

# CLINICAL UPDATE: A SMALL SERVICE EVALUATION OF A SOLIHULL APPROACH FOSTER CARER TRAINING GROUP PILOT STUDY

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## Abstract

This pilot evaluation represents the first study to investigate the effects of a Solihull Approach programme: ‘Understanding your foster child’s behaviour: supporting foster carer/child relationships’ for foster carers, taught within a community setting. Following qualitative and quantitative analysis, there was a significant decrease in the carer’s ratings of their child’s hyperactivity and attentional disorders and a trend towards a decrease in the behavioural difficulties of their child, as rated by the carer. These positive behavioural changes suggest this is a promising programme.

## Introduction

The Solihull Approach ‘Understanding your child’s behaviour’ courses are a well-established and trusted way of understanding more about your child. The program has been adapted to offer a 12 week course to foster workers involved with fostering and adoption: ‘Understanding your foster child’s behaviour: supporting foster carer/child relation-

Session 1	Introduction
Session 2	Brain development
Session 3	Containment
Session 4	Reciprocity
Session 5	Introduction to attachment
Session 6	Understanding your child’s behaviour
Session 7	Different styles of parenting
Session 8	Spending time together
Session 9	Rhythm of interaction and sleep
Session 10	Self-regulation and anger
Session 11	Communication and attunement
Session 12	Celebration

## Method

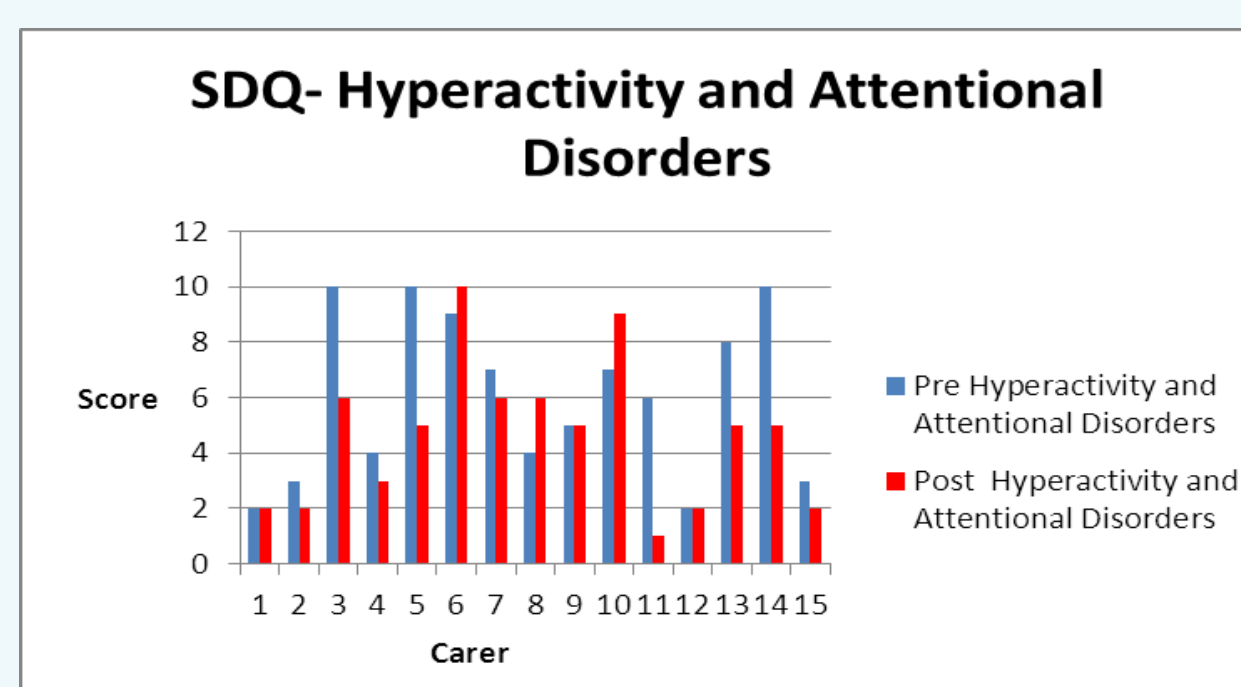
A total of 16 foster carers completed the programme, delivered over 12 sessions. The programme adhered to a manual delivered by a trained educational psychologist and a trained co-facilitator. 1 participant’s data was omitted due to attrition.

Several scales were employed: Parental Stress Index S-F, Carer Questionnaire and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) at pre and post intervention.

## Results

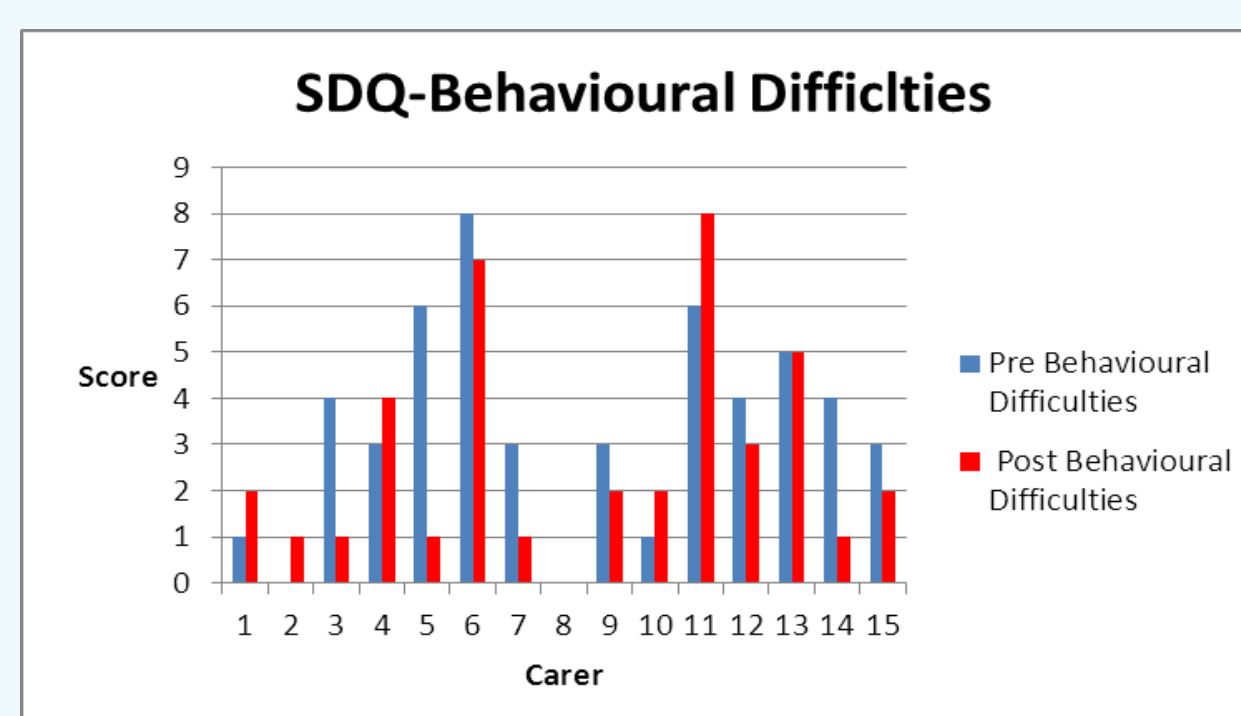
**Hyperactivity and Attention Disorders:** On average, carers rated their foster children as experiencing significantly lower levels of hyperactivity and attentional disorders after the intervention ( $M= 4.6, SE= .682$ ) than prior to the intervention ( $M= 6.00, SE = .762$ ),  $t(14)= 2.219, p= .044$ .

Figure 1.



**Difficult child:** Ratings in the difficulty of the child as perceived by the carer were showing a trend towards being significantly lower following the intervention ( $M=28.1, SE=1.87$ ) than prior to the intervention ( $M=30.9, SE= 2.13$ ),  $t(14) =2.052, p=.059$ .

Figure 2.

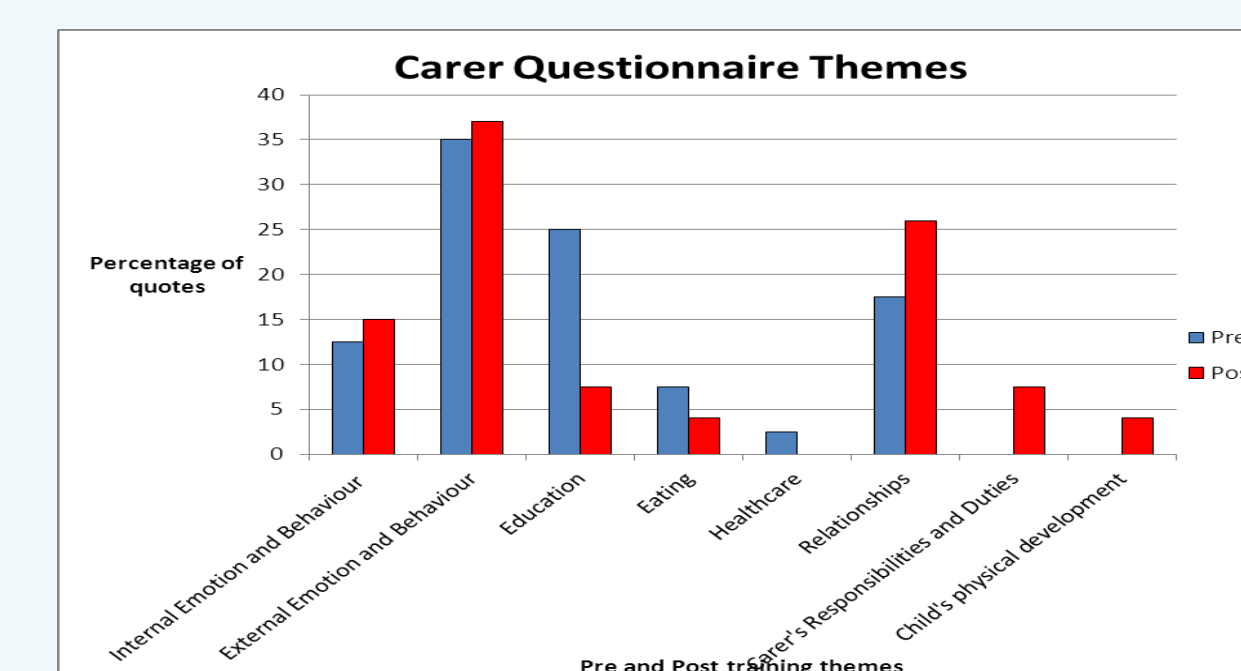


**Parental Stress Index-SF:** The Parental Stress Index indicated that the majority of foster carers rated themselves with fewer parental distress symptoms, fewer parents rated their child as difficult and overall stress was rated as lower post-intervention also; however, this was not statistically significant. Mean scores of Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction did increase slightly, raising the group into the ‘abnormal’ percentile.

## Results continued

**Carer Questionnaire:** Content analysis revealed pre-intervention the most common themes to emerge were related to the carer’s concerns over ‘External emotion and behaviour’ (35%), followed by ‘Education’ (25%) and then ‘Relationship’ (17.5%). Post-scoring of the questionnaire revealed the most common theme to emerge was ‘External Emotions and Behaviours’ (37%), followed by ‘Relationships’ (26%) and then ‘Internal Emotions and Behaviours’ (15%).

Figure 3.



## Discussion

The core foundation of the Solihull Approach course (containment, reciprocity and behaviour management) provide an opportunity for greater insight into the carer-child relationship. Carers may feel more aware and equipped to manage the behavioural difficulties of their child and facilitate change, for example emotional self-regulation in the child through sensitive parenting, as reflected in the results.

## Conclusion

Future research will want to consider replicating the study on a larger sample with the inclusion of a control group and longer follow up measures. The hypothesis would be that the effects of the course increase, as relationships between the carer and foster child continue to improve. In summary, this is a promising pilot study that supports the Solihull Approach programme reduces the carers perception of the behavioural difficulties of their child, leading to more harmonious interactions within the family dynamic.

Figure 3.