



Evidence-Based Intervention: PACE

Introduction

PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. PACE is a relational approach developed by Dan Huges. PACE is grounded in attachment theory and neuroscience, and it promotes emotional safety and connection.

Purpose of Intervention

PACE aims to support adults to build trusting relationships with children and young people, create a safe and nurturing environment, and support emotional regulation skills and resilience.

Target Audience

PACE can be used with all children and young people, although the approach and scripts may need to be adapted slightly for different ages and needs. PACE can be particularly helpful for children who find it difficult to regulate their emotions, or those who have difficulties building positive relationships linked to their past experiences.

Who Can Deliver the Intervention

Any adults who interact with children and young people can use PACE, including teachers, Learning Support Assistants, pastoral staff, parents and other professionals. PACE can be used as part of a whole-school approach to supporting relationships.

Session Structure

PACE does not have fixed sessions, but is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that can be used throughout interactions with children and young people.

Frequency and Duration

PACE should be used at natural opportunities throughout interactions with children and young people.

Key Principles

The key principles of PACE are as follows:

Playfulness – A light-hearted, relaxed and playful attitude to help the child feel connected and experience fun.

Acceptance – Accepting the child for who they are and showing unconditional positive regard.

Curiosity – Wondering about the child's thoughts and feelings without judgement.

Empathy – Stepping into the child's shoes and validating their emotional experience.

Training and Implementation

We would encourage anyone to try and apply the principles of PACE in their daily interactions with children and young people. A more in-depth implementation of PACE would usually begin with a training session on the theory and practice of PACE (around a half day). We would then suggest that staff engage in ongoing CPD around PACE, for example taking part in reflective practice groups to consider the impact of using the approach.



Evidence and Outcomes

PACE is grounded in psychological theory and research, including attachment theory, interpersonal neurobiology and co-regulation, polyvagal theory, trauma-informed practice and self-determination theory.

Research has suggested that relational approaches can have positive outcomes for children and young people, including pupil well-being, behaviour and academic outcomes (Avery et al., 2021; Dodds, 2023; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

Feedback

Practice-based reports and case studies suggest that when PACE is implemented, pupils:

- **Feel safer and more understood**, reducing anxiety and defensiveness.
- **Enjoy school more** thanks to playfulness and empathy making interactions feel kind and supportive.
- **Feel valued for who they are**, not just for behaviour or academic performance, due to acceptance.
- **Engage more in learning** because curiosity and empathy foster trust and motivation.
- **Experience less shame and conflict** during challenging moments, as responses focus on understanding.

Further Information and Resources

- [PACE - A Therapeutic Approach - Help Children Live Better](#)
- [Using PACE in schools](#)
- [PACE Overview Guide](#)
- Avery, J. C., Morris, H., Galvin, E., Misso, M., Savaglio, M., & Skouteris, H. (2021). Systematic review of school-wide trauma-informed approaches. *Journal of child & adolescent trauma*, 14(3), 381-397.
- Dodds, J. F. (2023). The views and experiences of school leaders implementing whole school relational approaches in a single secondary school: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham).
- Zakszeski, B., & Rutherford, L. (2021). Mind the gap: A systematic review of research on restorative practices in schools. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2-3), 371-387.