

resentment and rejection). Too much action, especially on the care professional's part, can show a lack of containment. It is not so much what you do but why and how you do it.

Attempting to develop a reciprocal relationship is likely to mean that the professional has to suspend her knowledge and understanding at first, rather than impose this 'expertise'. It is more helpful to allow a parent to have the opportunity to make her own discoveries, with support. Showing interest in a parent's story, and encouraging more exploration of something said in passing, can enable a parent to make connections for themselves that may have eluded them before. For example, a parent who briefly comments on the loss of a parent during the pregnancy, may find that they can identify how the bereavement had an impact on their capacity to bond with their child. It is not about having a solution, an answer to a specific problem. The process of being interested and responding with empathy, non-judgementally, is often the most effective intervention.

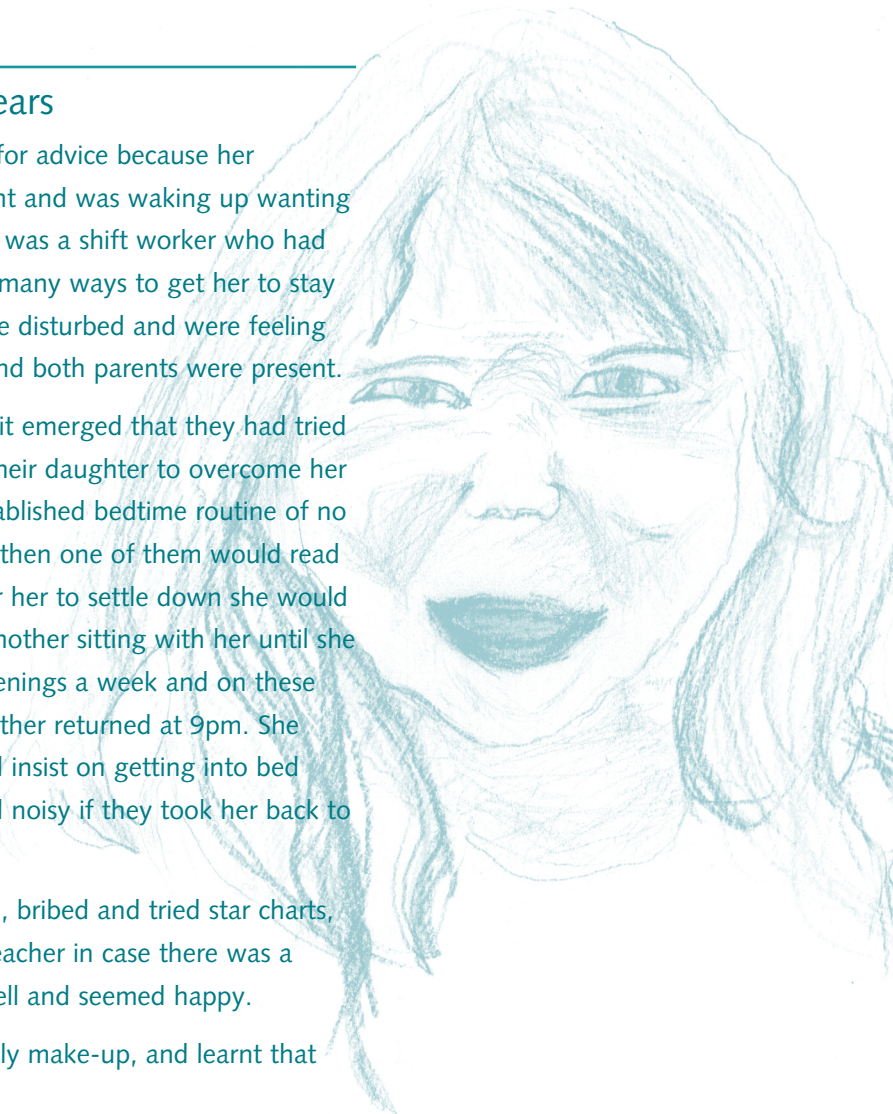
Case study – girl, aged six years

The mother of a six-year-old girl asked for advice because her daughter would not settle in bed at night and was waking up wanting to get into bed with her parents. Father was a shift worker who had to get up very early and, despite trying many ways to get her to stay in bed, the whole family continued to be disturbed and were feeling desperate. A home visit was arranged and both parents were present.

The parents described the problem and it emerged that they had tried everything they could think of to help their daughter to overcome her apparent fear at night. They had an established bedtime routine of no TV for an hour before bed, a bath, and then one of them would read to her, but as soon as the time came for her to settle down she would 'perform'. This usually ended with her mother sitting with her until she was asleep. Her mother worked two evenings a week and on these nights she would lie awake until her mother returned at 9pm. She would then wake again most nights and insist on getting into bed with her parents, getting very upset and noisy if they took her back to her own bed.

They had redecorated her room, cajoled, bribed and tried star charts, all to no avail. They had talked to her teacher in case there was a problem at school but she was doing well and seemed happy.

The school nurse asked about their family make-up, and learnt that



this was a second marriage for father, who had a nine-year-old son from his previous relationship. The boy spent alternate weekends with them and was causing concern at home and school because of his behaviour. He was aggressive, and fought and argued with his stepsister constantly. His father said he would demand his attention all the time and thought that he was jealous of this stepsister. A great deal of resentment had built up between the two children. Added to this, mother was also a childminder who had two other children after school each day, as well as a younger toddler of their own.

As the parents talked about their life, mother realised that she and her daughter had been very close at one time. Mother used to play with her a lot but things like cooking and going shopping together had stopped as more work and another baby came along. Both parents began to realise that their daughter was not getting the individual attention from them that she craved and began to think of ways they could change this. Ideas needed to fit into their busy lives but they thought that they would try doing some activities with the children separately at the weekends, as well as family activities, giving them both the attention of the parent they wanted. Mother also felt she could involve her daughter more in the household chores as she liked to help with these. The school nurse left them thinking about these ideas and the possibility that their daughter was not sleeping well because she knew this was one sure way of getting her mother to herself.

One month later, mother rang to cancel the arranged visit because she felt they were managing better. Her daughter had slept through the night several times and the whole household was feeling calmer.

Any suggestions of a behavioural management nature need to be consistent with the patterns and rhythms already in existence for the family, although they may try to incorporate the thinking that you have begun with parents. For example, a first step in encouraging a child to stay in their own bed may be for parents to notice brief periods of frustration and separation in the day and encourage the idea that the child can manage difficult feelings during the daytime rather than forcing the issue at night, especially if parents are very tired. The hope is that any behavioural programme can be internalised by the child (and the parent) as part of a whole style of parenting, not something imposed by an external, possibly unfamiliar, framework. For this reason it is best if parents 'conceive' any programmes themselves, with professional guidance. The motivation to carry it out will be higher and will be 'owned' by parents themselves.