

## **Anticipate - expect the unexpected – being ‘good-enough’ in a crisis**

Residential Child Care isn't meant to be perfect. Being 'good-enough' is 'good-enough'!

Group living is a creative endeavour. We co-think, co-create, co-produce every day. We aim to be cooperatively constructive.

We aim to be resilient responsive working for recovery or recommencement of growth.

### **The good-enough parent**

Being 'good-enough' stands in contrast to seeing oneself as 'perfect' parent, There is recognition that it is not possible at all times to be as empathic, available and immediately responsive as the children need.

The parent who aims to be 'perfect' may find it difficult to tolerate children's feelings of discomfort, frustration or anger, and may try to prevent them, and themselves, from experiencing these difficult emotions. In doing so, they provide little room for safe expression of negative feelings instead responding pre-emptively so that there is little chance of the child, or themselves, becoming frustrated.

Over time being 'good-enough, being attuned facilitates responding quickly and empathically as a conscious protection against becoming overwhelmed by feelings. The child experiences being calmed and soothed and this helps them learn to self-soothe over time, a pre-cursor to learn to tolerate waiting. Successively experiencing and surviving frustration comes gradually. The 'good-enough' parent encourages the expression of a range of feelings. They tolerate their children's feelings without losing themselves in those feelings. They can't manage this all the time, but a 'good-enough' amount of time.

### **The main components of good enough parenting:**

- Meeting children's health and developmental needs;
- Putting children's needs first;
- Providing routine and consistent care;
- Parental acknowledgement of any problems and engagement with support services.

And these are more common in homes that consciously aim to have the following protective factors

- Supportive family environment
- Nurturing parenting skills
- Stable relationships
- Household rules and monitoring of the child
- Adequate finances
- Adequate housing
- Access to health care and social services

- Caring adults who can serve as role models or mentors
- Community support

These are mirrored in What works in Residential Child Care key features

## Culture

4 key dimensions:

- *ideological*: the prevailing values and beliefs as implemented by staff and managers
- *organisational*: the way aims and values are enshrined in structures and staff roles
- *staffing*: the characteristics, training and attitudes of staff
- *residents' responses*: for example, whether there is learning or socialisation.

## Theories for practice

Clarity of purpose

Leadership

Relationships between staff and children

Relationships between children

Relationships with family members

Countering institutionalisation

- an active search to understand children
- people listen to children
- children feel they matter, and that people are concerned for them

Therapeutic support for children

Staff informed and empowered involvement

## **Anticipate - expect the unexpected**

The residential task is demanding of everything that you have, mind, body, emotions.

Sometimes you are not as attuned as you know you need to be. You know there is a gap and space in relationships, you are aware communication is not so smooth and open, it is taking effort. You have picked yourself up and refocussed. Yet things go wrong no matter the planning. This affects your confidence. Fatigue physically, emotionally and psychologically happens. So too does projection of emotions – are these feelings your feelings?

Projection is not something all residential child care workers get trained to recognise, manage and appropriately respond to yet it is, and other defence mechanisms, essential for the group living 'toolkit'.

Everyone who works in residential child care will have experienced this situation at some time. It is important nothing goes perfectly. Knowing behaviour is communication, there is something important in the situation to be understood. There is learning here!

Such is our need for a resilient identity the situation sneaks up on us. (It's behind you!). We did not see it. We had not experienced it.

We are surprised by it happening to me, us, here, now.

Our training and experience tells us we need to respond rather than react. But we can feel we are falling to bits, falling forever, or lose contact with our reasoning. We might feel we are being judged in our hour of need.

We are no good to anyone, including ourselves, in meltdown.

### **10 things to assist anticipation**

#### **1. Do not do something, sit with it, do nothing.**

Avoid fight, flight, freeze – and importantly, fix ( you know you need to...).

Notice your worries, don't try to suppress, ignore them.

“I knew you would be along, accompanying me at this moment. Now I know you're there where I can see you I can get on with what needs to be done”

#### **2. This has happened before**

“ I am self-aware. I have knowledge and experience. I am not in the same situation I was before. I have learning and preparation. I have analysed, assessed and use what I have learned adapting it to this situation” (see Afterwards below)

#### **3. We have made a what-if plan**

This is in the home's therapeutic care plan, the positive behaviour support plan.

Knowing the triggers for the situation quickly gets the fears out of your head and you. “The plan is our reasoned response to this situation we knew would happen, and I am putting it in operation. We have a plan, and this is it!”

If you need more for your planning try 3 columns

All our worries	Best ways to prevent	What to do
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Looks a lot like a positive behaviour support plan! Always start from answering the question: 'What is present when this child feels settled?'

#### **4. Process goals**

Remember your 3 P's – Professional: Personal: Private.

How is the time for Professional. Get technical. Go through the processes you have agreed previously. It is what they are there for.

You are using the personal skills set.

You are keeping your panic in your Private under close observation.

“I know what to do to do.”

## **5. Step by step**

Break the next moments into stages. There will be different sections, the child will change and require you to be different. Within the first stage of regulating - set process goals, focus on achieving them – use the interventions you have worked with yourself and the child to overcome being overwhelmed.

The aim is to shift the current state from sensations and feelings by engaging with something on a sensory level. Soothe, move towards social engagement (Lousie Bomber) and reasoning.

Focus the child on focus your surroundings in the present moment and away from what is causing anxiety. Interrupt current thought patterns. Practice the following during calmer times with the child.

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can physically feel
- 3 things you can hear outside of the body
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

## **6. Take a moment to think about what your next move will be**

Slow everything down.

- Breathing - slow, deep, long breaths can help you maintain a sense of calm or help you return to a calmer state. 5 inhales, 5 exhales then guide them to any thoughts and feelings they might be aware of and invite them to let go of those thoughts and feelings. Ask them to imagine that the thoughts and feelings are bubbles, floating away, as they return to their breathing. Repeat the five breaths – five in, five out – and do this as many times as feels right
- Pulse - how strong, how fast
- Thinking – not thinking? Lots of thoughts? One BIG thought. Is it blocking everything else?
- Locate where the excitement in the body belly or head or feet or hand?

This is a way of managing the biological aspects of fight or flight.

When in a situation of panic, don't panic!

## **7. You have trained for this moment.**

Rarely is this first time. If it is there has usually been something similar to draw upon. You have dealt successfully with this before.

The thoughts and feelings reflected upon in supervision help you to cope now.

Recognise that when in panic our brain works 5 times quicker than its logical part.

Remind yourself of your learning and abilities replacing panic and feeling muddled.

## **8. Know your strengths**

You know what you do well. Remember your appraisal. Keep a positive mindset.

## **9. Use your internal supervisor.**

Your internal supervisor facilitates hindsight, foresight and insight into what's happening and acts to provide a mental space or supervisory view-point ('islands of intellectual contemplation' Casement, 1985) for self-reflection, exploration and monitoring.

What would your supervisor advise now? Remember their tone of voice.

## **10. All will be well**

Keep yourself positive and purposeful. Be positive. Be purposeful.

Accept the situation, use the plan you made when anticipating it.

**And**

**Afterwards – draw out the learning – take it to debrief and supervision**

- **Analyse** - what and how did it happen, focus on the antecedents and events
- **Action** - something you learned
- **Brilliant** - 3 things you did really well
- **Better** - 3 things on reflection you would do better next time
- **Carry on** - the successful parts of the planning to be used again
- **Change** – things you will do differently if there is a next time – does the plan need changing?

