# Education Endowment Foundation 'Improving Behaviour in Schools' (2021)

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Although behaviourist approaches can work for the majority of children & young people (CYP), they are not successful with all. This is especially true for those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – traumatic life experiences that occur before the age of 18.

For CYP who have experienced trauma and loss, including vulnerable groups such as children in care (CiC), children with a social worker, and children previously looked after (PLAC), behaviourist approaches often serve to re-traumatise them and do not teach them how to express their emotions in a more appropriate manner.

This guide links the recommendations by the EEF to improve behaviour in schools with theory and research about children who have experienced trauma. Settings can then use the theory along with the strategies from the EEF and the voice of our CYP, to tailor behaviour strategies accordingly to meet the needs of this cohort of children.

Virtual School Kent

Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk

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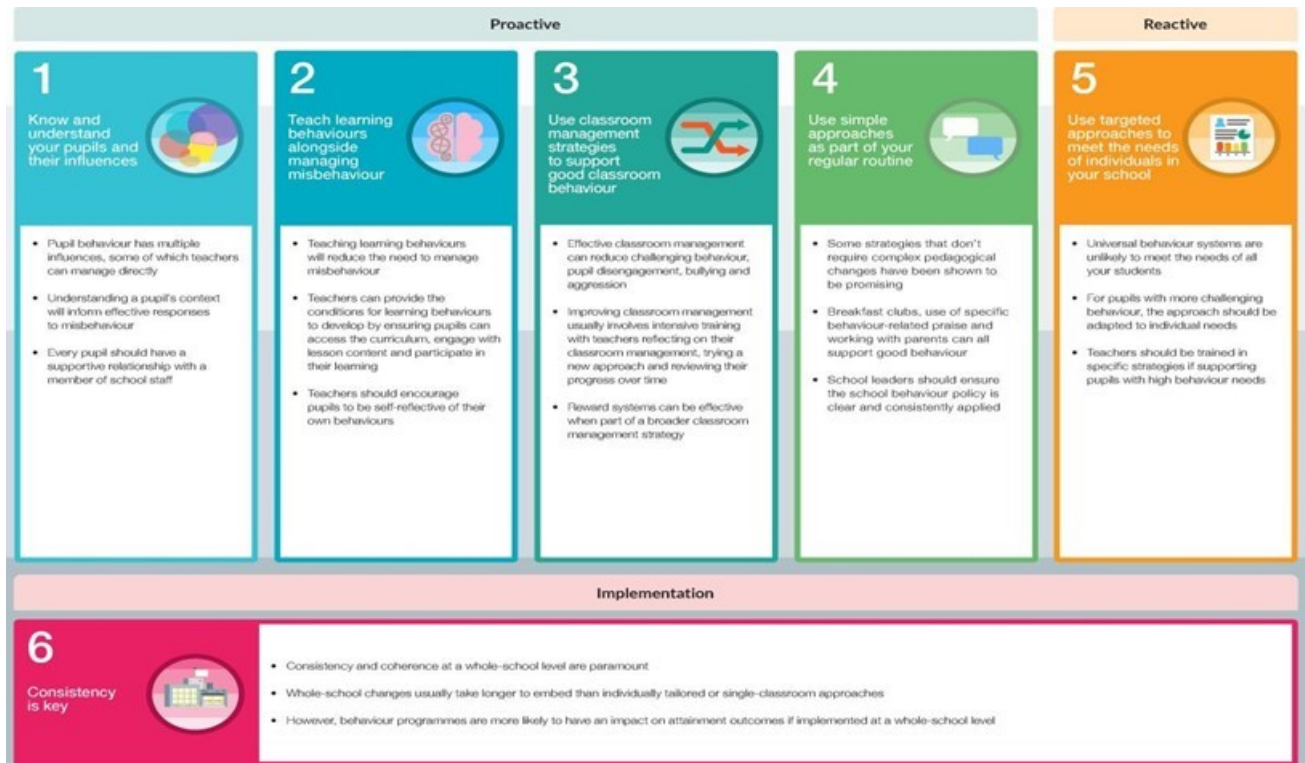
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Know and understand your pupils and their influences

- Pupil behaviour has multiple influences, some of which teachers can manage directly
- Understanding a pupil's context will inform effective responses to misbehaviour
- Every pupil should have a supportive relationship with a member of school staff

Theory:

Adverse Childhood Experiences:

Negative experiences that might influence behaviour. There is a growing body of research identifying the harmful effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the rest of a person's life.

ACEs are significant stressful events occurring during childhood or adolescence and can be direct, such as the child suffering abuse or neglect, or indirect, such as the parent suffering mental illness or addiction. The research suggests that ACEs have a strong link with chronic diseases plus social and emotional issues.

This research and terminology is becoming more prevalent in schools, some beginning to use ACEs as a framework to understand pupils. Knowing about trauma a pupil has experienced / experiencing can inform support a school provides.

Some children develop attachment difficulties (see Beacon House) and can swing between the 'Avoidant Strategy' and 'Pre-occupied Strategy', depending on what works in that environment. Although this appears disorganised, it is highly adaptive. It explains why so often the school sees one part of the child & parents/carers see another part, which can be very confusing .

The Kent Adoptables feedback around 'supportive adults' identifies that: *"Feelings about school/college staff was mixed – a few young people had key trusted adults at school or college but not all. Three people rely on themselves rather than adults in their lives."*

Strategies:

◊ Identify a key figure in school who will be responsible for communicating with parents and colleagues. This could be funded through HNF or PP+. Appointing a member of staff to act as a key contact can help the child to feel valued; greeting the child on arrival, being available when times are hard for the child, giving the child special tasks of responsibility, making positive comments.

◊ Adoptive parents have noted how it is vital for their child to see interaction between school and home, to reduce misunderstandings and encourage comprehension of shared values. This joint working provides continuity and stability for the child. EPPLAC meetings (Education Plan for Previously Looked After Children) / regular meetings for ChSW are good practice for schools and parents to identify support for the child.

Education Plan for Previously Looked After Children:Virtual School Kent (lea.kent.sch.uk)

◊ Encourage training for staff around the impact of ACEs and trauma and attachment on children's behaviour.

◊ Seeing the behaviour as an expression of the child's need rather than an issue itself. Separate the behaviour from the child and see it is an entity to work on together.

Further Resources:

Attachment Aware in Schools - Attachment Aware in Schools - YouTube

Bomber, L. (20060 Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in School.

Bretherton, I. (1992) 'The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth', Developmental Psychology 28 (5) pp. 759–775.

Developmental-Trauma-Close-Up-Revised-Jan-2020.pdf (beaconhouse.org.uk)

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Teach learning behaviours alongside managing misbehaviour

- Teaching learning behaviours will reduce the need to manage misbehaviour
- Teachers can provide the conditions for learning behaviours to develop by ensuring pupils can access the curriculum, engage with lesson content and participate in their learning
- Teachers should encourage pupils to be self-reflective of their own behaviours

Theory:

Learning behaviour can be thought of as a behaviour that is necessary for a person to learn effectively in the group setting of the classroom (Ellis and Todd, 2018).

Risk moments include transition within and between schools or changes in home circumstances. Low literacy or numeracy levels can also impede effective learning behaviours.

Lack of self-regulation (the inability to control impulses, change their behaviour if needed and soothe their own emotions). We learn self-regulation very early in life through being co-regulated by our parents. When a child hasn't experienced this from their parents or carers the ability to self-regulate isn't there. In the classroom you see them acting impulsively with others, seem to have no control over their emotions, they can dysregulate very quickly and then it takes a long time to bring them down.

Strategies:

- consider undertaking a Boxall Profile to understand the child's SEMH needs.

- implement a Nurture provision

Emotional:

- establish Emotion Coaching

- sessions to promote the understanding of emotions – visual faces, social stories, the Colour Monster, Zones of Regulation.

- Nurture groups for self-esteem

- Praise pupils' effort, not just result.

Social:

- implement social groups which focus on self-reflection

- develop empathy through stories and reflection

- encourage collaborative learning

Cognitive:

- Set high expectations which include the child's wishes, involving the child to build self-esteem (Adams et al., 2017)

- Small group tuition based on the child's academic need.

- Manage transitions by providing clear routines / timetables.

- Teachers explain their thinking when solving a task, promoting & developing metacognitive talk.

Further Resources:

Adams et al., (2017) *Experiences of Education, Health and Care plans: A Survey of Parents and Young People.* London: Department for Education.

Emotional Coaching Methods - SEMH   Effective Transitions, Classroom Management – TeamTom Education

What is a nurture group? | nurtureuk   Boxall (boxallprofile.org)

Ellis, S. and Tod, J. (2018) Behaviour for Learning: Promoting Positive Relationships in the Classroom', Routledge.

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3 Use classroom management strategies to support good classroom behaviour

- Effective classroom management can reduce challenging behaviour, pupil disengagement, bullying and aggression

- Improving classroom management usually involves intensive training with teachers reflecting on their classroom management, trying a new approach and reviewing their progress over time

- Reward systems can be effective when part of a broader classroom management strategy

Theory:

For disengagement:

There is a higher prevalence of sensory processing difficulties among children who are adopted, looked after or have experienced ACEs. Sensory refers to the way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate motor and behavioural responses. A child that struggles with sensory processing will often find it difficult to process and act upon information received through the senses.

Bullying:

A lack of empathy (they really do not understand how it feels for others, show an inability to take responsibility for their actions). Empathy is something that starts to develop early in life through mirroring with our parents. If babies haven't had that relationship where they work together with parents to understand that they have an impact on the world and that there is something outside of themselves – then they do not develop empathy

Reward systems:

Strategies such as reward and sticker charts that aim to reward or penalise can just add pressure and increase feelings of shame and failure.

Children who have experienced trauma often lack cause-and-effect thinking. So, they make the same mistakes over and over. Reward systems require the child to have cause-and-effect thinking in order to be effective.

Strategies:

If sensory processing difficulties are suspected, it may be beneficial to involve the assistance of an Occupational Therapist (OT). Classroom strategies might include:
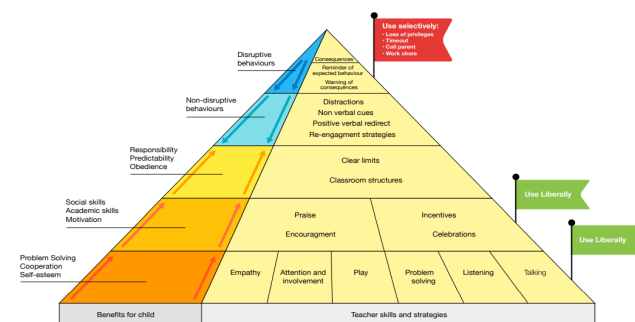
Fiddle toys   Sensory breaks

Need for calm spaces   Physical Activity

Bullying policy:

Restorative justice. Active listening, Restorative questions, Behaviour as communication.

Team teaching, peer observation and reflection to keep behaviour management consistent throughout school.

Rather than rewards, focus on increasing self-esteem & resilience in the child through comments on their effort, behaviour, learning and outcomes. Supporting them to develop cause and effect thinking – i.e. tell them what they need to do to reverse the sanction.

Further Resources:

What is restorative practice? (anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

How to Improve a Student's Self-Esteem (thoughtco.com)

Dweck, C. *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*. Routledge, 2016.

Sensory Processing and Trauma Nottinghamshire County Council (adoptioneastmidlands.org.uk)

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Use simple approaches as part of your regular routine

- Some strategies that don't require complex pedagogical changes have been shown to be promising

- Breakfast clubs, use of specific behaviour-related praise and working with parents can all support good behaviour

- School leaders should ensure the school behaviour policy is clear and consistently applied

Theory:

Behaviour is a form of communication.

The change in terminology in the 2014 Code of Practice of Special Educational Needs (SEN) replaces the Behaviour and Emotional, Social Difficulties (BESD) with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties – helps to promote a shift towards viewing the behaviour as a communication of an emotional need (conscious or unconscious) and responding accordingly.

Natural rewards as well as consequences that can follow certain behaviours should be made explicit, without the need to enforce 'sanctions' that can shame and ostracise.

Children who have suffered early trauma often live with a deep sense of being 'bad' and 'unwanted', this becomes their template for how they see themselves, and how they think others see them.

SIGNS OF POOR SELF CONCEPT & IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AT SCHOOL

- Being knocked back easily
- Becoming upset at failure
- Self doubt and self criticism
- Not trying for fear of failure

Research suggests that when schools place a strong emphasis upon the emotional health and well-being of all members of the school community, and this ethos is driven by the school's SLT and evident in practice, this leads to better outcomes for all – e.g. staff retention, pupil attendance & attainment, positive home-school relationships (Banerjee, R., Weare, K., & Farr, W. (2014). This promotes the idea

Further Resources:

The Inclusive Classroom – A New Approach to differentiation. Daniel Sobel and Sara Alston.

Behaviour Regulation Policy Guidance - Sep 18_1.pdf (brighton-hove.gov.uk)

Strategies:

It is expected that schools will carefully look at their current behaviour policies, processes and practice, and review as to whether these are consistent with the Attachment Aware Approach, as seen in Brighton & Hove's policy below.

Develop a Behaviour policy which includes the needs of all pupils, including those with adverse childhood experiences and many of the following:

* Not using punishments for misbehaviour or any element of shaming or singling out

* Do not carry over punishments or sanctions to a following day. Start each day as a new start

* Use PP for breakfast clubs

* greeting each student positively at the door

* giving specific behaviour-related praise throughout lessons

* Use emotion coaching techniques to develop understanding and language

* using simple approaches to improve teacher– student relationships, develop trust and hold them 'in mind'

* using checklists to ensure behaviour policies and school procedures are embedded with rigour

* Include the views of children in behaviour policies.

Why we don't enjoy school: *"Very strict teachers /rules that don't allow them to make mistakes; give them space/time to cool down or change their behaviour before being told off or receiving a punishment"* (The Adoptables – VSK feedback)

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Use targeted approaches to meet the needs of individuals in your school

- Universal behaviour systems are unlikely to meet the needs of all your students
- For pupils with more challenging behaviour, the approach should be adapted to individual needs
- Teachers should be trained in specific strategies if supporting pupils with high behaviour needs

Theory:

Hypervigilance (the inability to sit still, the need to fidget, turn around and watch others all the time). This comes as a result of a chaotic background where a child's brain has developed in such a way that their fight, flight, freeze mechanism is overdeveloped – hypersensitive. It's like they are on red alert looking out for potential danger. In the classroom they may be constantly watching the door, jumpy when there's an unexpected loud noise, distracted by the slightest thing around them, or just forever in their heads worrying about survival.

Pupils who have experienced ACEs might encounter such situations which may alert their primitive brain, certifying a need for safety and self-preservation, which disallows their limbic area (the emotional part) and then their cortical (thinking) brain to engage. When a traumatised child is feeling stressed, they may have a sensory flashback which means that they re-experience the same bodily feeling of immediate danger, with no way to make sense of it or communicating it verbally as the memory has no language 'attached' to it (Beacon House). This can mean that a child cannot be reasoned with, understand consequences or listen/learn as their primitive brain is keeping them safe.

Early intervention is imperative for addressing both active and passive behaviours, to ensure that low level features/ difficulties can be addressed early.

Strategies:

⇒ Undertake school training in trauma and attachment as well as in Special Educational Needs

⇒ The Adoptables Kent appreciate & encourage *"Staff that understand adoption and how it affects young people throughout their lives…A named member of staff you can go to with problems or issues… Training courses for teachers / young people around adoption."*

⇒ children setting their own targets to encourage ownership of the ntervention strategies (recommended by the DFE: Adams et al., 2017)

⇒ Team teaching with SEN support staff

⇒ Be consistent with home approaches & communicate with parents

⇒ Regular EPPLAC meetings (Education Plan for Previously Looked After Children) and for other cohorts which include the child's views

For hypervigilance:

∗ CYP may wish to sit near a door/back of the classroom or a window

∗ Ear defenders within reach can help when feeling overwhelmed

∗ Calm spaces within the classroom to move to

∗ Visual timetables and cues for the child to show their feelings

∗ A key adult who the child trusts and builds a relationship with

∗ Use of fidget toys/sensory toys/ sensory circuits or calm boxes

Further Resources:

KCA Training - KCA Trainingentry.lead

Adams et al., (2017) Experiences of Education, Health and Care Plans: a survey of parents and young people

The Trauma and Attachment Aware Classroom. A Practical Guide to Supporting Children Who Have Encountered Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences.

6 Consistency is key

- Consistency and coherence at a whole-school level are paramount
- Whole-school changes usually take longer to embed than individually tailored or single-classroom approaches
- However, behaviour programmes are more likely to have an impact on attainment outcomes if implemented at a whole-school level

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Theory:

Most interventions are helpful for all children, regardless of background or behaviour. For example, the use of visual timetables, timers or other learning aids are not detrimental to the learning of all young people and therefore can be used as a whole school approach and not necessarily just tailored to those children with SEND or children who have had ACEs.

Similarly, research consistently finds that home-school communication and consistency benefits:

School attendance

The development of relationships

Positive academic achievement

Enhance self-esteem

Berger (2000) and Kraft (2016)

The EEF provide a toolkit which finds that parental engagement adds on average 4 months progress yet is not always the case for disadvantaged pupils and is therefore an aspect for schools to focus on improving.

Strategies:

◊ Use interventions as a whole school approach to aid learning and concentration

◊ A whole school nurturing environment and ethos, inclusive of all CYP

◊ Support parents with visual timetables for a consistent message and include 'Ops moments' to support with sudden change of routines

◊ Create a positive community involving parents, school and children to ensure that they are all supporting each other to achieve the same goals

◊ Arrange regular EPPLAC or ChSW meetings to identify support for the child

◊ Access and signpost to supportive services such as Virtual School Kent, PIAS (Pupil Inclusion and Attendance Service), IASK (Information Advice and Support Kent) and KEPS (Kent Educational Psychology Service) who hold termly consultations with schools and social workers alongside VSK

◊ Being aware of inclusive curriculum content and delivery. The Kent Adoptables: a good teacher *"Is sensitive to me and my adoption e.g. thinks about the curriculum / syllabus and discussion topics…The PSHE curriculum talks about relationships that one person doesn't recognise or can't identify with, and no thought or support is put in place for this."*

Further Resources:

Berger, E. H. (2000). Parents as partners in education: Families and schools working together (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Kraft, M. A. (2016). The underutilized potential of teacher–parent communication. Communities & Banking, 27(2), 15–17

Parental engagement | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

What can you do?

* Make sure that the pupil's voice is heard. What they would like to see happen/change so that they can remain happy in school. Who are the staff members in school that they trust and feel are the ones that understand them and help them the most.

* If you need further advice please contact Virtual School Kent where I team can support you:
  Welcome to the Virtual School Kent Website:Virtual School Kent (lea.kent.sch.uk)

> **For additional resources to create a trauma and attachment aware behaviour policy, visit Resources (beaconhouse.org.uk)**
>
> **Beacon House is a team of professional, compassionate and highly experienced chartered psychologists, psychotherapists and occupational therapists. As a service they have a special interest in repairing the effects of trauma and attachment disruption.**

Whatever changes you face we are here to guide you
No matter what age, everyone is at a different stage
VSK can help you find your voice

How you behave tells us how you feel
VSK can be your safe space
Nurture helps you feel happy and healthy

A high-quality education is the foundation for improving life opportunities and fulfilling career aspirations. Virtual School Kent act as a local authority strategic leader in championing the educational attendance, attainment, wellbeing and progress of children with a social worker and within Kent education provisions; so that these young people can achieve their full potential.