

Educational Psychology Overview Guide

Key adult

Key relationships can and do make a difference!

A key adult can support children with attachment difficulties to develop trusting relationships and act as a safe base or an 'Additional Attachment Figure' in school. These adults can provide for opportunities for adaptation and recovery for children in the context of consistent, 'good enough' relationships. The main role of a key adult will be to develop a relationship with the child, check in with them regularly and offer support during a crisis. Time should be set aside for the child to develop a relationship with a key adult, although the frequency and duration may depend on the needs of the individual and will likely differ from child to child. Key adult relationships may be especially significant during times of potential stress (for example during transition, unstructured times, residential trips, anniversaries or birthdays etc.).

It is recommended that a team of key adults is established around a child and that adults involved are offered support to manage the emotional demands of the role. It is important that key adults have time to reflection on the challenges the role entails.

The core ingredients of key adult care are:

Availability: *Being available – helping children and young people to trust.*

For example; providing nurture, being there physically and emotionally, holding the child in mind when apart.

Sensitivity: *Being sensitive – helping young people to manage feelings.*

For example; emotion coaching, being curious about behaviour, creating safe spaces.

Acceptance: *Building self-esteem.*

For example; holding unconditional positive regard, supporting achievements, celebrate identity.

Cooperation: *Helping a child / young person feel effective.*

For example; promoting choice, working together, celebrating successes, responding to signals for support.

Family/Setting membership: *Promoting a sense of belonging.*

For example; promote feelings of value within a group, provide their own space, make sense of their story.

For further information, please see Manchester's Inclusion toolkit: Section Two, pg 45-49.

Recommended reading

Bomber, L.M. (2018) Inside I'm hurting: practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools.