

RESOURCE EIGHT

A RELATIONSHIP-BASED APPROACH TO SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

Positive, encouraging and consistent student-teacher relationships are fundamental building blocks to strong educational engagement, achievement and student wellbeing in the classroom. For students who have experienced trauma, these can become some of the most important, stable and enriching relationships in their lives – and are very much the gateways to learning. Through these relationships, teachers have the capacity to:

- Foster nurturing, flexible, predictable and stimulating learning environments
- Demonstrate empathy and acceptance
- Champion, value and nourish students' talents and strengths
- Promote fun and creativity
- Act as mentors and role models
- Support peer connectedness and belonging
- Encourage and model adaptive and prosocial ways of responding to stress and challenges

The strategies outlined in this resource are inspired by Dan Hughes' (2004) PACE model of attachment and trauma-informed parenting (*Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy*). PACE offers a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that can inform teachers' relationship development with students, particularly with those who have experienced trauma.

These strategies can also be applied to student *Behaviour Support Plans*.

<p>PLAYFULNESS</p>	<p>Use <i>playfulness</i> to defuse minor behaviours in the classroom</p> <p>Minor behaviours may include: <i>calling out during class, using inappropriate language, uncooperative behaviours, not following through with instructions, etc.</i></p> <p>Playful responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a light tone and a neutral voice to prevent unnecessary escalation • Use humour with sensitivity, and without humiliation. Also try to ensure you are not 'over the top', as the aim is to help the student regulate his/her behaviour rather than escalate the student further • Try to be relaxed and flexible. Choose your battles, be conscious of the bigger picture and be mindful of the student's broader strengths, struggles and context • Create contained opportunities for joy, laughter, play and fun in the classroom
<p>ACCEPTANCE</p>	<p>An approach that can reduce defensiveness and opposition within the child/young person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid judgement based on behaviours. Avoid labelling a student's behaviour as manipulative, controlling, bad, oppositional or lazy. Do not assume that a student will not be able to achieve a particular task or will always act in a certain way • Accept and make positive attempts to contain student behaviours that may be associated with past and ongoing experiences of trauma • Try to accept students' feelings, thoughts and beliefs which may underlie their outward behaviours, even if you find them challenging or do not agree with them. Resist the urge to 'correct feelings' • Respond to student behaviours with sensitivity and respect. Be careful not to single students out and always discuss potential issues privately • Be mindful of language and actions that may have the potential to cause students to feel embarrassment and shame, particularly amongst their peers • Show patience and be kind to yourself. Acknowledge the impact that working with this student have on you professionally and personally. Are able to access any additional support?

<p>CURIOSITY</p>	<p>An approach that can allow the student to feel heard and understood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity to truly understand why a student behaves in a certain way. Being curious can help to unravel the function of a student's behaviour. For example, a student may rip up their school work because they believe that they are worthless • Be open and interested • Wonder aloud with the student as if you are having a conversation with yourself. For example, "I wonder if you were feeling frustrated when doing....?" as opposed to, "Why did you do that?" • Use a measured, accepting tone • Help the student to understand themselves through exploratory conversations. A student may not initially know why they acted in a particular way, but reflecting the behaviour back to him/her can be a good start
<p>EMPATHY</p>	<p>An approach that can help to relieve feelings of shame</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show compassion and be empathic in your actions (either verbally or non-verbally) • Be conscious that the student may currently be doing the best they can, but is likely to have the potential to achieve far more with the right balance of academic and emotional support • Let the student know that he/she is not alone. Express care about his/her wellbeing and show that you are available for support

References

Hughes, D. (2004). An attachment-based treatment of maltreated children and young people. *Attachment and Human Development*, 6(3), 263-278.

Downey, L. (2009). From isolation to connection: a guide to understanding and working with traumatised children and young people.

Retrieved from <http://www.cyp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/isolation-to-connection-september-2009.pdf>