

Some foundations of practice relevant research for child wellbeing and protection

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Launch of the Stirling Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection

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Why the focus on child wellbeing and protection?



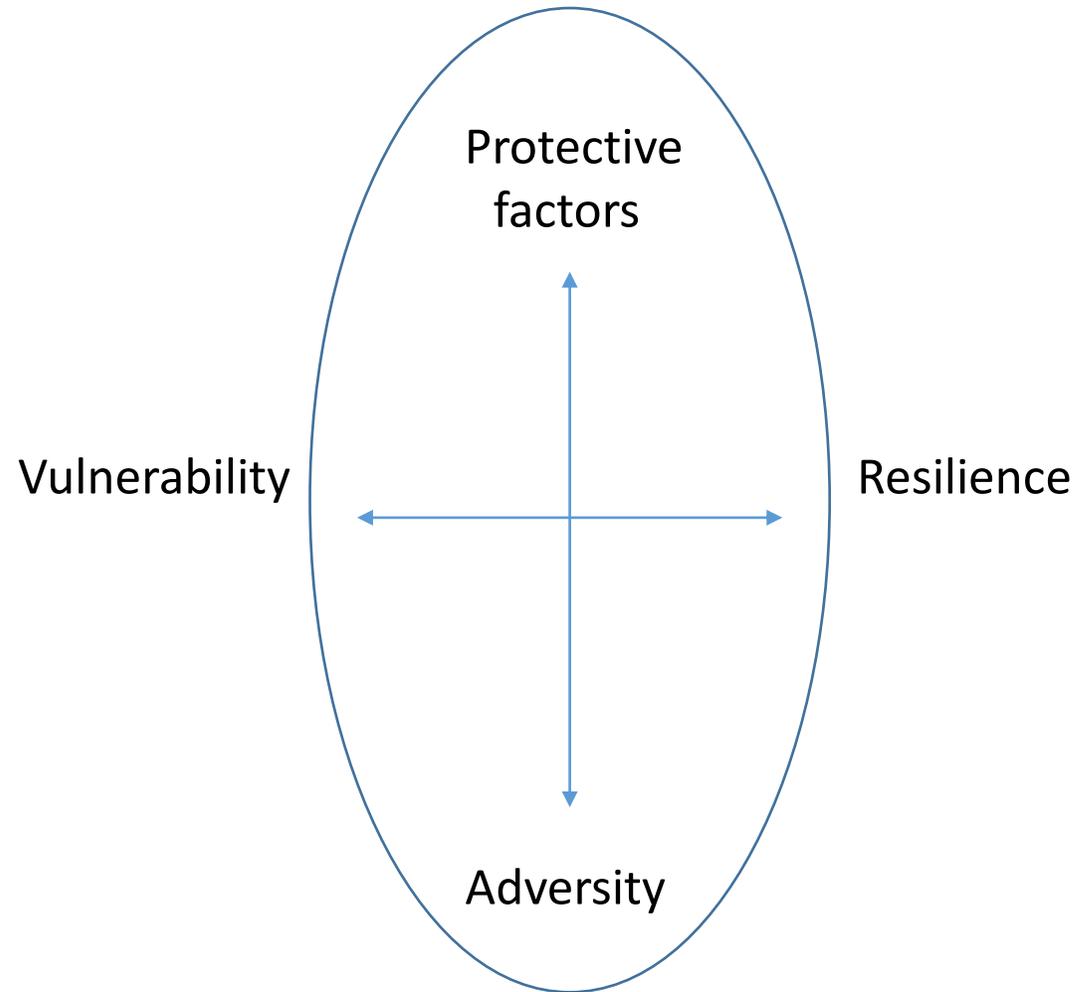
Are most children happy and healthy? Yes, but...

- **Subjective wellbeing:** children in England ranked 9th out of 11 countries. In other UK countries (Scotland and Wales) children are not faring much better (Children's Society, 2014)
- **Poverty:** over past 25 years between 1:4 and 1:3 children in the UK are living in poverty (Bywaters et al 2016). Association between poverty and poor child health, including child death (Wolfe et al 2014)
- **Poverty and maltreatment:** strong association between socio-economic circumstances and the chance of children experiencing maltreatment (Bywaters et al 2016)
- **Child maltreatment:** a public health problem - long term impact on mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, risky sexual behaviour, obesity, criminality (Gilbert et al, 2009).

What helps children and families be resilient?

(Daniel et al, 2010)

Protective factors in the child's environment act as a buffer to the negative effects of adverse experiences



Adversity is the experience of life events and circumstances which may combine to threaten or challenge healthy development

Child maltreatment: response and research?

- 1 in 200 children are named on a child protection register in the UK (Jutte et al 2014) the rate is going up in 3 of the 4 UK nations (Jutte et al 2015).
- Neglect the most common reason for a child protection plan/register
- On-line/off-line abuse
- Multiple maltreatment/ polyvictimisation common (Finkelhor 2008)

“Child sexual abuse will now be prioritised as a national threat, like serious and organised crime ” ... (David Cameron, press release Prime Minister’s Office, March 2015).

 *the need for rigorous, holistic and compassionate responses and research*

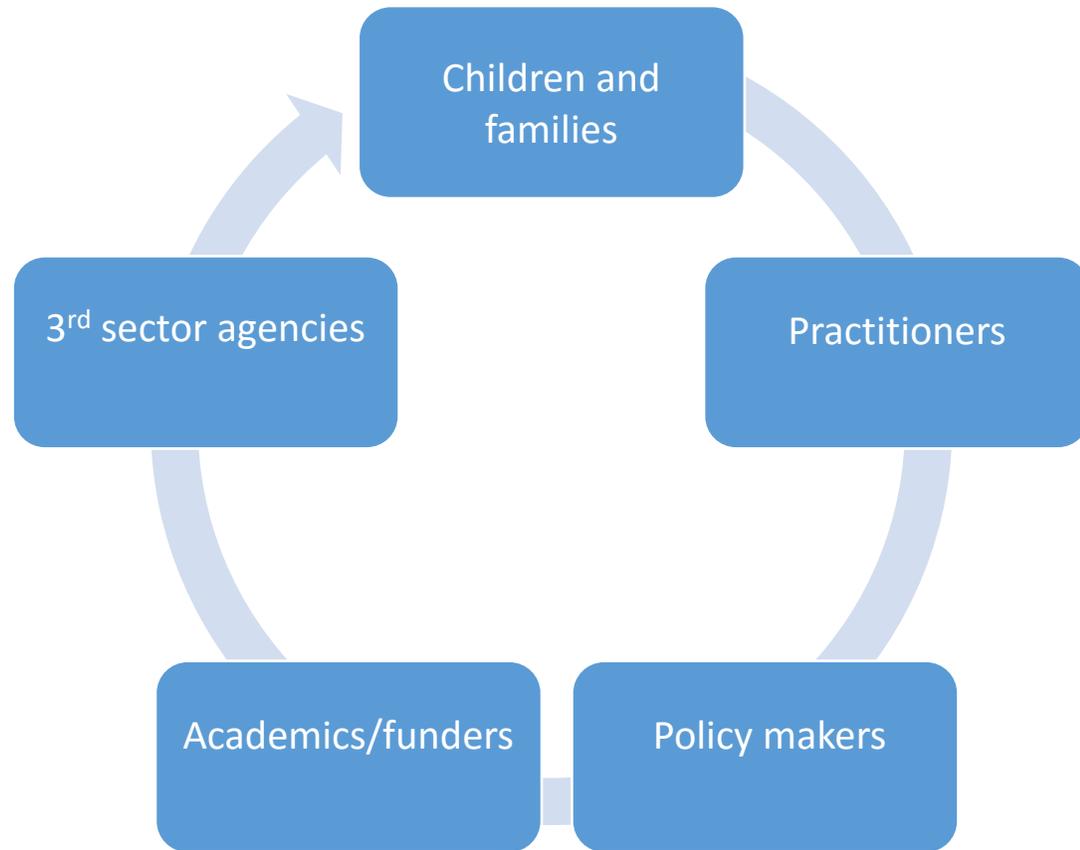
Applied research: real world concerns

- Congruence between research and practice (co-production with practitioners, partnerships)
- Inter-play between teaching and research (access to research)
- Understanding children in context (children's participation)
- Understanding families in context (family narratives)
- Dialogue with policy and guidance, and Government



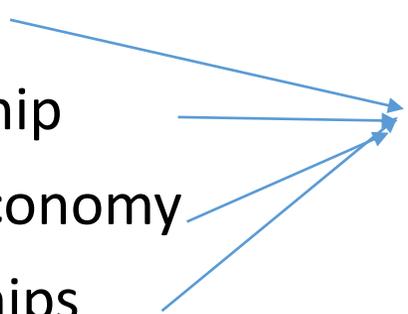
only possible through good relationships

Research, relationships and GIRFEC



Ways of thinking about children
holistically

Transactional ecological perspective (Cicchetti and Valentino 2006; Brandon et al 2008)

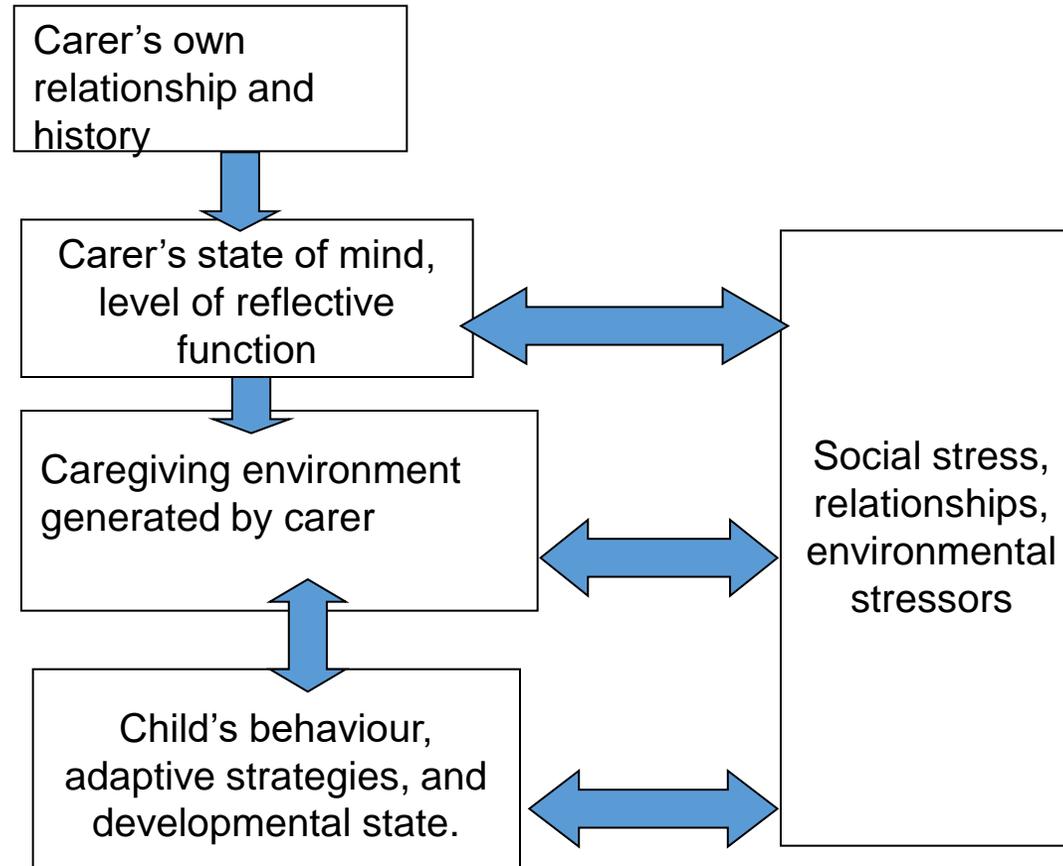
- Human development needs to be understood **ecologically** (adapting Bronfenbrenner 1979). Parents and children influenced by wide range of factors:
 - genes
 - parent-child relationship
 - material well being/economy
 - wider social relationships

influence the ability to cope with stress
- Human development as a **dynamic** process. The biopsychosocial outcome of each stage of development continuously interacts with the current ecological environment to forge the next biopsychosocial outcome
- Model of complex and **reciprocal dynamic interactions**

Child development

- An ecological-transactional perspective views child development as a progressive sequence of age-and-stage appropriate tasks in which successful resolution of tasks at each developmental level must be coordinated and integrated with the environment, as well as with subsequently emerging issues across the lifespan. These tasks include the development of emotion regulation, the formation of attachment relationships, the development of an autonomous self, symbolic development, moral development, the formation of peer relationships, adaptation to school, and personality organisation... Poor resolution of stage-salient issues may contribute to maladjustment over time as prior history influences selection, engagement and interpretation of subsequent experience... (Cicchetti and Valentino 2006 p143)

Ecological transactional perspective (from Brandon, Howe, Black and Dodsworth 2002)



The quality of the child's attachment

- is affected by the quality of the relationship with caregivers – the quality of care provided is the product of parents' own developmental history, interactional journey
- If parents are insensitive and psychologically unavailable when children experience distress and emotional dysregulation, there is a risk of setting in motion a train of developmental setbacks
- The feeling of abandonment this engenders in young children adds to their arousal and distress – in turn putting their parent under more stress
- Children's experiences travel with them in their developmental trajectory

Putting this together to
understand children through
research....

Dynamics for contextualising information about children's lives in research

- Policy development and its implementation into practice
- Seeing children within their family and society
- Children's voices are central

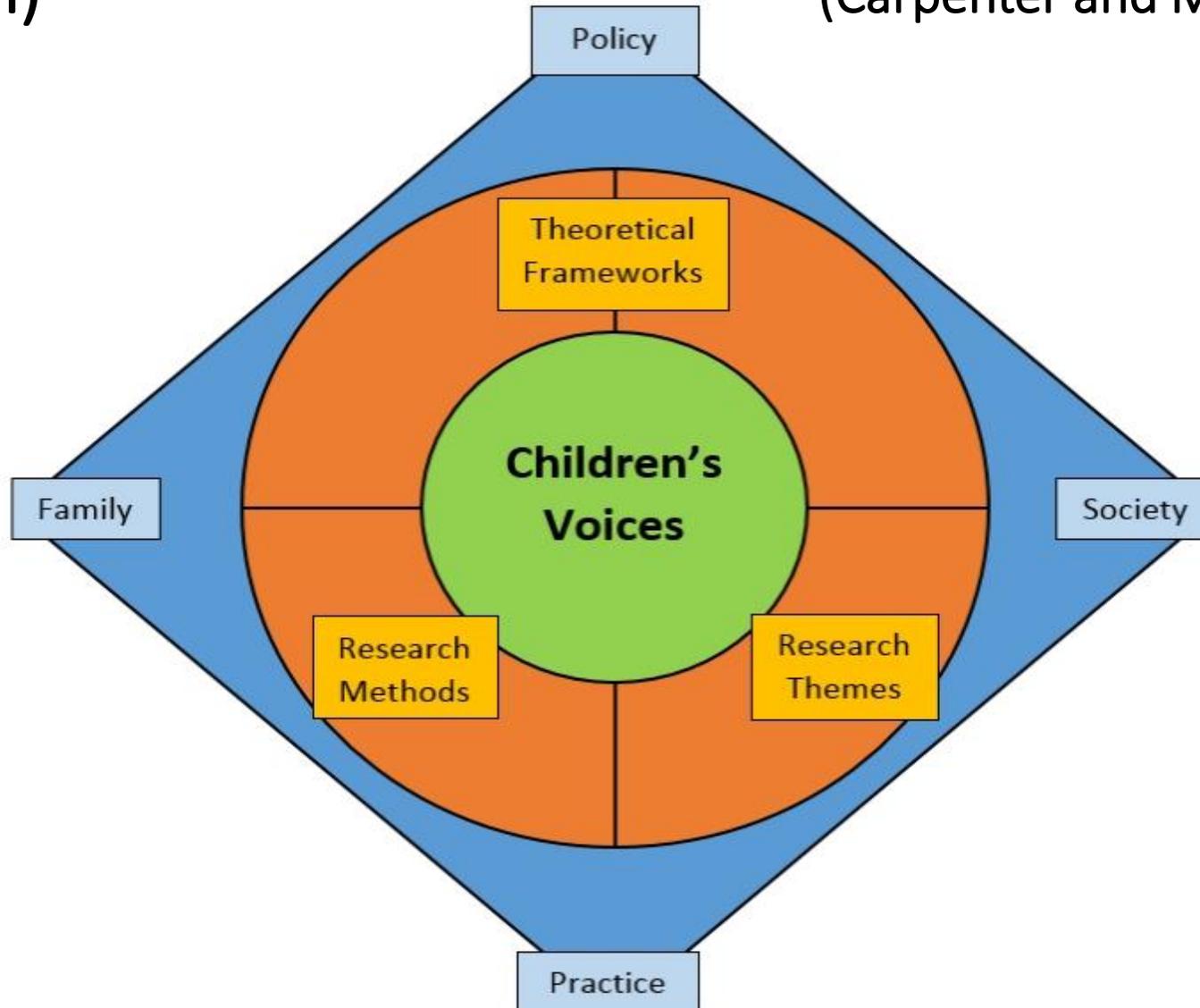
Three domains to carry out/critically evaluate research

- theoretical frameworks
- research methodologies that facilitate children's participation
- research themes and topics



What to take into account in empirical studies (of disabled children)

(Carpenter and McConkey 2012)



Conclusions

The centre already has good foundations:

- conceptually, understanding the whole child not just the maltreated part or only seriously maltreated children
- Congruence, between the worlds of research, practice and policy
- All set to be rigorous, compassionate and to make a real difference for children

Good luck!!

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