POSITIVE CAREGIVING APPROACHES

Approaches for helping children to build trust

N.B. It is important to choose only activities that the child is likely to accept and enjoy.

Day-to-day activities

- Establish predictable routines around mealtimes, getting up and going to bed.
- Ensure that the child always knows where to find you when you are apart.
- Manage separations carefully, with open communication about why it is happening, how long it will be and clear ‘goodbyes’ and ‘hellos’.
- Use calendar or diary chart to help the child predict and anticipate events.
- Ensure that the child feels specially cared for and nurtured when ill, hurt or sad.
- Be ‘unobtrusively available’ if the child is anxious but finds it hard to talk or accept comfort (for example, suggest a ride in the car).
- Offer verbal and non verbal support for safe exploration.

Building trust when caregiver and child are apart

- Allow child to take small item or photo from home to school.
- Use mobile phone or text to help child know that you are thinking of him.
- Place small surprise on child’s bed when he is at school to show you have thought about him during the day.
- Keep a ‘goodies tub’ in the kitchen and put small treats in it for child to have in the evening.

Activities that help children to think about trusting

- Ask child to draw a fortress or make one in clay or sand. Child may choose miniature toys or animals to stand for the main people in his life. Ask child to show and talk about which ones he would let into his fort and which ones he would keep out and why (from Sunderland 2000).
- Ask child to draw a bridge with themselves on one side and someone they trust on the other. Ask them to draw a speech bubble coming out of their mouth and write in it what they are thinking or saying. Do the same with the other person (from Sunderland 2000).
Games and activities that help to build trust

- Hand holding games such as ‘ring a roses’.
- Clapping games.
- Reading stories with child on lap or sitting close.
- Leading each other blindfold.
- Face painting.
- 3-legged race.
- Throwing a ball or beanbag to each other.
- Bat and ball.
- Blowing and chasing bubbles together.
- Rocking, singing, gently holding child.
- Rub lotion onto each others hands and arms.
- Brush and plait hair, paint nails.
- Teaching a new skill or learning one together.
Approaches for helping children to manage feelings and behaviour

N.B. It is important to choose only activities that the child is likely to accept and enjoy.

- Observe child carefully – perhaps keep a diary, note patterns, the unexpected etc, try to stand in the child’s shoes.
- Anticipate what will cause confusion and distress for the child and avoid if possible.
- Read cues for support and comfort – be aware of ‘miscuing’.
- Express interest, at a level that is comfortable for the child, in his/her thoughts and feelings.
- Provide shared, pleasurable activity and a ‘commentary’ on the feelings experienced by self and child.
- Find time for interactions that promote synchrony of action, experiences, expressions of feeling (simple action rhymes and songs, clapping games for younger children, ball and beanbag games, learning a dance together, building or making something together, share an ‘adventure’ or new experience together, a game that involves a shared experience of both winning and loosing).
- Make a ‘me calendar’ to help a child to see and remember what is going to happen next.
- Collect tickets, pictures, leaflets, stickers etc and make an ‘experiences book’ to help a child to remember and reflect on positive events.
- Name and discuss feelings in every day situations (happy, proud, sad, confused, angry, worried, peaceful, excited, guilty, lonely, pleased, etc. Also discuss mixed feelings and feelings that change over time.
- Play ‘sensory’ games (involving touch, sound, smell, observation).
- Use clay, paint, crayons to express feelings.
- Use play and real examples to make sense of the world, how things work, cause and effect
- Encourage children to stop and think before reacting.
- Help children recover/repair the situation/make things better after losing control of feelings – praise them for doing this.
- Use stories or puppets to develop empathy in the child – ‘poor owl, how does he feel now his tree has been cut down’, etc.
- Use television programmes/films to focus on why people feel different things and how they can feel different things at the same time.
- Speculate on and give names to the possible feelings of others in everyday conversations.
Approaches for building self esteem

N.B. It is important to choose only activities that the child is likely to accept and enjoy.

- Praise child for achieving small tasks and responsibilities.
- Provide toys and games that create a sense of achievement.
- Liaise closely with nursery and school to ensure a sense of achievement.
- Use positive language. For example, ‘hold the cup tight – good, well done’, rather than ‘don’t drop the cup’.
- Offer a brief explanation of why behaviour is not acceptable and a clear indication of what is preferred For example: ‘If you shout it’s really hard for me to hear what you want to say. I want to be able to hear you, so please talk in an ordinary voice’.
- Help child to list and think about all the things he/she has done that he/she feels proud of.
- Help child to think about times, events, occasions when he/she felt valued and special. Use photos and other mementos to record these events.
- List alongside child, all the things that make you feel proud of him/her. Can include acceptance of limitations (e.g. a time when the child tried but did not succeed at something, was able to accept losing etc)
- Encourage child to draw, paint, make a clay model or play in music how it feels when she feels good about herself. Do the same for yourself.
- Suggest that child lies on the floor, draw round the outline of the child’s body. Encourage the child to make a positive statement about different parts of herself (I’ve got shiny brown hair, a pretty T shirt etc) and write or draw these onto the figure. Take this at the child’s pace and ensure the child feels comfortable with the statement made.
- As a family group, suggest that each person in the family writes down one good thing about all other family members, so that each child gets given a set of positive things about themselves.
- Make a poster with the child of ‘best achievements’.
- Ask child to teach you something that he is good at – such as a computer game or a joke.
- Buy a small treat and place it in the child’s bedroom as a surprise.
- Discover and support activities and interests that the child enjoys and can be successful in. May need active support (liaison with club leader, becoming a helper at the club etc.).
- Use dolls, toys, games and books that promote a positive sense of the child’s ethnic, religious and cultural background.
- Ensure that the child’s ethnic, religious and cultural background is valued and celebrated within the household.
- Model the acceptance of difference in words and behaviour.
- Model a sense of pride in self and surroundings.
- Model within the family that it is OK not to be perfect, that no one is good at everything but everyone is good at something’.


Approaches for helping children to feel effective – and be co-operative

N.B. It is important to choose only activities that the child is likely to accept and enjoy.

- Find individual activities that the child enjoys and that produce a clear result. For example, give the child a disposable camera to use on holiday or on a day out, help him to get the photos developed and give him a small album for the results.

- Within the house and garden, minimise hazards and things that child cannot touch and keep ‘out of bounds’ areas secure so that the child can explore without adult ‘interference’ when he is ready to do so.

- Suggest small tasks and responsibilities within the child’s capabilities. Ensure recognition and praise when achieved. If they become an issue, do them alongside the child – a chance to show availability.

- Introduce toys where the action of the child achieves a rewarding result. For example, pushing a button, touching or shaking something.

- Make opportunities for choices. For example, allow child to choose the cereal at the supermarket, a pudding for a family meal, what to wear for a certain activity.

- Ensure that daily routines include time to relax together and share a pleasurable activity.

- Respond promptly to child’s signals for support or comfort or reassure an older child that you will respond as soon as possible. For example ‘I must quickly finish what I am doing and then I will come and help you straight away’.

- Do not try to tackle several problem areas at any one time. Set one or two priorities and work on them gradually until there are sustained signs of progress. Ensure that these are acknowledged.

- Use co-operative language wherever possible. For example ‘Would you like to come and have a sandwich after you’ve washed your hands’, rather than ‘Wash your hands before you eat your sandwich’.

- Find shared activities that the child enjoys and that produce a clear result. For example, baking cakes.

- Introduce games. State clearly when you have had enough and suggest alternative activity.

- Seek opportunities for the child to co-operate with other children – you may need to be present so that this is managed successfully.

- Help the child to identify a target that they would like to achieve, do, change etc. Settle on one where something done now will make a difference. Discuss what the young person can do and negotiate simple, relevant and achievable steps that they can take. When agreed, draw a simple staircase and write one task in each of the bottom steps of the staircase. For example, if the target is ‘go to see Manchester United play at home’, steps might be – use internet to find out dates of home games this season, settle on suitable date and put on calendar, find out train times, etc. Set a time to review progress and think about further steps needed.
Approaches for helping children to belong

N.B. It is important to choose approaches for helping children to belong that are suitable for the individual child and the plan for this child.

Belonging in an adoptive family, foster family or residential group

- Explain to the child from the beginning how the family/group works – its routines and expectations, its choice of food and favourite television programmes – so that the child can see how to fit in.
- Adapt those routines where possible and reasonable to accommodate the child’s norms and help the child feel at home e.g. meal times or bedtime.
- Have special places for the child in the home e.g. a hook for the child’s coat; a place at the table; the child’s name on the bedroom door or in fridge magnets on the fridge; bedding and bedroom decoration (posters etc) that reflect the child’s age and interests.
- Promote family/group mealtimes and activities (e.g. going bowling) where the child can feel fully accepted as part of the family/group.
- Ensure extended family members and friends/all staff members welcome the child and treat the child as one of the family/part of the group.
- Have photographs of the child and of the child with the foster or adoptive family or residential caregivers on display – alongside photographs of other children who have lived in the foster or adoptive family or residential unit and moved on/grown up.
- Use memory and experience books of events and feelings about events during the child’s stay to build a family story to help the child be able to reflect on the meaning of family/group life and, if the child moves on, to take home to the birth family or to a new placement.
- Make sure the school knows (and the child knows that the school knows) that you are the family/residential unit caring for the child and need to be kept informed of any concerns but also of things to celebrate.
- Plan family/group life and talk about plans that will include the child, even if this is just an expectation that they will all go swimming together next week.
Belonging to the birth family when separated

- Develop or build on an existing life story book that contains information, pictures and a narrative that links the child to birth family members and birth family history. Ensure that it includes key documents e.g. copy of birth certificate, provides a full and balanced picture (see also Chapter 12) and is nicely presented, robust, valued and cared for. Even children who return to birth families benefit from making sense of complex family histories and their place in the family.
- Have photographs of the birth family where the child would most like to put them, e.g. bedroom or living room.
- Ensure that conversations about the birth family happen appropriately and are carefully managed within the family/group, so that the child does not have to make sense of negative, contradictory or idealised ideas about the birth family.
- Where direct or indirect contact is occurring, be actively involved in planning and facilitating contact so that the child’s welfare is paramount and contact promotes security as well as roots and identity.

Managing memberships of more than one family

- Adults need to demonstrate their own flexibility about children’s family memberships and what they might mean to the child.
- Both informally and in a planned way, talk with the child about the benefits and the challenges of having more than one family and help the child to understand and manage these relationships.
- Find models around the child of children who manage multiple families e.g. in friends’ families, on television, in books.
- Help the child think about/talk about the inevitability of mixed feelings
- Watch for possible pressure points e.g. Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Christmas, and find ways of indicating (where appropriate) that it is OK to give cards to more than one parent or to choose one rather than the other at different times.
- If necessary and with the child’s permission talk to the teacher about family issues that may disturb the child if raised in class, i.e. help others outside immediate family circle be aware of the child’s task in managing their multiple loyalties/families.