

## Using the PACE approach at Bolney CEP

PACE is an approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes, an American psychologist who works with traumatised children. PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. These principles help to promote the experience of safety in interactions with young people. Children need to feel that you have connected with the emotional part of their brain before they can engage the thoughtful, articulate, problem solving areas and this approach supports this connection.



Once a child feels that you have connected with their level of emotion, they can stop showing you. Children show you how they feel through their behaviour, often in ways that are very unhelpful to you and also to themselves. More and more schools are beginning to use this as a basis for a more therapeutic approach to support their pupils and Bolney is one of them.

All the staff at Bolney CEP have received training from the West Sussex Virtual School Service on the theory behind this approach and on how to successfully deliver PACE and positive results have been seen already. It is intended that PACE will become a strategy within the school Behaviour Policy to use with those children that may benefit from the approach.

The four areas have distinct purposes which are explained below but for some children in some situations, it is more pertinent to just use A and E rather than the full PACE approach.

### Playfulness

The purpose of playfulness is to enjoy being together in an unconditional way. This gives the message that the relationship is stronger than things that go wrong. Using a playful and light-hearted tone, as if you were telling a story, shows your interest and curiosity. Playfulness reduces the shame a child might feel when something has gone wrong; difficult messages or serious conversations can be easier to have if the tone is light. It does not mean you do not take the emotions or the incident seriously.

### Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance is fundamental to a child's sense of safety because it shows that you have connected with their feelings without judgement, and without seeking to reassure their feelings away. This can be hard to do as it means you and the child sitting with some strong emotions, together. This is painful and uncomfortable, but also very powerful. If a child expresses distressing emotions about themselves or others (e.g. "nobody loves me", "I'm stupid", "I'm bad", "you hate me") it is hard not to challenge them as being wrong, but it is really important to accept those feelings and acknowledge them using curiosity and empathy. Accepting the child or young person's feelings and emotions does not mean accepting unwanted behaviour and it does not mean agreeing with the child's viewpoint, but for true acceptance to take place, it is important that the child also knows you can see them beyond their behaviour.

### Curiosity

It's important to be curious about the child's thoughts, feelings, wishes and intentions: they may still be learning that other people can think about them in this way or that they can be held in mind by an adult without judgement and accusation at all. Curiosity is also important for discipline to be effective: connect with the emotion before you engage in discussion. Showing the child that you are interested in what is going on for them and willing to do something about it is a very powerful experience. Don't feel afraid to share your curiosity with the child by wondering, not telling them. Try to avoid asking "Why?". Instead you might ask:

"Is it ok if I share my idea of what is going on for you? I might be wrong but these are my ideas."

Or "What do you think was going on?" or "I wonder what...?"

Try to be curious in a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child: this is not the same as agreeing with their perception of the event, but shows your interest in understanding it and accepting the feelings that were involved.

## Empathy

When you show empathy you are showing the child that their feelings are important to you, and that you are alongside them in their difficulty. You are showing that you can cope with the hard times with them and you are trying hard to understand how it feels. Understanding and expressing your own feelings about the child's experience can often be more effective than reassurance. For example, if a child says "You don't care," you can respond by saying "That must be really hard for you. I feel sad that you experience me as not caring."

For further information on PACE, please look on the school website or talk to a member of staff.

<https://bolney-pri.eschools.co.uk/web/pace/680407/CHJldmIld3x8MjAyNC0wMi0wOCAwOToyNjoyNg%3D%3D>

