



Secure Attachments - Robust Learners - Building Futures



## STRATEGY TOOLBOX

Keeping secure attachment connections to children during school closures



# The impact of the school closures- and the opportunity

- We will be worried about many students not being able to access school.
- School staff relationships are hugely significant and life changing for many students- many staff members are secondary attachment figures for children.
- School provides predictability, containment and mutual joy states for children- all essential elements of a secure attachment relationship.
- In the short term this will feel hard/catastrophic/extremely worrying- how would you describe it?

*In the long term we have an opportunity to show these children, we thought about them often, care about them, hold them in our hearts and minds and show them they make a significant impact on us and their school community- this is a great gift.*

# How do we keep connected in physical absence?

This short training will provide you with practical ways to keep secure attachment going and growing during the school closure.

- Why being 'held in mind' by key adults can change the emotional life of a child.
- Offerings you can create for children in isolation or who will not be in school for the foreseeable future.
- Activities to do with children who may be on a part-time attendance to school.
- Ways to speak to children who you may contact via phone or online chat.

# Being Held In Mind

*“Life is best organized as a series of daring adventures from a secure base”*

John Bowlby

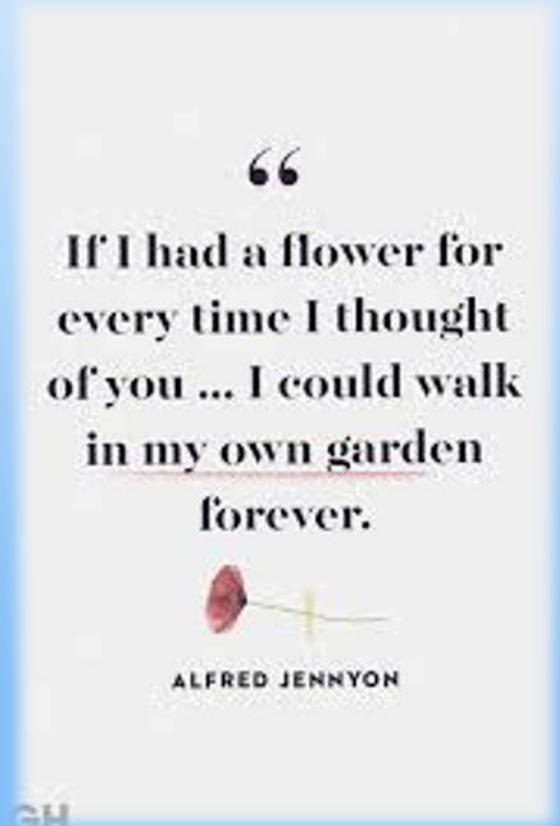
Being thought about or held in mind anchors us in the world. It helps us feel less alone, and feel steady, seen and significant.

*“When a child is held in mind, the child feels it, and knows it. There is a sense of safety, of containment, and, most important, existence in that the other, which has always seemed to me vital...It seems to me that one of life’s greatest privileges is just that- the experience of being held in someone’s mind.”*

John Bowlby

# The Power of Being Held in Mind

- In secure attachment the emotionally robust adult is a 'safe haven' for the child when they experience distress.
- *The safe haven can be knowing that they are held in mind, remembered and thought about on a consistent basis by the key adult.*
- This allows the child to feel held and contained when they are not with the key adult and have a secure and safe base in the world they can retreat to when the world feels overwhelming.
- *Many children do not feel psychologically safe enough to learn because they do not have a 'safe haven' connection.*
- Many children cannot imagine how they are thought about, they need explicit explanations of this.



## Before we start.....please hold in mind!

- Guidance from West Sussex County Council states that vulnerable children must be checked on at home at least once per week. If they are self-isolating this can be through a closed window.
- If we are visiting children we can set up 'holding in mind' exercise with them.
- It is important to remember that the strategies offered in this training will need to be adapted to meet the age appropriate and cognitive needs of the child or young person you are supporting.
- All of the exercises need to be scheduled in as part of your new working routine. Routine and consistency helps manage anxiety for you and the child.

## It's good to guess gently and empathise

We have a great temptation to rescue and move straight to the positive. You can bring them comfort by sitting alongside their true feelings before moving into a 'fixing' statement.

- *"I imagine you are missing your friends, **that can feel lonely**.....they will be looking forward to seeing you"*
- *"I'm guessing **you might feel confused** that school has closed.....we will see each other again"*
- *"You **might feel very worried** that you're not coming back to school.....you will come back to school"*
- *"you **might feel cross** that we didn't say goodbye for now.....it's okay to feel whatever you feel, this is a tough time"*

# Strategies for keeping connected

- **Sticker link**

*Ask the child to choose a sticker for you and a sticker for them (the same design) to wear during the day, this acts as a 'transitional object'. Whenever you are thinking about them you can tap the sticker, and join them on a collage at the end of the day (you might need to glue them on!)*

- **Strong string bracelet**

*Creating a bracelet from a ball of string is a ritual that is playful and symbolic in regards to building a connection and helping children feel they are connected to you when they are not with you. This is a good strategy if multiple adults are holding the child in mind.*

- **Secret symbols**

*Create a unique gesture to do with the child, do it with them whenever you see them, or have times of the day when you will meet to complete this ritual.*

- **Food imaginings**

*Connecting memory and food is natural for many people; we can use this to bring depth to holding in mind experiences. Find out what a favourite food for the child is, tell them you will think of them whenever you eat it or better still share a little of the food with the child gets a sense of being internalised via the symbol of the food.*

- **Job share**

*Asking the child to give you a job or a list and fulfilling it (reporting back at the end of the day or when you next see them) this helps them know you have remembered, thought about them and taken action to make sure you remember them.*

## Strategy: *Self-Soothing Kit*

Create a self-soothing kit with the child designed to help them feel connected, grounded and emotionally regulated.

- *Food*- that brings you comfort
- *Person*- who makes you feel warm and nurtured
- *Music*- that soothes you
- *Image*- you love looking at
- *Movement*- you find connecting and relaxing
- *Touch*- a material that you enjoy touching
- *Place*- a place where you felt grounded and at peace

**What would be in your comfort box?**

# Strategy: *Say what you think!*

- We take for granted that children know what we see when we look at them, and know how we hold them in mind.
- It is extremely helpful for them to hear what we see and think on a regular basis and in clear ways.
- Keep a diary of the times you thought of them- jot the thought down and show them the next time you see them or email them your weekly thought diary.
- Thoughts you might share:

*I thought of Billy at 11am on Thursday when I saw a picture of a red squirrel- it reminded me of the colour of his hair.*

*I thought of Billy at 9am on Tuesday when I was typing and remembered the time he wrote 'dinosaur' independently on the computer.*

# Transitional Objects

- A transitional object (Winnicott) is usually chosen by an infant between the ages of 0 and 3 sometimes a blanket, special toy or object- internalised feelings about the attachment figure are projected onto the object. This helps the child feel connected to attachment figure when separated.
- It is fundamental that the child chooses the object as it is their projection.
- There is great emotional safety in transitional objects. We can re-introduce them in later life to support with transitions/ separation anxiety.

## Strategy: *I'm with you box*

- Think about the child's ability to take and return objects and whether parents/carers have capacity to hold some responsibility for this.
- Create a box of 10 small objects (soft toys, plastic figures, ball- if possible objects from their classroom) They could decorate the box if they are in school.
- Invite the child to take one item from the box when they come into school. Ask them to do their best to return the item but make sure they know you understand that sometimes things get lost and broken and won't be returned.....

.....*Strategy: I'm with you box* continued

- If you are visiting their house take the box with you and invite them to choose an item from the box to keep until your next visit, then swop for another item.
- Put some of yourself in the object before they take it- have a secret 'chat' to it, wonder about what adventures it might have with the child.
- Talk to the child about keeping the object somewhere safe/ plan where they might keep it.
- This MUST have a joined up approach with parents so they can support the child with the system.
- The child can swop the item with another in the box when they return the last borrowed object. If the objects are not returned you have to be okay with this!

## *Strategy: What Were You Up To?*

- Ask the child to choose a time in the day when they are away from you.
- Explain that you will be really thinking about them and focusing all your energy into guessing what they are up to.
- Draw a picture guessing what they were up to at that time.
- Give it to the child next time you see them/ post it through their door/email a picture of the image to their parent/carer and see if you were right!
- The point of this is not to necessary get it right, it is to model that you are really thinking about them.
- Make it fun- get the oxytocin (feel good brain chemical) flowing!

# The importance of healing through relationship

*The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love.” Dr. Bruce Perry*

Remember: By offering a child a practical experience of being held in mind you are moving mountains to reach them and show them that there are grown-ups who will do their best for them and remain constant. These are absolute fundamentals in creating a Secure Base and the child's internalisation of a healthy relationship model. (Bowlby)

***Thank you for all you are doing for our vulnerable children***

# Strategy: *Write a Therapeutic Story.....*



*Metaphor is the emotional language of children. This is a hands-on and creative training which provides skills for teachers, learning mentors and teaching assistants providing deep empathy for children and enhancing children's emotional literacy.*

*You will have a finished therapeutic story to share with a child/children at the end of this short course.*

# Therapeutic Storytelling

*An amazing way to hold individual children and classes in mind with empathy through metaphor.*

The next online training that will be offered for school staff will be “Therapeutic Storytelling”

To buy this online training please email: [bookings@yourspacetherapies.org](mailto:bookings@yourspacetherapies.org)

Cost: £45 plus VAT

***What a gift to email a child, your whole class or whole school!***



**During school closure Your Space Therapies are providing online therapy, counselling, consultancy and training- please email for further details.**

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**[info@yourspacetherapies.org](mailto:info@yourspacetherapies.org)**



***We do hope you found this online training helpful and supportive in this difficult time***

***We would appreciate your feedback***