



RESOLUTIONS

CHILD PROTECTION CONSULTANCY





Website: resolutions-cpc.co.uk

Resolutions Child Protection Consultancy specialises in offering expert opinion in complex childcare cases before the Court. We have many years' experience working with families regarding the rehabilitation of children who may have been removed from their home due to child protection concerns. In particular we are able to offer an opinion in situations where children have suffered abuse, usually physical and/or sexual abuse or are deemed to be at risk of significant harm, but where the child's carers deny responsibility. Our view is that while denial is a significant risk factor, it does not necessarily rule out rehabilitation. After assessment to ascertain the appropriateness of rehabilitation, we may also be able to offer further assessment and therapeutic work to enable children to return home in as safe a way as possible. To achieve this we help create a context where children's safety and their wishes and feelings are central. We work in partnership with the professional and wider family systems to help create current and future safety. We also offer a follow-up review three to six months after the work is finished. In addition, we can advise on contact with, or the return home of, a carer who is deemed to pose a risk to children.

The two primary consultants are John Gumbleton and Colin Luger who both have over thirty years experience in child protection and are both UKCP registered systemic family therapists. Together with a colleague, Susie Essex (associate consultant), they were responsible for developing a unique service in Bristol between 1992-2000 called Resolutions. Resolutions set out specifically to work with families who were in denial or in dispute with the child care authorities, the so-called 'untreatable families'. Resolutions gained considerable respect among both the social work and legal professions for its ability to move on situations that had become 'stuck' before the Courts for many months, even years. Follow up research was undertaken with families that had used the Resolutions service (Gumbleton 1997). Whilst this study was not large enough to be statistically conclusive, the results are very encouraging and indicate very low re-abuse rates in comparison to other studies, making the option of rehabilitation much more attractive. (Further qualitative research with families worked with in our private practice was undertaken in 2002 under the auspices of the University of Bristol).

The Resolutions service was only available to families living in the Bristol area until early 2000 when we went into private practice. We are now able to offer expert opinion in cases before the Court and direct assessment and therapeutic work with families anywhere in England and Wales.

Over the years, with others, we have written articles about working with families who deny responsibility for injuries to their children. These have been published in both legal and social work journals (see references on page 5).

In our first article published in 1996 *“Resolutions: Working with families where responsibility for abuse is denied”* we described situations where we were able to work with families after determining a “safer carer”. Although it often never became completely clear which parent might have caused a specific injury to the child concerned, after a broader assessment we frequently found ourselves much more worried about one carer as compared to the other. For example, one of the carers may have had a previous Schedule I offence or behaved violently in the past. In working with the family we would help co-construct additional safety for children around this “safer” carer.

Over the last 10 years, however, we have worked successfully with a number of families where it was unclear which parent posed the greater risk. Typically in these cases a Finding has been made that a child has been injured in the care of its parents, but it is not possible to indicate which parent, or both, is responsible on the evidence available. In these cases we are particularly interested in what other adults are available to help monitor the children’s welfare and support the parents. We have worked with a number of cases where there were few, if any, concerns regarding either carer prior to the injuries to the child that led to our involvement. We no longer stipulate therefore that one parent must be identified to be the safer carer or less safe carer. This does not mean, however, that we would always work with such cases. We have conducted assessments in such circumstances where we have deemed neither carer to be safe enough to consider rehabilitation.

In order to determine whether either or both carers might be deemed “safe enough” we take into account a number of factors:

- The parents must acknowledge that professionals have legitimate concerns, even if they do not agree with them. While denying that they have injured their child, parents often say that they can understand why professionals are concerned, given the medical evidence before the Court.
- Parents must be willing to work in partnership with professionals in an open and honest manner.
- They must be willing to examine the way they care for their child and be willing to make changes to care routines in order to help ensure their child’s safety.
- They must be willing to accept a high level of professional support and monitoring of their child’s welfare.
- It is also helpful to have a wider support network composed of safe extended family members or friends, who are willing and able to be involved in helping to ensure the child’s future safety.
- We are also interested in a number of factors from the parents’ and the wider family’s past. This includes their experience of childhood and ability to make secure attachments, any evidence of mental health difficulties, any evidence of drug or alcohol misuse, any evidence of previous abusive behaviour to children, adults or animals.

From a careful assessment of all of these factors we are able to make a recommendation regarding the suitability of the Resolutions approach to a particular situation.

We have given many presentations to professional audiences regarding the Resolutions approach to working with families, including:

- British Association for the Study and Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN) Congress in 1994
- The Economic and Social Research Council in 1997
- Family Law Bar Association at Cumberland Lodge in May 1998
- Western Circuit Family Proceedings Conference in September 1998 at Dartington Hall
- National Council for Family Proceedings Conference at the Tavistock Clinic, London in December 1998
- Family Law Bar Association & Solicitors Family Law Association at Leeds in November 2000
- The New Bristol Family Forum in January 2002.
- The Iscoed Chambers Family Law Lecture, November 2003.
- South West Family Therapy Association Conference, December 2004 (workshop)
- AFT Annual Conference, September 2005 (workshop presentation, with colleagues)
- Presentation to Bristol Systemic Practitioners, April 2006.
- Presentation at day conference, *Understanding child protection errors: fine judgments*, London (with Peter Dale and colleagues), May 2006.
- Workshop at South West Family Therapy Forum Conference, December 2006.
- "Protecting the Child" (a conference for lawyers), in London, on 13th February 2007.
- Kent Family Justice Council Conference – 22nd November 2007
- Association of Lawyers for Children National Conference – 20th November 2009

N.B. We are in private practice and totally independent.

We have no formal association with any other statutory, voluntary or independent child care agency.

To discuss the services we are able to offer or a particular case we can be contacted at:

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We can also be contacted via our website at
www.resolutions-cpc.co.uk

CURRICULA VITAE

JOHN GUMBLETON has over thirty years experience of working with children and families in residential, fieldwork and therapeutic settings. For over twenty years he has worked predominantly in child protection, including over ten years at the NSPCC in Bristol. He holds a Diploma in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice, an MSC in Child Welfare, a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and the Advanced Award in Social Work. He is a visiting lecturer at both Bristol and Birmingham Universities and for a number of years sat on the Assessment Standards Board of the Top South West Post Qualifying Consortium. He is a UKCP registered systemic family therapist and a member of The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice.

COLIN LUGER has over thirty years experience in social work and holds an MSc in systemic family therapy, a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and a Diploma in Social Work. He has worked in the residential and fieldwork settings in a local authority, as well as over twenty years at the NSPCC in Bristol working with children and families. He sits on the Congress Scientific Committee for the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. He is a UKCP registered systemic family therapist and a member of The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice. Colin teaches occasionally at both Bristol University and the University of the West of England and is an honorary family therapist with the North Bristol NHS Trust.

As well as work with families, both John and Colin have considerable therapeutic experience working individually with children and adults who have experienced abuse.

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