

# Guide to Services for Education Providers

## Harnessing the power of relationships in schools



Helping children and families living with trauma.  
Nurturing attachment. Transforming lives.

## Harnessing the power of relationships in schools

It takes just one adult in a child's life to be the difference between thriving and surviving. The classroom can be a place of extraordinary opportunity when one adult seeks to understand the how and why of a child's behaviour and builds a relationship based on trust.

### Attachment informs our capacity to learn

Secure attachment relationships correlate strongly with higher academic attainment, better emotional self-regulation and social competence.

Educators who can harness the power of relationships, particularly with challenging and vulnerable children and young people, unlock the door to improve their chances of learning and achieving.



### An opportunity to change the mindset

Our work with hundreds of families living with relational trauma has allowed us to understand first-hand the pivotal and progressive role a school can provide for their students.

Attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice is particularly relevant to some of the most vulnerable pupils in our schools, including those who are looked after or adopted, and children who are exposed to ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) caused by abuse, neglect, or other often persistent household stressors, like witnessing domestic violence or alcoholism.

Schools who support these children by changing the institutional mindset away from behaviour and towards understanding and empathy can have a profound impact on the stability and outcomes in a young person's life.

And the best bit? An attachment-aware approach benefits everyone, from children to adults, from parents and carers to all school staff – harnessing the power of relationships in schools means developing an effective social and emotional framework in which everyone can thrive.

## Introducing Families Empowered

Families Empowered are a team of skilled therapeutic practitioners with an extensive background in social work and children's services and immersed in an attachment-focussed therapeutic approach. We are proud to be rated as an Outstanding Provider of Adoption Support Services by Ofsted (March 2023)

### Who we work with

We support children and young people living with relational trauma, alongside their parents, carers and guardians. We work closely with adoption support and foster care teams to deliver therapeutic interventions and training across many local authorities and agencies, including Barnardo's, Adopt East, Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire County Councils, and various London Boroughs.

### Our therapeutic approach

Our services are informed by the principles of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy), developed by clinical psychologist, Dan Hughes, as well as current research in neurobiology.

DDP and PACE are models that were developed for the treatment of children who have experienced abuse and neglect and who demonstrate ongoing problems related to attachment and trauma. It's a transformative approach that benefits all children and adults, regardless of any relational trauma.

### Working with schools

Our team has long-standing experience working holistically with schools and families to support the educational development of children and young people. We seek to build collaborative, trusted relationships and have liaised with Heads, SENCOs and teaching staff across primary, secondary and special schools, alongside regular participation in multi-professional meetings.

We work with Laura Dawson, our consultant Educational Psychologist, who brings over 25 years' experience and practical insight gained from a working with educational settings to develop thinking and provision for young people with SEND and additional needs.

Our robust safeguarding practices are integral to everything we do. We also ensure a sensitive and transparent approach to the sharing of confidential information, if required and only as appropriate.

We have real insight into the challenges and opportunities a school environment brings. We're here to help.

## Educational Psychology services for a holistic approach

Families Empowered are delighted to work alongside Laura Dawson, Senior Educational Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, to provide a joined-up service for schools.

### What can Educational Psychologists offer?

Educational Psychologists (EPs) use their psychological training and knowledge to enable people to make positive change in their lives. EPs work with children and young people, educational settings and families to think about and plan for the needs of young people. EPs develop an holistic understanding of the needs of a young person by considering their social and emotional wellbeing and learning needs to build a clear picture, understand priorities and consider interventions that may help.

### Experience and expertise

Laura has over 25 years' experience in education, including working as an Educational Psychologist for a number of local authorities over the last 20 years.

Laura works with young people with a broad range of special educational needs and has particular specialism in fostering, adoption and supporting young people who have experienced developmental trauma.

Laura has published research in various peer-reviewed journals and has Chartered Status.



### Enhancing our therapeutic support

Laura's role as our consultant Educational Psychologist complements the therapeutic approach and knowledge of the Families Empowered team. Laura can provide expert support and insight into a range of SEND and more complex needs, whilst her specialism in developmental trauma allows her to work meaningfully alongside the therapeutic practitioners to deliver an effective response for children, young people, their families and the school staff who support them.

### Flexible, responsive EP services

We work collaboratively to determine the support and services you need. Educational Psychology can often be the added dimension that helps to improve understanding and outcomes for a young person.

We can provide access to EP consultancy across a range of services, including:

- Staff consultations
- EP assessments
- Crisis interventions
- Training for educators and school staff

## Attachment and trauma services for schools

Our attachment and trauma-focused therapeutic services for schools aim to build trust, develop insight and create a transformative sense of emotional safety within the school environment.

We can help schools to refocus their relational approach whilst acknowledging the complex dynamics and pressures of the classroom and beyond.

Services can be fully tailored to respond meaningfully to your school's challenges and priorities.

We can work with you either in person or online to maximise flexibility and convenience.



Trauma and Attachment-  
Led Consultations for Staff

Connecting Up Intervention

Direct Work with Children

Workshops for  
Parents and Carers

Trauma and Attachment  
Training for Schools





## Trauma and Attachment-Led Consultations for Staff

Transitioning to a trauma and attachment aware culture isn't easy. Translating theory into practice takes time and can feel unsettling, especially when the training examples don't correspond to the real-life challenges of a lively classroom and a high pressure working environment.

Staff may feel overwhelmed by the sense of emotional responsibility or concerned that asking for help with a specific child will be seen as an admission of failure.

We offer a consultation service for schools looking to adopt a trauma and attachment-led approach. Suitable for senior leadership teams, SENCOs, educators and other school staff, it is fully flexible and tailored to meet the needs of your school.

Consultations can be provided as individual or group sessions; online or on-site; scheduled as hourly pre-booked appointments or as an open drop-in 'surgery'.

## Consultation services can include

### Trauma and Attachment Surgery:

- Named consultant available for surgery running throughout academic year, for individual 1-hour consultations to be booked directly with the consultant
- Written summary outlining key discussion points to be shared with consultee after each session

### Group workshop (6-week programme):

- 6 sessions for selected school staff tailored to meet the needs of the group (recommended for up to 8 participants)
- Opportunity to discuss best practice, deepen insight and understanding, consider real-life responses to challenging situations, reflect on the impact on self of being an emotion coach for students and the responses that may arise

Whether it's working on general classroom practices, considering how best to meet the individual needs of a specific student, or reflecting on the secondary trauma they experience, we provide a supportive and pragmatic forum for staff to take a step back from the intensity of classroom interactions and deepen their insight and understanding.



## Connecting Up Intervention

We know that schools aim to build positive relationships with parents and engage them in their child's education – and this can be challenging when emotions run high and communication breaks down.

Sometimes, too, schools may struggle to understand the context behind a child's behaviour and miss an opportunity to build trust and provide support.

Our 'Connecting Up' programme can help to reduce tension, develop dialogue and improve collaboration and perspective sharing so that parents and staff can work as a team to offer a child the support they need.

This intervention can be seen as a positive response to a crisis, where relationships are strained and children are at risk of exclusion.

## Connecting Up interventions can include:

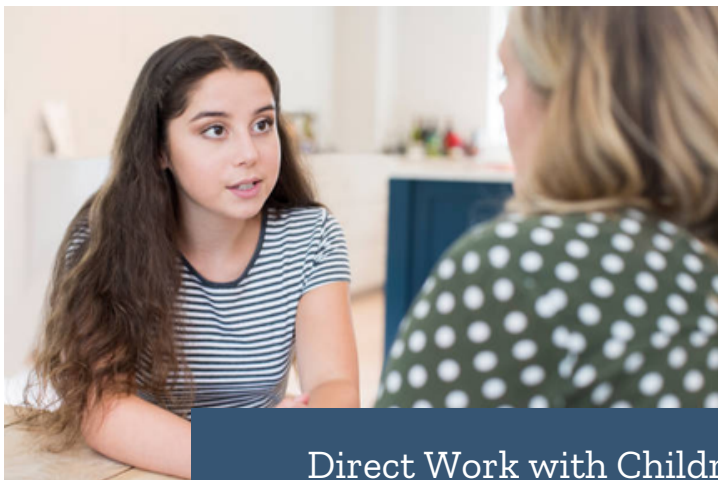
- Initial consultation with the school
- 2 sessions with the parents
- 1 session with the child
- Optional session with Educational Psychologist
- Consultation with the school
- 'Connecting up' meeting with parents and school facilitated by the therapist
- Online follow-up session with all parties after 6-8 weeks

All sessions are 1 hour. Sample programme only, intervention is tailored to meet individual needs for best results

'Connecting Up' provides personalised, attachment-led and trauma-informed therapeutic support, with an experienced therapist working with both the family and the school.

We can also offer access to a consultant Educational Psychologist during the intervention for assessments and recommendations if required.

We offer a non-judgemental and flexible approach, with both online and in-person sessions for parents, children and school staff with the aim of bringing everybody together for the benefit of the child.



## Direct Work with Children

Our direct work with children enables us to build relationships carefully and give them a safe, therapeutic space to talk about big feelings and difficult emotions.

Underpinned by an attachment and relationship-based model of therapy and using the principles of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (PACE), we support children to express themselves and help them to make sense of their world.

We use a variety of tools to support our work, for example: storytelling, drawing and other creative activities, work with puppets, games and worksheets to explore emotions.

We are able to support children who are struggling with a range of feelings such as anger, anxiety and sadness following challenging life experiences, such as parental divorce or separation, domestic violence, bereavement or bullying.

## Direct Work with Children can include:

- Initial consultation with the parent/carer, to include school staff if appropriate
- In-person introductory meeting with child, with parent/carer also present
- 6-12 sessions (55 mins each) of therapeutic direct work with child
- Written report for parents or school at the end of the intervention, with analysis and any further recommendations – subject to parental consent
- Feedback questionnaire

Inclusion of individual elements of our therapeutic services can be tailored to the needs of each family. Additional consultations and assessments are available on request.

We can work with schools and families to determine where the focus of the therapeutic approach should be and understand what is in the best interests of the child.





## Workshops for Parents and Carers

Our work with families over many years enables us to identify the key fears, frustrations and challenges that most parents are faced with at times. And we recognise the role schools can play in sharing knowledge and understanding with parents and carers within the school community.

We can offer a short programme of workshops for parents and carers to help them understand what's happening with their child at a time of crisis or challenge and develop key skills to improve resilience and confidence.

Programme topics can include: managing transitions, exam stress, the anxious child, bullying, the amazing teenage brain, understanding trauma, what do do when your child disengages from school, setting boundaries with your child or teen, and more

## Workshops programme can include:

- Initial consultation with school to determine programme content and sequence
- Choose from 3 x 1hour sessions or 6 x 1 hour sessions, held weekly/fortnightly/monthly
- Flyer or email content provided to explain and promote the sessions to parents
- Short feedback forms for attendees post session
- In-person session held at school venue or online session held over Zoom

Each session will be based on an attachment-focused therapeutic approach and underpinned by PACE parenting (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy: the cornerstones of healthy parent-child interaction as identified by clinical psychologist Dan Hughes).

We deliver these topics with a light touch – we don't want parents to feel lectured to or bombarded by theory. Instead, we use accessible, real-life examples that encourage active participation and useful self-reflection. We are skilled in swiftly establishing a safe space for parents and carers to engage with tricky concepts and manage challenging emotions.

Sessions can be delivered in person at a school venue or online using a secure platform. Daytime or evening sessions available.



## Trauma and Attachment Training

Families Empowered have developed attachment-focussed, specialist training for educators and school staff.

Delivered with a therapeutic approach, our training services offer effective and targeted support for schools looking to develop their understanding of an attachment and trauma-aware approach.

Training sessions can be delivered both in-person and online for maximum flexibility.

Each session is fully evaluated to provide feedback and quality assurance, which is shared with service commissioners.

## Whole school trauma and attachment training

4 hours / In person or online

This training course is suitable for all educators and school staff. It provides a concise introduction to the importance of a trauma and attachment-aware approach and includes:

- An introduction to Attachment theory: why is it important for all children to understand attachment?
- Understanding trauma: responding sensitively to children who have experienced trauma
- Emotion coaching
- Compassion fatigue and how to overcome it

## Short courses with specific focus

2 hours / In person or online

Short courses are ideal for twilight training sessions for specific staff or a group. Session topics include:

- Working with children who have ADHD and other social and emotional diagnosis
- Safeguarding and child protection
- The amazing teenage brain
- Supporting bereaved children

## Contact Us

Our friendly, professional team is here to help with all enquiries. For an initial consultation to explore your school's requirements and how our services may help you, please contact Deborah Sharratt.



**Director**  
Deborah Sharratt  
07917 440 683  
[deborah@familiesempowered.co.uk](mailto:deborah@familiesempowered.co.uk)



**Specialist Child and Family Practitioner**  
Liz Stirrat  
07828 170 798  
[liz@familiesempowered.co.uk](mailto:liz@familiesempowered.co.uk)



**Administrator**  
Tara Davey  
07917 891 868  
[tara@familiesempowered.co.uk](mailto:tara@familiesempowered.co.uk)

