

The Full Circle

Information for parents/carers

Caring for Children with Attachment Difficulties using a Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathic (PACE) approach

Some general points to consider

If a child has experienced trauma in the past as you may know by now, this has an impact upon behaviour. So, naturally the home that you are providing for now must be remarkably different from the past home if your child is able to recover from these past traumas and I'm sure this is something that is already in place.

We need to think about 'Boundaries'. It is important to be consistent with boundaries; sometimes it might be hard for a child to learn rules and let others be 'in charge'...this is because they did not feel very safe before. We know that this was the case for your child we know that he/she can at times, try to be 'in charge'.

But, in order to make boundaries work and help with the *Feelings* that your child might have, we need to think about '*Communication*' and using 'Empathy' – that means communicating that you understand what your child is feeling by observing him/her, putting into words what you think he/she is feeling...and fully accepting what those feelings might be.

Remember, we can't assume what your child is experiencing, so we need to ask by '*wondering?*' what he/she is feeling. This needs to be done in a way that doesn't criticise or judge, even if your child disagrees with your observation of their feelings.

Small acts of love, affection, fun and family togetherness will not in themselves be enough to help a child change; we need to help by getting 'in tune' with feelings and giving them permission to show themselves...

Examples of Statements to use, using 'Empathy'

"I wonder if you want to be close to me because you like to keep reminding me you are there"

"I wonder if it's hard for you know that you are really important to me"

"I wonder if it's hard for you know that you're important and I care about you, even when you are not here or out of sight"

The Full Circle : PACE hand out. References: K Golding Nurturing Attachments; D Hughes Parenting Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties.



"I wonder if it's hard for you to have wait and trust me to remember what you want"

"I wonder if it's hard for you that you don't have me all to yourself"

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"I wonder if you think it helps you feels less scared, or angry or sad if you try and take charge"

"You seem so sad right now....."

"I think you might be really angry at me for not letting you...."

"You look a bit upset at what I've just said...."

"I wonder if it's really hard for you to let me be in charge..."

"I bet you really want to..."

"You look so pleased about...."

"I wonder if you're remembering being scared in the past right now..."

"I might be wrong...but I think you sometimes get scared when you go to bed..."

"I wonder if when you hurt yourself, it means you can get a bit closer to me...."

"You can ask me for a cuddle, EVEN if you're not hurt or upset..."


"I wonder if you are feeling angry with me right now about things from the past"

Examples of Statements using 'Playful and Empathy responses'

Playfulness conveys your enjoyment in a way that is less threatening than affection which might trigger emotional regulation difficulties like anxiety or avoidance or even anger. Dan Hughes reminds us that from a neurological point of view it is hard to feel shame when we laugh! Avoiding shame is very important for our children.

'I wonder if you are taking or time because you find it hard to leave me when you got to school, lets see how fast you can get ready and then we might have some time left for game of I spy, a game of hide and seek, hot and cold game etc on the way to school/ before school etc.'

'So right now I wonder if you're thinking 'sorted, got what I wanted, I am in charge, or mission accomplished so that's what's happening, ahha that's what's going on, so that's what you do to make your self feel a bit better? '



'So I'm wondering if you're really angry and your showing how angry you can be by trying to break, damage, shout, create etc and if that's what you usually do when you're angry.' So you need me to understand this is what its like is for you when you get big feelings that are too much for you....'

'So I am wondering if you figured out by now that if you get really wound up when you can then blame them because it's really hard for you to own up or take responsibility.'

So I am wondering if you figured out by now that if you get '.....' (or the other children) really wound up this helps you get to be in charge/in control and that's the way you try to help yourself when you feel wobbly, muddled, mixed up etc. '

Examples of Statements demonstrating Acceptance

'I wonder if you need us to understand it is really very hard for you to trust us to keep you safe.'

'I wonder if you are telling us/me with your anger that it's hard for you to do what is expected.'

'I wonder if you get so worried because you think I will forget about you if I ask you to stay here and with everyone else because that feels too hard for you/unsafe.'

'I wonder when you get so upset (angry) if you are showing us that this is what you feel like, so you are showing me what it feels like to be let down (left out, forgotten, bad, not good enough, etc.)

Child says: "Sometimes I don't think you like me."

Parent responds: "That must be difficult for you if you if you think that. Help me understand what it is I do that makes you think this way?"

By using such statements, you will be

- Accepting and understanding your child's 'inner' life...not just for what she does and does not do.
- By helping you child separate out their thoughts, feelings and behaviours you are helping them grow their capacity for reflection.
- Letting your child know that it is OK to talk about feelings you can help make unbearable feelings bearable.
- Helping your child her recognise, accept and manage their feelings.

And finally, be mindful that it can feel very exposing to have someone say out loud what you might be thinking. That is why the tone of your voice is so crucial when using the PACE model.



For example some statements can easily be shifted from the empathic to the sarcastic by adopting a different tone. Similarly it doesn't take much to go from a playful tone to something more teasing. For many children who have experienced trauma any degree of shame whatsoever is unbearable and often these children have developed a radar like capacity for detecting the slightest whiff of any remark or behaviour that may make them feel ashamed or humiliated. Once they are enveloped in this unbearable feeling there is no way they are going to be able to think or hear what is being said, however sensitively put, so it is very important to get the tone right and of course always try to stay calm.

Good luck and don't worry about not getting it quite right, you're helping your child to learn it is okay to make mistakes.