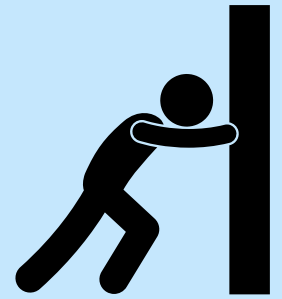


BLOCKED TRUST AND BLOCKED CARE FOR EDUCATION STAFF



The terms and concepts in this document are taken from Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), developed by Dr Dan Hughes

WHAT IS BLOCKED TRUST?

Sometimes, when children and young people's early experiences have been difficult, or when people have been unpredictable or inconsistent, they may find it hard to trust the adults around them. As a protective and survival response, they have learnt not to rely on others.

Signs You Might Notice

In education settings, a child or young person experiencing blocked trust might:

- Avoid seeking comfort from staff
- Resist authority or guidance from staff
- Stay on high alert
- Find it hard to be curious or open to learning
- Keep thoughts and feelings to themselves
- Distrust kindness or support
- Try to stay in control to feel safe



Children and Young People in Blocked Care may move through stages as they begin to feel safe:

1. **Mindless Mistrust** - 'You are mean, and I am bad.'
2. **Confusion** - 'You're different from other adults I've known.'
3. **Approach/Avoidance Conflict** - Unsure whether to trust
4. **Practicing Trust** - Trying out connection
5. **Trust** - 'I can trust you and I'm okay.'



PACE

Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (Hughes, 2009) can help a young person move through the stages to move into a state of trust over time.

Supporting Children and Young People in Blocked Trust

Relational CPR: Consistency, Predictability and Reliability

Persevere with support, even when change isn't visible—your consistent presence helps rebuild safety and lays the groundwork for future connection

PACE: Being Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathic

Logical Consequences: If responding to behaviour, do so with connection before, during and after correction, ensuring consequences are logical

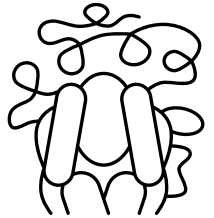
WHAT IS BLOCKED CARE?

Blocked care is a state that adults can enter into when they feel emotionally exhausted or rejected. It's common in education, especially when staff are trying their best but feel their efforts aren't making a difference. You might still meet a child's practical needs but feel disconnected emotionally.



Signs You Might Notice

- Feeling detached or resentful
- Avoiding certain learners
- Losing curiosity, empathy or hope
- Feeling overwhelmed, reactive or burnt out
- Being generally more defensive and focusing more on control and compliance than connection



Why It Happens

When a young person is in blocked trust, their brain signals threat—not connection—and over time, your brain may start to mirror that state, shutting down empathy as a form of self-protection.

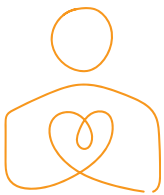
Blocked care can develop in different ways:

Chronic: Longstanding difficulties with being present or connecting with learners

Acute: Temporary stress or overwhelm

Child-specific: Struggles with a particular learner

Stage-specific: Certain developmental stages feel harder (i.e., adolescence)



What You Can Do

- **Self-care:** Go easy on yourself. When possible rest, reflect, and recharge. Remind yourself that children who are in blocked trust will find it hard to trust you
- **Be Realistic:** Supporting children in blocked trust is like rebuilding foundations—you may not see the house built, but your care and support can make it possible
- **Collective care:** Seek connection and co-regulation with trusted colleagues and ask someone else to take over when needed
- **Supervision:** If supervision is available to you, make use of it
- **Reflect:** Explore your own triggers and history
- **Use PACE:** Stay open and engaged
- **Celebrate small wins:** Notice and enjoy positive moments
- **Support:** Access support from [Educationsupport.org.uk](https://educationsupport.org.uk) / Helpline: 08000 562 561

Hughes, D. A., & Baylin, J. (2012). Brain-based parenting: The neuroscience of caregiving for healthy attachment. W. W. Norton & Company.

For more information: <https://ddpnetwork.org/>

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg