

Ghosts, aliens and things that go bump in the night: parent-child psychotherapy in relation to childhood sleep difficulties

Nicola Dugmore

Abstract

This paper suggests that parent-child psychotherapy may be considered a relevant extension of psychoanalytic psychotherapy in conceptualising and addressing the presenting child symptom. Two short-term cases where the presenting problem was a sleep difficulty are used as illustrations of parent-child psychotherapy. The underlying theory and key aspects of the therapeutic intervention are briefly described. In the first case, the link between maternal bereavement/loss and a child's sleep difficulty is explored. In the second case it is shown how alerting a child and his parents to the meaning of a symptom originating in the child's internal world may provide relief. Parent-child psychotherapy may be an effective and relatively short-term choice of treatment. This has positive implications for health and education professionals working with young children and their parents.