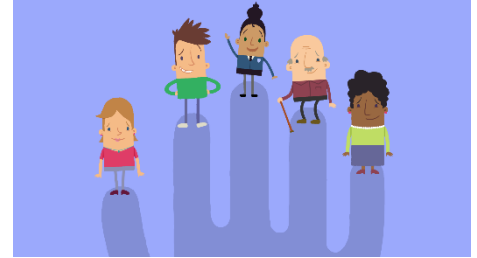


Trauma

Last week we looked at how the environment can cause trauma in a child; this week we are going to take a look what we can do to support children who have experienced trauma.

Children need to feel safe. They need to be able to emotionally connect with adults and other children so that they feel cared for and known. As adults, we need to spend time speaking to children in ways that are playful and meaningful. If a child feels threatened or is spoken to using aggressive or threatening words and actions, subconsciously they will be replaying early, often horrific and frightening, relational experiences they have had, and react in a way that is familiar to them and not how the adult expects.



At Little Ealing, we actively encourage all the children to talk about how they are feeling; that no feeling is wrong; and that 'swallowing down' our emotions and not expressing them is bad for our mental health. We need to validate and acknowledge strong feelings in the context of a safe relationship and work out ways where they can be expressed so other people do not get hurt.

It is important to get your child's view about how they would like their environment to be like. They could draw a picture and/or write a few thoughts about how they would like their home to be. Here are some other approaches to help children who have suffered, or are suffering trauma, to recover.

Empathy

Being empathetic helps to heal a child. Empathy is different from sympathy; it is emotionally connecting to someone, trying to understand how they must be feeling. Research has shown that this can radically change the feelings of rejection and low self-worth in a child.



Kindness

It sounds simple, but kindness helps the child feel safe enough to share emotions, speak and explore their own responses. Consistent kindness can heal a child; being harsh/aggressive can be very frightening.

Patience

This is hard and requires a lot of deep breaths, thinking things through, seeing the long term consequences of not being patient i.e. more tantrums and louder screams.



Not taking things personally

Once we move from taking things personally to actually what is going on and remain calm, kind and empathetic, things improve.



Being kind to yourself

It is important to look after yourself; meet up with friends, take some exercise, read a book, take time to breathe, reflect and think about your needs can really help you feel less frustrated and hurt and have the emotional energy to cope with tough behaviour.

Having some special time with a child one to one

A highly recognised strategy that works for all children. Find an activity that you and your child enjoy (or do one that they really enjoy even if you don't). It is important that it is fun for the child and that they get time to lead on it and it is just for them without any other distractions – one-on-one.

Offer opportunities for them to talk to you

Let them speak as often and for as long as they need to. Helping your child to make sense of what has happened and how they are feeling can make an enormous difference.

Validate their feelings

Reflect back the words they use and do not be afraid of using big words such as terrified, horrified or furious. You might say: 'It is really understandable that you are feeling.....' or 'I wonder if you are feeling....'



Be their anchor

A traumatic experience often involves feeling unsafe, frightened or out of control. Providing structure, routine and reassurance that you can support them to manage things can help them re-establish a sense of safety.

Reassure them

Let them know you love them, you are there for them and you can help them find the right support if they need it.

Getting help when you can

Speak out; ask for help. Parenting children who have been traumatised is very challenging. If you know a family that has a child or children that have suffered trauma, ask yourself what can you offer to support the family. They may be in real need of help and do not know how to ask for it.

Seek professional support if you are worried

Some children who have experienced trauma will need professional and specialist help to feel better. If you are worried that your child is struggling, seek professional advice.

In the next newsletter, we will have a look at where you can find professional help.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

Have a lovely Easter.

