

## **A Brief Overview of P.A.C.E**

Many of the children who are looked after by foster carers, adopters and other therapeutic parents, have suffered early life trauma and therefore have Attachment Problems. These difficulties mean that they cannot interpret the world as you or I may be able to.

The NATP has a great deal of experience and expertise in Attachment and Therapeutic Parenting and promotes close working with all Carers and Staff before, during and after placement to ensure that;

- The child's actions are interpreted correctly and understood
- The Therapeutic Parents react appropriately to the child
- Other professionals understand what the Therapeutic Parents are trying to achieve
- The Therapeutic Parents understand and can recognise compassion fatigue, where they can be so affected by the child's demeanour that they begin to withdraw or reject the child.

The area of Therapeutic Parenting developmental trauma and attachment is vast and complex. For this reason NATP advocate a high level of training and support in these subjects. One of the main models we promote is the P.A.C.E. model explained below.

One of the most popular model of therapeutic parenting currently being used in the U.K. is 'P.A.C.E'. This model was developed by Dan Hughes PhD. P.A.C.E stands for;

- Playfulness
- Acceptance
- Curiosity and
- Empathy

At times people have added and S at the beginning (SPACE) to highlight the importance of structure (boundaries), support and self care as without these essential elements in place it is not possible to implement any other strategies safely.

Some references have also been made to include an 'L' for Love, to make the acronym 'PLACE'. NATP do not recommend this, as some parents and carers may not be able to access love for the child, at least initially, and sometimes for a longer period.

In his book *(Building the Bonds of Attachment - Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled children)*, Dan Hughes, talks about 'The Attitude' that therapeutic parents need to have to help a hurt child. The idea of 'The Attitude' is to facilitate the capacity for love and fun.

Reproduced below is information from Dan Hughes Parenting techniques. These techniques are fundamental to the way we re parent children who have been traumatised and have related Attachment difficulties.

| <b>Dan says do more...</b>  |   |
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| <p><b>Safety</b></p>         | <p>It is important to develop a secure base by being physically present with your child and emotionally available to him. Physical closeness is important in building attachments. It provides effective discipline, helps the child develop skills and reduces shame by letting him know he is good to be with. It is important not to isolate a child, <u>especially</u> when he is distraught and /or behaving badly.</p>  |
| <p><b>Structure – routine, rituals, few choices</b></p>   | <p>Structure your child’s activities and routines and reduce his stress by making choices for him or by limiting choice to “this one or that one”. Be predictable by always accepting and validating his thoughts, feelings and behaviours, but surprising with the natural and logical consequences you provide for misdemeanours. Re-attune quickly after any dysregulation. Your presence is an effective discipline. Be directive and firm with instructions but also attuned to your child and empathetic about his difficulties.</p>  |
| <p><b>Smiling</b></p>       | <p>This refers to the atmosphere of your home as much as the look on your face. The idea is to create a home where life feel half full as opposed to half empty, where you focus on the positives, e.g. at an aggressive outburst try, “Listen to you! You really know how to show me you are angry.” Or, “You are my special girl”. Keep your interactions playful and accepting.</p>  |
| <p><b>Soothing</b></p>     | <p>Children need to accept being soothed. Asking for comfort shows you need somebody and that you believe you are worthy of care. A traumatised child who becomes distressed may be more likely to show rage or fear than to ask for comfort, so stay present with the child and introduce soothing in baby steps, remaining empathetic when he rejects your care. Soothing a child helps to co-regulate his distress. Given regularly, it teaches him self-regulation and appropriate self-soothing. If your child rejects physical soothing say that you will cuddle him in your mind until his body is able to accept a cuddle.</p>                                  |
| <p><b>Supervision</b></p>  | <p>Intensive parenting is hard but necessary. A parent who is keeping a close eye on things can be proactive, creating opportunities for the child to succeed and minimising the risk of failure, thereby reducing the child’s shame response and consequent emotional outbursts. Supervision involves being present with the child as if he were a toddler, structuring and child-proofing his environment, engaging with him at regular intervals in a playful way and helping to regulate his emotional response. Think of supervision as a gift that he needs, rather than a punishment.</p>  |
| <p><b>Success</b></p>      | <p>Children with attachment issues expect to fail at whatever task they are set, so parents need to create opportunities to succeed. Success is not about coming top of the class but about achieving at everyday activities appropriate to the child’s developmental level. If Sasha pinches her sister after sitting beside her for five minutes, say, “We’re going to practise sitting nicely for two minutes”. Stay with her and praise her for doing a great job. Often your child can’t learn from his mistakes. So, help him by creating opportunities when he is likely to succeed, not when he is almost certain to fail and won’t learn from the failure.</p> |
| <p><b>Storytelling tone</b></p>   | <p>Speaking with a tone of voice like that of telling a story tends to engage a child and hold his attention. He is also likely to be more receptive to your guidance than if you were to use a lecturing tone. Children usually pay less attention to lectures; they may comply verbally, but there is less true engagement. Ultimately, lectures have less influence on behaviour.</p>  |

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|  <p><b>Sleeping</b></p> | <p>Getting to sleep and staying asleep may be difficult for the child because of fears associated with night-time, separation, the bedroom, the state of being less in control, and because there are few distractions in bed. Have regular bedtime routines and rituals, where you gradually lead the child into a safer, calmer and quieter state. The state of the room, objects, light, sound, location – whatever works – needs to be established and maintained.</p> |
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**Dan says do less...**

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| <p><b>Shouting</b></p>                     | <p>Anger from parents confirms the child’s self belief that he is bad. To change the child’s belief about himself parents need to avoid threats, swearing and name calling. They also need to avoid angry, negative or ambiguous facial expressions. Children with attachment difficulties tend to read ambiguous faces as sad or mad; they interpret mild annoyance as rage, and hear parental disapproval as, “You hate me”. When a parent does get angry over a specific behaviour, express it directly and refer only to this behaviour. Give a quick alternative, not a lecture and repair the relationship asap.</p>              |
| <p><b>Shame</b></p>                        | <p>This permeates everything. Children often have such a deep sense of shame caused by the treatment they received in the birth family that they really can’t understand why you would care for them or want to keep them safe. You cannot talk a child out of his shame. You need to express empathy for the pain of his sense of being bad, and gently explore with him how it feels, how he manages it, and where his conviction that he is bad may have come from.</p>  |
| <p><b>Stimulation</b></p>                | <p>Because of the deficits in brain function caused by neglect and/or maltreatment in infancy, children with attachment difficulties find it hard to regulate their emotions even when those emotions are positive. These children need life to be fairly low key as they can become hyper aroused and over stressed when too much is going on. One of the first questions parents should ask themselves when their child becomes distressed or behaviour deteriorates is, “Was he over stimulated?” A big birthday party, a trip to Disney or too many presents at Christmas may be as difficult to manage as a problem at school.</p> |
| <p><b>Sarcasm</b></p>                    | <p>When parents try to limit their anger over a child’s behaviour, there is a tendency to express sarcasm toward him for what he has done or its consequences. Sarcasm elicits greater shame within the child than a direct expression of brief anger. This is because the child becomes confused as to how genuine his parents’ thoughts and feelings are toward him and he is less able to trust them. When employing the Parenting Attitude (PLACE), always do so with genuine empathy, curiosity and sincerity, otherwise it can sound mocking and sarcastic.</p>   |
| <p><b>Should</b> (“You should. ..”)</p>  | <p>Becoming angry with a child or placing expectations on him based on his chronological age is setting him up for failure and shame. Understand where your child is developmentally and adjust your expectations to match what he can achieve consistently, then encourage him to do a bit more, while being patient if he does not. Although he may be age appropriate in certain skills, he may be behind in other, less obvious, skills that lead to continuous challenges for him.</p>   |
| <p><b>Smacking</b></p>                   | <p>This may seem obvious but still needs to be said. Smacking a child for his behaviour is likely to activate terror, shame and/or rage within the child who may well associate that act with his having been physically abused in the past. It will be a major obstacle for the child to begin to trust his new parents and resolve the effects of past abuse and neglect.</p>   |

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## The Parenting Attitude

In his book Building the Bonds of Attachment, Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled children, Dan Hughes talks about 'The Attitude' that therapeutic parents need to have to help a hurt child. The idea of 'The Attitude' is to facilitate the capacity for love and fun. It is achieved through PLACE.

Playful Loving Accepting Curious Empathic

When parents work in this way they can achieve a great deal even in the absence of any other parenting strategies. It is by no means easy, but it can make a huge difference to the parent/child relationship.

Being **playful** can be achieved by the parent ruffling the child's hair when walking past, chasing them round the room when they come in from school, or giving them a quick hug when they don't expect it. Commenting on something that the child has done well can be positive as long as it is kept specific, short and done with pizzazz – a pretend fanfare, wolf whistles, or victory dance. Otherwise they may over-react to the praise.

**Loving**- Parents should show the child that they love them at all times, even when they misbehave. Parents can do this by staying calm even when they feel angry or the child is misbehaving, and reconnecting with the child very quickly after they have done something wrong.

**Accepting** the child for who they are, not what they achieve is very important for hurt children. This does not mean that their behaviour has to be accepted! Parents can say something like, 'I love you very much and I don't think you should spit at me.'

Being **curious** - wondering out loud why the child is behaving in a certain way - can be helpful. 'I wonder why you feel so angry today', 'I wonder why you remembered that (particular event) today,' can help a child stop and think about what they are doing and is usually more effective than asking him directly what's bothering him. A child who has 'switched off' his feelings may not know what is bothering him, he may say something trivial, or withhold the information as a form of control or through lack of trust. It is often more useful to be curious, or make an educated guess, 'I wonder if you are worried about seeing birth mum on Friday.' This can be an excellent way to open up a discussion, in which the parent should listen attentively and resist the urge to interrupt.

**Empathy** is **the** most important quality that a parent can have when working with a hurt child. To understand the child's needs the parent must 'put herself into the child's shoes'. The parent should convey the empathy to the child, 'I can see that this is hard for you', 'Your knee is really red, I can see that it hurts.' Empathy allows the child to feel his feelings, not repress them. It encourages the release of grief and rage, which if left buried can continue to cause him emotional and behavioural problems. The parent should empathise with the child before putting any disciplinary measures in place and throughout the employment of those measures (eg, consequences). The parent must be genuinely empathic, not flippant.

## **Basic Assumptions for Parents of Traumatized, Attachment-Resistant Children**

1. Both you and your child are doing the best you can.
2. You both - at a deep level - want family life to improve.
3. Your lives, as they are lived now, are often very difficult for you both.
4. Both of you are now trying to establish **safety** by **controlling** the other.
5. Your child tries to be safe by **avoiding** everything stressful and painful.
6. His attacks (emotional, verbal, physical) on you and his resistance to you, reflect his fear of your motives for your nurture and discipline of him, his poor affect **regulation**, fragmented thinking, pervasive sense of **shame**, inability to trust, and lack of behavioural controls.
7. For her to change, she will need you to accept, comfort, and teach her.
8. You will need to validate his sense of self, while teaching him important developmental skills.
9. You will need to come to know her developmental age, and fine tune your expectations to match that age so that she will have **success**, not failure. Your physical and psychological presence is the foundation of your comforting and teaching her. **Structure** and **supervision** are crucial.
10. Under stressful emotional conditions, he will regress and revert to his solitary defenses that he used to survive in his terrifying, lonely past.
11. You will both have to work hard to learn how to live well. You cannot do her work for her, nor can you save her. You can comfort and teach her.
12. You will need **support** and consultation from trusted others if you are to successfully comfort and teach him. You will make mistakes. You need to face these, learn from them, and continue. Your own attachment/parenting histories will often be awakened as you raise your child. You will have to address anything from your past that has not been resolved in order to persist in your difficult parenting activities and responsibilities.

By Dan Hughes