

Becoming attachment aware and trauma informed

This introductory document, collated by John Fardon, Education Inclusion Officer – Mental Health, Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service is based on training received and the writings of influential people in this subject.

*Acknowledgements are given to Louise Bomber, Daniel Hughes, Bruce Perry, Kim Golding, and others. I would recommend that all Designated Teachers for Children in Care and their colleagues are trained in the area of attachment and trauma and what they can do to meet their needs in school. Particular thanks to Louise Bomber for her 7 day 'Attachment Lead Training, enabling me to share some of her knowledge with the schools I have worked with in Northamptonshire. **Appendices and articles are available from John Fardon when supporting the school, after a request for help has been made to the EIOMH via the Virtual School.***

1. If your school is struggling with understanding the needs and behaviour of a child in the care of Northamptonshire Local Authority, go to the Virtual School website and download a form to request support from the EIOMH, complete it, with relevant signatures and return to Virtual School. **You may find the following advice helpful before making a request for help**, or this document may confirm that you definitely would like help from the EIOMH.
2. Get to know the child you are working with. Find out what has happened to them. The child's story can create empathy and knowing triggers and calmers are vital to help co-regulate with the child, anticipating dysregulation.
3. Ensure that the child has one key adult who knows them really well and becomes the expert in the child. (See Louise Bomber pocketbook 'The Key Adult in School.')
4. Gather a team of empathic people around the key adult to support the child, and let the child know who their 'team' is, where, when and how they can find them when needed. Possibly take photos of these adults and where they might be found. Give the team a name, such as 'Team Adam - *pupil's name*,' so the child knows that you are all there to help them. Meet weekly to feedback important information, improve practice and enable all the team to be better stress regulators for the child and for each other. **The EIOMH can help with this process.**
5. Create an Individual Development Plan for the child, including what you might do in case of emergencies.
6. Read the Louise Bomber article with 20 top tips for supporting children in care or adopted within their schools. This will help to give you some understanding and some practical advice for working with these children.
7. Read pages 29 and 30 from Calmer Classrooms, free to download. 'A Snapshot of the impact of trauma on learning, and classroom practices for dealing with traumatised children.'
https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/calmer_classrooms.pdf
Read the whole document when you have more time.
8. Familiarise yourselves with the different types of insecure attachment and how they manifest themselves. (Page 2)



Different Insecure Attachment Styles

You may see different language describing these styles, so I have tried to include the most common descriptors. There is a wealth of resources to look at on <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

Anxious / insecure /avoidant

- Pupil may appear shut down, doesn't appear to want adult intervention, compliant, can be busy with sharpening pencils etc, infrequent outbursts.
- The pupil may be thinking – why should I trust you, you will most likely let me down, I can't face more rejection. May come across as pseudo independent and self-sufficient.
- Strategies – still intervene, use tasks to do something together – build the relationship and do things alongside the child. Help them to build dependency on the adult – not independence.

Anxious /ambivalent/resistant

- Charming, very helpful, lots of chatter, hypersensitive, attention needing, often over familiar with strangers.
- The pupil may be thinking – I need to stay connected with you in case you disappear. It is scary when you are not with me and I am lost from your mind. I need to keep my eye on you.
- Strategies – be clear about what is happening and when, use transitional objects frequently, let them know you are coming back, check in with pupil throughout the day, tell them you are keeping them in mind even when you are separated from them.

Disorganised/ reactive/disorientated/controlling

- Harsh, fearful, unpredictable, rejecting, domineering, conversation fragmented and topics changed
- The pupil may be thinking – I don't know what will happen next, You might turn on me, I don't know whether to approach you or push you away.
- Strategies – stay very calm, stay close, provide safe spaces in school, predictable routines, very few transitions, regular sensory breaks and lots of empathy. Choose your battles for control. Practice co-regulation together.

9. In 1:1 work with pupils use the PACE or PLACE model described by Dan Hughes to help build your relationship with the child.
<https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/> PACE is an acronym that stands for:

Playfulness – The adult is engaged with the child in a way that invites spontaneity, curiosity, and exploration. The adult is able to engage with the child expressively, using facial expressions, voice and body to join in the affective and creative life of the child. A playful attitude implies that the strength of the relationship is larger



than any minor irritations. People with a playful attitude don't take themselves too seriously and are able to laugh at their mistakes. The primary intent of a playful attitude is to invite the other into one's experience - to simply enjoy being together, with no spoken or unspoken goals.

Love – The quality often omitted from this model, although sometimes included in the context of parenting. I believe it is important for children to experience love from adults in school in a way that is consistent and unconditional. This does not mean accepting all the behaviour the child may demonstrate, but that love is demonstrated even when the behaviour has been 'unacceptable' or 'unbearable' for the system and the child is treated with the respect and love that every child deserves - because they are a child!

Acceptance - Playfulness is fostered by an attitude of unconditional acceptance. The infant and/or older child's safety is enhanced when their inner self is never at risk for rejection, ridicule, or disappointment when adults relate to them. Rather, only their behaviour is subject to adults' evaluations and guidance, judgments, or criticism. The child who feels accepted knows that he is not his behaviour. Acceptance, when felt completely and taken for granted, becomes a secure base upon which the child is much more likely to learn from their mistakes and to accept the adult's decisions regarding their behaviour. For true acceptance to take place, it is vital that the adult has a habit of perceiving the individual child beyond the behaviours.

Curiosity – Ideally, parents are very curious to know who their children are from the time they are conceived. From birth, parents are continuously involved in acts of discovery with their child. When an infant senses the impact of his actions and expressions on his parents, he becomes more aware of these actions and more likely to engage in actions that have a positive impact on his parents. Curiosity is important for discipline to be effective. An attitude of curiosity is a "not-knowing" stance that requires that the adult enquire about the child's inner life that led to the behaviours under concern. When an adult holds this kind of attitude towards the child, the child is much more likely to feel accepted by them and subsequently more likely to follow any disciplinary action taken.

Empathy- Empathy is a natural response to being with another person. Our brains are wired to experience empathy for others. If we have experienced empathy from our attachment figures, it is easy to access empathy for those who see us as attachment figures. Likewise, it is hard for us to experience empathy for others if we have not experienced empathy from others in the past. Teachers and support staff often try to fix the problem, may give advice, or eliminate the problem by dealing with it themselves. *It is important that the adult is comfortable with the emotions the child is experiencing.* As the adult facilitates their own emotional development, they are also increasing their readiness to experience empathy for the child when he needs it.



Some key thoughts

'See child – think toddler.' These children are often like toddlers emotionally, having missed out on many of the childhood experiences we assume all children have. They are more likely to need to play, rather like children in Foundation Stage play with water, sand, singing of rhymes and songs and other early childhood activities.

'Build your relationship with the child.' You are most likely to be the adult with whom the child can change their model of the world, if your model is one reflecting PLACE and using the appropriate strategies. For more strategies and activities see Louise Bomber's website <https://touchbase.org.uk/>. Make sure you know the child!

'Feeling safe?' This is often not the case for these children and also sometimes for many of us who work with them. What could you do to help them feel safe? Watch and listen to the children and find out what helps them to feel safe, and then provide safe spaces for them to be. It is very helpful if the school has had training in Protective Behaviours, uses the Language of Safety and models safety to children and adults. I would encourage you to look after yourself, talk with someone and be aware that these children can stir up uncomfortable feelings for ourselves.

Creating calm in your school and classroom

- 1. Create Pauses.** It is important to create pauses during the school day, enabling children and staff to counteract the effects of stress. If we build in pauses then we will reduce the number of 'meltdowns' shown by pupils through anger, anxiety, frustration and a whole mix of different feelings. Relaxation techniques, mindfulness and reframing thinking are but a few of the ways to do this. How about just pressing the 'pause' button with the pupil, before moving on with the next task.
- 2. Settling to Learn.** Pupils settle to learn when their feelings are regulated and their thinking skills are activated. We need to know the children we work with, what helps them to calm down and what is too much, when we get too close and when they need space from their key adult.
- 3. Look out for sensory overload.** Pupils experience sensory overload when stimulated too much, when they get over-excited, too many transitions or maybe triggers from outside taking them back to a place/time when they were traumatised. We need to learn how each child responds as they are not all the same. It will help to build in sensory breaks during the school day, some that are high-energy and some low-energy based, depending on the needs of the child.

NB. Read the following document and reflect on practices in your school: Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy: Guidance for Brighton & Hove Schools, September 2018. https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-hove.gov.uk/files/Behaviour%20Regulation%20Policy%20Guidance%20-%20Sep%202018_1.pdf

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