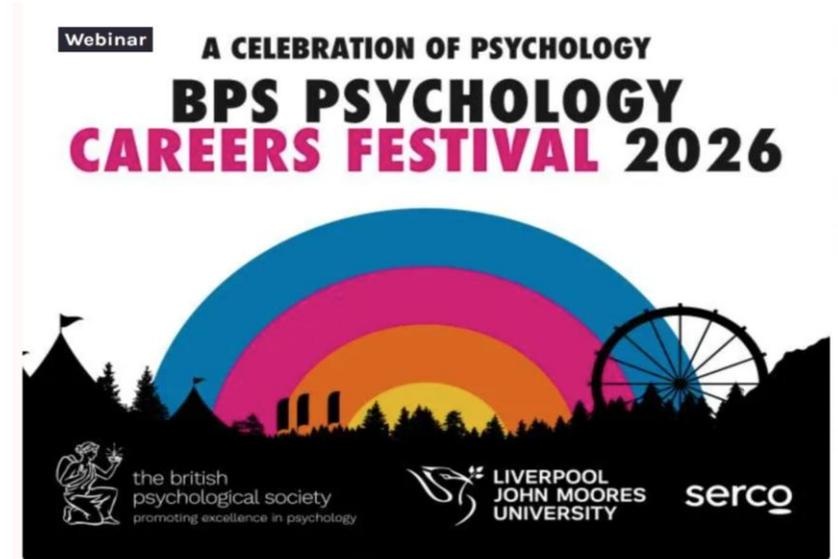# Regeneration through Repair

REGENERATING SAFETY AND DIGNITY THROUGH TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN IN PARENTING SUPPORT

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Webinar — A CELEBRATION OF PSYCHOLOGY
BPS PSYCHOLOGY CAREERS FESTIVAL 2026

the british psychological society — promoting excellence in psychology
LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
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Introduction

A **large percentage of professionals in human centred design** come from a psychological background. I am one of them.

I started my interest in **Psychology when I was 18**

I have been a **graduate member of the BPS since 2014.** I joined the Design leadership profession in the same year.

I have a **MSc in Forensic Psychology (accredited by the BPS)** and I am currently a **part time PhD Researcher** in Design at the Open University

My current professional role is as **Head of Customer Journey (in the public sector). Up to now I have had the pleasure of designing 63 services (30 new, 33 redesigns – human to human, digital and both).**

The Open University

Today's talk journey

- **Purpose** → Parenting, trauma, and public good

- **Evidence** → Safety before behaviour

- **Insight** → Engagement is not compliance

- **Practice** → Human-centred design

- **Context** → Design as psychological infrastructure

- **Application** → Trauma-informed Double Diamond

- **Impact** → Regenerative repair

Why Psychology has never been so important..

- We are living through overlapping crisis...

- Systems increasingly fail at the human level
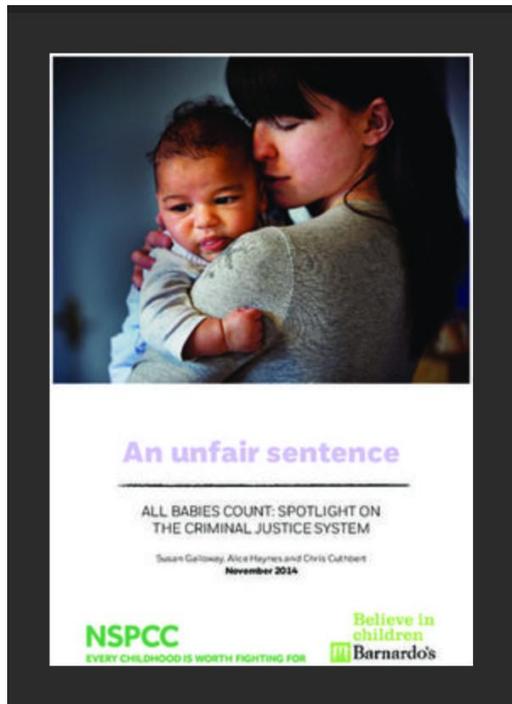
- Behaviour change is now mission critical

- Technology is now shaping minds faster than we can regulate it

- Prevention beats cure, economically and ethically

Inspiration

An unfair sentence

ALL BABIES COUNT: SPOTLIGHT ON
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Susan Galloway, Alice Haynes and Chris Cuthbert
November 2014

NSPCC
EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Believe in
children
Barnardo's

"We know where every Labrador is in the
country, but we don't know where every child is
who has a parent in prison." – Sarah Burrows

Many parents in the justice system
were once children without safety

Parenting support often meets
trauma with rules, not care

Design can repeat harm, or
interrupt it

Design is never neutral

What is human centred design?

01

Is an approach that is focused on creating solutions to 'wicked problems' that meet needs, preferences and behaviours

02

It puts an emphasis on discovering and defining problems

03

It involves creative processes of idea making

04

It puts co-creation of prototypes (physical and digital) and testing solutions in a stepped 'test and learn' way

Dovetailing Psychology and Human Centred Design

- Both focus on understanding human behaviour

- They share a priority of empathy

- Both use research and observation

- HCD is both a science and an art

- Both have a scientific discipline, and can be practically applied

- They both explore, and aim to predict responses

- Both can contribute to satisfaction, and aim to measure and promote improvement and transformation

Psychology Is the Engine of Human-Centred Design

It helps designers understand behaviours, motivations and cognitive thought processes

Applying principles helps designers to anticipate needs

Social Psychology helps us to understand the dynamics of groups, and cultural influences). This is critical to inclusion in design

My PhD Research

The Service Co-design of Parenting Education for Women who have experience of the Criminal Justice System

Designing for the 2 percent

- Study 1 – Scoping review of the literature (2024) – emerging findings
- Study 2 – Focus groups (2025) – completed
- Study 3 – Interviews (2026) – current
- Studies 4 and 5 – Survey and Systematic (or other) Review (2027)
- Write up (2028)

The Open University

Inside Mum

a service codesign research project

My PhD Research
- what I learned from the literature

The **small amount of current evidence** tells us that service co-design in this area likely would need to be focused on:

Acceptability

Empowerment

Being Trauma informed

Gender responsiveness

Being attachment aware

Providing peer support

All of these are underpinned by psychological theory

Psychology begins with life experience

Before we talk theory – let's talk people. It all starts with a human story:

"You think of prison as a rock bottom, but it's not really rock bottom because you do have a lot of opportunities to just get your stuff together. ... This is a privilege to me, you know. I'm incarcerated. I should be learning a lesson." [Jenni, a single mother who had benefitted from gender-responsiveness, in Tuxhorn, 2021, p 436]

"Incarceration and family separation can therefore lead to intergenerational cycles of trauma, incarceration, and family separation." (Sherwood and Kendall, 2013, p. 91)

Transforming parenting education and support into spaces of **safety, trust and dignity**

This is not a motivation problem.

CHANTELLE MORGAN
Age: 30   Starting parenting education

FEELINGS
Overwhelmed by separation   Hopeful about change

IMMEDIATE NEEDS
Support network, help from professionals

GOALS
Regain custody of her child

CHALLENGES
Coping with separation

BEHAVIORS
Resilient, committed to learning

Building Sanctuary: Safety, Dignity, Strength
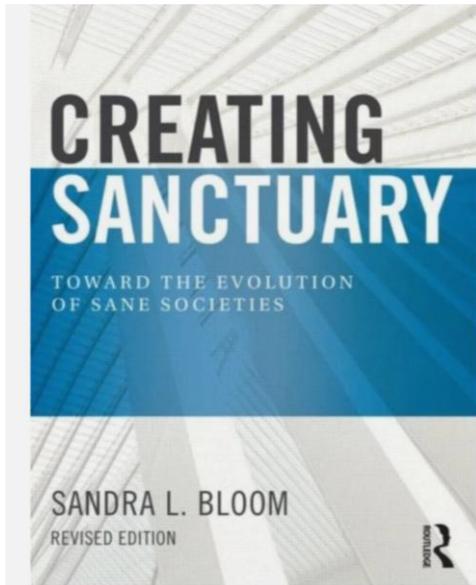
To be successful services in this area need to begin with:

"What happened to you?" and

"What strength's do you already have?"

These are design questions – not just therapeutic ones.

Sandra Bloom (1997) identifies **safety** as the foundation of any humane system:

Safety
People need to feel physically safe *and* emotionally safe. Without this, the brain stays in survival mode, making reflection, learning, and connection almost impossible.

Trust
Trust grows when systems are predictable, transparent, and fair. Trauma destroys trust; therefore, trust must be **actively rebuilt** through consistent actions, not just kind words.

Dignity
Dignity is protected when people are treated as **whole human beings**, not problems to be managed. This includes being listened to, having choices, and being free from shame and humiliation.

Safety before learning

Learning from **Bloom** (1997) helps us understand that behaviour can be an adaptive response to adversity, **not a personal failure.**

People can't learn when they feel under threat, safety is the doorway to growth

- Across psychology and neuroscience, one principle is clear: safety comes before learning.

- When the nervous system is in threat or hypervigilance, reasoning, reflection, and behaviour change are neurobiologically limited.

- Safety is not optional, it is foundational.

What psychology consistently tells us

- You cannot help a parent who feels unsafe, disconnected, or powerless. Before learning can happen, the heart and nervous system must be ready.

- Scholars from diverse traditions Bowlby (1969), Perry (2006), Porges (2011), Deci & Ryan (2000) highlight a shared truth:

- Regulation, connection, and agency are prerequisites for learning, engagement, and change.

- These needs are biological, psychological, and social, not just what might seem like abstract concepts.

- They have direct implications for service design: environments and interactions must support these foundational human needs.

Context shapes behaviour

Criminal Justice as a psychological context

- Criminal justice settings often trigger threat responses: surveillance, power imbalances, separation from children, and stigma.

- Farrington's (2011) research highlights how family context and early adversity shape both challenges and strengths.

- Mothers' behaviour in these contexts often reflects survival strategies, not lack of engagement or resistance.

Design as applied psychological science

Design Shapes What Happens *Before* Behaviour

- **Emotional Safety** - predictability and consistency, non-judgemental spaces and choice within constraints

- **Trust** – clear purpose and expectations, relational continuity (familiar faces), and fair and transparent processes

- **Motivation** – autonomy (being invited, not mandated), Competence (feeling capable), and relatedness (belonging, not being assessed)
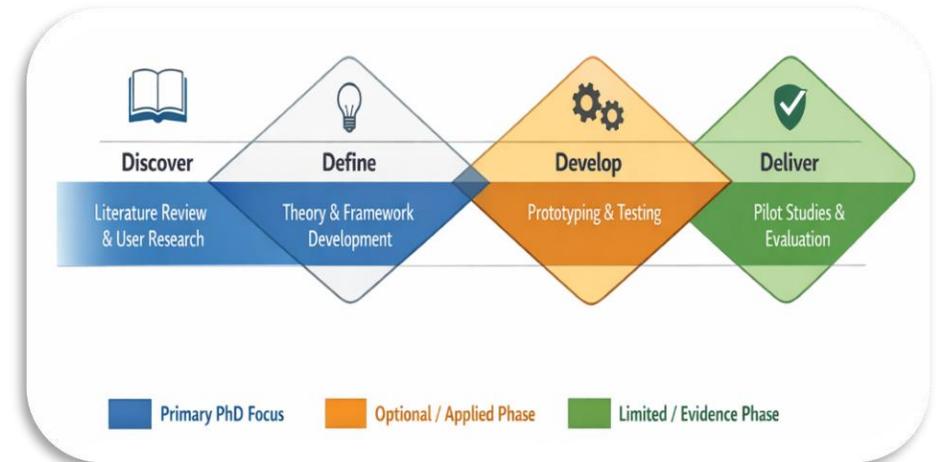
Design as a bridge
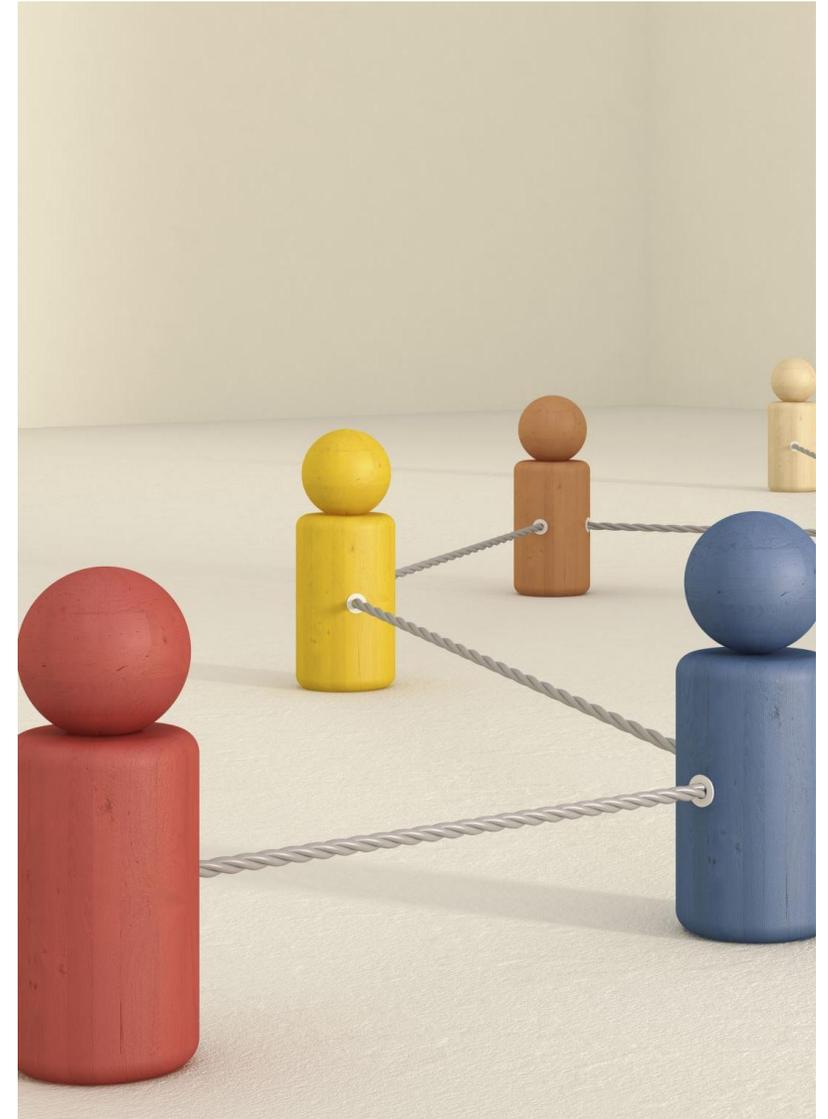
Operationalising psychology through design
A trauma informed double diamond process

Designing parenting support that feels safe, respectful, and effective

- **Discover – Listen safely**
  Create non-judgemental spaces to understand experiences, emotions, and context.

- **Define – Understand needs**
  Look beyond behaviour to underlying needs, strengths, and relationships.

- **Develop – Create together**
  Co-design with parents and practitioners, building choice, clarity, and consistency.

- **Deliver – Embed and learn**
  Deliver predictably and fairly; evaluate safety, engagement, and connection

Discover — Literature Review & User Research
Define — Theory & Framework Development
Develop — Prototyping & Testing
Deliver — Pilot Studies & Evaluation

Primary PhD Focus | Optional / Applied Phase | Limited / Evidence Phase

Safety • Dignity • Trust • Connection

From theory to lived experience
How theory shapes what parents feel and experience

Regulation before cognition *(Perry)*
→ Sessions feel calm and manageable, not overwhelming

Safety enables connection *(Porges)*
→ Parents feel able to speak, listen, and relate without fear

Secure relationships support learning *(Bowlby)*
→ Facilitators feel consistent and trustworthy, not evaluative

Motivation grows from autonomy and dignity *(Deci & Ryan)*
→ Parents feel invited to learn, not forced to comply

When psychological theory is embedded in design:

- Parents are more likely to attend
- Engagement feels safer
- Learning feels possible

Psychological outcomes that matter

Connection

Parents feel seen, respected, and not judged

Trust replaces fear

Support feels relational, not corrective

Engagement

Attendance becomes choice, not compliance

Parents return because it feels safe

Learning feels possible

Skills Development

Parents can reflect, practise, and apply skills

Confidence grows alongside competence

Mistakes become part of learning, not failure

Parent–Child Relationships

Stronger emotional connection

Greater sensitivity and responsiveness

Hope replaces shame

Trauma aware systems

Systems can either retraumatise or support repair

Focus on regeneration, not just recovery

Design safety, trust, and dignity into the way institutions work

How systems are built shapes whether families heal or stay stuck.

Senge, 2018; Ginwright, 2016, 2018)

What I hope you take away (Recap)

| | Safety is foundational, not optional |

| | Context is psychological data |

| | Design is how theory reaches people |

Inspiration beyond repair to regeneration

Design shapes how safe people feel – and safety shapes everything that follows:

- Safety first

- Context creates behaviour

- Connection before correction

- Regulation enables learning

- Dignity is non-negotiable

- Design is a pre-behavioural intervention

- Aim for regeneration, not just recovery

Prototype Checklist for Trauma Informed Design for Parents

Trauma-Informed Principles for Parenting Education in Secure Environments

1 Safety & Predictability
- ☐ Are spaces calm and consistent?
- ☐ Is participation free from judgement?

2 Trust & Transparency
- ☐ Do parents know the purpose of the program?
- ☐ Are processes explained clearly?

3 Dignity & Respect
- ☐ Are parents treated as capable, not broken?
- ☐ Is language non-shaming?

4 Choice & Autonomy
- ☐ Are choices offered, even in constraints?
- ☐ Is participation invitational?

5 Connection & Belonging
- ☐ Are positive relationships encouraged?
- ☐ Do parents feel supported, not isolated?

6 Regulation Before Learning
- ☐ Are sessions paced to reduce overwhelm?
- ☐ Is calm before content?

7 Regulation Before Learning
- ☐ Are sessions paced to reduce overwhelm?
- ☐ Is calm before content?

8 Strengths-Based Focus
- ☐ Are skills built on strengths?
- ☐ Are mistakes seen as learning?

8 Co-Creation & Voice
- ☐ Are parents involved in planning?
- ☐ Is feedback valued?

9 Consistency & Reliability
- ☐ Are sessions predictable and stable?
- ☐ Are changes communicated clearly?

10 Emotional & Relational Outcomes
- ☐ Are we meacuring growth, not just attendance?
- ☐ Are we supporting healing, not just compliance?

Guiding Question: Does this design reduce threat, increase dignity, and make learning feel possible?

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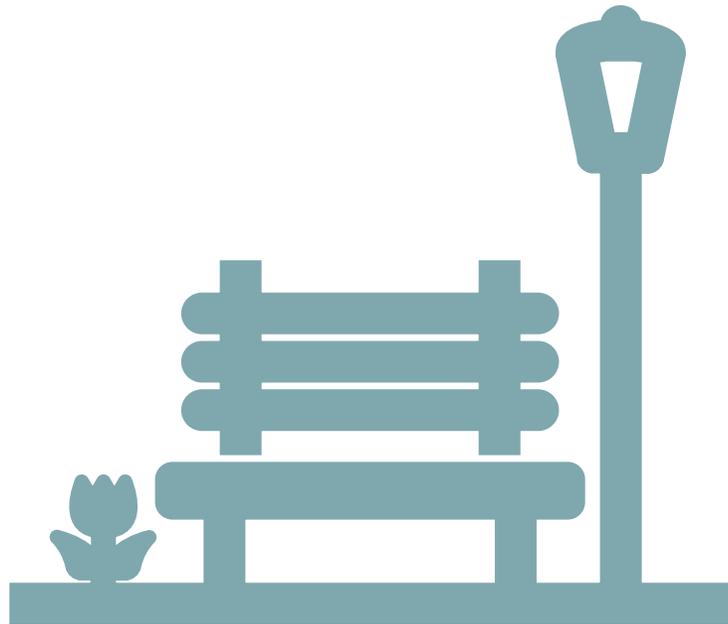
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Find out more about my work

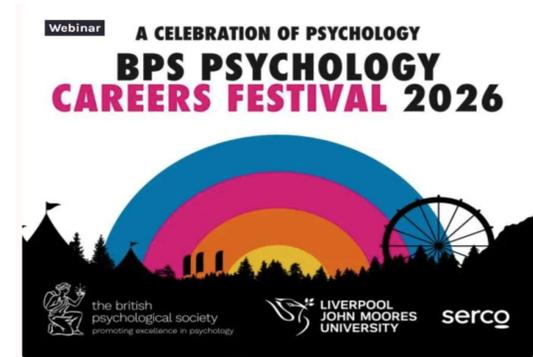|		
🔍	Find out	Find out more about my progressing research
🎙️	View	View my blogs, week-notes articles and wanderings all in one place
🧠	Take a look	Take a look at my case studies including human centred design

My Portfolio

Thank you for your time – Any Questions?

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