



NATP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THERAPEUTIC PARENTS

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LETTER FOR OLDER CHILDREN IN EDUCATION – COLLEGES

Letter to college – Re:

Date

Dear

I am writing to you with the support of the **National Association of Therapeutic Parents**.

I feel we need to communicate around issues of the experience of traumatised young people, in relation to the difficulties currently being experienced by my child at college.

Traumatised young people will almost always suffer from attachment difficulties, but this is frequently misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all, due to the complexity of diagnosis, and overlapping disorders such as ADHD. Attachment disorder is a very serious and debilitating condition, relating to early life trauma.

My child did not have a safe and trusted adult on whom they could rely as a baby or small child, so my child's brain could not develop in the same way as a healthily attached child. This is because they were often in a fear state and had high levels of cortisol and adrenaline. If you would like to see pictures of brain scans etc. showing how different traumatised children's brains look, then please visit the website of Dr Bruce Perry. (Link below).

As my child did not have a predictable life where their needs were consistently met, the part of their brain concerned with organisation, planning and impulse control are not well developed. These are abilities which depend on predictable cause and effect in early years for the appropriate brain building through experience to happen.

Some behaviours you may see in College

Young people who have suffered developmental trauma are easily stressed and have difficulty managing their feelings. This is because their overload of stress hormones triggers a fight or flight response. This is a result of overwhelm, not opposition. Confrontation will produce escalation, and this is not a conscious or controlled response.

High levels of stress also mean that processing capability is slowed. My child may need to take longer to process an answer or formulate a response. Also they may not remember multiple instructions and need support to find ways to overcome this.

You may notice:

- "Attitude" -controlling, oppositional defiant

- Lack of preparation and organisation – forgetting equipment and books
- Aggressive outbursts “for no reason” or when confronted
- Unable to remember topics from previous lessons
- Lack of concentration, fidgety
- Ignoring rules
- Younger age functioning
- Inability to work well in peer group
- Lying, stealing
- Absconding, truancy
- Finds ‘chink in teacher’s armour’- perceptive of others vulnerabilities
- Fails to complete homework set

NATP General Advice

Unrealistic Expectations

Staff will expect a level of cognitive ability, organisational skills (executive function) and social skills corresponding to the chronological age of the young person. These abilities are dependent upon having had a secure, consistent and predictable interaction with a Carer in the first 18 – 24 months of life. When a child has had experience of neglect, other abuse, or inconsistency (including multiple placements) their focus becomes survival, due to distrust of adults and their experience of the world as unsafe and unpredictable. We call this developmental trauma - the young person is still governed by ideas and impulses according to the developmental age they have managed to attain. These issues persist for years in some cases despite very good home environment and parenting techniques

One of the issues that is a common consequence of the above is not being organised, having poor or absent planning, increased impulsivity and failure to follow instructions and rules. Another is social and emotional immaturity leading to difficulties in relationships with peers and teachers.

Low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness lead to difficulties in developing skills or accepting praise.

It is NOT reasonable to expect:

- The young person to trust adults
- The young person to share your perspective
- Homework to be completed
- Young person to be organised and ready
- Young person to remember complex instructions
- Young person to grasp classroom jargon and technical terms
- Young person’s behaviours to respond to sanctions such as detentions or escalated systems
- Meaningful answers to traditional questions, for example,
 - Why did you...?
 - Do you remember...?
 - What did you say?

Some Things the College CAN do

I realise this is very difficult and that my child is not the only person you have to think of, however there are some fairly basic changes you can make to help to ensure my child's experiences at college are more positive. We have also added useful links and books which outline these changes in more detail

- Key adult (of child's choice) as secure base/mentor and liaison point between College and home. LA may have home/school link workers in place
- Seek advice from Virtual School Head (Local Authority)

Parent Partnership with College

- Awareness of impact of changes in staff/routine which should be flagged to home.
- Make home aware of topics coming up to avoid unintentional triggers or adverse behaviours due to course content
- Regulation of cortisol overload by using exercise, movement, rocking, marching
- Liaise with parents to develop strategies and to gain better understanding of specific issues the child faces

Supportive Environment - Proactive, not reactive

- Develop strategies which support, scaffold and model acquisition of new skills rather than punitive measures when child is not able to meet targets/obey rules
- Have an "escape" strategy. Support child to use this.
- Visual timetable
- Instructions on smart board
- Checklists to help complete tasks to help working memory – break tasks into achievable steps
- Give appropriate and specific praise to build confidence

Quick changes:

Instead of	Try
Expecting the young person to remember new behaviours (ie obeying rules; remembering equipment; taking time out..)	Use key worker to support and model acquisition of new skills. Use small steps and achievable goals
Asking "why did you...?"	"I wonder if....."
Conflict, confrontation	Calm response to regulate, reflect on incident in calm place with key person to support child
Reacting emotionally to the child's behaviour	Be alert and adopt calming strategy followed by thinking together with key person
Responding with anger	Take a pause – try to connect with young person's perspective (listen to their version of events)

Some useful tips to avoid escalation of behaviours

- Be aware of extreme/ manipulative/controlling behaviours. (Including Superficial charm)
- It's not personal! de-personalise any criticism
- Don't take anything at face value. Check and double check with colleagues/ parents etc.
- EXPECT to provide spares for equipment regularly
- Identify triggers and share information

The NATP provides useful information and training to schools, parents and supporting professionals, around childhood trauma and therapeutic parenting. As a college you have a duty to ensure that there is a designated teacher who is well versed in issues surrounding attachment difficulties and childhood trauma. Please see below our understanding of current N.I.C.E guidance about how children should be supported in educational settings.

Current N.I.C.E. Guidelines state:

Schools **and other education providers** should ensure that the designated teacher:

- has had specialist training to recognise and understand attachment difficulties and mental health problems

N.I.C.E also states;

Quality statement

Children and young people with attachment difficulties have an education plan setting out how they will be supported in school. **(These guidelines also apply to those in College or other further education).**

Rationale

Children and young people with attachment difficulties can have stress, fears and insecurities that impact on their experience of College, peer relationships and learning. An education plan for these children and young people can help educational staff understand and respond effectively to the child or young person. This can minimise disruption to their learning, ensure they are supported when at school and make it less likely the child or young person will be absent or excluded from school.

I truly hope that this letter helps us to work more closely together to improve the college experience for my child and other young people who may have early life trauma.

Yours sincerely

Useful links:

Dr Bruce Perry – Information on impact of trauma on brain development

<http://www.acrf.org/Self-StudyCourses/neglectcourse/n2brain.htm>

Ten things Teachers need to know about Childhood Trauma

<https://www.weareteachers.com/10-things-about-childhood-trauma-every-teacher-nee>

Department of Education- Early Childhood trauma and Therapeutic Parenting

<http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/topics/early-childhood-trauma/>

NICE Guidance for all working with children and young people with attachment difficulties

<http://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/attachment-difficulties-in-children-and-youngpeople#content=view-node%3Anodes-training-for-staff-and-carers>

Authors on this subject include;

Louise Bomber- *Inside I'm Hurting* (Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with attachment Difficulties in schools)

Louise Bomber: *What About Me?* (Inclusive Strategies to Support Pupils with Attachment Difficulties Make it Through the School Day)

Dr Heather Geddes: *Attachment in the Classroom- A Practical Guide for Schools*

Dan Hughes PhD has written extensively on this subject. Clinical Psychologist, originator of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and also Attachment - Focused Family Therapy. Internationally acclaimed therapist and author of ground-breaking books on attachment and emotional recovery.

<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-28/december-2015/negative-effects-rewardsystems-classrooms-0>