



Child and Family Solutions

a Resolutions Approach
Child Protection Consultancy

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Keeping Children Safe in their families

Child and Family Solutions specialises in risk reduction in child protection cases where abuse is denied by parents or carers. We provide expert opinion and assessment to the Court and Statutory Authorities, informed by the 'Resolutions' approach to risk reduction.

- Assessment and delivery of *Resolutions* risk reduction programmes.
- Risk reduction work with children and families where parental denial is an issue.
- Assessment of suitability for intervention in family proceedings where there are serious concerns about the future safety of children.
- A systemic approach to risk reduction work with children and families, combining experience gained within both Social Work and Family Therapy practice.
- Work with adults, children, parents, carers, members of extended family and friends as appropriate, in an individual or group context.
- Finding ways of working systemically with children and families within statutory and legal frameworks towards safe rehabilitation of children to their families.
- Individual techniques within the *Resolutions* approach can be adapted to many child protection situations.

The Principal of Child and Family Solutions, **Margaret Hiles M.Sc., Dip. SW., CQSW, Cert Man. Org.**, is a UKCP Registered Systemic Family Psychotherapist and a Member of the Association for Family Therapy, with over 20 years' experience of working with children and their families in a child protection context, and a background in Child Protection Social Work.

The practice continues an association begun in 1998 with Susie Essex, Consultant Family Therapist. Susie was principal co-creator of the 'Resolutions' approach and provides regular consultancy with occasional co-working.

A different approach to denied child abuse

Alleged perpetrators of abuse are not always able or willing to come to terms with their culpability, even where a Finding of Fact has been made by the Court to acknowledge that the abuse has happened.

The 'Resolutions' approach to risk reduction is not based upon admission of culpability, and does not seek to elicit one. Nobody is expected to 'own up', although this is a possibility as the programme of work progresses and family members discuss the concerns and understand them better.

The child's safety is at all times central and paramount. The work looks forward to their future safety, rather than backward to discussions of parental culpability. Parents/carers and members of their support network are expected to understand and accept the

concerns of professionals, even if they do not agree with them, and must be willing to demonstrate their commitment to engage with the programme.

A 'Resolutions' risk reduction viability assessment

Risk reduction work commences with an assessment to determine whether a programme of work based upon the Resolutions approach would be appropriate for the circumstances of the case. Our assessment considers the prospects for rehabilitation of the child to its parents or carers in such a way as to ensure future safety.

The assessment consists of a review of papers supplied, followed by a series of meetings with professionals and family members in whatever groupings are necessary to form an opinion. Finally, the assessment itself is presented in the form of a report. As such, it may form the basis for a proposal for further work with the family.

Usually, five weeks are required to complete the assessment from the date instructions are received. Experience has shown that this period provides the best time frame for the meetings and discussions that will provide a soundly-based opinion.

Risk Reduction Programmes

A risk reduction programme based upon the 'Resolutions' approach has a clear goal, that of rehabilitating children safely to their families. Often, the work is conducted in the context of legal proceedings that provide a 'badge of seriousness' for the parents. Work proceeds to an agreed timetable, usually under endorsement by the Court.

Work progresses in stages and is subject to review, with successful completion of each stage being required for progression to the next. Associated with this is the possibility of progressively greater contact between parents/carers and their children. Key professionals are encouraged to participate at every stage.

The great majority of sessions take place in familiar surroundings: the homes of parents, grandparents and other members of the child's support network. There may be one or two sessions where everyone is together, but most sessions will focus on smaller groupings or even individuals, to explore specific needs within the programme.

'Safer' Carers

Risk reduction work seeks to create a context for future safety around the child where parents/carers can demonstrate that they are taking the safety of the child seriously, and with the help of their support network are able to become 'safer' carers.

In some families it is possible to identify one or other of the parents as the 'safer carer' who will assume the role of primary carer for the child, and who is responsible for the child's safety and well-being. The primary carer is surrounded by a robust network of safe adults and professionals to provide help and support whenever it is needed.

Our experience has shown that it is nevertheless quite possible to work with families where neither parent can be excluded from culpability, providing that:

- parents/carers are willing to acknowledge the concerns that others, in particular professionals, have about the safety of the child
- there is openness, and a willingness to engage with professionals over an extended term
- parents/carers are prepared to examine in some depth the way they care for their children, and be prepared to sustain change if necessary
- the 'Resolutions' assessment is able to identify safe adults among the child's family and friends who will be able to monitor the care given to the child, and who will be prepared to intervene to ensure the child's safety
- predisposing factors such as e.g. a history of violence, drug or alcohol abuse or mental health difficulties do not outweigh other positive considerations

Further Information

More information about Child and Family Solutions, the 'Resolutions' approach to risk reduction, and some of the techniques we use, are available at www.childandfamily.co.uk