

Playfulness: the 'P' 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 'P' for Playfulness – 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 playfulness?

Playfulness is about having an open, positive and light-hearted attitude to connect with a child in a relaxed way. It does not mean 'joking around' and being silly all the time, although these can be forms of playfulness. It is about helping a child to see what is positive.

Sharing fun moments are important in child development. They tell a child they are interesting and valuable, and that any conflicts they have with others will not harm their relationships long-term.

For carers, having a playful attitude in everyday interactions reduces the likelihood of a child having a defensive attitude. For children who do not want physical affection or have not experienced shared fun, playfulness can provide them closeness in a way that is non-threatening.

What does playfulness look like?

Playfulness looks different for everyone. It might be a smile, a giggle, a wink. It might be purposefully taking a deep breath instead of reacting with tears and anger. It might be a little hug or a joke. It can be small or big.

What's important is that playfulness fits both the adult's and the child's personalities. When it doesn't, playfulness runs the risk of making a child feel they are being made fun of or how they are feeling isn't important. Sarcasm can also cause misunderstandings, which can make a child feel shame.

When to use playfulness

- ✓ In everyday interactions, by being open and interested.
- ✓ When a light-hearted response could help a child feel better about a mistake, for example, accidentally spilling milk.

When not to use playfulness

- ✗ When a more serious problem has occurred, a playful attitude may not be appropriate
- ✗ When it might be misinterpreted as patronising or minimising the child's feelings or experiences.
- ✗ As you are getting to know a child, be careful about how you use playfulness to avoid misunderstandings.

Remember playfulness 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/>

