

SECURE BASE CAREGIVING APPROACHES

Availability: caregiving approaches for helping the child to build trust

Day-to-day caregiving

- Establish predictable but flexible routines e.g. around mealtimes, getting up and going to bed, ensuring that the caregiver is available to the child at these times. Make routines explicit to the child and talk them and any changes through in advance e.g. special breakfasts on birthdays; if bedtimes are different at week-ends.
- Ensure that the child feels specially cared for and nurtured when ill, hurt or sad.
- Use a calendar chart to help the child understand time and anticipate events.
- Be unobtrusively available if the child is anxious but finds it hard to talk or accept comfort (e.g. sit nearby, suggest a ride in the car).
- Offer verbal and non-verbal support for safe exploration, new activities.
- Respond promptly to the child's signals for support or comfort.

Building trust when caregiver and child are apart

- Manage separations carefully, with open communication about why it is happening, how long it will be, clear 'goodbyes' and 'hellos' - and clarity about who will be available for the child in the absence of primary caregivers.
- Give child strategies for coping while apart e.g. suggest the child takes a small item from home to school or to contact.
- Ensure that the child always knows where to find you or, for older children, how to contact you when you are apart.
- Use mobile phone or text to help the child know that you are thinking of them.
- Place a small surprise on the child's bed when they are at school to show you have thought about them during the day.
- Keep a 'goodies tub' in the kitchen and put small treats in it for the child to have in the evening, again to show that you are thinking of the child /looking forward to seeing them.

Games and activities

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

- Hand holding games such as ‘ring-a-roses.’
- Clapping games.
- Hide and seek.
- Reading stories with child on your lap or sitting close.
- Rocking, singing, gently holding child.
- 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.
- Rubbing lotion onto each other’s hands
- Brushing and plaiting hair, painting nails.
- Teaching a new skill or learning one together

Sensitivity: caregiving approaches for helping the child to manage feelings

Day-to-day caregiving

- Observe the child carefully – keep a diary of the child’s behaviour and potential links to feelings. Note both patterns and unexpected behaviours and feelings. Try to see the situation from the child’s perspective. Gently feedback your observations to the child, as appropriate.
- Anticipate what may cause confusion and distress for the child and avoid if possible / find ways to reduce anxiety.
- Read cues for support and comfort – be aware of ‘miscuing’ e.g. when the child signals they don’t care or don’t need help but seem distressed.
- Express interest, at a level that is comfortable for the child, in their thoughts and feelings.
- Name and discuss feelings in everyday situations (happy, proud, sad, confused, angry, worried, peaceful, excited, guilty, lonely, pleased, etc). Also discuss mixed feelings and feelings that change over time.
- Speculate on and give names to the possible feelings of others in everyday conversations e.g. ‘I wonder how he felt when he scored that goal? Happy? Proud? Relieved?’
- Encourage children to *stop* and *think* – about their own feelings and the feelings of others - before reacting.
- Help children recover/repair the situation/make things better after losing control of feelings – praise them for doing this.
- Provide shared, pleasurable activity and a commentary on the feelings experienced by yourself and the child.

Games and activities

- Make a 'My calendar' to help a child to see and remember what is going to happen next, anticipate and name feelings e.g. first day back at school, birth family contact.
- Play 'sensory' games that can tune into feelings (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, feelings and behaviour.
- 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 books /television programmes/films to focus on why people feel different things and how they can feel different things at the same time e.g. sad and angry.
- Collect tickets, pictures, leaflets, stickers etc. to help the child to reflect on positive events, but also be willing to discuss aspects of events that may have been disappointing to the child.
- Make an 'experiences book' to help a child to remember and reflect on everyday and special events, to help the child think about how feelings can change over time.

Acceptance: caregiving approaches for building the child's self-esteem

Day-to-day caregiving

- Praise the 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 and manage set-backs.
- Use positive language. For example, 'Try holding 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'.
- 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'.

Games and activities

- Help the child to list and think about all the things they have done that they feel proud of.
- Support the child to think about times, events, occasions when they felt valued and special. Use photos and other mementos to record these events.
- List alongside the child, all the things that make you feel proud of them. Can include a time when the child tried but did not succeed at something, was able to accept losing etc.
- Encourage the 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.
- 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 is given a set of positive things about themselves.
- Make a poster with the child of 'best achievements', which could range from success at sport to sharing favourite toys with a sibling.
- Ask the child to teach you something that he is good at – such as a computer game or a joke.
- Play rule-based games with the child, such as board games - help the child to have fun, manage feelings of excitement or disappointment, enjoy the game whether winning or losing.
- Discover and support activities and interests that the child enjoys and can be successful in. This may need active support (liaison with club leader, becoming a helper at the club etc.).
- With the child's help, draw a picture of the child. Encourage the child to make a positive statement about different parts of themselves ('I've got shiny brown hair', 'My hands can make cakes', 'My legs like to run fast 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 – but also allow them to express/ explore negative feelings if they come up.

Co-operation: caregiving approaches for helping a child to feel effective

Day-to-day caregiving

- 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 supervision when ready to do so.
- 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 /co-operate in a pleasurable activity.
- Rather than tackling 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 signs are acknowledged with the child.
- 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'.

Games and activities

- Suggest small tasks and responsibilities within the child's capabilities. Ensure recognition and praise when achieved - and offer to work together if needed.
- Introduce toys or activities where the action of the child achieves a rewarding outcome: for example, a young child can push a button to make a toy car move.
- Find shared activities that the child enjoys and that produce a clear result. For example, baking cakes.
- Introduce games that promote co-operation, turn-taking and teamwork.
- Seek opportunities for the child to co-operate with other children in play, games or activities – 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, where something done now will make a difference. Discuss 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 local football club play at home', steps might be – use internet to find out dates of home games this season, settle on suitable date and put on the calendar, find out train times and so on. Set a time to review progress and think about further steps needed.

Family membership - caregiving approaches for helping the child to belong

Belonging in a foster / special guardianship / adoptive family

- Introduce the child to how the family operates from the beginning – the usual bedtime routines, mealtimes, activities and favourite television programmes etc., while also getting to know the child, their preferences and previous family experiences.
- Support the child to feel comfortable, adapting family routines, introducing flexible food choices etc. wherever possible to help the child feel they can fit in as part of the family.
- 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 visible, perhaps 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 mealtimes and activities e.g. playing games together, going bowling, where the child's interests are respected and they can also feel fully accepted as part of the family.
- Ensure extended family members and friends welcome the child and treat the child as one of the family.
- Have photographs of the child and of the child with the foster or adoptive or special guardianship family on display – alongside photographs of other children who have lived in the family and moved on/grown up.
- Make an album of family experiences that have included the child. This can help the child to reflect on the meaning of family, whether they will grow up in this family or will take the album with them when they return home to the birth family or move to a new family.
- Make sure the school knows (and the child knows that the school knows) that you are the family caring for the child and would like to hear about progress and achievements to celebrate as well as be informed of any concerns.
- Talk about regular family activities that will include the child.

Belonging to / feeling connected to the birth family

- Develop a 'Your life in our family' book which reflects the people in the household and key events, achievements, things enjoyed etc. during the child's time in the family. Ensure that it is nicely presented and robust, reflecting that the child was a loved and valued member of the family.
- Have photographs of the birth family where the child would like to put them e.g. bedroom or living room.
- Ensure that conversations about the birth family are carefully managed within the family, so that the child has a clear and coherent picture appropriate to their age and understanding
- 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.
- Talk to the child's teacher about family issues that may unsettle the child if raised in class.

Managing memberships of more than one family

- Adults need to demonstrate their flexibility about children's different family memberships and understanding of 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 belonging to more than one family and help the child to understand and manage these relationships and their role in them.
- Find models 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 when thinking about being a member of more than one family.

- Watch for possible pressure points e.g. Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas and other religious festivals 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. Help others outside the immediate family circle be aware of the child's task in managing their multiple loyalties/families.