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The Impact of Attachment and Trauma on Learning.

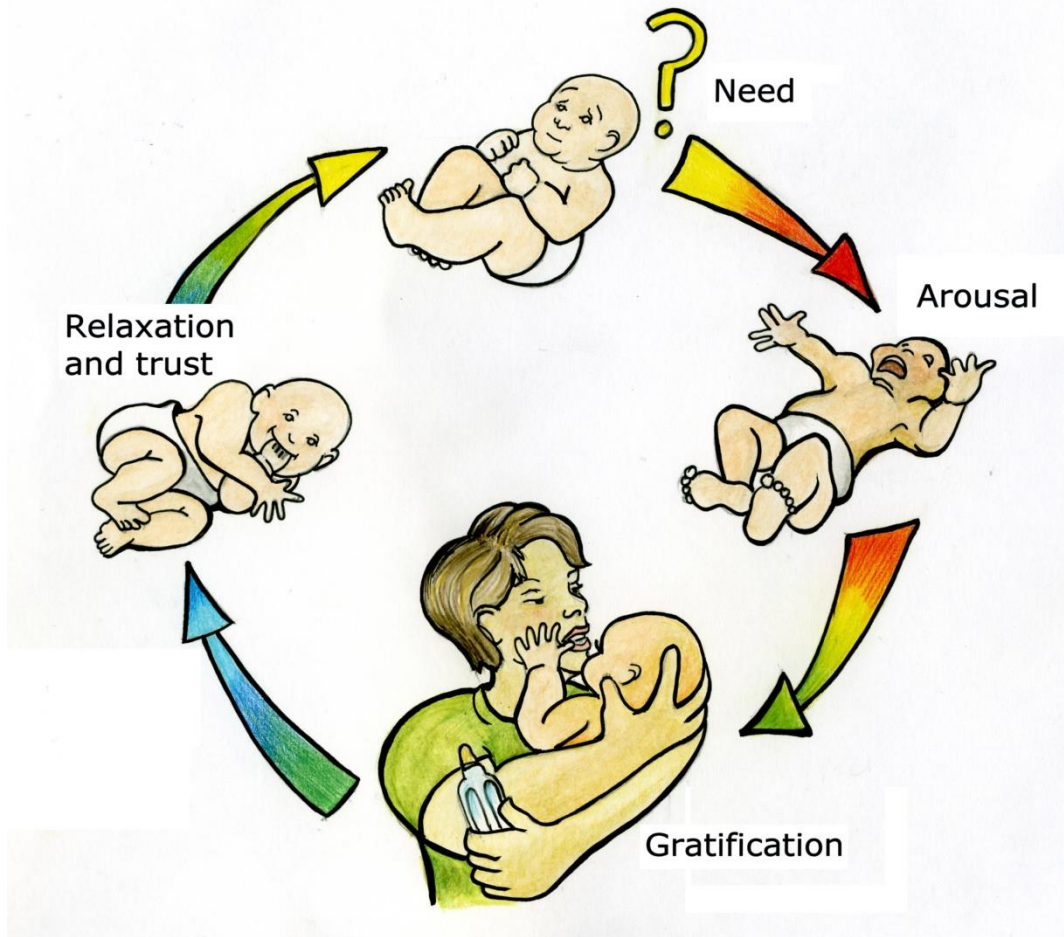
Ann Bell

Director for the Wales Adoption Support
Partnership.

Content

- Pre conditions for learning
- Psychological and physiological impact of poor early attachment and trauma
- What works – 3 Rs
- The policy context in Wales

Healthy Attachment Cycle



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**What picture do these
infants build of the
world?**

A Secure Attachment Helps a Child...

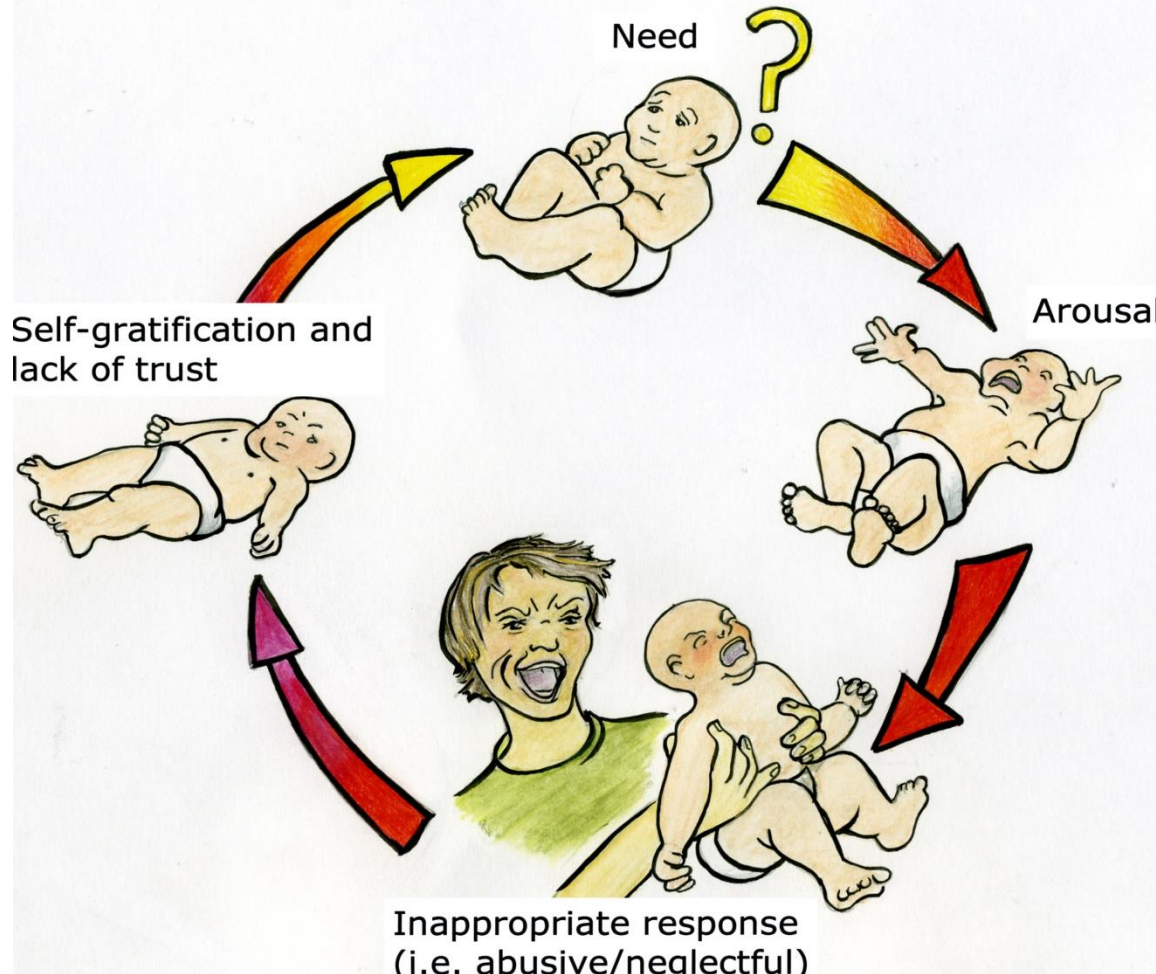
- Explore the world from a safe base – be confident, well motivated
- Attain full intellectual potential
- Behave in a socially acceptable way
- Think logically
- Develop a conscience - empathy
- Become self-reliant
- Cope with stress, frustration, fear, worry
- Develop good relationships with peers and teachers
- Feel like a worthwhile person

Vera Fahlberg

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The Unhealthy Attachment Cycle



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**What picture do these
infants build of the
world?**

Attachment and Relationships

- **John Bowlby and psychotherapy**



CHILDHOOD HOUSEHOLD INCLUDED



Parental
separation
20%



Domestic
violence
16%



Mental
illness
14%



Alcohol
abuse
14%



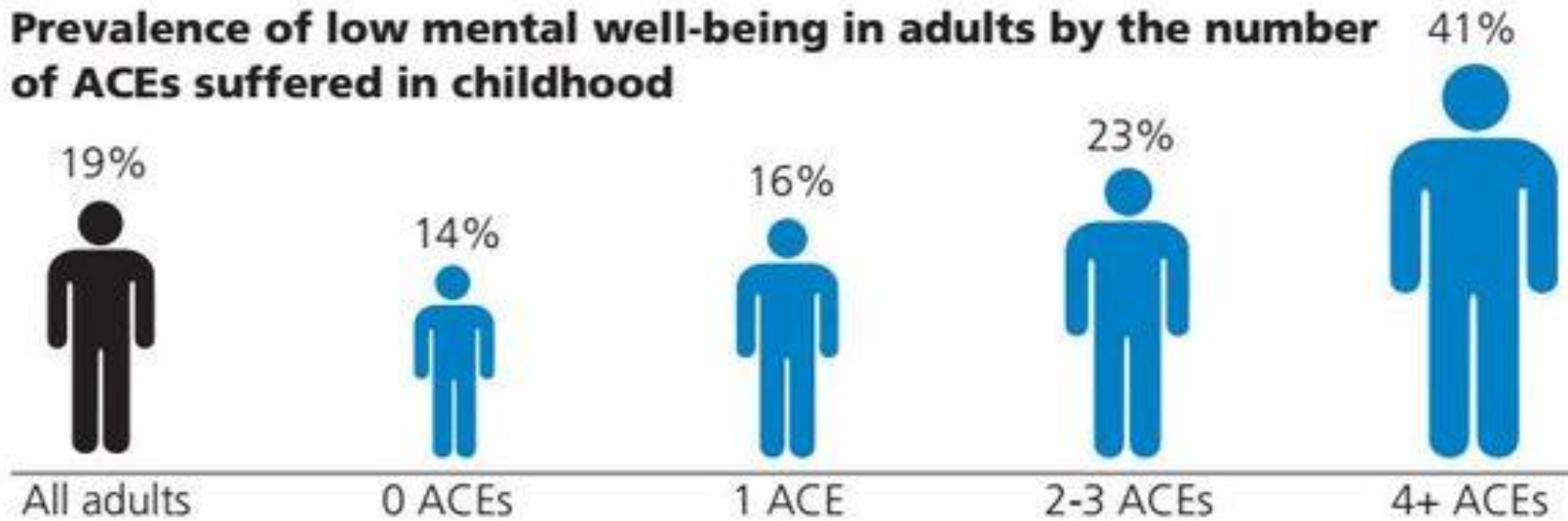
Drug
use
5%



Incarceration
5%

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- 72% of children adopted in Wales have direct experience of abuse and neglect.
- Less than 1% relinquished.
- 44% of the children adopted in Wales last year had 4 + ACEs meaning they are at high risk of a whole range of difficulties when they become adults.(14% in general population)



Pre birth

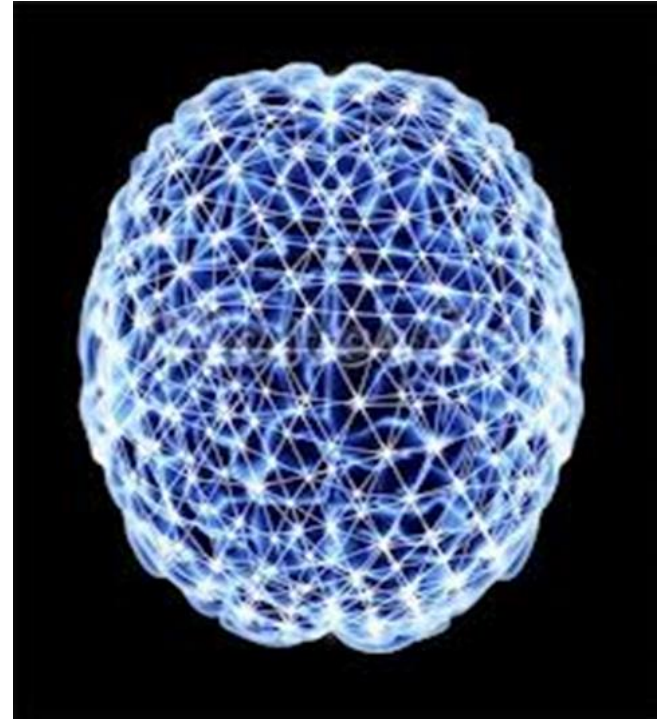
- Maternal drug and alcohol abuse
- Highly stressful pregnancy
- Domestic violence

= high cortisol levels in mother and foetus

Post Birth

- Direct experience of abuse and neglect
- Constant stress
- Multiple abrupt breaks in attachment relationships
- Inconsistent responses from main carer.

Why does early attachment matter so much?



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Maslow's Hierarchy of School Need

Self-Actualization

Student Is Available to Learn

Esteem

Positive Classroom Culture Present
(positive feedback, time for reflection,
encouragement to take risks)

Belonging

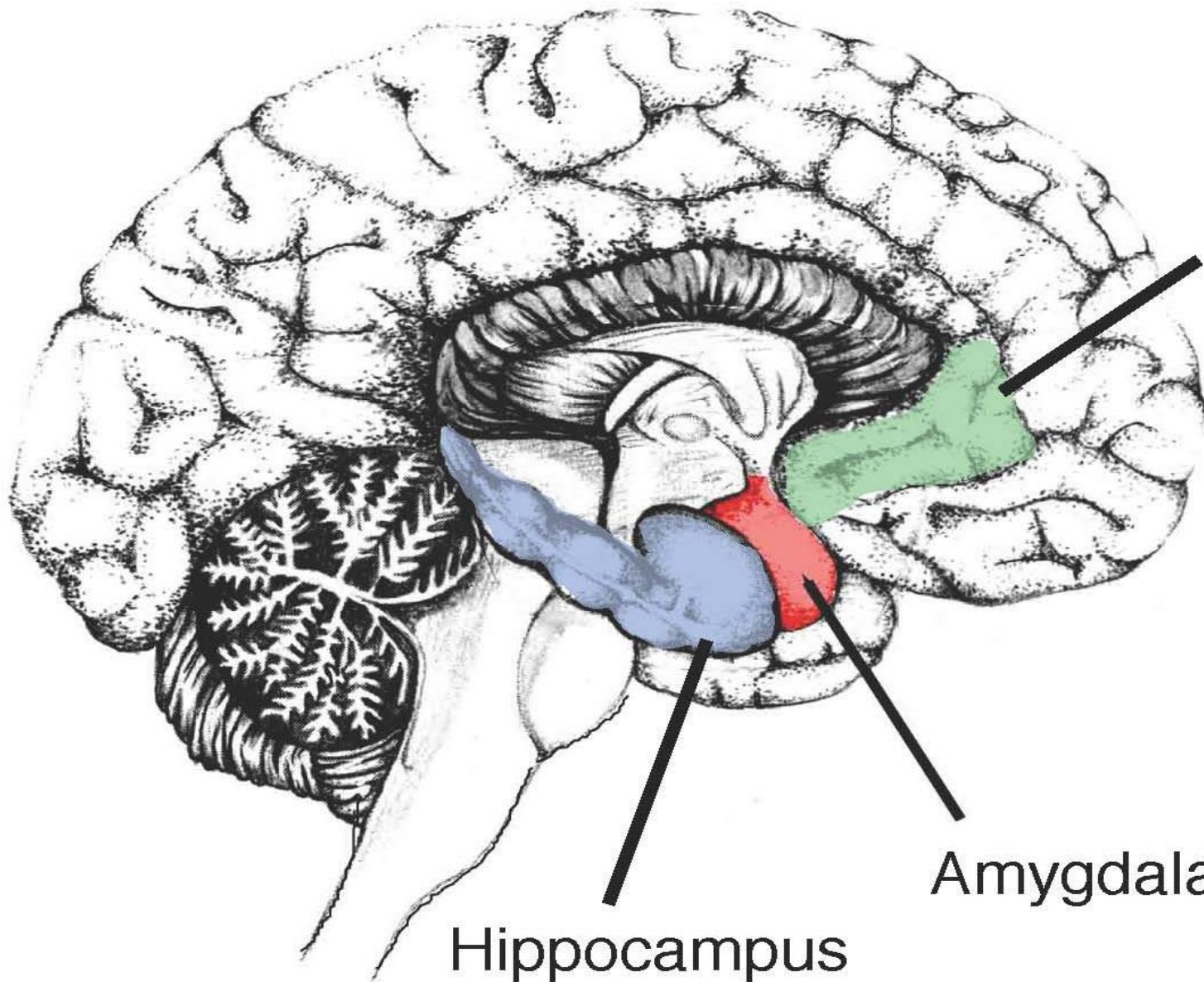
Forming Relationships
(advisory, adult role models, friendship
groups, peer relationships)

Safety

Emotional and Physical Safety
(clear school/class routines, access
to counselors/nurse, ok to take risks)

Physiological

Basic Needs Are Met
(eats breakfast, has clean clothing,
safe place to go home, able to sleep)



Prefrontal
Cortex

Amygdala

Hippocampus

Suppressed

Easily
triggered

Key Points About Trauma

Trauma:

- Changes how the brain works
- Changes your view of yourself and others
- Leaves you feeling unsafe
- Does not go away because you move to a loving home



Behaviour is the traumatised child's first language

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Co morbidity of symptoms

- ASD spectrum
- ADHD
- Sensory Processing disorder
- Attachment disorder
- Foetal alcohol and drug syndromes

The 3 R's

- Regulation
- Reduce stress
- Relationship

Regulation



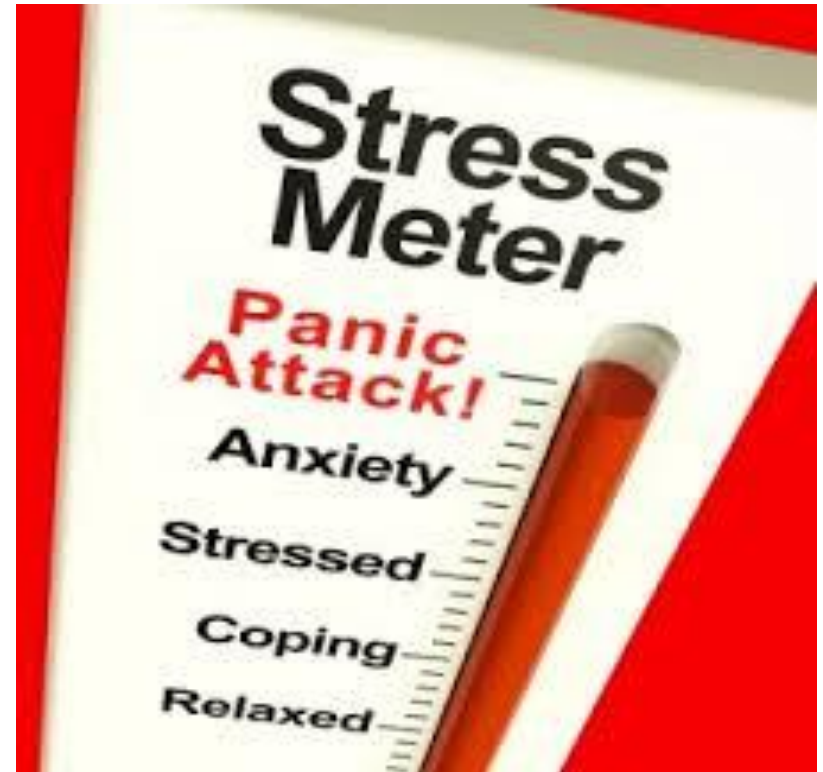
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Reduce Stress

- **P**layful
- **L**iking
- **A**ccepting
- **C**urious
- **E**mpathetic

Thanks to Dan Hughes



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Behaviour control.

Stress based	Relationship based
Work for 90% of population	Work for 100% of population
Quick, easy used by anyone	Take longer and require more practice and thought
Learnt from our own childhoods	Counter intuitive
Do not work if fear is already cause of poor behaviour	Do work if fear is cause of poor behaviour
Can be used when adult is angry and dis-regulated	Can only be used when the adult is regulated and in control of themselves

Relationships

We lend them ours.



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No such thing as school!

In reality it is a building in which our children are co-parented for 6 or 7 hours of the day by a range of other adults.

This is done in huge family groups with 20 or 30 other 'siblings' of the same age.

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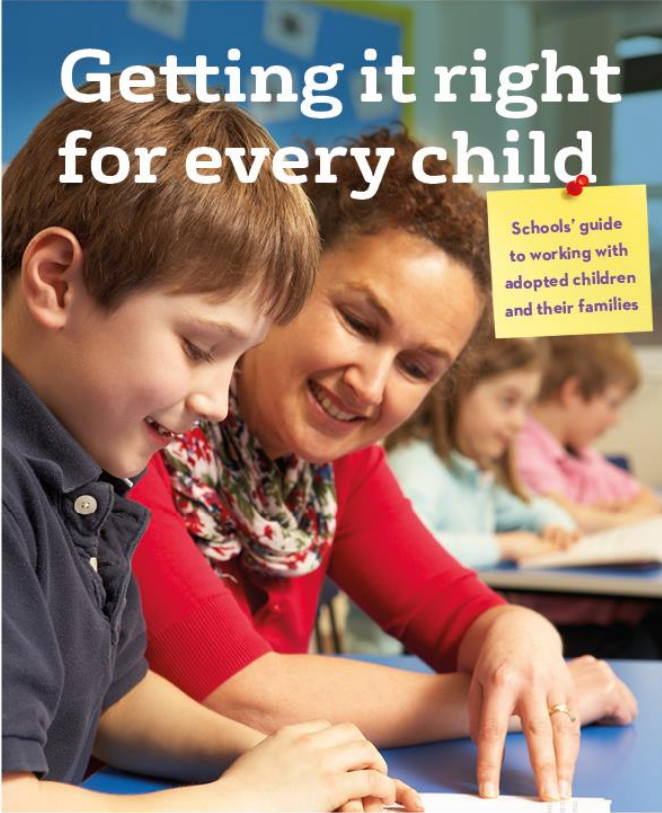
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Whole School Approaches

- Attachment Aware school
- Just Right State
- Roots of Empathy
- Emotional Coaching
- Group Theraplay
- Nurture groups
- ELSA training for staff

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**Getting it right
for every child**

Schools' guide
to working with
adopted children
and their families

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Booklet Contents

- Brain development and early trauma
- Additional learning needs
- Understanding children and stress
- Using PLACE to help children relax
- Support strategies
- Decoding and responding to behaviours
- Training for schools and other resources

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Policy Context

- 20 years ago – initiatives to improve outcomes for children looked after.
- 2 years ago – extended that to previously looked after
- Still too much emphasis is on parents and not enough on realising that early trauma causes lasting changes.