

Curiosity: the 'C' in PACE

Helping adults build safe, trusting and meaningful relationships with children

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PACE is a way for adults to connect with children. It is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving to help a child feel safe. This sense of safety helps everyone to understand the child's behaviour better and for meaningful relationships to grow.

Let's have a closer look at 'C' for Curiosity – what it is and how to use it.

What does PACE stand for?

PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. It is more of an attitude and way of being, than a strategy.

What is curiosity?

Curiosity is wondering what the meaning behind a child's behaviour actually is, without passing judgement or showing annoyance.

Children often don't know 'why' they do things, or if they do, they may not feel comfortable telling adults why. Being curious and asking 'wondering' questions can help a child understand their behaviour better and become more aware of their 'inner' self. This can help them adapt their behaviour and use less of it in the future.

An important part of curiosity is to show the child it is ok for them to feel the way they do and that you simply want to understand them.

What does curiosity look like?

Curiosity is a quiet and accepting voice, and one that does not pressure a child to respond. Think of it like when you use your inner voice to mull over things. Here's some examples:

- ✓ 'I'm wondering if you broke the toy because you were feeling angry.'
- ✓ 'I've noticed you have been using a really loud voice. I wonder if you have been trying to tell me you're angry with me.'
- ✓ 'I'm thinking you're a little nervous about going back to school today, and that's why you don't want to get ready this morning.'

It's important not to 'directly' ask the child why in your wonderings.

This is because it pressures them to respond, and possibly they don't know why. This can lead to them becoming defensive or disconnect from you.

There are many ways to start curious conversations. For example:

- ✓ 'I wonder if ...'
- ✓ 'It sounds like ...'
- ✓ 'I saw X and thought that maybe ...'

Remember though, using curiosity does not require a child to respond. Your one-sided conversation still shows them you care and can help them feel safe.

When to use curiosity

As much as possible, use curiosity when a child is calm and after you have shown them acceptance (the A in PACE). It can also help to include some playfulness (the P in PACE). This can help the child make sense of their behaviour, without feeling judged.

When not to use curiosity

Don't use curiosity when you are feeling angry or when the child is still struggling with their emotions (dysregulated). Children usually know their behaviour was not right and questioning them at that time is likely to reinforce feelings of shame.

Remember curiosity is one part of **PACE**. Learn about the others on our website.



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Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Go to Child and Youth Protection Services at www.communityservices.act.gov.au

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Sources:

- > PACE: A trauma-informed approach to supporting children and young people. Accessed from <https://cavuhb.nhs.wales/files/resilience-project/resilience-project-logo-adjustments/pace-pdf/>

