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# A school's journey in creating a relational environment which supports attachment and emotional security

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Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

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### **A school’s journey in creating a relational environment which supports attachment and emotional security**

<b>Attachment style</b>	<b>Parenting behaviour</b>	<b>Child’s behaviour</b>
<i>Secure attachment</i>	Parent is readily available and attentive to child’s emotional and physical needs (Bowlby 1988)	Child feels confident around parent and seeks security from them when in distress
<i>Anxious ambivalent</i>	Parent’s behaviour would be characterised by patterns of availability, then non availability, leaving the child prone to anxiety, anxiousness and a tendency to be clingy (Bowlby 1988)	Child lacks confidence that their parent is readily available and responsive to them
<i>Anxious avoidant</i>	Child is constantly rejected and rebuffed by the parent	Child expects rejection and does not seek support tending to be emotionally self-sufficient (Bowlby 1998).
<i>A disorganised pattern of attachment</i> (an additional model of attachment created by Main and Solomon, 1993, to account for children that did not fit into Ainsworth’s classifications)	Parent’s behaviour is frightening, anxious or shows contradictory behaviour (Main and Solomon 1993).	Child would demonstrate contradictory behaviour patterns such as approaching the parent for safety whilst looking in the other direction (Main and Solomon 1993).

**Table 1 –Patterns of Attachment**

<b>Attachment style</b>	<b>Child’s behaviour in class</b>
<i>Anxious ambivalent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• separation anxiety, clingy behaviour and an uncertainty as to whether their needs will be met (Geddes 2006)</li> <li>• coercive behaviours or friendships that seem possessive (Golding et al. 2013)</li> <li>• a mix of being dependent and hostile to the teacher</li> <li>• difficulties with completing tasks as this interrupts their attempts at getting the teacher’s attention (Geddes 2006) and being in close proximity to their teacher</li> </ul>
<i>Anxious avoidant</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may struggle with relationships with others and may avoid this and become socially isolated (Erikson et al. 1982, cited by Geddes 2006)</li> <li>• can show indifference to others, show independence to the teacher and possible hostility to the teacher (Geddes 2006)</li> </ul>

<i>A disorganised pattern of attachment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child may exhibit high levels of anxiety and terror as they cannot achieve closeness to a secure base (Geddes 2005)</li> <li>• child may show behaviours which show mistrust of adults and high vigilance in order to protect them against the unpredictability of perceived dangers (Geddes 2005)</li> <li>• erratic outbursts of aggression, strong or overwhelming feelings and a lack of empathy for others (Geddes 2005)</li> <li>• child may try to control the activities of staff in order to create a sense of safety and avoid stressful events (Hughes 2009).</li> </ul>
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**Table 2 – Possible child’s classroom behaviours linked to their attachment style**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Participant</b>
Head Teacher	John
Intervention Team Leader/SENCo/ Designated Teacher	Emily
Previous Class Teacher - Year 1	Rachel
Previous Class Teacher - Year 2	Amy
Current Class Teacher - Year 3	Andrew
Current Teaching Assistant (TA)	Alison

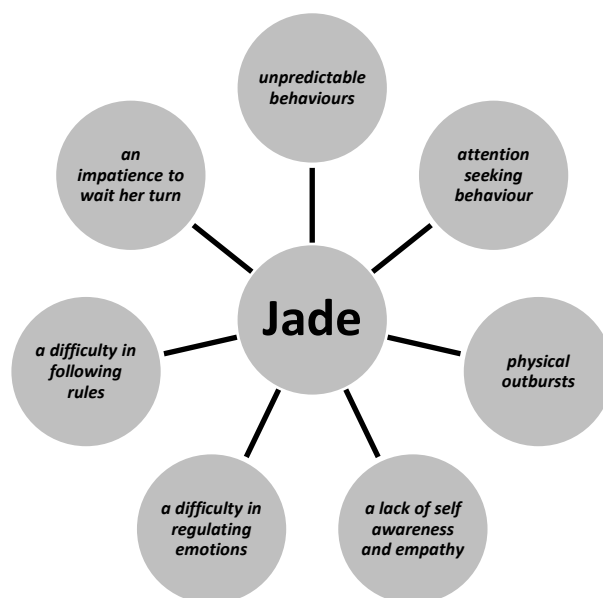
**Table 3 – Participant Table**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Further reading for parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Library – books on adoption and social story books for children</li> </ul>
<b>Education Plans for Adopted Children (EPAC) and Profiles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offered for every adopted child but not statutory</li> <li>• Similar format to Individual Educational Plan (IEP), a child may need an EPAC but not an IEP</li> <li>• Very useful as a transition document between classes, key stages or schools</li> </ul>
<b>Parent training workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapeutic approach to parenting techniques including PACE, attachment styles</li> </ul>
<b>Private consultation from Private Psychology Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All families offered 2 x 1 hour private consultation per child in their family (clinical psychologist and parents) as initial support</li> <li>• Further support provided as a bespoke package</li> </ul>
<b>Circle of Friends intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured weekly sessions for individual and friends exploring friendships, issues in peer relationships, time to talk/reflect and actively play games in a safe environment. Also builds emotional vocabulary.</li> </ul>
<b>2 x 2 hour weekly input with additional teacher</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:1 or small group of additional Maths or Literacy to close the gap</li> </ul>
<b>Meal Time Assistant daily support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For children who find it hard to access unstructured time, peer relationships and independent play.</li> </ul>
<b>Social stories, 1:1 or small group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared story (Bag of Worries/Bucket Filling).</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Literacy Support Assistant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bespoke programme can be developed e.g. puppet work, social stories, self-esteem work, anxiety support, feelings vocabulary etc.</li> </ul>

**Table 4 – Strategies used throughout the school to support children with attachment needs**

<b>Playfulness</b>	About 4-5 weeks into the term, when feeling pushed outside of her control, Jade would pull an extremely, threatening snarl at me, along with a snarling noise. One day, I just looked at Jade and said "wow, that's a really strange face, I'm going to practice tonight to see if I can do it", this threw Jade and I smiled, but she didn't know how to react. The next time I was given 'the face' I just giggled, and said "mine's better" and pulled a funny face resulting in a giggle and big smile from Jade. It took a couple times of doing this, but the snarl seems to be a thing of the past. Together we're learning to 'make fun' of some of the little things (Alison - TA)
<b>Acceptance and Curiosity</b>	For example, 'I can see you are finding this really hard', those words are really powerful to children, they look at you and you think, 'yes, they know, they know! Teachers know everything!' They tend to be a bit shocked when you say, 'I can see you are finding this really hard to be kind or finding it hard to keep your hands to yourself' or whatever it might be and they think, 'Yes, it is actually', (Rachel – Y1 Teacher)
<b>Empathy</b>	It is just about trying to empathise with the children ... My take on the PACE model is not, 'Why have you done this?' but, 'How can we stop this from happening again?', 'How can we put something in place to help you?' (Rachel – Y1 Teacher)

**Table 5 – Examples of the PACE approach**



**Figure 1 – Jade's typical behaviours at school**



**Figure 2 – Six main components of an attachment focused school**