

Supporting children and young people who are permanently placed – adoption or special guardianship

Key information for all staff working in educational settings

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Introduction

This resource pack has been created with the aim of providing practical support to staff in schools to working with children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship.

Schools can have a vital role to play in helping young people and children who are permanently placed through providing specific support, raising attainment and addressing their wider needs. However, for many complex reasons, school life also has the potential to create anxiety and stress for permanently placed children and their families.

It is hoped that this pack will provide you with guidance and tools to:

- support children settle into school
- support and develop positive relationships with adoptive parents and special guardians
- be sensitive to adoption/special guardianship issues within the classroom
- understand and support individual needs such as attachment difficulties and experience of developmental trauma

The Children and Young People

All adopted children have experienced significant loss and the majority of children and young people adopted today are likely to experience some impact of attachment difficulties and/or trauma. Most became 'Children in Care' before being placed for adoption and continue to have the same or similar needs as they had when they were 'in care'. The impact of early experiences is not erased when children are placed in loving and supportive families, and the contrast between the two experiences may even exacerbate difficulties.

Special Guardianship

In 2002 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were introduced as a legal option for establishing a permanent home for children who could not live with their birth parents. Special Guardianship was introduced as a route to permanency without needing to end children's legal ties to their birth families. Special Guardians do not have to be related to the children in their care, although many are family members, particularly grandparents.

There can be particular challenges for these permanently placed children and young people as often special guardians are extended family members who had not planned to parent but rather have responded to a need within the family. Special Guardianship Orders are often linked to supervision orders which involve regular contact with birth parents or other family members. This means that where guardians are grandparents they are expected to manage a complex relationship with their own son or daughter, whilst providing guardianship for their grandchild; this increases the complexity of the situation between the guardians, birth parents and children.

Aspects of Support

Thankfully, there is greater awareness than ever before about the potential needs and difficulties faced by adopted children or those under special guardianship and their families:

- Adoptive parents have often had considerable training and preparation related to nurturing attachments and meeting the emotional and relational needs of children placed for adoption.
- Adopted and special guardianship children now have priority school admissions and are eligible for an enhanced pupil premium grant, the Pupil Premium Plus.
- Since May 2015, the Adoption Support Fund has been accessible in order to provide funding to address adoptive families' unmet therapeutic needs.
- Special Guardians are also able to access the Adoption Support Fund.

The Education plan for adopted children (EPAC) form

The Education plan for adopted children (EPAC) has been developed to support children and young people who are adopted or under Special Guardianship and is similar to the Personal Education Plan (PEP) document used for children in care. The main purpose of the EPAC is to make schools and other providers aware of the needs of adopted children and to encourage dialogue between parents and schools. It gives a structure to the conversation and ensures that there is collaboration between schools and parents, as well as any other professionals such as the Adoption Support Team.

An EPAC can only be completed when parents choose to identify their children as adopted. The EPAC is voluntary and is not a statutory document, in contrast to the Personal Education Plan (PEP), but draws on the success of the PEP process. Reviews should be agreed between parents and schools and should be according to need. EPACS should begin after the last PEP when the child leaves care for adoption.

A copy of the EPAC is included at the back of this document. It is also available alongside guidelines around its use at

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/young-people/children-in-care/education-of-children-in-care/support-adopted-children>

Additional Support

School based: Designated Teacher (children in care and adoption)

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCO)

Outside school: Devon Virtual School

Post Order Support Team, Social Care

Babcock LDP Educational Psychology Service

When an adopted child joins your school

The experience of adoptive parents and special guardians

Children may have been placed with their adoptive parents or guardians at a pre-school age or parents may approach the school shortly after a child or children have been placed with them. These parents may just be developing an understanding of the impact of any additional needs that their child or children experience. Unsurprisingly, adjustment to an 'instant' family can also be challenging in itself.

Adoptive parents or guardians may have missed usual pre-school and induction experiences. They may not always know what to expect from schools or what schools may expect of them.

It is important to remember that children and young people can present very differently in different environments. It may be that a child or young person's behaviour at home is very different from what is seen at school. This makes close home school communication essential in developing a coordinated approach to support the child or young person.

Home-school partnership

Good home-school communication typically involves:

- An agreed plan for an appropriate level of communication that meets the needs of the parents and is manageable for staff
- A clear plan about which staff will be the point of contact for parents
- A home-school book sharing positive aspects of the day to be shared with child at home
- A means of sharing when things don't go well. Email is often used for ease and to prevent the child having to hear the adults discussing what has gone wrong and/or the parents being told in front of other parents at the end of the day

Whatever system is in place, ask: Do the parents feel that their feelings and views are being heard?

Information-sharing about children's experiences and needs

It is essential to spend some time with parents to consider the scope of information-sharing about the child with others. Understanding aspects of a child's early life can help school staff make sense of any difficulties they experience. Information about birth family is useful to know as well as contact arrangements and any 'tough' anniversaries as these may affect emotional wellbeing and behaviour of children. It is also useful to gain a picture of a child's strengths and needs from parents and perhaps any particular triggers that cause their child stress, as well as activities that they find calming.

It is also useful to consider the child's understanding of their life story. Children may never mention their early life or adoption but if they do it is useful to know in advance what and who they may talk about and the language that they use when describing people, places and events.

Sensitivity to how information is shared and who this is shared with is really important and focusing on a 'need to know basis' - with the staff who come into regular contact with the child - is often a good place to start. Two information gathering sheets are included in this pack which can be used to support this process - a general information sheet as well as one that is more detailed for children who are experiencing greater needs (Appendix 1 and 2). Depending on the age and needs of the child or young person, it may be appropriate for them to be involved in creating the Information Sheet that is to be shared with staff (Appendix 1).

Getting started

Transitions and change can be very difficult for children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship. Additional preparation to become familiar with the school environment, routines and key people in school may be useful in helping children and young people to feel safe in their new school.

Keeping the child in mind

- Consider supporting the development of a relationship with a 'key adult' in school. A key adult performs a different role to the class teacher or learning support. Instead, through getting to know the child and regular 'checking-in' - and perhaps a little protected time, over time - the relationship can provide an 'emotional safety net' and the opportunity to further develop trust and belonging in the school setting.
- If necessary, in order to promote a sense of safety and security, transitional objects and/or visual cues can be used to help the child gain a sense that they are being kept in mind by parents and/or the key adult in school when they are not physically present.
- There are a number of interventions and approaches that enhance a key adult relationship (e.g. Thrive, ELSA, Attachment-based mentoring – see Appendix 3).

Day-to-Day Considerations

We know that children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship often present very differently at home and at school. This can be confusing and at times can cause tension between home and school as both try and make sense of the child's experiences. Finding a way to work closely together is important as adopted children can be really tuned in to any conflict of ideas or breakdown of trust or relationship, increasing their anxiety levels.

Getting to know adopted children and sharing what you find out is really appreciated by parents. Use the agreed home-school communication system to share successes and also patterns of behaviour even if they appear relatively 'low level'. It helps build up the wider picture of how the child is doing.

Curriculum

Be sensitive to aspects of the curriculum that are not inclusive of adoptive families, those with special guardianship or children's experiences. In particular, be mindful of:

- family trees and family history
- autobiographical work including memories, timelines, baby photos
- growth and development
- sex education, drug education, personal safety, the law
- genetics
- changing in front of other children
- celebration dates including birthdays, Father's and Mother's Days etc
- themes or literature which include loss and loneliness

Reflect the diversity of family experiences in the class and also in the wider school environment.

Changes

Changes to routine and expected happenings may be particularly hard for children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship. Even very small changes e.g. to the routine of a lesson, can cause great anxiety to some children.

We find that behavioural incidents often occur when trusted staff members are absent or there is a change to the routine.

Make plans to support children if there are going to be changes to routines e.g. school visitors, supply teachers, school trips, and anticipate the impact on the child. Some children may just need additional reassurance, others may need more preparation.

Friendships

Maintaining relationships can be really hard for children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship. Some gravitate towards much younger children whereas others feel safer and more comfortable with adults. This can become more critical during adolescence when young people are exploring their sense of identity and establishing their social groups.

A helping hand to both make and keep friends is often required and may well be the most important intervention to support young people. This might include:

- Encouragement to become involved in groups or clubs that involve co-operation as these offer a safety net of adult mediation and/or supervision
- Increased supervision during unstructured times
- Time to listen to their worries, concerns and experiences and validate their feelings
- Quick support to help children make amends if there has been a falling out
- Teaching social skills; such as personal space, turn-taking and sharing with lots and lots of opportunities for practice
- Targeted interventions such as the Circle Of Friends approach, ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) materials, and there are a range of other social skill focused interventions

Supporting transitions

Transitions to new classes and between schools may lead to high levels of anxiety. It is important for schools to consider how we can help make these transitions as smooth as possible.

Joining a new school

- Where possible, plan for the transition, working collaboratively with adoptive parents or guardians, ensuring that appropriate information is shared
- Consider additional visits, introducing a few key staff at a time
- Depending on the needs of the child, it may be helpful to consider timing of drop off and pick up, particularly if separation anxiety is high /and or the child presents as hypervigilant in busy situations
- It may be that the child or young person benefits from having a transitional object from their adoptive parents or guardians to help them to still feel connected to their parents/ guardians whilst in their new school

Class transitions

- Staff to be particularly aware of the potential sensitivity to loss and difficulty with endings that children who are permanently placed may experience - it can be valuable if a level of relationship with the previous teacher is maintained so that the child can experience being 'kept in mind'.

- Additional opportunities to build up a relationship with the new member of staff in advance of the transition may be helpful
- If support staff are to also change, it may be helpful where possible to stagger these changes to ensure that the child has some consistency until they begin to develop a familiarity with the new staff (or the new support staff might visit prior to the change of class)
- A transition book to look at over the summer break with photographs jointly taken of the new classroom, seating etc. to increase a sense of familiarity
- Consider how the child or young person can begin to develop a sense of belonging and connection with their new classroom and/or teaching staff, for example leaving a picture or piece of work with a new teacher or in a workspace

Transition to Secondary school

- Joint agreement with parents around timing of when the transition will be discussed with the young person
- Consideration of whether an enhanced transition is needed and what this could involve, this might include additional visits and familiar key adult support
- For some pupils a transition book / photographs could be helpful, alongside the potential for follow-up contact
- Transition meetings and staff handovers to be arranged for summer term, focus upon strategies that have been shown to be helpful
- Parents might be able to support around the most important information to be shared with new staff, consider appropriate levels of information sharing

Difficulties that children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship may experience

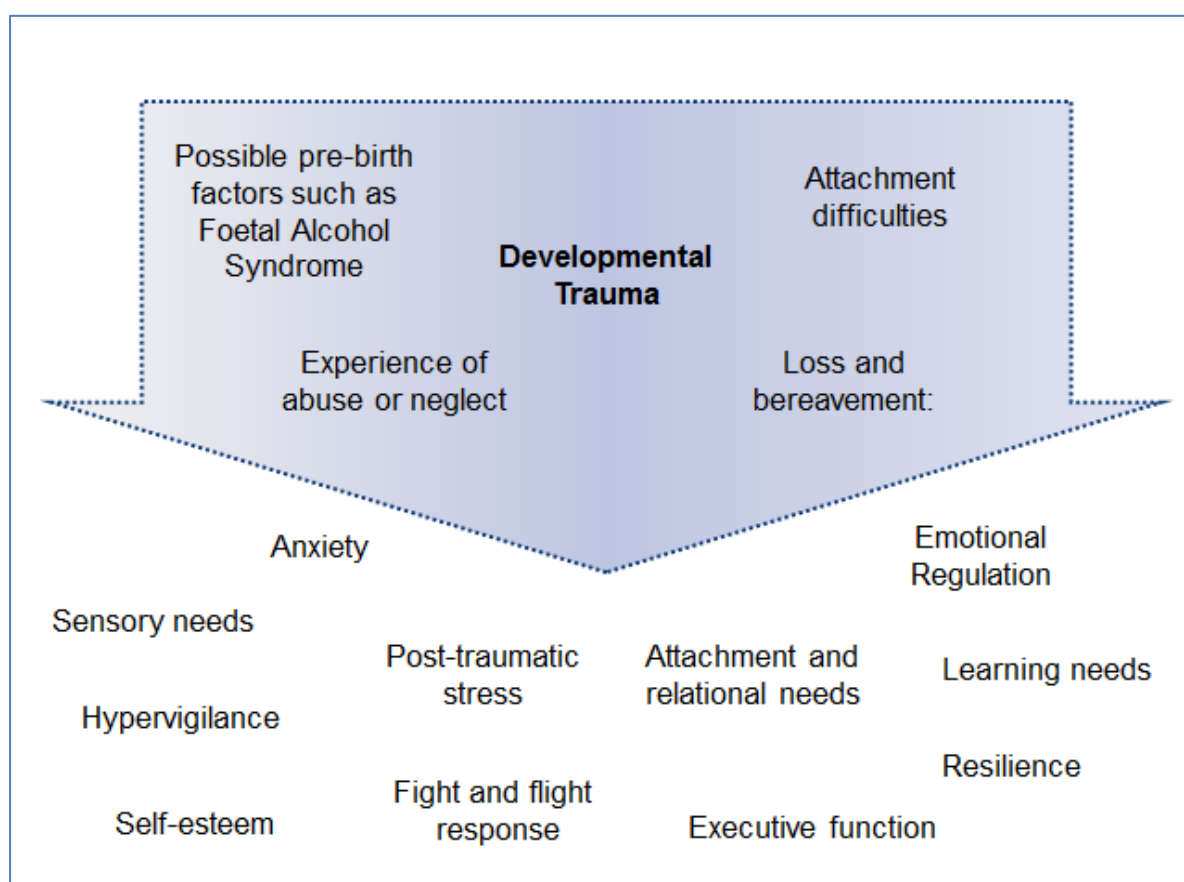
Children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship may experience a range of emotional and relational needs that can result in behaviours that can, at times, make teaching and parenting them a real challenge. School staff may be likely to observe them to have difficulties that suggest that their emotional level of understanding is not in line with their chronological age.

However, whilst it is vital for school staff to be aware of the potential impact of children and young people's life experiences, it is also important to recognise that each individual's story will be unique as will be their response to this.

The diagram below highlights some key areas that may be significant for children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship. There are many detailed resources to support families and schools in understanding possible difficulties that

adopted children may experience, including Let's Learn Together by Sheila Lavery (links to this and other resources are included in Appendix 5).

Where there are additional concerns regarding children and young people's Special Educational Needs it will be important for school staff to discuss these with the designated teacher and the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator. It will be important for parents to be involved and additional advice and support sought from appropriate sources, including the Post-adoption Social Worker team and Educational Psychology as appropriate.



Within this document, we will focus in particular upon attachment and relational needs, and how adults in school might seek to support such needs.



Attachment has been described as

'a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (John Bowlby, 1969)

'an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally' (Klaus & Kennell, 1976).

Human infants are biologically predisposed at birth to seek and make strong emotional bonds with another person. Evolution has ensured that when infants experience certain feelings, they seek proximity with an adult who provides protection, care and comfort. It is within close attachment relationships that children learn to make sense of themselves, other people and social interactions.

For children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship, their early life experiences may be likely to have led them to develop insecure attachment styles.

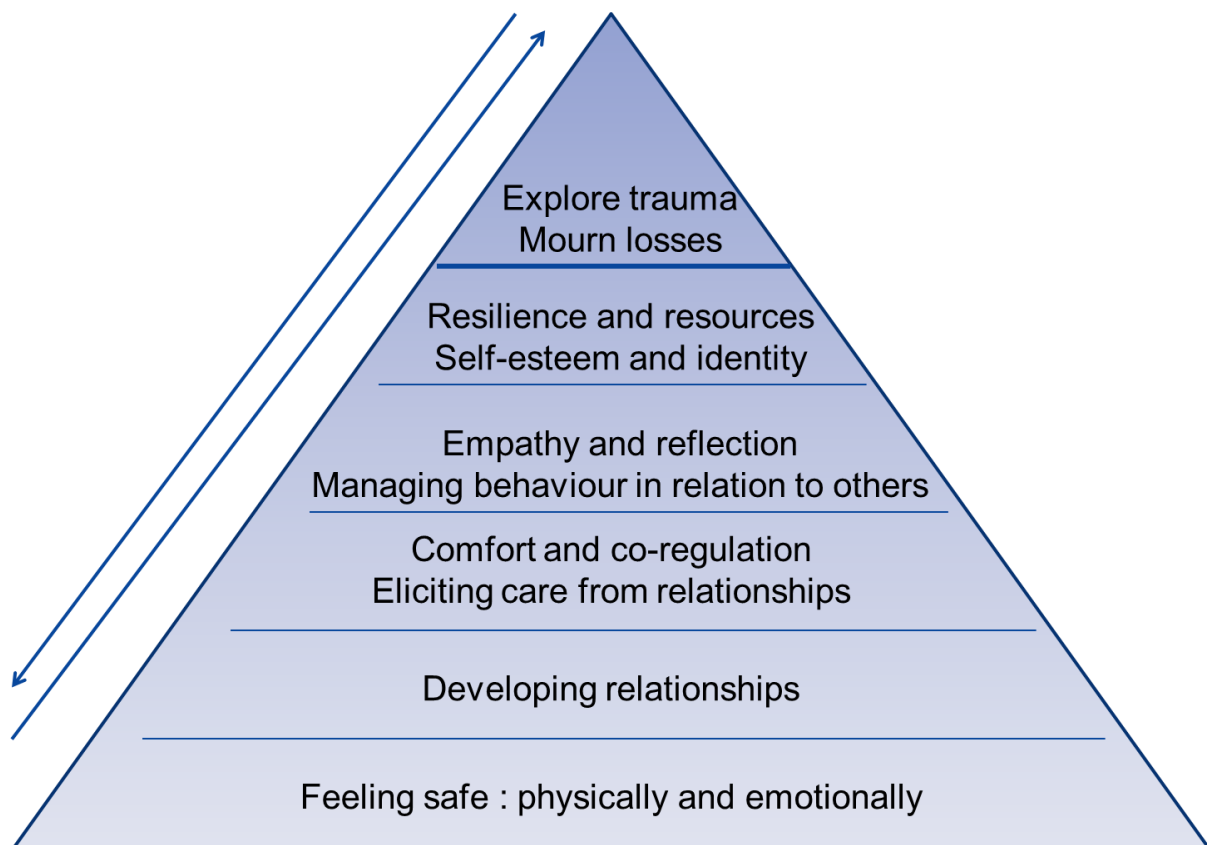
'Avoidant, anxious and especially disorganised [attachment] patterns make it difficult for the child to seek comfort and support, accept guidance and direction, communicate openly, and develop the safety necessary to explore the world and develop autonomy' (Dan Hughes, 2012).

Attachment-based approaches are likely to be helpful for all children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship children in that they focus upon building a sense of safety, security and try to support the child or young person in developing trust based relationships.

Attachment-based approaches

School staff may find that the usual behavioural approaches may have limitations with children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship. Behaviour is communicating a message and until we show that we get the message, it is very hard to get the behaviour to stop. Children's and young people's behaviour may be driven by anxiety and a need to feel safe and secure.

One way of considering the importance of safety and security is through Kim Golding's Pyramid of need that she developed to consider how to meet the therapeutic needs of traumatized children (shown below). This pyramid highlights the critical foundation of children and young people first feeling safe, both physically and emotionally, as a precursor to them develop relationships and emotional regulation.



Pyramid of need Kim Golding (2015)

<http://kimsgolding.co.uk/resources/models/meeting-the-therapeutic-needs-of-traumatized-children/>

School staff will be supporting children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship in partnership with parents, guardians, and potentially other multi-agency colleagues. The top level of the pyramid may be more likely to reflect conversations between the child or young person with parents, and/or professionals working in a therapeutic capacity. However, school staff can play a vital role in supporting children and young people in developing their sense of security, relationships and emotional regulation which form the vital base levels of the pyramid.

Key adult relationship

As discussed previously, it is likely to be beneficial for children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship to have a named key adult to support them in feeling emotionally safe and to gradually develop a positive relationship that can act as a secure base or 'key attachment figure'. In addition to emotional support from a key adult, children and young people may benefit from consideration of how to help them feel safe through consistency in terms of their environment, the structure of the school day and their routines. It will be helpful for a consideration of who the child or young person can seek support from if their key adult is out of school or unavailable. It will also be important for there to be consideration of an agreed safe space in addition to a safe person, for a child or young person to have access to if they are distressed.

Children and young people need clear boundaries to help them to feel safe and contained, with adults responding predictably and calmly to their behaviour, especially when they may be finding things hard. This model emphasises the fundamental nature of safety and relationships as the building blocks and precursor to higher level skills of reflection and emotional regulation.

Questions to consider

What support do you offer in your educational setting at each of these levels?

How might we help children and young people to move through these levels?

You are likely as a school to have a range of approaches that you use to support children and young people with developing their self-confidence, self-esteem, emotional understanding and emotional regulation. For children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship, they are likely to need these approaches at a greater level of frequency and intensity, alongside relational support from key adults, to enable them to feel safe and secure in the school environment and as a pre-cursor for their subsequent engagement in their learning and the social context of the school.

Building relationships

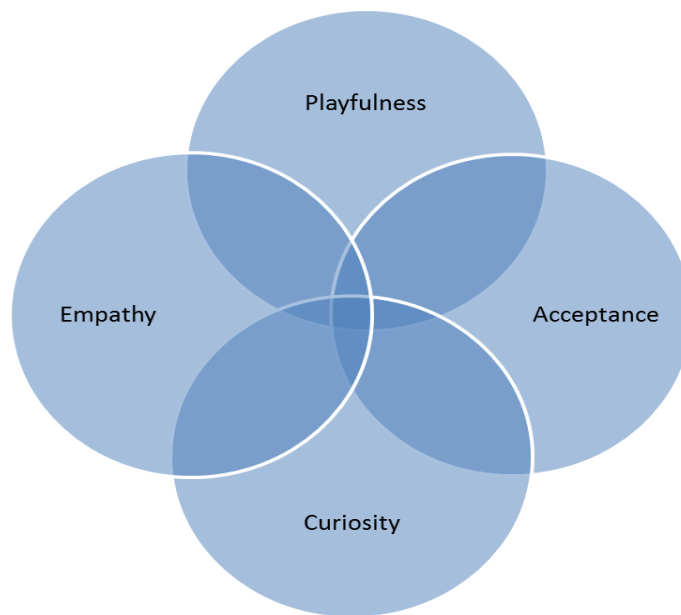
One model that can be helpful in building emotional safety and developing supportive relationships is the The **PACE** approach as developed by Dan Hughes (2005) which seeks to include key attitudes to shape all interactions with children, both verbal and non-verbal to communicate:

I'm interested

You're special

You're in my mind

An attitude of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) has been suggested to be very helpful to enable staff to be open and engaged with children and young people (Dan Hughes, 2009, 2012).



PACE (Dan Hughes, 2005)

Playfulness:

- Conveys a 'state of active enjoyment when with another person' (Dan Hughes, 2012)
- Engaging with a child in a way that encourages spontaneity, curiosity and exploration
- Using facial expressions, voice and body to join in the affective and creative life of the child

Accepting:

- Acceptance conveys a sense that you accept the child or young person although you may evaluate their behaviour
- Understanding that change will take time
- Holding onto the idea that 'If we were in their shoes we would be lucky to be doing as well as they are doing'

Curious:

- Taking a 'not knowing' and non-judgmental stance towards the child or young person's inner life
- Enquiring about the child's thoughts, feelings and motivations

- Using the language of “I wonder”; “I’m interested to know...” verses “why?”
- Being curious about what might lie behind the child or young person’s behaviour (this might include being alert to possible patterns of behaviour and potential triggers reminding them of early traumatic experiences)

Empathetic:

- Being with the child or young person in their emotional state and ‘experiencing with’
- Links to attunement, which is being aware of, and responsive to, another
- As the young person feels understood they may be more willing to think with the adult about the consequences of behaviours

The need for high empathy alongside high guidance

All children and young people need boundaries to help to keep them safe and for them to develop positive behaviours that will enable them to engage actively in their learning and build social relationships. Children and young people who are adopted or under special guardianship may present with control seeking behaviours which they may have developed as strategies to help them feel safe.

Children and young people may also experience a deep and powerful sense of shame, sometimes referred to as ‘toxic shame’ or ‘pervasive shame’ that may reflect their early experiences which have led to them having a ‘feeling that they are fundamentally flawed or a mistake’ (Louise Bomber, 2011). This sense of shame may be triggered when adults seek to reinforce boundaries and discipline children or young people for their behaviour.

When dealing with conflicts and reinforcing boundaries, it is important for adults to be mindful of the child or young person’s previous experiences and to consider a level of flexibility in the implementation of how incidents are managed. In certain circumstances it may be helpful to consider whether more realistic expectations for the child and young person, taking into account their current level of needs, is necessary to ensure successful inclusion.

It is important to consider the principles of PACE and the aim of supporting the child or young person to feel safe and secure. It is likely to be helpful to be mindful to:

- Stay connected to the child or young person even when there is conflict
- Try to stay calm and not become angry, with adults modelling appropriate emotional regulation in their interactions with the child or young person
- Help the child or young person to understand why a boundary is being reinforced with the ‘why’ statement also reaffirming the relationship and increase the child’s self-worth, for example, ‘Because you are important and I want you to be able to build good friendships with the other children’

- Give 'Time in' rather than time out, with adults staying with or within sight of a child or young person whilst they are upset and letting them know that they are there to help them through the difficulty
- Offer reparation activities so the child or young person is supported to make amends that doesn't reinforce shame as soon as they are in a place to do this, with consequences being natural and logical to what has happened
- For some children apologising and 'saying sorry' can be really difficult and it may be that an alternative 'kind action' might be more manageable for them
- Be selective in control battles and where possible encouraging the positive behaviours more than noticing smaller behaviours that might be frustrating but are not the priority
- Offer appropriate opportunities to give children and young people an element of control and choice through offering options within adult determined boundaries
- Where appropriate enable young people to be engaged with the way in which they will be supported through Person Centred Planning approaches

Considering how adults could respond to behaviours that may reflect attachment and relational needs

Whilst it is important to remember that all children's and young people's individual needs, experiences and their behaviour will be different, it can be helpful to consider examples of how these needs can present in school and possible appropriate ways to respond to these. The tables below are from Make a school a place for Playfulness Acceptance Curiosity Empathy (Dan Hughes, 2002), focus upon the behaviours that you might see in the classroom, how these may link to attachment and relational needs, and how teaching staff might respond to support the child or young person.

Source: Dan Hughes (2002), Make a school a place for Playfulness Acceptance Curiosity Empathy

Attachment Type	Behaviours	What this means for the child	Possible triggers	What might you do?
AVOIDANT I'm ok, you're not ok	Withdrawn Unable to make or keep friends. Bullies other vulnerable children	I have to rely on myself and nobody else. I respond to frightening situations by fleeing. I don't expect other people to like me. I pretend to be strong by making other children do what I want.		Introduce a buddy system. Consider "circle of friends" approach. Encourage the child to help around the school.
	Refusal of help with work	I was left helpless before. I'm not going to be left helpless again.	Singled out for 1:1 support	Encourage work in pairs or small groups. Ask the child to help another who is less able.
	Loses or destroys property	I have no sense of value of anything. I have little interest in things if they are not mine. I am angry and I take it out on things		Validate the child's feelings, 'I can see that you are angry...' Help the child repair/restore where possible – together.
AMBIVILENT I'm not ok, you're ok	Talks all the time, asking trivial questions	I feel safer if I do all the talking. I want to communicate but don't know how.		Have set routine. Make sure all first tasks are simple and achievable. Seat child close to you. Allow child to wait quietly
	Demanding teacher attention all the time	I fear that if I don't let you know I'm here you may leave me on my own. Even negative attention is good. I fear getting it wrong.		Notice the child explicitly. Give the child something to look after for a while. Give child responsibilities for things (not people)
	Hostile when frustrated	I will feel shame and humiliation if my difficulties are discovered	Task that is hard / new / unusual	Small step differentiation. Use timer to divide tasks.
DISORGANISED I'm not ok, you're not ok	Poor concentration, fidgeting, turning around	I must scan the room all the time for danger. I must stay hyper aroused. I dare not relax.	Sights, smells & sounds can trigger panic as reminders of past trauma.	Arrange seating so there is no one behind the child but where you can stay in contact. Laugh with the child even at silly things.
	Refuses to engage with work	Getting things wrong is frightening. Being wrong will lead to rejection AGAIN.	Task that is hard/new/unusual	Offer choices. Make sure both are acceptable! Make lessons/tasks very structured (multiple choice, sentence completion. All materials to hand.
	Tries to create chaos and mayhem	It feels chaotic inside so it feels safer if it is chaos outside as well.		Focus on modifying most serious behaviour. Validate the child's feelings, 'I can see that you are angry/upset'.
	Oppositional and defiant	I need to stay in control so things won't hurt me. I do not want to be exposed as stupid. You are horrible like all adults.	Task that is hard/new/unusual	Be assertive but keep emotional temperature down. Avoid showing anger, irritation or fear. Start each day with a clean slate
	Sexually aggressive	I know from past experience that sex = power and I want to be in control.	Variety of stimuli including stress	Record all incidents very clearly. Seek advice from other agencies

Source: Dan Hughes (2002), Make a school a place for Playfulness Acceptance Curiosity Empathy

Attachment Type	Behaviours	What this means for the child	Possible triggers	What might you do?
Indicators of Attachment difficulties generally	Unable to accept praise or to have fun	I am not worthy of praise and you are stupid if you don't realize how bad I am. I am unlovable.		Do praise but don't be too effusive and be specific about what you are praising. Privately may be more acceptable to child
	Physically or verbally abusive	I respond to frightening or threatening situations by fighting, fleeing or freezing.		Avoid threat of removal or rejection. 'Time in' not 'time out'. If unavoidable do so positively 'I need to get on with the class – you come and sit here until you feel better. Speculate aloud why it might have happened (don't ask child to explain).
	Ignores instructions	I have too much anxiety to be able to listen. I can only retain one instruction at a time as too much going around my head. I am easily distracted		Keep format same each day. Describe plan of activities for session at outset. Do the child's remembering for him/her! Let the child make lists on post-its.
	Sulkiness, avoids eye contact	I don't dare see what others think. I have no words to describe feelings – looking sulky is a cover up.	Face-to-face contact. Being told 'look at me when I'm talking to you'	Find ways to reassure – smile, thumbs up. Encourage playing games to make children laugh. Sit side by side.
	In trouble at break times	I fear rejection by my peers. I panic in crowds. I cannot self-regulate when stressed	Unstructured time.	Reduce time in playground. Introduce tighter structure and supervision Create inside 'retreat', establish nurture group
	Lying or living in a fantasy	I prefer to make things up how I would like them to be. I'm not sure who I am or what the truth is. I don't know the difference between fantasy and reality.		Avoid accusing child of lying or fantasizing. State the truth of the matter briefly and simply.
	Stealing	I have no expectation of getting something so I'll just take it. I have no idea you may feel hurt or anger and when I see the effect on you I feel powerful	Rejection by peers.	Do not insist on 'sorry'. Suggest an action that might repair damaged relationships. Try not to leave desirable things lying around!
	Behaviour suddenly deteriorates	There is a painful anniversary coming up. A new sibling has arrived. I have got contact with birth family coming up	Special occasions like Christmas, birthdays or Mother's Day	Be sensitive in curriculum delivery. Allow child time and space to manage feelings away from the classroom

Adolescent brain development

We now know that the brain grows again during adolescence, resulting in lots of change. Children and young people with attachment difficulties may be particularly vulnerable at this time.

Around the onset of puberty begins a rapid growth of neurons in the frontal cortex, the part of the brain that is primarily responsible for logic, reasoning, decision making and other important functions that help us manage our daily lives. Due to the developments in this region of the brain, teenagers use the area of the brain involved in emotional processing to help them make decisions and problem solve. The changes that occur in this region of the brain can lead to:

- Poor decision making
- Lack of personal organisation
- Poor management of self
- Being impulsive
- Difficulty reading social situations
- Being more self-conscious

We also know that the regions of the brain involved with pleasure seeking are more sensitive to reward during this time, meaning that young people may:

- Take risks more readily
- Be more susceptible to peer pressure
- Seek pleasure rather than daily carry out other responsibilities

For young people who may already struggle with some of the above functions due to the impact of early loss and trauma, adolescence can be particularly challenging. These young people may lack positive relationships and good role models. They are likely to have a negative self-image which may make them more vulnerable to acting on peer pressure. We can help by:

- Helping the young person build positive, trusting relationships with key adults and peers
- Provide support and guidance around decision making
- Give opportunities that allow the young person to get their 'fix' e.g. safe and supervised 'risk taking'
- Work closely with parents and other agencies to identify potential risk situations
- Provide additional practical support with organisational and self-management tasks
- Be aware that social sensitivity may be very high, which may lead to strong emotional responses to praise or criticism

Executive Function

Executive Function (EF) is a term that refers to lots of different skills that help us to regulate ourselves and to learn. They are generally considered separate from more ‘basic’ functions such as language, visual-spatial skills and long-term memory. EF has been described as “raft of psychological attributes that are supervisory, controlling and organisational” (Stirling 2002). Therefore it can be helpful to think of EF a bit like a manager or an air traffic controller, co-ordinating the brain to act in an appropriate way at an appropriate time.

EF skills develop throughout early childhood and into adulthood. We know that brain development in children who have experienced trauma, loss and neglect can be significantly affected, and these children are therefore likely to have poorly developed EF skills. In addition to this, they may well have missed out on healthy developmental experiences which can help EF skills to develop e.g. play, social interaction, adult modelling and guidance.

Executive Functions include skills such as:

- Working memory
- Attention
- Managing impulses
- Emotional regulation
- Planning
- Organisation
- Awareness of time
- Goal persistence
- Ability to transition between activities

These skills are important for managing daily activities and also for learning. Some children can appear articulate and able, however they may struggle because they are not able to regulate and organise themselves in order to be ready to learn. They might seem unwilling or uncooperative at times, however, they may simply lack the skills to be able to do what we’re asking them to do.

It is important that we don’t assume that our vulnerable children can carry out seemingly simple activities. Thankfully, a child’s EF skills are not set in stone and can be developed through positive experiences and interactions, enabling them to develop new neural pathways in the brain. We need to provide them with opportunities to practice, grow and develop their EF skills.

Appendix 4 contains some appropriate strategies to promote an ‘Executive Functioning-Friendly’ Classroom, adapted from resources created by Dr Andrew Eaton.

Appendix 1.

Pupil Information Form

PHOTOGRAPH

Important people in my family

People I might talk about

My story for adults who work with me in school

My strengths

Other information it would be good for you to know

Appendix 2.

What I might find difficult

What helps me

Additional Pupil Information

Parents and school staff to agree on how and with whom this additional information is shared

Relational traumas and losses experienced:

Potential triggers:

Strategies to avoid:

Strategies that can support the child or young person to calm:

Possible school-based interventions and approaches supporting social skills, attachment and relational needs:

Attachment Based Mentoring

<http://www.babcock-education.co.uk/ldp/attachment-based-mentoring>

Circle of Friends Intervention

<http://www.antibullyingworks.co.uk/resources/intervention-strategies/circle-of-friends/>

ELSA Emotional Literacy Support Assistants

<http://elsanetwork.org/>

Emotion Coaching

<https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/>

PACE model by Dan Hughes

<https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/>

Thrive

<https://www.thriveapproach.com/>

Appendix 4. The 'Executive Functioning-Friendly' Classroom

(Adapted from) Dr Andrew Eaton *CPsychol MBPsS* (Educational Psychologist)

Personal Organisation and Time-Awareness

- Visual/itemised timetables/kit lists/routines
- Homework diary management
- Checking in with an adult at the start/end of the day
- Timetabled personal organisation time
- Colour-coding / transparent pencil case etc.
- Chronological 'to do' lists
- Short, timed tasks using a sand-timer

Planning

- Harness the child's learning strengths to develop planning support materials
- Learning common routines / learning processes
- "What do we need? What are the steps? What does finished look like?"
- Pros and cons lists

Initiation

- Support at the beginning of independent activities
- Offering choice from a limited range of options

Inhibition

- Set up situations where child can succeed / errorless learning
- Introduce a small 'thinking' task in between the 'feeling' and 'acting' stage
- Gradually extend time spent on task
- Inclusion in groups with good role models
- Use of simple verbal or non-verbal reminders, possibly a code word

Transitions

- Give verbal / visual notice of upcoming changes in task
- Consistent routines for beginnings and endings
- Treat transitions as a separate learning activity
- Give time to process / talk before unplanned changes
- Consider a change of venue if lots of 'known unknowns' expected

Big Picture Thinking

- Making lesson/task objective explicit with visual reminder
- Explicit expectations, next steps, links to previous learning

Working Memory

- Chunking of information and instructions
- Jottings to reduce load on memory
- Additional processing time
- Electronic devices, alarms
- Use of highlighting
- Visual reminders
- Checklists

Appendix 5. Suggested resources

Adoption specific resources:

Let's Learn Together by Sheila Lavery

<https://www.adoptionuk.org/sites/default/files/documents/LetsLearnTogetherNIMarch2013.pdf>

Essex publication Supporting Adopted Children in School

https://www.essex.gov.uk/Publications/Documents/Supporting_Adopted_Children_In_School.pdf

<http://www.adoptionsupportfund.co.uk/>

<https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

Attachment:

Attachment in the Classroom: The Link between children's early experience, emotional wellbeing and performance in school (2006) by Dr Heather Geddes

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

Parenting a Child with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties by Dan Hughes

TouchBase <http://www.touchbase.org.uk/>

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

Yellow Kite Resources <http://www.theyellowkite.co.uk/>

Appendix 6. Education plan for adopted children (EPAC) form

This is included at the back of this document. It is also accessible at

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/young-people/children-in-care/education-of-children-in-care/support-adopted-children>

Education Plan for Adopted Children (EPAC)

(To be completed jointly by parents, school and other professionals where appropriate)

Date of Meeting:			
Child's Name:			
Date of Birth:		Year Group:	
Name of Educational Provision:			
Date placed with Adoptive Family:		Age at Placement:	
Parents' Names:			
Date of Admission:			
Request for Additional Services:	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is the young person identified on the SEN Code of Practice?	No: <input type="checkbox"/>	SEN Support (K): <input type="checkbox"/>	EHCP: <input type="checkbox"/>
Parents have agreed that copies of this EPAC can be shared with:			
Please list below other professionals involved:			

Those attending this meeting are:		
Name:	Role:	Contact Details:
Young Person's Views (please ensure that the young person gives their views):		
My strengths are:		
My interests are:		
I would like to get better at:		
I find it hard when:		
I would like some help with:		
Significant information on pre-adoptive and early adoptive experiences (what loss and trauma has the young person suffered?)		

Indicate where any further, or more detailed information, can be found (eg. document held by parents or in school file is available to specific members of staff)

The meeting should discuss and agree on the following:

Young person's areas of strength:

Young person's areas of difficulty:

Target areas for supporting the young person: (including any additional funding)

Aims for Support (how will you know when things have improved?)

Action Needed: (including discussion of any additional funding)	By when?	By whom?
1.		
2.		
3.		
Date, Time and Venue of review:		
Completed by:		
Role:		

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Adopter Voice forum for their 'Working with Children who have experienced Early Development Trauma- Do's and Don'ts for Schools', ideas from which we have sought to include within this document.