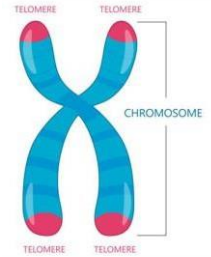


Trauma and its potential impact.

Whilst we are unashamedly academic, we have to give due consideration to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) and Developmental Trauma that many of our young people have experienced.

Research has found that prolonged, high levels of stress during childhood can potentially affect a person's health and well-being for life. Without a regulating, emotionally available adult to mitigate stress and ACE's early brain development can be interrupted, as well as compromising the way the nervous and immune systems function. ACEs have also been shown to damage telomeres (parts of chromosomes, which are responsible for DNA repair and overall health and length of life). Studies have shown that some children aged 5-10 who have high ACE's already show shortening telomeres.



ACE's - 97% of young people with no ACE's have no learning difficulties. ACE's are also directly linked to attendance concerns. (You may wish to view this clip <https://youtu.be/VMpIi-4CZKO>)

What are ACE's?

ACE's are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). Examples include:

- Experiencing violence, abuse or neglect.
- Witnessing violence in the family home or community.
- Bereavement of a family member or close friend.

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability and bonding. Examples can include growing up in a household with:

- Substance use problems.
- Mental health problems.
- Instability due to parental separation.
- Instability due to household members being in prison.
-

The examples are not a complete list of adverse experiences. Many other traumatic experiences could impact health and wellbeing. This can include, not having enough food to eat, experiencing homelessness or unstable housing, or experiencing discrimination.

STRESS and Trauma Responses

Three Types of Stress;

1. Positive: Elevated levels of cortisol and adrenalin, needed in the right contexts. Short lived and brief.
2. Tolerable: Elevated levels of cortisol and adrenalin, high and full on but tempered by supportive relationships.
3. Toxic: Elevated levels of cortisol and adrenalin for too long and too high. Stress response system not relieved through relationship.

Stress and Trauma responses

- Heightened emotional reactions in all and any of the RAGE, FEAR, PANIC/GRIEF, (Ref Panskepp, J.) systems
- Minor stressors become major emergencies. Lack of tolerance for self or others.
- Agitation.
- Aggression.
- Over Adaptation.
- Doing nothing.
- Incapacitation
- Disturbed activity in the brain stem, sleeping, eating, bodily needs.
- Depression.
- Lack of control of catastrophising or Intrusive thoughts.
- Social Defence versus Social Engagement.

COVID-19 REALITIES:

- Loss of control, no capacity to prevent changes.
- Loss of school as a safe place.
- Multiple losses.
- Who to trust?
- Enforced Isolation/ torture for some.
- Fear, Rage, Separation Distress (Call it this here as we are not referring to the genetically engrained circuits at this point but rather the emotional states.)
- Confusion, lack of certainty.
- Dysregulated adults.

3 or more ACE's without a buffering relationship = A young person with a potential of high need.

To expect a young person, who has suffered, or is continuing to suffer from trauma, to sit, listen to instruction, behave, and engage fully with the curriculum is somewhat naïve. Trauma impacts negatively on relationships, self-esteem, behaviour, and our capacity to remain thinking in the face of big feelings. Trauma replaces social engagement with social defence behaviours. (Ref Porges, S

Of course, as a Trauma Informed School, we have high expectations. However, we recognise that, for a period of time, a young person may not be able to be challenged academically as much as we'd like, and this is where our curricular flexibility and a Trauma Informed Approach comes into play

So what do we do as a school to help (reduce impact of ACE's)?

- **Structure** is important - **Routines** and preparing pupils for change (they should get better at accepting change over time, and we need to carefully push students out of their comfort zones in order to build resilience/we rely on our internal data and professional judgement to gauge when the time is right to begin this process).
- Containment through structure, through expectations, through boundaries and most importantly through strong, wise, kind relationships is vital.
- As adults we need to put **words to the experience** e.g. saying I know you are angry/I can see you are upset. While it is not okay to ..hurt..punch..spit.. it is okay to feel and I am going to help you do that safely. Often they won't be able to associate how they feel with the words, even to the extreme of not being able to associate a belly pain with hunger.
- **Facial expression is important** - your face says it all. Staff are happy to see the pupils, welcome them in the mornings, and are genuinely pleased to be in their company. We try to create an **environment** that is nurturing, stable and caring.
- Pupils need to establish a **key relationship** with one adult (teacher, tutor, TA etc) This will take some time and considerable patience as we will be let down by them on many occasions. However, once we are trusted (we may be the first adult they have ever trusted in their lives), the next step is to introduce another key adult. If so, your job with this person has in effect been a success. Trust one, then two - we are building resilience. Relationships are the key to health and ill health!
- **Rupture and repair** - It is actually good to say to a young person, actually I got that wrong and am sorry. They may have never had this in the past.
- **Safe touch** - (We have a policy around this). Positive touch (Touch) releases oxytocin (hormone) which plays a role in social bonding, but also helps to calm people down. This is also where the animal therapy helps.
- Neuroscience shows that scents and **smells** impact positively - Lavender really helps to calm people down, Lemon lifts learning
- **Music** is also a big help and along with storytelling is one of the few ways of lighting up and strengthening connections across the whole brain.
- Do activities that encourage **left-right movement** and left to right brain activity- card games, ball games etc.

- **Laugh** - Having fun with the pupils,
- or other staff members is vital in building safe relationships, altering Blocked-Care and Blocked-Trust, calming Fight, Flight, Freeze, building the bonds of attachment and strengthening the immune system
- **Play** - Many pupils have missed significant developmental play opportunities.
- Exhibit **unconditional positive regard** to the pupils.
- **Listen** to them (it is okay not to have the answers, and to say you can't imagine how that feels).
- Connecting with **nature** - beaches, moors, woods etc (our trips do help).
- Having **positive experiences**/visiting places of natural beauty etc.

Signs of safety - What we do to when a young person is in crisis:

1. Protect (may involve Team Teach) - to ensure the young person is safe
2. Regulate - help them to calm down
3. Relate to how they are feeling
4. Reflect and repair - When calm (reparatio

