



PACE | A
therapeutic
approach to
parenting
using Playfulness,
Acceptance, Curiosity
& Empathy

A guide to how we can build relationships with children through **emotional connection**

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to increase a sense of safety and trust in another person. It is a therapeutic approach drawing on **Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity** and **Empathy** and incorporates these concepts into how parents and professionals communicate with the children in their care who have difficulties regulating their emotions and behaviour.

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PACE places the relationship at the heart of parenting. The PACE approach focuses on helping to support interactions between an adult and a child and to **enable the child to learn how to better manage their emotions** and **develop healthier emotional relationships**.

Understanding **behaviour**

It is sometimes difficult to understand why a child is displaying challenging behaviour and therefore difficult to know how to confidently support them. We may try punishments or traditional parenting methods such as rewarding desirable behaviour.



Finding effective and supportive ways to emotionally connect with a child can help them feel safer to communicate what they are feeling and therefore increase trust within the relationship. By remaining open and engaged ourselves and alongside the attitude of PACE we become better able to maintain dialogue, demonstrate unconditional support and show genuine interest and empathy in the child's perceived worries.



Supporting both **parents** and **professionals**

Developed by Clinical Psychologist, Dr Dan Hughes, the PACE 'attitude' was originally introduced to help support children and young people who had experienced 'developmental trauma'. It provided a framework to allow these children to better understand and process their emotions, develop trusting relationships with their caregivers and begin to heal from their past trauma. PACE forms part of a wider therapy model known as DDP (Dyadic Developmental Practice)

PACE is now being used with great effect to support children of all ages and backgrounds, both at home and in schools who are struggling with managing their behaviour and emotions. We provide PACE training courses and workshops within our portfolio of services, which are tailored towards parents as well as those working with and supporting children in a professional capacity.

PACE combines **Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity & Empathy**

PACE incorporates four elements that facilitate communication between adults and children. We help to enable you as a parent or professional to:

- Explore how adopting a **playful** nature of speaking and listening can build trust in the relationship
- Become aware of and **accept** the inner life of another without trying to change it.
- Adopt a position of **curiosity** to try and understand their experience by showing a kind, genuine, enquiring mind without jumping to conclusions
- Communicate **empathy** to the child, conveying strength, love, commitment and confidence that together you can get through difficult times.



P IS FOR **PLAYFULNESS**

Some children find it harder to regulate their feelings than others - anger can become rage, fear can become terror, and sadness can become despair. **Playfulness** is about creating an **atmosphere of lightness** which can reassure the child that conflicts and separations are temporary and will never harm the strength of the relationship.

Adopting a playful stance is not about making jokes when a child is sad but about communicating to them that they are experienced positively. By being playful we are providing the child with an experience of **reciprocal enjoyment** within the relationship.

When used appropriately playfulness can also **diffuse a potentially difficult or tense situation**. Children will be less likely to respond with anger and defensiveness as there is no judgement or criticism involved when we are being playful.



Playfulness **creates a sense of hope** that things can change. If we can help the child discover their own emerging sense of humour, this can help them wonder a little more about their behaviours. When children laugh and giggle, they move from being defensive and withdrawn to becoming more **open, engaged** and **reflective**.



A IS FOR **ACCEPTANCE**

Acceptance in this context means to **become aware** of and understand the inner life of another **without trying to change it**. When children become dysregulated and exhibit aggressive verbal or physical behaviour what we perceive to be the reasons for this may be completely different to what the child is experiencing internally.



If we look behind angry behaviour we will not find a bad person, we will find a fearful, anxious child. If we can connect with that fear, we are connecting with our children on a level which builds trust and feelings of safety which allows any consequences to be accepted

We can **accept the child's inner world**, but **not accept their behaviour** - acceptance is about actively communicating to a child that we accept their wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and the perceptions that are behind their outward behaviour

We can be firm in placing limits on our children's behaviour but at the same time **accepting of the reasons for the behaviour** without judgment or criticism.

EXPLORING THE **FOUR ELEMENTS**



The hope for the child is that they are then able to **learn that while behaviour may be unacceptable** and requires limits, their **sense of self is not being criticised or rejected**. The child then comes to trust that conflict and discipline may relate to behaviour, but does not affect the fundamental relationship with the adult or the child's self-worth.



If we are able to accept, we are mindful that a child's inner life is not right or wrong it simply is.

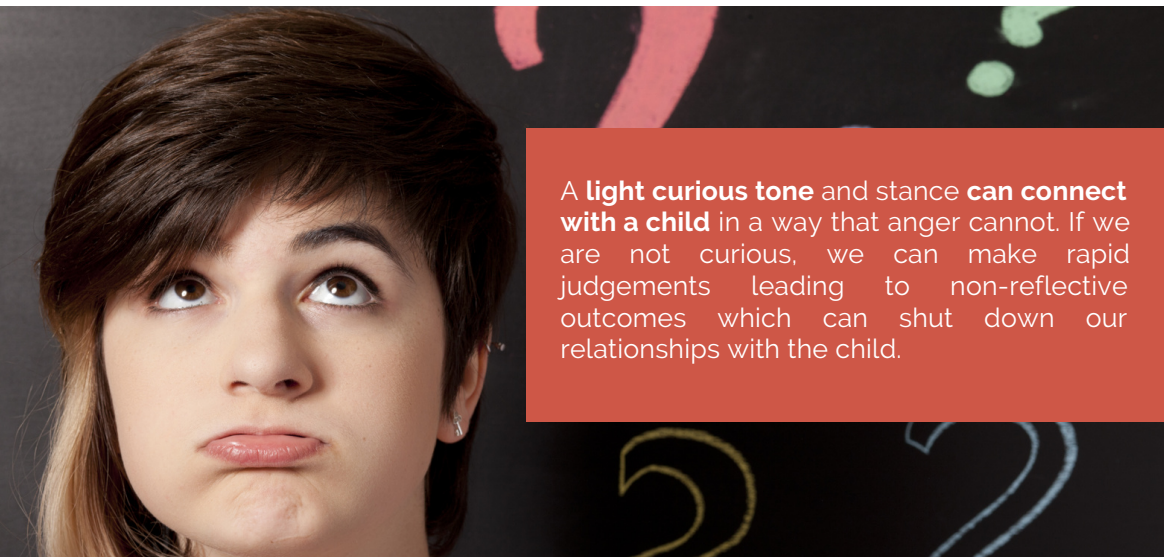
C IS FOR **CURIOSITY**

Curiosity supports our capacity to be able to accept. Children are usually aware when their behaviour is not appropriate, but they are often **unaware why they did it** or reluctant to say so. Curiosity is a tentative wondering with the child about their experience where the adult's intention is to **truly understand and express a desire to help the child**, and not to lecture or imply that the child's inner experience is wrong in some way. It is a search for alternative stories about events, conversations and actions without making judgement.



EXPLORING THE **FOUR ELEMENTS**

It is **not a fact-gathering exercise** or about trying to interpret or read between the lines, it is merely about **getting to know the child** and their interpretation and understanding what led them to behave the way they did.



A **light curious tone** and stance **can connect with a child** in a way that anger cannot. If we are not curious, we can make rapid judgements leading to non-reflective outcomes which can shut down our relationships with the child.

If we can **be curious with our children** they can then start to develop the skills to **reflect upon their own inner life** with us and begin to understand themselves. As the understanding deepens, the **child can discover that their behaviour does not reflect something innately bad inside them**, but rather a thought, feeling, perception, or motive that was stressful, frightening, or confusing and could only be expressed through their behaviour.

The child's feelings about their behaviour may change, with less defensiveness and shame but more towards guilt (and so a desire to make amends) leading to **less of the undesirable behaviour**.



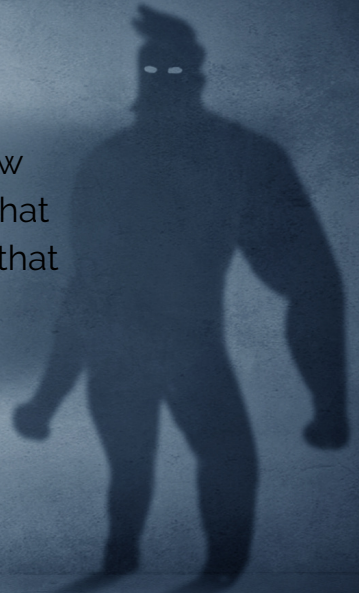
E IS FOR **EMPATHY**

Once we have a **clear understanding of a child's experience**, we are more open to feeling **empathy**. Empathy is the ability to feel with someone. It allows the child to feel the adult's compassion. Being empathic means the adult is demonstrating that they **understand how difficult the experience is** for the child, that their inner life is important to them and that they are there for them during times of sadness or distress.

Empathy shows the child that the adult is feeling the sadness and distress with them. The adult remains emotionally available to the child, **providing comfort and support**. They are also communicating strength, love and commitment with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much and that **together they will get through it**,



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Adopting a PACE approach has been proven to:

- help children **feel more secure** with the adult and enable them to **reflect upon themselves** through their thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- build a **foundation of trust** between the child and adult so that when boundaries and consequences are required, the child knows that the adult has their best interests at heart
- help the child build the skills that are necessary for the development and maintenance of **emotional intelligence** and regulation and ultimately **greater resilience**
- enable the child to discover that they are doing the best that they can, and are **not innately "bad"**, "lazy" or "selfish"
- help adults to support the child, **reduce levels of defensiveness** and conflict that may ordinarily be a barrier to healthy relationships
- enable the adult to **see the strengths** and **positives** that lie underneath negative and challenging behaviour
- support **effective discipline** and can be viewed through the concept of **two hands of parenting**, which combines emotional connection and nurture, with boundaries and discipline. 'connection alongside correction' which underpins the concept.

What are the **two hands of parenting**?

Hand one, provides warmth and encouragement; it gives a child the appropriate autonomy matched to their developmental age.

Hand two, provides structure and boundaries; it draws on your capacity to be mind-minded so that you can adopt the attitude of PACE.



OUR TEAM & SERVICES



How we deliver our PACE training

All our training is delivered **face to face nationally** and **online**: We offer 1 and 2 day packages in this highly effective approach. Suitable for birth and adoptive parents, foster carers and social workers, professionals in education and therapists. We also offer half day tasters which provide an overview of the approach.

“ A brilliant day of training. Teaching was easy to understand and delivered in a humorous yet empathic way, thoroughly enjoyed it thank you

Sarah, Birmingham



Our team

We're approved by **DDP Connects UK** as official PACE trainers and have extensive **experience both in the NHS and privately** and understand that clients and their families need to feel supported in a comfortable environment. We pride ourselves on our ability to connect with young people - we are creative and nurturing in our approach and form trusting relationships with our clients as well as working closely with families to ensure everyone involved works towards what's most important.

Contacting us



Dr Kate Mason

DR KATE MASON BSC (HONS) PSYCHOLOGY
DCLIN.PSY., CHARTERED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
REGISTERED PRACTITIONER WITH HCPC

t: 07522 558835 e: kate@rootspychologygroup.co.uk



Dr Ann Laight

DR ANN LAIGHT BSC (HONS) PSYCHOLOGY
DCLIN.PSY., CHARTERED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
REGISTERED PRACTITIONER WITH HCPC

t: 07552 029358 e: ann@rootspychologygroup.co.uk

ABOUT **ROOTS PSYCHOLOGY** GROUP

Emotional distress is an inevitable part of life. Our aim is to help children, young people and their families strengthen their roots to feel safe, grounded and supported so that they may grow wings to fly with confidence, strength and resilience.

We work closely with our clients to create bespoke ongoing support programmes. These can be focused on topics such as self-harm, depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, and can be delivered as twilight sessions for teachers and parents, as well as drop-in sessions for students and mental health & resilience workshops as part of PSHE.

We also offer general support for parents and teaching staff directly caring for young people as well as consultation via phone or in person if you are concerned about a child in your care. We offer a free one-hour consultation to schools to discuss your needs and create a package tailored to you.

CONNECTING **ONLINE**



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