

'CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION' - THE TWO HANDS FOR EDUCATION STAFF

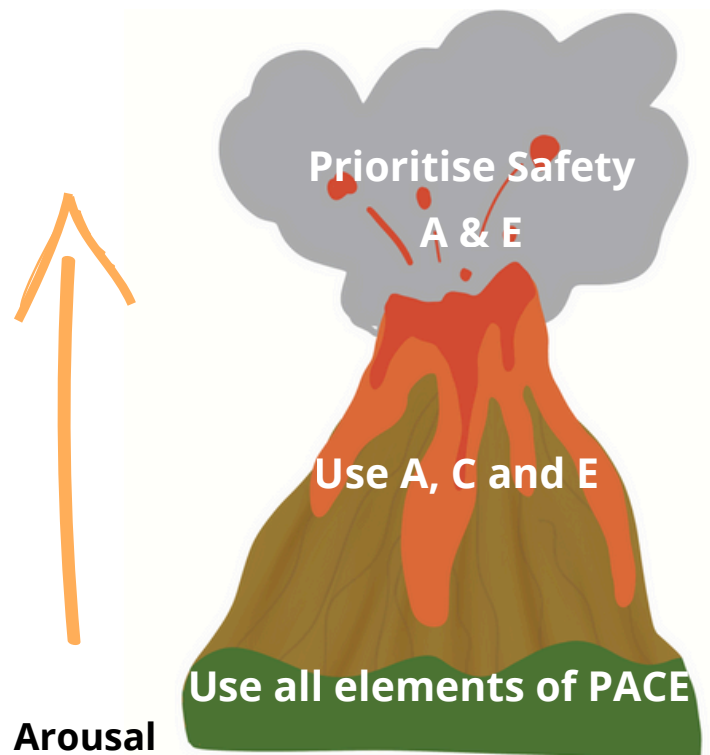
This resource has been created utilising ideas, principles and concepts developed by Hughes (2009); Golding and Hughes (2012); Golding (2013); Siegel and Bryson (2015).

When children experience difficult things, especially when they are very young, it can lead them to develop feelings of mistrust and a lack of safety in relationships. For these children/young people it can feel safer, or more comfortable, to feel disconnected rather than connected to others. They may also struggle to separate who they are from their behaviour, so it is very easy for them to misinterpret being disciplined (e.g. punishments such as exclusions or detentions) for something they have done as being told they are a bad person or not good enough, resulting in strong feelings of shame. You can find out more about this in the 'Understanding Shame' resource on our website, but the key to remember is that shame will rarely help to manage challenging behaviour, and usually makes things worse. Education staff can limit feelings of shame in the child/young person by working to first build stronger emotional connections that create a base where structure and discipline can be offered. Over time, using the approach offered below, education staff can help these pupils to trust in the relationship and to feel safe in the knowledge that they are accepted and liked unconditionally, which helps them feel safe and open to learn.

KEY PRINCIPLES

'PACE' AND AROUSAL STATE

PACE: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (Hughes, 2009) is a way of being as the adult, and is a consistent feature. Discipline is brought in as and when it is needed. This helps children/young people to feel unconditionally accepted and emotionally connected. PACE with discipline helps to maintain connection when the children/young people are at their most vulnerable, experiencing shame and fear. As children/young people's arousal level increases, the number of elements of PACE that can be used decreases. During an emotional eruption, elements such as curiosity and playfulness should be avoided. During these times, prioritise safety and use only A&E (Acceptance and Empathy). See 'PACE for education staff' resource on our website for more information.



'CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION' (THE TWO HANDS)

'Connection before correction' is an approach that encourages high levels of warmth and nurture alongside age appropriate behaviour strategies. It can be thought of as 'The Two Hands' approach:

Hand One – Provides warmth and nurture and allows children appropriate autonomy matched to their developmental age (**connection**).

Hand Two – Provides structure, discipline and boundaries (**correction** – behavioural support)



CONNECTION **CORRECTION**

A child needs both of these to thrive

Here are some examples of what might be connection / what might be correction:

CONNECTION

- Adult remaining calm and regulated
- Acceptance and Empathy (for feelings and thoughts)
- 'Name it to tame it' – Labelling feelings
- Curiosity (I wonder what this behaviour is communicating? What are their hidden needs?)
- Helping to regulate emotions
- Light and caring voice
- Time in strategies (i.e. time away from a situation to regulate emotions, but alongside/with support from a trusted adult)
- Drawing out feelings/their experience
- Staying with the child
- Avoiding shame
- Pausing conversations about the behaviour or problem until everyone is more emotionally regulated

CORRECTION

- Time in strategies (i.e. being alongside them, until they are open and engaged)
- Boundaries for harmful behaviour
- Conversations about the behaviour (reasoning)
- Providing natural and logical consequences* for their behaviours – if needed (linking directly to the behaviour)
- Increased supervision, matching a child's developmental age
- Solving problems collaboratively

*There are resources on the www.cavayoungwellbeing.wales website that explain these ideas in more detail

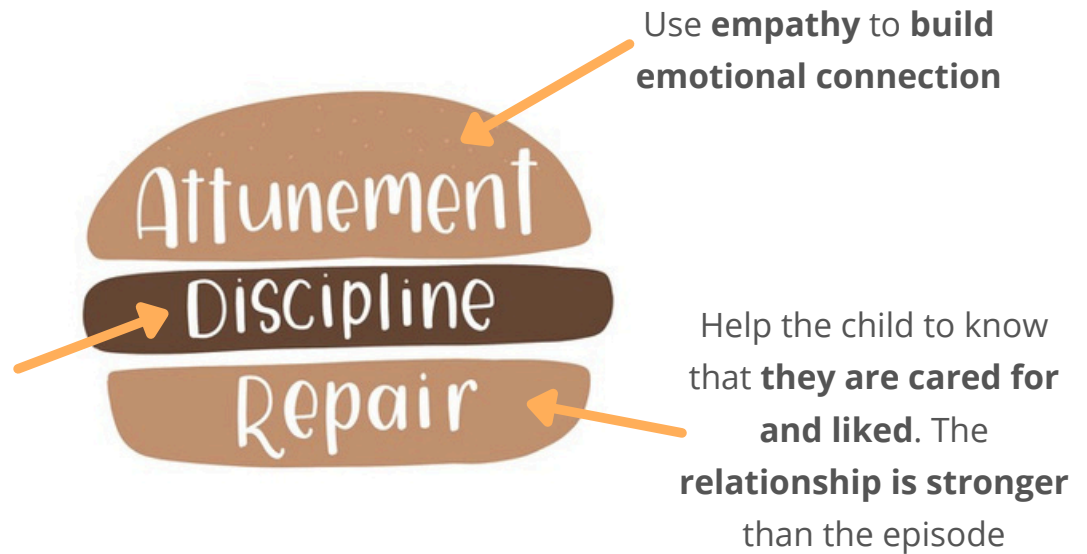
Using connection strategies with the aim of understanding the pupil's experience, before implementing behaviour support will likely help build trust between you and the pupil, and also allow you to find the most appropriate consequences. Avoid discipline or consequences until you have an understanding/explanation for the behaviour. Discipline, consequences or increased structure, will likely be more successful if the pupil feels understood and connected to first.

'THE SANDWICH'

Discipline in the form of boundaries and consequences is important at times, but it works best if it's sandwiched between lots of attunement (connection) and relationship repair.

Remain calm, warm and sympathetic, whilst being clear about the boundary (what isn't allowed) and the possible consequence (if – then*).

Avoid anger.



* 'If-then' statements help when implementing boundaries and teach cause and effect i.e. if you break something, then you won't be able to use it.

EXAMPLE WITH THE KEY IDEAS:

A pupil arrives late to school, and their key adult notices they look low and withdrawn. The adult decides a game of up regulating Jenga during registration would be a helpful way to start the day, while they wait for 1st lesson to begin. When the bell goes, the key adult says that it's time to put the game away and get their bag ready for their first lesson. The pupil continues to build with Jenga blocks. Two minutes later, the adult gives the pupil another reminder; the pupil says they don't want to go and that it's not fair. The adult then uses this opportunity to empathise with the pupil saying 'I know, it must be really hard for you to stop doing something that you are really enjoying right now, what I'm asking you to do is really difficult but it's time to go to your first lesson'. This helps the pupil to know that the adult understands the child's internal world and their feelings. The adult may then say "Tell you what, I'll help you pack away" and puts the Jenga away. The adult may then see the child in the corridor later, and think it would be helpful to do some repair to show the pupil their relationship is ok. "I really enjoyed our game this morning, sorry we had to stop. How about we have another game in our next session?"

(Case study adapted from Kim Golding's (2013) Foundations for Attachment Training Resource).

ATTUNEMENT (CONNECTION)

'I know, it must be really hard for you to stop doing something that you are really enjoying right now, what I'm asking you to do is really difficult...'



REPAIR (CONNECTION)

"I really enjoyed our game this morning, sorry we had to stop. How about we have another game in our next session?"

DISCIPLINE (CORRECTION)

"...but it's time to go to your first class... Tell you what, I'll help you pack away" – puts Jenga away

THINGS TO DO:

- Take breaks when needed/practically possible to look after yourself.
- Take responsibility for the relationship (including repair)
- Be mindful of the pupil's emotional maturity and provide appropriate structure and supervision
- Stay open and empathic to the child/young person's struggles with letting you have well-meaning authority over them (in order to keep them safe or when bringing an activity to an end)

THINGS TO AVOID:

- Punishing by withdrawing from the relationships, ie. avoiding or ignoring
- Lecturing – children can rarely be talked into or out of behaviours
- Responding with anger
- Problem solving or reassuring too soon – aim to understand first

"It is at the challenging times that the pupils need connection most"

Working with Relational Trauma in Schools (2021)

Visit www.cavyoungwellbeing.wales for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health information and resources for children, young people, parents and professionals.

Originally created by the Resilience Project team (2021) and adapted by School In-Reach Service (2024).
This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg