Understanding PACE - A Way of Being

For Parents/Carers

At times children can present in ways that can be overwhelming and may trigger feelings of anger or frustration in you. PACE, or being PACEful, is a simple approach you can use to help you to regulate your own emotions and help you connect with your child. If your child feels connected to you and understood, they are likely to be more engaged and open to find ways forward.

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make children feel safe. It involves communicating using these elements together flexibly, not as a step-by-step process. PACE focuses on the whole child, not just the behaviour.

PACE has 4 principles:

P – Playfulness - when we are stressed by children's behaviour, we can forget our own sense of humour and light heartedness which can do so much to defuse a difficult situation. It can be as simple as keeping your tone of voice light rather than stern or it can be making time for fun, which can transform emotion and mood.



A – Acceptance – This does not mean accepting unsafe behaviours, rather accepting the thoughts, wishes, needs, motivations and feelings that your child may share with you or be communicating through their behaviour. It means acknowledging the things they struggle with rather than trying to persuade them to co-operate or to understand your point of view.

C – Curiosity – Curiosity is the super-power parents have that can help you explore situations rather than assuming you already know what's going on – It helps explore what's going on beneath the behaviour. Curiosity involves wondering and asking what's going on for your child.



E – Empathy – Empathy involves showing that you are listening to and are tuned into your child's feelings and experience. It can communicate that you care, which helps build connection. It can transform emotions, situations and relationships. When you are empathic you validate your child and their experience.

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

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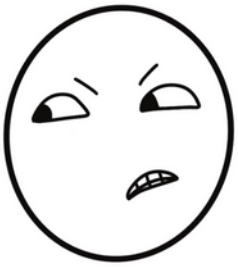
Playfulness

Playfulness is about expressing...

Joy FUN Pleasure **Hope**

If you're feeling angry, frustrated or even a little bit out-of-control then it could be time for a bit of PLAYFULNESS. And if you're not....It's still time for some PLAYFULNESS

Instead of...



"JUST STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING RIGHT NOW AND DO WHAT YOU ARE TOLD!"
Angry voice

Try...

"Whoa, I wasn't expecting that! I'm just going to have a little body shake little body shake, or some basketball to help me calm down and then let's think about what to do"

OR

"How about a quick game of Snap/Hide and seek/Dance Party. I need something to help me relax a little. I wonder if that would help you too?"

It's not so much what you say but how you say it – with a light tone of voice

Playfulness is about fun together or even by yourself if you need to regulate

Playfulness can be...

LIGHT-HEARTEDNESS

High-fives

Dance-Party

MOVEMENT

Games

Doing or talking about something fun together

Quizzes

A 'Storytelling' tone of voice

What else can you think of?

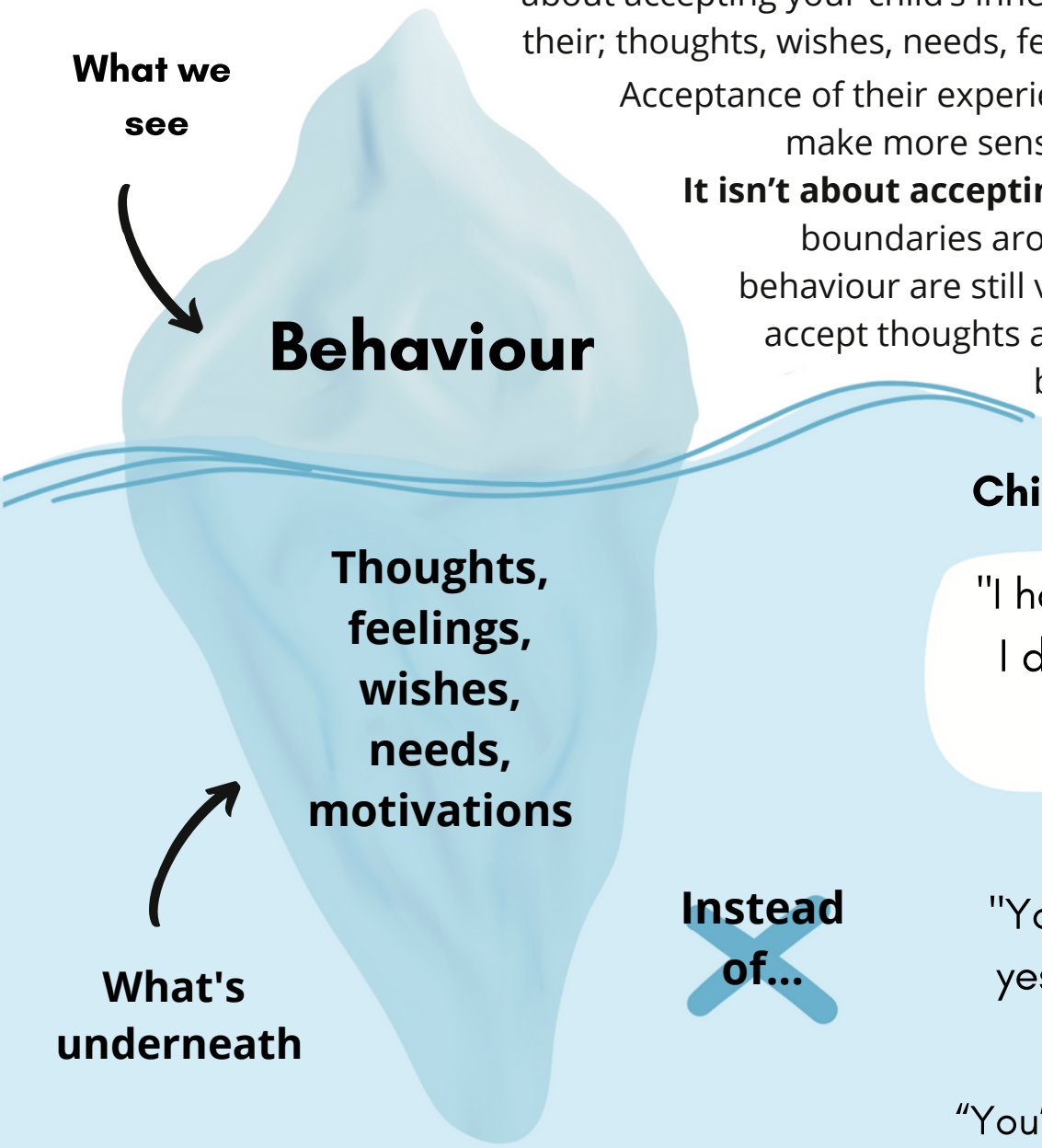
Playfulness isn't about being funny or making jokes all the time (especially if it involves making fun of them or someone else) but creating shared joy and being playful when it feels right. It's about having a good time together – It strengthens relationships and builds co-operation. It also helps to regulate and balance the body, and makes it easier to focus and problem-solve.

Acceptance

When faced with difficult behaviour, sometimes parents will want to change how their child is thinking or feeling, hoping that will lead to change. Unfortunately, it often doesn't help and can sometimes make the child more defensive. Acceptance is about accepting your child's inner experience. Including their; thoughts, wishes, needs, feelings and motivations.

Acceptance of their experience can allow them to make more sense of their inner world.

It isn't about accepting harmful behaviour boundaries around harmful or unsafe behaviour are still very important. We can accept thoughts and feelings even when behaviour needs limits.



Child says:

"I hate school. I don't want to go!"

Instead of...

"You liked it yesterday!"

Try...

"You're really upset that you have to go to school today. I see that"

"You really wish you could stay at home with Dad. It's so frustrating for you"

"This feels so unfair to you"

Thoughts & feelings NEED ACCEPTANCE – actions may need LIMITS

'You're really angry with Mummy. Can you say what you feel without hurting?'

Curiosity

Curiosity is a valuable skill that you can offer your child – it increases your understanding of what is happening for your child and can help build a stronger relationship. It is often a much better alternative than trying to get your child to do what you want.

Curiosity is not:

- Judging
- Evaluating your child's behaviour
- Assuming

It is:

Exploring what has happened and their thoughts & feelings

Keeping an open mind about what is underneath the behaviour

CURIOSITY:

builds co-operation

strengthens relationships

helps your wellbeing (rather than feeling angry / powerless)

models a positive approach to learning

Instead of...

"I know what you're up to"

"You're being lazy/difficult/selfish"

"What we're you thinking?"

"Why did you do that?"

Try...

"I **wonder** why that happened?"

"What do you think was going on?"

"I wonder if you felt scared?"

"I **guess** you might have felt worried about that so tried to avoid it"

"**Can you help me understand** what you were feeling just then?"

Notice if you are feeling like you should be able to make your child behave or if you are feeling responsible or challenged by behaviours you don't understand. That can stop your curiosity and if we stop being curious, we stop thinking. Curiosity will help you, and your child, find new understandings and new ways of being and seeing themselves.

Keep in mind:

"What was that behaviour communicating?"

"What might be happening for them?"



Empathy

Empathy is about listening with your full attention – especially to your child's feelings – and communicating back that you hear and accept those feelings. Being empathic with positive feelings enables us to share in those positive feelings. It is very easy to want to minimise or 'fix' things if your child is struggling with difficulties, or experiencing big emotions. Whilst showing empathy might not feel like you are 'fixing things', it is helping through showing your child you understand.

EMPATHY IS NOT LIKE SYMPATHY

it is not 'feeling sorry' for your child. Empathy is about letting them know that you understand how hard it is and have compassion for how they are feeling. It involves trying to stand in their shoes, staying with them throughout their emotional experience, and helping them to develop the confidence to manage those feelings.

Instead of...

denying, explaining or avoiding difficult feelings

Try...

Giving the feeling a name

"Losing a friend hurts. It's so painful"
"That sounds frustrating"
"I'm not surprised you're angry. I think I probably would be too."

Acknowledging the struggle

"That's so hard..."
"Its not easy..."
"Things feel so tough right now"



Listening or acknowledging with a word or two

"I see", "Oh no"

Acknowledging hopes and wishes

"You really wish you didn't have to go to school today."

Checking for understanding

'If I've got you right, you.....' "Thank you for helping me understand"

Naming and acknowledging feelings VALIDATES your child – It helps them to realise that we all have a wide range of feelings and helps them find solutions themselves whilst knowing there is someone who trusts them and will support them.
Empathy is the root of CONNECTION and COMPASSION