

Building the tool box PACE-fully

Playful

You need to provide numerous activities to become engaged with the child with reciprocal playfulness. You are attuned to the child's emotional state and are engaged with him in positive emotional, nonverbal communication throughout.

- Feed based tasks/lessons
- Theraplay games which include: Holding, rocking, hugging, positive touch
- Theraplay games on the floor which include: roll, crawl, rest amongst pillows
- Theraplay games which include: Combing hair, washing face, face painting
- Songs and games
- Habitual background music
- Read and tell stories
- Fun rituals at the start and end of the day, break times/lunch, e.g. shoe race/follow my leader to the toilets to wash hands etc.
- Go for a walk, hold hands

If you approach this vital area of the child's learning with a more light-hearted, relaxed and playful attitude the child is likely to experience fun and live without even expecting to do so. If he doesn't know it's coming, and if it's over quickly, it is much harder for him to avoid and then disengage from the interaction. Here are some examples:

- Give the child a quick, unexpected smile touch or hug for 'no reason'. If the child asks why, shrug your shoulders and then carry on with the current task.
- Add surprises during lessons, e.g. give the child a special rubber for his work halfway through the lesson claiming you'd forgotten to give it him earlier
- Have unexpected breaks for milkshakes/biscuit
- When the child is having fun, or showing affection, acknowledge it briefly, without embarrassing them
- Change the plan of the day to do a fun activity (games/messy art session/DVD etc.) but insist that the child must not have 'fun' while doing so.

Poorly attached children fear and are very resistant to activities that foster mutual enjoyment and affection. They habitually and unconsciously work to maintain experiences which are consistent with their early life of abuse, humiliation and rejection. The child must not be able to prevent these experiences through oppositional or avoidance behaviours.

You need to accept the child's fear and resistance provide empathy and then actively and persistently bring these experiences into the child's life. Love and enjoyment will be given to him again and again and again – at some point in time these experiences will be reciprocated!!!

Accepting

One of the most important messages we want the children to hear is we accept the child and all the feelings and motivations for the child's behaviour. When a child experiences someone's complete acceptance of his feelings and understanding of behaviours, the child will more likely be open to exploring the roots of behaviours and feelings.

A simple way to start practicing acceptance for difficult thoughts and feelings is to say 'thank you' up front.

- 'You think I'm stupid? Thank you for letting me know....'
- 'Wow, you are really angry! Thanks for telling me.'
- 'Thank you for staying quiet and keeping part of yourself safe and private from everyone.'

Acceptance means accepting the child's emotions, motives, thoughts – and not trying to change or judge them.

Curious

The key to being experienced as accepting is to adopt a curious stance to problems. Being curious requires you to have a genuine interest in the child's experience, thoughts and feelings and what these mean to the child. It helps assure the feelings of acceptance, even as the most self-deprecating feelings begin to rise and keeps the process going. Some ways of conveying curiosity include:

- Open your eyes wide and lift your eyebrows
- Have a puzzled tone of voice
- Show (and feel) no anger
- Sound incredulous but not sarcastic
- Express confusion

Above all, don't take anything personally

Thank the child for sharing thought and feelings with you.

Curiosity helps turn off the child's internal, abuse-sensitive alarm system – the flight, fight or freeze reaction. When you are able to remain curious in the face of provocative behaviours, the child is likely to stay better regulated and helps to promote the child's openness and the trust that there will be no humiliation, rejection, anger or punishment. It hints that the child's efforts will be welcomed, accepted and understood.

Empathy

'When you feel understood, you feel better about those who understand you'. - Anonymous

Empathy is the ability to 'sit' with another's feelings. It means being able to feel what the other is feeling, but not be overwhelmed.

In communicating empathy to a child you need to observe his movements, emotions, behaviours, gestures, and the current situation. Most often the child is nonverbal about what he is feeling. Using your observation, you can verbalise what you think the child is feeling, fully accepting whatever those feelings seem to be. If the child disagrees with your comments, do not argue, since there is no value, even if you are 'right'.

To communicate empathy, your verbal observation must be non-judgemental. If you are critical, the child will only experience criticism and not empathy. Even if you might hope that someday the child will not have that particular feeling in response to that situation, you accept the feeling as being how the child is experiencing the situation now.

- You seem kind of sad now.....
- I think you're mad at me for not letting you.....
- You look really upset about what she said.....
- It's scary sometimes when you have to.....
- Boy, I bet that you really want to
- You seem so proud of the choice you just made.....
- Wow! Are you pleased with that.....
- You look like you're mad at me. I wonder if you think I'm being mean about.....
- It seems to be so hard for you.....
- I see that you're happy about.....
- If you think I don't care, that must be really hard for you!
- I feel sad that you experience me as not caring.

By making such statements you are:

- Communicating acceptance of the child's inner life
- Communicating understanding of the child's inner life
- Communicating that you think the child's inner life is important
- Differentiating between thoughts/feelings and the behaviour
- Communicating that talking about one's inner life is acceptable and even desirable
- Helping the child to increase self-reflection and understanding
- Helping the child to develop a more complete and positive sense of self
- Fostering the attachment with the child
- Building important communication patterns with the child
- Preserving an atmosphere that facilitates attachment