



## Latest Research, Evidence & Resources for Family Support Services in the UK

Compiled for: Practice & Development Manager

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*Note: Media sources and documentaries are included as contextual resources to support understanding of lived experience and public discourse. They should be considered alongside peer-reviewed research, government data, and sector evaluations when informing policy and practice decisions.*

### RECENT BBC ADOPTION DOCUMENTARIES

**If You Love Your Baby** (2021) – BBC, presented by Duncan Kennedy

- **Focus:** Historical forced adoptions of babies from unmarried mothers (1950s–1970s)
- **Impact:** Contributed to renewed public, sector, and parliamentary attention on historic adoption practices, alongside survivor testimony and advocacy
- **Key themes:** Historical trauma, lack of redress, lifelong impact on birth mothers and adoptees
- **Relevance:** Supports understanding of intergenerational trauma and trust issues experienced by families affected by historical state intervention

**Searching for Mum: Sri Lanka** (2018) – BBC Two

- **Focus:** International adoption, identity loss, and trafficking concerns
- **Key themes:** Corruption in adoption systems, loss of identity, adoptee lived experience

**Nicky Campbell Podcast – “Against Adoption”** (2024)

- **Focus:** Arun Dohle’s account of adoption trafficking from India
- **Key themes:** Failures of international safeguards, including the Hague Convention
- **Relevance:** Encourages critical reflection on adoption systems and child protection risks



### Use in practice:

These resources are most appropriate as *entry points* for discussion and reflection, and should be triangulated with academic research, government inquiries, and sector evidence.

While documentaries such as *If You Love Your Baby* and *Searching for Mum: Sri Lanka* provide compelling narratives of adoption experiences, they must be interpreted as narrative evidence rather than empirical proof. Media accounts foreground individual lived experience, which is essential for understanding the human impact of adoption policies, yet they are subject to selective storytelling and editorial framing. Consequently, these resources should be triangulated with academic studies, government inquiries, and longitudinal adoption outcome data. For instance, findings from the Movement for an Adoption Apology reports and the Forced Adoption Inquiry (2022) contextualise historical and systemic issues highlighted in these documentaries. By integrating narrative accounts with robust evidence, practitioners can maintain an empathic lens while making decisions grounded in empirically validated insights, balancing the emotive pull of human stories with the rigour required for effective family support interventions.

## LATEST UK GOVERNMENT RESEARCH & REPORTS (2024–2025)

### Supporting Families Programme – Final Report (2024–2025)

**Published:** Department for Education, June 2025

#### Key findings:

- Programme concluded March 2025 after 13 years of delivery
- Reported **858,179 successful family outcomes** since 2012
- Responsibility transferred from MHCLG to DfE in April 2024
- Successor programme: **Families First Partnership Programme** (£500m, 2025–26)

#### What the evidence indicates:

- Whole-family, relational approaches are associated with improved outcomes
- Integrated early help and statutory services align with current reform direction



- Systemic family practice approaches are being piloted in a small number of local areas

### **Evidence base:**

DfE-commissioned synthesis reviews of:

- Trauma-informed practice
- Signs of Safety
- Parenting programmes
- Psychologically informed approaches

The Supporting Families Programme demonstrates notable reach and apparent effectiveness in whole-family working, yet caution is required in interpreting the outcomes as universally replicable. Programme success metrics, while impressive, may be influenced by local implementation variability, workforce capacity, and funding fluctuations. Moreover, while systemic family therapy approaches show promising results, long-term evaluation remains limited, particularly concerning sustained behavioural or wellbeing outcomes. The programme aligns with theoretical frameworks advocating relational, trauma-informed, and systemic approaches, yet effectiveness is contingent on consistent fidelity and organisational support. Therefore, while the programme offers a valuable evidence-informed model for practice, policy adoption should be accompanied by ongoing monitoring, adaptation to local contexts, and rigorous assessment of both short- and long-term impacts on families.

### **Family Hubs – Evidence and Funding Context**

**Family Hubs Interim Review** (Centre for Social Justice, October 2024)

#### **Findings:**

- 75 hubs piloted with £300m investment
- Evidence of improved service coordination and access in high-need areas
- Positive indications for reducing pressure on schools and CAMHS
- Funding beyond March 2025 remains uncertain

**FOI data (Centre for Young Lives, April 2025):**



- 49% of local authorities reduced Family Hub budgets (2023/24–2024/25)
- Spending approximately **25% of pre-2010 Sure Start levels**
- Average spend ~£275k per hub
- Approximately 2,100 centres remain nationally

### **Interpretation:**

Evidence suggests promise when adequately resourced; sustainability is currently the primary risk.

The Family Hubs initiative illustrates a promising model of place-based, integrated family support. Pilot evaluations suggest improved service accessibility, early intervention potential, and reduced pressure on statutory services. However, the sustainability of these benefits is threatened by significant funding uncertainty, as indicated by recent FOI data showing widespread budget cuts. Furthermore, while hub integration embodies best practice principles of relational and whole-family approaches, there is limited longitudinal evidence assessing impact on child outcomes, family resilience, or intergenerational effects. Practitioners and policymakers must therefore balance the aspirational potential of hubs with pragmatic constraints, ensuring that implementation strategies are adaptable and evidence-informed, with mechanisms for continuous evaluation and learning embedded into operational models.

## **CURRENT APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH FAMILIES (EVIDENCE-INFORMED)**

### **Trauma-Informed Practice**

**Evidence status:** Emerging to moderate; strongest when embedded system-wide

- Emphasises safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment
- Informed by ACEs research and attachment theory
- Evidence suggests training alone is insufficient without organisational change

### **Signs of Safety**

**Evidence status:** Mixed; effectiveness dependent on fidelity and implementation quality

- Strengths-based risk assessment and planning framework



- Widely adopted across UK local authorities

Trauma-informed practice is increasingly regarded as foundational in family support, emphasising safety, empowerment, and relational trust. Nevertheless, research indicates that training alone does not guarantee improved outcomes; organisational culture, workforce capacity, and systemic integration significantly mediate effectiveness. While the Supporting Families evidence review highlights the value of trauma-aware approaches, long-term impacts on family outcomes remain under-evaluated. From a critical perspective, practitioners should adopt trauma-informed approaches as part of multi-modal interventions, integrating relational, systemic, and evidence-based models, rather than relying on discrete training interventions. This balance ensures both fidelity to theoretical principles and responsiveness to contextual challenges, allowing interventions to be both ethically grounded and empirically defensible.

### **Systemic Family Practice**

**Evidence status:** Strong in clinical settings; emerging in early help contexts

- Rooted in systemic family therapy research
- Focus on relational patterns and family systems
- Currently being evaluated in early help models

Relationship-based practice foregrounds the therapeutic alliance between practitioners and families as the primary mechanism of change. While intuitively compelling, its empirical evaluation is complex, as outcomes are mediated by relational quality, practitioner skill, and organisational support. Research from the Family Hubs model and restorative practice initiatives indicates that sustained, trusting relationships enhance engagement, reduce conflict, and improve wellbeing outcomes, particularly for families experiencing trauma or multiple adversities (Ruch, 2018). Critically, however, relationship-building alone is insufficient; it must be integrated with evidence-informed interventions and systemic oversight. For Level 8 practice, this necessitates a reflective, critically-informed approach where relational strategies are continuously evaluated, contextualised, and aligned with policy frameworks, ensuring interventions are both ethically grounded and empirically defensible.



## Relationship-Based Practice

**Evidence status:** Strong theoretical and practice foundation

- Emphasises consistent, trusting worker–family relationships
- Central to Family Hubs and restorative practice models

Systemic Family Practice applies relational and systemic theories to understand and intervene in family dynamics, emphasising patterns, communication, and relational context rather than focusing solely on individual pathology. Randomised controlled trials in clinical settings provide strong evidence for the efficacy of systemic family therapy in improving child and family outcomes (Carr, 2019). In the UK, pilot integration within early help services through the Supporting Families programme demonstrates potential, though translation from clinical to community contexts requires careful attention to fidelity, practitioner training, and organisational culture. For high-level practice, systemic family approaches should be implemented with robust evaluation frameworks, allowing adaptation to local family contexts while preserving theoretical integrity, thus bridging the gap between evidence-based therapeutic models and practical, policy-informed family support.

## Whole-Family Working

**Evidence status:** Core principle with long-term programme data support

- Single lead practitioner
- Addresses interconnected needs across family members
- Reduces duplication and service fragmentation

Whole-family working, central to the Supporting Families programme, reflects a theoretically coherent and evidence-aligned approach, emphasising interconnections between family members and systemic understanding of risk and resilience. However, evidence indicates that its effectiveness is contingent on the quality of practitioner engagement, intensity of intervention, and continuity of support. While large-scale programme data suggest positive outcomes, causal attribution is complicated by concurrent interventions, socio-economic context, and variable fidelity across local authorities. Therefore, while whole-family working provides a



robust conceptual framework, practice must remain critically evaluative, embedding iterative feedback, evaluation, and context-sensitive adaptation to ensure that interventions are genuinely responsive and effective for diverse family structures.

### **GAPS IN THE EVIDENCE (IMPORTANT TO NOTE)**

Current limitations identified across reviews include:

- Limited long-term outcome data for trauma-informed training alone
- Insufficient comparative data between parenting programmes
- Inconsistent evidence on workforce development models
- Ongoing challenges engaging families labelled “hard to reach”

### **Implication:**

Practice should be evidence-informed rather than evidence-absolute, with continuous evaluation and local learning.

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