



# Foundations of Trauma-informed, Relationship- based Practice

Course - Section 3  
Easy Read

# About this document



This is an Easy Read document.

It is Section 3 of the Foundations of Trauma-informed, Relationship-based Practice course.



Section 3 is called **Nurturing** connections – building positive relationships.



**Nurturing** means looking after.



Section 3 will tell you:



- about different kinds of relationships
- how relationships support people to deal with stress and trauma
- how to build relationships with people who have experienced trauma

## Why relationships are important



How we get on with another person is called a **relationship**.



We have relationships with:

- our family members
- friends
- people we know
- pets
- people who lead groups
- teachers
- healthcare staff



All these relationships are important because they are key to our day to day lives.



Relationships are important for everyone in the care system too.

When relationships are good, young people in care are happier and have more chances to live better lives.

### 3.1 Childhood



The kinds of relationships we have in our lives can be affected by:

- the way we were brought up
- our experiences of trauma



If we experience trauma in our childhood it might affect the way we:

- trust others
- get close to others
- leave others
- listen and talk with others

## 3.2 Attachment theory



In this course, **attachment** means the ways we feel closely supported by an important person in our lives.



A **theory** is an idea or an understanding.



John Bowlby was an expert who worked in London in the 1950s.

He focused on:



- young children who had been taken away from their mother, for reasons like hospital stays
- children who lived in **children's care homes**



At that time, **children's care homes** were buildings where many children in care lived together.

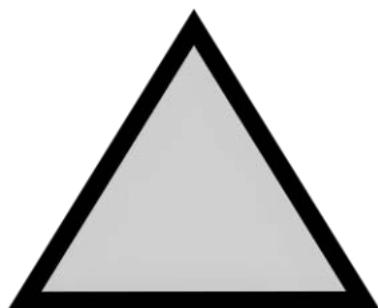


He noticed that children's **emotional wellbeing** was just as important as their **physical wellbeing**.



**Emotional wellbeing** means how happy, content and safe we feel.

**Physical wellbeing** means how well our bodies are.



John Bowlby drew a triangle with these 3 things linked to each other:



**1. Self** – meaning ‘myself’

A child might ask themselves:

- am I good enough to be loved?
- do I have a safe emotional space?



**2. Other** – meaning ‘other people’

A child might ask themselves:

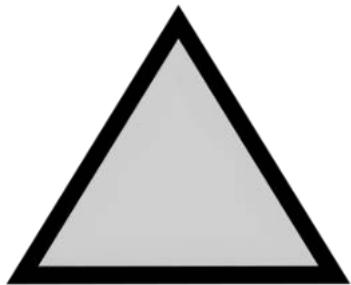
- how much can I trust others?
- will others help me to share my emotions?



### 3. The world – meaning ‘everything else’

A child might ask themselves:

- how safe is it out there?
- do I feel confident to explore it?



The triangle shows how a young child builds up their emotional wellbeing by the kinds of relationships they have with the people around them.



In Section 1 we heard about Jemma.

Think about:

- Jemma's journey through care
- Jemma's different relationships with others
- what she might have thought about herself and the world around her



Children can build safe and happy attachments when their adults are always warm and loving towards them.



These children then grow up believing that they:

- are accepted
- deserve attention
- can share their emotions



They are more likely to build positive relationships with others as they go through life.

## 3.3 Relationships



Every relationship should have these things:

- respect
- understanding
- trust



Relationships that do not have these things can cause harm.

If there is **abuse** or **neglect** in a relationship it can lead to trauma.



**Abuse** means when 1 person hurts or distresses another person.



**Neglect** means that someone is not giving another person their basic needs – things like food, clothing, a home, medicines and emotional support.

## The things that affect relationships



It can be harder to build positive relationships if there are differences between people.



These are some of the things that can make it harder to build a positive relationship:



- differences in their education



- differences in their **race** - this means someone's ethnic group, skin colour or where they come from



- differences in their **gender** – whether someone sees themselves as male, female or in a different way



- differences in their **religion** – the set of beliefs that some people have



If we understand these differences we can help build positive relationships for people with lived experience of care.

### 3.4 The importance of positive relationships for people who have experienced care



Positive relationships are very important because they boost our:

- emotional wellbeing
- physical wellbeing



When we use the 5 trauma-informed principles in everyday life, we are helping to build relationships which are:

- trusting
- respectful
- supportive



The 5 trauma-informed principles are:



**1. Safety** – this means having a space that feels safe.



**2. Trust** – this means building relationships that are clear, kind and reliable.



**3. Choice** – this means giving a person chances to choose how they join in.



**4. Collaboration** – this means sharing decisions and encouraging respect between everyone.



**5. Empowerment** – this means valuing people's strengths and accepting their behaviours.



These things help a person to carry on learning and do well in their lives.

## East Lothian Champions Board



**East Lothian** is an area in Scotland.



There is a group of young people in East Lothian Council called East Lothian Champions Board.

East Lothian Champions Board:

- are 12 years old and older
- have care experience



The group are encouraged to:

- speak up for children and young people in care
- change the care system to make it better
- change policies to make lives better for young people in care
- get positive help from experts



The Champions Board were asked how positive relationships made them feel.

They said they felt:



- heard and understood
- safe and cared for
- loved and wanted
- important
- happy and confident

## Care experience and relationship-based approach



A **relationship-based approach** means thinking about all our connections with other people in a way that builds positive relationships with them.

It can also be called relationship-based practice.



In May 2024 there was a big meeting called Children in Scotland Conference.

The people at the meeting had:

- lived experience of care, or
- worked with children and young people in care



They were asked:

**When you think about relationship-based practice, which words come to mind?**



Almost everyone said:

- understanding
- **empathy** – how someone else might be feeling
- listening
- connection



Many people also said:

- trust
- people
- time
- safety
- communication



The words from the Champions Board and the Children in Scotland meeting tell us that positive relationships make us happier and healthier.

### 3.5 Informal relationships



In this document, **informal** means friendly, easy going and relaxed.



Children and young people with experience of care might have informal relationships that help support them.



These 4 kinds of informal relationships are so important.



### Family

This can include anyone we feel very close to, including friends or people in our communities.



Different people can have very different understandings of 'family'. Especially young people with experience of care.

Think of the case study about Jemma.  
What was her experience of family?



## Friendships

A report written about Care Experience and Friendship in 2022 says:



- most children want to make friends
- having no supportive friends makes it harder to be happy and healthy
- there are lots of ways to describe 'friendship'
- people with care experience should have the same chances to make friends as anyone else
- adults need to understand how important friendships are to children

2022



## Pets and animals

In 2022 the University of Edinburgh did some research.



The research looked at how important pets are to young people in care.

And what happens when the young people move homes.



The study showed that:

- the pets supported the emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing of the young people
- the young people felt less lonely
- the young people got more fresh air and exercise
- the pets showed love
- the young people felt more secure
- if the pet moved home with the young person it helped them to settle in



## Objects and belongings

**Objects and belongings** mean things which are part of someone's life.



Some examples are:



- favourite bedding



- framed photos

- special stones, crystals or shells



For children with care experience objects and belongings are extra important.

This is because the objects can move with them to new homes and remind them of people or emotions from their past.



Think about Jemma.

What would it have been like for her to leave her family home with her belongings?

## 3.6 Formal relationships



**Formal relationships** means the ways we connect with some people who may be in charge of decisions that affect us.



There are many different kinds of formal relationship that are important to children with experience of care.

Some examples are:

## Corporate parents



For children who have experienced care, there are organisations or people who have special responsibilities towards them.

These are called **corporate parents**.



Corporate parents are very important for children who have experience of care.



Corporate parents are in charge of things like:



- housing
- education
- social care
- healthcare



## Education

At school or college, the relationship that a young person has with their teachers and other staff can make school life feel safe and supportive.



## Workforce

This includes:

- social workers
- health workers
- youth workers
- foster carers
- teachers
- family support workers

## 3.7 Positive relationship skills



Different skills are needed for different types of relationships.



To sort out friendship problems where things feel tense, we need these skills:

- active listening
- empathy
- boundary setting



To sort out family problems like arguments, we need these skills:

- **negotiation** – this means reaching an agreement
- care giving



To work through parenting challenges, we need these skills:

- **patience** – this means being able to wait with kindness
- empathy
- parenting skills



To sort out relationship worries, we need these skills:

- communication skills
- emotional connection



To sort out problems at work, we need these skills:

- communication skills
- ways to solve a disagreement



To make our communities better we need these skills:

- **co-operation** skills – this means working together
- **leadership** skills – this means being able to be in charge sometimes
- team working skills



## Boundaries

**Boundaries** are limits that we can set.

The limits say what we can and cannot deal with.



When we make boundaries, we are looking after our emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing in relationships.



Good boundaries help us stay in our window of tolerance.



It is important to be aware of our own boundaries and the boundaries of the person you are supporting.



### **Creating emotional safety**

It is really important that people feel safe to talk about their feelings.



We can create emotional safety by using the trauma-informed principles:

- safety
- trust
- choice
- collaboration
- empowerment

## Listening with empathy



When someone listens to us with empathy, we are more likely to be open with them.



Listening to someone with empathy means:

- focusing on just them
- not interrupting them
- eye contact – giving them your full attention
- asking them questions
- giving them time to answer
- telling them what you are hearing
- checking that you have understood what they have told you

## 3.8 Language



**Language** means the words we use.



We use language to tell other people what we are thinking and feeling.



When we choose language that:

- is easily understood
- does not **stigmatise** someone

we can connect better with the other person.



**Stigmatise** means to treat people unfairly because of something you do not like about them – for example, a group they belong to or a health condition they have.

### 3.9 The Learning Outcomes – what you have learned

# 3

In Section 3 you have learned:



- how important positive relationships are
- about attachment theory
- types of relationship – formal and informal
- about boundaries and emotional safety
- about listening with empathy
- the importance of language



This is the end of Section 3.

In this Easy Read document, we used pictures from:





**We listen.**



**We care.**



**We love.**

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