

Empathy: the 'E' 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 'E' for Empathy – 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 empathy?

Empathy is the actions and words you use when supporting a child to make sense of their experiences, feelings and thoughts. It is about showing the child their feelings are important to you, and you are there to help them get through them.

Why empathy is important?

Children can have a difficult time understanding and regulating their emotions, and this can be very overwhelming for them – especially big emotions like anger, sadness, grief, fear and even self-hate or loathing. For a child who has experienced trauma, managing their emotions can be even harder for them to do.

As a carer, you can help ease this load by providing understanding, support, courage and confidence to the child when they are facing these big or difficult feelings and thoughts.

When to use empathy

Empathy can be used in everyday interactions. Encourage the child to talk about whatever they are feeling or thinking and show them, through your responses, that it is safe for them to do so.

It is helpful to remember what the child has experienced in their past and that they may not have had someone before to support them to 'organise' their thoughts, feelings, responses and behaviours – so it may take some time for the child to open up to you.

Empathy is not about trying to make everything better, or trying to change a child's feelings or behaviour. It is not saying: 'You should have ...', 'Next time don't ...', 'Your behaviour is ...'. It is about listening and showing the child you are there for them.

What does empathy look like?

Showing empathy is often in the small and quiet actions. For example:

- ✓ listen with eye contact
- ✓ provide reassurance through closeness and a gentle hug or touch
- ✓ express care for their wellbeing, without questioning their experience
- ✓ create a calm and safe environment.

There are many ways to start conversations that use empathy. For example:

- ✓ 'It sounds really tough to ...'
- ✓ 'That would be difficult for anyone to ...'
- ✓ 'I'm here for you ...'
- ✓ 'It's hard waiting for ...'
- ✓ 'That must be hard feeling ...'

Remember empathy 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/>
- > Dan Hughes. Creating PACE for the special children in our lives. Accessed from P.A.C.E. <http://www.danielhughes.org/p.a.c.e..html>
- > DDP network. What is meant by PACE? Accessed from <https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/>



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