

# PACE: A trauma-informed approach to supporting young people

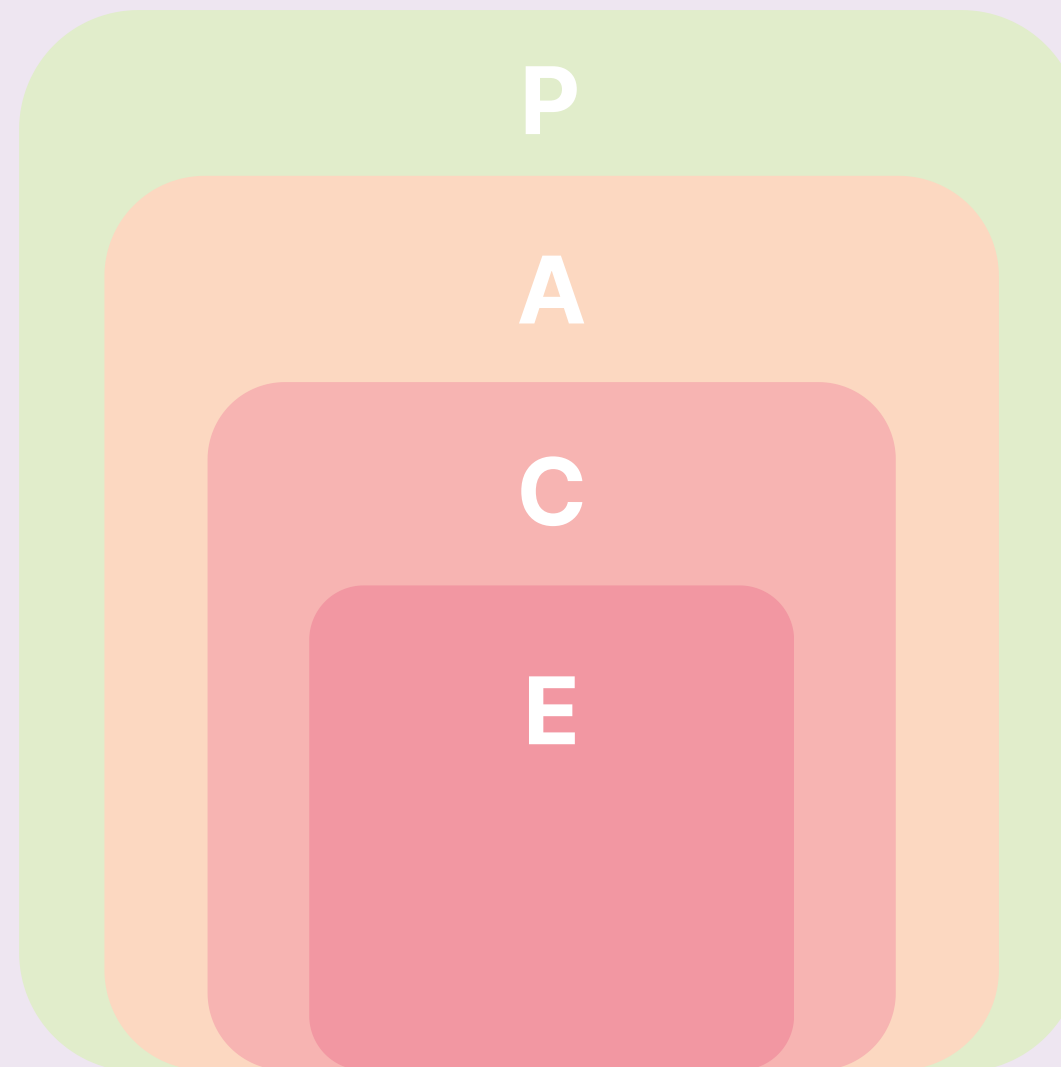
PACE was developed by Dr Dan Hughes, and is a way of thinking, feeling, and communicating that aims to make young people feel safe. It emphasises the importance of building trusting and meaningful relationships with young people by using **Playfulness**, **Acceptance**, **Curiosity**, and **Empathy** in our interactions.

## PLAYFULNESS

This is about spending time with the young person without agenda. Playful moments reassure children and young people that their conflicts and separations with adults are temporary and will never harm the strength of their relationship.

## CURIOSITY

This is wondering about the meaning of the behaviour for the child. It involves showing the child you are interested in what is happening for them and willing to do something about it. It can help children reflect on their own behaviour.



## ACCEPTANCE

Accepting the child's thoughts, feelings and perceptions without judgement. It does not mean having to accept their behaviour, but accepting and validating the underlying feelings, and understanding the child's motivation.

## EMPATHY

This is not about reassuring the child, but being with them in the moment and carrying and containing their big feelings. It is about demonstrating that we understand how difficult an experience is for them and understand how they feel

Using **PACE** helps adults to slow down their reactions, stay calm and tune into what the child is experiencing in the moment. It supports us to gain a better understanding of what the child is feeling. In tricky moments it allows us to stay emotionally regulated and guide the child through their heightened emotions, thoughts and behaviours. In turn, **PACE** helps children and young people to feel more connected to, and understood by, important adults in their life and ultimately, to slow down their own responses.

## PLAYFULNESS

Incorporating playfulness into your approach helps keep things in perspective. Suggestions include:

- Use a light tone of voice, like you might use when story-telling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone.
- Show with your eyes, eyebrows, smile that you are interested in what the child is doing and saying.
- Try and soften your facial expressions, and lower your body to their level, so not to tower over them.
- Make a game of getting organised; practise socialising using fun role-play; give them a job during a busy transition.

## CURIOSITY

Being curious is different from asking the child, "Why did you do that?" with the expectation of a reply. It is not interpretation or fact gathering. It's just about getting to know the child and letting them know that.

Sentence starters could include:

I wonder if....

Could it be...?

I am trying to imagine....

Can you help me understand...?

Tell me if I'm getting this wrong...

Is there a part of you that...

## ACCEPTANCE

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. Convey your acceptance through your tone of voice as well as through non-verbal communication, such as posture, maintaining an open stance, mirroring their body position, and maintaining eye contact.

## EMPATHY

Being empathetic means actively showing the young person that you want to support them. Possible sentence starters to use in this situation include:

It sounds like it's been really tough...

You have had lots of tricky times...

I am so sorry it's been so hard for you...

I can't even imagine how that was for you...

I really want to hear how it's been for you...

I think you are saying....

I think you might be letting me know that....

If you had words for those feelings, I wonder what they would be....

Let's make sure I've got that right....