

Pastoral Care, post Pandemic (Trauma-Informed Practice)

Notes copied from the Playlist, as they appear beneath each video

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLL2ZK9CqKpu-2hAqqDswAIYjvenUHNlvu>

Video 1 – escalating social and emotional need – the challenge ahead

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) survey shows strong correlation between stressed-filled (high ACEs) childhood and poor outcomes, both mental and physical. Excellent, short animation about ACEs here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiMjTzCnbNQ>
- Free, certificated e-module about ACEs here: <https://www.acesonlinelearning.com/>
- In every setting, there will be a higher level of ACEs, post-pandemic. (e.g. bereavement, domestic violence, alcoholism, poverty, family breakdown, all steeply rising.)
- The earlier in life the trauma, the more devastating the impact on neural development and health outcomes.
- However, the child's brain is highly malleable and if the right stimulus is provided, then there will be growth and recovery – risk isn't destiny.
- That stimulus is, in essence, high quality relational support – the strongest predictor of positive outcomes in adulthood is the number and quality of relationships during childhood. These build resilience. A sense of belonging at school is thus a key protective factor.

Video 2 – the therapeutic school community as antidote

- The therapeutic school community is one that prioritises relationships.
- We habituate challenging life events by talking about them – pupils need to have access to listening, empathic adults so that stressful experiences don't become toxic. Grief, for example, may become 'blocked' when it isn't expressed, processed. School might be the only place where this can happen.
- Therapeutic dosing occurs when there are relatively minor, kind interactions throughout the day. These allow new connections to be formed and hard-wired through repetition. They help the most vulnerable pupils rebalance.
- Most vulnerable also needs long term, deeper relationships with a key adult who also gets to know family – the single point of (attuned) contact. Lack of this deeper relational support can be what makes transition from primary challenging for those who need to feel known and held within the safety of an unconditional relationship before they can flourish.

- Talk with key adult shouldn't always be problem-focused. Solutions focused conversations explore what's working well – the exceptions – how to grow those. ("Every problem has a crack in it, that's where the light gets in" – Leonard Cohen) Email PRT@lincolnshire.gov.uk for a digital copy of the Solutions Focused Coach's Handbook).
- Not all pupils act out distress. Wellbeing screens or even simple scaling exercises allow us to identify those who act-in or who may be dissociated as a result of traumatic or adverse experience. These pupils need the safety of the relationship too.
- Worry boxes (or inboxes) send out reassuring message that school is a listening place where pupil wellbeing comes first. Adds to climate of psychological safety.
- Extra-curricular activities create relational wealth as well as adding structure to the unstructured and potentially triggering lunchtime. Vulnerable pupils need to be actively encouraged to participate in these.

Video 3 – harnessing positive emotional contagion

- Emotions are contagious. Our mirror neurons mean that we match the mood of the other – so hostility is met with hostility; warmth with warmth etc (unless a deliberate effort is made).
- 90% (+) of communication is non-verbal.
- Hyper-vigilant pupils – those in 'survival mode' because of their experience of the world as unsafe – are more tuned into the adult's non-verbal cues than those children who are calm & regulated.
- A slightly dysregulated adult can quickly dysregulate a vulnerable/hyper-vigilant child.
- Teacher wellbeing is therefore of critical importance. A study showed that the higher teachers rated their level of burnout, the higher the cortisol level of pupils in the class.
- Peer mentoring is strongly supported by evidence. (Links with relational wealth creation too)
- Post-traumatic growth is very common and an opportunity for school leaders. After a community trauma, people reflect on their values; what really matters; what they will now change. A chance for school communities to reflect in this way on return – and then to recognise pupils who live the school's newly defined or reaffirmed values.
- A culture of recognition (as opposed to narrower 'rewards') promotes positive emotional contagion.

Video 4 – connection before correction

- Early relational trauma disrupts the socialisation cycle that enables children to accept boundaries.
- 'Terrible twos' is their learning through this stage. Initially the 'rupture' to the attuned relationship caused by the firm No evokes shame.
- Repetition of 'repair' following 'rupture' means that boundary setting is tolerated over time and doesn't continue to shame.
- However, where early attunement is poor, there is inadequate repair. The experience of discipline thus remains shaming and can continue to cause major reactions.
- Children may become shame-based; the difference between 'I did a bad thing' and 'I am a bad thing' not understood.
- They develop a 'shield against shame' to protect themselves from its pain, meaning that they may lie, minimise, rage or blame others rather than accept discipline.
- This makes discipline difficult, both in school and the home. Consequences alone don't enable progress, however 'consistent'. They only confirm the child's view of self/sense of shame.
- The answer is Kim Golding's correction before correction.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/children-australia/article/connection-before-correction-supporting-parents-to-meet-the-challenges-of-parenting-children-who-have-been-traumatised-within-their-early-parenting-environments/CBC0372DD4B624050FC43CA7E5BA757B>
- This allows educators (and therapeutic parents) to accept the child whilst also setting the boundary – achieved by 'connecting' first and then ensuring there is relational repair following the correction. (illustrated in the video).
- Empathy is the super-power within the strategy: Brene Brown's short animation, essential viewing -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>
- Two hands are needed for discipline: one for boundaries, the other for nurture.

Video 5 – Dr. Bruce Perry's 3 Rs (helping children in crisis)

- The brain develops from the bottom up: brainstem first, then limbic system, then cortex (thinking brain).
- To stabilise distressed children in a biologically respectful way, we need to attend to every region in the right order – from the bottom up.
- Sensory data from the world first enters the brainstem and is passed up into higher thinking part of the brain for integration.
- If sensory stimulus is experienced as threatening, a stress response is activated, shutting down or reducing access to the cortex.
- Highly sensitized/hyper-vigilant pupils are frequently activated by what may appear inconsequential stimuli.

- If they are to settle to learn and to self-regulate, the 3 Rs of Regulate (the brainstem) Relate (the limbic system) Reason (the cortex) are needed. It isn't possible to regulate a distressed child by going straight to 'reason' – we must first 'get to the cortex'.
- Regulatory activities (first R) demonstrated on Dr. Karen Treisman's videos here. <http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/covid-anxiety-stress-resources-links/>
- Many resources available online through a search of 'grounding and regulating activities'. Each child is different and will take to a different approach, but repetition is needed for lasting therapeutic change. Worth introducing regulating activities into lessons as 'brain- breaks'. Good for all children.
- 'Repair' is the same as the connection step (video 4) – vulnerable children can't 'reason' outside the safety that relational 'connection' provides. This is about validating the child's feelings (as opposed to the behaviour).
- 'Reason' – this steps needs to respect the fact that the experience of trauma is the experience of utter powerlessness. Overtly 'power over' consequences can be re-traumatizing. Logical consequences generally most effective with vulnerable children – Ross Greene's Collaborative Problem Solving also recommended. <https://www.livesinthebalance.org/about-cps>