

PRACTICE TOOL

THE IMPORTANCE OF CARING

WE
LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS
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Every child needs at least one person who is really crazy about them

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CARE PRINCIPLES

- Relationship Based
- Developmentally Focused
- Trauma Informed
- Family Involved
- Competency Centred
- Ecologically Oriented

A secure base is required to explore and grow

Attachment is a positive emotional connection with a caregiver that provides a secure base. Children need a secure base to regulate emotions, explore their environment and achieve developmental tasks. Being in the company of a competent caregiver reduces a child's fear and provides the safety and confidence required to try and learn new things. Children's early experiences of attachment, separation and loss heavily impact their ability to trust and form relationships with adults.



A child who is attached to one person can more easily become attached to others.



How to help a child build a secure base

- **Establish trusting relationships with children** – it is through this trusting relationship that children can develop and grow.
- **Support the child's attachment to family** – helping the child feel secure in their attachment to family, regardless of separation, will enhance a sense of connectedness and well-being.
- **Help children cope with grief and loss** – by facilitating the grief process and helping children to acknowledge and process their experiences we can help them feel more able to form new attachments.
- **Do with, not to** – work alongside the child. Having reciprocal relationships with adults who show real interest in them helps children to trust and feel safe. The relationship becomes the therapeutic alliance and is 'the active ingredient' through which change is facilitated.
- **Respond, rather than react** – attachment seeking behaviours, often referred to as attention seeking behaviours, represent a child's efforts to attach to caregivers and build relationships. These behaviours are children seeking caring relationships with adults who can keep them safe.

Attachment building responses

Children need caregivers who can respond to them in ways that build attachments. These attachment building responses can also be understood as caregiver attributes. Children need caregivers who can demonstrate:

- **Availability** – being actively involved in helping a child or young person with their daily life and being ready to provide support and assistance.
- **Sensitivity** – being ‘in tune’ with the child or young person and responding to their needs with compassion, care and calm.
- **Acceptance** – accepting the child or young person for who they are, and seeing beyond any challenging behaviours.
- **Investment** – being personally invested in the child or young person, ‘being in their corner’. Communicating high expectations and providing the right amount of support helps children to believe in their value and ability to do well.

Every interaction we have with a child or young person is an opportunity to demonstrate one or more of these attachment building responses. Caring adults and a secure base form the foundations for healing and growth.



ACTIVITY

UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS

Think about a child you know.

- How enduring is their secure base?
- How have you built your relationship with them over time?
- What are some behaviours or signs that they are seeking attachment?
- How might you help them?
- What are some practical ways you can show them that you are:
 - o Available
 - o Sensitive
 - o Invested
 - o Accepting



PRACTICE TIP

‘When teams are thinking about ways to create successful transitions and handovers, we talk about what they can say or do to help young people experience them as being ‘available and invested’ even when they are not physically there. Like talking about what they are looking forward to doing together. It can be something simple like, ‘let’s both have a think about the type of cake we will cook when I come back on Friday’ or ‘see you in a couple of days, I am really looking forward to hearing how your football match went.’ (Emily Boxhall, CARE and TCI Practice Team)

References

- Holden M.J (2009) Children and Residential Experiences 2nd Edition, Residential Childcare Project, Cornell University
Holden M.J et al. (2020) Therapeutic Crisis Intervention 7th Edition, Residential Childcare Project, Cornell University