

Playfulness, **A**cceptance, **C**uriosity, **E**mpathy

(In this document he/she is used interchangeably to demonstrate its relevance to either gender)

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe. It is based upon how parents connect with their very young infants. As with young toddlers, feeling safe allows the child to begin to explore. Remember that challenging behaviour from these pupils has its origins in stress, anxiety and fear. With PACE, the troubled child can start to look at himself and let others start to see him, or get closer emotionally - he can start to trust some of those around him.

Playfulness

This is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice, like you might use when storytelling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone. It's about having fun, and expressing a sense of joy.

Having a playful attitude isn't about being funny all the time or making jokes when a child is sad. It's about helping children be more open to and experience what is positive in their life, one step at a time.

Sometimes a troubled child has given up on the idea of having good times and doesn't want to experience and share fun or enjoyment. Some children don't like affection or reject hugs. A playful approach can allow closeness but without the scary parts.

When children find it hard to regulate their feelings, anger becomes rage, fear becomes terror, and sadness becomes despair. If this is the case, then children may also find it hard to regulate positive feelings such as excitement, joy and love. Feeling these emotions can sometimes turn to anxiety but playfulness allows children to cope with positive feelings. It also gives hope.

If you can help the child discover his own emerging sense of humour, this can help him wonder a little more about his life and how come he behaves in the ways that he does. When children laugh and giggle, they become less defensive or withdrawn and more reflective.

A playful attitude adds elements of fun and enjoyment in day-to-day life and can also diffuse a difficult or tense situation. The child is less likely to respond with anger and defensiveness when the adult has a touch of playfulness in his or her discipline. While such a response would not be appropriate at the time of major misbehaviour, when applied to minor behaviours, playfulness can help keep it all in perspective. Our objective is to keep the big emotions under control by being aware of the child and keeping emotions as regulated (not suppressed) as possible.

Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance is at the core of the child's sense of safety.

Acceptance is about actively communicating to the child that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, her inner life. The child's inner life simply exists; it is not right or wrong.

Accepting the child's intentions does not imply accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. The adult may be very firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour.

One hopes that the child learns that while behaviour may be criticised and limited, this is not the same as criticising the child's self. For children with adverse early childhood experiences it can be *very* difficult to separate self from behaviour. If successful however the child may become more confident that conflict and discipline relates to behaviour and does not affect her relationships or self-worth.

Curiosity

This might also be expressed as "Learn the Child". Take time to enter their world to better understand their motivation. Our curiosity at first may be focused on their likes, dislikes, activities out of school, observing new shoes or a new hairstyle. We are trying to get the child to see that we appreciate them as a person rather than a problem and thereby promote a positive relationship.

The curiosity we are seeking is to speculate out loud to help children become more aware of their inner life.

Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Expressed curiosity lets the child know

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that the adults understand. **But it must be curiosity without judgment.**

Children often know that their behavior was inappropriate. They often do not know why they did it or, if they do know, are reluctant to tell adults why for fear of being judged.

Without a **VERY** strong relationship **NEVER** ask “**Why** did you?” – it is likely that the child does not know (lacking cause and effect thinking) or will possibly lie to try to maintain the relationship.

With curiosity the adults are conveying their intention to simply understand why and to help the child with understanding. The adult’s intentions are to truly understand and help the child, not to lecture or convey that the child’s inner life is wrong in some way.

Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child: “I wonder what...?”, “I think perhaps ?” This is said without anticipating an answer or response from a child. This is quite different from asking the child, “Why did you do that?” with the expectation of a reply.

It is not interpretation or fact gathering. It’s just about getting to know the child and letting her know that.

Curiosity must be communicated without annoyance about the behaviour. Being curious can, for example, include an attitude of being sad rather than angry when the child makes a mistake. A light curious tone and stance can get through to a child in a way that anger cannot. Remember the power of body language.

You might make guesses about what a child may be thinking and feeling, saying this aloud, and keeping it connected to the present. It can be about having a conversation, almost with yourself, with the child in the room, without anticipating a response.

If an adult can stay curious about why the child is behaving as they are, the child *and* adult are less likely to feel cross or frustrated. As curiosity is non-judgemental, this can help the child to be open to how she, and other people, are thinking and feeling. Curiosity lets the child stay open and engaged in conversations.

Children then start to reflect upon their own inner life with the adult and start to understand themselves. As the understanding deepens, the child can discover that her behaviour does not reflect something bad inside her, but rather a thought, feeling, perception, or motive that was stressful, frightening, or confusing and could only be expressed through her behaviour. As the child communicates this to the adults, the need for the behaviour may reduce, and with that the behaviour itself.

Empathy

Empathy lets the child feel the adult’s compassion for her. Being empathic means the adult actively showing the child that the child’s inner life is important to the adult and he or she is readily available to the child in her hard times.

With empathy, when the child is sad or in distress the adult is feeling the sadness and distress with her and lets the child know that.

The adult is demonstrating that he or she knows how difficult an experience is for the child. The adult is telling the child that she will not have to deal with the distress alone.

The adult will stay with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support, and will not abandon her when she needs the adult the most.

The mantra here could be “Name it to tame it” by identifying the emotion for the child and validating it.

“I think you could be feeling quite angry because Tom broke your model. I would be angry too. Especially if I had worked as hard as you did to make it”.

“I don’t want anyone to get hit though so let’s take a walk to our special place to help get over it. I will make sure that Tom is dealt with.”

“I would like to help you rebuild the model if you would let me.”