

***“If a community values it’s children, it must cherish it’s parents” John Bowlby***

The MotC seeks to understand the meaning of the child to their parent, and to explore the connection between a parent and child.

The MotC helps explore and consider elements that may be impacting behaviour, how it can be understood within the relationship, and what may be helpful for a family.

The MotC can add clarity on which support would be best for the family’s individual circumstances.

The MotC is based in attachment theory, which highlights how human behaviour is shaped by our shared need for protection and comfort from those close to us.

Therefore, it can indicate how past trauma, significant losses, and anxious or dangerous experiences might impact upon parent-child relationship.

The MotC is being used in a wide range of settings including family support, child protection, fostering and adoption, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS), Occupational Therapy services, and in counselling and psychotherapy.

If you would like to learn more about the MotC and the research behind it please feel free to visit Meaning of the Child website for more information:

[www.meaningofthechild.org](http://www.meaningofthechild.org)



*Parenting is a life-long relationship and the best of relationships go through times when support could make a difference. Most of us have experienced times when a close relationship has been at breaking point, as well as periods of real joy; and sometimes we go through both with the same person.*

*The MotC recognises the complexity of human relationships, and the multiple challenges parents face in trying to protect and nurture their children through to adulthood and beyond.*

Dr Ben Grey



INFORMATION  
FOR  
PROFESSIONALS





## What is the MotC?

The Meaning of the Child (MotC) explores the nature of the parent's connection to their child by carefully analysing an interview with them using a standardised method.

The parent-child relationship may be the most enduring, deeply-felt relationship, but too often it is treated simply as if it were another task or job. The MotC explores the range of feelings, thoughts, stories, and experiences that make up the parent-child relationship.

The MotC seeks to understand the influence of the child upon their parent, and how that might in turn shape the parent's experience of their child.

The MotC considers aspects that are working well for a relationship, as well as difficulties. It can indicate how the relationship is working for both parent and child. It gives an indication of the level of support that the relationship needs and what kind of intervention (if any) might be effective.

In child welfare settings, it can help contribute to the broadest possible understanding of the challenges faced by everyone concerned with the welfare of a particular child, without glossing over the need for effective action where it is warranted.

The MotC is grounded in research of child and adult attachment, affect regulation, reflective functioning and family systems.

## How does it work?

The process involves a semi-structured interview, which means the parent is asked set questions about their child and experiences of being a parent, whilst also allowing room to explore their thoughts and feelings about their relationships more deeply.

The set questions give the interview a standard structure that allows it to be informed by current science, whilst still offering freedom for fuller exploration.

The interview takes approximately 1-1½ hours, is typed up and then sent to someone trained and certified in the MotC coding analysis.

A benefit of the MotC being analysed in this way is that it offers a systematic and impartial view of key elements of a parent-child relationship; a fresh look from someone not influenced or involved with the parent or family.

The MotC brings to light the positive intentions of parents to offer love and nurture to their children; giving insight into some of the obstacles that the relationship faces (in particular the impact of trauma); guiding work *with* parents to tackle problems in their lives and parenting, rather than blaming them for complex and multi-faceted difficulties.

Whilst the MotC should never be used on its own to make decisions regarding a child, it offers just this kind of information to help clinicians intervene wisely to help children and their families.

## Why Use the Meaning of the Child (MotC)?

Experience shapes the sense we make of our relationships, as well as the understanding and information about those relationships that we can access. Trauma in particular can exert a major influence on what we can allow ourselves to know, and what we can't bear to look at.

The MotC brings this process to light, showing the translation of one's own story on the parent-child relationship. This insight enables services to be provided at a level which can be accessed by a parent and can have an impact.

The MotC brings understanding as to whether the parent or relationship is in a position to access or make use of certain support, meaning that intervention can be targeted effectively.

By offering parents the opportunity of targeted support, it also allows for a reduction in attributing blame to parents who may have disengaged in services, which at that time, they were simply unable to access.

NICE guidelines on children's attachment (26) and a recent consensus paper of 70+ leading attachment theorists and researchers recommend a focus on caregiving sensitivity in understanding child attachment in child welfare cases.

*"We should first and foremost assess the parent's ability to understand and respond effectively to the child's needs, to know and value the child, and to be consistently in charge in the relationship."* (Forslund et al 2021, p.31).