



Creating An Emotionally Responsive Environment

Culture and practice

In order to create an environment in which a child can grow and develop we must attend to, and respond to the emotional atmosphere of the environment as a whole

In order to create an environment that can effectively respond to the emotional needs of its young people, we must consider the emotional atmosphere of the culture as a whole. Opportunities must be created within the system to respond to the emotional needs of the adults to enable them to be emotionally available for young people. Opportunities must be given for adults to share their own emotions, practice and experiences, enable the development of their own self-awareness, allowing them to more effectively meet the needs of the young people in their care.

Emotionally responsive environments can only be provided by emotionally literate adults

In the words of L.R Knost

"When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions it is our job to share our calm, not join their chaos"

We all experience our own internal chaos at times. At these times, our ability to think clearly, take in new information and to engage effectively with others can be compromised. Adults need opportunities to safely share their chaos *outside* the care environment and classroom to enable them to access their calm in response to challenges *within* the care environment / classroom.

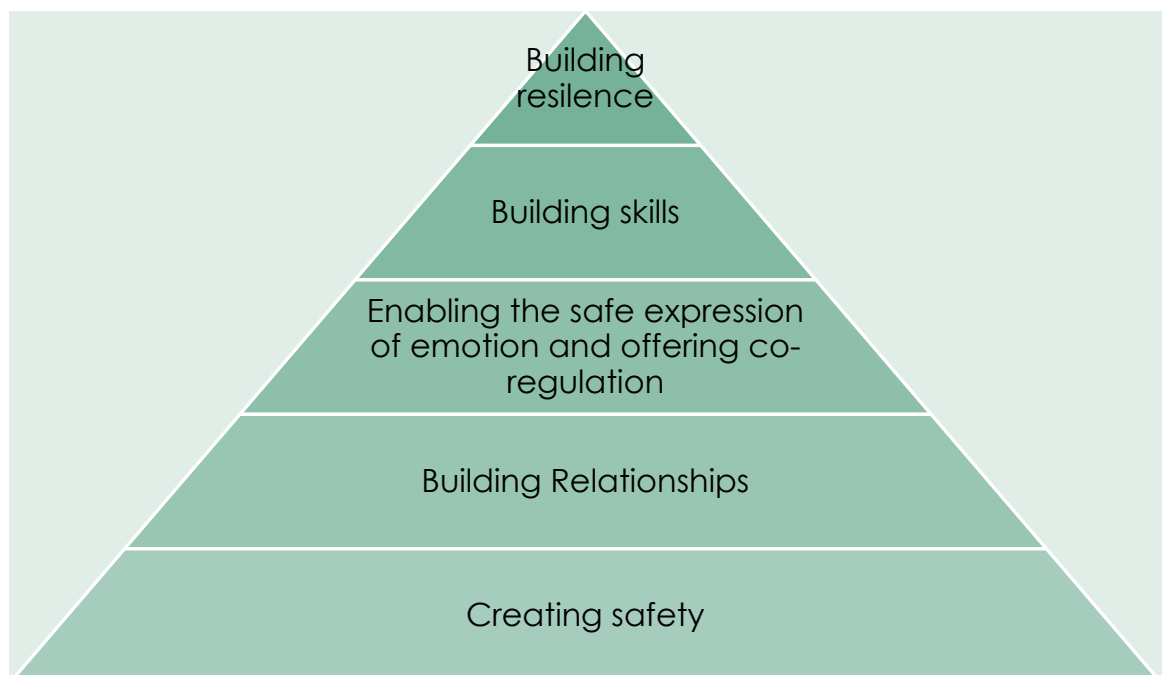
With an increased understanding of our own vulnerabilities as adults, we can gain insight into the emotional world of the children we teach and care for. We know that not every child starts their day with a clear head, free from emotional burden and stress. In fact many children start their day with numerous stresses and pressures that impact upon their ability to engage with adults. On top of this, there is an expectation that every child in Scotland will be in a position to attend formal education every day, to sit down and engage their learning brain. Every young person in their school career is likely to experience a time when their emotional needs overwhelm their ability to learn. For some, the pressures and stresses within their home life make it difficult to focus within school and therefore, engage with learning. For others falling out with a best friend or breaking up with a boyfriend may be enough to preoccupy their mind and inhibit their ability to focus.



To consider the emotional atmosphere within your care or learning environment, we introduce the layers of healing care. This framework was developed in a residential school to provide a framework for adults to consider the environment they were providing both in care and education, to maximise each child's capacity for development and learning.

Introduction to the Layers of Healing Care

The Layers of Healing Care (Quin, 2019) was adapted from Kim Golding's pyramid of need (2015) to support the development of both culture and practice within both care and education settings. It highlights the fundamental factors, or layers, informing an emotionally responsive culture:



An example of what factors need to be considered at each layer is presented overleaf: (this list is not exhaustive!)



SAFETY

Emotionally responsive environments provide safety for all

Adults safety	Child's safety
Adults experience job security	There an understanding of the child's experience of safety out with the care / school environment
Adults work within an environment where they can openly discuss their need for safety	There is an understanding of the child's safety needs within the care /school environment
The environment is responsive to the adults need for safety	There is an understanding that a lack of safety may be expressed through a child's behaviour
Adults feel emotionally supported and contained	Safety is openly discussed and there is a daily check in with young people about their experience of safety within care / school environment
There are clear expectations for adults and clarity about their role	Young people are supported to talk about how the environment could be made safer for all
Adults are working together towards a shared goal / core set of values	Young people are encouraged to listen to each other's safety needs and are supported to respond to this.
There are opportunities for reflective practice and supervision to address any specific safety concerns?	Young people are welcomed into and claimed by the environment
There are clear communication structures and mixed messages from the system are minimised	Young people experience predictability within the environment
There is consistency of approach	Rhythms and routines are established and sustained



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Emotionally responsive environments recognise that relationships are at the core

Adults Relationships	Child relationships
Positive professional relationships, amongst adults, are encouraged and celebrated	Young people observe positive, trusted relationships between adults
Opportunities to develop trusted relationships that encourage safe expression of emotion and supportive feedback, through reflective practice, are encouraged.	Young people are actively supported to celebrate positive relationships with each other and between adult and child
Conflict resolution is modelled across the adult team – challenges are discussed and resolved	Young people are actively supported to share experiences in relationships and are supported to resolve conflict
Adults feel listened to	Pro social skills are celebrated daily
Senior team are visible and available and actively engage with the team as a whole	Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (PACE – Dan Hughes) informs relationships across the culture.
Adults are encouraged to develop attunement, observing the needs of their colleagues	Young people are encouraged to be honest and kind
Adults are aware of appropriate relationship boundaries between themselves and with young people	Young people are encouraged to build their communication skills to articulate what they need from relationships



ENABLING THE SAFE EXPRESSION OF EMOTION AND CO-REGULATING

Emotionally responsive environments meet the emotional needs of all with recognition that emotional wellbeing is essential for learning and development

Adults Emotional needs	Child's Emotional needs
Appropriate forums are established where adults are enabled to express their emotions openly through reflective practice, supervision	Adults are encouraged to develop a daily emotional check-in for young people
Adults are encouraged to build their own self-awareness, developing an understanding of their own emotional experience, triggers and regulation strategies	Adults are encouraged to develop young people's emotional literacy through conversations about emotion
Adults are encouraged to be mindful of their own emotional needs and self-care	Adults are encouraged to support young people to name emotions and recognise the physical sensations of emotion.
Adults are encouraged to understand and reflect on helpful ways of responding to distress in young people and unhelpful ways of responding (3 Rs)	Adults are encouraged to support young people to understand the escalation in their emotion using techniques such as the 5 point scale, volcanos, thermometers etc.
Adult's are encouraged to recognise the importance of responding to their own and others' emotion in a compassionate way	Adults are encouraged to introduce young people to emotional regulation strategies as part of their daily routine eg mindfulness / relaxation exercises, outdoor activity, talking
Adults are encouraged to talk about and reflect on their understanding of young people's emotions	Adults are encouraged to talk with young people about the range of different emotional experiences
Adults are encouraged to normalise the experience of emotion	Adults are encouraged to support young people to understand the emotions of others and respond with kindness



BUILDING SKILLS

Emotionally responsive environments encourage continuous personal / professional development

Adult's Development needs	Child's Development needs
Adult's developmental needs are valued and CPD encouraged	Adults understand development and developmental trauma
Adults are encouraged to recognise their own need for professional development when it comes to building skills to effectively respond to the emotional needs of young people eg developing their own self-awareness, developing skills in mindfulness training, building emotional literacy skills etc	Adults can recognize gaps in development and can work to create an environment that meets a child's developmental needs
Adults are encouraged to reflect on gaps in their own personal and professional development	Adults work to support a child to build on their social and emotional skills, understanding that these skills provide the foundations for more formal opportunities for learning
Adults are encouraged to source opportunities to build on their skills	Realistic expectations are in place that enable a child to experience mastery
Adults are encouraged to consider their own development in terms of a process as opposed to a series of check list courses	A strength-based approach is adopted
Adults are encouraged to share new learning and insights	Achievement is regularly celebrated
Achievement is recognized and celebrated	Skills development is understood within its broadest context
	Support is offered to assess and reduce barriers to developing skills



BUILDING RESILIENCE

Emotionally responsive environments create resilience

Adult's Resilience	Child's Resilience
Adults understand what is meant by the term resilience Competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, control (Dabell)	Young people are introduced to the term resilience and a framework is used to support their development in this area
Adults understand their own resilience and vulnerabilities	Children are supported to explore their own resilience and vulnerabilities
Adults are offered time to reflect on their own resilience and highlight their own needs in reflective practice / supervision	Opportunities are offered to build their resilience eg. through repeated experience of mastery, acceptance of character, increased contribution to society, skills for coping
Adults recognize methods to support the development of resilience in themselves and others	Strengths based approaches are employed to support the development of competence
Adults are introduced to and encouraged to explore frameworks to support the development of resilience (eg Boing Boing, Bounce back, Growth Mindset, 7Cs)	Children experience feeling valued and adults understand the value of building connections to facilitate this process. Regular feedback offered to build confidence
Adults experience their own value, have opportunities to achieve and grow in confidence	Children are offered opportunities to explore their identity, build their self-awareness, understand their own strengths, develop their own value and self-worth
Adults are given time to explore their own self-awareness, who they are as individuals to support them to model this with young people	Children and young people are offered opportunities to contribute within their home / school / wider community
Adults are encouraged to recognize their own self-care needs and these are valued within the Organization.	Children and young people are encouraged to ask for help, struggles are recognized as part of growth and development and children are introduced to problem solving techniques and strategies
Adults voices are heard and their contribution valued	Children are given a voice, given opportunities to make choices and recognize their influence in the world

