et al.* 2000) in England:<sup>1</sup>

- [AQ] Part 1, Undertaking Assessments, explores general principles and best practice in relation to the assessment task and process.
- Part 2, Assessing Parenting, examines the assessment of parenting from a range of different perspectives.
- Part 3, Assessing the Child's Developmental Needs, focuses on various aspects of children and young people's development.
- Part 4, Assessing Safety, Care and Support Needs, includes chapters on child abuse and neglect and other sources of harm.

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1 And similar guidance in the other nations of the UK – the *All Wales Child Protection Procedures* (Children in Wales 2008), the *My World Triangle* (The Scottish Government 2015) and *Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland* (UNOCINI) (Department of Health [Northern Ireland] 2011).

- Part 5, *Assessing the World of the Child and Family*, considers social and environmental factors affecting the lives of children and their families.

### **Part 1: Undertaking Assessments**

The first part of the book introduces the task and general processes of undertaking an assessment. Chapter 2, the first substantive chapter after the Introduction, focuses on the assessment task. An argument is made that the nature of the task is not static but depends on several factors including political context, resources and thresholds. Chapter 3 explores how and why information is gathered from different sources. The importance of understanding the daily lived experience of the child and family members is emphasised, as is learning about the family's past through chronologies and family histories. Emphasis is placed on gathering information about family strengths as well as difficulties. Chapter 4 examines how to make sense of the information once it has been collected. The focus of this chapter is on analysis and using professional judgement to inform decisions about the needs of the child and the choice of appropriate interventions. We have taken a novel approach by drawing on a single unfolding case study to illustrate the points being made in Chapters 3 and 4.

A crucial part of any assessment is engaging with the family to establish an effective working partnership. Chapters 5 to 7 examine the interpersonal skills required when engaging and assessing children and families. Two of these chapters address the knowledge and skills necessary to develop meaningful communication with children. Chapter 5, written by Tait and Wosu, gives a general overview, focusing on working with children and teenagers. Suggestions are offered as to how to build rapport and gain the trust of a child or young person, elicit information from a child using play-based activities, and manage endings. Marchant, in Chapter 6, tackles the challenging task of working with children who might be showing or telling that they or others are at risk of harm. Suggestions are made as to how to ensure the practitioner 'opens doors', rather than close a child down or contaminate possible court evidence. In Chapter 7, Turney and Ruch explore the dilemmas and difficulties of engaging parents and carers. They consider ways in which to establish a positive helping alliance and they explore some of the barriers that practitioners may need to address.

The final chapter in this part of the book (Chapter 8, Neil, Hodson and Taylor) addresses the central expectation of collaborative practice between professionals and services, including a summary of the tricky topic of sharing information between disciplines.

### **Part 2: Assessing Parenting**

In Part 2, critical aspects of parenting assessment are explored, which together give the reader the opportunity of a variety of perspectives. Chapter 9 draws on David Jones's

highly regarded overview of parenting assessment from previous editions, and together with Hadcroft and Platt this chapter has been updated and expanded to explore the central processes involved in parenting assessment. The authors discuss contemporary perspectives on parenting and there is a particular focus on identifying what children need from caregivers. Their work is complemented by Houston's chapter (Chapter 10) which offers an interesting development beyond the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DH *et al.* 2000). He presents an approach to assessing the dynamics of parenting, a model that is currently becoming well used in Northern Ireland. Chapter 11 (Platt and Riches) examines the theory and practice of assessing parental motivation and capacity to change, an aspect of assessment the importance of which has only recently been recognised and remains neglected in practice (Macdonald *et al.* 2017). The case study used in Chapters 3 and 4 is followed up in this chapter to demonstrate how assessing motivation and capacity to change is an integral part of the assessment process. The final two chapters in this part recognise the particular difficulties affecting parents themselves. The brief for Chapter 12 enabled Murphy and Rogers to re-examine the interconnections between mental health problems, domestic violence and substance misuse, parenting capacity and the health and wellbeing of children. At the same time they present a critique of the term 'the toxic trio', which has become subject to oversimplification and misuse. Finally, the specific complexities of assessing parents with learning difficulties are set out in Chapter 13 by Tarleton and Tilbury, who manage a national UK network of support for both parents with learning difficulties and the professionals who work with them.

### **Part 3: Assessing the Child's Developmental Needs**

The purpose of this part of the book is to explore some aspects of child development that are of particular concern in assessments; various aspects of developmental needs are considered in separate chapters. The chapters are not intended as a substitute for a detailed understanding of child development theory, nor as an alternative to one of the many well-respected child development texts (e.g. Boyd and Bee 2014). Naughton in Chapter 14 considers key aspects of child development from birth to 16 years. She discusses the latest developments in neuroscience and the implications for assessing children and young people. Following this overview, other authors explore specific aspects of developmental need. Appleton and Whittaker (Chapter 15) focus on health needs assessments, providing frameworks and tools and outlining the contribution health professionals can make to an assessment. This is followed by Gould and Lawrie (Chapter 16) who argue that educators' contributions to an assessment should be much more than a focus on attendance and educational attainment. Teachers are well placed to identify other developmental needs that are and are not being met, and their daily contact with a child ensures they are well placed to notice changes in behaviour.

Essentially, these chapters explore the contributions of the health and education sectors to multidisciplinary assessments of children's needs, and the procedures and processes involved. They provide an introduction both to professionals working in health and education as well as to other practitioners in terms of what they can expect from their colleagues. Shemmings and Shemmings bring this section to a close in Chapter 17. They examine attachment theory using the latest research and make suggestions as to how the busy practitioner can use these insights to inform their assessments.

#### **Part 4 Assessing Safety, Care and Support Needs**

As many readers will be aware, the fields of child welfare and child protection are developing and changing continually. Awareness has increased in recent years of types of harm that had hitherto been neglected, whilst knowledge has grown in areas of existing expertise such as physical abuse. This part of the book has enabled us to present information on a range of discrete topics concerned with the needs of children, topics that were chosen in collaboration with practitioners and academics because of their ongoing significance in improving the lives of children and young people.

Based on these priorities, we have expanded this edition to include chapters on all four principal types of maltreatment presented in UK child protection guidelines. In Chapter 18, Horwath explores the challenges associated with assessing cumulative harm caused by emotional abuse and neglect. In Chapter 19, Bentovim and Pizzey consider the various forms of physical abuse, when to suspect abuse and the initial assessment process. In Chapter 20 Bentovim, Gray and Pizzey explore the identification and prevalence of familial sexual abuse. They provide guidance on how to assess the impact of familial child sexual abuse and ways in which to establish a safe context of care.

We have also sought to maintain and expand the book's contribution to understanding the diversity of children's safety, care and support needs. New chapters in this section are provided by Smeaton (Chapter 21), who covers assessing children who experience or are at risk of sexual exploitation; Palmer (Chapter 22), who focuses on specific assessment issues in relation to refugee, asylum-seeking and trafficked children; and Munro, who draws on the latest research to consider assessment and young people leaving care (Chapter 26). In addition, there are new chapters on subjects that have appeared previously in *The Child's World*. Hackett considers young people exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours, including a section on the use of social media by young people. He provides a useful model to assess level of concern (Chapter 23). Marchant has drawn on her recent work with children and young people with complex needs to provide insights into their experiences of a quality assessment (Chapter 24). The needs of young carers are considered by Bishop (Chapter 25), and Barlow, Ward and Rayns draw on their own work to provide advice on completing pre-birth assessments (Chapter 27). By broadening the coverage of the book in this way, we hope to fulfil one of

our aims, which is to create a more comprehensive view of the assessment task than was possible in previous editions, and to make it relevant to a wider range of practitioners.

### **Part 5: Assessing the World of the Child and Family**

In the final part of the book, we return to the theme of Part 1, and present a range of material that further explores key aspects of the ecological approach to assessments of children, young people and families, namely the family and environmental context. Whilst the various topics in this section are touched on throughout the book, particular issues are explored in more detail here. In Chapter 28, Backwith challenges the reader to reconsider the deep and all-pervasive effects of poverty on children, young people and their families. For professionals to address economic inequality in individual cases is a huge and difficult task because of the power of the existing economic and political order. However, Backwith refuses to duck the issue of 'poverty blindness' and encourages us to open our eyes to the effects of poverty experienced by individual families. Following this, in an editors' contribution, Horwath and Platt continue the theme of structural inequality in their chapter on family and community support (Chapter 29). Assessing supports of these kinds can give the practitioner an opening into the real effects of social and environmental conditions on families, as well as uncovering opportunities for making genuine improvements in children's lives. It is an area that receives insufficient attention, but one that we neglect at our peril. Finally, Bernard offers a thought-provoking and insightful chapter (Chapter 30) on cultural and religious diversity. This is another chapter that cannot provide a substitute for more in-depth study, in this case of diversity, inequality and anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory practice. However, she analyses with great insight the dilemmas and dichotomies of working with black and minority ethnic groups in the UK, where conflicts between cultural practices regarding child-rearing and judgements about what is and is not acceptable behaviour in a modern western society have to be addressed by practitioners on a case-by-case basis.

### **Target readership**

This book is aimed at a diverse readership. Whilst the authors have focused primarily on UK jurisdictions, the theory and good practice models are relevant for practitioners working with children and families beyond the UK. We believe the book is of value to all those who come into contact with children and families, whether they are working in statutory organisations or the third sector.

The book is a comprehensive and valuable guide to assessments from early help through to child protection. It is an important and helpful resource for those coordinating assessments, such as social workers and lead professionals. *The Child's World* is also a valuable resource for those in child and adult services who contribute

to assessments, ensuring they understand the part they can play in an assessment and what they can expect from other practitioners.

It is not only front line practitioners but also managers and safeguarding leads who need to keep abreast of developments as well as understanding the key components to effective assessment practice. As managers become increasingly responsible for supervising staff who do not have the same professional background as the manager themselves, this book importantly outlines what should be expected of practitioners in terms of roles and responsibilities as well as what the practitioners themselves require in order to meet the needs of children and families.

The material is particularly relevant for students completing health, social work, and social care and education qualifying and post-qualifying courses. The references included at the end of each chapter will be of assistance to students in directing them towards texts for more in-depth study.

Professional courses are only one aspect of learning development, and inter- and intra-agency training have a crucial role. *The Child's World* is a significant resource to support trainers. For example, a training course on multidisciplinary assessment practice could be developed drawing on the case study from Chapters 3, 4 and 11. Trainers and academics will also find the book useful for accessing the underpinning knowledge required for courses on particular assessment areas with content that could be adapted easily for use in handouts or topic briefings (subject to the usual copyright restrictions and acknowledgement of sources).

In conclusion, as editors we hope that this book will be a valuable, accessible and readable guide for students, practitioners, trainers, academics and managers. Our overarching aim is to assist those working in challenging environments to complete sensitive, child-centred assessments taking into account families, often difficult and complex circumstances.

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