

Student Wellbeing: The Thrive Approach

The Thrive Approach originates from the UK and was devised by a multi-agency team that have been working with staff in education and care settings since 1994.



What is the Thrive Approach?

The Thrive Approach is a developmental approach designed to meet the social and emotional developmental needs of all children and young people. It is informed by established findings in neuroscience; child development theory; attachment theory and research into the importance of play and creativity.

The program helps to support all children in line with age-related expectations, by equipping them to cope more effectively with the challenges they face, so that they can recover from difficulties rather than becoming overwhelmed. It also provides a way of identifying those children who are most vulnerable to stress, and offers practical strategies for working with them in a targeted way to help them cope better.

The model gives educators a framework for understanding what healthy child development looks like in terms of behaviour and learning, and clarifies what the role of adults should be in facilitating a child's development at each of the different phases.

One of the components of The Thrive Approach, is the use of PACE to support children's behaviour.

What is PACE?

Whatever our start in life, healthy relationships and the experience of secure attachments help us to develop a healthy stress-regulation system, which in turn provides us with the emotional resilience that we need to be open to life and learning, and to fulfil our potential.

Parents, carers and teachers can help to provide children with secure attachment experiences.

The key to this is creating a warm and caring connection, based on authenticity and presence. Psychologist Dan Hughes has identified four key components i.e. being playful, accepting, curious, and empathic (PACE).

It can sometimes feel difficult to maintain an attitude of PACE when a child starts behaving in an unacceptable way because it can feel like we are condoning their behaviour.

However, it is at these moments that it is even more important to demonstrate PACE.

It is helpful in your response to the child, to separate them from their behaviour. In other words, make clear to the child that while their behaviour is unacceptable, you continue to care about them and are committed to maintaining the relationship with them.

If you are able to maintain the PACE attitude during your interactions, the child will feel that you are genuinely interested in them and can see and appreciate them for who they are.

This is essential if the child is to develop a secure attachment to you and, through this, do the emotional learning necessary to re-shape their stress-regulation system and develop emotional resilience.

We can think of PACE as 'how to be' with children.

PLAYFULNESS

Is about using a light tone in your voice, like you would when reading a story to a child (story-telling voice).

Is about having fun and being playful when it feels right.

Is about expressing pleasure, joy, hope and fun.

Is NOT about being funny or making jokes all the time.

ACCEPTANCE

Is about accepting the child's inner experience, including their, wishes, feelings, thoughts, needs, and motivations.

Is NOT about accepting harmful behaviour. Boundaries around behaviour are still very important and safety should always be prioritised.

Their behaviours are often what you see on the surface (tip of the iceberg).

Their thoughts, feelings, wishes, motivations, needs are often the underlying reasons for behaviour (beneath the surface).

CURIOSITY

Is wondering about the reasons behind the behaviour, which often leads to a better understanding.

What do you think their behaviour was about?

What do you think is going on for them?

WONDER ALOUD – “I’ve noticed you seem a little frustrated today; I’m wondering if there’s something about this work that’s bothering you.”

AND IF WE GET IT WRONG, THAT’S OKAY TOO – “I think I got it wrong earlier. Would you help me to understand what’s going on for you?”

Is NOT about being judgemental, anticipating a response or directly asking, “Why did you ...?”

EMPATHY –

Is about actively showing that you understand, have compassion for your child’s experience.

Is about standing in their shoes.

Is staying with them throughout their emotional experience.

Drives connection ... “Thank you for telling me how you’re feeling. I know it can be hard to talk about how we feel sometimes.”

Adriana Dickinson (AP: Wellbeing Co-ordinator)

Sue Houghten (Thrive Practitioner)