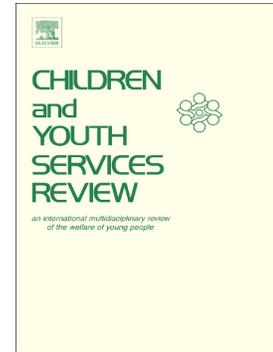


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The team as a secure base: Promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work

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The team as a secure base: promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work

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The team as a secure base: promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work

Abstract

This paper outlines research findings on the relevance of the Secure Base model (Schofield and Beek 2014) for developing supportive teams in child and family social work. When the social work team functions as a secure base, this can help workers cope with the emotional demands of the role. The concept of the secure base comes from attachment theory (Bowlby 1969) in which our relationships with significant others, who are available, sensitive to our needs and reliable, provide us with a secure base to return to when life is stressful and provide us with comforting internal mental models when we are physically away from them. This 'secure base for exploration' reduces anxiety and enables us to engage with the world, consider the internal world of others (empathy) and remain resilient when life is stressful. Using data from 52 phone interviews with child and family social workers across eight local authorities in the UK, we show how the Secure Base model has relevance for emotion regulation and resilience for child and family social workers. Data were analysed using Theoretical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). In the context of the emotional demands of social work, our data indicate that the supervisors and teams provide a work related secure base across five dimensions by behaving in ways which instil these beliefs:

Availability - 'People are there for me'; *Sensitivity* - 'My feelings are manageable'; *Acceptance* - I don't always have to be strong'; *Cooperation* - 'I can work with others to find a solution'; *Team belonging* - 'I am valued and I belong'. Implications for practice are proposed to help supervisors and team members reflect on beliefs and behaviours which can help provide a secure base for their teams.

Keywords: emotion regulation, teams, child and family social work, reflective supervision, attachment, secure base

1. Introduction

Child and family social work (CFSW)¹ requires interprofessional collaboration (Ruch et al 2005, Blustein 2011) involving skill, patience and dedication. CFSW is also an emotionally demanding profession involving uncertainty and risk. CFSWs often witness service user trauma, such as domestic violence and child abuse, which can create secondary trauma for social workers (Dagan et al 2016). Therefore social workers often need to contain their own and others' emotions in order to remain functional at work (Ruch 2007). Social workers are often required to take action, such as removing a child from their family, which can cause distress in the short term to reduce long term harm to children. Job resources, such as social support from supervisors and colleagues can help CFSWs cope with these emotional demands and organisational psychology research consistently shows that believing in, seeking and receiving good social support predicts employee resilience, wellbeing and performance (Nielsen et al 2016). The function of supervisor and team support is to help individuals restore emotional equilibrium and adapt to a challenging work environment. In psychodynamic terms, this interpersonal process is similar to emotional containment (Bion 1962). Research reviews in this area indicate that emotional equilibrium needs to be recovered before employees can cognitively engage in problem solving to perform competently at work (Rimé 2009).

Social work research shows that supervisors and managers often pay more attention to the cognitive work of problem solving without recognising that emotional needs, such as anxiety, fear, anger, frustration or resentment might prevent CFSWs from engaging with children and families (for example if they are afraid of a violent family member) or be a distraction to thinking analytically about a case (Ferguson 2016). Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth's (1978) concept of secure base, originating from observations of optimal and sub-optimal caregiving environments for children, indicates that providing a reliable source of comfort to children when stressed and encouragement and support for exploration helps children manage their emotions and feel safe to explore their environment. Adults also draw upon their social networks in times of need to provide comfort and engage in reflective thinking to help manage their emotions (Rimé 2009, Shaver and Mikulincer

¹ Child and family social work/er will be referred to in the text as CFSW

2010, Collins 2008). From our research with 52 CFSWs, we demonstrate how applying Schofield and Beek's (2014) Secure Base theoretical model to the experiences of social work teams provides an essential framework for understanding the emotional needs of CFSWs to better promote resilience and effective social work practice.

1.1 Emotion regulation, reasoning and decision making

CFSW involves emotion work (Zapf 2002). CFSWs need to regulate their own emotional reactions to the often distressing context of children and families' lives at the same time as managing service users' emotions. CFSW also involves emotional labour (Hochschild 1983), such as the display of professionally appropriate emotions, for example maintaining a calm demeanour during a crisis, masking their real feelings. The effective regulation of emotions is therefore an essential skill for CFSWs.

Intense emotions play a useful role in signalling the significance of events directing us and others to pay attention and take action. However, in a Canadian study of 156 social workers, Regher et al (2004) found that frequent exposure to intense emotional events had long term effects on individuals, regardless of individual differences in ability to cope. Intense emotional events have been found to have a range of effects on memory, one of which is that intense emotional events can be more strongly committed to memory and can also exert effects long after the event itself, (Tambini et al 2016). Research evidence shows that strong emotions may also reflect cognitive dissonance between our ideas of how the world should be and how we have experienced it. This dissonance can create confusion, thus motivating individuals to search for understanding (Harman-Jones 2000). As individuals try to make sense of events, these cognitive processes tend to generate intrusive thoughts (Luminet, et al., 2004) and rumination (Brosschot 2010). Intense emotions and lower intensity moods both influence the content of our thoughts and our thinking processes (Forgas and George 2001). Emotion and thinking are interdependent and Forgas and George's (2001) Affect Infusion Model integrates the evidence on emotion and thinking which

shows that making complex decisions and judgements in situations of uncertainty, which CFSWs encounter daily (O'Connor 2013), are more likely to be affected by emotion than more routine tasks.

If CFSWs are emotionally preoccupied, this can inhibit their ability to remain emotionally engaged with children and families, or be analytical or flexible in their decision making (Author's own 2016). To counter these effects of emotion, Berkowitz et al., (2000) found that if individuals were aware of their emotional state, this reduced the influence of the emotion on their decisions. Given the propensity of emotion work and complexity of case decisions in CFSW, effective emotion regulation is therefore of great importance for improving key elements of CFSW practice. As emotion regulation efforts deplete emotional and cognitive resources, CFSWs need time and support to regain equilibrium (Rimé 2009).

1.2 The importance of social support for emotional regulation

Rime's (2009) psychological research found that talking to others helps individuals process emotions, restore equilibrium and facilitate understanding. In the short term, experiencing intense negative emotions can destabilise both our understanding of how the world works and our sense of self-efficacy. Individuals are therefore motivated to reduce these negative feelings by sharing their experiences to restore cognitive coherence and regain control. Talking with trusted colleagues and supervisors can help CFSWs identify their emotions by having reflected back to them emotions that make sense to the context (e.g. 'That sounds frightening') (Ruch et al 2007). Talking with others also helps individuals consider causes of their emotions and discuss how their emotions could be managed. In a study of 189 Spanish social workers, informal social support was found to make the job of CFSWs less distressing (Sánchez-Moreno et al 2015). Whilst support may be often sought out by CFSWs in response to *negative* emotions, talking to others about *positive* emotional events also has beneficial effects as this provides a boost to self-esteem, self-efficacy and helps cement relationships (Gable et al 2004). Good quality supportive work relationships in

CFSW which provide reliable protection, care, comfort and opportunities for reflective thinking are hypothesized to create internal beliefs that 'the work can make a difference' and 'I can do it' (Ruch 2005). Such beliefs are at the heart of resilience and essential for confident social work practice (Webb and Carpenter 2012). A 2014 review of empirical studies in social work showed that social support is associated with fewer turnover intentions and less burnout (McFadden et al 2014).

1.3 The relevance of attachment models for emotion regulation

Inter-relational support for emotion regulation is also a cornerstone of attachment theory. Bowlby (1969) described two systems (secure haven and secure base) which promoted survival: firstly, an attachment system where children seek proximity to caregivers in the face of physical and psychological threats which evoke fear, and secondly, a complementary exploration system which is activated when children feel that the caregiver is reliably available and sensitive to their needs, (Bowlby 1988). In 2014, a Secure Base model of therapeutic caregiving in foster care was developed by Schofield and Beek (Figure 1) to help foster carers understand the importance of their role in supporting children in care to develop good psychological functioning. The model has five dimensions to guide caregiver thinking and behaviours: Availability (promoting trust); Sensitivity (promoting emotion regulated); Acceptance (promoting self-efficacy); Co-operation (promoting autonomy); Family membership (promoting belonging and identity). As children develop, they create internalised representations of their caregivers which they call to mind when caregivers are not immediately available and this internal model helps them cope with emotional challenges, explore, learn and become more resilient. This Secure Base model, in which the importance of others for managing our emotions, remains relevant in adult life.

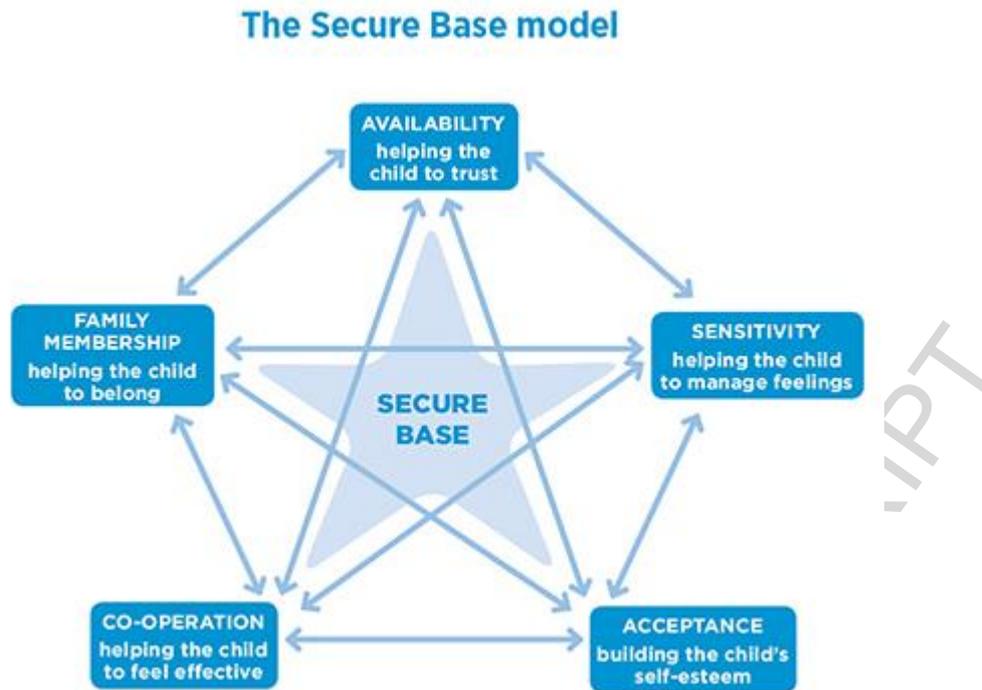


Figure 1. The Secure Base model (Schofield and Beek 2014)

Usually in adulthood, individuals have generated a range of relationships which contribute to their sense of secure base (family, romantic partners, friends, colleagues). These relationships are drawn upon to help restore emotional balance and return to function and fulfil the same criteria as for children (Shaver and Mikulincer 2010). Primary attachment figures are romantic partners, family and close friends. However, other important adults can be also sought to provide support and comfort in times of need within a hierarchy of attachment figures (Shaver and Mikulincer 2010). If individuals cannot access an available and sensitive caregiver, they will remain anxious and preoccupied and be unable to give attention or energy to work, socialising or learning.

Rimé (2007) studied individual motives for seeking social support and proposed that individuals seek to satisfy socio-affective needs, similar to attachment system needs (e.g. attention, venting, comfort, validation, understanding). Individuals also seek to resolve cognitive dissonance by undertaking cognitive reframing, similar to the attachment exploratory system (e.g. cognitive exploration through problem solving, advice, clarification, seeking meaning). Rimé (2007) found

that cognitive reframing could not effectively take place until socio-affective needs were met.

Cognitive reframing can help individuals gain greater confidence in solving future problems i.e. self-efficacy. Greater self-efficacy is positively related to competent practice and ability to become resilient (Masten et al., 2004).

1.4 The relevance of Secure Base for emotion regulation in social work

Colleagues and supervisors are frequently used by social workers to help regulate their emotions (Collins et al 2008). Supervisors and work colleagues can offer greater experience, wisdom and support, important characteristics of caregiving (Weiss 1991). We suggest that this support is usefully conceptualised as providing a secure base (somewhere to find protection either physically or psychologically and from which one feels safe to explore and learn about the environment) (Ainsworth 1991). In the unpredictable environment of social work, being able to draw upon internalised models of team security should help sustain resilience and functioning for CFSWs. Supervisors' and colleagues' behaviours influence individual's beliefs about their ability to cope and the range and effectiveness of the coping strategies they draw upon. CFSWs exposure to risk and emotional demands makes them more likely to seek proximity to and care from experienced and competent colleagues (Collins et al 2008). Supervisors and experienced colleagues can also help anticipate and contribute to resolve problems for CFSWs. If their feelings of fear and anxiety are not alleviated, CFSWs can end up psychologically pre-occupied with these concerns and their attention to and quality of work is likely to suffer (Ferguson 2016). Therefore, providing support at work is important for employers, to help employees engage independently with work tasks and be open to learning.

Given the interdisciplinary evidence showing the beneficial effects of social support on reducing stress at work (Kahn 1993, Rimé 2009, Nielsen 2016) and the theoretical relevance of the Secure Base model for maintaining psychological resilience in the face of stressful environments, we examined how social support was perceived by child and family social workers and whether the

Secure Base model could be used to conceptualise the relationship between team support and emotional regulation. Our research questions were:

- What aspects of social support helped social workers cope at work?
- What hindered them in feeling able to cope with emotionally demanding work?
- What helped CFSWs do their job effectively?
- How do the five Secure Base dimensions interact?

Data came from 52 interviews with frontline CFSWs from a larger funded study. The local authorities taking part were not explicitly employing the Team as Secure Base model; the research team were interested in whether existing practice embodied Secure Base principles.

2. METHODS

2.1 Sample

Participants (N=52) were a sub-set of 207 CFSWs taking part in a wider UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) study on Emotional Intelligence and Social Work. Participants in the main study were frontline child and family social workers who varied by role and were recruited from Children's Services Departments within eight local authorities in England. The local authorities varied by size, and region, see Table 1. Twenty-five percent of overall participants from each local authority (N52) were selected for phone interviews. The participants for phone interviews were selected to represent the range of social worker roles from the overall study sample. We selected sixty-six social workers, of these 66 interview requests, 13 social workers were unable to be interviewed, either through no response to the request, workload or email error. The final 52 interview participants' were majority female (75%, n39) and ranged in age from 21 to 61 years, M=41.7 years, SD=10.48 years. Participant ethnicity was primarily white- British and

European (88%, n46). Participants varied by qualified experience from less than 1 year to 33 years' experience, $M=6.36$ years, $SD=6$ years.

Social work roles can differ from local authority to local authority; however for the purposes of this study, the tasks of participant child and family social work broadly fitted these role descriptions outlined below:

- o *Safeguarding*: Social workers whose work consists of assessment and intervention with children who are risk of, or are suffering, significant harm
- o *Looked after children*: Social workers whose work primarily consists of working with children and young people who are in the care of the local authority
- o *Fostering and/or adoption*: Social workers who are involved in family-finding, or support of children in foster or adoptive placements
- o *Early intervention/children in need*: Social workers who provide services to children and families in need of support
- o *Children with disabilities*: Social workers who work solely with children with disabilities
- o *Family/children's centre*: Social workers working in children/family centres (such as Sure Start) which may undertake a range of supportive work at statutory and non-statutory level

Table 1 Representation of the interview participant sub-set of the wider study.

Type of authority ²	Interview participants - Safeguarding	Interview participants Looked after children	Interview participants Fostering and adoption	Interview participants Other (Family centres, Disability)	Interview participants LA Total N and (percent)	Total participants in study by LA
Shire	6	5	5	2	18 (23.4)	77
Shire	3	1	0	0	4 (25)	16
Shire	7	2	1	1	11 (25.6)	43
Shire	3	0	0	0	3 (25)	12
Large Unitary	1	1	1	0	3 (17)	18

² Shire local authorities offer county wide local state services such as social services, transport, police. District local authorities provide local services such as environmental health, housing, planning, but not social services. Unitary local authorities provide merged shire and local district services, usually for an urban area.

Small unitary	4	1	2	0	7 (26)	27
Small unitary	2	0	1	1	4 (80)	5
Outer London	1	1	0	0	2 (22.2)	9
Interview participants	27 (52)	11 (21.1)	10 (19.2)	4 (7.7)	52 (25.1)	207
Total and (percent) by role						
Total participants and (percent) by role	117 (57)	45 (17)	35 (21.5)	10 (4.5)	207 (100)	

The project received ethical approval from the Authors' University Ethics Committee and research governance approval from the UK Association of Directors of Children's Services.

2.2 Interviews/data collection

The semi-structured interviews were undertaken by two researchers and took place over the phone at a time convenient to the participant, ensuring that participants were in a private space where they could not be overheard and took one hour on average. Interviews ended on less emotive questions and interviewers checked in with participants' emotional state at the end of the interview signposting participants to general and, where available, specific agency support services.

Interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Participants were asked a range of questions about their emotional experiences at work covering: the team and physical work environment; experiences at work (emotional rewards and demands); the wider organisation, supervision and informal support. The interviews provided rich data regarding social workers' experiences, both of their work and their perception of organizational support.

2.3 Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymised, quotes provided indicate the participant anonymous ID and page number from the transcript. We analysed the data in two stages: firstly using an inductive approach to Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to generate emergent themes by examining aspects of the job which evoked emotions, were described as overwhelming

(stressful) and which affected practice. This first stage was followed by a theoretical Thematic Analysis approach, applying the five theoretical dimensions of the Secure Base model (Figure 1) to code emergent themes. One researcher created case summaries to provide researchers with a quick overview of contextual and individual circumstances for each interviewee. Three members of the research team subsequently undertook coding of all 52 transcripts to identify factors which supported, hindered or developed social workers' emotional resilience. In the first round of coding, using NVivo software, each researcher coded the data independently, after which they met to discuss instances where their coding appeared to be similar or diverse. In the second round of coding researchers separated codes which referred to individual coping strategies from codes which highlighted social support features to focus analysis on either individual coping or social support. The themes we report in this paper are from the social support analysis.

We show how CFSWs talk about their colleagues' and supervisors' support in ways which highlight five secure base dimensions: Availability – promoting trust; Sensitivity – promoting emotion regulation; Acceptability – promoting self-efficacy; Co-operation – promoting autonomy; and Team belonging – promoting team membership (Figure 2). Each dimension is explained and illustrated with example quotes from the data, the number shown after each quote is a unique participant number, followed by the page number in the transcript that the quote originated from. Note that where quotations have been edited for clarity, we have inserted three dots (...) to indicate missing text.

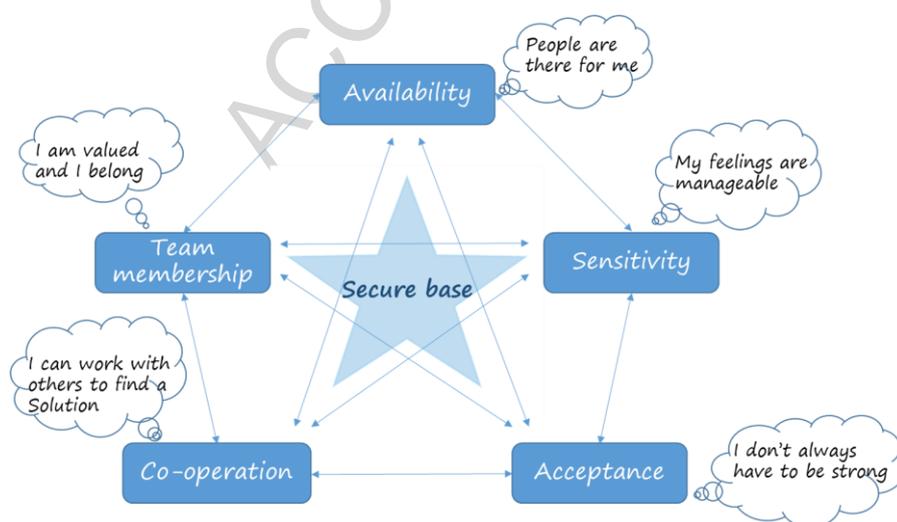


Figure 2. The Secure Base model for teams

3. FINDINGS

A summary is provided below for each of the five Secure Base model dimensions of Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Cooperation and Team membership examining how CFSWs talked about social support within these dimensions. Although each dimension is important, it appears they are not sufficient on their own for effective social support, each dimension is related to each of the other dimensions. For example, if CFSWs believe that people are available to them and sensitive to their needs, this creates a foundation of trust in self and others and positive self-regard which, in turn, helps CFSWs be cooperative and inclusive. CFSWs also spoke about the need to proactively seek support and be confident to ask questions of team or supervisor. Different dimensions of the secure base such as the availability, sensitivity and acceptance offered would influence how confident CFSWs were to ask for help. A summary table outlining the beliefs and behaviours for each Secure Base model dimension can be found in Appendix A.

3.1 Dimension one: Availability – Promoting trust, 'People *are there for me*'

Caregiver availability is important for reducing anxiety and developing trust. Attachment theory (Bowlby 1988) and the Secure Base model propose that the availability of trusted others is sought when individuals feel afraid or threatened to provide a secure base for protection and comfort, and enable exploration and learning. In social work, CFSWs work with families who are experiencing intense emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. CFSWs also face verbal and threats of physical aggression. Experiencing colleagues as physically, emotionally and practically available helped social workers to manage these emotional demands.

Being perceived as available did not mean being physically on call 24-7, but involved being approachable, being clear when supervisors or colleagues were able to respond, and also responding to urgent calls. Being available to colleagues was seen as reciprocal and an inherent part of the role.

... when I.. had a bad day and I want to speak things with her [supervisor] and even though she's at home I can say, I can text her to say "Look, are you able to talk?" and ... either she will call me and we will talk or she tell me, "Look, put this to bed and talk about it first thing tomorrow morning."...So usually she tends to be there. And I do the same as well, I make myself available ... to other people if it is particularly difficult for them and that is what we do is support each other. 017007006006, p11

Availability was often demonstrated virtually through a variety of communications including email and IT messenger services. Knowing that there were a number of ways to access support if needed was reassuring. Availability of a range of colleagues for support was valued and, given the demands of workload, home visits and court, having 'back-up' colleagues to talk to increased the chances of receiving support when needed. Having some consistency of supervisor was particularly important for emotion regulation and maintaining resilience for CFSWs. Experiencing frequent and high turnover of staff within teams could disrupt access to trusted colleagues.

...You know, when I compare my experience to other people, you know, within sort of six weeks they've had about four or five supervisors...I think that, that's [having the same supervisor] the thing that's sort of kept me going really. 067167110091, p10

Available supervisors influenced CFSWs' capacity to reflect on their cases and their practice. Discussing cases with colleagues and supervisors helped CFSWs create more coherent narratives about their cases, which was often missing, given interrupted contact and different professionals working with children and families.

[I welcomed]...the opportunity to talk that through because you think of little bits as you're going along but I think it's the first time I linked it all together...077187119097, p1

Consistent availability of support helped social workers to be available for service users. If CFSWs believed that colleagues and supervisors were available for them, they remained open and curious about what service users might be thinking and feeling, which motivated them to build trust with service users and co-professionals in order to find out more.

I like the detective work...why is somebody behaving in a particular way? ...what experience is this person having that's leading to this situation happening? What is the cause of the issue? ... I find all that fascinating.... unearthing the family dynamics, ...and in order to do that, that's about building up trust... 017038025023, p10

Supervisors and colleagues were perceived as available if they focused on team needs, kept the team in mind when apart, felt important to team well-being and understood the importance to team members to have trust in their availability. Supervisors and colleagues gained trust from team members when they signalled their availability verbally and virtually and organised the work with their availability in mind. Supervisors and colleagues who were approachable, open, consistent and honest in their communication were trusted and helped promote social workers' internalised representations of the team of *'people are there for me'*. Trust was an essential precursor to seeking, being open to receiving support and working together.

3.2 Dimension two: Sensitivity – Promoting emotion regulation, *'My feelings are manageable'*

Demonstrating sensitivity to others' feelings and needs and responding appropriately is another key dimension for creating trust. Sensitive attuned behaviours from colleagues helped CFSWs believe their feelings could be managed more effectively and that they felt heard and understood. Regulating feelings takes effort and is essential to promote thinking and reflection (Forgas and George 2001, O'Connor and Leonard 2013). If practitioners could manage their own feelings they felt more able to think about colleagues' and service users' feelings.

I think if you're not emotionally safe and you're not supported then you're not in a position to be able to help other people. 017058038034, p26

It was important for CFSWs to believe that supervisors and managers were sensitive to what team members might be feeling and thinking or 'being tuned in'. This could be communicated through checking in with colleagues and offering a suggestion as to how CFSWs might be feeling, such as 'it must be very tiring to....',. Such suggestions could initiate conversations about feelings and thoughts. Colleagues and supervisors who could tune in to the needs of others through observation and listening were better able to recognise unusual behaviour in colleagues, as highlighted by this social worker.

... I can recognise, ...in... certain colleagues, when they're feeling overwhelmed. ... I have a certain colleague who comes quite sort of hyperactive when she's under stress. .. and she'll talk in a lot of detail about cases and get very caught up in them and ... I think, "You're just becoming a bit manic." ... she doesn't eat much. ...Another colleague will bury her head in the sand more and procrastinate so I can tell that when she's feeling under stress ... she'll be trying to organise the team and have a tidy up, or create a new filing system. 017079048040, p20

Where supervisors showed that they had not heard CFSWs, this could create uncertainty, self-doubt and lack of trust. If CFSWs could not trust supervisors they faced a dilemma where the person most relied on to provide care and protection from the dangers of the work could not be relied on for support, which added to the anxiety burden and removed a source of support.

Listening to CFSWs and clarifying understanding was a valued supervisory skill which could avoid assumptions being made about issues and possible solutions. In the example below, the social worker felt they had to protect themselves from possible criticism from their supervisor because the

supervisor was unable to keep track of their previous conversations, and likely to blame the social worker if things went wrong.

With the previous manager, I found that she would say one thing and then it wouldn't be recorded ...and then in the following conversation she'd ...have forgotten what we'd talked about before and ask, "Why are you doing that?" and I'd have to say, "Well, it's because we talked about it and you said x, y and z." and she'd say, "Oh, I can't remember that conversation." So it made me very, myself and another colleague in particular, we had a conversation about having to be really clear in our supervision notes. 017079048040, p16

It was also important for colleagues to notice and raise any unusual behaviour in a caring and considerate way. If colleagues and supervisors noticed if colleagues were having a difficult day and could respond with empathy, reassurance and flexibility, these personalised encounters helped CFSWs feel that they were cared for and recognised as an individual alongside their identity as social worker.

[My supervisor would say] "Are you alright? You didn't seem quite yourself." You know, that kind of thing...Because I guess ... Maybe I'd come out of a meeting and I'd packed up my laptop and I've said goodbye, but I haven't done it in the way I normally would do and, you know, people are just quite attuned I think. 017041026024, p9

Showing compassion and understanding for people's lives and feelings outside work was an important part of providing support as it could explain behaviour which was not related to the work itself, thus enabling supervisors and colleagues to understand and accommodate their interactions to take into account personal circumstances. In the example below, colleagues recognised that their manager's change in behaviour was due to difficulties that she was experiencing in her personal life and they were more tolerant of her unreliable response during this time.

... She's definitely one of the better managers I've had. ... and you have to balance that she's unpredictable because we happen to know that, when it started getting really bad, we kind of understood her relationship was breaking down ... So she's got kind of stuff that was going on as well. So you have to give people a bit of space for that don't you? 0872111461, p6

Offering time to listen and providing some space to talk was greatly appreciated and seen as a key indicator that someone cared by showing an interest in what CFSWs were feeling and thinking. This could happen informally in a tea break or formally in supervision. Knowing that colleagues cared about each others' welfare helped instil beliefs that CFSWs felt known, and understood, confident that they could manage their feelings and continue with the work at hand. Supervisors helped clarify and provide structure for CFSWs' thinking, seen as essential for newly qualified social workers and for complex cases. This assistance in structuring thinking helped CFSWs feel safe

CFSWs with supervisors who could not regulate their own emotions experienced their behaviour as unreliable and inconsistent. Such supervisors did not inspire confidence that feelings could be managed which could increase anxiety, mistrust and confusion for team members. The impact of leader feelings on their team's emotional well-being has been shown in the organisational psychology literature for example, see Skakon et al (2010) Supervisors showing poor emotional management would be less likely to tune into their social workers' feelings and thoughts.

..... she's [supervisor] really good, but then we're worried about her moods. And then we can't tell, sometimes she'll, we'll have a joke and she'll come over and join in and another time she'll come over and talk to us like we're children and tell us off and we think, well, you were doing that [joking with us] yesterday. 0872111461, p5

Supervisors and colleagues who observed and listened to team members closely and who showed interest (without seeming intrusive) in team member's thoughts and feelings were perceived as empathetic, reassuring and flexible. CFSWs described sensitive teams being where they felt heard and understood and believed that feelings could be identified and managed. The opportunity to reflect on their feelings gave CFSWs insight into their own and others' minds which helped resolve problems.

3.3. Dimension three: Acceptance – Building self-worth, 'I don't always have to be strong'

Building and maintaining CFSW self-worth is important for the Acceptance dimension. Feedback which was non-judgemental helped CFSWs feel less anxious when things went wrong and helped them remain open to learning from mistakes. In social work CFSWs work in a UK public service culture of 'continuous improvement' (Ofsted 2016). The inspection regime and government recording requirements can lead to supervisors and managers focusing their time more on meeting targets than providing reflective supervision, which provides time for social workers to reflect on their cases in terms of the emotional impact on them and how such impact could be influencing their judgement and decision making (e.g. Munro 2004). Such a focus on targets and continuous improvement could instil a belief that one's work is never 'good enough', particularly as targets often change or become more demanding. CFSWs also work with some intransigent families, who remain in the system long-term and show little improvement, added to which, case numbers rarely decrease and are more often increasing. Social workers in our study described how this audit culture could reduce their self-esteem and confidence in their skills, because they felt that they did not have the capacity or resources to reduce caseloads and therefore the relentless organisational emphasis on processing cases within unrealistic timescales made them more anxious and pessimistic about their role.

In these circumstances, acknowledgement of successes with families and positive feedback from supervisors and managers was particularly important both for building self-worth, and to manage

setbacks. Supervisors and colleagues helped by listening, reflecting back, providing constructive feedback and encouragement.

... my manager wrote a really nice comment about a report that I'd finished earlier in the week and it was a report that I had to do under a very tight timescale ... so when I, [received the positive comments] it meant a lot and that then keeps me going and bolstered. And positive feedback from the team as well... 017079048040, P13

An important part of attachment theory proposes that individuals develop internal working models of the social world which, based on past experience, predict the reliability of others and the worth of the self (Mikulincer and Shaver 2005). These internal representations can be amended by exposure to alternative repeated experiences, hence the importance of providing positive and constructive feedback. CFSWs could draw upon a mental reserve of positive feedback at times when things were not going so well and reflect on positive feedback to challenge negative thoughts. Being able to draw on a 'positive' reserve was particularly important set against the trend of negative feedback that CFSWs often received from service users, other professionals and supervisors.

I love a bit of praise so if I've had an email from someone saying, you know, that was a good day's work I save it in a little folder then, if one day I'm feeling a bit miserable, I can look at it and think, "Actually, I'm not rubbish because people have said I'm not." 087201140107, p10

Providing practitioners with constructive feedback helped practitioners reflect on and revise judgements they were making and share decision making. This process is similar to the concept of 'goal corrected partnerships', in which other people's goals, feelings and needs are taken into account whilst pursuing one's own goals, feeling and needs (Howe 2011). Supervisors who could identify positive skills and abilities within each person helped practitioners understand their

strengths and also how they contributed to overall team goals. Painting a clear picture of how each CFSW's work fitted into wider organisational and national goals helped CFSWs understand that their contribution was important and that their efforts contributed to a larger coherent system.

... she [supervisor] treats everybody like we are part of a big jigsaw. .. she sees us as different in the team, [as] if each individual member is OK, the strength of individual member is the same, individually [we] bring something to the team [that] the team cannot do, [we] cannot become a team without the individual. 017007006006, p12

Heads of service and team members could also contribute to encouraging colleagues. One CFSW thought there should be more opportunities for teams to acknowledge when things went well. An important function of praise or celebrating accomplishments was to acknowledge progress being made, as this helped CFSWs keep in mind hope and a belief that change was possible. To notice progress in the face of overwhelming caseloads helped keep CFSWs optimistic, motivated and engaged.

Supervisors who provided constructive feedback about both positive and negative aspects of practitioner's work helped practitioners learn from setbacks, safe in the knowledge that they would not be berated for making mistakes and that the focus would be on taking remedial action and learning.

...if you.... need to fail in order to progress, then you will be supported accordingly. 017007006006, P13

She's [supervisor] a very calm person, ... she says, "... OK, so what you're saying is this and have you tried that?" and ..., it's not like there's any judgment, It's all very constructive.

017001001001, p12

It was equally important for CFSWs to hear how practice could be improved. This ability to be open about the need to learn was fostered by trusting relationships between CFSWs and supervisors.

... I went up and said to her [manager] "It's really lovely that you're pleased with my work, but actually it's much better if you tell me what you think I could do better. Because then I can...grow ... if you don't tell me where I've gone wrong or what I could do better next time then I ... won't ever get better. 017078035031, p14

Practice observation and feedback had a powerful influence on CFSWs' confidence about their practice, constructive feedback can play an important role in building confidence and adding to CFSWs internal representations of what 'good' social work practice entails.

... you do need feedback and I think that's the first time I've had feedback in a long time and it ... really, really, it really improved ... my confidence in myself as a social worker. 087198139106, p8

Accepting behaviours, such as acknowledging and praising good practice alongside enabling CFSWs to learn from setbacks, helped CFSWs believe that they were worthwhile and develop a more realistic appraisal of themselves and others. By developing self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses in a safe working environment, without fear of personal judgement, it was possible for CFSWs to integrate feeling both vulnerable and competent. In a profession which relies on problems being brought to the surface, creating safe spaces for CFSWs to raise and examine setbacks without destroying their self-worth is essential for learning and better practice.

3.4 Dimension four: Co-operation – Promoting self-efficacy '*I can work with others to find a solution*'

Promoting self-worth through the dimension of acceptance contributes to self-efficacy and the capacity for co-operation. Working with others to solve problems within a co-operative team culture builds competence and promotes autonomy. Understanding that CFSWs could act autonomously but also depend on others to achieve goals provided a more holistic view of working practices and helped protect individuals from feeling overwhelmed and believe that it was possible to be both vulnerable and competent. It was particularly important for supervisors and colleagues to be available at the beginning of new relationships to establish trust to help practitioners move from dependency towards autonomy but also towards the capacity for supporting others at work. Colleagues and supervisors provided structured and informal opportunities to work together, offering suggestions rather than directions to help facilitate independent but supported practice. CFSWs valued collaborative effort and opportunities to learn from each other, understanding that their thinking and practice improved through sharing ideas with other experienced colleagues.

... people see the role here as being a team effort that we're not working in isolation. ... so if someone brings a referral for a new case we all bring ideas, expertise. 017079048040, p5-6

Hearing and understanding other points of view helped CFSWs transform their thinking and open up new possibilities. Such collaborative discussions helped foster a sense of direction and helped CFSWs try new skills or approaches.

[from]...that discussion... I'll think, "Well, I've been working on this case for weeks and it's not until now that we've come up with where we should be going." I've been going in the wrong direction, ... just having this conversation has enabled me to go "Ooo, maybe I could do that instead." and I find that incredibly useful. 017038025023, p20

By taking the time to model good practice, more experienced colleagues communicated a willingness to work together to solve problems by working cooperatively with the service user as

well. In this example, a CFSW's supervisor received a complaint from a parent and facilitated a meeting between the father and CFSW modelling how to listen.

.. my manager ..., invited me [and the father] to the office and we sat and spoke, we were having a discussion about what he [the father] was feeling and giving the opportunity to say what he wanted to say. And you know, just sitting there talking to somebody, letting him talk and, you know us sitting together, helped us move on. ..And that's because my manager's so good...Another manager would just have taken it as a complaint and just ignored it. 067168105086, p14

CFSWs understood that working in isolation could lead to biased judgements and used colleagues extensively to provide another perspective on cases to help CFSWs confirm or amend their judgements or perceptions.

... I did the unannounced [visit] for that time, [the social worker] was quite concerned that she was being too particular or having too high expectations on the care work. So you know, I said, ... "Do you want me to go out and have a look and I'll tell you what I think?" ... which I did and came back and it was reassuring for her because it confirmed her concerns. 017018013012, p18

Colleagues would regularly cover for each other at times of high workload in the belief that such support would be reciprocated. Knowing that colleagues were available, helped CFSWs feel able to cope with high caseloads.

...when things are tough for you the whole team rallies round and helps you and that's a really nice feeling...So you don't feel that you're drowning. People will kind of prioritise and help you out. There is that feeling of ... even if it's at four thirty on a Friday afternoon when everyone wants to go home, they'll be there helping, so that we all get to get home and not just leaving you on your own. 017062041037, p3

Cooperation was important for supervision as well. CFSWs preferred a more collaborative style of supervision rather than 'command and control'. They wanted to contribute to case discussions and feel heard rather than receive instructions or reprimands. Part of this transformational style of leadership encourages employees to think creatively to find new solutions rather than being passively reliant on centralised or rote decision-making (Bass and Riggio 2006). Being able to think creatively about solutions for cases is an essential part of CFSW.

Researcher what sort of things would you say help you to feel valued at work?

SW ... feedback. Being able to have a voice. ...by being able to discuss the case and whatever you discussed being taken on board. ... be listened to, ... for example, you say, "Well this isn't going anywhere. Right, OK then, so what are we going to do about it?" you know, rather than, "Oh, well, you haven't done this, you haven't done that yet..." 047177116094, p11

Careful communication by supervisors was seen as vital, as CFSWs could easily interpret supervisors' questions to imply that they were not trusted. Supervisors who believed that CFSWs were doing their best tended to enter conversations with positive assumptions rather than negative and would have more productive interactions, unlike this encounter below.

... I put a visit down on the board and one of the ...consultant social workers, she ran down the stairs after me and was ... saying, "What time are you back?" I said, "I'm not coming back." She said, "You'll be finished that visit by about four o'clock." And I said, "I've got two visits. I've just put them up on the board."...She said, "Oh, have you? OK as long as you've," and I was thinking, "What's it got to do with you anyway?" ... things like that sort of frustrate me in the sense that ... I feel like they're trying to sort of say that I'm lazy and trying to, ... pull a fast one. 057131087073, p14

Co-operative relationships with supervisors were valued over a directive style. Such co-operation could be facilitated by supervisors who were able to share influence and control and negotiate resolutions to problems.

Supervisors and colleagues who promoted cooperation understood that individuals need to feel effective and autonomous and encouraged team members to make their own decisions, whilst still taking on board the thoughts and advice of others. Working with others offered new perspectives and made practice more innovative and creative. Taking a co-operative approach helped practitioners to understand and believe that their views mattered, that they could be proactive and make choices and that it was possible to achieve things both on their own *and* with others.

3.5 Dimension five: Team membership - Promoting team belonging, '*I am valued and I belong*'

This dimension highlighted team belonging and recognising the strength that the team brought to individual practice. Team membership was explicitly created structurally through the organisational hierarchy, with formally outlined duties and responsibilities, and often reinforced practically, through team names and team meetings. Implicit psychological membership was created through teams establishing expectations and norms for team members' behaviour. In this emotionally demanding occupation, one implicit expectation for team members was to protect each other. It was very important that CFSWs felt cared about and one way of achieving this was to show concern for each other's safety and welfare.

CFSWs made regular and frequent contact with each other to help combat feelings of isolation which came with a job that was uncertain, sometimes dangerous and away from the office.

And in the evening, ... there are various appointments..., that we kind of say ...at the morning meeting, "It's OK, I'll be working late, when I finish I will call... the manager to say, "OK I'm safe, I'm home." ... that is part of what we do...to make sure that everybody is OK. 017007006006, p5-6

Social occasions and the provision of food provided an important ritual in getting team members together more informally to get to know each other away from the immediate stresses of the job and let off steam.

... we do go for lunch together, ... and, ... we tend to have a bit of a laugh and a joke at the table...I think, in this job, it's really important. When some horrible things happen you need to be able to laugh, so when you get home you're not so crotchety, wound up.... 0872111461, p5

However, not everyone felt able or wanted to socialise outside work, and not taking part could set individuals apart from the team and potentially miss out on opportunities for team support. Supervisors who ensured that there were opportunities for informal gatherings in work time (e.g. breaks or lunchtimes) could ensure that team members with caring responsibilities did not miss out on such opportunities for informal support. Another opportunity for creating team membership was to undertake reflective group supervision where team members learned from each other and got to know what cases colleagues were dealing with.

CFSWs were generally very positive about the level of support they experienced in their teams, however, when teams and supervisors had been changing very frequently, without leadership and stability, under heavy caseloads, team membership could break down as individuals focused inwards, protecting themselves.

... when we were a solid team, we would support each other, we'd look out for each other. That's almost disappeared because everybody's quite insular because you're so stressed and so downtrodden with your work and what's being asked of you...that you don't have time to look up from your desks to see how everybody else is. 047117075064, p4

Cliques were reported by CFSWs in contexts where there had been high turnover in the team for some time, poor supervision or temporary supervision arrangements. Cliques were closed to new arrivals making team working and learning difficult. This example came from a CFSW remembering when she was a student on placement.

[CFSWs would say]... "You're not part of this team," ..., "just do what I've asked you to do and that's it." ... The team ...was... cliques of people and some people didn't get on with others and all whispers behind their back and it was, you know, "You're a student here, don't get yourself involved in all that, just get your head down ... and get your time." And that was very difficult because, actually, I was part of a team and I did have people I talked to...017001001001, p6

Close attachments were often formed with colleagues or supervisors and CFSWs experienced a sense of loss when team members left. Such losses came with a mourning period which could disrupt the focus on work activity as CFSWs adapted to the loss of meaningful work relationships and forging new team relationships. Sensitive supervisors understand that their role is important to the team for emotional management. Moves and team changes needed to be handled sensitively, with the expectation that there could be strong emotional reactions to the loss of their secure base. In the example below, the supervisor had not given thought to how news of her leaving would be received by her team.

...she [supervisor] just wandered over and said, "By the way I'm leaving." ... and a couple of people burst into tears... 0872111461, p9

Supervisors and managers played an important role in setting the team culture, especially the extent to which teams felt they worked collaboratively with supervisors and managers. In teams where supervisors or managers took a more controlling approach, team members tended to be more demoralised and would mentally split the manager off from the team, no longer trusting them.

Such splitting can lead to teams becoming less engaged in organisational goals and managers in reaction becoming more controlling, thus creating a negative spiral.

Team membership was important for perceiving the team as a Secure Base, because the work is organised as a collaborative effort, therefore each CFSW needs to believe that they are included and valued as part of the team but not to the exclusion of other identities that they hold. Providing a Secure Base for CFSWs helps them remain cognitively open and flexible to working in new ways with new people sensitively, confidently and cooperatively.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Developing the team as a Secure Base

Stress and burnout are significant concerns in CFSW (McFadden et al 2014), for social worker welfare and disruption in service provision that staff sickness absence and turnover cause. Social support helps CFSWs manage their emotions at work and we examined how social support made a difference to social workers feeling safe and achieving emotional equilibrium to enable cognitive engagement with work. We adapted Schofield and Beek's (2014) multi-dimensional attachment model (the Secure Base) to explain emotional management and its influence on practice in the stressful occupation of child and family social work.

Our findings suggest that socio-affective needs (our need for protection and care) are met to a large degree in CFSW by sharing emotional experiences with colleagues and that cognitive reframing (our need to manage feelings) was reported to be more reliably achieved through reflective supervision. According to Rimé (2009), the most effective form of social sharing to encourage emotional recovery is a combination of addressing socio-affective needs, usually soon after the event alongside cognitive reframing work taking place later. If socio-affective needs are met, CFSWs feel safe and open to cognitively exploring ideas and become resilient in the face of the emotional demands of CFSW. For CFSWs to undertake good practice, they need help and

support to understand and process negative feelings such as anxiety, anger and sadness. Without emotional support in place, social work practice and engagement with children and families is likely to suffer. Our findings support previous work indicating the importance of both formal and informal social support (Ruch et al 2007, Sanchez –Mareno 2015), however our findings also indicate that it is supervisors who have a noticeable influence on team beliefs about availability of support.

The Secure Base model dimensions provide a structured way to think about how such emotional support is provided by supervisors and team members (summarised in Appendix A). Being available, sensitive and non-judgmental creates a mental representation that colleagues and supervisors can be trusted, a key precursor to working together to solve problems and jointly create order out of confusion. Trust is a vital foundation underpinning collaborative effort to achieve the complex cognitive tasks of judgement and decision making. Reflective supervision offered CFSWs time to work through their feelings in a safe space and examine their thinking and explore case issues. Many CFSWs experienced controlling and authoritarian supervision which focused on monitoring key aspects of their work such as families visited within time and forms completed rather than the interests of children and families. Under authoritarian supervision, CFSWs felt self-doubt, anxiety, frustration and resentment and took steps to protect themselves which made them less available to support colleagues. CFSWs felt more autonomous and effective when they worked with supportive supervisors. Without undertaking cognitive reframing possible during reflective supervision, the affiliative benefits from receiving empathy are likely to be short term and the negative effects of emotional events more enduring. The minimal time available to social workers for reflective supervision reported in this study has been reported elsewhere (McFadden et al 2014), with negative effects on social worker burnout.

4.2 Limitations and considerations for future research

We sampled from a population of UK child and family social workers. Further research to examine whether the Secure Base Model would be relevant to social workers in other fields (e.g. mental health, adult social care) and in other countries would be useful to understand whether the Team as Secure Base model translates to other emotionally demanding contexts. In this qualitative study we are unable to generalise whether Secure Base Teams are effective in reducing burnout or stress. Further research examining whether the Team as Secure Base model can be measured and running an evaluation of the effectiveness of the model in reducing burnout or stress would be helpful next steps.

4.3 Implications for practice

The psychological benefits of providing a secure base in teams were that CFSWs believed that support and protection were available, the world and emotions could be managed and that their actions in the world would be effective. These internalised beliefs were likely to lead to confident practitioners who were able to learn from mistakes, work autonomously and also co-operatively with others, including service users. Practitioners without a secure base doubted what they were doing, worried about taking action, were indecisive, tried to get others to make decisions, and blamed others when mistakes were made. Unsupported practitioners' found it difficult to consider service user or colleague needs, as they were emotionally preoccupied with anxiety and fear about unresolved issues at the interface of self and work. Practitioners' state of mind affected their practice. Without a secure base to help social workers manage their emotions, research on attachment style shows that insecure attachment styles are associated with burnout and stress which is mediated by negative perceptions of team cohesion (Ronen and Mikulincer 2009). Further research on the relationships between secure base teams and burnout would be helpful. It would also be useful to examine whether the Team as Secure Base model is relevant to other emotionally demanding occupations such as teaching, nursing or police work, as theory suggests the model should also be effective in other emotionally demanding contexts.

Our findings suggest that it is particularly important for supervisors and managers to create the foundations of a secure base to model good practice but also to take responsibility of leadership for their teams in the same way that parents do for their children. Team members seek a secure base for protection and comfort from more experienced colleagues, such as supervisors and managers. Even though supervisors and managers also have performance management responsibilities, these should not detract from providing for socio-affective needs of colleagues. It should be possible to strike a balance between these duties similar to caregivers who help children achieve better outcomes when they adopt an authoritative style of caregiving rather than an authoritarian or permissive style (Darling and Steinberg 1993). In the management literature, there are some similar constructs included in Transformational Leadership style (Bass & Riggio, 2006) such as 'individualised consideration' or 'Situational Leadership' where leaders adjust their leadership style to the structural and socio-emotional needs of the employee (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996). Both these leadership styles are associated with lower employee stress (Skakon et al 2010).

From this study, some initial recommendations for practice are proposed below:

- Organisational leaders influence the emotional climate of their workplaces. Leaders, as well as direct line managers, would benefit from learning about how the emotional demands of teams can negatively affect social work practice if these emotional demands are not managed well.
- Through training, direct line supervisors and managers could benefit from learning about the importance of socio-affective needs and cognitive reframing for promoting resilience and improving practice.

This study concludes that the Team as a Secure Base model provides a helpful framework for understanding how child and family social work teams can best support staff to deliver their full potential in this challenging area of practice.

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Appendix A. Adapted Secure Base model (Schofield and Beek 2005) for developing teams –
dimensions description

Socio-affective need met (SA) Cognitive work (CW)	Availability	Sensitivity	Acceptance	Co-operation	Team membership
CFSW Thinking	People are there for me (SA)	My feelings are manageable (SA)	I don't always have to be strong, it's ok to be vulnerable (SA)	I can work with others to find a solution (SA)	I am valued and I value the team (SA)
	I am safe (SA)	I am known and understood (SA)	I am not judged (SA)	My views matter (SA)	I belong to the team and to the organisation (SA)
	I can trust supervisor and colleagues (SA)	I have insight into my own mind and the minds of others (CW)	I am accepted and valued for who I am (SA)	I can make choices, decisions and achieve things on my own	I have rights and responsibilities as a member of the team
	I feel confident to ask supervisor/colleagues questions (CW)		I accept and value myself (SA)	I can seek support from others (SA)	I can become a member of other teams/ groups (SA)
			I accept and value others (SA)		I can contribute to the team culture (SA)
			I can recover and learn from mistakes (CW)		
CFSW behaviour	Curious, open to ideas and learning (CW)	Reflects on own thoughts and behaviours and those of others (CW)	Approaches work with confidence. Gains satisfaction from work.	Cooperates and negotiates (CW)	Incorporates the team as part of work identity
	Uses supervisor, colleagues when stressed	Demonstrates empathy (CW)	Copes with failures and disappointments (CW)	Can also work autonomously (but is not wholly self-reliant) (CW)	Shows commitment to inclusive, cooperative and constructive team culture (CW)
		Can identify own and others feelings (CW)	Has realistic but positive appraisal of self (CW)	Work tends to be more proactive than reactive (CW)	Understands that teams change and is inclusive to new members of the team (CW)
		Can regulate own and others' emotions (CW)	Has realistic but positive appraisal of others (CW)		
	Availability	Sensitivity	Acceptance	Co-operation	Team membership
Supervisor Thinking	Has a focus on team needs	What are colleagues feeling and thinking?	Understands everyone's need for self-esteem	Accepts and values everyone's need to be effective	Values team membership

				and autonomous	
	Keeps the team in mind, even when apart	How do colleagues' emotions and thoughts affect me?	Sees colleagues in the round – strengths and weaknesses	Trusts in colleagues potential to make their own decisions and work autonomously and with others	Has flexible and permeable team boundaries to help include new members
	Feels important to team well-being	Why are colleagues behaving in this way?	Believes that colleagues are doing their best and their potential for good	Values learning through experience but also through joint reflection on experience	Understands it is normal for team membership to change
		Thinks about colleagues in wider context (their family life, life events, work events)	Cares about colleague achievements/successes and personal development opportunities		
Supervisor behaviour	Organises work with availability in mind – physically, virtually, emotionally, mentally	Observes and listens to colleagues closely	Promotes positive achievements	Promotes learning opportunities (informal, formal, observation, shadowing, reflection)	Offers full inclusion to new members e.g. team rituals
	Signals availability through: communicating physical and virtual availability, being approachable; open and honest communication	Responds with empathy, reassurance and flexibility	Puts in place resources, systems to help colleagues succeed including personal development opportunities formally and informally.	Provides clear instructions when necessary, but is not intrusive	Promotes colleagues understanding and acceptance of team norms and values
	Uses availability to reduce stress and anxiety in colleagues e.g. responding reliably and consistently to colleagues	Once emotions have stabilised, provides colleagues with alternative ways of thinking about problems	Tackles problems which colleagues raise or that have been observed and facilitates learning and repair	Offers choice, allows colleagues to take some risk/s	Helps colleagues manage organisational change

Appendix B Interview schedule

Introduction and consent

The team and physical work environment

Could you describe the environment/workspace where you usually work for me (Prompts: How does the team use the space? Are there areas to meet informally or chat?)

Describe the range of locations where you spend your working day

What does it feel like to work in your team?

How often does the team meet together as a whole group? (Prompts: What is the atmosphere like during these meetings? How else do team members get together, whether formally or informally?)

Do staff members talk about their feelings towards the work with each other?

Tell me about how team members work together?

What do you think the relationship is like between the team and the manager?

Do you feel supported by your team? (Prompts: How do they support you? Is this team more or less supportive than others you have worked in?)

How do you think your team is perceived within your wider organisation?

How do you think your team is perceived by other agencies?

Your experiences at work

Choose a typical day from last week. Talk me through the main activities of the working day

What aspects of your role are emotionally rewarding for you?

In your experience, what are the emotional challenges of working with this service user group for you?

If you feel emotionally overwhelmed at work what do you do/what makes you feel better?

(Prompts: Can you give an example (if not covered by the example given in the previous question),

If you feel emotionally overwhelmed at work how does your organisation support (or fail to support) you to manage this experience?)

Have you had any training that has supported you to manage the emotional aspects of your role?

Are there any aspects of your role which are unclear or that you find confusing?

Wider Organisation

What kinds of things help you feel valued at work?

Do you feel that management understands the day-to-day challenges of your role?

Do you feel that the wider organisation understands the day-to-day challenges of your role?

Supervision

Tell me about your supervision arrangements

What happens in a typical supervision session?

How do the emotional aspects of your role get discussed?

How do your feelings about your cases get aired? (Prompts: How does supervision affect the management of your cases?)

How often do you have your supervision?

How would you describe the relationship between you and your supervisor?

Wrap-up questions/debrief

The team as a secure base: promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work

Conflicts of interest - None

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The team as a secure base: promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work

Highlights

- Emotion regulation is important for social work practice
- Supervisors and teams provide essential social support to help regulate emotions
- The five dimensions of our Secure Base model help emotion regulation but also build self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Secure base team: availability, sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation, membership

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