Secure Base

The Secure Base model: promoting attachment awareness in schools

A TRAINING SESSION FOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Contents

Introduction

- This training session is designed to be presented in two hours, to include a ten minute break. The amount of material to be covered requires the trainer to maintain a fairly brisk pace.

- The training session introduces relevant ideas from attachment theory and the five dimensions of the Secure Base model for schools. Each dimension is explored in turn, with accompanying examples and three short group discussions.

- The final part of the session provides pointers to applying the whole model to the practice, policies and ethos of their school.

- This script should be used in conjunction with the PPT presentation, *The Secure Base model: a training day for high schools*, www.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources .

- When presenting, the trainer is expected to read the heading and text from the PowerPoints, and add additional information from the notes, as seems helpful/appropriate.

Preparation

- This training session can be presented in both mainstream and special schools. If it is presented in a special school which caters for children across both the primary and secondary age range, case examples drawn from staff and children in primary schools can be used as substitutes for some of those used in this programme. These can be found in the PPT presentation *The Secure Base model: a training day for primary schools*, www.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources.

- Further information on the Secure Base model can be found at www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase

Participants

- This session is suitable for ALL school staff members, including senior staff, teachers of all subjects, specialist teachers, teaching assistants, counsellors, administrative support staff, librarians, midday supervisors. Some schools may wish to include governors and others who have direct involvement with the school. There is no upper limit on the number of participants that can be included.

Advice for trainers

- Be alert to issues of: class, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, language, religion and sexuality.

- Respectfully challenge unhelpful assumptions and stereotypes.

- Confidentiality: state that all discussion will be treated as confidential.

Preliminaries

- Ensure that participants are comfortable and able to see and hear the trainer.

- Mention location of toilets and fire exits.

- Advise phones switched off or on silent.

FOR THIS SESSION YOU WILL NEED

- [ ] **A laptop and projector**

- [ ] **PowerPoint presentation**

  www.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources

- [ ] **Print out of PowerPoint Slides (optional)**

An introduction to the Secure Base model for schools

SLIDE 1: **The Secure Base model: promoting attachment awareness in schools**

SLIDE 2: **Aims of the session**

- To introduce key concepts in attachment theory

- To outline and explore the Secure Base model for schools

- To consider ways of applying the model in your school

Notes

- Outline the arrangements for timings and breaks.

- Explain that this session will provide enough information and discussion of the model to allow participants to take it forward and think about implementation in a range of ways within the school.

- Explain that the first slides introduce some important ideas from attachment theory (which underpins the Secure Base model). Then the model is introduced and its 5 key elements are explained and illustrated by quotes from children and staff members. The final part of the session focusses on ideas for ways in which the model might be implemented in the school setting.

- N.B. Explain that the session will touch on some sensitive areas of human experience – feelings associated with attachment, separation, trauma and loss. These things can be hard for all of us to think about, but for some participants, they could be particularly difficult.

- Advise the group that if anyone feels strongly affected at any point in the session, this is wholly understandable and they might wish to take a break.

SLIDE 3:   **What is the Secure Base model?**

- A framework for promoting secure base relationships between adults and children

- Drawn from theories of attachment and resilience

- Based in the day to day interactions between adults and children

- Strengths based

Notes

- The Secure Base model provides an attachment and resilience based framework for understanding and developing beneficial secure base adult/ child relationships.

- Attachment theory underlines the importance of warm, consistent, trusting relationships for children's development, mental health and sense of security. Resilience is the capacity to recover from past adversity but also to face future challenges positively. Research suggests that some key factors in building children's resilience are secure base relationships, positive educational opportunities and participation in hobbies and interests.

- Research suggests attachment awareness in schools can help improve behaviour and reduce exclusions.

- The model suggests that every adult/child interaction however small, has the potential to have an emotional and developmental benefit for the child.

- The Secure Base model provides a framework which will highlight much of the good practice that is already taking place in the school and also suggest new ideas. Three key benefits of this strengths based framework are:

  - It helps to apply attachment and resilience theory to the everyday life of the school

  - It identifies and affirms existing good practice

  - When good practice is identified, it can be further developed and built upon

- The Secure Base model has been developed since 2004 by Professor Gillian Schofield and Dr Mary Beek in the Centre for Research on Children and Families at the University of East Anglia, UK. It is used across the UK and internationally in diverse countries (e.g. Norway, Australia, China, Thailand and Ukraine).

SLIDE 4: **What is a secure base relationship?**

- A secure base relationship develops when parents and other responsible adults reduce a child's anxiety by responding to their needs consistently, sensitively, warmly and reliably

- When anxiety is reduced, the child feels secure and is able to explore, to think and to enjoy play and learning

- Attachment theory suggests that secure base relationships are first formed in infancy and support healthy development, including brain development

- But secure base relationships can be formed at any age

Notes

- Attachment theory and research describes how from birth an infant will seek proximity to adult caregivers in order to get their needs met and to survive. Attachment behaviours include crying, reaching out and smiling, moving on to approaching and seeking support verbally.

- If the caregiver responds consistently and meets the child's needs, from the early weeks the child will start to relax, trust, explore their environment and enjoy play. It is important to emphasise that the key benefit of secure base relationships across the lifespan is that they provide a secure base for EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT. It is not simply about receiving reliable comfort, although this is a good starting point.

- As the child develops, and IF the caregiving continues to provide a secure base, the child will become more confident and feel secure in the world of wider family relationships– and later relationships and activities with friends and at school.

- The quality of early relationships will have an important impact on all aspects of development, including brain development. BUT attachment security and insecurity are not fixed in infancy – secure children can become insecure and insecure children can become secure if the quality of caregiving changes. The brain is flexible especially in adolescence, and can adapt to changing caregiving environments.

Further information about attachment theory – for trainers and participants – is available on the Secure Base website www.ac.uk/providingasecurebase

SLIDE 5: **What does the secure child take into school?**

- The child who has experienced secure base relationships in the family learns:

  • I am loved and lovable

  • Adults can be trusted to be available for me

  • I can explore and return for help

- The secure child takes these positive expectations of self and others (their internal working model) into new relationships in nursery, school and other activities

- Others tend to respond more positively to a secure child who has positive expectations of self and others and is happy to play and learn

Notes

- The child's experiences become incorporated into what is called an 'internal working model', a set of beliefs and expectations about self and others.

- Children who have basic trust in themselves and others will enter nursery and school with less anxiety. They will expect that their teachers will be kind, supportive and reliable and that there will be other children who will like them and want to play with them- but they can also cope with setbacks.

- Research suggests that adults and children respond more positively to a child who has positive expectations, greets them warmly and is emotionally and socially competent.

- The child's positive beliefs about the self and others are therefore likely to be reinforced through a child's school career and lay the foundations of a positive school experience.

SLIDE 6: **Why have some children not had secure base relationships in their families?**

- Some parents who did not experience secure base relationships in their own childhood find it hard to meet their children's emotional needs

- Parental stresses such as isolation, poverty, mental Ill health, domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse may make parents less able to provide a secure base

- Parents / caregivers may have:

    - Rejected the child's emotional needs

    - Responded unpredictably

    - Been frightened or frightening

Notes

- It is very important / helpful to think of each type of insecure caregiving as a range i.e. caregivers are more or less responsive to the child's needs.

- The following examples of insecure care may be used

- **Caregivers may have rejected the child's emotional needs.** May have offered physical care but found it hard to offer emotional warmth, reassurance, soothing, comfort. May have denied the child's emotional state. For example, 'Stop crying, that didn't hurt'.

- **Caregivers may have responded unpredictably.** May have responded positively sometimes, but been emotionally absent/cold/rejecting at other times, perhaps because preoccupied with their own needs and difficulties.

- **Caregivers may have been frightened or frightening.** May have either been anxious and fearful themselves and so unable to have a calm, reassuring presence for the child OR they may have been angry/controlling towards the child – in some cases neglecting or abusing the child.

SLIDE 7:   **How do children cope in the absence of secure base relationships?**

- Children may develop defensive strategies for coping/attempting to get their needs met. e.g.

  - Shutting down or denying emotional needs and feelings, being self-reliant

  - Becoming emotionally demanding

  - Being confused, aggressive or controlling

- Early coping strategies will develop by the age of 12 months e.g. not showing emotions or making demands

- Unresolved fear or anxiety beyond the child's capacity to cope is sometimes known as trauma, which can have lasting effects on thinking, emotions and behaviour

Notes

- Also important to think of the child's response as a range e.g. shutting down on feelings to some extent /to a larger extent when parents find it difficult to respond to their emotional demands.

- Attachment research shows that infants and children from the first year of life develop defensive strategies /patterns of thinking and behaving in order to get the best from their caregiving environment.

- The following examples of the impact of insecure early care may be used if there is time

  - **Shutting down or denying emotional needs and feelings.** Children have learned not to express their needs or demonstrate emotions in order to avoid causing the caregiver stress and being rejected. May

present as emotionally closed, self-reliant and withdrawn, but this is in order to keep their caregiver close.

- **Being emotionally demanding.** Children may have increased their emotional demands in the hope of gaining the attention of the caregiver, who is inconsistent in their response. May present as excessively loud, needy, and demanding of time and attention.

- **Being passive or aggressive/controlling.** Children may have become 'disorganised' in their thinking as the person they are looking to for safety and reassurance is creating fear and anxiety in them. May present extreme behaviours which do not always 'make sense' to adults.

- **Trauma** refers to the lasting impact on children of being overwhelmed by anxiety or fear that threatens their security and capacity to cope. This term needs to be used carefully and is not always related to harmful parenting. Trauma or unresolved fear and anxiety may relate to abuse and neglect, but may also relate to a sudden family bereavement or an event such as a road accident.

- It is important to note that some children who have experienced harm or trauma may be known to Children's Services or CAMHS and the school will be aware of their needs and difficulties. BUT others will not have received services and family difficulties may have remained hidden.

SLIDE 8: **What does the insecure child take into school?**

- The child who has experienced insecure relationships in the family may start to think:

  - I am not loved or lovable

  - Adults cannot always be trusted to be available for me

  - It is too risky to explore or try new things

- The child takes these negative expectations of self and others, their internal working model, into new relationships in nursery, school and other activities

- Others (adults and children) tend to respond less positively to a child who has negative expectations of self and others and may be very needy, demanding or aggressive

Notes

- Negative expectations of self and others, negative internal working models, can be deeply rooted and resistant to change, even when current caregiving with relatives, foster carers, adopters or residential care staff is positive.

- Children who lack basic trust in themselves and others will enter nursery and school with greater anxiety. They will be anxious that their teachers will not like them or be supportive and reliable and also anxious that other children will not like them or want to play with them and may be a threat to them. These negative beliefs about the self and others are likely to lead to negative interactions, and a reputation for being difficult or aggressive. Thus, their behaviour, often driven by anxiety and the need to survive, may produce reactions that reinforce negative expectations and lay the foundations of a negative school experience.

- However, school can also be the place where children with difficult early experiences can find a safe place to be where they learn trust in adults, gain a more positive sense of self and are able to change their internal working model.

SLIDE 9: **DISCUSSION:**
What do you see in school when children:

- Shut down or deny emotional needs and feelings

- Are emotionally demanding

- Are aggressive or controlling

Notes

- Brief whole group discussion. Encourage brief but specific examples. E.g. 'Won't ask for help', 'shouts out all the time in class'. The aim is to establish a mutual understanding of the needs and difficulties that school staff are dealing with and to understand them in terms of the possible impact of insecurity or trauma.

- Possible group responses are that children:

  - Appear not to need adults – try to be self-reliant

  - Demand excessive amounts of time and attention

  - Find it difficult to concentrate

  - Tell lies

  - Become a target for bullies/bully others

  - Become controlling/oppositional OR over compliant

  - If more troubled, may show disorganised behaviours e.g. aggression, soiling, rocking, harming self or other children and staff

- This list is not exhaustive, but illustrative of the range of behaviours that might connect with insecurity or trauma.

- Within just a few weeks, peers and staff may start to respond to these behaviours in ways that increase the child's anxiety and difficult behaviours. Negative spirals can occur.

- **NB** Some of these behaviours may also be associated with other needs, such as ADHD, but important to remember that ALL children, across the full range of needs, can benefit from secure base relationships.

SLIDE 10: **Secure base relationships in school**

- From first entering school, all children's learning and development can be supported by secure base relationships with staff members – insecure children in particular will benefit but all children feel anxious at times

- These relationships will build trust, provide reassurance, reduce anxiety and so enhance children's capacity for learning

- They also enhance children's capacity to manage their feelings and behaviour, to build self-esteem and to form co-operative relationships with staff and peers

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Notes

- The Secure base model highlights these important areas of development and provides some indicators of ways in which school relationships and the school environment can help to promote each of them.

SLIDE 11: **Providing secure base relationships in school**

- Secure base relationships in school can be developed through

  - one to one relationships with staff that the child sees regularly

  - brief contacts with staff throughout the school day

  - a school culture of respect for and responsiveness to every child

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Notes

- Trusting relationships with all members of the school staff can help to reduce a child's anxiety and promote development and learning.

- This can be through one to one relationships with particular members of staff. These relationships can become a major source of reassurance for the child – a 'safe haven' in which the child feels accepted and understood, and feels confident to turn to when upset or anxious.

- Contact with all staff throughout the school day can also contribute to the child's experience of the school as a secure base. Small interactions in the

corridor, at break time etc. can all help to reduce anxiety, increase feelings of safety and trust.

● Each of these relationships and encounters, underpinned by the ethos and policies of the school, has the potential to change children's expectations of themselves and others in a positive direction.

TRAINING NOTE

This is the end of the section outlining the attachment theory and research that underpins the Secure Base model and how it relates to children in school. It may be advisable to take a short pause here, to respond to any comments / queries. The next section explores the Secure Base model, beginning with the relationship cycle which helps us to understand the process of building secure base relationships in school.

SLIDE 12:

The staff–child relationship cycle
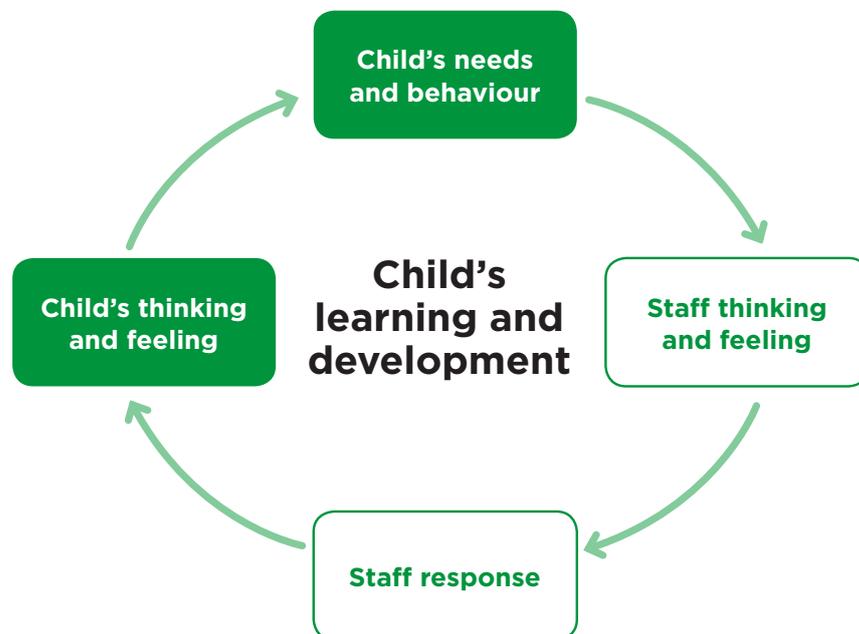
Notes

- The relationship cycle helps us to understand the process of secure base relationship building in school. It can best be explained by talking through each stage, starting at the top:

  - Each child presents with a range of needs and behaviours. Take the example of a child who is looking anxious or worried in a lesson.

  - A staff member responds, but the first stage of responding is to think and feel something about the child, which draws on the staff member's own state of mind. For example, 'this is unusual for this child. I wonder what's wrong?' accompanied by feelings of concern.

  - This thinking and feeling, in turn, promotes a particular response from the staff member. For example, 'You look worried. Is there something I can help with?'

  - The way in which the staff member responds has an impact on the child's thinking and feeling about him or herself and others. (I matter, this teacher is here to help me).

  - This, in turn, can promote change in the child's needs and behaviour (more relaxed, more able to settle and learn).

  - Sensitive thinking and responding from staff members contribute to secure base relationships, and can have a positive impact on firstly the child's thinking and feeling, and then on his or her behaviour. Positive cycles can be created.

- **NB It is important to explain, at this point, that the relationship cycle will be followed as each of the 5 dimension of secure base relationships is explored. The relationship cycle underpins the five dimensions of the Secure Base model, outlined in the following slide.**

SLIDE 13: **The five dimensions of the Secure Base model**

Availability – helping the child to trust

Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings

Acceptance – building the child's self esteem

Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective

School membership – helping the child to belong
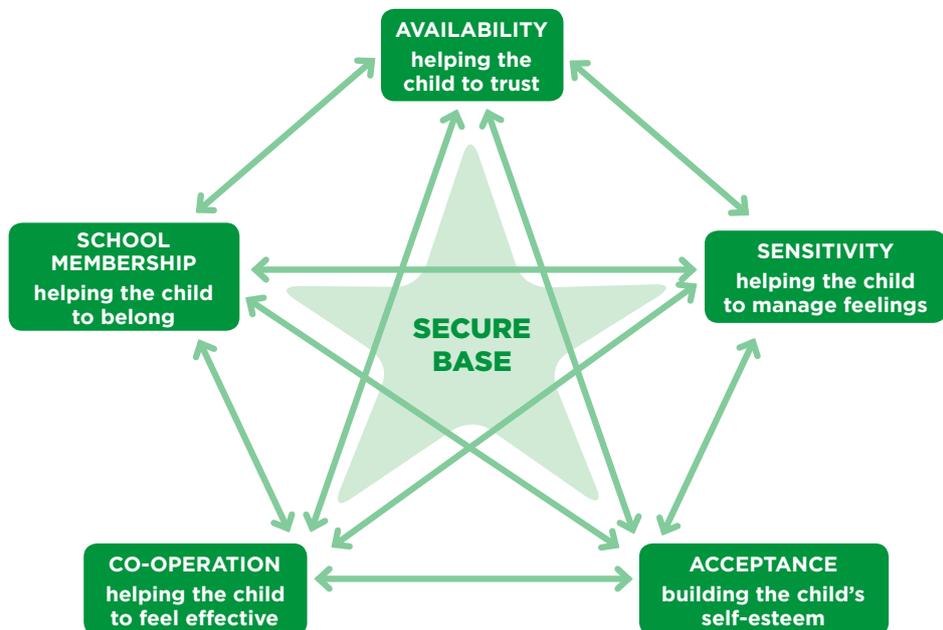

Notes

- This slide can simply be read through at this stage, explaining that each dimension will be explored separately and in more detail.

- These dimensions are drawn from attachment theory and family relationship research, adapted here for application in a school setting.

- Note that each dimension is paired with a developmental benefit for the child. E.g Availability – helps the child to trust.

- Together, they combine and interact to form a secure base – a whole school environment in which anxiety is reduced and ALL children are more able to concentrate, learn and develop to their full potential.

SLIDE 14:

The Secure Base model for schools

Notes

- This diagram represents each of the five dimensions of secure base relationships and their key benefit for the child.

- The linking arrows show how the dimensions interact with each other. For example, a staff member who is available and trusted by a child is better able to tune in to them and be sensitive to their feelings.

- Together, these elements of staff/child relationships provide a SECURE BASE which reduces anxiety and from which the child can explore, develop and learn.

- From here, each dimension is explored in turn, and illustrated with quotes from children and staff.

- **NB It is important to explain that the model does NOT suggest that every staff member needs to be fulfilling every aspect of secure base relationships with each child at all times – but all staff will be making a contribution that collectively ensures all children have the support they need. In some cases specialist staff or individual staff may need to have a key role for an individual child. The goal is for all children to feel trusting and secure in school.**

SHORT BREAK

AVAILABILITY – HELPING THE CHILD TO TRUST

Availability: helping the child to trust

- Physical and emotional availability means signalling your interest and concern to all children

- Children who are more troubled may need individualised approaches to demonstrating availability

- The aim is for ALL children to be able to trust that one or more staff members are 'there for them'

Notes

- ALL children need to be able to trust in the availability and interest of staff members.

- Children who are more troubled may need staff members who are consistently physically and emotionally available to them, alert to their needs and able to find individualised ways of reducing the child's anxiety, calming and supporting them. For some children an opportunity for a one to one conversation may be welcome, but others may just want a safe space to sit and relax for a brief period.

- The aim is for ALL children to be able to trust that there is one or more staff members who are 'there for them' and that there is someone readily available to turn to in times of stress or anxiety.

- **NB It is helpful, at this point, to explain the link between the relationship cycle and the 5 dimensions of the model by explaining that this session is going to explore each of the five dimensions of the model, using the relationship cycle as a guide. So Availability will be explored as follows:**

Availability – helping the child to trust

Notes

- Point out that this diagram follows the Staff-Child relationship cycle that has just been shown, starting with the child's needs and behaviour at the top and then thinking about staff thinking and feeling, staff response, and then child's thinking and feeling (shown in black print outside the boxes). Read through but do not expand on the contents of the boxes at this stage. Place emphasis on the goal for the child's thinking and feeling – i.e. I matter, I am safe, adults will help and support me. This is the desired outcome for the child in this dimension.

- So we start with thinking about the child's needs and behaviour when he or she lacks trust in adults.

Availability: staff member thinking and feeling

It can be helpful to think about:

- What does this child expect from adults?

- How can I show this child that I can be trusted?

Notes

- Most children will have positive expectations of adult availability and the school setting provides an opportunity to reinforce positive role models of adults as reliable, consistent and trustworthy, interested in them as individuals, as well as interested in their educational progress.

- Where there seem to be deeply rooted problems with trust, it may be helpful for a staff member to observe the child's behaviour and discuss with colleagues. There may also be important background information about the child's current and previous experiences of adults and how this might link with current needs and patterns of behaviour. For example, if a child has not been able to trust adults in the past, it may take time for this to develop in school.

- In the light of any relevant information, staff members can be thoughtful about ways of showing availability that are targeted at the needs of an individual pupil. That is 'what can I say and do that will help this child to develop trust in me and then in others?'

SLIDE 18:   **Availability – helping the child to trust: staff member response**

- Responding to the child's needs and signals
- Providing verbal and non-verbal signals of availability

Notes

- Children signal anxiety in a range of ways, as already discussed. When staff members are alert to the individual child's way of signalling anxiety, they can respond appropriately.

- Some children respond well to verbal reassurance, but others may need non-verbal signals – for example a pastoral support staff member leaving an office door open as a signal that children are welcome to come and talk or ask for help.

SLIDE 19:   **Availability – helping the child to trust**

Every morning, one of us (usually me) is on the gate. I say 'Good morning', 'How are you' to every child as they arrive. I might chat to anyone who's 'hovering', say hello to parents, check uniform and give a friendly warning. I just think it's important that they feel a connection with someone as soon as they arrive. (Pastoral support staff member)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

- This is a gesture of connection with individuals and their families – the teacher gives a 'friendly warning' about uniform. She picks up on any children who might be anxious about entering school (hovering) and chats to them – a more direct signal of interest and availability.

- The first minutes of the school day are seen as an opportunity to 'make a connection' with every child. This could be at the school gate or as the child enters the classroom.

SLIDE 20: **Availability – helping the child to trust**

There's a lad at the moment and he's looking really sad and he comes and sits in the Library, in my line of sight, but he won't say anything. I say to him 'everything OK?' and he says 'Yes, I just want some peace.' And I passed him in class and saw him staring out of the window. I've sent an e mail round to everyone to keep an eye on him. But he keeps coming (to the librarian) and sooner or later, he'll probably talk about it. (School librarian)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

- The staff member picks up the child's non-verbal signals (sitting in the Library).

- But is non-intrusive (Does not say 'What's the matter?', 'You look sad' etc.).

- She is alert to his signals, even when he is not with her (passed him in class).

- She trusts that the whole staff group will be concerned/would want to be alert to his signals (e mailed everyone).

- Staff member is confident that the child will share his feelings, in his own time – and she will continue to be available for him to do this.

- **NB trust between staff members is as important as trust between staff and students**

SLIDE 21: **Availability – helping the child to trust**

Researcher: What would you do if you had a problem or you were worried about something in school?

If you've got a problem, you can always find a teacher who understands, someone you can turn to. (Child, age 13)

Or another teacher will take you to one who understands, because maybe they've had that sort of problem themselves or they've helped other children with that problem. (Child, age 14)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

1. Child is confident that there is 'always' someone to turn to. That is – you never have to doubt adult availability.

2. Child has sense of a network of support, and of being taken to someone who will have special understanding of *her* situation.

SLIDE 22:   **Availability – helping the child to trust**

Researcher: What makes a trusting relationship with a teacher?

You build trust with a teacher when you have a nice conversation with them – not just about your work but about other things as well. Like how they might deal with things that are on your mind. They have the right attitude – they are positive and they can nip things in the bud before they get too big. (Child, age 13)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

● The 'nice conversation' suggests that the teacher is physically available – offering focussed time and attention to the child and also emotionally available – willing to think and talk about what is on the child's mind.

● This example also captures the essence of a secure base relationship. The 'nice conversation' suggests warmth and closeness – but the benefit to the child is that the conversation provides forward momentum. It 'nips things in the bud' before they become overwhelming and allows the child to move forward.

SLIDE 23:   **DISCUSSION:**
Availability – helping the child to trust

● How do you identify opportunities in lessons or at other times:

   • to signal to each child that you value them

   • to note/respond to individual needs and signals of anxiety?

● How does your school culture/policies identify and respond to individual children's' needs and anxieties.

● What are the challenges of showing availability/building trust in a school setting?

Notes

Brief small group or whole group discussion (depending on numbers). Ask for brief feedback.

SLIDE 24: **Availability: child thinking and feeling**

● In school, I matter and I am safe

● Adults will help and support me
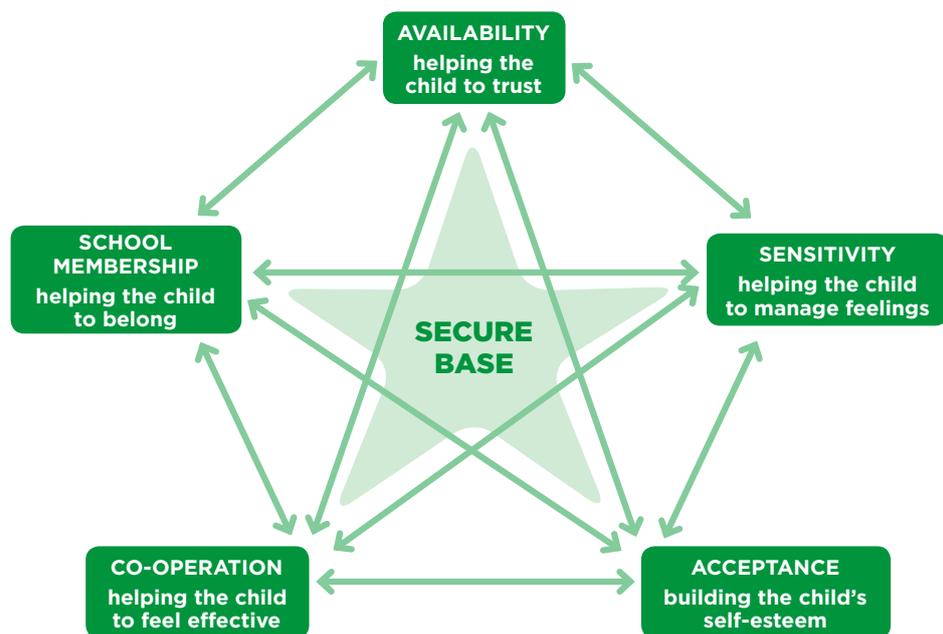
Notes

● When children can trust that staff members will respond to them warmly, consistently and reliably, they will think and feel more positively about themselves and others.

● They will feel safe in school, that they matter to staff, that staff can be relied on for help and support.

● Anxiety will be reduced and children will be enabled to develop as individuals, to settle, and to learn.

● N.B. For some, more vulnerable or more challenging children, these changes in thinking and behaviour may be very small and there may be setbacks to progress. It is important for the whole staff group to value small steps of progress and to have realistic timescales for change (perhaps months, rather than weeks).

SENSITIVITY – HELPING THE CHILD TO MANAGE FEELINGS

The Secure Base model for schools

Notes

The next dimension to be discussed is Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings.

Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings

- Sensitivity refers to the adult thinking about what the child might be thinking and feeling and taking this into account in how they respond

- Sensitive discussion about feelings can help children to name and manage difficult feelings and to regulate troubled behaviour

- The goal is for all children to be able to better understand and manage their feelings, and to be sensitive to the feelings of others

Notes

- When children are aware that trusted adults understand their feelings and can make sense of them, they are helped to make sense of their feelings and to feel that they are 'understandable in the circumstances'.

- For children who are more troubled, strong feelings (e.g. excitement, anger, sadness) may be overwhelming. Sensitive discussion includes naming feelings and helping children to understand the connection between how they feel and how they behave and how other people feel and behave.

- The aim is that gradually, empathy will develop and the child will become increasingly aware of other people's feelings and more able to respond appropriately to them.

- Understanding and managing feelings is a key life skill that is acquired gradually from infancy onwards and contributes to mental health. Some more troubled children may have lacked support with this in their early months and years and may behave in ways that are not in line with their chronological age. For these children, progress in managing feelings and showing empathy might be much slower and there may be setbacks. Again it is important for the whole staff group to understand this and to recognise and value small steps of progress.

SLIDE 27:

Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings

Notes

The caregiving cycle should be becoming familiar now, but it might be helpful to briefly mention it again, and to state that you are starting at the top with the child's needs and behaviour. Read through but do not expand on the contents of the boxes at this stage. Place emphasis on the goal for the child's thinking and feeling. I.e. My feelings make sense and can be managed. Other people have feelings too.

SLIDE 28: **What you might see in school when children cannot manage their feelings?**

- Feelings may be shown excessively or denied/repressed

- Feelings may become chaotic

- Feelings may be expressed through bodies e.g. headaches, eating problems, self-harm

- Children may appear unaware/unresponsive to the feelings of others

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Notes

- All children are in the process of learning how to manage their feelings and recognise the feelings of others and most will have difficulties with this at times.

- However, children who have not had their needs and feelings responded to consistently and reliably may have developed patterns of behaviour that have helped them to 'survive' in difficult circumstances.

- Some children may express their feelings excessively. That is they may easily become very angry/sad/tearful/excited, and then find it hard to regulate these feelings and respond to comfort, calming and so on.

- Some may deny or repress their feelings. For these children, showing feelings may be too threatening or frightening.

- In some cases, the expression of feelings may be chaotic or dissociated. That is, children respond unpredictably, or with a chaotic mix of feelings, or they seem to separate themselves from their feelings.

- Feelings may also be expressed through bodies in confused ways such as headaches, stomach pains, over/under eating, self-harm, etc.

- When children are overwhelmed or pre-occupied with difficult feelings, it is harder for them to predict and order their world, plan and organise their lives, regulate their strong feelings and be aware of and responsive to the feelings of others. These are vital skills for school life – without them, children struggle with peer relationships, find it harder to focus on school work and do not reach their potential.

SLIDE 29: **Sensitivity: staff member thinking and feeling**

It can be helpful to think about:

- What might this child be thinking and feeling?
- How does this child make me feel?

Notes

- It is important for staff to be able to think flexibly about what the child might be thinking and feeling, in any particular situation, and why they behave as they do. Staff can be thoughtful about the child's previous experiences and how these may have shaped his or her thinking and feeling.

- It is also important for staff to be aware of their own feelings. Troubled child can trigger strong feelings in adults. For example, children's unmanaged feelings of anger, frustration, despair and sadness can be transferred to staff, especially when there are competing needs and goals to be met in the classroom. Occasionally, troubled and traumatised children can trigger memories and feelings from the adult's own past experiences.

- Bringing awareness to difficult feelings and naming them can be an important first step in managing them positively for the staff member, and, in turn, for the child.

SLIDE 30: **Sensitivity – staff member response**

- Helping the child to understand, express and manage feelings appropriately
- Managing my own feelings

Notes

- It is important that the school community can develop shared understandings and approaches to helping all children to understand, express and manage their feelings and that this is reflected in classroom practice and school policies. Some more troubled children may need additional support and more focused strategies to help with this.

- It is also important for staff to feel confident to talk about their own feelings at times and to be supported to recognise that these feelings are understandable and normal in the circumstances.

- Relationships with designated colleagues can be key in providing a safe space for staff where difficult feelings can be discussed and managed positively. This offers staff a secure base, which reduces anxiety, and from which they too can move forward.

SLIDE 31: **Sensitivity – helping the child to manage feelings**

Sometimes I think when they're angry, they're just teenagers and they just need a bit of time and space to have a think. Sometimes I can catch someone when they're storming out and I say come and have 5 minutes in here (reception) and I don't say anything to them but that five minutes of quiet and non-judgement can be enough for them to calm down and get over it. (School receptionist)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

- Staff member understands the importance of a 'pause for thought'.

- She is not intrusive – does not say anything (NB it would be easy to say 'Calm down, what are you angry about, you mustn't get like this' etc.)

- She sets a boundary (5 minutes) which provides a sense of a safe limit.

SLIDE 32: **Sensitivity – being helped to talk about my feelings**

I think it all comes back to trust again. The teachers you can trust can read your emotions. They know you and you'd open up to them. In this school, there's loads of teachers who would know if you're upset about something. But just one or two who you'd talk to about it. That's good because you wouldn't want everyone saying, 'Are you OK?' But you'd know that one or two teachers really understood and cared how you were. (Child, age 14)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

- This child makes the link between availability and sensitivity – a trusting relationship has to be in place for feelings to be discussed.

- He conveys a sense of feeling generally 'understood' in the school (loads of teachers would know if you're upset).

- He values respect for the personal nature of his feelings and for him as an individual (You wouldn't want everyone saying 'are you OK?')

- But he is confident that there are one or two teachers who really understand (they can read your emotions) and can offer him the help he needs (you'd open up to them).

SLIDE 33:   **Sensitivity: child thinking and feeling**

- My feelings make sense to others and can be managed

- Other people have thoughts and feelings that need to be taken into account

Notes

- When children are aware that trusted adults understand their feelings and can make sense of them, they are helped to make sense of their feelings and to feel that they are 'understandable in the circumstances'. Gradually, empathy will develop and the child will become increasingly aware of other people's feelings and more able to respond appropriately to them.

- The long-term goal is for the child to recognise, express appropriately and manage their own feelings. For some children, this will be especially challenging, but small steps towards this (e.g. expressing anger in words rather than actions) should be acknowledged.

TRAINING NOTE

School staff and other professionals have highlighted that working with troubled children can sometimes trigger strong and often mixed feelings in those who work with them and it is important that these feelings are acknowledged and managed so that they do not become overwhelming. The following section focusses on this issue. It is possible that this will be a difficult area of discussion for some staff and the trainer will need to acknowledge this and suggest that if anyone feels strongly affected, this is wholly understandable and they might wish to take a break and/or discuss with a senior colleague after the training.

SLIDE 34:   **DISCUSSION:**
Sensitivity – managing your own feelings

- What is the range of feelings that you have experienced in your interactions with children in school?

- What are the challenges of acknowledging and managing difficult feelings that children might trigger for you? What can help with this?

Notes

Small group discussion. Ask for brief feedback from each question.

● Summarise by stating that it is normal for school staff (and ALL people who are working alongside children, especially troubled children) to experience the full range of feelings at times. Sometimes there are difficult feelings that are hard to manage.

● Emphasise that it is important for staff to feel confident to talk about difficult feelings when they need to and be supported to manage them. This idea should be normalised within the school, as a secure base for staff, and there should be a clear route for every staff member to obtain the necessary support.
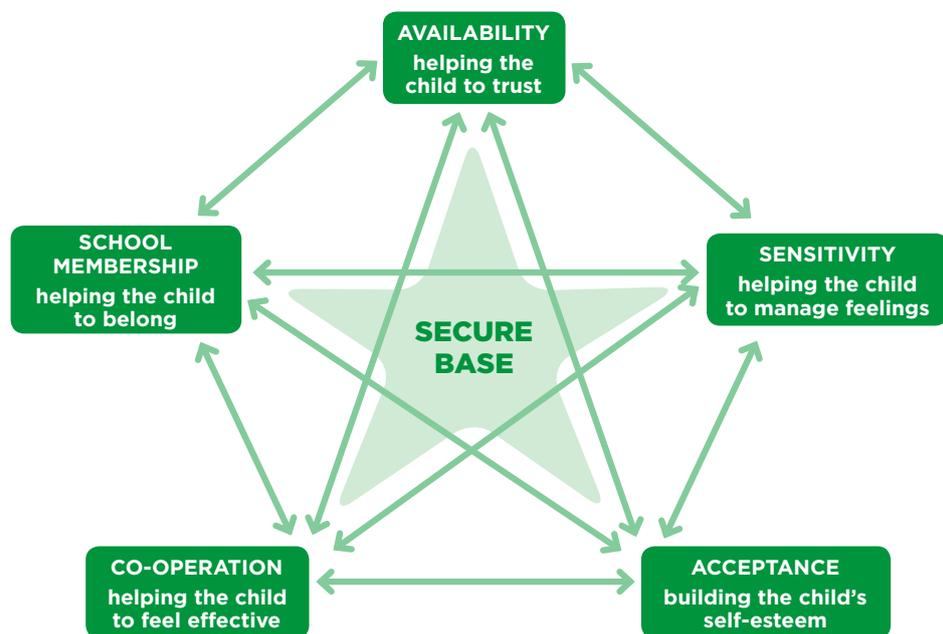
TRAINING NOTE

● A 5–10 minute break can be suggested here.
● Show Slide 35 and explain that the remaining three dimensions will be covered after the break.

ACCEPTANCE – BUILDING THE CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

The Secure Base model for schools

Notes

The third dimension to be discussed is Acceptance – building the child's self-esteem.

Acceptance – building the child's self-esteem

- Acceptance
  - involves relationships in which each child is accepted for who they are
  - celebrates difference – in ethnicity, culture, sexuality, personality and talents
  - celebrates success – but also supports the child through disappointments and setbacks
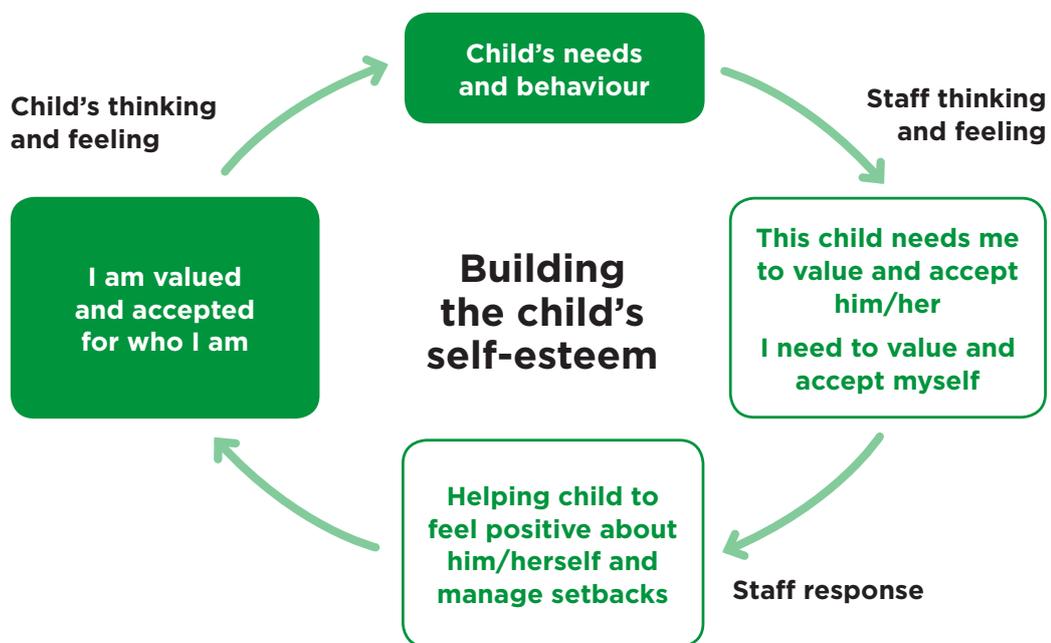
- These elements of acceptance combine and interact to build the child's self-esteem
- Some children may need targeted approaches to building self-esteem

Notes

- Acceptance does not mean accepting negative behaviour or under achievement – rather, it is a fundamental acceptance of the child as a person who is of interest, value and concern.

SLIDE 37

Acceptance – building the child's self-esteem

Child's thinking and feeling

Child's needs and behaviour

Staff thinking and feeling

I am valued and accepted for who I am

Building the child's self-esteem

This child needs me to value and accept him/her

I need to value and accept myself

Helping child to feel positive about him/herself and manage setbacks

Staff response

Notes

- Read through but do not expand on the contents of the boxes at this stage. Place emphasis on the goal for the child's thinking and feeling. I.e. I am valued and accepted for who I am.

SLIDE 38: **What might you see in school when a child's self-esteem is low?**

Child may:

- Feel unworthy of success/praise and react negatively to it

- Fear failure/avoid risk

- Minimise knowledge or achievements

- Defend themselves with exaggerated claims

Notes

- All children may experience low self-esteem at times – this is a normal response to the ups and downs of life.

- Some children are at greater risk of low self-esteem, because they feel different or find it difficult to compete with peers socially or academically.

- Children who have suffered severe adversity in their family lives can feel profoundly worthless. They may blame themselves for family difficulties, especially if families have become fragmented through separation or removal into care.

- Some children respond well to praise and positive reinforcement. But others feel unworthy of praise and find it hard to accept. They may even behave negatively when praised – seeming to invite a negative response.

- Children with low self-esteem may have a fear of failure and so will not take risks /try new things, or they may refuse to join in with games, activities and so on. Children may develop a sense of being inferior, outside the mainstream, unworthy of success and this can become a negative cycle.

- Some children with low self-esteem may 'pretend' not to know things or work at a lower standard than they are capable of – feeling unworthy of success.

- Children may defend against feelings of worthlessness and become boastful, or make exaggerated/untrue claims (for example, 'I am the best in my class at football', 'I've got hundreds of friends').

SLIDE 39: **Acceptance: staff member thinking and feeling**

It can be helpful to think about:

- This child needs me to value and accept him/her

- I need to value and accept myself

Notes

- Staff members might think about the need for every child to feel valued and accepted – whether the child is apparently confident OR having difficulties in school.

- Alongside this, and especially if the child is challenging, it is important for staff members to hold in mind the need to value and accept themselves, and be reminded of their strengths and skills. Troubled children can undermine the confidence and self-esteem of those who are working closely with them. This may be an important area of discussion with senior staff, in order to avoid the staff member's emotional resources becoming depleted.

SLIDE 40: **Acceptance – staff response**

- Helping the child to feel positive about him or herself
- Helping the child to manage setbacks

Notes

- Acceptance includes promoting and celebrating the child's successes in every aspect of their lives, in small things and in bigger things.

- Acceptance also includes supporting the child through setbacks and disappointments. The message is 'Nobody is perfect. You do not have to be perfect to be valued'. At these times the staff member may need to emphasise that their acceptance and support for the child remains unchanged.

- Some more troubled children may need targeted, individualised approaches to offering praise and encouragement and to managing setbacks.

SLIDE 41: **Acceptance – building the child's self-esteem**

We want every child to feel valued, and if there are issues in school we always convey that we will deal with them and move on. Each day (sometimes each lesson!) is a new one and what's over is over. (Teacher)

SLIDE 42: **Acceptance – a targeted approach to building the child's self-esteem**

You have to think of how you're doing it (giving praise). Some children love everyone to know they've done well. But others hate all that and you have to just quietly, privately say 'I'm really proud that you managed that so well' or something like that. (Teacher)

SLIDE 43: **Being accepted for who I am**

In this school, whoever you want to be, they'll be happy for you.

But also, if they know you well, they know if you're trying to act like someone else and you're not really being you. Like if you're mixing with the wrong people. So they help you be your best self.

Teachers always deal with it if someone's not respectful.

(Young people)

SLIDE 44: **Acceptance: child thinking and feeling**

- I am accepted and valued for who I am

Notes

- When children feel accepted and valued for who they are they will gain confidence, enjoy their successes and manage their disappointments.

- For some more troubled children, this may be a very gradual process, susceptible to setbacks. It can be important for staff morale to be supported to accept this and to acknowledge small steps of progress.

CO-OPERATION – HELPING THE CHILD TO FEEL EFFECTIVE

The Secure Base model for schools
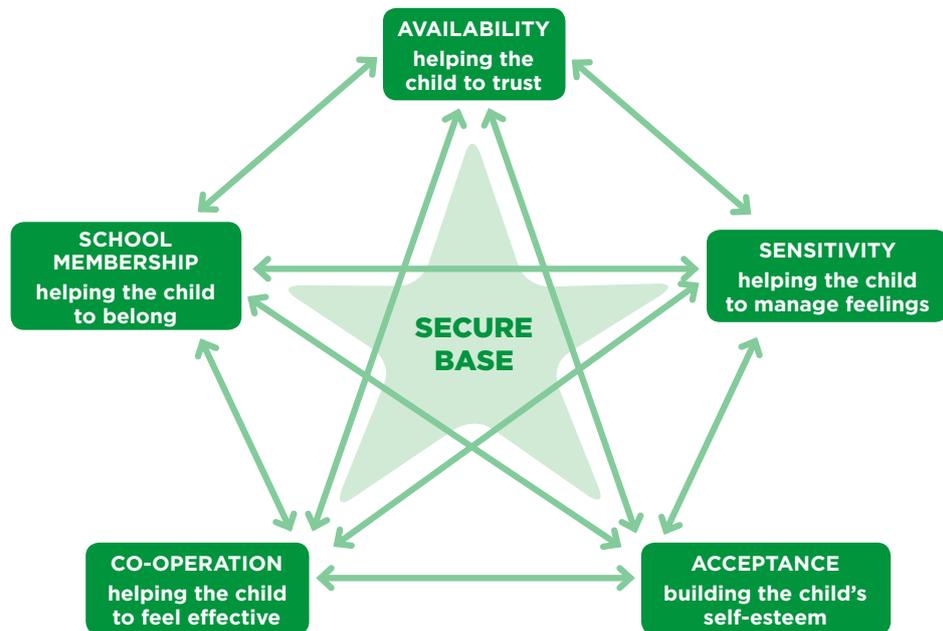
Notes

● The next dimension to be discussed is Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective.

Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective

● Co-operation means encouraging and enabling children to work together with staff members and each other to achieve shared goals

● Working together promotes effectiveness and competence

● When children feel effective and competent, they are more likely to compromise and be co-operative

● Some children may need additional support to engage in co-operative relationships

Notes

- The link between effectiveness and co-operation may need careful explanation. Effectiveness is connected with competence, agency, a feeling that you can have some influence over events that affect you. The more effective we feel, the more likely we are to co-operate and compromise.

- This dimension can be problematic for staff members who are dealing with children who are highly unco-operative and seek to control adults and their environment. This is disruptive and can lead to battles for control even when co-operation is the goal.

- It is important, therefore, to emphasise that co-operation does not imply a lack of boundaries or structure. Clear boundaries, calmly explained, will actually reduce children's anxiety. But for some children, co-operation might mean finding individualised ways of allowing some degree of agency and choice within the rules and boundaries of the school.

SLIDE 47:

Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective

Child's thinking and feeling

Child's needs and behaviour

Staff thinking and feeling

I feel effective
I can co-operate with others

Helping the child to feel effective

This child needs to feel effective and competent

How can we work together?

Helping the child to co-operate and feel effective within rules and boundaries

Staff response

Notes

- Read through but do not expand on the contents of the boxes at this stage. Place emphasis on the goal for the child's thinking and feeling – i.e. I feel effective, I can co-operate with others. This is the desired outcome for the child in this dimension.

SLIDE 48:   **What might you see in school when children find it hard to co-operate?**

- Some children have not experienced co-operative relationships in the past or may have felt powerless and lacked control over what happens to them. May try to cope by being:

  - Too powerful and controlling of adults

  - Bossy/controlling with peers

  - Over-compliant, lacking confidence and appropriate assertiveness

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Notes

- Some children have seldom experienced a co-operative approach as part of their early care.

- They may not have developed a sense of themselves as competent individuals, nor of adults as co-operative partners, either in exploration and play or in managing difficulties.

- They may try to control adults, both at home and at school. They may not accept the family or classroom rules and small issues become 'battles'.

- They may also be bossy/controlling with peers and become unpopular at school.

- Alternatively, some children may become over-compliant, unable to assert their views and wishes – and vulnerable as a result.

SLIDE 49:   **Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective: staff thinking and feeling**

It can be helpful to think about:

- This child needs to feel effective and competent

- How can we work together?

Notes

- It can be hard for staff members to think about promoting effectiveness and working together if a child is being particularly challenging or wanting to be too powerful and controlling and there are times when it is only possible to work within the rules and policies of the school (for example, an oppositional child may need to be removed temporarily from the classroom in order for others to be taught effectively).

- However, there may also be opportunities to pause to think about the reasons for the behaviour and identify an approach that might both manage the behaviour AND help the child to feel effective within the rules and boundaries of the school.

- Additionally, specialist staff might have opportunities to promote effectiveness and co-operation when working one to one or with a small group.

SLIDE 50: **Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective: staff response**

- Helping the child to feel effective within rules and boundaries

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Notes

- For all children it can be helpful to think about ways in which they can be supported to feel effective and competent, both in the classroom and within the wider school environment. For example, through being offered choices that are safe and age appropriate, through opportunities to engage in decision making and through taking on responsibilities within the school community.

- When a child is finding it hard to work together in this way, there may still be opportunities for the staff member to hold to the rules and expectations of the school BUT AT THE SAME TIME allow the child to have some degree of choice and control over what they do and what happens to them.

- This approach can be helpful both for children who resist co-operation and for children who are over-compliant.

SLIDE 51: **Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective**

The rules are the same for everyone, but there are different ways of going about it. For example, someone's chewing gum and you know there are issues. I might say 'I don't want you to have a bad day because you get caught chewing. I'll let you pop it in the bin, and I'll check later'. (Pastoral support staff member)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

- The staff member is clear about the rule regarding chewing gum – and that it is the same for everyone. However, this brief interaction with a child where there are 'issues' (i.e. co-operation might be more difficult) conveys important messages:

  - You matter to me (I don't want you to have a bad day)

  - You have some choice and agency, we can work together on this (I'll let you pop it in the bin)

  - The rule/boundary is important (I'll check later)

SLIDE 52: **Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective**

Negative points are for shouting out, pushing, answering back etc. But for each one, your form teacher talks to you about it and you can have your say. You still get the point but you can explain the circumstances or if you were upset about something else that day. So you're not powerless. (Child, age 12)

Notes

Relevant point in this example

- This child values the fact that even when you are being sanctioned, you can have a say and be listened to.

- This child trusts that staff understand that there can be underlying reasons for difficult behaviour, and that they will want to explore this with you.

- He values having a degree of agency, even within the firm behaviour policies of the school.

SLIDE 53: **Co-operation – helping the child to feel effective**

Researcher: How might a teacher work together with you on a problem?

They always try to find a way forward – and they give you a choice about whether or not you want to do it. For example, whether or not you want other children to know about it and that sort of thing. (Child, age 13)

Notes

Relevant points in this example

- This example demonstrates the importance of being helped to move 'forward' (as we have seen, this the key benefit of a secure base relationship). But it also illustrates the importance of choice and agency. The child retains a degree of control in what happens – and so values

working together in a co-operative relationship with the staff member, to solve the problem/find a way forward.

SLIDE 54: **Co-operation: child thinking and feeling**

- I feel effective

- I can co-operate with others

Notes

- All children will benefit from feeling that their views are listened to and valued at school.

- For some troubled children, a co-operative approach, in which they can learn to compromise, may help them to learn that school is more rewarding when they work together with staff and accept the boundaries.

SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP – HELPING THE CHILD TO BELONG

SLIDE 55:

The Secure Base model for schools
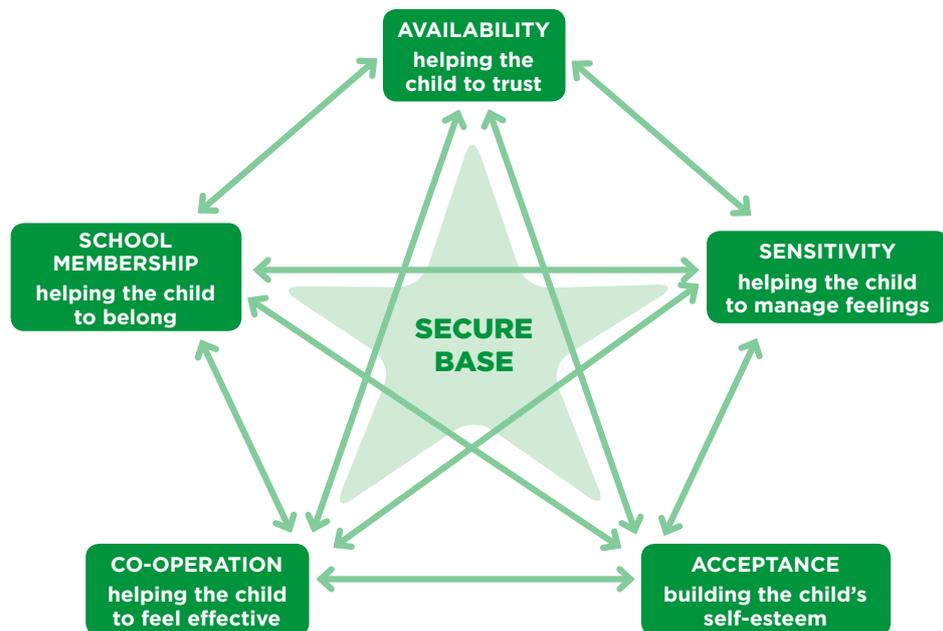
Notes

● The final dimension to be discussed is School Membership –helping the child to belong.

SLIDE 56:   **School membership – helping the child to belong**

● School membership

  • is indicated by the extent to which the child identifies with the school and participates in academic and non-academic school activities

  • offers the child feelings of solidarity, entitlement, unconditional acceptance and shared identity

  • provides a set of expectations, norms and values for living in society

  • extends to the whole family – parents, carers, siblings, grandparents

● Some children may be resistant to a sense of belonging in school
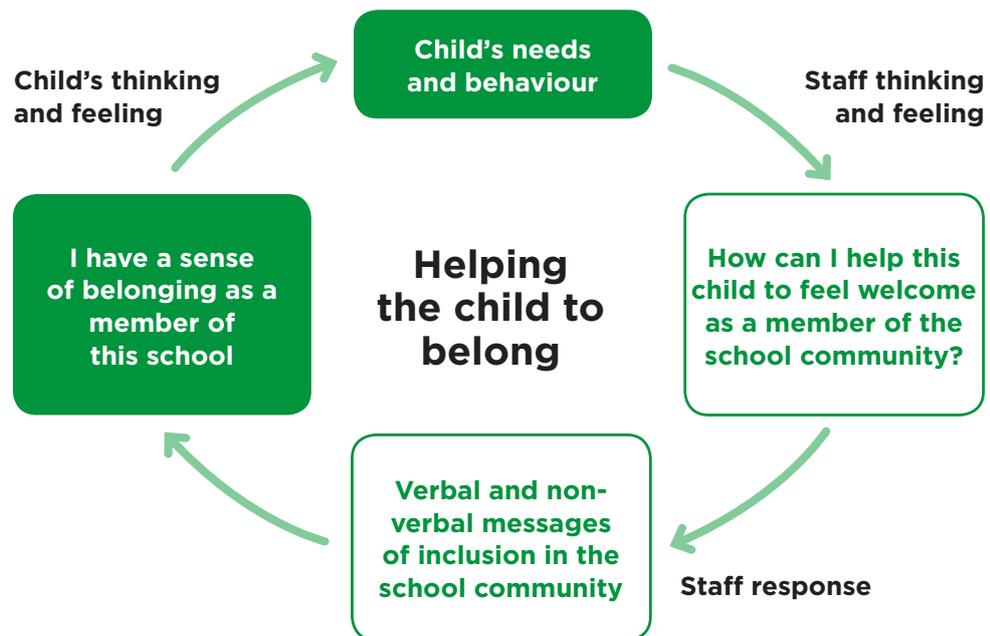

Secure Base

Notes

- In optimal circumstances, a sense of belonging begins in the family context (family membership). It is important for healthy development.

- But a sense of belonging can also be generated through membership of other groups outside the family – sports clubs, community groups, and most importantly, schools.

- Resisting a sense of belonging in school may link with other dimensions. For example, lack of trust and/or low self-esteem.

School membership – helping the child to belong

Child's thinking and feeling

Child's needs and behaviour

Staff thinking and feeling

I have a sense of belonging as a member of this school

Helping the child to belong

How can I help this child to feel welcome as a member of the school community?

Verbal and non-verbal messages of inclusion in the school community

Staff response

Notes

- Read through but do not expand on the contents of the boxes at this stage. Place emphasis on the goal for the child's thinking and feeling. I.e. I have a sense of belonging as a member of the school.

SLIDE 58: **What might you see in school when children do not have a sense of belonging?**

- Poor participation/disengaged

- Negative behaviour and attitudes

- Anti-social behaviour (in and out of school)

Notes

- Some children have not had opportunities to experience a sense of belonging. They may feel rootless and disconnected from their families, had many moves or changes or caregiver and/or have had negative experiences of school membership in the past. They may not believe that academic success will have a strong bearing on their future.

- These feelings and attitudes may result in their becoming disaffected from school. They may gradually withdraw from school activities, and in some cases participate in disruptive behaviour and display negative attitudes towards teachers and other children. Meeting the needs of children who have become disaffected is a major challenge for schools.

SLIDE 59: **School membership – helping the child to belong: staff thinking and feeling**

It can be helpful to think about:

- How can I help this child to feel welcome as a member of the school community?

Notes

- It can be difficult to help a child to belong when they feel different / find it hard to fit in.

- It is also challenging to think in this way when a child is actively rejecting school norms and values, and appears not to want to belong.

- You might make a connection with the 'Sensitivity' dimension ('Managing my own feelings'). Staff members may feel let-down, disappointed, defensive and so on when a child is actively rejecting school membership. These feelings are valid and may need to be acknowledged and managed in order to provide a positive response.

SLIDE 60: **School membership – helping the child to belong: staff response**

- Verbal and non-verbal messages of inclusion in the school community

Notes

- School membership is promoted by offering and supporting as wide a range as possible of opportunities for children to engage with specific subjects, activities and roles within the school, and to receive positive feedback from doing so.

- Opportunities and feedback might need to be targeted individually. For example, some children may respond to taking a more prominent role, others may prefer a low key approach. Some will enjoy overt praise, some may prefer quiet acknowledgement.

- For some children, it is important to value and acknowledge small steps of progress.

SLIDE 61:   **School membership – helping the child to belong**

Language is important. We use the word 'We' a lot. 'We can sort this out'. 'We're very proud of you' etc. To give the feeling that we're all in this together.

We do a lot in the community and that creates a sense of pride and lots of positive feedback for them. For example, we entertain the elderly at Christmas, we recently had the Royal Philharmonic. They feel proud to be part of things like that.

Our interview process for new staff includes other staff and students – it's a shared decision (Head of school)

SLIDE 62:   **A sense of belonging**

Teachers you trust have their doors open at lunchtime so it's not 'them and us' we're all here together. (Child, age 13)

Teachers never ignore anyone – it's like everyone is as important as each other. (Child, age 12)

New children get a teacher to check thinks out with them, make sure they're ok, feel part of things. They even keep in touch with you if you move away. Like 'how are you doing'? (Child, age 14)

Notes

Relevant points in these examples

- Examples 1 and 2 indicate a strong sense of whole school membership and inclusion.

- Example 3 illustrates the value of routines and rituals (important in families as well), in this case, to mark beginnings and endings, and also gives a message that you are not forgotten.

SLIDE 63:   **School membership: child thinking and feeling**

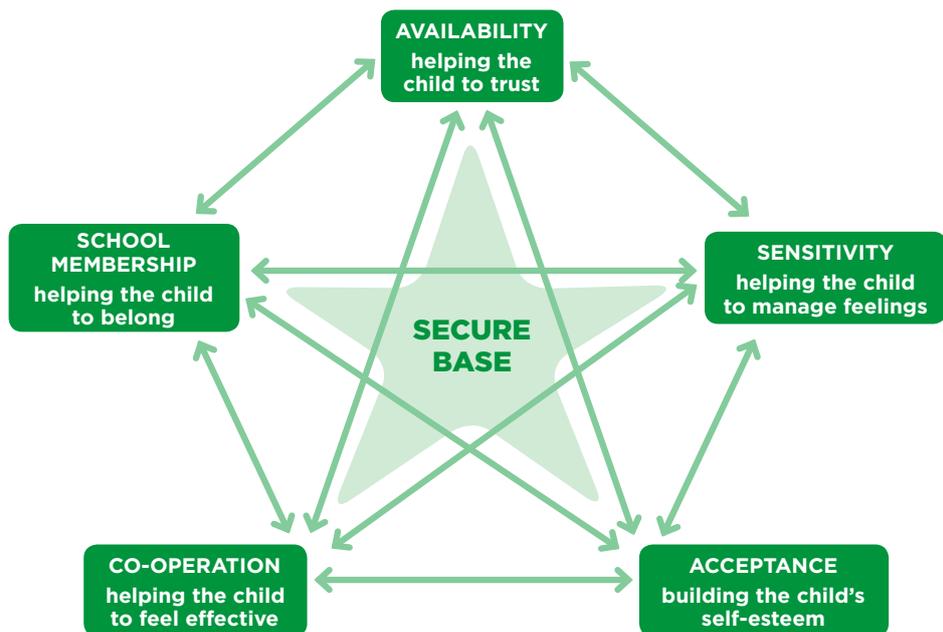- I have a sense of belonging as member of the school

TRAINING NOTE

This is the end of the introduction to the Secure Base model. Questions may be taken, if time. Explain that there are now two exercises which individuals or groups might like to think about after the session.

SLIDE 64:

The Secure Base model for schools

- Consider a child in school who is 'on your mind' at present. From what you know about this child, how do you feel he or she is managing, at a classroom and/or whole school level, within each of the 5 dimensions of the model? What might help?

Notes

- Explain that this is a short exercise which aims to help participants to apply the model.

- Suggest that participants complete the exercise after the session and make some notes.

- For the child they are considering, they should think about how this child is managing in terms of trust, managing feelings, self esteem, feeling effective/being co-operative and a sense of belonging to the school.

- Suggest that participants look for positives as well as difficulties within each dimension.

Using the Secure Base model in school

SLIDE 65:

The Secure Base model for schools
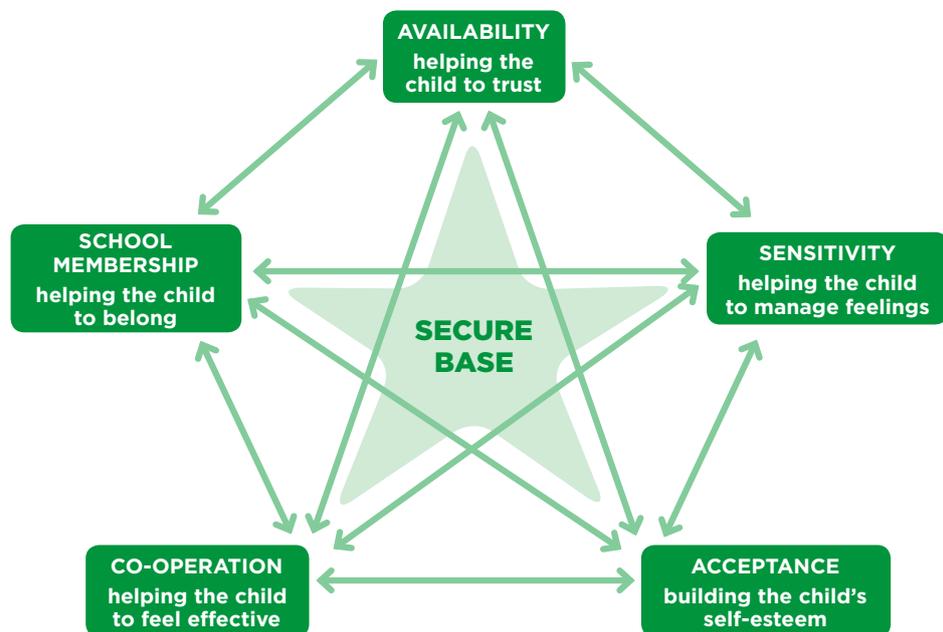
- How are the ideas from the Secure Base model already reflected within your practice and in the policies and ethos the school?

- How might they be further developed?

- What might be done differently?

- List the next steps that might be taken to achieve this

  - to provide a secure base for children

  - to provide a secure base for staff

Notes

● Suggest that this exercise might be discussed by staff members after the session as a basis for further planning or for the follow up session (if planned).

● Emphasise the importance of a secure base for staff – as this will, in turn, enable staff to provide a secure base for children

● Suggest that this is an opportunity to develop ideas, both at a practice and policy level. Participants can consider the question from their individual role perspective.

● They might want to consider:

  • Any resources needed (e.g. time, money, books)

  • Support needed

  • Short and longer term timescales

  • Points at which progress can be reviewed

TRAINING NOTE

Finish with a brief recap of the whole session: key concepts from attachment theory, the five dimensions of the Secure Base model and finally thoughts on using the model within the school.