

Briefing Paper: Attachment, nurturing and parenting an integrative approach to training within West Dunbartonshire

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Background



The importance of a secure attachment in promoting a positive sense of self is well established. Young children who have positive early experiences know that their needs will be consistently met and hence feel free to explore the world. Sadly, for some, such positive experiences are not the norm and consequently when it comes to school, preoccupations or ambivalence in forming relationships can significantly hinder emotional and cognitive development. One way of responding to the needs of young children who have attachment difficulties on entering school is the use of nurture groups. Following a successful pilot of the nurture group approach in 2006, eight nurture groups have been established within primary schools in WDC. The aim of this approach is to target those children whose significant social and emotional needs are likely to hinder a successful transition to primary school. Research both within WDC and nationally continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of nurture groups in supporting children within mainstream school who otherwise would have struggled.

Training

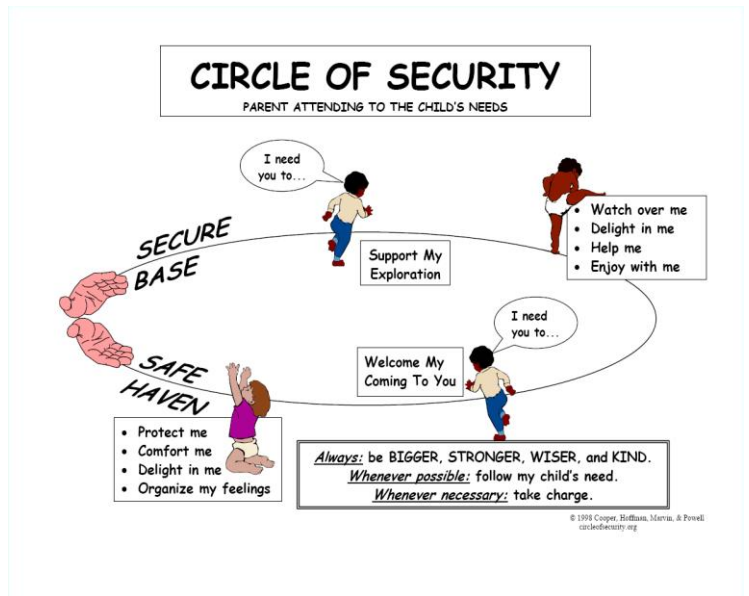
Clearly not all schools have the benefit of an on site nurture class therefore in order to assist schools and early year establishments to become 'attachment aware' training, on the principles and practice of attachment theory, has been developed and delivered by the Psychological Service. A key aim of this training is to provide all staff working with children and young people with an insight into how a child with attachment difficulties might present in school. Further it seeks to encourage discussion as to how school structures and supports might



be put in place to assist such pupils. To date training has been delivered to staff within establishments where nurture groups are in operation. In addition, training has also been delivered to a number of pre-school, primary, secondary and specialist schools. In session 2013-14 the Psychological Service organized an Attachment Conference where Louise Bomber (author of many books on the subject of attachment and specialist practitioner in the field) led very practical workshops on how schools can support pupils with Attachment based difficulties. Follow up training by Psychologists has been noted by schools to be highly effective in raising awareness and in promoting a different frame of reference for understanding challenging or puzzling behaviour.

The role of parents

Educational establishments undoubtedly make a difference to children's social and emotional well being through the delivery of the curriculum and in how they structure support to children in need. They are however but one part of the answer leaving a wider question as to the role of parents. All parents will have had very different experiences of being parented with their own experiences impacting on their subsequent roles as parents. For many the transition from adult to parent will be a relatively seamless one but for others, the process may be far from straightforward. Increasing parents understanding of attachment, as exemplified in the 'circle of security', is critical for the promotion of a child's social and emotional development. The nurture group training taking place is on the subject of parental involvement and will start the discussion for this target group of parents. Reaching a wider range of parents remains a goal with possible ways forward outlined below.



The Solihull Approach – A Unifying Strategy

The Solihull Approach to supporting parenting has, as its core philosophy, the principles of attachment theory. Through the discussion of 3 key concepts - containment, reciprocity and behaviour management – it seeks to provide professionals and the parents they support with a common framework around which parenting issues can be discussed and indeed assessments undertaken. The approach sits well with the ongoing emphasis within WDC on the promotion of social and emotional well being. The Solihull framework is included as part of

the training currently offered by the Psychological Service as the concepts of containment and reciprocity are the foundation of attachment training.

The Solihull Approach serves as the unifying frame of reference to the promotion of social and emotional well being in children and positive parenting approaches. Currently there are a number of parenting programmes on offer within WDC each with a slightly different target audience however, the principles of the Solihull Approach is provided to staff delivering such programmes to ensure a common frame of reference in both assessing and selecting most appropriate intervention.

Strategically it is helpful to think of the needs of children and parents in four groups: 0-3 years; 3-5years, primary and secondary.

0-3 years

The Solihull training is the central tenet for parenting approaches used by frontline workers such as health visitors and education staff working with pre-3's. It aids the assessment and identification of vulnerable families who might benefit from more intensive intervention programmes such as mellow parenting, mellow babies, etc This sits comfortably alongside any strategy involving Triple P.

Over the last 2 years we have targeted Solihull training at health visitors, early years education staff and other agencies. Training has been delivered by those staff trained as trainers in the Solihull approach within WDC. Educational psychologists alongside health staff have been responsible for the vast majority of training sessions.

3-5 years

In nursery settings, workers need to be armed with a similar theoretical framework but, as the work rarely involves intensive parent/child assessment, the focus of the training provided here has been more about how the child's attachment history might be impacting on their learning, play and behavioural development within the nursery context. Small modification to the training already offered by the Psychological Service incorporating the Solihull frame of reference meets the needs of this group.

Primary

As the child moves into the more formal school setting, and the demands for formal learning accelerate, children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which remain unresolved quickly identify themselves in the primary school and tend to be slow to settle in school and often begin to fall behind academically.

It is here that a nurturing approach within the primary school, and possibly inclusion in a nurture group, gives the child the level of support they require at a developmentally appropriate level and an opportunity to build attachment relationships within the school context.

Priority for this group of staff has been to deliver training on attachment, nurture and resilience.

Secondary

Two key areas to consider at this stage first, the continued impact of attachment difficulties on adolescents and second, the preparation of adolescents for parenthood. On the first of these issues core training on attachment incorporating the Solihull Approach aimed at all staff is necessary. The second is to look at the experiences and outcomes of CfE (health and well being) and how these can perhaps include learning opportunities on attachment and the developing teenage brain.

This is a next step once the early years sector training and development is complete.

The Way Forward

It is clear from the above that the Solihull Approach is a unifying approach to work already happening within WDC on promoting the importance of the social and emotional development of children and young people. There are clearly very different training needs dependent on the age, sector and agency in which individuals work. Training is already being offered on attachment and the Solihull Approach. To ensure that this is making a difference to the experience of children and families we now need to consider further coaching and mentoring sessions with key staff so that we can ensure that our early years workforce has the appropriate skills to support children, their parents and each other.