

Guidelines for Supporting Pupils who have Experienced Significant Relational Traumas and Losses

Identifying These Pupils:

There are a group of pupils within the school context who are currently identified in many different ways: children in care, fostered, looked after, adopted, special guardianships, on residency orders, in need, vulnerable, concerning, troubled, at risk...However, these pupils all belong to the same tribe. They have all experienced significant relational traumas and losses.

Relational Trauma and Loss:

Significant relational trauma and loss can include: emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, parental substance misuse, moving away from birth family and/or country of origin, different placement moves, witnessing domestic violence or violence against family members as a result of unrest or war. However, this list is not exhaustive. Many pupils who are in care or adopted have sometimes experienced five or six of these relational traumas or losses or more. Many of the pupils who are adopted nowadays have been part of the care system. We must never underestimate the level of pain around for these pupils, often buried deep down. This pain surfaces in all kinds of ways. With so much unresolved grief around, we need to support these pupils to grieve their losses and to move forwards towards adaption and recovery. They cannot do this alone.

Key Points:

- The earlier the trauma and/or loss the more extensive the consequences on the child's development.
- There is often developmental vulnerability as a result. Pupils may present on many different levels as much younger than their peers and this is because they are less mature in some parts of their brain.
- Memories can be stored both in a sensory and a cognitive format and so whatever the age of the injury or loss pupils will 'remember'.
- Many of these pupils are hard wired for self - protection. Their defences and alarm systems will have served a survival purpose in another context but can interfere with their learning capacity within the school context.
- Developing quality relationships with these pupils can be powerful vehicles towards adaption and recovery. Every relationship has the capacity to either confirm or challenge all that has gone on before.
- The brain has the capacity to re-organise itself based on nurturing experiences that are repetitive, during a time of protected stability.
- The earlier we can recognise a pupil's needs and put in place supportive interventions the better, as the brain takes longer to re-organise the older we become.

The 'Big Ask' in School:

- Trusting grown ups
- Following the lead of grown ups
- Relinquishing some control to grown ups
- Being free from anxiety
- Being free from toxic shame
- Feeling safe
- Managing multiple transitions
- Feeling that they belong
- Feeling special and significant
- Being freed up enough to engage in curiosity and exploration
- Taking the risks required in learning
- Managing sensory overload
- Negotiating key developmental stages such as adolescence
- Being self and others aware so that they can have the capacity to make wise choices

The main aim of support in school: *To settle the pupil to learn.*

What these pupils need:

- A Key Adult who forms a meaningful and genuine relationship with the pupil on a 1:1
- Relationally rich contexts in school: Team Pupil
- Sensory interventions on a regular basis
- Using state dependent interventions
- Encouraging and facilitating playfulness whatever the age
- Relentless care
- Nurture and gentle challenge

Read about these in greater depth – from the work of Louise Michelle Bomber, Dan Hughes, Bruce Perry, Daniel Siegel & Margot Sunderland

What these pupils don't need:

- The adult increasing power, authority and control
- Relational withdrawal
- Stress
- Shaming
- 'One size fits all' approaches
- Rigidity
- External controls such as stickers, charts, points

Helpful Interventions Maximise Opportunities for: RELATIONSHIP and REGULATION

Bomber (2007): Inside I'm Hurting : Practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools

Bomber (2011): What About Me? : Inclusive strategies to help pupils with attachment difficulties make it through the school day

Bomber & Hughes (2013) :Settling to Learn : Why relationships matter in school

Bomber (2015-16) Attachment Aware School Series : Bridging the Gap (5 pocket sized books in the series for Team Pupil & parent/carer)

Geddes (2006) : Attachment in the Classroom : The Link between childrens' early experience, emotional well being and performance in school

Perry (2009): Teenagers & Attachment: helping adolescents to engage in life and learning