

The Attachment Style Interview for Adoption and Fostering & Child Care

ONLINE Training Information Sheet - Sessions by Zoom

- Originally developed and tested in international psycho-social research the Attachment Style Interview (ASI) was introduced into social work and psychology practice in the UK around 2005 by Parents for Children who commissioned a pilot study in its use. Whilst never formally part of the original Form F, or Prospective Adopters Report (PAR), it encompasses many of the key elements required for assessment and was identified in the Adoption Guidance documentation.
- Its increasingly high level of use in services has been based on practitioner demand for a user-friendly attachment measure which aids with case analysis of risk and resilience in carers.
- Trainings are now conducted in local authority and voluntary organisations nationally through Child and Family Training and the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University with around 150 teams trained and regularly using the ASI.
- Feedback from practitioners indicate it to be a highly effective tool, with many courts and panels now requiring attachment style assessments of prospective carers.
- The ASI reflects in Secure individuals, the positive interaction, support and stability of relationship with partner, family and friend relationships, the presence of appropriate levels of autonomy, effectiveness of support for combating stress, and openness to help-seeking and service-access, all elements required in adoption practice guidance.
- This introduction to the ASI and its uses in Adoption and Fostering and child care services will cover:-

1. What is the ASI?
2. ASI Mission Statement from Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies Team
3. What does the ASI assess?
4. ASI Risk and Resilience Factors
5. Course training Aims & Timetable
6. How does the ASI fit in with Adoption /Fostering and Child Care services?
7. For Carers: Why do we use the ASI?
8. ASI book 'Understanding adult attachment in family relationships'.

1. What is the Attachment Style Interview (ASI)?

- A standardised interview for assessing the **current** quality of partner relationship; quality of close supportive relationships and the degree of Secure or Insecure attachment styles (Enmeshed, Fearful, Angry-dismissive, Withdrawn or Dual/disorganised). It does not cover retrospective information.
- It is a measure that describes, quantifies and analyses aspects of close relating important for adoption suitability retaining original narrative for justification of scoring and to illustrate service-user views.
- It has established reliability and validity and long history of use in researching families.
- The interview requires a 4-day training in its reliable use. Trainings are held regularly either on team sites or in open courses.
- The training team also provides consultancy in its reliable use and help with analysis and report writing.
- The interview takes around 1.5-2 hours to administer and 4-6 hours to score and analyse.

2. ASI Mission Statement from Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies Team

- We are committed to evidence-based practice in health and social care. We have therefore undertaken to provide assessment tools for practice, which are based on high quality research methods. These have undergone all the necessary standardisation tests to make them both reliable and valid. The aim is to improve the quality and objectivity of assessments in social care practice. While the use of such tools in no way overrides social workers' judgement, they should be seen as an essential element in decision-making processes. Of course any particular measurement tool can only reflect a part of the total picture required to assess family and children characteristics.
- The Attachment Style Interview for Adoption/Fostering and Child Care is used for assessing parent and carer characteristics and likely support needs and should be used alongside other family assessment tools.

- The ASI is developed for different services (e.g. adoption-fostering, child care services) and purposes (e.g. research and practice). The ASI interview and ratings remain unchanged, but there are specific training packages, which are adapted for the different specialisms.
- The ASI is a measurement tool especially adapted for social workers and psychologists working in Adoption/Fostering and Child Care contexts. It involves a four-day training containing the essential elements required for administering the instrument reliably. Specifically we can ensure:-
 - That the ASI is based on a published research measure used in a number of research settings. References to publications are available in the training pack and on the linked website.
 - That conference presentations and workshops are additionally used to disseminate the evidence-based findings using the ASI research instrument and to explain the instrument to members of services who will not themselves train.
 - That the reliability and validity of the ASI have been tested and published.
 - That additional workshops, presentations and interview checking for quality control can be provided, separate from the main training package.

3. What does the ASI assess?

ASI SUMMARY

The ASI mainly assesses a person's levels of **current support** from close others (including their partner if they have one), their ability to make and maintain relationships, the presence of any negative attitudes held about closeness and their overall attachment style.

1. Support from close others

The first part of the ASI interview explores in detail the quality of support a person receives through their relationship with partner, with other close support figures and family of origin at the time of the assessment. Good support is identified as a high level of confiding or sharing of personal information on important issues including emotions and worries, with active emotional and practical support offered. It also assesses the extent to which the relationships are smooth or involve discord and the degree of attachment and closeness in the relationship. Actual examples of confiding are required.

2. Ability to make and maintain relationships:

In summarising the number of close supportive relationships a scoring is made of how good the individual is at making supportive relationships. Those objectively rated Marked or Moderate have very good or good levels of support and are considered to be secure in their relating style. Those with Some or Little/no support in relationships are considered to be less good at making relationships and are scored as insecure in their interpersonal style

3. Negative attitudes about closeness:

The second part of the interview asks questions to ascertain the reasons for attitudes which a person can have that form blockages in obtaining support from close others. This includes those attitudes that create distance from others e.g. high mistrust, psychological barriers to getting close to people, fear of rejection or anger. It also includes attitudes that create over-dependence on others e.g. high need for the company of others, low self-reliance in decision making and high fear of separation from loved ones.

4. Overall attachment style

This is then derived according to an established procedure. Those with good support and positive attitudes to others are rated as Clearly Secure and those with good support and some negative attitudes are scored as Mildly Insecure. However those with poor support, inability to make relationships and a series of negative attitudes are scored as Markedly or Moderately insecure in their attachment style. Insecure attachment styles: are either of an anxiously attached nature (Enmeshed or Fearful) or are of an avoidant nature (Angry- dismissive or Withdrawn).

4. Risk and Resilience factors from the ASI

- In-depth details of quality of partner relationship and of close support. This will establish stability of family and friend setting for future child care.
- Brief assessment of current stressors
- Resilience, in terms of positive relationships (Partner and support figures) and Secure, or mildly insecure attachment styles. Such resilience relates to positive support, parenting and mental health.
- Risk, in terms of individuals with problematic or distant relationships and Marked or Moderate levels of insecurity including Dual/disorganised, Enmeshed, Fearful or Angry-dismissive styles. Such risk reflects potential deterioration of relationships post-placement, lack of support and negative attitudes to help seeking, problem parenting and potential mental health difficulties. This is associated with early childhood adversity which is unresolved.
- Parenting associated with highly insecure styles is less competent with issues around helplessness or hostility.
- Those with marked or moderately Withdrawn styles have lower risk levels, but their parenting is likely to lack necessary warmth.

5. Course training Aims & Timetable

ASI Training Day: The first zoom session of the four-day training introduces the Attachment Style Interview, an assessment of adult attitudes and behaviour in making close relationships, and its relevance for the Adoption/Fostering and Child Care contexts. The day finishes with an introduction to the Support section of the measure and covers the partner questions and ratings.

- Aim 1: Explain the background of the ASI and its development.
- Aim 2: Provide an overview of the interview and scoring system.
- Aim 3: To enable a good understanding of the partner section and to be able to rate Vignettes describing partner relationships.

ASI Training Day 2: The second zoom session examines the Support component of the ASI by examining Very Close Other support. Those Support scores are then summarised in the Ability to Make and Maintain Relationships scale. The day finishes with an introduction to the rating of the ASI attitude rating scales and the Overall Attachment Profile and the first rating vignettes. Life Events are also covered and the semi-structured questions of the ASI.

- Aim 4: To enable a good understanding of the VCO scales and scoring.
- Aim 5 : To enable accurate scoring of the VCO section and the overall 'ability to make and maintain relationships' scale.
- Aim 6 :To understand the scales and scoring system of the Attitudinal sub-scales of the ASI (e.g. Mistrust)
- Aim 7: To enable scoring of the Attitudinal sub-scales interview examples accurately

ASI Training Day 3: The third zoom session ASI training recaps on the Overall ASI attachment style rating and continues with rating vignettes.

- Aim 8: To introduce the scoring system of the overall Attachment profile (e.g. Moderately Insecure Enmeshed)
- Aim 9: To enable scoring of the overall Attachment profile examples accurately

ASI Training Day 4: The fourth zoom session with a discussion of the pilot interview and use of ASI in adoption/fostering and child care practice. The objective of the third day is to enable good understanding of the Overall Attachment style and to meet the following aims:

- Aim 10: To enable scoring of the overall Dual Attachment profile examples accurately
- Aim 11: To be briefed on undertaking the demographics section
- Aim 12: To be briefed on undertaking an ASI pilot interview

ASI Training Day 5: The final zoom session of ASI training involves all trainees presenting their pilot interview to trainers and each other. **It takes place six weeks or so after Days 1-4.** There is extensive discussion both of individual cases and of any difficulties experienced in interviewing or rating, and around practical issues of its use. Time is set aside for discussion of the use of the ASI in Adoption/Fostering and Child Care practice.

6. How does the ASI fit in with services?

6.1 How is the ASI useful in Adoption /Fostering services?

- The ASI provides an evidence base for current:

- The ability to make and sustain close relationships
- The capacity for emotional openness
- What life events have happened over the last year
- For couples, the quality, stability and permanence of the relationship
- How a person has used their current support network to predict future coping and asking for help and support.

- The ASI is a useful tool in Adoption and Foster Carer assessment both pre-placement or when support is needed post placement. It meets some key assessment criteria for assessing prospective adopters or foster Carers.
- The ASI is a useful tool in Child Care services for measuring current risk and resilience in parents.
- The ASI is only one tool amongst many other approaches that will be used in the assessment process and reflects only part of the overall picture of the parent's characteristics and situation, which is used in decision-making.

6.2 When should the ASI be used?

- Agencies can decide the optimum time to administer the ASI, but its most successful use has been early in the assessment procedure. This can show likely suitability at an early stage and therefore reduce delays in other assessment procedures.
- The ASI can be used again post-placement to look at changes in quality of relationships and attachment security to aid prevent placement breakdown. At this point the supplement - Parenting Role Interview - can be used to assess parenting competence and interaction with the placed child or children.

- The ASI can be used with current or prospective adoptive or foster carers; with family/friend carers and with birth parents for example over contact or custody issues.
- An adolescent version of the ASI is used with children in residential care, and a child version is under development to allow for a more sensitive matching analysis between carer and placed child.

6.3 What are the benefits of using the ASI?

- Objective ratings with direct links to the evidence-base. This creates the best balance between standardised assessment and practitioner judgement.
- Transparency and salience of questioning and coding, with the interview booklets having clear instructions and benchmarked rating examples for other multiagency practitioners, panels and courts to understand. This helps with interagency communication, but also defending judgements in the case of complaints through the IRM.
- A good track record in terms of its use in adoption panels and court proceedings.
- A time-effective measure in terms of balancing the length of interview (1.5-2 hours) scoring and analysis (4 hours) given it substitutes for a number of other assessment tools.
- Whilst there are other interviews in attachment such as the Adult Attachment Interview which has a good track record in researching effects of adoption as an intervention for maltreated children the ASI is much more user-friendly, can be reliably used by social workers and is very transparent in its coding of ongoing information about current attachment figures.

6.4 What are the disadvantages of using the ASI?

- The ASI requires training in its use. This involves 4-days of social worker time and the undertaking of a pilot interview to a good level. Whilst this involves cost, the training provides CPD for social workers in terms of increasing their knowledge and practical skills around understanding and assessing using attachment theory and methods.
- The ASI requires assessment time commitment. This involves approximately around 4.5 hours in all with scoring and analysis. Whilst this may seem lengthy, it is of course only a small proportion of time spent assessing the adoptive carers, and its yield in terms of

objectively assessed risk and resilience factors relevant to adoption suitability is high, making it time-effective.

- Not all professionals in the adoption system will know the ASI in detail. Therefore some 'translation' is required in the final report writing to clarify categories used and their meaning. Standard definitions of the various scales and categories are provided for report writing with advice on where to use original verbatim remarks to illustrate information collected. Increasingly as the ASI is used more widely practitioners in social work, psychology and the legal system, are becoming more familiar with its use and find it readily accessible.
- It is tied to Attachment Theory which is only one psychological theory about families and parenting. However attachment theory is increasingly becoming a dominant and highly effective approach to social work and psychological practice with substantial research to show its validity in this field. The ASI can be used also as a more 'neutral' tool for assessing partner and support relationships, as well as hostile or fearful interactions, which hold as basic social psychological and cognitive risks for problem relating and mental health issues.

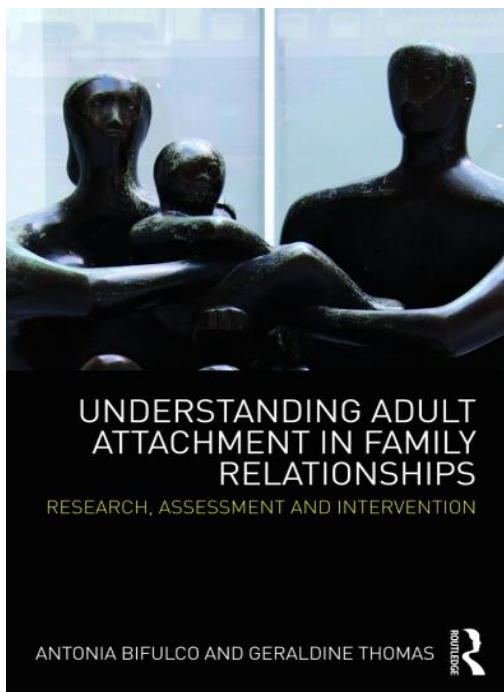
7. For Clients/Carers: Why do we use the ASI?

The ASI as an interview is being used with parents/carers' in adoption and fostering and child care services to help with the following:-

- As a means of predicting parents and carers' support in relation to anticipated need over the course of crises that may arise with any of your children.
- To aid understanding of parents current supportive network, quality of partner relationship, other close relationships and relating ability to help assess resilience and ability to provide a stable family context for the child.
- To provide an objective, evidence-based assessment tool that has gone through careful checks to show it is consistent and reliable in its use. This means the scores do not depend on the opinion of the professional undertaking the interview, but on a series of rules and rating procedures all outlined in a training manual and verified in research contexts.
- The ASI is only a small part of an assessment - The ASI is only one tool amongst many other approaches that will be used in the assessment process and reflects only part of the overall picture of the parent's characteristics and situation, which is used in decision- making. The focus of the ASI is on around a person's partner relationship (if there is one), their support figures and their ability to make and maintain relationships

and access support. It also asks about current difficulties with children and who the client can go to for support.

- Knowing a person's attachment style helps to determine whether they can ask for help easily when they need it, or prefer to be self-reliant and cope on their own. This will help their social worker in their assessments and in planning future service support if needed. Also, knowing the style may help to match their characteristics with that of the child being placed to help with a smooth transition.



8. ASI book 'Understanding adult attachment in family relationships'.

Antonia Bifulco & Geraldine Thomas, (2012)
London: Routledge. This practical book introduces and explains an easily accessible assessment tool for adult attachment style, the Attachment Style Interview (ASI). Based on extensive research study, it then discusses appropriate interventions and case assessments that can be made to help families in need.

For further information on the ASI and upcoming courses or prices for agency training please visit

www.lifespantraining.org.uk