



From mountain to sea

# A guide for working with children who are Care Experienced

Supporting children to reach their potential





# Introduction

As a parent, carer or teacher of a child who is struggling with school, you may find yourself wondering how to deal with this and provide the best support. This booklet offers practical strategies to help parents, carers and teachers work together more effectively and offers a greater understanding of how a child's past experiences can affect their ability to cope within education.



## Do all looked after children have additional support needs?

The Additional Support for Learning Act 2009 says that all looked after children and young people have additional support needs unless the education authority, after assessment, decides they do not need additional support to benefit from their education.

This means that the education authority must identify the additional support needs, if any, of every looked after child or young person whose education they are responsible for. They must also identify whether any of these children or young people need a co-ordinated support plan.

## Understanding the impact of life experiences

Early childhood experience can impact on the ability of any child to learn and form relationships with peers and adults. A secure home environment, responsive carers and stable experience of school are crucial factors in children's physical and emotional health.

Children who have experienced early trauma and loss may present particular challenges as a consequence. Many experience multiple moves which can create a sense of loss, for instance, loss of their birth family, of one or many foster families, friends, and previous schools etc. A popular perception is that babies who are adopted are the 'lucky ones' who do not notice 'change' and that all children settle in their new families and do not exhibit any difficult behaviours. However, all children, whether they are babies, toddlers or older, are affected in different ways by grief, loss, and trauma.

As a result, the difficult behaviours, and attitudes they can exhibit at times can feel like an impossible challenge to overcome and parenting, caring for or teaching them may have little or no reward. It may feel like you are taking one step forward and two steps back.

Some children may have the emotional needs of a much younger child and as such will need to make up for what they missed out on during

their early years. For example, an older child may still want to be walked to the school gates; may like to engage in messy play such as finger painting, jumping in puddles and making models with Play Doh. These may appear strange however developmentally, this is what they need to do and will probably only last a short while.

## Understanding a child's feelings of attachment

Children's feelings can vary. Here are some examples of the range of emotions they may feel within one day:

- children who have not been in control of their past often seek to control their current world.
- they can feel a deep sense of shame, believing what happened to them was their fault; they become scared of further rejection and therefore try to engineer situations to achieve the rejection they fear.
- some work hard to be compliant and helpful but beneath their attempt to be good, there may be a traumatised child struggling continuously to 'fit in' to avoid further hurt.
- many have been let down by adults in their life; they find it extremely difficult to trust others and then struggle to form friendships and attachments with those who try to care for them.
- children finding it difficult to manage and make sense of their emotions signal that they need help via challenging behaviours which may be seen superficially as expressions of anger or rage.
- children feeling anxious can struggle with listening as their mind is in a muddle so not open to new stimuli.
- children may refuse to do work as they are afraid to fail or may struggle with it and then feel helpless and hopeless as these are feelings they are trying to avoid.
- children may panic and constantly need reassurance and ask lots of questions, sometimes repetitively, as they are desperate to get it right; it is too 'dangerous' to get it wrong.

## 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 their caregiver which 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. The trust creates a secure attachment, which gives the child a safe base from which to explore the world around them and return to when they need comfort and safety.



### The Power of the Primary Attachment

Our children may not have had this chance to build attachment security and that can make life hard for them. This is because the first attachment between a birth mother and baby is critical for survival, so it is the one that sets the template for all other relationships in life. All 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 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 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 children who have had these experiences come into our homes or our school, they cannot easily change the way that they think, feel, and behave. Only through a process of intensive nurturing and re-parenting can we help them feel safe enough to relax and learn new ways of relating to the world.

### 10 ways to build a better attachment

1. Help the child to 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 the behaviours before disciplining.
4. Share lots of fun, playful, low-key activities.
5. Parent or respond to the child based on their emotional age.
6. Model and teach good emotional control.
7. Listen with empathy to the child, acknowledge their difficulties and validate their worries.
8. Have realistic expectations. Think of what the child has lived through and how you would feel and behave if those things 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.



## Attachment difficulties can make it hard for a child to.....

- Explore the world from a safe base – be confident and 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.

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 25 other children, having their work and behaviour under scrutiny and trying to manage dozens of relationships ?



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

- I cannot trust adults
- I am no good
- The world is scary

## Developmental Gaps

Children who have had difficult early life experiences often feel and present as 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, targets and boundaries appropriate to their developmental age, 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, carer or teacher invests in building an attachment (with bottom-up re-wiring) is like watering a plant. It is essential for growth and development and is likely 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 and carers keep their children at home from school for several weeks after placement, while others arrange for struggling children to attend school on a reduced timetable.

## 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 which has not been resolved in order to persist in your difficult parenting.” (Dan Hughes).*

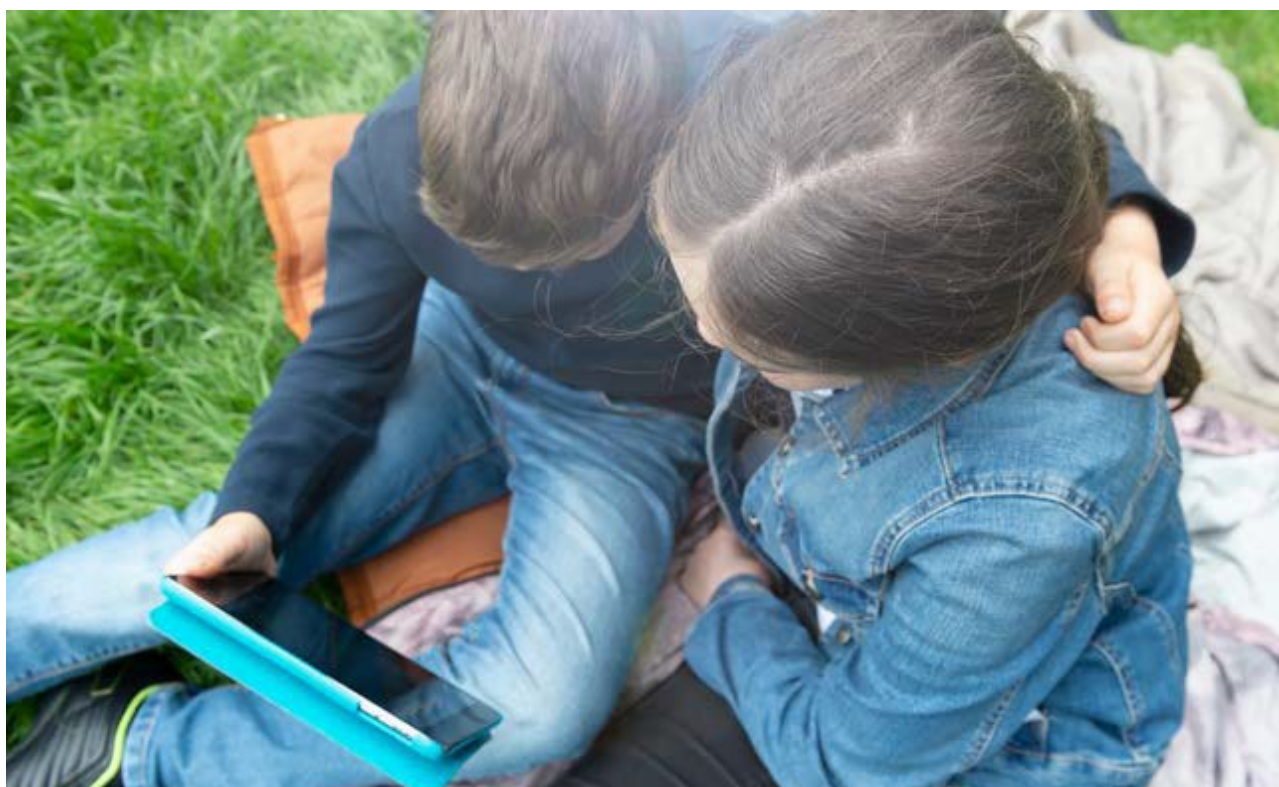
Flicking through this booklet it may look like parenting or teaching a child who has had these early childhood experiences is relentless and demanding. It is true that just a few months of neglect and/or abuse can mean years of repair for our children. The reality though, is that parents, carers, and 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 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

Teaching or parenting a child who has had difficult early childhood experiences can mean giving a lot but getting very 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, teaching, and supervising, but without joy it is 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 (playful, loving, accepting, curious and empathic).

Self-care helps us delight in our children and lets them experience us in 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.



## 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 children who have had adverse early life experiences 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 adrenalin, but when stress is prolonged or chronic, cortisol takes over.

Some things we know about Cortisol:-

- It stays in the body much longer than adrenalin 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 can cause children to behave as if they are under serious threat.
- High levels of cortisol in the early years can cause sensory integration problems.
- Traumatized 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.



## Toxic stress and anxiety in the classroom

Although cortisol levels can stabilise when children settle into loving families, the stress of school and the absence of parents or carers 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. Think of 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.
- Reduce anxiety about what's coming next by talking about it and providing a visual timetable. Some parents and carers 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 school.
- Give "this or that" choices and accept that either choice is ok.
- Wonder 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 need to calm down. This must not be regarded as punishment.
- Consequence unwanted behaviour quickly and without anger, threat, loss or separation.
- Children often find enclosed spaces calming. A pop-up tent, cushions, or a blanket draped over a table can be a safe space.
- Teach children activities that can calm them down quickly such as press their hands down on their head, hug their knees to their chest, rock slowly, suck a sweet, suck a drink through a straw, get a big hug.

## Classroom and school spaces

School environments may be so stimulating that some children shift constantly between alert and alarm. When a child who has had difficult early life experiences enters a room or a different area, they need 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 that the child can relax and make the most of the 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 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](http://www.mindsinbloom.com) are worth a look.

## Relationships with Teachers

*"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 humanised or dehumanised". (Hiam Ginott).*

When a child has had difficult early childhood experiences their focus 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 that I am 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 and always helps children who are upset" etc Children who have had difficult early childhood experiences 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 to hold 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, or another sensory reminder of your presence.

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 acknowledge. “I know this is hard...” Try saying “Let’s see if we can work this out together “ so the child knows you are alongside.

**Have compassion, not pity. Children with difficult early life experiences 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.**

**Let the child know that you like him/her. If they have been out of school, welcome them back. Notice things about the child, even if they are small or hard to find! try to think of small tasks which would make the child feel valued.**

**Never underestimate 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/carer – child relationship must come first. Children with attachment difficulties can be indiscriminately friendly with adults, while rejecting their parents/ carers, which is not healthy. Remind the child how pleased their parents or carers will be with his work or behaviour. Avoid warning that parents/carers will be angry or disappointed with work or behaviour.**

**Whole class nurturing supports children with a wide range of needs. Check out websites like [www.nurturegroups.org](http://www.nurturegroups.org) and [www.rootsofempathy.org](http://www.rootsofempathy.org) for emotional literacy ideas, while being mindful of how topics might affect children with difficult early life experiences.**





CREATIVE ART





# What behaviours can result from attachment issues and what might you do?

## KEY TO FOLLOWING TABLE:

### ATTACHMENT TYPE

- = INDICATORS OF ATTACHMENT DIFFICULTIES GENERALLY
- = AVOIDANT (I'm ok, you're not ok)
- = AMBIVALENT (I'm not ok, you're ok)
- = DISORGANISED (I'm not ok, you're not ok)

Behaviour	What my behaviour is trying to say to you	Possible triggers	What might you do?
<b>Unable to accept praise or to have fun.</b>	I am not worthy of praise, and you are stupid if you don't realise how bad I am.  I am unlovable.		Do praise but don't be too effusive and be specific about what you are praising. (see <a href="#">Carol Dweck video</a> ). Be conscious of praising the effort rather than the outcome. For example, "I can see you are trying really hard to learn to tie your shoelaces".
<b>Physically or verbally abusive.</b>	I respond to frightening or threatening situations by fighting, fleeing, or freezing.		Avoid threat of removal or rejection. Time in not 'time out'. If unavoidable, do so positively 'I need to get on with the class - you come and sit here till you feel better'. Don't ask the child to explain why it happened. It may be helpful to have prepared a plan with the child before this type of behaviour happens. Support the child to label the emotion and how they feel.  <a href="#">Emotion Coaching</a>
<b>Ignores instructions.</b>	I have too much anxiety to be able to listen. I can only retain one instruction at a time as too much going round in my head. I am easily distracted.		Keep format same each day. Describe plan of activities for session at outset. Do the child's remembering for him/her! Let the child make lists on Post-Its. Consistent and predictable routines are helpful.
<b>Sulkiness, avoids eye contact.</b>	I don't dare see what others think. I have no words to describe my feelings - looking sulky is a cover up.	Face-to-face contact. Being told 'look at me when I'm talking to you'.	Find ways to reassure - smile, thumbs up. Encourage playing games to make children laugh. Sit side by side.
<b>In trouble at break times.</b>	I fear rejection by my peers. I panic in crowds. I cannot self-regulate when stressed.	Unstructured time.	Consider constructing predictable playground activities. Have physical toys/ activities for children to do. Prepare children before breaktime and help them to make a plan for their playtime.

Behaviour	What my behaviour is trying to say to you	Possible triggers	What might you do?
<b>Lying or living in fantasy.</b>	I prefer to make things up how I would like them to be. I'm not sure who I am or what the truth is. I don't know the difference between fantasy and reality. I am afraid of the consequences of getting into trouble.		Avoid blame and accusation. Focus on problem solving
<b>Stealing.</b>	I have no expectation of getting something, so I'll just take it. I have no idea you may feel hurt or anger and when I see the effect I have I feel powerful.	Rejection by peers.	Do not insist on 'sorry'. Suggest an action that might repair damaged relationships. Use restorative approaches. For more information see <a href="#">Restorative Approaches - Education Scotland</a> Or <a href="#">Restorative Approaches in UK schools</a>
<b>Behaviour suddenly deteriorates.</b>	There is a painful anniversary coming up. A new sibling has arrived. I have got contact with birth family coming up/ have just come from contact with birth family.	Special occasions like Christmas, birthdays, or Mother's Day.  Before and after weekends.	Be sensitive in curriculum delivery. Allow child time and space to manage feelings away from the classroom. Know your child and their life story.

<b>Withdrawn. Unable to make or keep friends. Bullies other vulnerable children.</b>	I have to rely on myself and nobody else. I respond to frightening situations by fleeing. I don't expect other people to like me. I pretend to be strong by making other children do what I want.		Introduce a buddy system.  Consider <a href="#">Circle of Friends</a> approach.  Encourage the child to help around the school.
<b>Refusal of help with work.</b>	I was left helpless before. I'm not going to be left helpless again.	Singled out for 1:1 support.	Encourage work in pairs or small groups.  Ask the child to help another who is less able.
<b>Loses or destroys property.</b>	I have no sense of the value of anything. I have little interest in things if they are not mine. I am angry and I take it out on things.		Validate the child's feelings, 'I can see that you are angry...'. Help the child repair/ restore where possible - together.

<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>What my behaviour is trying to say to you</b>	<b>Possible triggers</b>	<b>What might you do?</b>
<b>Talks all the time asking trivial questions.</b>	I feel safer if I do all the talking. I want to communicate but don't know how.	Task that is hard/new/unusual.	Have set routine. Make sure all first tasks are simple and achievable, so the child gets success from the start. Seat child close to you. Allow child to wait quietly.
<b>Demanding teacher attention all the time.</b>	I fear that if I don't let you know I'm here you may leave me on my own. Even negative attention is good. I fear getting it wrong.		Notice the child explicitly. Give child something to look after for a while. Give child responsibilities for things (not people).
<b>Hostile when frustrated.</b>	I will feel shame and humiliation if my difficulties are discovered.	Task that is hard/new/unusual.	Break the task into small steps and use a timer to divide tasks.
<b>Poor concentration, fidgeting, turning round.</b>	I must scan the room all the time for danger. I must stay hyper-aroused. I dare not relax.	Task that is hard/new/unusual	Be assertive but keep emotional temperature down. Avoid showing anger, irritation, and fear. Start each day with a clean slate.
<b>Refuses to engage with work.</b>	Getting things wrong is frightening. Being wrong will lead to rejection AGAIN.	Task that is hard/new/unusual.	Offer choices. Make sure both are acceptable! Support organisational skills to complete the task. Introduce challenge in a supportive way. Praise effort.
<b>Tries to create chaos and mayhem.</b>	It feels chaotic inside, so it feels safer if it is chaos outside as well.		Focus on modifying most serious behaviour. Validate the child's feelings. 'I can see that you are angry/upset...'
<b>Oppositional and defiant.</b>	I need to stay in control, so things don't hurt me. I do not want to be exposed as stupid. You are horrible to adults.	Sights, smells, and sounds can trigger panic as reminders of past trauma.	Arrange seating so that there is no one behind the child but where you can stay in contact. Laugh with the child even at silly things.
<b>Sexually aggressive.</b>	I know from past experience that sex = power and I want to be in control.	Variety of stimuli including stress.	Record all incidents very clearly. Seek advice from other agencies.





Remember the 5th of November  
by Mick Gouvor and Mike Phillips

IMAGINARY

The Gingerbread Man

Charlie & The Rocket  
Hilary

## Hints and tips to create a strong school and family partnership

The most important thing is good communication between home and school. Here are some suggestions for parents and teachers to consider:

- good practice guidelines suggests having progress meetings where targets are set for the child. Ensure they are achievable, measurable, and manageable to suit the child's levels/needs.
- consider having a key adult in school the child feels comfortable and safe with for the times when the child needs reassurance.
- it is helpful if the school is aware of when birth family contact (face to face or LetterBox- written) or any 'tough' anniversaries are due, as these may affect the child's emotional state and behaviour in school.
- look out for patterns in behaviours and learn what triggers these so you can learn what makes a child tick. Good practice would suggest this information could be written in a document accessible to everyone involved in the child's education e.g., in an Individual Education Plan or Pupil Passport.
- adults around the child may need to help them to learn how to recognise their feelings and triggers. Use encouraging words such as "I wonder if you are feeling worried because the work was difficult?" and engage in problem solving- e.g., "what can we do together to make this easier?"
- communicate and share the personal achievements with one another even if they are small and don't just focus on any negative incidents. Ensure the message is the same from school and home.
- plan for transitions within school and anticipate its impact on the child. Changes to school routine need to be supported such as beginnings and endings.
- try seating the pupil next to positive role models rather than moving them away from their peer group. This fosters feelings of inclusion and avoids feelings of rejection
- Set expectations and boundaries at the outset and reinforce positive behaviours.
- It is helpful if parents and carers inform themselves of the [school](#) and Local Authorities policies and procedures and explain these to the child, on their level. It would be useful for parents, carers, and teachers to discuss the impact of specific school policies on the child and agree how to work with these. These policies can be found on the individual schools webpage (see [Aberdeenshire schools contact page](#)) or in the school handbook.
- practice with them the behaviour that is expected at school. Use role play with realistic scenarios and share with them the correct way to respond to a situation. This will give them the opportunity to have choices and feel more in control should an incident arise. Try modelling the behaviour you want or use a [Social Story](#) .
- share any triggers or emotional outburst between home and school, including exploring how it was dealt with to find what does and doesn't work for the child. There are a variety of ways to promote regular communication. For example, some schools use Home/School books.
- try not to tell them not to diminish emotional responses- e.g., saying not to be 'silly' or that 'it doesn't matter'. It may seem trivial to you but to the child it may really matter. See [Emotion coaching](#) for further advice.



## Homework tips

### Why not consider:

- having a set, predictable routine for when and where homework is to be done and ensure that your child is aware of the plan.
- including breaks and allow for fun time at the end. Set out at the start how long the homework session will be and what will happen afterwards.
- if the child says they cannot do a task, offer help, and use approaches which encourage working together. For example, “why don’t we do the first part together”. The aim is to help them build up confidence to go it alone and avoid over helping.
- sharing feedback on homework within a Home/ School diary/book (if applicable). Ensure the child knows you are doing this and why you have made the comments, focusing on the positives. For example- “focused well on task for 15 minutes and worked without rushing”.
- if you would like to suggest an area for improvement talk it through with the child and talk about how it could be achieved. Set realistic expectations. You may need to rehearse (or model what this would look like) as they may not know or understand what is expected, especially if it has never been requested before. For example, “I will know you are focusing on your work when your body is turned to your book and you are looking carefully at the questions/ task”.
- utilising homework clubs - sometimes creating a space out with the home to complete work helps to reduce pressure and create a neutral space.





## Be aware of the potential triggers of curriculum topics

Parts of the curriculum may trigger different memories and emotions for children. This is normal for all children and talking about life experiences in a safe a nurturing environment helps to consolidate learning and helps children to make meaning.

For some children these emotions and memories may be difficult to manage. This may also cause some children distress, and this can be displayed in different ways.

In order to help them prepare for and manage these emotions, we recommend parents, carers and teachers get together prior to enrolment and on a regular basis to discuss a child's needs. Teachers should be aware of a child's individual narrative or story and should be aware of sensitive issues for the children in their class.

Teachers should try not to avoid certain topics rather they should discuss with parents/carers prior to the beginning of topics how best to manage them. Sometimes issues come up in a more unexpected manner and plans should be put in place to help the child and support them. Teachers should be sensitive not to diminish feelings or overlook them as they appear.

With regards to children who are in permanent places (adoption, foster or kinship) these

issues can still arise long after initial placement. All children have a unique narrative about their lives, and it is important to be mindful about all children in a class or school.

Rehearsal and role play of possible situations may help the child make the right choices when they are presented with challenging areas such as:

- family trees or family history
- child's personal/first memories and timelines
- sex and relationship education
- growth and development
- photographs or baby/early years topics
- changing in front of others for PE may be challenging
- themes which include loss, failure, or loneliness
- Health and Wellbeing
- guest speakers who discuss topics such as drugs, alcohol, personal safety and the law, their uniforms could trigger memories and emotions
- celebration dates, religious beliefs, and anniversary such as Father's and Mother's day, Christmas, and Easter celebrations





## References

With thanks to Essex County Council Post Adoption Team for their kind permission to adapt their protocols and suggestions for supporting adopted children in Education.

### Further recommended reading

Aberdeenshire Council Adoption/fostering webpage

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/children-and-families/>

Aberdeenshire Council Education service website.

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/additional-support-needs/>

Bereavement support

<http://www.gcbn.org.uk/support.htm>

Independent Additional Support Needs website for parents

[enquire.org.uk](http://enquire.org.uk)





**This booklet is issued by  
Aberdeenshire Council  
Education and Children's Services**

You can contact us in the following ways:

**Adoption Team**

93 High Street, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, AB51 3AB.

[adoption@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Tel: 01467 532800

**Educational Psychology Service**

Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GB.

Tel: 01224 664272

This leaflet is also produced in consultation with the  
Medical Adviser for Aberdeenshire Council.

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