



Evidence-Based Intervention: Key Adult Support (as described by Louise Bomber)

Introduction

The key adult support model described by **Louise Bomber** is the “**Key Adult**” model (also known as the “**Key Adult Attachment Support**” model). This is a relational support framework used primarily in schools to help children and young people who have experienced trauma, disrupted attachment, or relational difficulties—often those who have suffered early neglect, abuse, or who are in care.

Purpose of Intervention

The model is based on **attachment theory** and emphasises the importance of a **consistent, emotionally available adult** in school to support the child or young person. This adult becomes a **secure base** from which the student can explore the world of learning, relationships, and emotional regulation.

Target Audience

CYP who have experienced trauma, disrupted attachment, or relational difficulties—often those who have suffered early neglect, abuse, or who are in care (e.g., Looked After Children, Adopted Children, those cared for under a Special Guardianship Order).

Who Can Deliver the Intervention

Choose a **trusted, emotionally available adult(s)** (TA, teacher, pastoral lead) who:

- is warm, patient, non-punitive
- Can be consistent and boundaried
- Is committed to the long-term relational work

Frequency and Duration

To provide planned support throughout the day and across school contexts. It is likely that CYP with a history of local authority care will need a key adult(s) throughout their education journey.

Key Principles

Consistency & Reliability

The Key Adult provides a steady, predictable presence, creating a sense of safety through routine and dependable responses.

Emotional Availability

They remain emotionally present, attuned, and responsive, helping the child regulate their emotions, especially during distress.

Relationship Before Learning

A strong, trusting relationship is prioritised, as emotional safety is essential before learning can take place.

Co-regulation Before Self-regulation

The adult supports the child in managing emotions, modelling calm behaviour until the child can begin to self-regulate.

Behaviour as Communication

Challenging behaviours are viewed as expressions of unmet needs or emotions, not as defiance, and are met with understanding.

Repair & Reconnection

When conflict occurs, the focus is on repairing the relationship, reinforcing that it is safe and secure even after rupture.

Advocacy & Safety

The Key Adult champions the child's needs, ensuring their emotional and psychological wellbeing is protected.



Whole-System Integration

The model is most effective when supported by a trauma-informed, school-wide culture with trained staff.

Training and Implementation

Provide key adults with attachment and trauma-informed training, including:

- Understanding attachment theory
- Co-regulation strategies
- Emotion coaching
- Reflective practice
- De-escalation and repair work

Evidence and Outcomes

CYP who feel safe in school have significantly improved outcomes (e.g., school attainments). The evidence base shows that key adult support can significantly improve outcomes across wellbeing, behaviour, and academic engagement.

A systematic review by the EPPI-Centre found that adult support staff, including key adults, can positively impact pupil behaviour, inclusion, and learning outcomes when roles are clearly defined and relationally focused.

Further Information and Resources

Louise Bomber outlines this model in her books:

- *“Inside I’m Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in Schools”*
- *“What About Me? Inclusive Strategies to Support Pupils with Attachment Difficulties Make it Through the School Day”*