

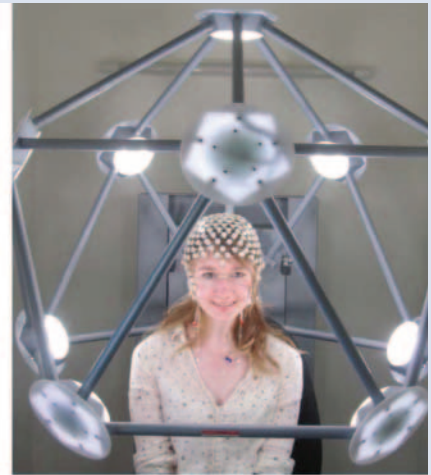
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psychiatry in pictures

The neuroscientific legacy of Anna Freud

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From the left, clockwise: The exterior of the Anna Freud Centre in London, UK; a photogrammetry system that helps to increase accuracy of the neuroimaging data; an infant wearing a high-density electroencephalography net.

In 1941, Anna Freud created the Hampstead War Nurseries in London to provide practical, emotional and psychological support for children affected by the Second World War. The Hampstead Clinic opened a decade later and together the centres had four main goals: to provide therapy for needy children, to provide specialised child-focused training for professionals, to improve education and society through psychoanalysis and to support research. The clinic, renamed the Anna Freud Centre, continues to offer psychiatric and psychological support to young people. The developmental neuroscience research arm reflects the Centre's melding of old with new. Neuroscientific techniques including high-density electroencephalography are used to investigate the brain basis of various aspects of paediatric mental health, such as abnormal attachment in infants and conduct disorder in adolescents.

Anna was Sigmund Freud's sixth and final child, born in Vienna in 1895. She grew up surrounded by psychoanalysis but initially trained as a teacher before joining the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1922. During the 1920s, along with others, she championed the application of psychoanalytic techniques to childhood and began to theorise about and lecture on child analysis. In 1938, she emigrated with her family to London.

While Anna Freud is recognised primarily for her work in psychoanalysis, she also played an active role in research and appreciated the importance of integrating psychoanalysis with ideas from other disciplines. That the modern-day Anna Freud Centre uses neuroscience to inform theory and practice and is, therefore, in keeping with Anna Freud's multidisciplinary heritage. Despite her beneficial impact on a range of psychoanalytic, educational, legal and social spheres, much of her initial input has long been forgotten. Through embracing modern technologies and approaches, the Anna Freud Centre's research may help to reverse this trend.

Given that contemporary psychiatry often involves delving into, or acknowledging, the past in order to improve the future, it is in a similar vein that the theoretical and historical legacy of Anna Freud continues to inform the contemporary practice of, and research into, mental health in young people.

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