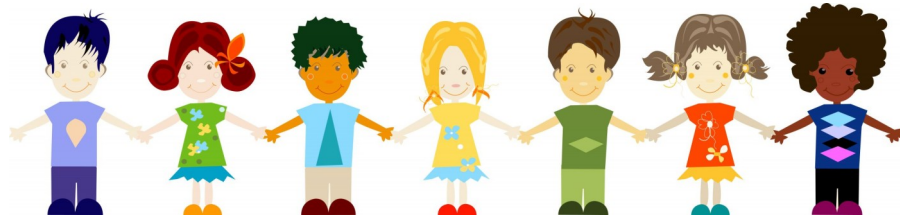


Information for Schools



Supporting the Education of Children in Care

Produced by:

Claire Page
Rebecca James
Shelagh Bolton
Jadie Wardle

With thanks to:

Louise Bombèr
Ann Radford
Catriona Potter
The young people who agreed to contribute to this
booklet

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Attachment theory	6
Working with pupils with attachment difficulties	9
Supporting the development of emotional regulation	11
Supporting the development of self esteem and a sense of self	13
Supporting the development of positive peer relationships	15
Supporting the development of feelings of security	17
Supporting organisation and learning	19
Reducing feelings of agitation and anxiety	20
Supporting transitions	22
A final thought	24
References and further reading	25
Useful websites and contacts	27

Introduction

This booklet aims to support school staff working with children who are in care. Every child is unique, and children in care are just as different from one another as other children. However, children in the care system are particularly vulnerable due to their experiences of serious loss or disruption to their most important relationships. Some children in care, but by no means all, have experienced significant relational traumas through neglect or abuse. These experiences can impact on children's development and affect their social, emotional, behavioural development and academic progress in school.

Although this booklet focuses on children who are in care, the issues covered may also be helpful for adults who are supporting other vulnerable children.

Understanding the behaviour of children in care

The behaviour of a child in care can be baffling and frustrating. An understanding of attachment theory can help us make sense of a child's behaviour.

What is attachment?

Attachment is described by Bowlby (1969) as the 'bond that ties'. It is the deep and enduring early connection established between a baby and his/her main caregiver(s). These relationships are our most important relationships.



Modern research suggests that our earliest relationships are important for:

- The physical development of the brain
- The development of the ability to regulate emotional state
- The ability to develop empathy and relationships with others (reciprocity)
- The development of executive functioning skills (the collection of processes that are responsible for guiding, directing and managing cognitive, emotional and behavioural functions)
- The development of a sense of self

Attachment theory

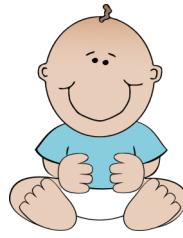
Attachment theory suggests that our earliest relationships form the blueprint, or template, for what we expect from all relationships we go on to develop.

These blueprints are developed at a time before we have language and therefore are very resistant to change. Even when children form new relationships they continue to expect the pattern of responses from adults they have experienced in the past.

If a child has experienced early care where the adult is available, responsive and able to meet his/her needs (and has developed a secure attachment), the child will expect adults in the future to be similarly available, responsive and able to meet his/her needs.

If a child has experienced early care where the adult is unreliable, unresponsive, not attuned to his/her needs, threatening and/or abusive (and developed an insecure attachment), the child will expect the same from adults in future relation-

Attachment theory



Secure attachments

From the moment a baby is born (and some research suggests even before birth), a baby starts to build up a picture of his/her world. When a baby signals his/her distress (for example, due to feeling hungry, cold or wet) and is soothed by his/her caregiver, the baby starts to build up an understanding along the lines of, 'when I'm upset someone makes me feel better again'. When the caregiver is well attuned to the baby's needs, the baby is soothed and returns to a comfortable state. This interaction is repeated many times a day and forms the beginning of a baby being able to regulate, or control, its emotional state. The baby learns this pattern and starts to be able to wait for short periods of time and to signal less often and less loudly when s/he is upset. This is the beginning of a secure attachment

.

Newborn babies are difficult to manage. New parents often feel overwhelmed. It takes time for a parent to get to know their baby and to start to be able to understand what the baby may be needing. Every parent knows the feeling of having tried everything but still being unable to soothe their baby. Thankfully, research suggests that parenting only has to be 'good enough' - not perfect. So long as parents get it right the majority of the time, secure attachments will develop. Research figures vary, and there are many cultural differences, but around 55-60% of children have been found to have secure attachments.

Insecure attachments

Not all caregivers can manage to be sufficiently attuned to their child's needs and be able to soothe them. This can happen for a variety of reasons - for example, a parent being preoccupied with their own needs/problems/grief, being separated from the child or being unable to be consistent in their relationships. Difficulties which develop in early child-caregiver relationships are very rarely deliberate.

There are three patterns of insecure attachment which have been described.



Avoidant insecure attachment

Where a caregiver is slow to give relevant care or shows a lack of emotional connection to their child, the child may stop signalling his/her needs (because s/he cannot see the point). Romanian

orphanages show the extreme outcomes of such lack of care.

While most children are not subjected to this level of absent care, some children in care may have experienced neglect. This causes children to become withdrawn, quiet and 'closed off'.

These

children may not show their emotions to others, even though they are feeling just the same emotions. They are less likely to trust adults and may not seek support even when they are in real need. Often they can appear quiet, calm and self-reliant. These children can be mistaken for being resilient and independent and are not always noticeable in school. These children are at risk of developing mental health difficulties.

Ambivalent insecure attachment

This pattern develops when a child receives inconsistent care or when the caregiver does not understand the child's needs. For example, where the child's caregiver is permissive at times and authoritarian at others; where the child is the centre of attention at times and ignored at other times; where the child is tired but the adult tries to play. Because the child cannot predict if the signals s/he sends out will be responded to in a way that makes him/her feel better, the child keeps trying to signal, even when the caregiver has responded. These children are not easily soothed and remind adults of their existence and needs. In school, these are the children who always need your attention and can be exhausting.



Disorganised insecure attachment

A disorganised attachment is not really a pattern at all. It is used to describe the behaviour of a child where care-giving has been so chaotic and unpredictable that the child has not yet developed a way of understanding and predicting what is likely to happen in their world. This kind of attachment is often, but not always,

associated with children who have experienced abusive caregiving. Imagine being a helpless child who is biologically pre-programmed to signal your needs to your caregiver and the caregiver bringing pain, humiliation and distress. Children who have had these experiences can show behaviour which is difficult to predict and may not appear to link directly to what is happening at the time.

Working with pupils with attachment difficulties

When working with a pupil with attachment difficulties, it is important to consider what approaches would work best, in view of their early life experiences.

Some strategies which may work for a pupil who have developed a secure attachment, may **not** be successful for a pupil who has attachment difficulties.

General Guidelines

Understand the pupil's personal history - walk in his/her shoes, consider what experiences s/he has had.

Display a photo of the vulnerable pupil and the name of the key adult in the staff room. Give a summary sheet to the educational `team` around the pupil (including support staff) with bullet points indicating the main issues, taking care not to divulge confidential information.

Personal Education Plan (PEP) and Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings held regularly can help to share successful strategies and areas of vulnerability and ensure a consistent approach. Consider what information from these meetings would be helpful to share with all adults in contact with the pupil - for example, lunch staff, supply staff, premises officers.

Support each other. Arrange regular times when staff can meet to share their experiences and seek support.

Work in partnership with the pupil's carers and share good practice.

Specific Guidelines



The following section provides recommendations related to specific areas of development which are likely to be affected by attachment difficulties.

The recommendations are intended as a menu of suggestions school staff may find helpful rather than a finite list of approaches which should be implemented.

Examples of strategies which are appropriate to the primary and secondary classroom are provided. It will be important that strategies are used flexibly and adapted to meet the particular needs of the pupil in his/her classroom and school.

Please note, to simplify the text the term pupil has been used throughout to represent both child and young person.

Supporting the development of emotional regulation

Pupils with attachment difficulties may not have learned how to recognise and control their emotional state. They may be reliant on others to support them to do this.

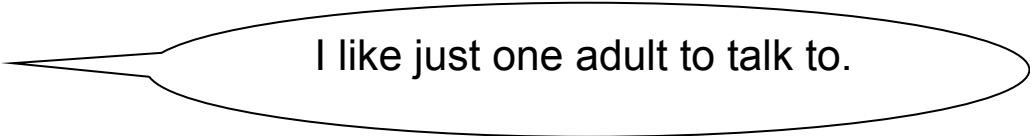
Difficulties with emotional regulation can be addressed but it should be recognised that it will take time.

Set emotional and social expectations based on the pupil's **emotional** age rather than his/her **chronological** age. The pupil's emotional age may be significantly different from their chronological age.

THINK TODDLER!

Allow the pupil to work through the stages of **dependence** (relying on an adult to help soothe them) and **interdependence** (working with an adult) before learning **independence**.

Allocate **one key worker** to build a relationship with the pupil. Allow the pupil to practise dependency with this key adult before moving on to independence. Make sure there is a **back up adult** who knows the pupil well and can provide cover and maintain consistency of approach. Ensure the key adult is given time to regulate their own emotions. Encourage the key adult to ask for help or a break when needed.

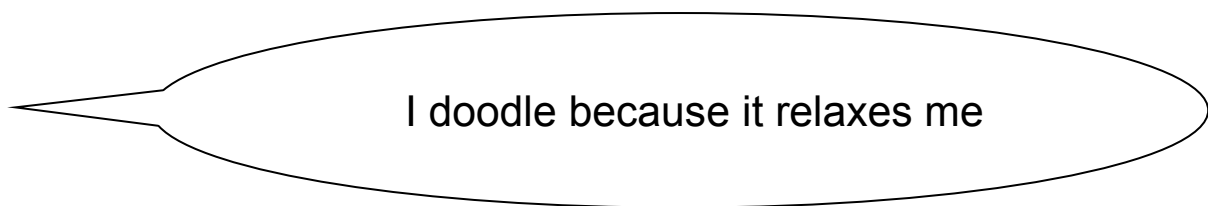


I like just one adult to talk to.

Be explicit about what you are expecting. Do not assume that a pupil will know what you mean by 'be sensible' or 'be good'.

Try not to take things personally. If a pupil is testing you, it may be because s/he wants to trust you but is finding this hard. A pupil may leave you feeling disempowered or de-skilled but try to bear in mind the pain behind the pupil's behaviour.

Try to intervene early. Recognise early warning signs and step in before things escalate. This could involve encouraging the pupil to take a break. You may need to support the child to recognise that this is needed—for example, 'I can see you're finding this hard... let's go for a walk and come back to it in a minute'.



Provide opportunities for the pupil to talk when needed. Encourage him/her to express emotions and discuss difficulties etc.

This is

often best done while 'helping' to do a job - sharpening pencils, photocopying, running errands for the teacher/office staff.

However, be aware of giving too many jobs.

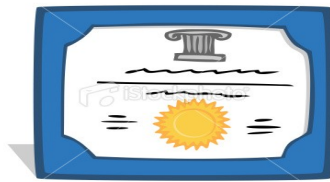
Be aware of possible triggers in PSHE - for example, stories about abandonment or loss etc. Allow time for preparation on a smaller context e.g. with key adult and foster carers.

Be aware that some pupils may find PE lessons particularly difficult. PE lessons differ from the usual structure of lessons. Challenges include: getting undressed, leaving possessions unattended, a dramatic change in pace (and the expectation to return to a ready to learn state at the end of the session), needing to listen to instructions in a busy, loud environment and a focus on one's physical self. This can leave pupils feeling exposed and vulnerable.

Supporting the development of self esteem and a sense of self

Pupils with attachment difficulties are likely to have negative views about themselves and a heightened sense of shame. They may not have experienced feeling accepted, valued or respected. They may feel more comfortable and safe to stay with the familiar pattern of being seen as 'bad'. They may find it hard to believe any positive comments about themselves and may find it difficult to cope with a lot of praise.

Make a 'Success Book' – keep records of good work, successful playtimes/break times, positive comments etc. This should be looked after by an adult to avoid it being destroyed/ripped up when the pupil feels he is 'rubbish'.



Notice aloud examples of appropriate behaviour - for example, 'You were really polite when you asked to borrow A's pen – well done'.

Give praise often but be specific about what is being praised and do not be too effusive, as even praise can be overwhelming at times.

Give the pupil responsibilities/jobs – including helping in a younger class (and thereby accessing younger play activities).

Avoid **shame**. Show empathy first then relate sanctions directly to the misdemeanour and explain why they are being given (e.g. as part of reparation). Assure the pupil that s/he is still wanted/liked/belongs. Start each day or part of a day with a clean slate.

Try **not** to use a threat in the presentation of choice.

For example, in primary school: **Avoid** 'you can choose either to pick those up or stay in at lunchtime to do it'. **Instead**.....'We need to pick those beads up before break – we could either scoop them up in our hands or use this pot to scoop them up. Which way?'

For example, in secondary school: **Avoid** 'You can pick up that pen now or choose to spend break in detention'.

Instead...'Would you like to pick that up or shall we leave it there and pick it up later?'

Suggest an action that would serve to repair or amend a damaged relationship rather than insisting on a verbal apology.

Choose your 'control' battles so that the pupil is not overwhelmed by the expectations on him/her. Select two or three areas you want to work on at any one time.

If the pupil does not follow your instruction, be firm but also supportive – for example, 'You didn't shut down the computer when I asked you to. You probably feel cross/upset now that you can't go out to play until you have done it but maybe you'll remember next time' (think carefully about tone of voice).

Take some responsibility when things go wrong - for example, 'Perhaps I shouldn't have asked you to do that when I knew you were feeling upset.....'

Avoid a sense of failure by giving the pupil set work broken up into small, manageable tasks.

Offer choices so that the pupil feels s/he has some control - for example, 'What shall we write with - pen or pencil? Which colour paper shall we use - blue or green?'

Supporting the development of positive peer relationships

Pupils with attachment difficulties may not know how to make or maintain friendships, due to developmental delays and/or their social experiences. They may have a 'bad name' among their peers and this 'label' should be removed as soon as possible

Translate social situations and use commentary, direction and modelling - for example, 'I can see you need a pen. I'm sure someone will lend you one – lets ask A if he will let you borrow his pen for a minute'.

Develop social skills – for example, play/'test' a game with individual classmates in turn, encourage work in pairs so that peers can begin to see him/her in a new light.





Partner the pupil with good role models.

Include the pupil in small group work on social skills.

Act out social situations using role play/puppets/persona dolls/photos.

Structure lunchtimes/playtimes. Provide opportunities for supervised games and responsibilities. Think about the **emotional** rather than the **chronological** age of the pupil when planning activities. Try not to place the pupil in situations for which s/he is not developmentally ready.

Reduce the amount of unstructured time in the playground. Encourage the pupil to participate in lunch clubs/activities, with adult support if necessary.

Give the pupil responsibility at lunchtimes – for example, collecting play equipment, counting pupils into dinner, office jobs balanced with other opportunities to form and maintain peer relationships.

Supporting the development of feelings of security

Pupils with attachment difficulties may not have learned that the adults who care for them will keep them in mind even when not physically with them (permanency). They have a need for security/connection and can become pre-occupied with trying to have their needs met. This can result in attention-seeking behaviour - an attempt to stay connected to an adult.

Provide the pupil with a photo keyring in their pencil case - for example, photos of their siblings and carers.

Provide the pupil with a reminder of their carer - for example, a small object from home or a piece of fabric with the scent/perfume of the carer on it.

Ask the pupil to look after an object in your absence - for example, a special pen.

Ask the pupil to do a job for you when you are not in class.



Use non-verbal recognition – smiles, thumbs up.

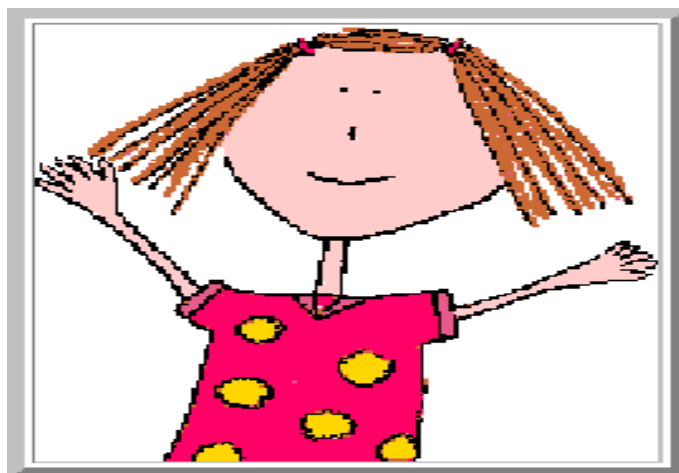
If the pupil/adult leaves/moves school, create a memory book about the school with photos, messages etc.

Be assertive but remain calm, positive and warm. Avoid showing anger/fear.

Maintain regular contact with carers, via a home-school book, email or phone call. Reassure the pupil that all the adults involved work as a team.

If the pupil behaves inappropriately, try to seat him/her close to you rather than sending him/her out. If s/he needs to be removed from the area, try to do so positively – for example, 'Lets go and get a drink.....' **Avoid** sending a pupil out. This can reinforce feelings of rejection and exacerbate shame. The child needs to remain connected to another at difficult times not separated.

Listen to the child and validate his/her feelings. Use positive language to commentate with empathy – for example, 'I can see you are feelingso let`s.....'.



Supporting organisation and learning

Pupils with attachment difficulties may have poor organisational skills and find it difficult to grasp the concept of time. They may therefore need support to have the right equipment and to be in the right place.

Help to ensure the pupil has what s/he needs to do a set task
– keep a special pencil case with pens, rubber, ruler etc.

Use a whiteboard to plan stages of a task and tick off each one as it is completed.

Encourage the pupil to start work independently – for example, set a routine of copying the date and heading/ lesson objective before any adult intervention.



Give warning of the session coming to an end – 10 mins, 5 mins
– use a visual timer.

Allow the pupil to have a piece of textured material to fiddle with or a doodle pad to draw on while listening in class.

When a pupil seems to be struggling, use phrases such as 'I'm going to help you practise getting stronger/better at.....'

Be aware that the pupil may refuse help at first, fearing that s/he will not be able to do the task and so will feel shame. Try to take the pressure off by making a comment such as 'I know you probably don't want any help at the moment but maybe we can just have a look at it together and work out what needs to be done first....'

Allow the pupil to take frequent physical sensory breaks.

Reducing feelings of agitation and anxiety

Any change can be stressful for pupils with attachment difficulties and especially when it is not expected. This can cause anxiety which may lead to a deterioration in behaviour or could be internalised. In both cases the pupil's ability to settle and learn can be detrimentally affected.

Keep a 'Calm Box' containing suitable calming activities/games.

Laugh with the pupil – play silly games, tell jokes.

Arrange a 'meet and greet' time on arrival – a welcome smile/hello or a chance to chat if needed. If the pupil has had a taxi journey, an opportunity to have a physical break and/or a drink and snack may help him/her to settle to learn.

Prepare for a school trip – look at website, make a visual plan, discuss the coach trip/seating etc.

Provide the pupil with a safe space they can go to if they are finding things hard. Everyone needs an exit strategy when times get too much. Go with them and be alongside.



'I love having my hood right over my head even when I'm in my room, it makes me feel really safe and cosy and like I'm in my own little nest'.

If you know there will be a change to staffing, tell the pupil in advance. Reassure the pupil that a familiar adult will pop in to see them and check how things are going. If necessary have an Alternative plan in mind (for example, go to another class with a familiar member of staff, help a member of staff to do a job).

Use a **check in** card rather than a **time out or report card**. Encourage the pupil to 'check in' with a familiar adult.

Use post-it notes/memory cards as reminders that an interrupted task will be finished at a later stage or to assure the pupil that he/she will be attended to in due course.

Try not to ask the pupil **WHY** he has done something – speculate aloud what may have happened—wonder aloud.

Try to avoid lining up/waiting/crowded cloakrooms. Allow the pupil to go in early, do a job etc. In a secondary school, it may be necessary to allow the pupil to leave the class first to get to the next class before the corridors become crowded.

Try to keep the format the same each day. Look at a personal visual timetable, discussing any changes to the norm. Refer to the timetable regularly throughout the day – after break, lunchtime etc.

Assure the pupil that school is a safe place where his/her needs will be met (notice aloud when an adult looks after a pupil, tour the dining hall/kitchen to show enough food is prepared etc). Use social stories if appropriate.

Be aware that, due to prior experience, the pupil may be anxious about getting enough food or may seek comfort from food. This can lead to stealing, hoarding and having a desire to eat outside of scheduled meal times. Staff will need to respond sensitively in order to reduce feelings of shame and anxiety.

Supporting transitions

Transition inevitably involves loss and some uncertainty. It can be a particularly difficult time for pupils who have experienced trauma and loss. Any transition, including transitions between years within the same school, can be difficult. A pupil's transition from primary to secondary school must be particularly carefully planned and managed. Even if a pupil appears to be coping within one setting, it should not be presumed that a supported transition is not needed.

Planning a transition:

Use transition PEP (Personal Educational Plan) meetings to plan the transition well in advance.



Ensure the pupil visits his/her new school two or three times with staff from the present school. Allow opportunities for the pupil to get to know the geography of the school, meet key staff, etc. The pupil could make a video/take photos of key features of the new school which can be shown to others.

Introduce the pupil to key staff in an informal, 'relaxed' meeting. Make good use of transitional objects (e.g. photos, maps, from the pupil to his/her key worker and vice versa).

Ensure all paperwork is passed on to the new school in plenty of time. It is important that information about the pupil's needs is shared with all staff involved.

Make the transition from one school to the next a positive experience. Ensure key staff say 'goodbye' in person, provide the pupil with photos, leave a painting created by the pupil in the foyer, etc.

Make good use of transitional objects. Consider giving the pupil something small (for example, a pen, photo or map) to take home from their new school to keep over the holiday.

When the pupil arrives at the new school:

Ensure that PEP (Personal Educational Plan) meetings are frequent during the first year of transfer.

Make sure key staff meet and greet the pupil on arrival.

Help the pupil use their timetable by providing little reminders (i.e. it's week one or two, it's day 6, etc).

Allow the pupil to check in with their key worker. Or, the key worker could drop in to lessons to check how things are going.

Encourage communication between all staff, the key worker and the carer.

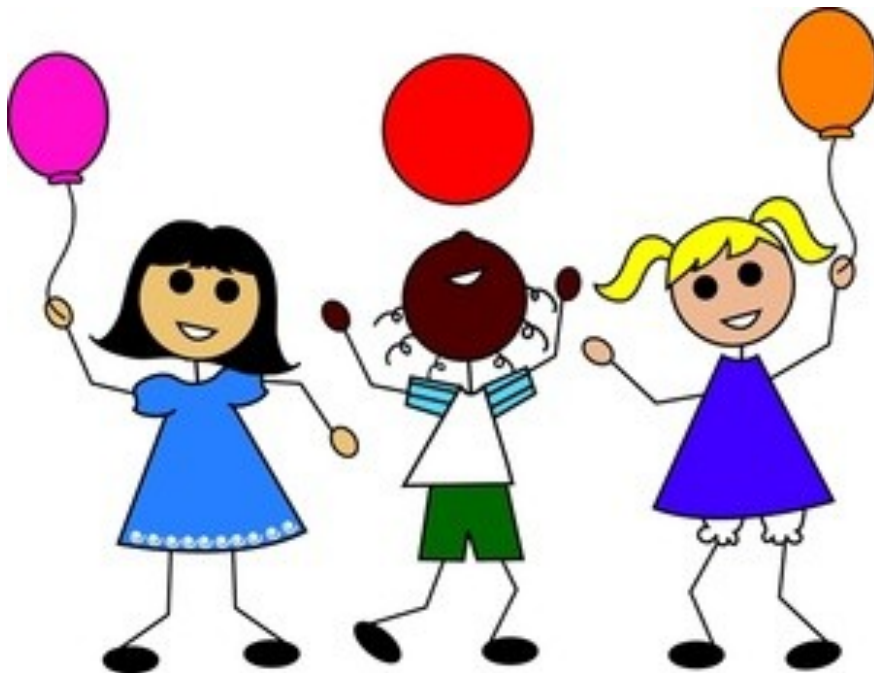
Ensure information and action plans are circulated to all relevant teaching staff so there is a consistent approach to discipline. Have high expectations of what the pupil can achieve.

A final thought...

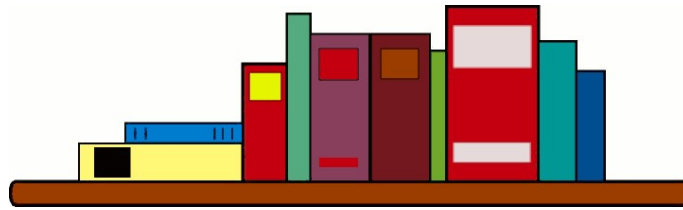


Research shows that where children have had a difficult start to life but have overcome this to succeed (both in relationships and work), there is often one key person, a teacher or another adult in school, who they realised made a key difference to them.

Usually this was due to a belief that the adult had held in the young person, or something they said or did for them. It did not always make a difference at the time - often, the adult knew nothing of the effect it had.



References and further reading



Allen, M. (2008) Attachment, Developmental Trauma and Executive Functioning Difficulties in the School Setting: Their Effect on the Behaviours of Adopted, Fostered and Looked-after Children and Ideas to Manage These Behaviours and to Establish an Environment That will Enable These Children to Achieve Their Personal and Academic Potential. Family Futures.

Bowlby, J. (1969) Attachment and Loss. New York: Basic Books.

Bomber, L. (2007) Inside I'm Hurting: Practical strategies for supporting children with attachment needs in school. Worth Publishing.

Bomber, L (2010) What About Me? Inclusive Strategies to Support Pupils with Attachment Difficulties Make it Through the School Day. Worth Publishing.

Geddes, H. (2006) Attachment in the Classroom: The links between children's early experience, emotional wellbeing and performance in school: A practical guide for schools. Worth Publishing.

Gerhardt, S. (2004) Why Love Matters. Brunner-Routledge.

Perry, A, (Ed) (2009) Teenagers and Attachment - Helping Adolescents Engage with Life and Learning. Worth Publishing, Ltd. London.

Family Futures leaflet 'Won't Do or Can't Do – Supporting Children whose early life experiences have affected their ability to function effectively and responsibly within the school environment' available at <http://www.familyfutures.co.uk/services/teachers-info/documents/WontdoorCantDo.pdf>

Child Safety Commissioner (2007) Calmer Classrooms - A guide to working with traumatised children. Victoria, Australia. Available at www.kids.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf

Hertfordshire County Council (2007) Working with looked after or adopted children in school—A guide for teachers, parents and carers of looked after or adopted children. Available at www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/csf0046.pdf

National Children's Bureau - Understanding Why - Understanding attachment and how this can affect education with special reference to adopted children and young people and those looked after by local authorities. Available at http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/177349/understanding_why.pdf

Useful websites



The Yellow Kite: www.theyellowkite.co.uk

Family Futures: www.familyfutures.co.uk

Helpful contacts



Education of Children in Care Service:

Leicestershire County Council, Room 600, County Hall, Glenfield,
Leicestershire LE3 8RF.

Telephone number : 0116 305 6097.

Leicestershire Psychology Service:

Leicestershire County Council, Room 600, County Hall, Glenfield,
Leicestershire LE3 8RF.

Telephone number : 0116 305 5100.