

Supporting Children's attachment and resilience through relationships

Children manage best when they feel loved, accepted, safe, and that people understand them. If a child or young person has access to a warm and emotionally sound relationship they are more likely to have a positive sense of self, to have safe and caring relationships with others and to be able to face the world and approach challenges effectively. Through these relationships children can learn to regulate their:

- Bodies
- Feelings
- Attention
- Thoughts
- Behaviour

Emotion and learning are inextricably linked. Key attachments influence children and young people's successes. Secure attachment is associated with better educational outcomes. To be able to engage in learning a pupil needs to be able to take risks, to learn new things and face new challenges.



© Queen's Printer and Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (2014).

6

All children need to feel safe and secure. Children may communicate how safe and secure they feel unconsciously through their behaviour. They may use self-protective strategies which they have developed to meet their unmet needs. This may present as 'challenging behaviour'.

All behaviour is communication. For example: 'Ten year old Rosie comes home from school and throws her bag on the floor and stomps upstairs saying "no one listens to me!". This may be because she has fallen out with a friend, feels that the staff in school don't listen to her or that she feels that she needs more quality time with her family. It is the adults who need to use the context and their emotional attunement to support Rosie.

How can adults help?

Positive relationships can be developed to enable children and young people to feel secure. Strategies for children could include:

- **Time spent with a key adult, giving attention and affection-**(lots of smiles and hugs) - this helps your child to feel secure, loved and valued.
- **Playing together-**will help your child to develop their physical, creative, interaction and learning skills, as well as giving you chance to share enjoyment.
- **Read and tell your children everyday stories-**talk about them to build their understanding of the world.
- **Be there to comfort your children-** this helps them to learn that you understand and to develop healthy ways to manage their feelings and emotions.
- **Share conversations with your child and give them time to share their ideas-** this lets them know that they are valued and that they have interesting things to say.
- **Model to your child that you understand how they feel-** you don't have to agree but it is important that they feel understood.
- **Talk about feelings-** so that they know that all feelings are ok.
- **Take care of yourself-** the adult needs to value themselves, have awareness of their own needs and strengths and seek help if necessary.

Teenagers

Fred, is 14, his mum pops to his room to see if she can have a chat, knocks on the door a few times, says his name and there is no response, she goes in and Fred is lying on the bed with headphones on. He shouts at his mum "What you doing in my room? You could have knocked!" His mum tries to explain that she did knock, but he responds by saying "knock harder." She notices homework that is unfinished and due tomorrow, she offers to help with it. Fred bristles and says "I know what I am doing, I'm not stupid!" Things just seem to escalate so quickly at the moment. His mum leaves the room. Five minutes later, he is downstairs asking for money to buy a new top to go to a party in.

The teenage brain is developing and changing and teenagers tend to use a different part of the brain to adults when reading facial expressions, tone of voice

and body position; they seem to use the emotional part of their brain, rather than the thinking part of their brain to react. For this reason, teenagers can misinterpret facial expression; concern or worry can look like anger to them. Teenage reactions can seem faster, stronger and can take us by surprise.

Strategies for teenagers could include:

- **Empathise** – this does not mean agree, but helps us to understand how they may be feeling, recognise and validate those feelings, perhaps label them; “I wonder if you are feeling overwhelmed by what you have to do?” this helps them to engage their thinking brain.
- **Keep boundaries and limits clear**- teenagers will naturally push against boundaries, but ultimately, they provide guidance and safety, consistency in an ever changing world.
- **Problem solve**- take the time to help them come up with ideas on how to move forward. It is sometimes useful to have a reason for them to spend time with you, so in the case of Fred, perhaps saying “Ok, we can talk about buying a new top, but first of all, shall we have a look at how we can organise the homework better, you seem to be given a lot at the moment.”
- **Recognise that teenagers feel a lot of stress**- teenagers are more prone to producing cortisol (stress hormone).
- **Be available and interested**- try when you can to be there for your teenager, ask them how things are going and continue to do this, even when they appear to ignore you. This shows that you care and will always be there for them.

If you are worried the following websites provide a broad range of advice and information...

www.positivediscipline.org

<https://www.annafreud.org/>

<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/angie-hart/>

https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1463/the_resilient_classroom-2016.pdf

www.cumbria.gov.uk/ph5to19

<http://www.ehcap.co.uk/content/sites/ehcap/uploads/NewsDocuments/325/Behaviour-Regulation-Policy-Guidance-Sep-181.PDF>

www.rollercoaster.nhs.uk

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/help-your-child-try-new-things>

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/parenting-and-child-care/parenting/parenting-sa/parent-easy-guides>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414908/Final_EHWB_draft_20_03_15.pdf

There are also some YouTube videos which explain growth mind-set in a child friendly way. A series of 'bite sized' videos can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zrtHt3bBmQ>

Understanding Why, The National Children's Bureau. This and other useful information can be found on; <https://www.ncb.org.uk/>

If you remain concerned consider talking to your GP or the school SENCo.

[All website links were active in April 2019]