

Understanding 'PACE' - A Way of Being For Education Staff

Working with vulnerable young people can at times be overwhelming, and can trigger feelings of anger or frustration in you. At these times, when we try to make the young person co-operate, the situation can escalate. 'PACE' (Hughes, 2009), or being PACEful, is a simple approach you can use to help you to regulate your own emotions and helps you to connect with the young person. A child who feels connected to and understood, is often more open to learning and engaging.

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the children/young people feel safe. It involves communicating using these elements together flexibly, not as a step-by-step process. PACE focuses on the whole child, not just the behaviour.



PACE has 4 principles:



P - Playfulness - when we are stressed by a child/young person's behaviour, we can forget our own sense of humour and light-heartedness which can do so much to defuse a difficult situation. It can be as simple as keeping your tone of voice light rather than stern or it can be making time for fun which can transform emotion and mood.



A - Acceptance - This does not mean accepting unsafe behaviours, rather accepting the thoughts, wishes, needs, motivations and feelings that children/young people may share with us or be communicating through their behaviour. It means acknowledging the things they struggle with rather than trying to persuade them to co-operate or to understand our point of view.



C - Curiosity - Curiosity is the super-power we all have that helps us explore situations rather than assuming we already know what's going on - It helps explore what's going on beneath the behaviour. Curiosity involves wondering and asking what's going on for the child/young person.



E - Empathy - Empathy shows that we are listening to and are tuned into the person's feelings and experience. It can communicate that we care, which helps build connection. It can transform emotions, situations and relationships. When we are empathic we validate the person and their experience.

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

Playfulness

Playfulness is about expressing...

Joy

FUN

Pleasure

Hope

If you're feeling angry, frustrated or even a little bit out-of-control then it could be time for a bit of PLAYFULNESS. And if you're not....It's still time for some PLAYFULNESS

Instead of...

"JUST STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING RIGHT NOW AND SIT DOWN!"

Angry voice

It's not so much what you say but how you say it - with a **light tone of voice**

Playfulness is about fun together or even by yourself if you need to regulate

Try...

"Whoa, I wasn't expecting that! I'm just going to have a little body shake and a deep breath, and then we can think about what to do"

OR

"How about a quick game of Snap/Hide and seek/Dance Party. I need something to help me relax a little. I wonder if that would help you to?"

Playfulness can be...

LIGHT-HEARTEDNESS



Games

Doing or talking about something fun together

Quizzes



High-fives



Dance-Party

MOVEMENT

A 'Storytelling' tone of voice

What else can you think of?

Playfulness isn't about being funny or making jokes all the time (especially if it involves making fun of them or someone else) but creating shared joy and being playful when it feels right. It's about having a good time together - It strengthens relationships and builds co-operation. It also helps to regulate and balance the body, and makes it easier to focus and problem-solve

Acceptance

When faced with difficult behaviour we sometimes want to change how a child is thinking or feeling hoping it will lead to change. Unfortunately, it often doesn't help and it can sometimes make the young person more defensive. Acceptance is about

accepting the child or young person's inner experience. Including their; thoughts, wishes, needs, feelings and motivations. Acceptance of their experience can allow them to make more sense of their inner world.

It isn't about accepting harmful behaviour boundaries around harmful or unsafe behaviour are still very important. We can accept thoughts and feelings even when behaviour needs limits.

What we see

Behaviour

**Thoughts,
feelings,
wishes,
needs,
motivations**

What's underneath

Child says:

I hate school.
I want to go home.

Instead of...

"Ah, You're only saying that. If you don't give it a try you will never learn."

Try...

"You're so upset that you have to be in school today. I see that"

"You really wish you could be at home. It's so frustrating for you"

**Thoughts & feelings
NEED ACCEPTANCE -**

**actions may need
LIMITS**

'You're really angry with him. Can you say what you feel without hurting?'

"This feels so unfair to you"

Curiosity

Curiosity is a valuable skill that we can offer to a child – it increases our understanding of what is happening for the child and builds a stronger relationship. It is a much better alternative than trying to get the child to do what we want.

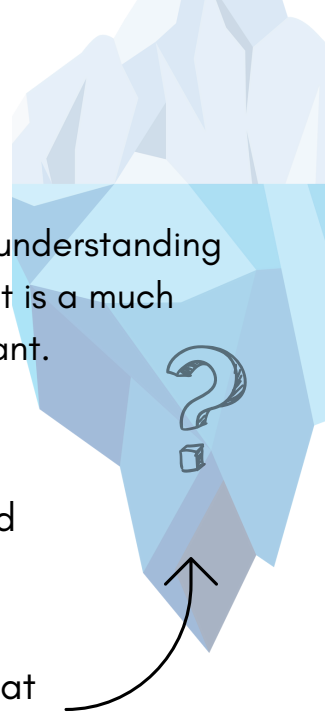
Curiosity is not:

- judging
- evaluating the child, or their behaviour
- assuming

It is:

Exploring what has happened and their thoughts & feelings

Keeping an open mind about what is underneath the behaviour



CURIOSITY:

builds
co-operation

strengthens
relationships

helps your wellbeing
(rather than feeling angry / powerless)

models a positive approach to learning

Instead of...

"I know what you're up to"

"You're being lazy/difficult/selfish"

"What were you thinking?"

"Why did you do that?"

Try...

"I wonder why that happened?"

"What do you think was going on?"

"I wonder if you felt scared?"

"I guess you might have felt worried about that so tried to avoid it"

"Can you help me understand what you were feeling just then?"

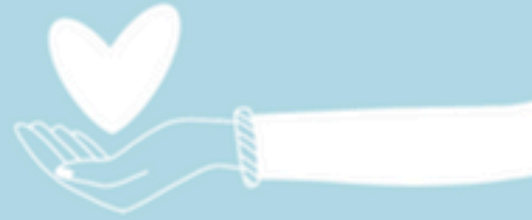
Keep in mind:

"What was that behaviour communicating?"

"What might be happening for them?"

Notice if you are feeling like you should be able to make the child behave or if you are feeling responsible or challenged by behaviours you don't understand. This can stop your curiosity and if we stop being curious, we stop thinking. Curiosity will help you, and the child, find new understandings and new ways of being and seeing themselves.

Empathy



Is about listening with your full attention – especially to another's feelings – and communicating back that you hear and accept those feelings. Being empathic with positive emotions enables us to share in those feelings but it's so easy to want to minimise or 'fix' things if a young person is struggling with difficulties, or experiencing big emotions. Whilst showing empathy might not feel like you are 'fixing things', it is helping through showing the child you understand.

— EMPATHY IS NOT LIKE SYMPATHY

It's not 'feeling sorry' for someone it's about letting them know that you understand how hard it is, and have compassion for how they are feeling. It is trying to stand in their shoes and staying with them throughout their emotional experience, and helping them to develop the confidence to manage those feelings.



Instead of...

denying, explaining or avoiding difficult feelings



Try...

Giving the feeling a name

"Losing a friend hurts"
"That sounds frustrating"
"I'm not surprised you're angry. I think I probably would be too."

Acknowledging the struggle

"That's so hard..."
"Its not easy..."
"Things feel so tough right now"



Listening, or acknowledging with a word or two

"I see", "Oh no"

Acknowledging hopes and wishes

"You really wish you didn't have to go to school today."

Checking for understanding

"If I've got you right, you....." "Thank you for helping me understand"

Naming and acknowledging feelings **VALIDATES** the young person – It helps them to realise that we all have a wide range of feelings and helps them find solutions themselves whilst knowing there is someone who trusts them and will support them.

Empathy is the root of **CONNECTION** and **COMPASSION**.