



## Protecting and Connecting : Restoring Social Work in Child Protection

IASW Children and Families SIG

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Mark Twain defined an expert as “an ordinary fellow from another town”



# Commissioning 'Experts'

- ▶ So, in every case we must consider the reasons behind the request for an expert's report. Why is this additional evidence necessary? How will it add to the information the court already has? Is there not already an expert in the case who can provide that information – the social worker or the children's guardian?
- ▶ **Social workers are experts.** In just the same way, I might add, CAFCASS officers are experts. In every care case we have at least two experts – a social worker and a guardian – yet we have grown up with a culture of believing that they are not really experts and that we therefore need experts with a capital E. The plain fact is that much of the time we do not.
- ▶ One of the problems is that in recent years too many social workers have come to feel undervalued, disempowered and de-skilled.

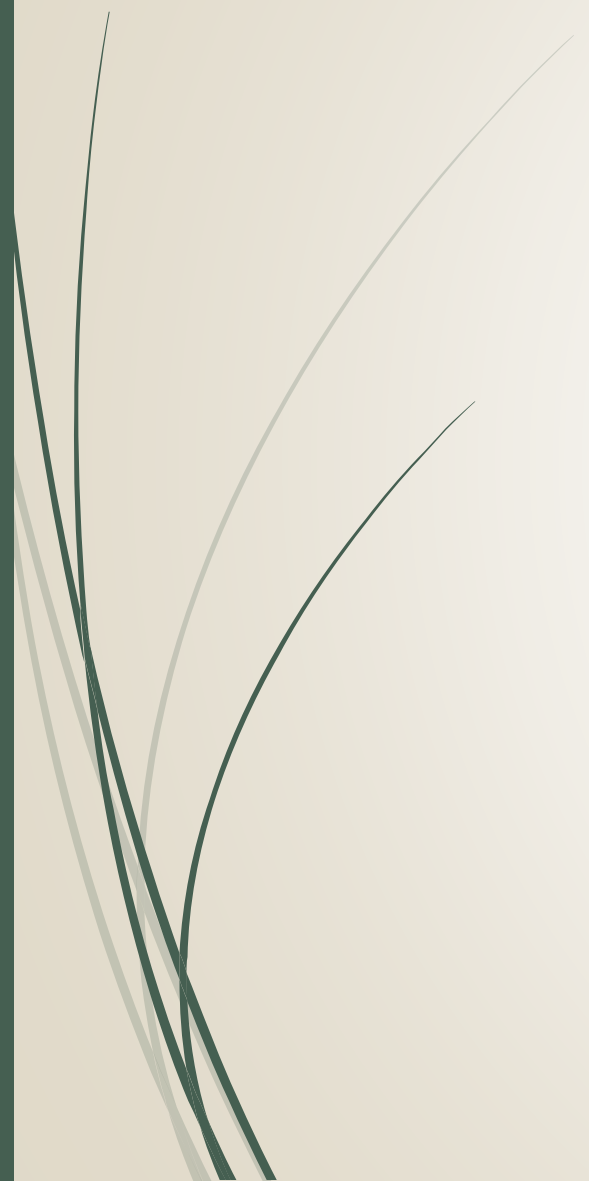
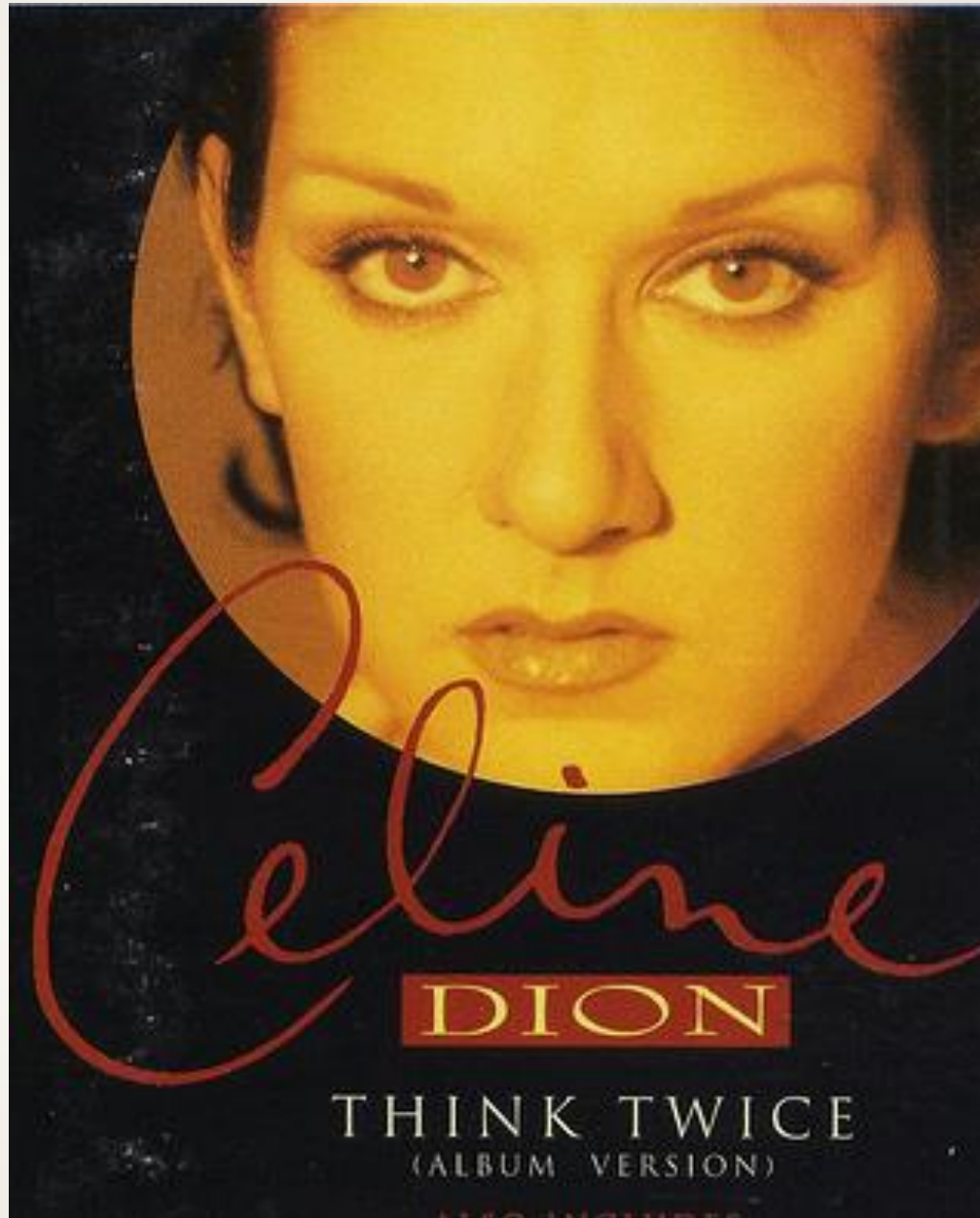
(Sir James Mumby, View from the President's Chambers, 2013)

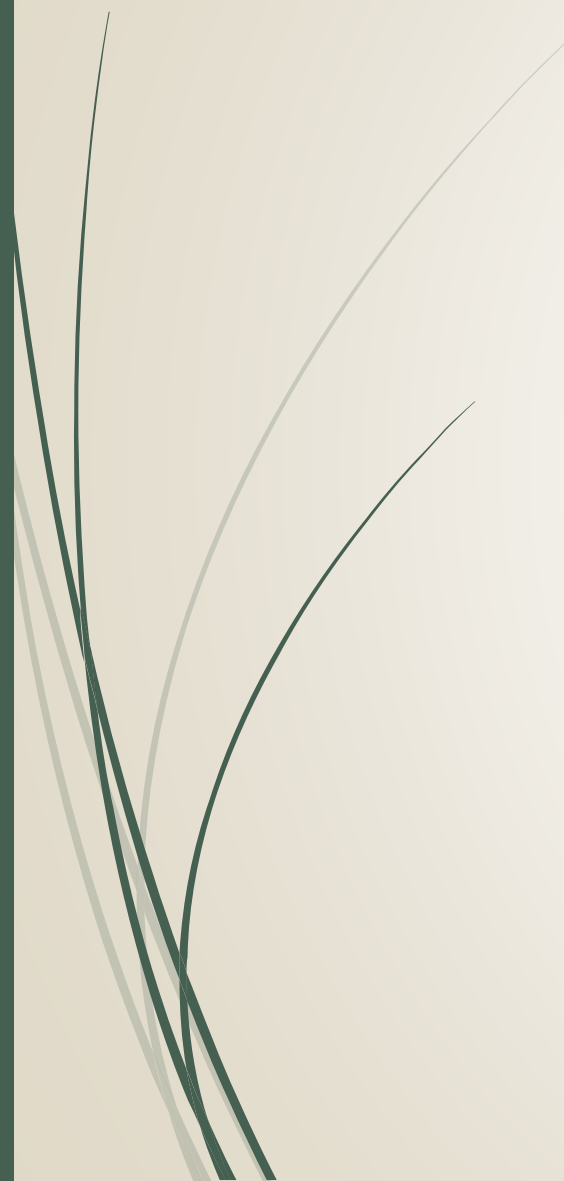
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- ▶ 1990s research study –286 childcare referrals made to three SW teams over a 3 mth period. Cases tracked over 12 months. 40% of cases where the children were considered at risk / acute need, SWs performed a case management role only. Direct work undertaken by family support / psychology and other services. Other 60% SWs did some direct work usually alongside other services (Ferguson and O'Reilly, 2001)
  - ▶ SW acted as case manager while various family support and/or other 'therapeutic' professionals did the intensive work. The narrowing of SW to assessment and then 'signposting' rather than direct delivery of service is now common. (Harry Ferguson, 2011)



# Resulting Issues


- Reduces direct work and relational work
- Children and families meeting more people
- Making decisions based on other's professional opinions and assessments when we are the child protection experts
- Becoming more and more administrative
- Relationships are restorative – protective
- Cycle – undermining our profession









# What is Shame?

- A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour
  - Self punishing action
  - Feeling / perception of having done something wrong
- 





When we experience shame, we feel disconnected and desperate for worthiness. Full of shame or the fear of shame, we are more likely to engage in self-destructive behaviors and to attack or shame others. In fact, shame is related to violence, aggression, depression, addiction, eating disorders, and bullying.




"Shame is the most powerful, master emotion. It's the fear that we're not good enough."


BRENE BROWN

Brene Brown quotes:

Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.



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- Social workers operate within a complex environment
  - Failure to live up to expectations can lead to negative self-judgements or negative judgements from others, a sense of inadequacy and not feeling 'good enough'.
  - The intense experience of believing one is inherently inadequate may lead to feelings of incompetence, inferiority, and powerlessness (Andrews et al., 2002; Ferguson et al., 1999).
  - Some may become submissive and compliant in an attempt to regain acceptance (Gilbert, 2000; Hartling et al., 2000; Tracy & Robins, 2007), while others may attempt to distance themselves from the source of shame by blaming other people (Stuewig et al., 2010).
  - Overall, shame is considered to be linked to a motivation to deny, hide, or escape the shame inducing situation (Tangney et al. 2007).

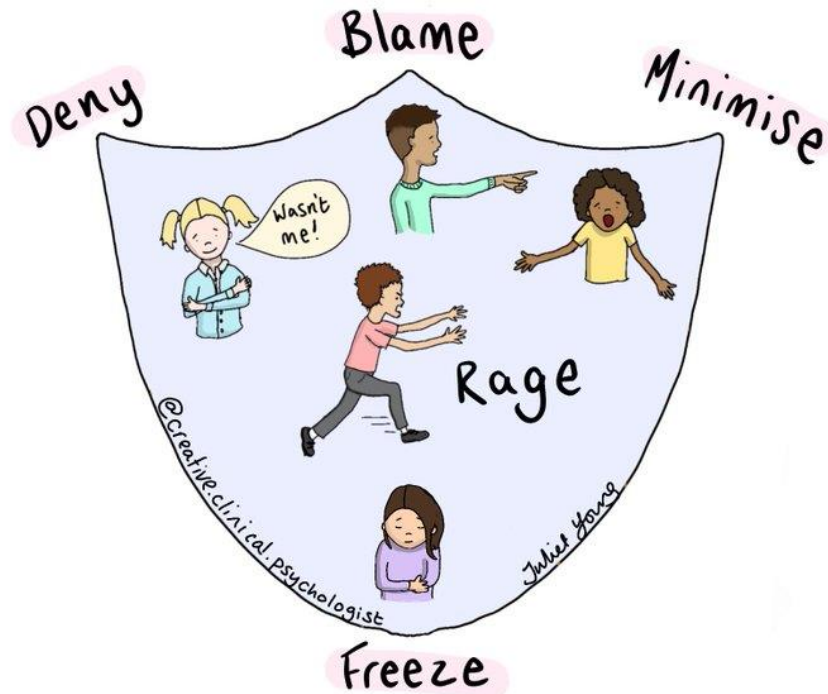
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- ▶ social workers may feel that the demands placed upon them, personally, organisationally, and professionally, compete and conflict (Munro, 2011a).
  - ▶ social worker shame can be seen as a reaction to a **threat** to the social worker's sense of personal or professional identity.
  - ▶ Tangney et al. (1998) in a study involving 229 individuals using a mixed methods approach - Individuals who felt they had not lived up to their own standards, or those of others, tended to experience the self-condemnation of shame (Tangney et al. Study 1998)

Matthew Gibson, 2014

# The Shield of Shame

(adapted from Golding and Hughes, 2012)

Shame can be such a painful emotion to feel that we often respond in ways that end pushing people away (at a time when connection is really needed)





# Reflective Spaces

- “It can make the unbearable bearable” (social worker)
- 100% traumatised population
- Traumatized systems
- We need to have high levels of emotional intelligence, reflective functioning, resilience
- Ruch calls ‘emotionally informed thinking spaces’
- Covid-19 – diminished some of these – back to back meetings, home/car reflection / discussion
- Helps us make links between what we observe, experience and feel

## Pick a word to describe Social Workers

Compassionate

Helper

Givers

Holding hope

Agents

Tenacious

Supporting

Hopeful

Passionate

Reflectors

Change facilitators

Advocates

Committed

Courageous

Relational

Nuanced

Advocate

Empaths

Strong

Humanitarian

Caring

Dynamic

Resilient

Disruptors

Interested