

PACE

PACE is a set of principles to help promote safety when interacting with children and young people who may have experienced trauma or who may have insecure attachments.

PACE stands for:

Playfulness

Acceptance

Curiosity

Empathy

Children and young people often tell us how they feel and what their emotions are through their behaviour. This behaviour isn't always positive.

PACE is structured to help the adult to connect with the emotional part of the child's brain. Once they feel the adult has connected, the child can stop showing you how they feel through, often, unhelpful behaviour.

With PACE, the child can start to look at themselves and let others start to see them or get closer emotionally. In short, they can start to trust again.

Playfulness 1.

Playfulness is about creating a less intense atmosphere. You should use a light tone to your voice. The playful essence is based on the strength of the relationship being stronger than any irritations or poor behaviour. Playfulness reduces the shame of when something has gone wrong. The goal is for the children and the adults to enjoy being together.

Acceptance 2.

Accepting the child's wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions unconditionally, and understanding that these are the reasons for different behaviours. It is accepting the inner child without judging or evaluating. Accepting their feelings and emotions but not the unwanted behaviour. Do not challenge children's feelings, even if they are about themselves, accept them with curiosity and empathy.

Curiosity

3.

'Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child.' Dan Hughes.

With curiosity, the adult is conveying their intention to understand why and to assist the child. The adult should be curious about the child's thoughts, feelings, wishes and intentions and showing the child that you are interested in what is going on for them.

Empathy

4.

Empathy is validating and empowering. It is stepping into the child's shoes for a moment, imagining the experiences and feeling a small portion of what they may be feeling. It is showing the child that their feelings are important to you and that you want to be with them in hard times.

The following two excellent resources cover the PACE attitude in much more detail.



USING PACE IN SCHOOL
Through PACE, we have the capacity to see what children know and feel.

Dr Heidi Hodges, Educational Psychologist
Dr Dan Hughes, Clinical Psychologist

PACE: A trauma-informed approach to supporting children and young people

PACE was developed by Dr Dan Hughes, a clinical psychologist specialising in childhood trauma, more than 20 years ago as a central part of attachment-focused family therapy. It was created with the aim of supporting adults to build safe, trusting and respectful relationships with children and young people who have experienced trauma. The approach focuses on building trusting relationships, emotional connection, containment of emotions and a sense of security.

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe. It is done by communicating the four elements of PACE: together slowly, not all at once by any means.

Using PACE helps adults to slow down their reactions, stay calm and sensitive to what the child is experiencing in the moment. It supports us to gain a better understanding of what the child is feeling, in tricky moments it allows us to stay emotionally regulated and guide the child through their heightened emotions, thoughts and behaviours. In turn, PACE helps children and young people to feel more connected to and understood by important adults in their life and ultimately, to slow down their own responses.

