

TRAUMA AND ATTACHMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

Understanding the Impact

Common Stressors

- Early experiences of neglect, loss, or inconsistent caregiving
- Exposure to violence or chronic stress
- Unmet emotional or physical needs
- Abrupt changes in caregiving, environment, or expectations

How Trauma Impacts Learning

- **Attention & Memory:** Difficulty focusing, remembering instructions, or transitioning between activities
- **Emotion Regulation:** Quick to frustration, tears or anger
- **Trust:** Difficulty forming relationships with peers or teachers
- **Behaviour:** May appear oppositional, but often reflects survival-based coping

Tip: View behaviour as communication rather than defiance.
Ask, What is the behaviour telling me?



Attachment Patterns: Why It's Important

Understanding attachment helps educators interpret behaviour through a relational lens, rather than through compliance or performance alone.

Attachment Style	Typical Behaviours in Class	Educator Approach
Secure	Comfortable with connection and autonomy	Provide consistent, warm responses
Dismissive (Avoidant)	Prefers independence, avoids closeness	Gently offer connection without forcing it
Dismissive (Anxious)	Seeks reassurance, fears rejection	Offer calm consistency, reassurance through routine



Building Safety and Connection: The PACE Model

Developed by Dr. Dan Hughes (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy), the PACE model fosters connection and emotional safety.

Playfulness | Acceptance | Curiosity | Empathy

Component	Description	Example Teacher Statement
Playfulness	Use lightness, humour, or warmth to signal safety.	"I'm glad you're here today! Let's see what we can figure out together."
Acceptance	Accept the child's inner experience, even if the behaviour needs redirection.	"It sounds like you were really frustrated when that happened."
Curiosity	Wonder about the feelings behind actions without judgement.	"I wonder if it felt unfair when your turn was skipped?"
Empathy	Reflect genuine care and shared understanding.	"That must have felt really hard. I can see why you were upset."

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Practical Tools for Educators

Strategy	How it Helps
2 by 10 Method	Builds connection and trust: Spend 2 minutes a day for 10 days in genuine conversation about the child's interests.
Visual Schedules	Predictability reduces anxiety. Show the day's sequence with pictures or icons.
Give Choices, Not Ultimatums	Supports autonomy and reduces power struggles.
Name Emotions	Helps children identify and regulate feelings.



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"Addressing Trauma and Attachment in the
Classroom Environment"

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