

Enabling children to thrive

Supporting children with attachment difficulties and trauma

Aldersbrook Primary School

OUR SCHOOL VISION

We aspire to be:

1. A school community that values every day, every lesson, every opportunity and everyone. No child left behind!
2. A safe nurturing learning community that instils confidence, resilience, tolerance and compassion.
3. A school that provides a wide range of creative experiences that inspires excellence, a sense of awe and wonder and a thirst for knowledge.
4. An entire school community that models high expectations, social and moral responsibility, global citizenship and a sense of pride.
5. A school that empowers children to make informed decisions about their health, safety and well-being and ensure that they are prepared for life beyond school as a global citizen.
6. A responsive, reflective and supportive staff who are passionate about inspiring future generations.
7. A school celebrated for innovation, integrity and spirit.
8. A school that promotes self-awareness, self-control and acceptance of responsibility of own actions beyond school.
9. A community that embraces Aldersbrook's motto: LET'S LEARN TOGETHER!
10. A school that enables all to be 'Curious, Independent, Creative and Involved'

Values

To make learning an enjoyable and challenging experience, preparing our pupils for life. To ensure all pupils and staff achieve as highly as possible.

Aldersbrook has a successful learning culture, which enables pupils to become effective, enthusiastic and independent learners for life. Values are principles that guide behaviour. At Aldersbrook adults are encouraged to model values and to give time for discussion and reflection. We believe that this empowers individuals to be effective learners and good citizens.

Our curriculum underpins our work to actively promote fundamental British values of democracy, individual liberty, mutual respect and acceptance of those from all faiths, backgrounds and cultures. As well as this, we aim to enable all to be 'Curious, Independent, Creative and Involved'.

A rounded programme of assemblies and events promote children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, enabling them to develop their own moral and ethical compass to guide what is right and what is wrong.

Each month we will focus on a new value which will be promoted through lessons, discussions and also in the playground. We encourage children to talk about the value at home and to share and celebrate the value with adults and children both at home and at school.

Statement

The aim of this document is to promote the understanding of attachment and trauma and extend our knowledge so that children and young people who have experienced adversity, can heal, progress, play, and learn. We know that behaviour is a form of communication and what is deemed as an unacceptable reaction is an outcome from social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

Attachment at Aldersbrook

Aldersbrook Primary School has an attachment friendly ethos with regular staff training through PAC-UK and the Virtual Schools Head for Redbridge.

Through consultation with parents, we have developed a strategy to support pupils who have experienced early childhood trauma and attachment difficulties.

As part of our ongoing commitment we aim to:

- Provide annual whole staff training on attachment and trauma
- Provide LAC/ previously LAC/adopted pupils with a 'Designated Adult'
- Ensure individual SMSC needs, including Mental Health provision, is available to all pupils and parents
- Provide enriching experiences to support learning
- Recognise the value of allowing parents to share lived experiences of supporting pupils to manage trauma
- Meetings with parents
- Parent consultation group for Pupil Premium Plus parents/carers

Below are examples of specific strategies that we currently use to support pupils at Aldersbrook.

- Soft Start - ensuring a smooth transition from school gate to the classroom with time given to settle in before the school day begins
- Greet pupils at the gate and door by their name daily at the beginning of the day
- Forest School - allow pupils to thrive in outdoor settings, working in smaller groups to build confidence and resilience
- Consideration given to staff allocation and friends during transition
- Commitment made by the school to ensure parents of Pupil Premium Plus children meet with the new class teacher in the Summer term
- Dedicated spaces for extra-curricular clubs for all children in receipt of Pupil Premium funding
- Pupil Premium tutoring - planned in weekly each term and reviewed termly
- Allocate adopted pupils/LAC/ previously LAC with a 'Designated Adult'
- Termly parent meetings with childcare cover for Pupil Premium Plus parents/carers
- Pupil Passport - reviewed termly with Pupil Premium Plus parents/carers
- Additional support provided during school sleepovers and residentials
- Playtime support in the playground - additional adults, midday assistants and play leaders.
- Pupils joining EYFS are allocated a key worker
- Pupils given time to settle in over 2 weeks before beginning full time in EYFS

- Teachers plan home visits to meet with parents/carers and pupils before the beginning of the term
- EYFS leader to visit pupils existing nursery of pupils to get a thorough handover from practitioners

As a school, our policy is to support pupils social, emotional and mental health needs by following attachment friendly practices. As a school we have support from an attachment advisor, a School Counsellor, Mental Health Leader, two Mental Health Champions and four accredited Mental Health Aiders.

Aldersbrook Primary School is fully committed to attachment friendly practices and works closely with the Virtual Head of Schools to ensure we are fully reflective on our practices. It is important to our school development to reflect on best practice in order to review and improve provision.

Sensory Development

Sensory development is integral to a child's understanding and experience of the world around them, it helps inform decisions that we all make, from where and how we sit, to what we eat and wear. The sensory needs of a person change with time. A child's sensory processing will mature as they get older and a child will seek to meet their sensory needs in various ways. We all experience sensations in our own individual ways and as such we have our own sensory needs; some people can be extremely sensitive to noise, light, touch, smell or movement others may under respond to such sensations (COT April 2015).

At Aldersbrook Primary School we aim to provide a range of sensory stimulus for pupils' so that we can best support our pupils and enable them to thrive. There is never any judgment on a pupil's experiences in life but these may have an influence on their sensory development. An example of how pupils are supported is through: Speech and Language Therapy and Learning Behaviour support. Pupils are an integral part of our school curriculum, all pupils are planned for with support from specialist leaders and our SEND team.

Sensory Stimulus – based on individual needs/triggers

As part of the curriculum at Aldersbrook Primary School we aspire to integrate sensory stimulus throughout the day, as part of a lesson, or a brief break. The aim of a sensory stimulus is to meet pupil's sensory needs, whether they need an activity to alert them or settle down, in order to be able to cope with the demands of the day. These may work at other times, whether at home, or when you may be out and about, give them a try:

Calming Activities

- Push hands on a wall
- Push hands together
- Interlock fingers and pull hands apart
- Chair or wall push ups
- Lying on a therapy ball, over and pushing hands into floor
- Deep touch/pressure (play dough, stress ball)

- Deep belly breaths – have them put their hands on their belly and feel it expand and contract with deep breathing
- Play soft music/ turn lights down
- Mat of the carpet for consistency and assurance
- Yoga

Changing the environment

- Dim lighting
- Soft, mellow music
- Listen to quiet rhythmical music, with or without headphones
- Whisper and move slowly in the child's environment
- Designated area that the child can use as a hideout, such the library, Serenity garden, Reading garden, hall space or playground.

Alerting Activities

- Running
- Jumping
- Start and stop activities
- Light touch/tickling/feathers
- Fast bouncing on ball
- Use of the therapy ball
- Blow whistles
- Bright lights/ bright, contrasting colours
- Fidget with a koosh ball, paper clip,
- Balance on the beam on the bench

Attachment Review

We aim to review all practices on a yearly basis, depending on the individual needs of the initiative or pupil involved. We aim to review practices by assessing the success of existing strategies and embedding better systems in place to allow pupils to thrive. This helps us to improve our processes and create stronger relationships with our staff, pupils and parents.

Appendix

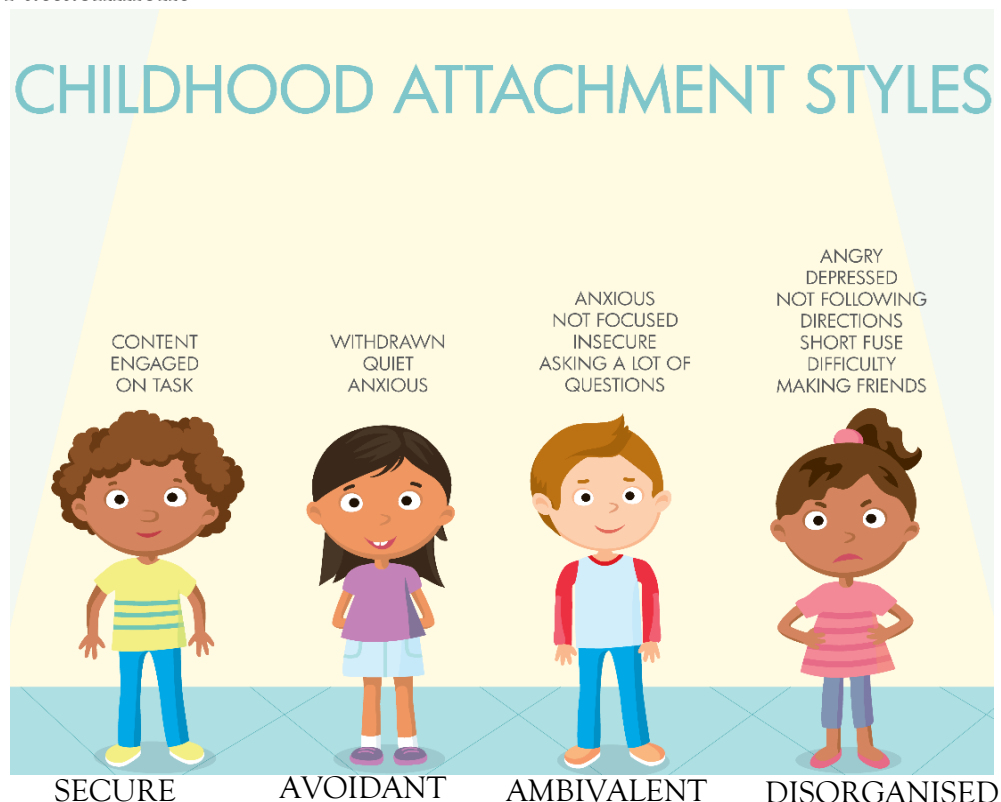
Attachment

Attachment is a theory developed by psychologists to explain how a child interacts with the adults looking after him or her. If a child has a healthy attachment, this means the child can be confident that the adults will respond to the child's needs, for example if they are hungry, tired or frightened, the adult caregiver will respond to meet the child's needs or reassure and comfort them.

There are times when a carer's ability to look after a child and respond consistently may be interrupted i.e. post-natal depression, bereavement, divorce, misuse of drugs, and alcohol. This has been noted to have potentially very serious and damaging consequences for the adult that child will become. If caregivers are seriously inconsistent or unresponsive in their behaviour to the child, the child may become very anxious as they are not able to predict how the adults around him will act; the child may even give up trying to get his needs met.

It is the role of the adult to guide the child in developing confidence to explore his environment and develop a good sense of self-esteem. This will help the child grow up to be a happy and functioning adult.

Types of attachment



Trauma

A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens life or physical security of a

loved one can also be traumatic. This is particularly important for young children as their sense of safety depends on the perceived safety of their attachment figures.

Traumatic experiences can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event. Children may feel terror, helplessness, or fear, as well as physiological reactions such as heart pounding, vomiting, or loss of bowel or bladder control. Children who experience an inability to protect themselves or who lacked protection from others to avoid the consequences of the traumatic experience may also feel overwhelmed by the intensity of physical and emotional responses.

Even though adults work hard to keep children safe, dangerous events still happen. This danger can come from outside of the family (such as a natural disaster, car accident, community violence) or from within the family, such as domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse, or the unexpected death of a loved one.

Anxiety

Why do children become anxious?

There are a range of reasons why children and young people become anxious. In most cases, when children are extremely anxious there is a very real cause to this; perhaps they are having difficulties at school, (for example) being bullied. Anxiety can also have no apparent cause, but be very real in its own right, and cannot be overcome by will-power. However, attempts to get children to master their anxiety by telling them “not to be so silly” will fail. Below are a number of reasons why children and young people might become anxious.

- A temperamental disposition. Anxiety can run in families. There is a genetic predisposition to some children being anxious.
- Physical illness or disability
- Family problems
- School worries
- Problems with friends and activities out of school.

At Aldersbrook Primary School we provide a nurturing environment where all feel safe to explore their feelings and surroundings. Staff and outside agencies work tirelessly to ensure pupils gain access to the curriculum and the wealth of expertise available to ensure their individual needs are met.

Dysregulation

There will be times when a pupil will be triggered into a response and their reaction is deemed as unacceptable i.e. hitting out, running away and damaging property. However, these reactions are not intentional but a form of communication informing us their needs at that time are not being met, for example, feeling unsafe, lack of trust (relationships), separation anxiety, fear (expectations in class). We work alongside outside agencies such as CAHMs, Speech and Language therapists and Counsellors who provide individual/group interventions for pupils and support staff to ensure consistent approaches in ensuring the needs of the pupils are met.

SMSC

Every pupil, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, disability or SEND within this inclusive school has an entitlement to fulfil his optimum potential. To achieve this we believe the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspect of education to be an important focus for all our pupils. SMSC plays a major part in their ability to achieve and learn and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experience of adult life. These aspects are embraced in every aspect of school life: making sure we provide the best services for both learning progress as well as the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development.

What Experiences Might Be Traumatic?

- Traumatic events during the last trimester of pregnancy (Alcohol, domestic violence, anxiety)
- Placed in care
- Physical, sexual, or psychological abuse and neglect (including trafficking)
- Natural and technological disasters or terrorism
- Family or community violence
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Substance use disorder (personal or familial)
- Refugee and war experiences (including torture)
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illness
- Military family-related stressors (e.g., deployment, parental loss or injury)
- Illness from an birth/early age
- Being hospitalised from birth/early age

Risk and Protective Factors

Fortunately, even when children experience a traumatic event, they don't always develop traumatic stress. Many factors contribute to symptoms, including whether the child has experienced trauma in the past, and protective factors as the child, family, and community levels can reduce the adverse impact of trauma. Some factors to consider include:

Severity of the event

How serious was the event? How badly was the child or someone she loves physically hurt? Did they or someone they love need to go to the hospital? Were the police involved? Were children separated from their caregivers? Were they interviewed by a principal, police officer, or counsellor? Did a friend or family member die?

Proximity to the event

Was the child actually at the place where the event occurred? Did they see the event happen to someone else or were they a victim? Did the child watch the event on television? Did they hear a loved one talk about what happened?

Caregivers' reactions

Did the child's family believe that he or she was telling the truth? Did caregivers take the child's reactions seriously? How did caregivers respond to the child's needs, and how did they cope with the event themselves?

Prior history of trauma

Children continually exposed to traumatic events are more likely to develop traumatic stress reactions.

Family and community factors

The culture, race, and ethnicity of children, their families, and their communities can be a protective factor, meaning that children and families have qualities and or resources that help buffer against the harmful effects of traumatic experiences and their aftermath. One of these protective factors can be the child's cultural identity. Culture often has a positive impact on how children, their families, and their communities respond, recover, and heal from a traumatic experience. However, experiences of racism and discrimination can increase a child's risk for traumatic stress symptoms.

Case study: Anya

Anya is an adopted girl who became very quiet, looked scared in the playground and sat on a bench rather than joining in with the other children.

Anya's teacher found an immediate solution, which was for Anya to stay in the classroom over lunchtime. Anya seemed much happier and calmer, and enjoyed playing in the classroom on her own or with a teaching assistant.

Anya's teacher then started trying various approaches to give Anya confidence to return to the playground, which started with her spending time (as Anya's most trusted adult in the school) in the playground with Anya. She also kept in close contact with Anya's parents, who were able to email her about what Anya had shared with them at home.

In time various approaches started to pay off. Anya played in the playground initially with a teacher and then with one or two friends. Her parents bought her a digital watch and she took it into the playground to try being there for one or two minutes on her own. Anya was also introduced to teachers in the playground and encouraged to trust that they would look after her if she was scared or needed help. Anya's parents reiterated to her that all the teachers would look after her, and reminded her of their names. She was also given picture cards that she could show a teacher if she felt scared in the playground, as it was likely Anya would find this easier than using words when she was scared.

All these approaches were taken at Anya's pace, recognising that while she needed to be encouraged to go back to the playground, if she didn't feel in control she was unlikely to feel safe and her fear might just increase.

Eventually, after several months, Anya began to spend longer in the playground, initially with a teacher and finally on her own. She was much less scared and grew in confidence. By the end of the year she was joining in with play. She could tell her parents if she felt scared in the playground, and was better able to ask for help if anything happened which made her feel scared or hurt.