

# PEP toolkit: adult relationships

Virtual  
School



Hampshire Virtual School

# Insecure relationships with adults at school

## Indicators suggestive of insecure adult relationships at school:

- denying the need for support from the adults
- sensitive to the proximity of the adults (either wanting them close by or watching them from a distance)
- always needing consistency from adults (change in adults is very unsettling)
- showing hostility to adult-directed tasks
- constant need for adult attention or avoidance of adult relationships, such as ignoring them (or a mixture of both)
- dependency on adults (attachment/connection-seeking behaviours)
- difficulty trusting adults
- control/power-seeking behaviours with adults (task refusal)
- regressive behaviours (baby talk to adults)
- resentment/jealousy when adult approval or attention is given to other children
- more importance placed on objects rather than on adult relationships



# Creating positive attachments

**Long-haul relationships:** the emotional availability and consistency of significant adults in the school environment is important. Support should not fall to one person alone. A core group of adults that the child regularly interacts with or can seek out when feeling anxious would be beneficial.

**To feel attended to:** children with insecure attachments are unlikely to feel as if adults have them or their needs in mind unless they have direct contact. The regular check-in approach is useful at key times in the day. Some children/YP would benefit from transition objects with their key adults at school

**Language:** adults need to be familiar with PACE approaches, empathic commentary and emotional coaching: [About DDP - DDP Network Emotion Coaching - United Kingdom \(emotioncoachinguk.com\)](http://emotioncoachinguk.com)



# Creating positive attachments – pace approaches

Avoid sanction-driven approaches based on rewards and punishments and use more relational approaches to behaviour management.

**Playfulness:** sharing positive emotions, using appropriate humour, reducing authority and promoting a sense of connection by showing an interest and defusing stressful demands with play and humour.

**Acceptance:** showing the child that you understand their difficulties and to safely explore and communicate their experiences, such as “I can hear you are angry about doing the ... but when we finish, we can do ...”

**Curiosity:** exploring the child’s inner thoughts and feelings without judgement to understand the reasons as to why they feel the way they do, such as “I’m wondering if you’re finding this work difficult.”

**Empathy:** to connect with the child’s emotional perspective by acknowledging and validating their feelings, such as “you were so excited to have another turn – it’s unfair that we ran out of time.”



# Creating positive attachments at school

## Projection

Children who have experienced significant trauma and broken attachment with key adults are often hypervigilant around adults as potential sources of threat, which also includes vulnerability, which is frightening to them. However, they are skilled at highlighting any vulnerability.

For example, they may 'notice aloud' your laddered tights, scuffed shoes, and other aspects of yourself that you feel vulnerable about. These can be quite personal. However, the child may still comment on them. In doing this, the pupil is trying to get rid (unconsciously) of their own intense emotions, insecurities or feelings of shame. This is called projection.

**When presented with this challenging behaviour, the pupil needs you to react calmly and in a measured way, not with heat and emotion: [home \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://www.beaconhouse.org.uk)**



# Creating positive attachments – Six Rs by Professor Bruce Perry

**Relationships:** all relationships need to be based on trust, safety, empathy, attunement and predictability.

**Relevance:** activities need to be developmentally matched to a child's needs.

**Repetitive:** opportunities to experience new things over and over to grasp and thus form new neural pathways.

**Rewarding:** fun, enjoyable, lowering levels of stress and the promotion of mastery.

**Rhythmic:** strong, simple rhythms that are soothing to the limbic system.

**Respectful:** to the child and their experiences.



# Creating positive attachments: restoration and reparation

## **Gather all perspectives:**

1. Gain a calm and objective description of the problem including the child's voice.
2. Focus on the opportunities for reparation.
3. Spend time identifying the problem before embarking on the intervention.

**One-to-one meetings:** this is not about apportioning blame. It should be a statement of the problem backed up with observations and school/classroom policy references. Ensure the meeting is away from peer pressure. Keep a record of the comments made.

**Informal meetings:** not part of formal lessons (a brief but well-directed positive exchange can greatly contribute to relationship building) – teachers also need to ask the young person what they can do differently to help.

**Break and lunchtimes:** not to be set up as a “come and see me at break” – try the less formal, impromptu approach

**Key resource:** [Building a Trauma-Informed Restorative School: Skills and Approaches by Jo Brummer](#)

