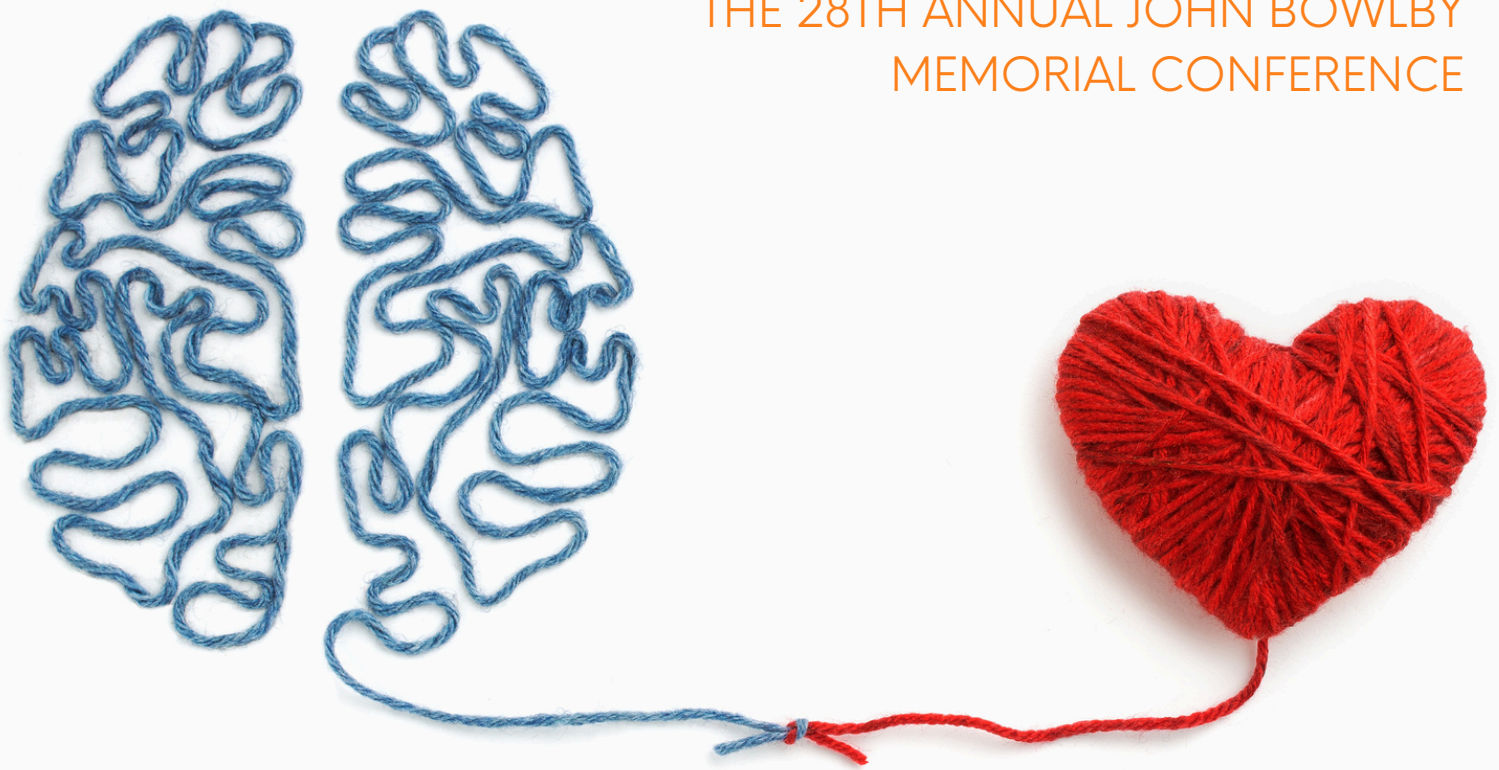


# ONLINE CONFERENCE

## SUPPORTING CONNECTION: ATTACHMENT AND AUTISM

THE 28TH ANNUAL JOHN BOWLBY  
MEMORIAL CONFERENCE



**Saturday 11th October 2025 | 10:00am - 5:30pm**

Speakers: Dr Salma Siddique, Dr Ben Grey, Ann Hardy, Finn  
Gratton, Dr Gilbert Foley And Tal Baz  
Chaired by Dr Lisa Greenspan



**THE BOWLBY CENTRE**

The Bowlby Centre's annual 28th conference is an opportunity to open up a vital conversation about the complex, under-researched, and often misunderstood relationship between autism and attachment.

While traditional models of attachment have focused on neurotypical development, emerging perspectives challenge us to reconsider attachment models with neurodevelopmental complexities in mind.

Autistic individuals and families deserve the attention and containment that attachment research and practice have to offer, from a stance of acknowledging and welcoming difference.

Chaired by Dr Lisa Greenspan, our international roster of speakers includes Dr Salma Siddique, Dr Ben Grey, Finn Gratton, Ann Hardy, Dr Gilbert Foley and Tal Baz. They will draw from clinical practice, lived experience, and current research to explore how autism intersects with themes of connection, regulation, and emotional development.

## Who is this conference for?

This conference is open to therapists, educators, researchers, healthcare professionals; attachment and autism theorists and practitioners from a range of disciplines; and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of autism through a relational and attachment-informed lens.

We aim to prompt a conversation about how we can better listen, re-engage, offer adaptations, and design environments that reach people of all backgrounds, genders and abilities and highlight the often-overlooked emotional and relational needs of autistic people.

## HISTORICAL AND CURRENT SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SUPPORT FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

Bowlby emphasized the need for research to be conceived within the context of social structures. We will discuss how the complexity of autism discourse is informed by power structures and privilege, and environmental structures that impact us all.

## WHAT DOES ATTACHMENT THEORY HAVE TO OFFER ?

The conference aims to highlight current research and practice in light of autistic people's experiences. A strong emphasis is on co-development amidst the neuro-spectrum, to facilitate insight on what can be done to build trust.

We will explore the nuanced relationship between early relational experiences and neurodevelopment, asking how early attunement shapes our experience within an environment of shared emotional safety. Whether in infancy, adolescence, or adulthood, a felt sense of safety remains foundational for emotional development.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES, SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Our ambition is that this conference will explore how autism and other characteristics intersect with themes of connection, nervous system regulation, and emotional development. Together, we will examine how attachment-informed approaches can help bridge gaps in understanding and care, and how attachment theory can be expanded to reflect neurodiverse experiences and foster deeper understanding.

**Speakers:** Dr Salma Siddique, Dr Ben Grey, Ann Hardy, Finn Gratton, Dr Gilbert Foley And Tal Baz

**Chair:** Dr Lisa Greenspan

## DETAILS

**Date:** Saturday 11th October 2025

**Time:** 10.00 – 5.30 (UK Time)

**Location:** Online Via Zoom

**Cost:** Early Bird Tickets £125\* | Bowlby Members and Supervision and Certificate Students £100 | Bowlby ABPP & APL Students Free  
Early bird discount for Full Ticket bookings made before 31st August 2025 – Full Price £150

**Book Here:** <https://thebowlbycentre.org.uk/cpd/>

# ORDER OF EVENTS

SATURDAY 11TH OCTOBER 2025 | 10:00AM - 5:30PM UK TIME

10.00-10.30 am **Lisa Greenspan** - Welcome & Introductions

10.30-11.30 am **Dr Salma Siddique** - Attachment Unfinished: Fitting In, Belonging, and the Institutions We Inherit

Break

11.45 am-12.45 pm **Dr Ben Grey** - Why can't you just be normal!? Making Sense of Autism in Family Relationships

12.45-1.15 pm **RECAP OF MORNING SESSIONS**

Lunch

1.45-2.45 pm **Dr Gilbert Foley & Tal Baz** - Individuated but not separated: A hypothetical understanding of anxiety in autism and DIR (Development, Individuated Difference, Relationship-based)/psychodynamic intervention paradigm

2.45-3.45 pm **Ann Hardy** - Autism, attachment and couples

Break

4:00-5:00 pm **Finn Gratton** - Neuroqueering relationality: An exploration of neuroqueer experiences of embodiment, connection, and resonance.

5:00 pm - Panel Discussion



# SPEAKER

**Dr Salma Siddique, PhD, FRSA, FRAI FHEA UKCP'Reg** – Attachment Unfinished:  
Fitting In, Belonging, and the Institutions We Inherit

*"It is a joy to be hidden, but a disaster not to be found." — Winnicott.*

This reflexive piece explores how institutions — those fragile surrogates for family — have long been less about nourishing attachment than managing the terrors it provokes. Bowlby, who insisted that attachment was not a luxury but a necessity, described a child's first precarious attempt to make the world survivable. Later, as Menzies Lyth observed, we hand over this impossible project to institutions, quietly deputising them to regulate the unbearable weight of our dependencies. Freud, ever attentive to our inventive self-defences, suggested that it is often the small differences we cultivate — the bureaucratic distinctions, the protocols of belonging — that allow institutions to protect themselves against the deeper and more disturbing recognition of our shared vulnerability. In this light, the toxic workplace is not an aberration but the logical, if tragic, extension of an institution's defensive logic: an architecture of disavowal. In this, attachment itself is treated as a threat. And those we call 'canaries' — the ones most sensitive to the institution's psychic atmosphere — are not failures of adjustment but early messengers, exposing what the system would prefer to deny. Praslova's (2025) Canary Code invites us to listen differently, not to symptoms to be corrected, but to revelations of a broken contract between people and the systems meant to sustain them. As AI automates intimacy, hybrid working disperses the physical anchors of belonging, and financial precarity erodes the promises institutions once offered, the old defences grow brittle, less able to hold back what they were designed to protect us from. In such a landscape, "fitting in often replaces belonging", and the cost of this substitution is borne silently, in the private failure to feel found. If institutions were built to shield us from the dangers of being found, perhaps their survival now depends on learning, belatedly, that it was never the finding that was dangerous, only the hiding.



## Biographical note:

What if we/I write because attachment falters, because the wish to be known misfires? I work as a part-time academic, as a Research and Teaching Consultant at NSPC with recent experience as an Associate Professor of Psychoanalytic Anthropology, USA, a psychotherapist, Clinical Supervisor and Consultant with a small private practice in Scotland — ways, perhaps, not of explaining myself, but of rehearsing what cannot be explained. I move between psychoanalytic anthropology, existential thought, and medical humanities to not resolve contradictions but linger with them. Fact and fiction may not be enemies; they may be two ways of staying close to the unbearable through friction. Like Winnicott, I have found a certain joy in hiding — and, perhaps, an even stranger joy in the risk of being found.

# SPEAKER

## **Dr Ben Grey** - Why can't you just be normal!? Making Sense of Autism in Family Relationships

Dr Ben Grey is a social worker, chartered psychologist, and a Principal Lecturer (for Research) on the Doctoral programme in Clinical Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. He is former director of the pioneering Attachment Theory, Research and Practice postgraduate programme at the University of Roehampton. He developed the Meaning of the Child Interview (MotC: [www.meaningofthechild.org](http://www.meaningofthechild.org)) a method of understanding parent-child relationships from parental discourse, and a model for using this understanding to plan intervention.



Ben has published widely on attachment, caregiving and

child-welfare, including his forthcoming book *The Meaning of the Child Interview: Making Sense of Parent-child Relationships* (Palgrave Texts in Counselling and Psychotherapy). The book has been endorsed as "the most important development in the field of attachment and caregiving since the Adult Attachment Interview" (Dr Steve Farnfield, co-editor *The Routledge Handbook of Attachment*) "a major contribution to our understanding of the attachment relationships between parents and children and ... a substantial innovation for the field." (Professor Rudi Dallos, author of *Attachment Narrative Therapy*).

Ben also has a long standing interest in autism, contributing to a relational and contextual understanding of challenges faced by families negotiating a diagnosis. This interest comes from both personal experience as a parent, as well as a researcher, having worked and published with the team behind SAFE (Systemic Autism-Related Family Enabling) a multi-family intervention, based on the principles of Attachment Narrative Therapy, to support families where a child has a diagnosis. SAFE is about to undergo a national trial.

# SPEAKER

**Dr Gilbert Foley and Tal Baz** - Individuated but not separated: A hypothetical understanding of anxiety in autism and DIR/psychodynamic intervention paradigm



**Dr Gilbert Foley**



**Tal Baz**

This case-based presentation chronicles a 4-year treatment of a 4-year-old-child with autism who presented with advanced capacities in some aspects of self but remained severely constricted by excessive separation anxiety and blunted progression through the separation process- thus the formulation of individuated (pseudo-mature) but not separated. It is hypothesized that some children on the spectrum, while attached, may not progress through the separation subphases because of the confounds and complications in relating imposed by the symptoms and individual differences of autism and may be a contributing factor to high levels anxiety seen in this population. The treatment paradigm integrates DIR and psychodynamic principles and represents the collaboration between an occupational therapist and psychodynamic psychologist.

## **Biographical note:**

**Tal Baz** is an Occupational Therapist specializing in autism spectrum disorders. In addition to providing direct treatment to children and consultation to families, she has served as a supervisor and consultant to clinicians from across disciplines, agencies and various school systems, for more than thirty years. She has been a DIR faculty member since 2001, first through ICDL and later through the Profectum Foundation, where she serves as a senior faculty member and a leader in defining the role and integration of DIR, occupational therapy and mental health.

Tal has conducted numerous courses and training seminars across the USA and internationally, and has published on the intersection of sensory processing, sensory processing disorders, autism and mental health. Tal's special interest is in sensory-affective regulation, as it develops within the parent-child relational field, and how it translates into therapeutic practice, style and technique. She maintains an active clinical practice as the director and senior clinician of a multidisciplinary clinic in Boston, which she founded in 2005.

# SPEAKER

**Dr Gilbert Foley and Tal Baz** - Individuated but not separated: A hypothetical understanding of anxiety in autism and DIR/psychodynamic intervention paradigm

**Gilbert M. Foley, Ed.D., IMH-E** serves as Consulting Clinical Psychologist at the New York Center for Child Development (NYCCD) in New York City and Clinical Co- Director of the New York City Early Childhood Mental Health Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC). He has had a private practice serving young children and their families for over 40 years with a specialization in mental health and developmental disabilities. He is Endorsed as an Infant Mental Health/ Clinical Mentor, Level IV and is a founding board member of the New York and Pennsylvania State Associations of Infant Mental Health. He is a senior faculty member of the DIR Profectum Academy and core faculty member of the Psychodynamic Institute for Clinical Social Work (Chicago). He is on the editorial board of the Journal of Infant, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy. Dr Foley is a retired tenured faculty member of the doctoral program in School-Clinical Child Psychology at Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology (Yeshiva University) and Director Emeritus of the Graduate Program in Infant Mental Health and Developmental Practice at Adelphi University. He served as Visiting Fellow at the Yale Child Study Center and was Director of Psychology at the Department of Pediatrics at the Medical College of Pennsylvania. An innovator in reflective supervision, Dr. Foley served as Senior Clinical Supervisor at NYU/ Bellevue Hospital Center, Department of Pediatrics. As Principal Investigator of the Federally Funded Family Centered Resource Project, he trained early childhood professionals across the US. Dr. Foley is the co-author of four books and has written over 55 scholarly articles and chapters. Linking Sensory Integration and Mental Health: Nurturing Self-Regulation in Infants and Young Children has recently been published by National Zero to Three. Dr. Foley lectures widely nationally and internationally. His contributions to the field have been acknowledged by numerous organizations.



# SPEAKER

**Ann Hardy** - Autism, attachment and couples

This talk explores how to provide neuro-affirmative therapeutic support to neurodiverse couples whether that's two neurodivergent partners, or one neurodivergent and one neurotypical partner, with a particular focus on managing difficulties emerging from past infantile attachment issues.

Insecure attachment patterns have a way of finding their way into the present-day, particularly into our most intimate relationships. The couple is a space where past difficulties can often be reenacted, and, sometimes, with help and hard work, worked through and resolved. Since neurodivergent people are at greater risk of developing an

insecure attachment style as infants, it is particularly important to provide neuro-affirmative and attachment theory-informed support to enable them to build more secure adult attachments.



## Biographical note:

Ann is a psychodynamic couples psychotherapist, with both a personal and a professional interest in autism spectrum conditions. As the parent of an autistic young person, she has served as a trustee of the autism research charity, Autistica, and is one of the authors of its 'One in a Hundred' report exploring what autistic people and their families want from autism research. As a psychotherapist, her work with neurodiverse couples and individuals has given her a deep respect for the strengths, as well as the challenges, autistic people bring to relationships.

Ann has a masters in psychodynamic psychotherapy from Tavistock Relationships (TR), the internationally-renowned centre for excellence in couples therapy, where she remains a visiting clinician.

She runs trainings, writes and speaks about neurodiverse relationships and is embarking on a professional doctorate, researching the unconscious phantasies that emerge when neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals partner up.

# SPEAKER

**Finn Gratton** - Neuroqueering relationality: An exploration of neuroqueer experiences of embodiment, connection, and resonance.

Finn Gratton's presentation will explore the experience of relationality among autistic people, including those who are trans, genderqueer, and gender expansive. Autistic relationality is sensitive, expansive and ecological. We will look at how this autistic relationality can enliven and expand our conceptualizations of attachment and resonance, how limited frameworks for understanding connection exclude and abrade against neuroqueer experience, and how we can neuroqueer our approaches to being in and supporting relationship in general.



## Biographical note:

Finn Gratton, M.A., LPCC (they/them), is an autistic, genderqueer, somatic psychotherapist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. They are deeply absorbed in the nourishment of neuroqueer relationality, and in neuroqueering societal experiences and discourse around being with Life, self and other. In addition to their psychotherapy practice, they facilitate multiple neurodiversity-affirming professional consultation groups, creating an environment for shared learning among neurodivergent and neurotypical mental health practitioners. They are also a founding member of the Neuroqueer Somatics Research Collective, and facilitator of Neuroqueer Somatics Learning Lab. Their publications include *Supporting Transgender Autistic Youth and Adults: A Guide for Professionals and Families* (2019), and a chapter, "A Trans Autistic Vision" in *Surviving Transphobia* (2023).

# CHAIR: LISA GREENSPAN



Dr Lisa Greenspan's (she/her) passion and commitment to inclusion in psychotherapy practice and education spans decades of work in research, clinical and service provision across all of the sectors, and teaching in several institutions including The Bowlby Centre. Since the 1980's Lisa has worked in the psychology discipline in the area of disability and accessibility, initially working as an Occupational Psychologist carrying out action-research with dementia patient care in the NHS and social services. Lisa then qualified as a chartered Counseling Psychologist in 2009, piloting an attachment priming imagery intervention with parents of learning disabled and autistic children.

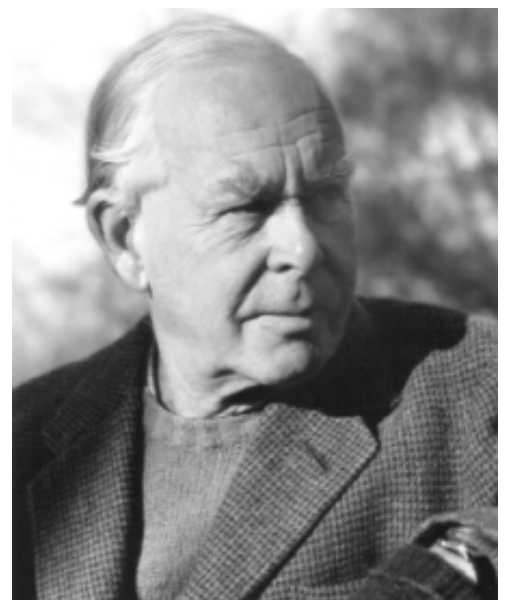
She gained experience of working therapeutically as a trauma specialist with a wide range of people with learning disabilities and neurodivergence, physical impairment and health conditions, in schools, the statutory and the charitable sector. The opportunity to work alongside some of the pioneers in the field of disability psychotherapy has enabled Lisa the joyous opportunity of working therapeutically with many individuals and families.

Over the past eight years, Lisa's energy has been focused towards campaigning for trauma-informed accessible psychotherapy. Her platform is to prove the case for inclusive practice as the mental health industry standard, rather than conceptualised as radical and other, with the promotion of the use of trauma-informed working within a containing yet flexible frame. In 2021 Lisa founded London Accessible Psychotherapy & Inclusive Supervision (LAPIS ), a disability psychotherapy service that works through the specialist training and clinical supervision of therapists. LAPIS designs and offers services that showcase the viability of an approach that honours the diversity amongst humans.



## THE BOWLBY CENTRE

Since 1976 The Bowlby Centre has developed as an organisation committed to the practice of attachment-based psychoanalytic psychotherapy. As a registered charity it trains attachment-based psychoanalytic psychotherapists, offers related CPD short courses and delivers a low-cost psychotherapy service to those most frequently excluded from long term psychotherapy.



# WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE

**Date:** Saturday 11th October 2025

**Time:** 10.00 – 5.30 (UK Time)

**Location:** Online Via Zoom

**Cost:** Early Bird Tickets £125\* | Bowlby Members and Supervision  
and Certificate Students £100 | Bowlby ABPP & APL Students Free  
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