



Six Principles of Nurture



What does a nurturing approach mean for us?

A nurturing approach recognises that **positive relationships** are central to both learning and wellbeing. A key aspect of a nurturing approach is an understanding of **attachment theory** and how early experiences can have a significant impact on development. It recognises that all school staff have a role to play in establishing the positive relationships that are required to **promote healthy social and emotional development** and that these relationships should be **reliable, predictable, and consistent** where possible. A nurturing approach has a key focus on the **school environment** and emphasises the balance between care and challenge which incorporates **attunement, warmth and connection** alongside **structure, high expectations** and a focus on **achievement and attainment**. It is based on the understanding of 6 Nurturing Principles:

1. Learning is understood developmentally
2. The classroom offers a safe base
3. Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing & self-esteem
4. Language is a vital means of communication
5. All behaviour is communication
6. Transitions are important in our lives

Learning is understood developmentally

With a nurturing approach adults respond to young people not in terms of arbitrary expectations about 'attainment levels' but in terms of their **developmental progress**. The response to the individual is 'as they are', underpinned by a **non-judgemental and accepting attitude**. Staff understand young people's development varies across areas such as **physical, social, emotional, and cognitive capacity**. Consistency from young people is not demanded as it is understood that learning is not linear and requires repetition to embed.

The classroom offers a safe base

We all need to feel safe to function and learn. Classrooms must be a place where a young person feels welcome and at ease. **Organisation of resources, structure of routines and predictability** of adult behaviour are key. A classroom where adults are reliable and consistent in their approach towards young people fosters learning. Low stimulation classrooms where adults **communicate calmness** allow young people to regulate and thrive: Calm breeds calm...

Nurture is important for the development of self esteem

Staff can build **resilience** within young people by providing opportunities to achieve **small successes** in tasks throughout school – **feedback** is given on **how** they have managed to achieve this. Praising **approaches** as opposed to a focus on work produced or outcome supports a nurturing approach. Providing feedback through appropriate levels of **directed praise** supports young people to feel valued and thought of as individuals.

Language is understood as a vital means of communication

Language is more than a skill to be learnt, it is the way of putting **feelings into words**, being **heard**, and **understood** in the world. Lacking access to an emotional vocabulary results in 'acting out' feelings. A nurturing approach involves using **reciprocal relationships** to listen and respond to each other in a manner which is integral to supporting development of **emotional language**. Activities which encourage positive dialogue are helpful. A 'name it to tame it' approach encourages using **experiences** in the classroom to develop use of emotional language. Daily interactions provide opportunities to share language around emotions – adults can model this by using language to share their own feelings.

All behaviour is communication

This principle asks us to consider how we respond to a young person's challenging or difficult behaviour. 'Given what I know about this young person and their development, what are they trying to tell me?' Understanding what someone is **communicating through behaviour** helps adults to respond in a calm, firm and non-punitive way - not being provoked or dragged into the negative. We are asked to consider **what lies beneath** the 'unwanted' surface behaviours. When a young person knows their **feelings are understood** it will help diffuse difficult situations. Conflict and challenge provide an opportunity for a **restorative approach**. Difficulties with behaviour gift us 'learning/teaching' moments to support the development of **new neural pathways** – leading to better choices in the future. When a young person is supported to **connect to the impact** of their actions true behavioural change can occur.

Transitions are important in our lives

Schools have put in **transitional support** around key stages for many years. A nurturing approach encourages us to think on transitions in the widest context. Following holiday periods, between school years, moving class to class and even micro transitions between activities in a classroom are all examples of transitions for young people. When a young person has experienced adversity changes (even between task) can trigger feelings of threat and hypervigilance. Being mindful that changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable young people and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.

Adapted from:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/applying-nurture-as-a-whole-school-approach-a-framework-to-support-self-evaluation/>

#Article28 - I have the right to an education.
#Article3 - Adults must do what is best for me.

Updated: May '22.