



Let's learn together

By Sheila Lavery

A guide for parents
and teachers of
adopted children
in primary school
in Northern Ireland

adoption uk
supporting adoptive families



Health and Social
Care

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Introduction

This booklet has been commissioned by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board.

It is written by an adopter with contributions from other adoptive parents, using recommendations from internationally renowned experts on trauma and attachment, plus a wealth of information gained through the training department of Adoption UK. Its purpose is to give adoptive parents and teachers an insight into how early relational trauma affects brain development, why school can be challenging for adopted children, and how we can help to improve the experience for all children by paying attention to the needs of the most vulnerable.

Although the focus is adoption, the information also applies to looked after children and any child living with loss and the effects of trauma. Certain common areas of difficulty are highlighted and various tips and ideas suggested. However, not all of the information is relevant to all adopted children all of the time, so feel free to pick and mix what works for your child, revisit and revise often and strive to be an equal partner in your child's education. We parents know our children better than anyone and our insight is a valuable asset to the teaching and support staff in school.

As our children look to us to give them a sense of safety and self worth, it is worth remembering that our attitude towards them and our relationship with the school can make a huge difference to how well they manage the whole experience. This "attitude" is critical regardless of whether or

not our children qualify for additional support in school, so it is emphasised throughout the booklet. The section at the back focuses on special educational needs and guides you through the process of securing support for your child.

Finally, because few teachers have a working knowledge of attachment and developmental trauma, there are some separate teacher information sheets in the back cover, which can be copied and distributed to teachers. The completed confidential pupil information sheet should be kept in a locked cabinet in the school office. Hopefully, this information should help the school develop a better understanding of your child's needs.

This small booklet is by no means an exhaustive resource, but the aim is to give you the beginnings of a toolkit. Use the resources and the contacts listed to add to this, trust your instincts, and avail of any support on offer and you will be well equipped to help your child through primary school. Good luck and keep up the great work.

Please note:

The views expressed in this booklet are the author's, and do not necessarily reflect those of the HSC Board.

All the case histories and quotes from parents are genuine, but names and details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

All photos are posed by models

The terms – 'he', 'she' and 'they' are used interchangeably throughout the booklet and are not intended to discriminate.

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Development and developmental trauma

“There is considerable evidence for changes in brain function in association with child abuse and neglect... Hyper arousal, aggressive responses, dissociative reactions, difficulties with aspects of executive functions and educational underachievement thus begin to be better understood.”

Dr D Glaser, Consultant Paediatric Psychiatrist, Great Ormond Street Hospital

Neuroscience has established that the way we are cared for in the womb and in early childhood affects how our brain develops. Consistently good enough loving relationships and low stress levels in early childhood build a brain that equips us to learn, share, empathise, regulate our feelings, feel good about ourselves and others, and withstand everyday stresses. On the other hand, traumatic early experiences can affect both our ability to form trusting relationships and develop healthy, well functioning brains.

Traumatic experiences can be defined as anything a child experiences as life threatening. This does not have to be abuse; neglect alone can cause the damage. Imagine yourself as a tiny infant, completely dependent on your mother to keep you alive and you get an idea of how being separated from her could feel life-threatening.

The human brain is not fully developed at birth, it continues to grow after birth, reaching 80-90 per cent of its adult size in the first three years of

Amygdala

The amygdala is a part of the limbic system involved in processing emotional responses. Trauma expert B. van der Kolk calls it the smoke alarm of the brain. Our children have extremely sensitive smoke alarms, so the slightest whiff of stress can put them into a state of alarm.



life. It develops from bottom up and from inside out, starting with the brain stem.

The brain stem (primitive brain) controls basic functions like breathing, blood pressure, plus fear, rage and regulation. For a child developing in a high-stress environment, the regulatory abilities of the brain stem are already impaired at birth.

The limbic system is the emotional centre of the brain, built on the brain stem. It becomes wired by experiences in the first year of life. Children born into loving homes have a limbic system wired for love, security and dependence while being born into a hostile environment creates a limbic system wired for fear, insecurity, and control.



Neo-cortex



Limbic system



Reptilian/
Brain Stem

The **neo-cortex** or 'thinking' brain continues to develop into adulthood. It processes information from both the brain stem and the limbic system. When children experience abuse, neglect or abandonment at an early age, fear and stress flood the brain stem and/or limbic systems. The resulting developmental trauma impacts on the neo-cortex, causing problems with attachments and executive functioning skills, (see pages 7&8).

Think about how your child functions in school. Many of our children have good enough thinking and reasoning skills when they are calm, but when they feel anxious or stressed, they can "lose the plot". Working to ensure they feel safe and calm helps all of the brain work better.

Bottom - up rewiring

Although our children's experiences have impacted on their brain development, they can still make good progress at school and at home when we parents, teachers and carers change our attitude and expectations. Quite simply, we need to rewire the brain from the bottom up by relating to traumatised children of all ages with the attitude we would use with babies and toddlers, accepting that there are some things they cannot do despite their chronological age. This developmental approach is intensive and lengthy. It can take many years to repair the damage caused by neglect in infancy.



“The brain systems responsible for healthy emotional relationships will not develop in an optimal way without the right kinds of experiences at the right times of life”

Dr Bruce Perry



Developmental trauma

The relatively new term “developmental trauma disorder” is used to cover any number of difficulties that can arise when a child's developmental becomes somewhat derailed either in the womb and/or by neglect and abuse after birth. We now know from scientific research that this type of complex trauma can impact on every area of a child's development, from their physical health to their thinking, feelings, behaviour, sense of self and ability to form attachments. Two effects that we see frequently in adopted children are foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), which is a pre-birth trauma, and attachment difficulties which occur after birth.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a range of physical and neurological birth defects caused by a woman drinking while pregnant.

FASD is the most common preventable cause of learning difficulties known to doctors. If you have a child diagnosed with FASD, you may already know quite a lot about the disorder, but many children,

who do not display the physical characteristics are often undiagnosed until they show difficulties at school, or are never diagnosed at all.

People with FASD do not grow out of it. So a diagnosis is critical in increasing understanding of their difficulties, getting support in school and helping them to develop essential life skills.

Children with FASD can appear bright, articulate and

confident, but there are parts of their brain that just don't work well and they can quickly become frustrated, angry and behave badly. As these behaviours result from deficits in brain functioning and are beyond the child's control, parents and teachers may find that "normal" discipline does not change the child's behaviour and may actually make it worse as the child can feel frustrated and confused.

An invisible disability

Alcohol causes neurological damage such as:

- Poor school performance
- Memory problems
- Difficulty storing and retrieving information
- Inconsistent performance ('on' and 'off' days)
- Impulsivity, distractibility, disorganisation
- Ability to repeat instructions, but inability to put them into action
- Difficulty with abstract concepts, such as maths, money and time
- Slower thinking skills
- Slower hearing pace (may only understand every third word of normal conversation)
- Developmental gaps (may act younger than chronological age)
- Inability to predict outcomes or understand consequences
- Inability to interpret and respond appropriately to social situations.

“My son has FASD and is in mainstream school, He struggles with friendships and can be overwhelmed by stimulating environments; even bright wall displays distress him. He can't bear people touching him so he goes to the front or the back of the class line. In class he sits beside the teacher, which gives him the close supervision he needs. He was made a P1 mentor, and he gets out of class 20 minutes early at lunchtime to set up play equipment for P1 and P2. The responsibility is good for him and it means he's not lonely at breaks. He needs routine and doesn't cope well with change. School works best when teachers communicate with me and each other as any change to rules, routine or strategies throws him completely.”

World Health Organisation figures suggest that:

- 1 in 100 have FASD
- Many more remain undiagnosed

A 1998 report, *Maternal alcohol consumption and the behaviour of the fetus* by Professor Peter Hepper, QUB, discovered that 60-70 per cent of women in Northern Ireland drink alcohol during pregnancy. Many people think an occasional drink does no harm, but there is no safe limit of alcohol in pregnancy.

Attachment difficulties

Healthy attachments are essential to a child developing well at home, school and in wider society. The word attachment can be described as a deep and supportive bond between a child and his caregiver that binds them in space, endures over time and creates a sense of safety and stability.

Although nobody is born attached, we are born with the drive to form attachments, primarily with our birth mother. Attachments are formed in infancy through the meeting of physical and emotional needs. All babies have needs. If a baby's caregiver recognises and meets those needs consistently in the first year of life, then the baby begins to trust that their needs will be met. This trust creates a secure attachment, which gives a child a safe base from which to explore the world around him and return to when he needs comfort and safety.

The power of the primary attachment

Our children will not have had this chance to build attachment security and that can make life hard for them. This is because the first attachment between birth mother and baby is critical to survival, so it is the one that sets the template for all other relationships in life. All adopted children, will have experienced disruptions to this cycle caused by maternal deprivation, neglect, illness, multiple carers, abuse and/or frequent moves through the care system. As a result, they tend to have an insecure attachment style that shows up as an anxious, avoidant, angry/ambivalent or disorganised way of relating to others and the world.

They are also likely to have found alternative ways of trying to get their



“Hours in infancy have more power to shape us than months in middle age”

Bruce Perry

Adoptive parents need to be as...

- Physically present
- Emotionally available
- Responsive
- Caring

... as you would be with a baby

needs met. We tend to call these behaviours “attachment difficulties”. For example, they may try to get their needs met by being loud, demanding, clingy, aggressive, controlling, or safety seeking, or sometimes by simply “switching” off and waiting until it is safe to make their needs known.

This is not their fault; it is their “internal working model” of how they learned to survive in an unsafe world. When our children come into our homes, they cannot easily change the way they think, feel and behave. Only through a process of intensive re-parenting can we help them feel safe enough to relax and learn new ways of relating in the world.

10 ways to build a better attachment

1. Help your child feel safe by being calm, consistent, predictable and repetitive.
2. Be available, responsive and caring - nurture as you would a baby or toddler
3. Look for and validate the feelings behind behaviours before disciplining.
4. Share lots of fun, playful, low-key activities.
5. Parent the child based on their emotional age
6. Model and teach good emotional control
7. Listen with empathy to your child, acknowledge their difficulties and validate their worries.
8. Have realistic expectations. Think of what your child has lived through and how you would feel and behave if it had happened to you
9. Be kind and patient with yourself- you have needs too!
10. Take good care of yourself and make good use of available support

What makes adoption different?

Although attachment difficulties are perceived as problems with close relationships, the damage may be much more pervasive. Attachment difficulties can leave a child feeling...>>

Think about how your children behave at home and in school because their behaviour is the language they developed before they had words to name their needs and feelings. Behaviour continues to be the adopted child's first language.



I cannot trust adults to give me what I need

I am no good

The world is scary

Attachment difficulties can make it hard for children to...

- Explore the world from a safe base – be confident, well motivated
- Achieve developmental milestones
- Reach their intellectual potential
- Behave in a socially acceptable way
- Think logically
- Develop a conscience, have empathy
- Become self-reliant
- Cope with stress, frustration, fear, worry
- Develop good relationships with peers and teachers
- Feel like a worthwhile person.

With thanks to Vera Fahlberg

How might a child like this feel and behave in school when they are away from their attachment figure for several hours a day, competing for adult attention with up to 30 other children, having their work and behaviour criticised and trying to manage dozens of relationships?

Developmental gaps

A **adopted children** often feel, think and act much younger than their chronological, age. It's as if they get 'stuck' at critical developmental stages which leaves gaps in their development.

These gaps can create challenges for them at school, where they are expected to behave with the same maturity as their securely attached peers. This can be frustrating for a child who may have the concentration and stimulation levels of a much younger child and may need learning tools, play activities, nurture, supervision, targets and boundaries appropriate to their developmental, rather than their chronological, age.

The key thing to remember is that it is never too late to build a secure attachment. A secure attachment is critical to emotional stability, relationship building, and learning. So, the time a parent invests in building an attachment (with bottom-up rewiring) is like watering a plant. It is essential for growth and development and is likely

John's story

"The parenting style we used successfully with our birth child was just not working with our adoptive son. His behaviour was "stuck". We went on Adoption UK's It's a Piece of Cake training and gained valuable insight into therapeutic parenting. We changed the way we parent to suit our son's development and the improvement in his behaviour is massive."

to pay greater dividends in the long run than academic hot housing. In fact it is so important to put family first that some parents keep their children home from school for several weeks after placement, while others arrange for struggling children to attend school on a reduced timetable (see starting school, page 26 and attendance and absences, page 35)

Think toddler

A good rule of thumb when parenting or teaching a child with attachment difficulties is to "think toddler". In other words, actions that you would accept as normal in a much younger child may be linked to attachment, trauma and loss in school age children.

You may notice others gaps. "Babyish" behaviours can become more pronounced in periods of stress when we all naturally revert to earlier patterns of behaviour and more primitive survival responses, but less obvious gaps can persist unnoticed throughout childhood and adolescence.

Common developmental gaps include:

- Having the emotional control and concentration levels of a toddler (see Executive functions page 10)
- Sense of permanency of an infant (see pages 12 & 13)
- Unable to wait for reward or attention (see Delayed gratification, page 23)
- Controlling behaviour (see page 24)
- Not able to regulate stress and stimulation (Toxic stress, pages 17 & 18)
- Unable to play nicely or socialise well (see Friendships, page 34)
- Sensory issues and difficulties with motor skills (see page 19)
- Being excessively clingy or overly independent
- Having the overwhelming shame of a toddler (see pages 20 & 21).

Executive functions

“Our children are doing the best they can. The neurobiological impact of trauma means that rather than “won’t do, they simply “can’t do” much of what is asked of them at home and at school.”

Christine Gordon, Parent Consultant

Executive functions are a set of mental processes that help us to learn. We use them to solve problems, remember, manage time and space, plan, organise, start and change activities, set goals and stay on task long enough to achieve them. They also help us to control impulses and regulate feelings. While many children navigate school with a basic set of ‘school skills’ that enable them to follow rules, learn right from wrong, understand what comes next, see other people’s points of view, predict outcomes and know that a hidden object (be it a pencil or Mum) is still there even when they cannot see it, our children may be lucky to develop these skills by the time they leave.

Essentially, executive functions are like a manager that controls and organises the brain. It is good to keep this analogy in mind when thinking about how bright children often struggle at school.

Executive functions develop from infancy through to adulthood, enjoying a burst of activity in adolescence. How well these skills develop depends on a child’s environment. Our children will likely have experienced angry and abusive parents who exposed them to an over-stimulating environment and/or neglectful parents who created an under-stimulated one.

Neither of these environments provide the stability and predictability needed to develop emotional regulation and good executive functioning. Consequently, our children struggle to process new

experiences and may remain ‘stuck’ in repeating patterns of behaviour that served a purpose in their traumatic past but are no longer useful to them.

When completing even simple exercises executive functions help us to:

1. **Think about what we want to achieve**
2. **Make a plan**
3. **Carry out the plan**
4. **Evaluate the job.**

A child may have plenty of ability and try his best, but if he cannot make a plan, carry it out and evaluate the results, he will rarely achieve his goals. Also, executive failures at any stage of this sequence can lead to aggressive outbursts. Teaching the “goal, obstacle, plan, do review” approach can keep children on track.

“Supporting an adopted child’s EF skills in class supports all children. Teachers need to realise that all children are still developing their EF skills, so all children will benefit from supportive strategies.”

Marion Allen, Education Consultant, Family Futures

When Canadian psychiatrist, Dr Adele Diamond, studied self-regulation and problem solving in four-year olds, she found that even at this early stage self-regulation skills were a more reliable predictor of academic success than IQ.

(Diamond 2007).

How to help children develop their EF skills

- Set one task at a time and demonstrate; “here’s one I did earlier”
- Plan routines and use visual and verbal prompts
- Chunk information to improve learning and recall
- Play memory games
- Break down tasks into simple steps (see checklist opposite)
- Goal, plan, obstacle, do, review
- Provide the right materials
- Give a stress ball to help concentration
- Plan and structure times of change.

Visual planners help a child to structure their day or part of their day at home or at school. You can adapt these according to a child’s age and ability, perhaps using one for the morning, one in school and one for homework. Ask the class teacher to place a plan for each day on the child’s desk. You can use wipe clean laminate cards for this or download free printable resources from www.visualaidsforlearning.com

Alex’s room tidying checklist

Put dirty clothes in wash basket ✓

Put all rubbish in waste

Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function™ (BRIEF™)

by Gerard A. Gioia, Ph.D., Peter K. Isquith, Ph.D., Steven C. Guy, Ph.D., and Lauren Kenworthy, Ph.D. is the psychological assessment to ask for if you want your child’s EF

My morning routine



• I get up ✓

• I wash my face and brush my teeth



• I get dressed

• I eat my breakfast



• I put on my shoes and coat



• I pick up my school bag

• We drive to school

www.projectlearnnet.org,

a site dedicated to working with children with acquired brain injury, is a great resource for learning about and teaching EF skills.

“Goal, Obstacle, Plan, Do, Review”

Model and teach this approach to planning a task:

Goal (what do you want to achieve? What will it look like when finished?)

Obstacle (what is getting in the way of you achieving your goal?)

Plan (how will you do that? Need help?)

Do (work on the task)

Review (how did it go? what worked? what didn’t? How might you improve it?)

Permanence

and the Parenting attitude



Never withdraw family fun time as a consequence for bad behaviour.

a safe base. This is why adoption can make such a difference to children even when their early years have been traumatic.

We can further enhance the benefits of permanency by developing a parenting attitude that recreates the “good enough” mother-baby relationship that our children missed out on, or did not get enough of, in infancy. Attachment psychologist Dan Hughes sums up this attitude with the acronym PLACE, where PLACE means being playful, loving, accepting, curious and empathic. This attitude alone can rewire how children see and understand themselves, other people and the world. It effectively repairs the attachment relationship – and it is the relationship, not positive reinforcement, that produces lasting change for our children. But it is not a quick fix. It is important to maintain the attitude as much as possible, especially when your child’s behaviour is challenging. Use it as your main strategy and to underpin all other strategies you employ.

This attitude effectively repairs the attachment relationship and produces lasting change for our children.

Having a forever home in which you are cherished as a permanent family member is wonderfully healing for a child who has had a difficult start in life. The stability of adoption lets children begin to rediscover life from the position of

Share the PLACE attitude with your child’s teacher and classroom assistant to help reduce your child’s stress at school.

The PLACE attitude

PLAYFUL: Playfulness and positive experiences allow a child to develop feelings of self-worth. Being playful could mean ruffling the child's hair when walking past, playing games after school, or giving her a quick, spontaneous hug. A relaxed and playful environment has a greater influence on a child's behaviour than rewards, sanctions or anger-based discipline. Playfulness engages and rewires children at the brainstem and limbic levels and recognises their limited ability to follow instructions. Timetable lots of fun into your family routine. Never withdraw family fun time as a consequence for bad behaviour.

Simply delighting in your child conveys playful acceptance of her regardless of her achievements or misdemeanours. Soft eye contact and facial expressions, good touch, and welcoming body posture communicate positivity, as does maintaining a "smiling" home environment.

LOVING: Show your child that you love her at all times, even when she misbehaves. Try not to get angry when the child misbehaves. Don't reject her even if she rejects you and reconnect with her quickly after absences or disciplining. Find something valuable about your child and find ways to love that part of her when her behaviour is at its most challenging. One way to increase your empathy in the tough times is to picture your child as the tiny frightened tot she was before coming

to you and remind yourself that it is this part of her that is frightened and fighting.

ACCEPTING: Showing acceptance of the child and the reasons behind her difficulties, even if you don't accept her behaviour, can help the child stay regulated and enable her to change her responses. Understanding that your child is doing the best she can and remembering that behaviours are a way of communicating needs and fears can help you develop an accepting attitude. You can use accepting expressions like, 'I love you very much and still it's not okay for you to hit me. Let's see if we can find a better way for you to show me what you need.'

CURIOUS: Being curious rather than angry about behaviours can encourage change. You can show curiosity by wondering out loud about the unacceptable behaviour. Curiosity can help a child to stop, think and make sense of her feelings and behaviours, and usually works better than asking direct questions. A child who has 'switched off' her feelings may not know why she's upset. She may say

something trivial, or withhold the information through lack of trust. An educated guess such as, 'I wonder if you are worried about the school trip on Friday,' can open discussion, in which you can listen empathically.

EMPATHY is the most important quality adopters can have. To understand the child's needs we have to put ourselves in their shoes and show them that we 'get it'. For example, 'I know that these spellings are hard for you to remember', 'Your eye is really red, I bet that hurts.' Empathy allows the child to feel her feelings and encourages the release of grief, fear and rage behind emotional and behavioural problems. Try to empathise with your child before disciplining and throughout any disciplinary measures (eg, consequences). It is vital to remain genuinely empathic, not flippant or sarcastic.

Empathy increases when you move from thinking, "What has my child done to me?" to "What is my child trying to say to me?" Your child's behaviour is a means of communicating their distress. While it might be directed at you, it is not about you.

Our children need parents to:

- help them feel safe
- communicate PLACE, verbally and nonverbally.
- help them regulate big feelings like fear, shame, anger and sadness.
- help them feel like a good person even when they behave badly
- show that our relationship is strong even when things are tough
- help them make sense of their life story
- help them understand our point of view and motives towards them.
- stay with them and remain strong when they are upset.

Self care

You will need support from trusted others to comfort and teach your child. You will make mistakes. Learn from them, and continue. Your own attachment histories will be awakened as you raise your child. You will have to address anything from your past that has not been resolved in order to persist in your difficult parenting.

Dan Hughes

Flicking through this booklet it may look like parenting or teaching an adopted child is relentless and demanding. It is true that just a few months of neglect and/or abuse can mean years of intensive repair for our children. The reality, though, is that parents and teachers don't need to be perfect - just good enough for long enough to help our children feel valued and give them a sense of belonging. Part of being "good enough" means having a playful, liking or loving, accepting, curious and empathic attitude most of the time.

However, we can only do this when we feel calm and regulated. To maintain a healthy attitude, we need to ask for and accept support, and take care of our own needs as attentively as we care for our children.

"There is an Indian proverb which says that everyone is a house with four rooms – a physical, a mental, an emotional, a spiritual. Most of us tend to live in one room most of the time, but unless we go into every room every day, even if only to keep it aired, we are not a complete person." Rumer Godden

We all have needs, issues and histories which impact on how we interact with others. How we were parented influences how we parent,

our experiences at school affect how we feel about our children's schooling, and of course we all have our own attachment styles with anxious, avoidant, angry or enmeshed elements that can be triggered by stress.

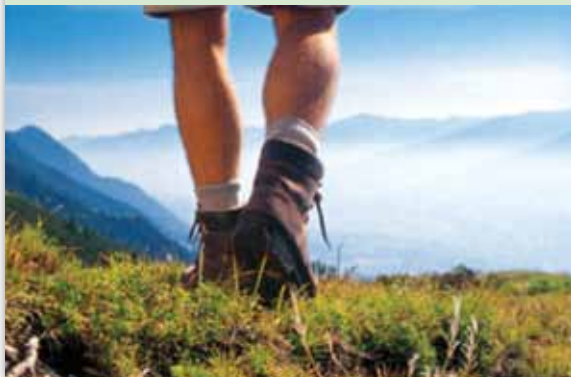
It is tempting to assume that relationship difficulties with our children are caused by the children's issues, but what matters more is the dynamic of our relationship with them. We have more ability to control our responses than our children do, so it is our job to do so. Finding out about adult attachment styles can help us understand our own relationship needs and responsibilities, while valuing ourselves teaches our children the importance of self care.

Blocked care syndrome

Parenting (or teaching) a traumatised child can mean giving a lot but getting little back, so we often defend ourselves by shutting down emotionally.

You may notice under stress how you go through the motions of caring – feeding, supervising, teaching, but without joy it's a chore! If we get blocked like this we need to reduce our stress levels by looking after our own needs, taking time out, having hobbies and seeking the support of somebody who listens to us with PLACE.

Self care helps us delight in our children and lets them experience us the way a baby experiences his doting parents, through smiles, soft eye contact, playfulness, and the "I love you because you are worth it" messages in non-verbal face and body signals. It literally changes their brain.



Permanency and constancy

“For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost.”

Frederick Buechner



The term permanency is used to describe a child’s ability to know that objects and people continue to exist even when they cannot see, hear, smell or touch them. Permanency creates a sense of safety and helping a traumatised child to feel safe is the most important thing we can do for them.

Throughout infancy children need many repetitions of things and people going away and returning repeatedly in order to grasp the concept of permanency. In healthy homes this happens all the time. For example, a baby drops a rattle and someone gives it back to him; mum goes out of the room and soon returns, parents play peek-a-boo and hide and seek; and families have loving, multisensory goodbyes and big hellos.

Thousands of repetitions of these actions with an attachment figure

enable a child to complete the critical developmental stage of permanency, which creates a feeling of safety. So, by the time securely attached children start school, they can tolerate being separated from family for a few hours without feeling like they will never see them again. Adopted children who didn’t have enough of this type of healthy interaction are likely to feel frightened and abandoned when separated from their primary carer, need almost constant attention from others, and be unable to soothe and regulate themselves.

Because they feel like they have been forgotten, children with a poor sense of permanency can become fearful and panicky and behave in a way that appears attention-seeking, disruptive, manipulative, or irritating.

Constancy

Constancy is a developmental stage linked to permanency. Constancy gives children stability and resilience and helps them see themselves and others as people of many parts. So, for example, if they misbehave they know that they have done something wrong, but they are not a bad person. Likewise, they can see a parent

or teacher’s anger as a response to a particular event, not because you hate them.

Our children have poor constancy but we can help improve it in a couple of ways:

1 Correct misdemeanours by being firm but pleasant. Tell the child the rule e.g, “you know it’s not okay to take things without asking...” and remind them of the

consequence. Do this without anger so that the limbic part of the child’s brain gets the message that he is safe even though you are not happy with what he has done. Remember, think toddler!

2 Use what Holly van Gulden, co-author of *Real Parents, Real Children*, calls the language of parts, so the child learns that we are all capable of using different parts

– angry part, sad part, chocolate-loving part – and yet be one person. Talk about the child, yourself and others using parts language, e.g, “my sleepy part didn’t hear the alarm”, “Your hungry part wanted the chocolate cake”. Name more positive parts than negative ones, use the language when you are in a good mood as well as bad, and have silly parts as well as serious ones.

3 great ways to build permanency



1 Play peekaboo and hide and seek. Holly van Gulden recommends parents play hide and seek with their children every day. Even 10 minutes a day before or after school makes a difference.

2 Use sensory reminders. A spray of mum's perfume or dad's aftershave on a child's sleeve,

a family photo in a key ring, loving notes in a lunchbox or pencil case, or a phone call from home at break time can all give a child a sensory connection with his safe base.

3 Model being held in mind.

Our children need to feel us thinking about them. Keep a photo of your child on or near you and tell them, "I keep your photo with me when you are at school, so I can see you in the picture and hold you here (tap over your heart) and here (tap your head), until we are together again". This shows the child that they are important to you and models how they can hold you in mind, too. Teachers can do this too with children who constantly demand attention in school.

Hugs and kisses from xxxxxxxx



Toxic stress and anxiety

“A child with a trauma history only has to get the ‘slightest whiff of stress’ to put them into a state of alarm. I have seen this even in children adopted as babies – they are simply born stressed! In a busy school environment it is essential that we keep these children regulated and feeling safe.”

Mary Roulston, head teacher

A little stress is motivating but adopted children will have endured unrelieved bouts of stress that had a toxic effect on their development. This is due mainly to a chemical called cortisol. In quick bursts of stress the body produces a motivating chemical called adrenaline, but when stress is prolonged or chronic, cortisol takes over.

Some things we know about cortisol

- It stays in the body much longer than adrenaline and knocks out calming and happy hormones such as serotonin and oxytocin.
- It affects memory.
- Too much cortisol in infancy can over-activate the stress response, so even minor problems cause children to behave as if they are under serious threat.
- High levels of cortisol in the early years can cause sensory integration problems (see sensory issues, page 17).
- Traumatised children can develop anticipatory stress - they expect bad things to happen so their cortisol levels are spiky.
- Highly stressed children have difficulty controlling their impulses.



Caregiver as regulator

Babies cannot regulate themselves; they need a caring adult to co-regulate their distress and model how to stay calm and alert. The caregiver does this by being available, calm, soothing and responsive, so that the child's body rhythms match those of the carer. Children who did not have this quality of care in infancy often

develop strange or immature ways of self-soothing such as biting, head banging, rocking, scratching, chewing, and cutting. They may keep turning around, call out, hide, fidget, ask questions, chat constantly, and there may be other behaviours, which increase under stress. Some children manage to hold it together at school and offload their stress when they get home.



Toxic stress and anxiety

Although cortisol levels can stabilise when children settle into loving families, the stress of school and the absence of parents can mean children who are calm at home are anxious and fearful at school.

Stress can make children fidgety

in class. Telling them to stop fidgeting rarely works, as stopping is not within their conscious control, but a stress ball provides a physical release that can help children relax and focus. Encourage teachers to see a stress ball not as a distraction but as a way to concentrate.

Ways to reduce stress

- Surprises are stressful, even when they are fun. New situations, people and places activate the stress response, so plan carefully for change and challenge (*see times of change, page 35*).
- Reduce anxiety about what's coming next by talking about it and providing a visual timetable. Some parents put a daily planner on their child's bedroom wall. At school the teacher can tape a class timetable to the child's desk.
- Predictable, consistent, repetitive, familiar, nurturing experiences reduce stress levels at home and at school.
- Give "this or that" choices and accept that either choice is ok.
- Encourage teachers to wonder out loud about what might be provoking challenging behaviour and respond with empathy.
- Provide a "safe space" or "calm spot" filled with sensory activities to which the child can go with a trusted adult when they feel anxious, or dysregulated. (this must not be regarded as punishment).

Children need to be calm and alert in order to absorb new information. Imagine how hard it must be to learn when trying to manage high stress with the regulation skills of a toddler.

- Where possible, identify stressors and try to keep them to a minimum.
- Consequence bad behaviour quickly and without anger, threat, loss or separation (*see discipline page 24*)

The analogy of the stress bucket is useful. If you think of having a bucket, into which you dump your stress throughout the day, most of us will finish the day with a half full bucket. Our children can wake up with an already full stress bucket so that even tiny drops of stress throughout the day can cause an overspill.



Teach children sensory activities that can calm them down quickly

- Sit under a heavy blanket
- Press their hands down on their head
- Hug their knees to their chest
- Rock slowly
- Smell lavender or camomile oil
- Snuggle into a small space
- Suck a sweet
- Suck yoghurt/thick milkshake through straw
- Get a big hug.

Routine calming activities

- Walk home from school (with backpack on)
- Do physical tasks or jobs throughout the day
- Have a chill out time before homework.
- Swim, cycle

Children often find enclosed spaces calming. A pop-up tent, cushions, or a blanket draped over a table can be a safe space.

Sensory issues

“Sensory integration sorts, orders and eventually puts all of the individual sensory inputs together into a whole brain function.”

Dr A. Jean Ayers, pioneer in sensory integration dysfunction

Everyone has occasional sensory integration or processing challenges when the brain is overloaded by sensory information, or deprived of it. But some people go through daily life unable to process and integrate effectively the sensory information they receive through the seven senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, body awareness and movement/balance. Adopted children may fall into this category as developmental trauma affects all areas of a child's functioning. Some children may get diagnosed with sensory processing difficulties, others may just get labelled as badly behaved. Symptoms vary depending on which senses are affected, but many children indulge in sensory or thrill-seeking behaviour and over react to, or avoid, certain tastes, smells and touch. They may also have executive functions difficulties such as problem-solving and may have difficulty maintaining friendships.

Sensory difficulties can arise from within the child, for example having to

Bad boy no more!

My son James has successfully finished P1, but in nursery he would knock down children and plough through anything they had built with no sense of remorse; he'd jump off things, go too fast and indulge in risk-taking behaviour. He couldn't sit at peace at story time and would try to trip up other children. He was generally known as "the bad boy".

At a sensory assessment the OT said he needed dedicated help in school. We fought for a statement and a fulltime classroom assistant, who is wonderful with him. She does joint, back and chest compressions to calm him down and jumping and crab walks before going into class. He has a special cushion to allow him to move while sitting on a chair or on the mat, and blue tack to fiddle with in class. His concentration has improved and there was only one accident in P1, for which he was sorry afterwards. His friend said, "James used to be a bad boy in nursery but he's a good boy now."

sit for a long time on a hard chair can make a child fidget or get out of their seat. Challenges can also arise from the external environment, for example, it can be hard to concentrate in a busy classroom and a child may focus on something outside the window in an effort to deal with the sensory overload in the room. Consequently, she cannot feel calm, pay attention or do her work.



Be mindful of trauma

Occupational therapists may recommend a sensory diet of activities for a child with sensory issues and/or behavioural problems. As with all interventions it is critical to know the child and her trauma history as certain sensory experiences can trigger past trauma.

Getting help

If you suspect your child has sensory processing difficulties, ask your GP to refer her to a paediatric occupational therapist who has a background in sensory processing.

See How to help kids in school with sensory processing disorder at http://www.ehow.com/how_5692394_kids-school-sensory-processing-disorder.html

Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour A Practical Approach at Home for Parents and Carers, is an excellent downloadable booklet full of tips, produced by Occupational Therapists in the Children with Disabilities team at Falkirk council. www.falkirk.gov.uk/cwd

To find out more about occupational therapy and to find a private OT contact the British Association of OT and College of Occupational Therapists www.cot.co.uk

Shame and self esteem

Sometimes the child will show how bad he feels, at other times he may hide his shame by acting like “Superkid”.

Traumatised children tend to have a deep and powerful sense of shame. This is not the same as guilt. Guilt occurs when you feel you have made a mistake; shame occurs when you feel you are a mistake. Many adopted children believe they are bad and their ‘bad’ behaviours are often their unsuccessful attempts to regulate frightening or shame-based memories, feelings, experiences and beliefs about themselves. Demanding that children stop shame-based behaviours may make it harder to parent and teach them because it can actually increase their shame.

(perhaps a bread knife or a crayon-covered wall), expecting to see a delighted parent but instead sees a horrified one, and he gets upset as he feels that Mum or Dad don’t love him. This is shame. It is a painful state, which makes a child want to hide and causes changes in stress and nervous system responses.

How long a child stays in shame determines how toxic it becomes. A caring parent quickly comforts the child, repairs the attachment relationship and regulates the shame response. These short bursts of shame within a caring relationship teach the child acceptable behaviour without him feeling like a bad person.

Three big challenges for parents and teachers

1. How to build a child’s self esteem when they feel bad about who they are
2. How to discipline a child without increasing their shame
3. How to create success when they expect failure.

How shame becomes toxic

Shame is an attachment and socialising emotion. It kicks in when a child starts to walk and his caregiver tries to keep him safe as he explores his surroundings. An excited infant shows Mum or Dad his new discovery

Anger, control, fear of failure

However, if the parent ridicules, humiliates or rejects the child, the child is left with unrelieved painful feelings that develop into a sense of feeling bad, not about what he has done, but about who he is. On top of this an abused child may feel that he was abused because he was bad and deserved it. This feeling of being “not good enough” creates anger and controlling, impulsive behaviour, which can be triggered by a disapproving look or tone of voice. In older children it may be internalised so that the child thinks he is disgusting and gets upset when he makes any kind of mistake at all. You may see this in your child when they get things wrong or in their anger, control or reluctance to try something new, just in case they get it wrong. It also shows up in lying or blaming others to cover their mistakes. Sometimes the child will show how bad he feels, at other times he may hide his shame by acting like “Superkid”.

Creating self esteem out of shame

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

Maya Angelou



Because we love and value our children we want them to love and value themselves. So, when they say things like, “I’m stupid”, “I always make mistakes”, “Nobody likes me”, “I hate my sister”, or simply, “I’m bad”, we tend to deny it by saying, “Of course you’re not bad, you just made a mistake”, or “Don’t say that about your sister, you’re just annoyed”. But trying to convince a child that he is really good when he feels he is not, may make him mistrust your judgement and force him to try harder to prove you wrong. He may feel even more alone and reluctant to tell you anything because you “just don’t get him”. Not getting him undermines your attachment and encourages a child to suppress their feelings.

We can help children to overcome their shame by meeting it with empathy about how they feel and curiosity about why they feel that way (See *The Parenting Attitude*, page 12). This allows us to share in the child’s inner life and helps them to change.

Joy is the opposite of shame.

Building lots of genuine good fun

into family life, especially when times are tough can reduce shame. Do something fun together every day so your child gets the message that you like being with him because he’s a great child, not because it’s your job.

Dan Hughes recommends maintaining a smiling home (and school). The idea is to create an atmosphere where life feels half full rather than half empty, where you focus on the positives e.g. “Listen to you! You really know how to show me you’re angry,” and where your interactions are playful and accepting of the child, warts and all.



Shame makes people close up and withdraw, so when your child is open and trusting enough to tell you, “I’m no good”, grab the opportunity to empathise with how hard it must be to feel like that. e.g. “I’m sorry you feel that you are no good. It must be awful hard to carry that feeling around with you.” You can go on to say that you see him as a good person who struggles with a lot of hard stuff and you’d like to help him with that. But first acknowledge his view of himself, as this is what underpins his behaviour and colours his world.

Praise, reward and success

Keep challenges small and praise specific. Confidence and pleasure come from success. Everyone needs to succeed at something.



Affirming a child for who she is, matters more than rewarding her for what she does. Relationship, not reinforcement, changes a child.

Praise and reward are the foundation of how most parents and teachers manage children's behaviour. This may work for securely attached children with good impulse control and a healthy sense of self, but it rarely does for adopted children. Our children need to feel like they are good enough, even when

they make mistakes; rewarding them only when they get things right may mean they get few of the feel-good moments that build success – and they need loads!

They also need unconditional love and acceptance, rewarding them when they do what they are told may teach them that they are only valued when they do what other people want.

Also, if you think about the stress response, a child may desperately want a sticker on his chart, but his stress bucket is full and the part of his brain that manages impulses and concentration does not work well. Wanting rewards and failing to get them even when you try really hard, compounds shame and could make you want to stop trying altogether.

Five ways to praise better

Children who believe they are bad, can feel uncomfortable when you tell them they are good. You may find when you praise your child for getting spellings right, they start getting them wrong, they tear up a piece of work you checked, or say that it was just a fluke they got it right. This is because the praise doesn't fit with their view of themselves. There are several ways to praise more successfully:

- **Keep it brief.** Say it with a smile or affirming touch so the child feels the praise, then move on quickly so it isn't too much. e.g. "That's lovely writing, Jack. Now let's see how well you can do your picture."
- **Praise the task not the person.** So, it's "nice tidy sink", "great bit of writing", "lovely clean face", rather than, "good boy" or "good girl".
- **Praise effort not achievement.** Remember traumatised children often can't do, rather than won't do, so we need to acknowledge that the task was, "a big ask. I'm proud of you for trying it. We'll just keep practising."
- **Ham it up.** Some children need lots of playful pizzazz in order to feel praise. For them doing a victory dance or chanting, "We are great" loud and soft, fast and slow, while holding hands can work.
- **Affirm the child at all times** even when they don't finish the task or do what they're told. Empathise with something like, "it's a shame you couldn't do ... let's have a hug and we'll try again later."

Practice creates success

Children with attachment issues may expect to fail at most tasks, so we need to create opportunities for them to succeed at managing everyday activities appropriate to their developmental level.

If Sue cannot sit beside someone for 10 minutes without pinching or poking them, say, "We're going to practise sitting nicely for five minutes" (or whatever she can manage). Stay with her and praise her for doing a great job. When she succeeds, try for longer. Often our children can't learn from their mistakes, so we need to reduce their chance of failing by giving them achievable goals.

It's good to use the word 'practising' with children who struggle. Practising is about learning to do things well, not about success or failure and we all need to practise.

Reward and learning to wait



When you get what you need consistently as a baby you learn to trust that you will continue to get what you need and so you can wait for food, attention, toy or other reward without getting stressed or feeling forgotten. This skill is called delayed gratification. It is a skill we all need in order to succeed – think of studying for an exam or saving for a car. Because of their histories many of our children have a problem waiting for rewards and stopping their impulses. This is a deficit in brain functioning that behavioural management systems like star charts need to take into account.

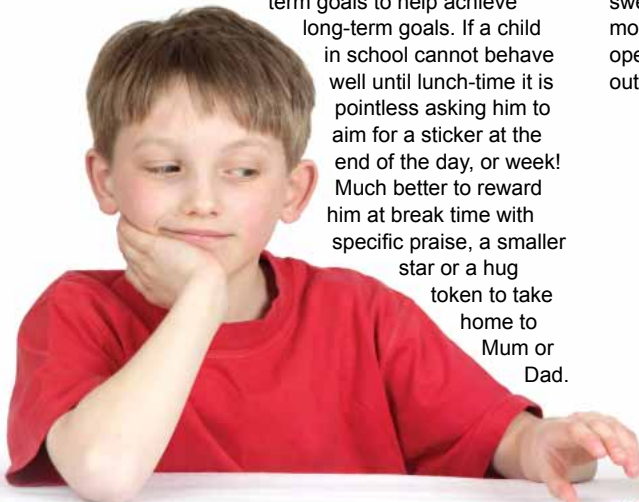
Think about what a baby needs and remember that we want to fill the gaps that were missed when rebuilding the brain from the bottom up.

- Our children may need lots of short frequent check-ins from parents and teachers before they can learn to wait for attention.
- They often need instant rewards to build the connections in the brain that allow them to wait, and short-term goals to help achieve long-term goals. If a child in school cannot behave well until lunch-time it is pointless asking him to aim for a sticker at the end of the day, or week! Much better to reward him at break time with specific praise, a smaller star or a hug token to take home to Mum or Dad.

- Keep challenges small and praise specific. Confidence, pleasure and self esteem come from success.
- Everyone needs to succeed at something; find things a child enjoys and use those to build self esteem – learning to swim, riding a bike or other out of school achievements can all develop skills needed to achieve at school.

The famous “marshmallow test” by Walter Mischel showed that four-year-olds who could resist eating sweets in order to get a bigger treat later, developed into adolescents who did better at school and managed frustration and stress well.

Other children who had been able to wait only one minute before eating the sweets were taught simple mental tricks - such as pretending that the sweets were only a framed picture – to help them to wait 15 minutes. But the real challenge is to create good habits that encourage children to wait in small ways every day and to reward them with PLACE while waiting. Simple habits such as no sweets before dinner, earning pocket money, or waiting until the big day to open presents all teach the brain to outsmart temptation.



Reward and control

Some children who feel unsafe or mistrust adults' intentions, attempt to control their environment by whatever means they can. For these children rewards, bribery, threats and punishments won't work. No punishment is greater than what they have lived through and no reward outweighs the instinct to keep yourself safe at any cost.

Controlling behaviour is hard to live with, but it is a strength – controlling children are often more able to stand up to peer pressure than compliant children. Tell your child how much you admire their strength and determination. Use PLACE to help them feel safe and give a clear “this or that” choice (without anger). Some choice gives back some



control – too much choice is stressful. Congratulate the child on making a choice, whether or not you believe it was the best one.

Shame and discipline

“Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse? Think of the last time you felt humiliated or treated unfairly. Did you feel like cooperating or doing better?”

Dr Jane Nelsen, Educational Psychologist

Traumatised children often experience discipline as being harsh or abusive. The easiest way to change this perception is to:

- not get angry with them
- help them understand why they are being disciplined.

The 'why' must always affirm your relationship and increase the child's self worth. Hence something like, “Because you are important to me and I want to help you pass your test” is better than “If you fail this test, there'll be no trip on Saturday!”

Parents and teachers need to embrace the power of empathy when disciplining traumatised children. Think about how the child feels. What could be going on for them that would make it difficult for them to do what you ask? Convey to the child that you get it that some part of what you are asking them to do is hard for

them and you are happy to help.

When thinking about discipline, make a clear difference between behaviours, which are okay to criticize, and the child's thoughts, feelings and intentions, which are not up for judgment.

Helping a child to regulate the feelings behind their behaviours, and to understand where those feelings come from, is more effective than trying to stamp out behaviour. At the same time address the behaviour with better supervision and/or consequences, both of which are best done with PLACE, not anger, rejection, or other shame-inducing approaches such as sarcasm or humiliation. Staying accepting and empathic when children misbehave helps them feel safe, repairs the relationship and minimizes shame.

After all, the purpose of discipline is not to punish but to socialize children by building 'cause and effect' thinking and replacing shame about self with guilt about actions.

Empathy, not anger, is the key to effective discipline

Bottom line: Avoid discipline that involves separation, rejection, anger or fear. Your relationship not reinforcement heals the child. Repair it quickly after disciplining.



Connect to correct – When disciplining ask, “Will what I am about to do strengthen or weaken my connection with this child?”

Some positive ways to discipline

Give win/win “this or that” choices. Don’t ask, ‘will you ...?, do you want to...? what time would you like to...?’, just think of two options that you are happy with and offer them as a choice, so whatever the child chooses you get a positive outcome. For example, you want a child to do homework, she wants to go out to play. A win/win choice would be, “you can go out to play now for 20 minutes and come back to do homework, or do homework now and go out to play until teatime”. Amazingly, children usually take one option. If she complains, just empathise and repeat the choice. Whatever she chooses let her know it’s okay.

Employ natural and logical consequences. Consequences differ from punishment in that they are proportionate, reasonable and enforceable measures used to build good cause and effect thinking skills. They can be natural, eg, go out in the rain without a coat and you get wet, or logical, eg, you spill the milk, you clean it up. Logical consequences are either pay backs or withdrawal of privileges.

Consequences must only be given when the child and adult are both calm, perhaps after or during time in. Angry adults can trigger even worse behaviour and reduce the learning experience as the child shifts her focus from what she has done wrong to what the adult is doing wrong, which reinforces her view of adults as angry and abusive.

Because it’s hard to come up with an appropriate consequence on the spot, it can help to write down 10-20 in advance on index cards or a notebook.

60 second scolding. We all lose our temper some times – we’re only human! In fact a quick burst of anger is often preferable to a long sulk or sarcasm. The secret is to keep it brief, preferably less than a minute and then quickly begin a much longer period of positive repair.

No sarcasm!

Sometimes when we try to hide our anger it comes out as sarcasm, which makes children anxious and stops them trusting us. Think of a simple phrase like, “Sure, you just watch TV and the homework will do itself!” If you are a child who struggles to know what is right, does that mean you continue watching TV, or stop watching TV?

Parents and teachers who are clear and honest in their communication, make a huge difference to a child’s sense of safety and success.

Structure and supervision

Give children the message that supervision is a gift not a punishment

The best discipline for a traumatised child is to reduce her risk of getting into trouble by providing the structure and supervision that you would give to a toddler. It is hard, but necessary.

- **Structure (routine, repetition, rituals, limited choice)** – Parents and teachers can structure a child's day and reduce her stress by making choices for her or limiting her choices to this or that. Introducing frequent breaks into the timetable gives the brain time to process new experiences. Repeat rules and routines many times, only relaxing them when she is completely comfortable. Tighten the structure again, if there is any change to the routine (see *Times of change, page 35*) Be predictable by always accepting and validating a child's thoughts, feelings and behaviours, but surprising with the consequences you provide. **Never withdraw your affection as a punishment and re-connect quickly after any discipline, like you would do with a toddler.**

- **Supervision –Adults** who keep a close eye on things can create opportunities for success and reduce the risk of

A big part of supervision is time in.

Time in with a misbehaving child, works so much better than time out. It reinforces the attachment relationship and shows a child that you like her, even when you dislike her behaviour. (Time out does the opposite). Your presence and your PLACE attitude is an effective discipline and a regulating influence on the child. Tell the child that you believe she needs to stay with you while she's upset and you will take care of her. When she is calm, she can help you with a job, either to clear up her own mess, or do some other safe task. Tell her you will help her with any part that is difficult. Be directive and firm but also attuned to your child and empathic about her difficulties. Keep practising. It may feel odd to begin with, but it gets easier with practice.



Exceptions to time in and time out

- Time in will only work if you are calm so take a few deep breaths to regulate yourself or take a time out for yourself.
- Some children self-select time out as a way of calming themselves, which is fine as it is not imposed upon them. Simply reconnect when they are calm.
- Schools may insist on giving time outs. It is important to tell staff that a traumatized child needs to be given a time out in a safe space, where they can see or hear the teacher. Alternatively, they can be sent to a teacher with whom they feel safe (preferably the same teacher every time). They should never be left alone in a corridor or shamed in front of the class as the behaviour teachers are trying to eliminate will only get worse.

failure, thereby minimising the child's shame and emotional outbursts. Supervision means staying with a child as if she were a toddler, structuring and child-proofing her environment, engaging with her frequently in a playful way and helping her to manage

her feelings. It's important to give a child the message that supervision is a gift not a punishment. A child who qualifies for a learning support assistant is lucky because close supervision alone can make a huge difference to success in school.

“Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.”

Brene Brown, PhD professor of social work

Trauma triggers and the alarm response

“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.”

Anais Nin

Traumatized children tend to have a ‘sensitized’ alarm response, which over-reacts to all kinds of verbal, non-verbal and sensory triggers that other children ignore - the sound of a door banging, the look on a teacher’s face or tone of voice, certain smells, and sensations such as hunger, rejection or shame. So seemingly minor threats can cause dramatic changes in behaviour.

Different children respond differently under threat; all tend to regress, some get hyped up, and others switch off or shut down, many do a bit of both. Teachers and parents can misinterpret a frightened child’s response as wilful and controlling and may respond to what looks like defiance by becoming angry and more demanding. The frightened child reads the adult’s body language as threatening and moves from alarm to fear to terror. The smoke alarm in her brain reacts as if ‘the bad stuff’ is happening all over again and primes her to fight, flight or freeze. If there is no physical release for the adrenaline she can be left feeling irritable and restless for a long time. When she realises she over-reacted and there was no real danger she can go into shame.



Three things to prevent meltdowns

1 **Get to know the signs and help the child feel safe.** You can help a child recognise signs like, “I notice you chew your sleeves/pull on your jumper/bite your hand, etc, when you are getting really stressed. Agree with the child and school that this is the time to use a calming strategy such as belly breathing, go to their safe place, have a brain break, or do a job with the classroom assistant as physical activity can release the adrenaline. These early warning signs occur when all areas of the brain are working and the child can still be engaged. This is the time to prevent a meltdown, if you can.

2 **Teach impulse control.** Traumatized children often think they are stupid, bad, or not right in the head. They need to know that alarm reactions are normal responses to trauma and they can work on them. Encourage the child to recognise the feelings in their body rather than focusing on emotions, which are harder to define. Adrenaline causes physical sensations like feeling hot, tight chest or fizzy tummy. Simply focusing on sensations starts to change them. Then take a couple of deep breaths or count to 10, which creates a gap between impulse and action. Teach them to fill the gap with thoughts about how much mum or dad love them and want them to do well. Now they can choose what to do.

3 **Help school staff understand how traumatized children think, feel and behave.** Understanding reduces adults’ confusion, frustration and anger which means more helpful interactions with the child. Teach school staff about number one on this list, give out the teacher information sheets and ask them to consider the classroom tips below.



When stress responses flood the brain stem and mid brain a child cannot easily engage the thinking part of the brain. So she could sit in a classroom in a state of anxiety and learn nothing. In a state of alarm, she cannot respond to instructions, assurances or threats.

Triggers could be anything in the child's sensory environment – It is impossible to know all or even any of them, but there are things you can do when a child looks like she is becoming dysregulated.

Classroom tips

Have a key adult stay with the child when they are in a state of alarm. The child is unlikely to be able to respond to reasonable demands, but the presence of a key adult is regulating. The adult can reassure the child, "you are safe here with me". If a child is under a table, recognise that she must feel safe there and acknowledge, "I can see that this feels like a safe place to be right now. I'll just stay

with you to make sure you are okay." This is much more effective than attempting to threaten, bribe or coax her out. Afterwards, help her reflect on what felt safe about that space and encourage her to build that safe place in her mind next time she gets scared.

Oriente to the environment.

A big issue with trauma is staying in the present. Taking notice of little things in the environment helps the child return to the here and now. The supervising adult could ask the child to notice things about her appearance and the room around them. When the child feels safe enough the adult could take her around the class to check that everything is in its proper place.

Safe space. It is important to have a safe space in the classroom to which the child can go when she needs a time out for any reason (see *classroom environment*, page 28)

Circle of safety. A frightened child may feel safer if she can draw a boundary around herself with chalk when she is in the playground or somewhere else where she cannot get to her safe space. The idea is that nobody crosses the boundary until the child is ready to move.

Attune to the child's energy, vitality and rhythm.

We know that children feel heard and understood when we match the intensity of their feelings, which is why we do it with babies instinctively. The idea is not to match the child's anger or fear. Instead match the intensity with which they express those feelings while substituting wonder, acceptance and empathy for their anger, and using movements, volume and energy similar to the child's. Most adults make the mistake of speaking very softly when trying to calm a distressed child, which leaves the child feeling that you just don't get it!

Teach belly breathing

Deep, slow regulating breaths focus the attention in the present and slow down the rapid breathing linked to fight and flight.

Get the child to put her hand or small soft toy on her belly and breathe right down into her belly so her belly expands and the toy or her hand lifts up.

Breathe in for a count of three, hold for one and then breathe out slowly for a count of four. Repeat until she feels calmer.

Practise this with your child so that she knows how to do it anytime she feels anxious.

Starting school

“Primary schooling can only build on what has gone before. Children will have experienced three to four years of development and learning before entering primary school and their pre-school experience provides many of the building blocks for the rest of their lives.”

The Early Childhood Forum



Northern Ireland has the youngest statutory school starting age in Europe; while most European children start school at age six, our children start at four. Starting school is a challenge for most four year olds; for adopted children it can be overwhelming. So, our first question really needs to be, “Is my child ready for school?”

Children will not necessarily miss out by starting school later, in fact having bad educational experiences early on can put a child off for life, while investing in attachment building leaves them feeling safe enough to learn. To make the transition as easy as possible consider the following:

1 Find a school that best suits your child’s needs. This is likely to be one that is most inclusive, not highest achieving. It is worth asking if there are other adopted or looked after children in the school and how the school provides for them. Good schools for our children are high on nurture, tight on structure and flexible about individual needs.

2 Visit the school several times before your child starts. Locate areas like the cloakroom, toilets and dinner hall together; meet the teacher, pop in for story time, etc. Let the child explore their classroom and see that it is fun and safe. Plan these arrangements with the school before the previous school year ends.

3 Help the school to understand your child’s strengths and difficulties. Use the sheets at the back of this booklet. Develop a good relationship with the school and the class teacher - the more attuned the teacher, the better the experience for your child.

4 Try to arrange for a key adult. See Relationships (page 32). For more details see *Inside I’m Hurting* by Louise Bomber.

5 Rehearse and role play situations that are likely to crop up. Play provides a safe way to practise new skills and situations. Practise simple things like changing into PE kit and what happens at lunchtime as well as how to ask the teacher for help, or what to do if you have an accident. Likewise, you can role play responses to difficult situations like getting frustrated with games. Assume the role of the child and together act out how he could have done things differently.



6 Familiarise the child with what's coming next and when things start and finish. Ask the teacher in advance about the daily routine and produce a visual timetable of how each school day is broken up, include home time and your evening routine. Stick to the timetable or provide advance notice of change.

7 Plan and organise clothes, equipment, lunch etc with your child each evening. Think out loud as you do it, for example, "let's check

that your reading book is in your bag", or "bring me your drinks bottle so we can wash it for morning". These daily rituals develop executive function skills and help children feel safe.

8 Provide transitional objects and sensory reminders of home to help your child feel safe when apart from you (see *Permanency and constancy*, page 13)

9 Ask the school to provide safe spaces. See *The school environment* (page 31)

Liz and David's story

We refused to let our son start school until he got a classroom assistant. His behaviour was impulsive so he was offered behavioural management but denied an assessment. We appealed. Initially, he got three hours support a day so he went to school for three hours a day. After a diagnosis of SEN, he got a fulltime classroom assistant. He is now managing well!



10 Arrange an exit strategy before a crisis Schools need to be aware that children with a trauma history are likely to struggle with separation and stress. They need a pre-arranged exit strategy to prevent melt downs, shamed-based behaviours or even school refusal. These can be simple breaks from school that allow attachments with family to grow – perhaps staggered attendance, a regular afternoon out with Dad mid week, or some other arrangement that suits the child's attachment needs. Some children would benefit from starting school a year later. The Department of Education states that a parent or carer has a duty of care to send their child to school when they are of age unless the child has a statement of special educational need that states otherwise. However Mark Langhammer, NI Director of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers says, "We would like the parents of some children, including looked after and adopted children, to be able to defer their child starting school by a year, if it is in the child's best interest. There is no academic advantage to starting school at four. In fact, it can educationally and psychologically disadvantage children who are not ready for school."

Classroom and school spaces

School environment may be so stimulating that some children shift constantly between alert and alarm. When a traumatised child enters a room or a different area, they need time to check it out before settling to learn. A key adult can walk and talk the child through the corridors, checking locks on doors, the school entry system and the various nooks and crannies in the classroom so he can relax and make the most of the learning opportunities on offer.

Within the class, seating position is important. It depends on the child, but most feel safest near the teacher, with their back to the wall and from where they can see the door and scan the room easily. Try to keep the child with a friend who is a positive influence. Never threaten to move the friend away as it can trigger loss and insecurity.

Unstructured times

Lack of structure can feel very unsafe so it pays to supervise closely in dinner queues, the dining hall and the playground. The child's visual planner

can be extended to cover playtime, 'golden time' and more creative lessons where the usual restrictions are dropped. Children can only enjoy freedom and fun when it feels safe, otherwise reduced boundaries can invite chaos.

Give children regular brain breaks. Bruce Perry recommends introducing quiet periods during the day to allow the brain to "catch up", process new experiences, improve memory and attention. Movement breaks also help concentration. Activities like jumping jacks take only a few minutes between subjects and leave children ready to focus again. Resources such as 20 Three Minute Brain Breaks at www.mindsinbloom.com are worth a look.



Safe place/calm corner

Children may climb under a desk, hide, run off or simply 'switch off' when frightened or over stimulated. If they are to learn anything they will need time out to get regulated. Providing a sensory-comforting safe space in the classroom (and elsewhere in school) can allow them to do this. It could be a cushion-filled corner behind the book case or a pop-up tent with beanbag and soothing music on headphones. Ideally, the child would go to the space with a trusted adult. He needs to know that it is a place of safety because you care and not a punishment zone. Some children self-select to retreat when things get too much, teachers can suggest a calm time, or may slot regular refreshers into his planner. As always, structure and supervision are essential.



Relationships with teachers



* Mindfulness involves being in the moment, paying attention to events and your responses to them with openness, curiosity, and acceptance.

I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. ... In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized.

Haim Ginott

The focus of a traumatised child's attention in the classroom is always the adults. Where is the teacher/classroom assistant? What is she doing? Is she angry? Has she forgotten me? How can I remind her I'm here.

Adults determine how safe the classroom feels. Children feel safe when adults are predictable and nice to be around. If the timetable is consistent but the teacher is not, the child does not feel safe. It is important for the child to know for example, that, "our teacher never shouts when angry, always helps children who are upset", etc. Traumatized children tend to think

in absolutes. You might think you shout occasionally, but it can feel to them like you are always shouting. Teachers who are mindful* of children's needs create a climate of safety.

Key things for teachers

- **Hold the child in mind.** Children with attachment difficulties are often branded 'attention seeking', because they can't bear to be left alone and need to know they are held in mind at all times. Check in with the child at regular intervals. Use sensory reminders of your presence like wearing a jingly bracelet or a specific perfume. The section on permanency (page 15) has other ideas on using transitional objects to help with this. You can also timetable daily or weekly hide and seek sessions for the class. Hide and seek teaches a child that people leave and come back, that people exist even when he can't see them, and that he (the child) exists even when you can't

see him. When children hide, they want to be found. It shows you've remembered them!

• **Acknowledge the 'big ask'.** In an effort to encourage children we often minimise their struggles with comments like, "you can do this, it's easy". But, if it was easy they would do it. Children feel validated when we do it. Children feel validated when we acknowledge, "I know this is hard..." Louise Bomber uses the phrase, "It's a big ask..." to soften any request. Similarly, try, "Let's" as in "Let's see if we can work this out together." so the child knows you are alongside.

• **Behaviour is communication** and management strategies regarding eye contact (difficult for traumatised children), touch, authoritative tone, behaviour charts etc, need reconsidered for traumatised children. Please read and practise the PLACE attitude (*page 13*).

• **Have compassion, not pity.** Adopted children don't need us to compensate for their past, just to recognise its impact. Everyone needs consequences for their actions. Be firm but kind, sad rather than angry and curious about what prompted misdemeanours. (*See discipline, page 24*).

• **Let the child know you like him.** If he has been out of school, welcome him back. Send notes home if he is absent, notice nice things about him, even if they are small or hard to find! Try to think of small tasks that would make him feel valued.

• **Never underestimated how stressed and anxious a child might be feeling.** Even super kid can be just a scared kid in a costume.

• **Support attachment relationships.** Although it is important to have a nurturing relationship with the

child, please respect that the parent/child relationship must come first. Children with attachment difficulties can be indiscriminately friendly with adults, while rejecting their parents, which is not healthy. Send hug tokens home for parents rather than giving hugs in school. Remind the child how pleased Mum or Dad will be with his work or behaviour (while it is going well). Avoid warning that parents would be angry or disappointed with work or behaviour.

Hi Jack,
Sorry to hear you are sick. We all miss you in class and hope you get better quickly. We know your family are taking really good care of you and that makes us happy.
See you soon,
Mr Campbell and all of P3

The key adult

"In order to develop normally... somebody has to be crazy about that kid. Someone has to be there and be doing something together with the child." Urie Bronfenbrenner

Teacher and therapist Louise Bomber recommends the appointment of a sensitive key adult as a substitute attachment figure for the child in school. The key adult is additional to the class teacher and while the teacher may change every year, the key adult should be available to the child for at least two to three years. The key adult is often a classroom assistant, who has time to work with the child, the ability to stay regulated when the child is dysregulated, who can practise the PLACE attitude, advocate for the child and build his self-esteem.

Finally...

- **Whole class nurturing supports children with a wide range of needs. Check out sites like www.nurturegroups.org and www.rootsofempathy.org for emotional literacy ideas, while being mindful of how topics might affect adopted children.**
- **Traumatised children often learn best through sight, touch and movement. A multi-sensory approach that caters for different learning styles gives all children a chance to work in the way they learn best.**
- **Techniques used to support children with ASD, can also work for traumatised children when used with knowledge of attachment and trauma.**

Relationships with friends

“When people have a wealth of relationships in high quantities and of good quality, they are physically and emotionally healthier, more cognitively enriched, and they reach their potential to be humane in ways that are impossible without relationships.”

Bruce Perry



Children with attachment difficulties often struggle to make or keep friends.

They may not share or play nicely, have poor social skills, problems with intimacy, may bully or be bullied. Often it is a combination of factors, complicated by the fact that adopted children are often serial honeymooners – they are fine with relationships until there are challenges – then they end them, fearing rejection or hurt. In order to develop lasting supportive relationships they need to learn how to repair relationships.

Model quick repair

Children learn to repair relationships from their parents, carers, teachers and peers. When there is a break in your relationship with the child, either through absence, discipline, misunderstanding or conflict, take the initiative with

repair. Perhaps invite the child to do a task, let her know that you are no longer annoyed with her, make her aware of your intentions and model saying sorry. For example, “Hey Sarah, looks like you are still cross with me. I’m sorry you missed out on rounders. It’s just my job to keep everyone safe. You’ll get a chance to practise again tomorrow. Come and help me with the pencils!” When friends fall out, intervene to help them make amends.

Nurture friendships

Parents can invite classmates home after school and keep a close eye on play. Be aware that our children tend to do better one to one and find it difficult to manage groups. Try not to withdraw play with friends or invites to parties when a child misbehaves; think of a different consequence. Teachers can involve budding

friends in joint projects, or set up social skills groups. Getting involved in clubs also encourages co-operative play in a supervised setting.

Structure free time and practise dependence

Remember “think toddler”. Leaving a child with attachment difficulties unsupervised at break times is like leaving a toddler alone in a playground. Our children need a key adult to supervise and structure their playtime and keep them regulated. Remember, children who could not depend on anyone early in life need to practise dependency before moving towards independence in tiny steps. Look out for children sitting alone and organise an activity or game to encourage co-operative play.

Teach games

When children learn games, they have the tools for engagement and can invite other children to play with them. Attachment focused games such as Theraplay® involve structure, engagement, nurture and very slight challenge. Playing a group Theraplay® game in the mornings or after a break can help all children reconnect, feel safe and settle to learn.

A book called *Fun to Grow on: Engaging Play Activities for Kids with Teachers, Parents and Grandparents* by Virginia K. Morin, is a wonderful resource for Theraplay®-type activities.

Times of change

Times of change threaten many adopted children's sense of safety and self esteem. Because changes in the past involved loss and fear, even small changes in routine, or fun things like a school trip, can trigger the feeling that bad things may happen. Some changes affect some children more than others. You may notice increased or decreased arousal, regressive behaviour or loss of skills at transition times, particularly when a teacher is absent and at the start and end of term.

- **Arrange a handover.** Some parents find it helps to hand over and collect their child from a trusted adult every day. It can build attachment security to exchange a transitional object as well. The child could carry a sensory reminder of Mum or Dad like a photo or Mum's perfume on her sleeve, and the key adult could exchange an object such as a friendship bracelet at home time to help the child feel 'held in mind' even when out of sight.
- **Give prior warning.** Change is unavoidable, but how we manage it for the child makes a big difference to how they deal with it. Where possible,

tell them in advance and adapt the planner to match. Remember, it is a big deal if the teacher or classroom assistant changes. You may not know about the absence until the start of the school day. Ask the adult involved in the handover to explain before the child goes into class to find a stranger in the teacher's place. The adult should use empathy to show the child that they 'get it' that this is tough. Something like, "Things will be a wee bit different today because Miss A is off sick and Mr B is taking her place. I think it's just for today, but I'll let you know if it's not. I know you don't like it when Miss A is off, remember I will be here all day and we will follow our usual timetable. Now let's go and meet Mr B."

- **Be as clear as possible about why the teacher is absent,** so the child doesn't feel to blame. If a trusted adult is to leave permanently, let the child know well in advance so she has time to grieve and be comforted through the transition.
- **Walk children through changes in routine.** It is much more powerful to do

this with a trusted adult alongside than simply to talk about it and assume they know what it will be like.

- **Do what you say you will do, be where you are meant to be.** Pick up and collect your child from school at the same place, same time every day. Even nominate a special place. Give her no chance to panic. If your child gets out at 3pm, be there at 2.50pm. If you can't make it ring ahead and make sure the child is informed.
- **Don't change anything unless you really have to.** Routine and structure are vital.

Flash points

Start and end of term
Teacher, teaching assistant, key adult or friend is absent
Moving child or friend to a different seat.
Start and end of day
Settling after break
School trips
Any change to the timetable or routine
Moving up to secondary level

School topics

Literature

My daughter adores animals. When she was in P3, she had a great teacher who tried to encourage her to read by giving her books about animals. I remember her bringing home a story about a donkey, which she would not open and couldn't say why. I was baffled until I discovered that the story was about a donkey that'd lost his mum. Mystery solved!



Our school curriculum is based on the premise that family life is good and so it is littered with topics about babyhood, family trees, personal timelines, local culture, and traditional family units. Parents can minimise possible distress by getting a curriculum forecast from school about what topics are coming up and when. You can then tackle issues in two ways:

- 1 Liaise with the teacher about adapting topics to respect the experiences of every child in the class.
- 2 Prepare the child in advance by providing strategies and cover stories. This is better than removing the child from class when topics arise, as this only encourages avoidance of painful subjects and can draw attention to the child.

Tricky topics in primary school include:

- ◆ **Babyhood Projects** involving baby photographs can distress children who may not have photos or happy memories. Teachers could vary the task by asking all the class for a favourite childhood photo, or the child could bring in a photo of any baby.
- ◆ **Family trees** Perhaps a family orchard, or a tree with roots and branches could work. Issues about origins also affect step families, looked after children, and many more children who do not fit the traditional family unit.
- ◆ **Race and ethnicity** it takes sensitivity to celebrate culture and identity with children who are racially different from their adoptive parents. Teachers and parents can work together to identify ways to help a child value their origins while feeling part of their adoptive family.
- ◆ **Mother's/Father's day.** Although some children delight in making loving

tributes to parents, others are upset by these and celebrations such as Christmas and birthdays. Even if a child says nothing be alert to the non-verbal cues. Sometimes permission to make a "caring person" card is all it takes.

- ◆ **Animal sponsorship** The idea of 'adopting' abused or abandoned animals can give offensive and confusing messages to adopted children. 'Sponsorship' is a more acceptable (and accurate) term.
- ◆ **PE** Children who have been abused may be reluctant to remove their clothes in company.
- ◆ **Personal history** Life story events such as "going into foster care" and "being adopted" loom large in a child's mind and they may panic about revealing their story. One boy wouldn't do his homework because he said, "I have to write what happened when I was five and I got adopted when I was five." His mum reassured him that he also moved house and he could put that in instead.

Caring at sharing times

Although activities like circle time can encourage openness and understanding they can present problems when a child's experience is way outside the norm. One mother tells of her son's 'news' that his birth brother was going to prison for murder. Another child explained her grief at her birth mother's death from drug misuse by saying her hamster had died. Adults need to be mindful of children's experiences and potential crisis times such as birth family contact, by giving children cover stories for difficult situations.

Homework



Opinions vary about the benefits of homework in primary school. Many of us feel the school day is long and stressful enough and our children need a break before another one begins. Relationships are at the heart of our children's problems so families need to spend time building connections, not arguing over homework. Adopters often manage the home/school balance by leaving school work at school and keeping home as home. Alternatively, you can agree with school about how much homework is enough and what to do when the child cannot do any at all.

Some of the following strategies might help. Remember every child is different and what works for one won't work for all.

◆ **Use homework club.** Some children can just about manage school if school work ends when they go home. Being in the school environment, in uniform, with school staff may also keep the child in learning mode rather than having to re-engage at home. The downside is that it makes the school day longer.

“Life would be much easier without spellings. I don't know if it's the pressure to learn them or the shame of getting them wrong, but they're a nightmare”

Karen, mum of two

◆ **Agree a time limit with the school and stick to it, even if work is not finished.** Some experts think this should be 10 minutes per year group, e.g. 10 minutes in P1, 20 minutes in P2, etc. Use a timer or a big clock as a visual and/or audible reminder of when homework ends. Not having a stop time before you start, can feel like homework lasts forever.

◆ **Have a snack and a game of hide and seek first.** Some children need a nurture break followed by the joy of finding or being found by mum or dad before sitting down to an agreed short period of homework.

By gum
Chewing gum, just until it loses its flavour can help children concentrate. If you don't like gum, dried apricots work as well.

Karen has a son in P4 and a daughter in P6.

“Of all the things we've done, using a visual planner for each child is by far the best. The kids can see that homework lasts only a short amount of time and we can do other things afterwards like walk the dog, have tea, etc. We also use a timer and agree that homework lasts no longer than 30 minutes for my son and 45 minutes for my daughter.”

Memory games

Spellings and tables can cause problems for children because they are either right or wrong, so you can't hide that you don't know them and that can trigger shame. Also, short-term memory problems mean a child can learn work at home, but forget it when they go into school. Being told off by a teacher increases the child's frustration, shame and unwillingness to learn. Playing spelling games, and chanting times tables to music, can help children remember better. Speak to your SENCo about ways to engage children in homework through play.

◆ **Stay in school uniform until it is done.** This creates a clear division between school stuff and home stuff.

◆ **Give a limited choice.** Perhaps, “homework before playtime or 10 minutes play now and then reading”. Or dive straight in there with, “Okay, loveliest girl, what’s first, reading or sums?”

◆ **Don’t be too keen.** If it looks like homework is more important to you than it is to the child, she won’t do it. Be relaxed and casual in your tone of voice, body language and facial expression and give a clear choice. e.g. “That’s okay, do homework or don’t do it. It’s your homework and your choice. I’ll let you sort it out with Mr X tomorrow.” You have to have the confidence to pull this off and give the child time to think through the consequences. Whatever she decides, stay loving!

“The child who learns to read while sitting in Mommy or Daddy’s lap will become a lifelong learner. In contrast, the child who is made to sit still and listen and read in a classroom where there is no tolerance for play, touch or movement during this highly cognitive activity will learn to read – but will often come to hate reading... Reading builds networks in the cortex: the area of the brain responsible for planning and impulse control. And reading fiction... is essentially practising empathy.”

Bruce Perry, *Born for Love*

Attendance and absences

Most children have days when they don’t want to go to school, and although it is unusual for primary school children to refuse to attend school at all, they may struggle to do a full week. Problems often start in P4, when children have a longer day and harder work. At this age they also start to understand loss better and may need to be reassured that their adoptive family is forever. It is not unusual for children to get sick at lunchtime so they can go home and reconnect with family. Others may feel ‘burned out’ mid week.

The information regarding stress, permanency, transitions and safe spaces also applies here. In addition, try the following:

◆ **Attend to the first signs of anxiety.** Empathise, validate and be curious about solutions to the child’s worries. Rather than say, “Don’t be silly, there’s nothing to worry about”, try “I can see doing a whole week at school is hard for you, what could we do to make it easier?”, or, “Looks like you get sick a lot these days, I’m glad you get better quickly at home. I wonder if we could take a little bit of home into school so you feel better there.” It is vital to say this sincerely so it doesn’t come across as mocking or sarcastic.

◆ **Staggered attendance and reduced timetables.** If children are shut down or acting out, they are not learning and forcing them to stay at school in that state could put them off completely. Prearranged breaks, shorter days or weeks can help a child keep attending or ease them back into school if they have been absent. This needs to be agreed and timetabled rather than the child electing to leave when he feels like it. A child who has been off school will need a great deal of support to return and should be eased back gently. Think toddler! Take tiny steps!

◆ **What school can do**
Rather than point out what may happen if they don’t go to school, teachers can show a child that they like them and miss them when they are not around. Ringing home to chat to the child if their attendance drops off, or sending a, “Thinking of You” card can help a child feel valued as a person and a member of the class, rather than a name on the register.

When absences are frequent or prolonged, the Educational Welfare Service will become involved to try to resolve the problem.

Social stories

Parents and teachers can use social stories to help children cope with difficult situations in school. These short stories describe:

- what people do in a given situation
- why they do it
- common responses in that situation

They refer to specific social situations that would be obvious to most of us but not to people with impaired social understanding. Social stories were developed by Carol Gray in the early 1990s, originally to teach social and life skills to children on the autistic spectrum. They are now also used with children who have attachment difficulties.

The stories use words and pictures to give clear, concise and accurate information about specific situations. They help to teach routines, expectations, and behaviours in a non-lecturing way, while visual examples reinforce learning and the individualised stories connect children with the learning process.

Stories should always affirm the child and show them doing well. Although the aim is not to change the child's behaviour, increased understanding of situations and expectations may help them to respond more effectively in challenging situations.

How to make a social story

You can either choose a ready-made social story from resources in books or online (e.g. www.asdvisualaids.com) or create your own to suit your child's needs (see www.thegraycenter.org). Here's how:

1 Make a list of the steps in the routine you want your child to work on, for example, starting homework or getting ready for school.

2 Write a simple sentence to explain each step, for example "open your bag and take out your book".

3 Beside each sentence, draw a picture or insert a photo of the child performing the action.

4 Go through the completed story with your child every time before they perform the routine or activity.

5 Encourage the child to review it himself before a routine or activity.

6 Slowly wean the child off the story when they can do the task correctly and consistently.

Sample story: Lining up

1 My name is Jack and I go to Park Primary school



2 At school, we sometimes line up

3 We line up to go to lunch, to go out to play, and to get on the bus



4 Sometimes my friends and I get excited when we line up, because we're going somewhere fun, or out to play.

5 It is okay to be excited and still I need to stay in line.



6 Messing about can cause accidents, and my friends or I could get hurt.

Social stories help children who

- **Struggle with social skills and situations like queuing for lunch, behaving in the playground, meeting and greeting, asking for help, etc**
- **Have problems with organisation and executive functions**
- **Need reinforcement of rules, routines and procedures**
- **Do not respond to cues, redirection or refocusing**
- **Fail to meet reasonable expectations.**

7 When a teacher tells me to line up nicely it is so we can all stay safe.



8 I will try to keep my place in the line

Working together with the school

“What helped me in primary school was having teachers who understood me, friends who liked me and a good family to support me – I just knew I wasn’t alone.” Lucy

The next section of this booklet deals with special educational needs. Some parents feel that a diagnosis of SEN will benefit their child, which may be true for some adopted children, but not for all. Even children with an SEN diagnosis still need school staff to be mindful of their attachment and trauma histories so they feel safe and settled to learn.

Available, responsive and empathic adults make a huge difference to our children. What SEN support often secures is a helper or assistant offering one-to-one support several hours a week. The presence of an attuned assistant provides a safe base for the child even when the teacher is not around, keeps them regulated, focused and on task, offers encouragement and lets the child know, “I am here because you are worth it.”

In fact, most children’s educational needs can be provided for between school and home. Many adopted children who have finished school will say it was the attitude of teachers and the ethos of the school that shaped their experience. Undoubtedly, working together reaps rewards for everyone as information sharing is critical in helping children achieve. It helps the school to see that adoptive parents did not cause this child’s problems - they are part of the solution; it helps parents

to understand the challenges facing teachers, and that they too are part of the solution, and it helps the child to have a team of supportive adults on his side!

So what do schools need to know?

- The school needs to know that your child is adopted! Adoption means a child has specific needs relating to separation, loss, trust, safety, stress, executive functions and family dynamics. Keeping your child’s adoption a secret will almost certainly disadvantage them.
- Family must come first! Education is not everything; supporting the attachment between a child and his parents is vital.
- Information and training on attachment and developmental trauma.
- Information about your child specifically (e.g. confidential pupil information sheet).
- It is important for teachers to be nurturing, but they should not compromise the parent/child attachment relationship.
- Your strategies so staff can mirror them in school.
- That the child is doing the best they can.

Parents need to know that

- Teachers are human too! Most teachers try to do the best they can for every child within the confines of limited time, limited knowledge, limited resources and limited super powers!
- Education is not all – the cognitive brain is built on the emotional brain, family must come first!
- It’s important to get involved – volunteer in the classroom, the playground and on school trips, join parent teacher groups or the board of governors. Every bit helps!
- The child is doing the best they can.

Keeping in touch stops splitting

Children who don’t trust adult’s motives may try to manage people around them by divide and rule. They fail to deliver messages, tell tales on teachers, tell school staff, “My mum says you shouldn’t do x” and tell parents, “don’t go into school, you’ll make things worse.” All of which injects conflict and confusion and keeps school and home separate. Having regular contact and direct communication between home and school can pre-empt problems and greatly reduce the child’s ability to split.

Learning difficulties

“It is not uncommon for teachers working with traumatized children to observe that the children are really smart, but they do not learn easily... they are often diagnosed with learning difficulties.” Dr Bruce Perry

The *Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996* states, “For the purpose of education orders, a child has ‘special educational needs’ if he has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him.” It defines learning difficulty as:

- (a) A significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children his age.
- (b) A disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of his age in ordinary schools.
- (c) He has not attained compulsory school age, but would be likely to fall within (a) or (b) when he is of compulsory school age if special educational provision were not made.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) defines a disabled pupil as someone with, ‘a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his

ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’.

Although there is currently a support needs policy for looked after children, there is not one for adopted children. You could argue that adopted children fall into the above categories, yet most adopters struggle to get their children’s needs recognised in school.

The term “developmental trauma” is quite new and few children have such a diagnosis. In an effort to fill the gap, many parents push for a diagnosis of learning difficulty such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), social and emotional behavioural difficulties (SEBD), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), Asperger’s syndrome, dyslexia, etc as the effects can be similar in terms of executive function problems and behaviour to developmental trauma.

For example, a child with attachment difficulties could behave like a child with ADHD in a classroom; there are similarities between ASD

Every School a Good School (ESAGS) is an overarching policy that proposes to introduce a new inclusive model of Additional Educational Needs (AEN) for children who face barriers to learning. AEN would allow children with family difficulties, or social and emotional challenges to receive additional support if necessary. The AEN model would not affect the existing definition of SEN.

and the effects of trauma, and FASD is known to mimic many other disorders. In short, because the effects of developmental trauma look like learning difficulties, they can often be supported (in part) by similar strategies regardless of the label even though they do not adequately meet the child’s attachment and trauma needs.

It is a challenge for adopters to secure the right support. And, although this section deals with statementing, very few children qualify for a statement. The key is really to work closely with the school as even without an SEN diagnosis, schools can adapt existing resources and strategies to suit our children. If you think your child has a learning difficulty, talk to the principal or class teacher, who will arrange for you to meet the school’s special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).

Pat’s story

“I got support for my daughter when she was diagnosed with FAS. The school recognised this as a medical condition, whereas when I talked about attachment and trauma I was treated like a neurotic mother! The diagnosis meant she could have “a helper” and an individual Education Plan (EP). Although this helped, she was still anxious and easily upset by loud, demanding, or sarcastic teachers. I learned that even with an SEN diagnosis it is still important to address the attachment issues not covered by SEN provision.”

The SEN Code of Practice

Schools and education and library boards (ELBs) use the SEN Code of Practice to identify and assess children's needs. The Code addresses a range of learning difficulties, from children with short-term problems, where in-school adaptations may meet their needs, to severe difficulties, which may require an SEN statement and specialised provision. It recommends the following:

- **Schools should identify and aim to meet children's needs as early as possible**
- **Schools should work closely with parents**
- **Teachers should be guided by the Code but use their own judgement about how best to meet a child's needs**
- **Schools should take a step-by-step approach to support –**

matching available resources to the needs of the child.

Ideally, the school will work with you to decide how best to meet your child's needs within limited resources. Bear in mind that resourceful teaching staff can make a huge difference to many adopted children without ELB intervention.

There are several stages of support in the Code of Practice which have been summarised here under three headings

- 1 Early stage provision - including providing individual Education Plans (EPs)
- 2 Additional help
- 3 ELB Statutory Assessment

1 Early stage provision

Parents and teachers who note concerns liaise with the school SENCo, who includes the child on

Individual Education Plans

Your input and cooperation is essential as you know your child best and you know if they are capable of achieving the targets on the EP

An individual education plan, (EP) is used to identify individual needs, and plan, teach and review a child's progress throughout each school year. An EP aims to establish clear achievement targets that are different from and additional to the rest of the class targets. Children earmarked for additional support (with or without a statement) are likely to have an EP.

An EP can focus on academic, social, behavioural or emotional targets. An adopted child's EP should focus more on executive function skills than on IQ. The plan usually highlights one or two areas for change as too much change at once could overwhelm any child. Some of the areas of difficulty in this booklet could well form part of the EP targets. These targets become easier if they are worked on at home and in school. It is important that you attend review meetings to help assess which strategies work, which need revising and how your child is

progressing. EPs for our children need to be employed in conjunction with strategies that also address the child's trauma history so your input is vital in making the plan work. For example:

- **Attachment needs.** Children use their exploratory system to learn and in order for the exploratory system to be switched on the attachment seeking system must be switched off, which means they need to feel safe and settled to learn. For example, a child may have an EP target to, "sit still on the mat", but she would find it physically impossible if the alarm in her brain triggered a rush of adrenalin in her body.
- **Developmental gaps.** There are some things some children simply cannot do, not because they lack intelligence, but because they did not complete the developmental phase due to crises in their early lives. For example, many adopted children have the attention span of a toddler, so it is more effective to set targets and employ and attitude and strategies that suit a toddler, rather than a school-age child.

the school's SEN register and advises teachers as necessary. An EP is written to target areas of difficulty and the SENCo plans, monitors and reviews school-based provision. Your help is essential in the planning your child's targets on the EP. Setting achievable targets increases the child's successes and reduces failure and shame. It is also good for children to see adults working together to meet their needs.

While you need to give an understanding of your child's needs and how they have arisen, it is also important to protect your child's private history and self esteem. The teacher sheets at the back of this booklet can help with this.

2 Additional help

If your child needs additional help, the SENCo may ask for an educational psychologist's report. The school may also call in a specialist teacher or service. Strategies such as social stories (see page 39) may help children to manage challenging social situations in school and at home.

3 ELB Statutory Assessment

If your child's needs cannot be met within their school, you, the school or an educational psychologist can ask the ELB to carry out a statutory assessment. Few children reach this stage, as most support is provided in school.

The ELB will explain what happens and the time scales involved. You get time to consider if you agree to the

assessment.

If the assessment goes ahead, you can attend meetings and bring a trusted friend, professional or support worker with you. Your child can also contribute their views. Based on all the evidence the ELB will decide whether or not to draft a statement of Special Educational Needs.

NB. Statutory assessment does not always result in a statement. It is estimated that approximately two per cent of children should have a statement, although this varies within ELBs.

Where a statement is made, the ELB will give you information about what support is available and ensure that resources are provided to meet the statement recommendations.

With or without a statement, we still need to address attachment needs and the effects of developmental trauma. This means developing strong and empathic relationships between teachers, parents and children.

Behavioural management strategies, which work with the cognitive part of the brain, may not benefit children who cannot control their impulses. Instead, school staff can work with the child as if they were much younger, learning to read their behaviour as a way of signalling their needs and helping them develop self control through self awareness. Working with traumatised children is about building new connections in the brain and this happens within the context of positive relationships rather than positive reinforcement.

Janice and Mark's story

"We asked for a statement when our child was in reception and was already being left behind. Initially, he was turned down but we appealed with the help of a psychologist's report, an occupational therapist's report and the school, who backed us all the way. He is now in P3 and is doing extremely well. He gets three hours a day of one-to-one support which helps him to sit still and focus on his work. It makes a big difference that he likes his helper and she likes him. I would urge parents not to give up if you don't get an assessment or statement first time. Work with your school, get expert advice and try again."

What is a statement?

Some parents feel that a statement labels their child, while others believe it secures much needed support. The purpose of a statement is to ensure that the child gets educational opportunities that best meet their needs.

An SEN statement is a document that specifies your child's individual educational needs and the help they need in school. It contains the following information:

- you and your child's name, address and details.
- details of your child's learning difficulties as identified in the assessment.
- information about the help the ELB thinks your child needs, the objectives that support should achieve and the interim goals and review details.
- Information about your child's school or any out of school provision.
- any non educational needs required, e.g., transport.
You will receive a draft statement to review these details before it is finalised.

Getting the right school

If your child is already in a school, the ideal situation would be to provide the support needed to keep him there as change is extremely unsettling. If the assessment suggests that your child should move to a special school, the ELB will help you decide which of

the grant-aided schools in your area would best suit your child. If you want your child to attend an independent school with particular facilities, the ELB will consider your wishes but has no legal responsibility to meet them. When you receive the proposed statement you will have time to comment and state your school preference. If you still have queries you can request another meeting and more time.

When the statement is finalised you will receive a copy along with information on your rights to appeal. The statement will come into force straightaway and the ELB must provide any resources needed to carry out the recommendations. The school's board of governors must ensure your child gets the help specified in the statement. This whole process should take around 18 weeks, providing everyone sticks to the timescales, but it can take longer. The statement is reviewed annually. It may last throughout a child's school career, but it can be stopped at any time if the ELB decides your child can progress well without it. The ELB will contact you if they intend to stop the statement, and you will have a right to appeal. You can also ask for another assessment if you feel the current one isn't meeting your child's needs.

“**Statementing is a lengthy process that doesn't always give children what they need. It is essential that parents and teachers work together to meet the child's needs throughout the process instead of waiting for a statement that may not be issued, may not be enough when it is issued, or may be too late in coming.**”
NI SENCo

A review is particularly important when your child moves from primary to secondary school, as everyone needs to feel confident about the choice of secondary school and how the move is managed.

Appeals and complaints

You can appeal any decision made about your child's educational needs if you feel he has been unfairly treated or his needs have been misunderstood.

Contact the school

Begin by approaching the school and try to resolve the issues in an informal way (see *Working in partnership with the school, page 40*). Make a list of your concerns before you meet school staff so that you can remain focused on what you would like to change or improve for your child. If you are still not satisfied you can make a formal complaint. The school will have a protocol for dealing with parents' complaints and they will advise you on how this will be conducted.

Contact the ELB

If you are unhappy with how the ELB have handled any aspect of your child's education start by talking with the Board officer who dealt with your child's case. You can also contact voluntary and support organisations such as Adoption UK, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Nofas, etc, for additional information and support.

Contact DARS

The Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service (DARS) came into effect in 2005 as a result of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO). It is a confidential, independent, voluntary service, which aims to identify areas of disagreement and find

solutions that all parties are willing to accept.

The contact point is the DARS manager in your Board area. Involvement with DARS will not affect your right of appeal to the SENDIST. The DARS can only be used in disputes regarding SEN provision. If you feel your child has been discriminated against because of a disability, contact the Equality Commission.

Contact the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST)

If the above approaches fail you have a right to appeal to an independent body called the Special Educational Needs

and Disability Tribunal. You can find more information on Tribunal procedures in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal – How to Appeal booklet, available from the SENDIST offices, details below.

Contact the Ombudsman

Although the above procedures are the usual route for appeals and complaints, you can also contact the Ombudsman. An Ombudsman is an official appointed to represent the interests of the public by investigating and hopefully resolving complaints made against a government department, agency or public body.

Complaint and appeal contact details

DARS SELB

3 Charlemont Place,
The Mall, Armagh BT61 9AX
Tel. 028 3751 2383 / 028 3751 2224
Email: DARS.enquiry@selb.org

DARS BELB

40 Academy Street,
Belfast BT1 2NQ
Tel. 028 9056 4030
Email: DARS.enquiry@belb.co.uk

DARS NEELB

County Hall, 182 Galgorm Road,
Ballymena, BT42 1HN
Tel. 028 2566 2391 / 028 2566 2387
Email: DARS.enquiry@neelb.org.uk

DARS SEELB

Grahamsbridge Road,
Dundonald, Belfast BT16 2HS
Tel. 028 9056 6954
Email: DARS.enquiry@seelb.org.uk

DARS WELB

North West Teachers' Centre
24 Temple Road, Strathfoyle, L/
Derry BT47 6TJ
Tel. 028 7186 3520
Email: DARS.enquiry@welbni.org

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY TRIBUNAL

Secretariat, 3rd Floor Bedford House
16 - 22 Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7FD
Tel: 028 9072 8757
E-mail: SENDtribunal@courtsni.gov.uk

NI OMBUDSMAN.

Contact in any one of the following ways: Freephone 0800343424, email: ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk, or write to The Ombudsman, Freepost BEL 1478, Belfast BT1 6BR.

Resources

Downloadable papers

www.childtrauma.org www.scholastic.co.uk

Scholastic Early Childhood Today Emotional Development: Creating an Emotionally Safe Classroom By Bruce D. Perry MD, PhD

Books and DVDs

First Steps in Parenting the child who Hurts: Tiddlers and Toddlers by Caroline Archer (Jessica Kingsley)

Next Steps in Parenting the child who hurts: Tykes and Teens by Caroline Archer

New families, Old scripts A Guide to the Language of Trauma and Attachment in Adoptive Families by Caroline Archer and Christine Gordon (Jessica Kingsley)

What about me by Louise Michelle Bomber

Inside I'm hurting by Louise Michelle Bomber

Learn the child by Kate Cairns (BAAF)

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog by Dr Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz

Attachment Focused Parenting: effective strategies to care for children by Dan Hughes

Brain-based Parenting: The neuroscience for caregiving for healthy attachment by Dan Hughes

Safe place DVD Parenting strategies for facilitating attachment and sensory regulations

The Out of Sync Child: Recognising and Coping with sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Stock Kranowitz, Skyliite Press

The Out of Sync Child Has Fun – Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Kranowitz, Penguin

Won't do or Can't do, DVD, leaflets and training from www.familyfutures.co.uk

Organisations providing support and information

Adoption UK, Linden House, 55 the Green, South Bar Street, Banbury, OX16 9AB.

Tel: 01295 752240. Helpline: 0844 8487900. Online community: www.adoptionuk.org

Adoption UK Northern Ireland Office, 545 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 3BU. Tel: 028 9077 5211

AKAMAS Care & Education, for publications and training to support vulnerable children in education.

Go to www.akamas.co.uk

Inclusive Solutions, for publications, training and support on working with children with exceptional needs. www.inclusive-solutions.com

The Nurture Group Network Go to www.nurturegroups.org

The Theraplay Institute is about building better relationships through play. Go to www.theraplay.org

Yellow Kite Attachment Support Service for Schools (Louise Bomber), go to www.theyellowkite.co.uk

Adoption today



Adoption today is very different from what it was 30 years ago. Many of today's adopted children will have come from a background of abuse and/or neglect and may have had many moves through the Care system, if adopted from another country will likely have spent time in an orphanage. The average age of adoption in Northern Ireland is now almost five and their experiences before adoption will have impacted to some degree on their development.

Developmental trauma

Abuse and neglect in infancy gives a child a deep sense of shame about who they are; they tend not to feel worthy of care, have little trust in adults and frequently feel unsafe in their environment.

Neuroscience shows that a baby's brain grows to 80-90 per cent of its adult size in the first three years of life. Each individual brain develops to ensure our survival in the environment into which we are born, so children born into hostile environments have a brain wired for stress and fear. The damage caused by these early experiences is so pervasive and enduring it is now recognised as developmental trauma. Affected children have many of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder plus learning difficulties and an inability to articulate how they feel because much of the hurt happened before they had developed language.

Key points about trauma:

- Adoption does not fix it. It can be triggered by stress and sensory reminders for years. When activated, children typically respond by becoming hyperaroused or dissociating.
- All adopted children will have some level of developmental trauma, which can be reactivated by experiences in school.
- The trauma is relational and so it can be

helped by good relationships or triggered by difficult ones. Our children need adults to be trustworthy, and to engage with them in a friendly, fun, nurturing and structured way.

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)

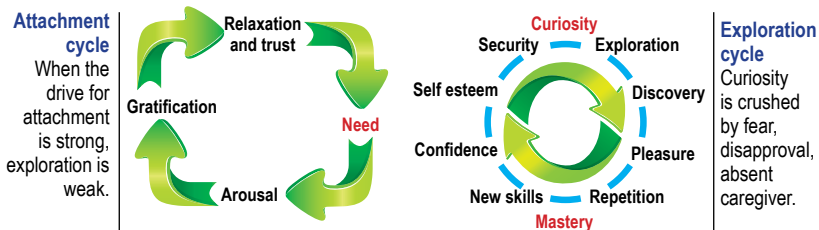
This is a developmental trauma that occurs before birth. Some adopted children will have a diagnosis of FASD by the time they start school; many other children may be affected by it but have no diagnosis. FASD and attachment difficulties are growing problems in our schools. Organisations such as NOFAS and FAS Aware UK have great resources.

Attachment

Because adopted children did not get their needs met in infancy, they have an insecure attachment style (even if they are attached to their adoptive parents). This has many implications, but the bottom line is that the child needs to feel physically and emotionally safe in order to benefit from learning opportunities. Feeling unsafe, distressed or in need activates the attachment cycle, which in adopted children was not successfully completed in infancy. When the attachment cycle is activated, the exploration cycle becomes inactive and children don't learn. The diagram overleaf is a simple illustration of why it is vital to help children feel safe, calm and cared for.

Why children need to feel safe to learn

The more available you are, the safer a child feels and the more they are able to learn



What works for adopted children?

What doesn't work?

Nurturing, highly structured environments ✓

Shouting ✘

Low stimulation ✓

Sarcasm ✘

The PLACE attitude ✓

Isolation ✘

Routine and repetition ✓

Shaming ✘

Good (friendly) relationships with adults

Pressurizing ✘

Rhythmic learning – being active before learning theory and taking short sensory breaks throughout the day ✓

Compensating ✘

Feel-good learning experiences, relevant to their developmental age. ✓

Reward- based behavioural management ✘

Strategies and settings that work for children with ASD often work for traumatised children.

Ignoring the impact of the past. ✘

Want to know more?

The parent who gave you this sheet has a booklet containing information and a list of resources that could help. You can also do an online search of the topics. Reliable sources are Dr Daniel Hughes, The Child Trauma Academy, Bessel van der Kolk, Dr Bruce Perry (who has written downloadable papers for Scholastic) and Louise Bomber at www.theyellowkite.co.uk.

The following books are recommended:

Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools, What about me? Inclusive strategies to support pupils with attachment difficulties make it through the school day, both by Louise Bomber (Worth Publishing)

For information on any aspect of adoption please contact Adoption UK's head office on 01295 752240, or the NI office on 02890775211. www.adoptionuk.or.uk

The PLACE attitude for teaching traumatised children



Attachment therapist Dan Hughes talks about the therapeutic attitude needed when working with a traumatised child. It is achieved through PLACE. Parents and teachers can achieve a great deal through being Playful, Liking, Accepting, Curious, and Empathic, even in the absence of other strategies or resources.

Playful - A relaxed and playful environment is a more effective way of influencing a child's behaviour than rewards, sanctions or anger-based discipline. Playfulness engages and rewires children at precognitive levels and recognises their limited ability to follow instructions. Simply delighting in the child also conveys acceptance, regardless of their achievements or misdemeanours. Positive non-verbal communication such as soft eye contact and facial expressions, good touch, and welcoming body posture communicate positivity, as does maintaining a happy school environment.

Liking - Show the child that you like them by staying calm even when they misbehave. Do not reject the child even if they reject you, and reconnect with them quickly after absences or disciplining. Find something valuable about the child and try to like that part of them when their behaviour is challenging. Remember, the behaviour gets worse when the child is frightened or stressed. As a baby or toddler they were frequently in this state.

Accepting - It's easier for our children to stay regulated and start to change if you can show you accept them and the reasons for their difficulties, while not necessarily accepting the behaviour. Reminding yourself that traumatized children often "can't do" rather than "won't do", that they are doing their best, and their behaviours are a way of communicating needs and fears can help you develop an accepting attitude. You can use accepting expressions like, 'I really like having you in my class and still it is not okay for you to hit people. Let's see if we can find a better way for you to show me what you need.'



Curious: Being curious rather than angry about why children act in certain ways can help them to change. You can convey curiosity by wondering out loud why the child is behaving in a certain way. Simply saying something like, 'I wonder why it is so hard for you to wait your turn/queue up for lunch' etc can help a child to stop, think and begin to make sense of their feelings and behaviours. This is usually more effective than asking directly what's bothering them. A child who has 'switched off' their feelings may not know why they are upset. They may say something trivial, or withhold the information through lack of trust. An educated guess such as, 'I wonder if you are worried about the school trip on Friday,' can also be an excellent way to open discussion, in which you can listen empathically.

Empathy is the most important quality you can have when working with our children. To understand the child's needs we have to put ourselves in their shoes and convey to them that we 'get it'. For example, 'I know that these spellings are hard for you to remember', 'Your knee is really red, I bet that hurts.' Empathy allows the child to feel their feelings and encourages the release of grief, fear and rage behind emotional and behavioural problems. Try to empathise with the child before disciplining and throughout the employment of disciplinary measures. It is vital that you remain genuinely empathic, not flippant or sarcastic.

Confidential pupil information sheet



Trauma triggers

My name is:



Names of people who matter to me:

How I show my needs



A bit about my past



My personal care



Eating

Toileting

Dressing

Touch

What helps me to learn



My strengths



Things that are hard for me



Ideas to calm me



Topics and times that might upset me



SAMPLE

Confidential pupil information sheet



My name is:

Jack Jones

Names of people who matter to me:

Mum

Dad

Birth mum

Foster carer,

siblings,

Birth siblings.

A bit about my past

I was left alone a lot

I was often hungry and cold

I was punished badly for minor things

I had to look after my siblings

I didn't get to play

I lived in six different families



Trauma triggers

Shouting/raised voices



Being touched without warning

Being touched without warning

Being laughed at

Doors banging

Feeling hungry

Doors banging

Being left alone/ignored

Saying goodbye

sarcasm

Enforced eye contact

How I show my needs

Chatting non stop



make people laugh/ act the clown

I just pretend everything's ok

Being overly affectionate

Following you around

Constantly demanding attention

Chewing my hand/jumper

Rocking

Being argumentative

Teachers' notes

My personal care



Eating

I don't eat in crowds or if I am scared/stressed

I may need help cleaning up after lunch

Toileting

I need reminding to go to the toilet

I wear pullups

Dressing

I need help with laces

I have sensory problems with clothes

I may feel uncomfortable undressing for PE

Touch

I don't like being touched without warning

I need to touch everything in a new space

What helps me to learn



Sitting beside a focused pupil

Having frequent breaks

Sitting beside a friend

Having a photo of Mum/dad handy

My strengths



I am kind

I am friendly

I am good at football

I love music

I'm good on the computer

I love animals

Things that are hard for me

Being away from mum/dad



Homework might be an issue

Trying new things

Joining in

Being told off in front of people

Ideas to calm me



Recognise anxiety

behaviour and help me name it

Listen to me and help me pick a calming activity to do for a few minutes

Let me do a message or chore but not as a punishment

Stay with me and use PLACE

Topics and times that might upset me

Mother's day



Baby photos

Circle time topics about loss

Five things to remember about me



1 Please try to think less about managing my behaviour and more about reducing my anxiety - reducing anxiety will lead to better behaviour. Behaviour is how I signal my needs and fears. I first experienced need when I had no language to describe it, so my behaviour is my first language. I will revert to it when I'm stressed or anxious.

2 I learn much better when I feel safe – emotionally and physically. I need you to like me and I need to like you, otherwise I just won't learn and school will be harder for both of us. Deep down I feel I am bad and that nobody would want to care for me, so I will challenge your interest in me. Please don't get angry when I don't trust you. Use the PLACE attitude and consequence my misdemeanours - without anger! This will help me build cause and effect thinking, reduce my shame and encourage a healthy sense of guilt.

3 I may act much younger than my years. Because difficult things happened to me when I was young, parts of my development just got stuck. So, I find it hard to get through the day without my Mum or Dad and I may need sensory reminders of them to make me feel safe. I need you to supervise me, give me boundaries, and relate to me as you would to a much younger child. With me the motto is always, "Think toddler".

4 I'm not good with change or surprises. I need a timetable for my day, so I know what is coming next. I need you to prepare me for any changes in teacher, classroom assistant or pupils; if we are going on a school trip, to a different class or if lunch or break arrangements are going to change. If I am sent out of class for any reason, please tell me where I am going and who I will be with. If I am sent to a different teacher as a discipline, please let it always be the same teacher, where possible. If I go somewhere new, let me check out the space before we settle down to learn. Please don't leave me isolated or alone at any time.

5 Please remember that you, me and my family are all doing our best. Don't take my behaviour personally; it may feel personal but it is not about you and it is not deliberate. Model how you want me to behave. It helps if you can say "sorry" when you get it wrong and "thank you" even when my behaviour is bad. E.g. "Thank you (name) for showing me that this is hard for you. Now let's see if we can find a better way for you to show that you need help". Finally, you may pick up on my feelings and begin to feel anxious, demoralised and deskilled yourself. Please get support if this happens. You make a real difference to children's lives, we need you to take good care of yourself. Thank you.

