



Newborn babies & care proceedings

Pre-birth engagement

In this second edition of *Newborn babies and care proceedings*, a new series of bulletins for professionals who are involved in safeguarding babies at or close to birth, we are focusing on engagement with parents in the pre-birth period.

Pregnancy can be a real motivator for parents to make positive changes. When there are safeguarding concerns about an unborn baby, the pre-birth period can provide an important window of opportunity for the parents to be helped and supported to address the problems and issues they face, and make the changes needed to prove their ability to safely care for their child.

However, when a pregnant woman becomes the focus of child protection, this can inevitably create great anxiety for her, as well as for the father. These anxieties are likely to be more extreme if the parents have experienced the removal of previous children through care proceedings, or if they spent time in care as children themselves.

Many parents whose unborn children are the subject of safeguarding concerns may have experienced trauma in their own childhood or in adulthood, or both, which often underpins the problems they face. Parents' past experiences can make them fearful, sceptical and suspicious about children's social care, which in turn can affect their willingness to participate in pre-birth assessments and interventions. Understanding complex trauma and the impact it has on parents is therefore particularly important when engaging parents during the pre-birth period.

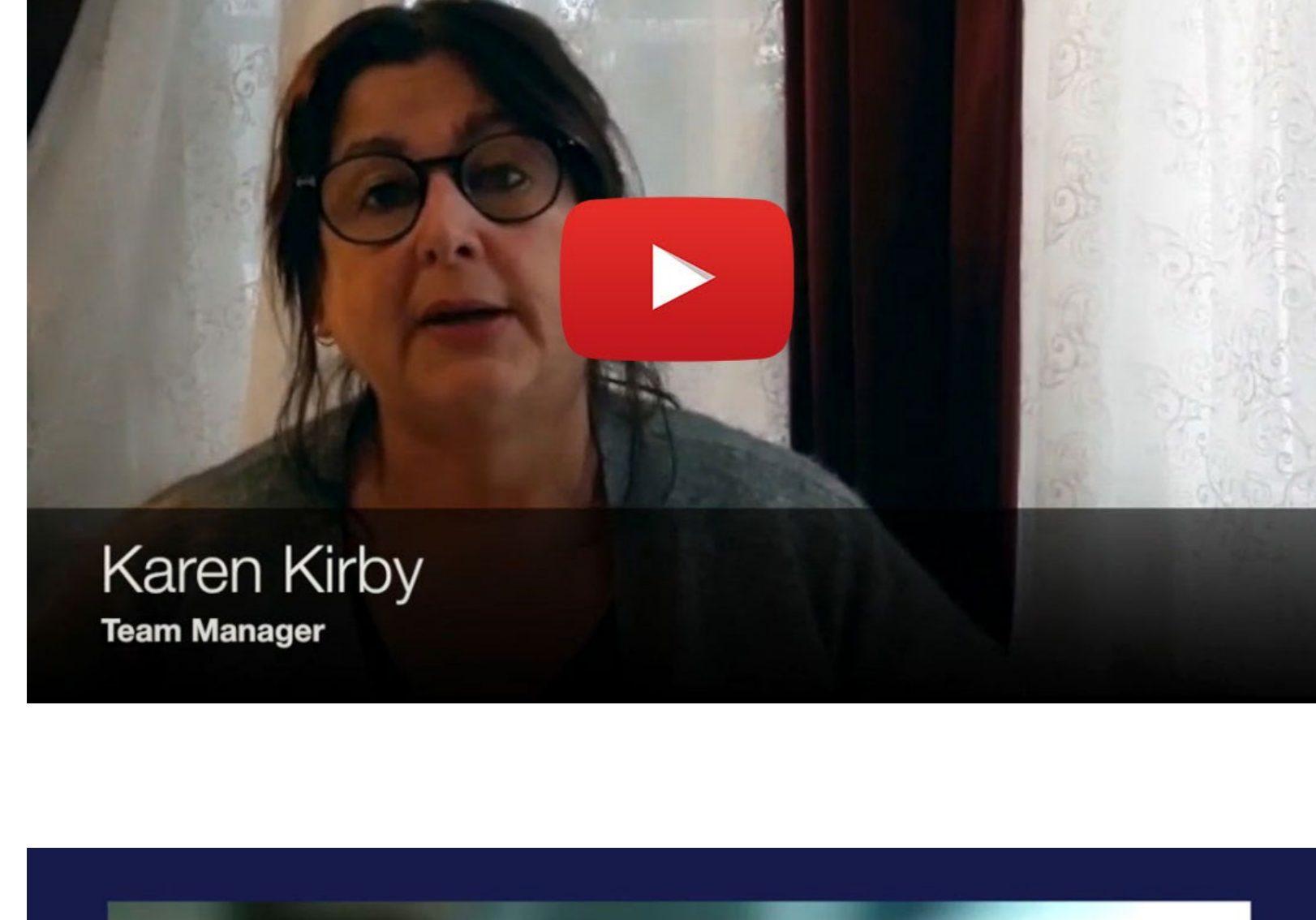
We hope the information provided below increases your understanding of complex trauma and why parents' past experiences can result in unwillingness to engage with services collaboratively in the pre-birth period – and how their participation might be encouraged and improved.

Next time we'll be following on from pre-birth engagement by covering **pre-birth assessment and intervention/support**.

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Services share their approaches to engaging parents in pre-birth period

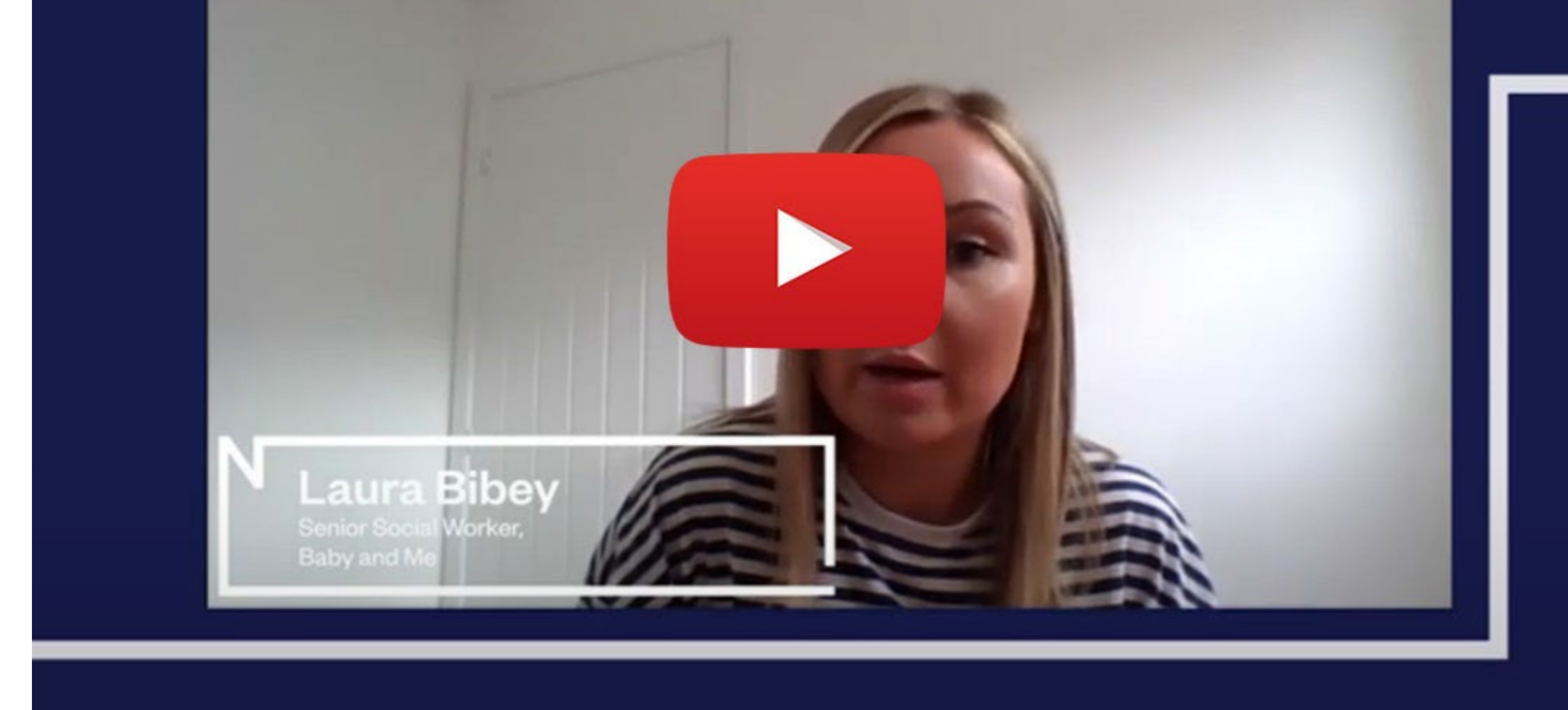
These short films provide information about different approaches services are using to engage parents in the pre-birth period. The three services featured all work with parents who have had previous children removed, and all stress the importance of being trauma-informed and building relationships with parents.



Futures is a service in Leeds working with young parents under 25. The service has recently started working with young parents in the pre-birth period. Karen Kirby, Team Manager, and team members discuss engaging parents in the pre-birth period, as well as when they are not pregnant and have no children with them.



Strengthening Families is a service in Salford working with parents in the pre-birth period and beyond. It was set up as a direct response from Salford City Council to the growing number of women involved in repeat removal cases. Elaine Duke, Recurrent Care Proceedings Manager, explains more about its approach.

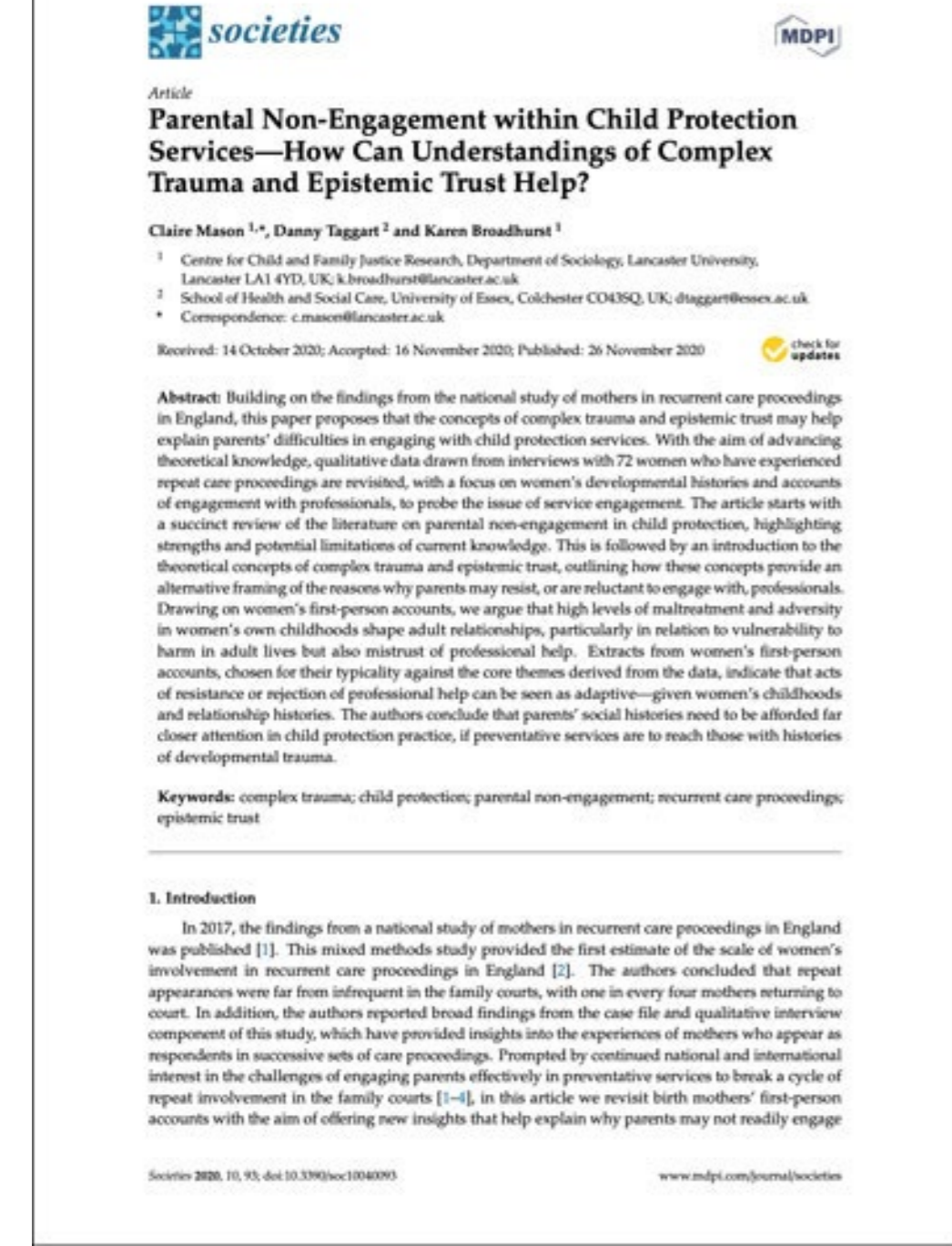


Baby and Me is a service in Newport working with parents in the pre-birth period, with the aim of reducing the amount of newborn babies being taken into care. Laura Bibey, Senior Social Worker, talks through how the team works with parents.

Understanding the relationships between trauma, non-engagement and recurrence



In this [paper](#) (available to Research in Practice members, or as a one-off purchase), Dr Danny Taggart, Claire Mason and Dr Sheena Webb make the case for reconceptualising parental 'non-engagement' with services – proposing that an understanding of how some parents' experiences of adversity and trauma in their own childhood can help to explain why they may find service engagement difficult.



In this open access [journal paper](#), Claire Mason and Dr Danny Taggart develop these ideas further. Drawing on interviews with women who have experienced recurrent care proceedings, they explore how the concepts of complex trauma and epistemic trust may be useful theoretical frameworks for understanding some parents' reluctance to engage with services.

In this [presentation](#), from the [Supporting Parents](#) website, clinical psychologist Dr Sheena Webb, who has specific expertise in how complex trauma affects parents and children referred to children's social care, describes complex trauma and its impact, and introduces the theory underpinning a trauma-informed approach to practice.

A new video-based learning programme is now available for organisations that are partners in Research in Practice to support practitioners working with parents who have experienced complex and/or sustained trauma. Created by Dr Sheena Webb, the [Working with trauma-experienced parents in children's social care: Video Learning Resources](#) (available to members) is an 11-chapter programme. It includes perspectives from those with lived experience as well as practitioners, re-enacts practical examples with actors, and goes through the different effects of serious and multiple trauma. It is suitable for children's social care practitioners with previous experience of trauma-informed principles or those who are new to them.

A set of resources about working with parents who have experienced the recurrent removal of their children is available from Research in Practice. [Recurrent Care Resource Pack: Section 3](#) provides information and exercises to assist understanding of 'non-engagement' and the role complex trauma plays in this.



Newborn babies and care proceedings aims to support professionals who have the difficult and complex task of assessing whether a newborn baby will be at risk of significant harm if they remain in the care of their parent/s. Each edition will provide links to a range of resources to help professionals better face this challenging area of work and improve practice and support for families.

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