

Educational Psychology Overview Guide

PACE approach

PACE: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (Hughes, 2011)

PACE is an open and engaged approach for children who have experienced trauma, designed to promote safety, develop trust and enhance understanding and regulation of emotions. Key adults supporting children and young people should implement the PACE approach to offer support in a nurturing, yet firm and consistent environment. It is not a structured intervention, but a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe.

Adults should communicate the four elements of PACE together flexibly and not as a step-by-step process:

- **PLAYFULNESS** is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. An open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude (e.g. warm greetings, tone of voice, games, dancing)
- **ACCEPTANCE** is about active communication to the child that you accept their wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. Unconditionally accepting a child makes them feel secure, safe and loved (e.g. "I can see how you feel this is unfair, you wanted to play longer")
- **CURIOSITY** is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the child know that the adults understand. Without judgement, children become aware of their inner life (e.g. "I'm wondering if you are finding this work difficult and that's why you're asking to go for a walk more often this morning")
- **Empathy** lets the child feel the adult's compassion for them. This communicates that no matter how stressful the experience, the adult will stay with the child emotionally. The child will not be abandoned at a time the child needs them the most. (e.g. "You are SO upset about this right now. This is really tough!")

Using PACE helps adults to slow down their reactions, stay calm and tune into what the child is experiencing in the moment. It helps to gain a better understanding of what the child is feeling. In tricky moments it supports adults to stay emotionally regulated and guide the child through their heightened emotions, thoughts and behaviours. In turn, PACE helps children and young people to feel more connected to and understood by important adults in their life and ultimately, to slow down their own responses.

Children show you how they feel through their behaviour, often in ways that can be unhelpful to you and themselves. Once a child feels that you have connected with their level of emotion, they can stop showing you.

For further information, please see Manchester's Inclusion toolkit: Section Two, pg 46-48