

Attachment Aware Schools



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Imagine you walk into a school..

- How would you know it was trauma/attachment aware?
- What would you see?
- What would you hear?
- What makes it different from other schools?



What it means to be an attachment aware school:

“A trauma sensitive (attachment aware) school is a safe and respectful environment that enables students to experience positive and caring relationships with adults and peers, self-regulate their emotions and behaviours, succeed academically, while supporting their physical health and wellbeing.”

Lesley University and Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Creating Trauma/attachment aware schools

- There is a good understanding of the significant relational traumas and losses upon pupils
- An attachment framework is used to understand behaviours
- Relational interventions are prioritised
- Every pupil is known well
- A careful balance of nurture and gentle challenge is used
- Prioritise employing and supporting key adults to build special relationships with troubled pupils
- This understanding is reflected in the vision and values of the school
- Understanding of trauma and attachment theory and this is visible and evidenced through practise
- Support behaviour/emotion regulation policies/interventions/quality first teaching reflect this
- Supportive school climate
- Family and community partnerships
- Staff wellbeing and supervision/team support and understanding of 'secondary stress'
- Know the developmental age of the pupils in their care differentiating emotional and social tasks and expectations

In attachment aware schools

- Adults and community are prepared to recognise how to respond to those impacted by traumatic stress. Including administrators, teaching staff, governors and parents.
- Students are guided with clear expectations and communication strategies to guide them through stressful situations.
- The goal is not only to provide tools to cope with extreme situations but to create an underlying culture of respect and support.



How do we get there? . . .

- Audit of current skills
- Checklists to assess current level of awareness/practises
- Questionnaires from young people to gather data on this
- Use this to inform action planning.

Key considerations:

- Do we have a behaviour policy that reflects understanding of attachment theory? Do we have a safe space for young people to regulate? Do we have interventions to support development of socio-emotional skills? Do school members have access to support/supervision in times of stress? Do we have key adults around the school?

Knowing your students and positive home links

- What are your concerns around information sharing about children in care within school? How much information to share, with whom and how?



Knowing and understanding your students

- In order to give young people the best chance to succeed it is useful for key staff to understand a young person's strengths, needs and strategies to support them
- Staff who know and understand a CYP's background are able to respond in more helpful ways to support the young person and demonstrate more empathy for their students. This leads to positive relationships with carer's, parents and young people.

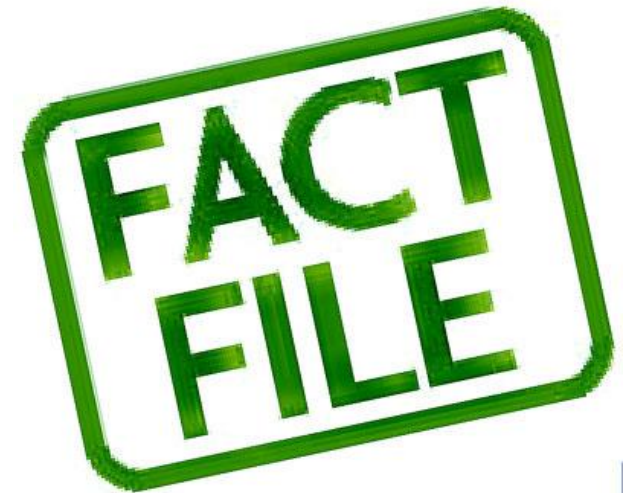
Let's get to know each other...



Fact file

- Compiling a fact file to be shared with a small team (need to know basis).
- Usually key adult, Class teacher, SENDCo, Head of Year and Head teacher.
- Stored confidentially.

What do you think it would be important to include?



Important things to include:

- Relational traumas and losses experienced
- Main triggers
- Strategies that work
- Things that help them regulate/calm
- Signed by carer, social worker and DT.

Young person can help to write if they want to



Home/school partnership

- When working with children with complex histories it is important to invest time in the home-school partnership from the outset.
- We need to honour and respect the wealth of information on a young person so we know best how to support them.
- Beware of splitting (convict and division) occurs in relation to working with these children. Be careful not to collude with setting up 'goodies' and 'baddies'.
- Preparation is key. Both school and home need to share information in ample time so that the child is not at risk of being misunderstood and so that appropriate action can be taken by the school and home.



Home/school partnership

- Share what works together. We can all learn from each other's best practise and approach. This also helps to maintain consistency across environments.
- Enter into a relationship with the parents/carers and enjoy the partnership. It doesn't all have to be problem orientated.
- Work at keeping hope alive! There is always hope somewhere. Children mature, adapt developmentally, learn new skills, even coming from the most disturbing pasts.

Questions that would be good to ask

- Discuss in a group what you might want to know and ask



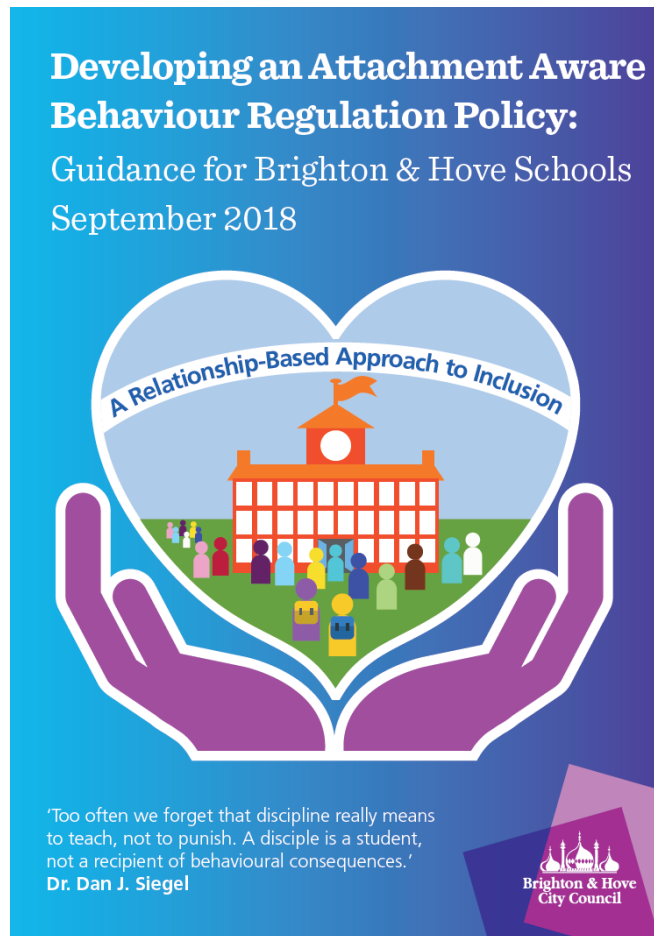
Areas for discussion with an initial meeting with carers:

- Brief summary of trauma experiences and losses
- How has the child responded to these experiences? What impact has this had on their attachment style (avoidant, ambivalent, disorganised, if this is known)
- Approximate emotional age of the young person
- Triggers that might create anxiety (all senses)
- Strengths
- Areas for development
- How are they around times of transition? End of year/beginning of year

More key questions

- Response to their birthday, religious holidays, anniversary of being in care, parents birthdays, any other significant dates?
- Self care concerns; eating, toileting, dressing, inappropriate touch
- Contact with birth parents and their response to this. How will this be communicated with the school?
- Strategies that carers/parents use at home to help the CYP regulate and provide reparation with things go wrong
- Who else is involved? What other professionals are involved? What is the parent/carer's response to further support if necessary?
- The best way of communicating with each other on a regular basis.

Some other resources



<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/schools/education/research/attachment-aware-schools/resources-and-bibliography/>

<http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces>

Apply the checklist to your school

- What are the priority actions to make your school attachment aware?

