

‘Twos, transitions and the dark’: An adopted boy and therapist’s struggle to find the ‘therapy boat’ and ‘oars’ to navigate and reconstruct his early history

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Abstract

This paper describes a once-a-week psychotherapy with a young boy over a period of 18 months. The boy was removed from his biological parents at three years of age because of concerns about his birth parents’ capacity to care for him and his younger brother. When the boy was seven years old a psychotherapy was sought to address a range of behaviours that were difficult for his adoptive parents to manage. The very early history of the boy was not known. Clinical vignettes from a beginning session, the middle and toward the end of the process are used to illustrate the importance and usefulness of careful attention to countertransference, particularly when the very early history of a child is unknown. The paper demonstrates that by being attentive to these dynamics, emotionally relevant themes may be reconstructed and reworked in the clinical setting. The unknown history is reconstituted and made conscious in the therapeutic relationship. The early emotional themes from the clinical work that rose to the surface include ‘twos’ – two sets of parents, two emotional worlds, two siblings, two therapists; ‘transitions’ – between his two families, between his worlds, between his adoptive mother’s arms into the therapy room; and ‘the dark’ – what lies beneath and between, what is unseen, what is unremembered.