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WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Trauma and ACE (TrACE) Informed Reparative Work

Children can be supported to develop a pro-social identity by helping them to engage in positive and constructive activities and to develop beneficial interactions with others.

The Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System (YJB 2019) define the minimum expectation for all agencies that provide statutory services to ensure good outcomes for children in the youth justice system. The standards highlight that YOTs must 'assist the child to build a pro-social identity to enable sustainable desistance'. Similarly, for out-of-court disposals, the standards state that YOTs must ensure plans focus on promoting a pro-social identity and aiding desistance from crime.

In a Child First context, restorative approaches support each child to develop a 'pro-social' identity, and to help them to take a positive place in society. These approaches can help children to see the value of good behaviour and promote inclusion. A restorative approach will play to the child's individual strengths, help them to evolve constructive interests and widen their horizons (Hazel, N et al, 2020).

Rather than repaying society, the child is re-engaging with it, facing the future and shaping their place in it. The focus of a restorative approach should be for the child to move forwards and recognise their valuable place in the community.

Children who have experienced trauma have often developed a negative view of themselves and the world around them. Reparation can help challenge the way the child thinks about themselves and their place in the world.

Children who have experienced abusive, ambivalent or inconsistent care giving may have missed vital early years experiences that are crucial to their development. A key intervention for a child who has experienced trauma can be spending time with trusted adults doing activities that provide shared emotions, attention and intention. Reparative activities can be a positive method of recreating the experiences, the child has missed in their early years (intersubjectivity, attunement, co-regulation of affect). Reparative activities fit this model in the following ways

Intersubjectivity: during reparative work the child and practitioner are focusing on the same activity and are working towards the same goal, e.g. painting the school classroom. For children at the lower levels of the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) the emphasis should be on doing something together rather than the purpose of the reparative activity itself (although activities the child enjoys will help with engagement) to communicate to the child they are worthy of spending time with, e.g. "I was hoping you would come to today we had such a nice chat last week". As the child progresses the focus can shift towards the positive contribution the reparative activity has and the

impact in terms of the feelings of others, e.g. “the children will be so happy to see their newly painted classroom”

Attunement: children learn how to self sooth, recognise and manage their feelings through the people surrounding them. When working alongside a child completing a reparative activity there is a unique opportunity for practitioners to (where appropriate) name the feelings in the child, themselves, and in others in a non-threatening manner. Everyday scenarios/conversations can be used to identify and discuss feelings. For example, “You are smiling today, you look really happy to be here” or “it can be a bit frustrating painting wall as it take a long time and often needs several coats”, or “your brother looked really sad, has he argued with your mum again?”.

The practitioner can also seek to model these feelings (e.g. showing concern when they tell stories about their peers/family) or showing kindness to others in the child’s presence (e.g. offering to share biscuits, opening doors).

Co-regulation of affect: co-regulation must be learned before a child can self-regulate. The reparative practitioner can help the child identify emotions, by naming them for them when they can’t, make guesses with them about how they might be feeling. Lots of repeated experiences of adults helping them to make sense of their emotions will help them learn to manage them themselves in the future. Reparative work can also provide opportunities for the child to be able to raise and lower their emotions in a safe environment, e.g. assisting the child to complete a delicate, fiddly task.

Reparative activities may also provide less intense/non-threatening opportunities for the child to talk about their experiences, but this should be led by the child rather than instigated by the practitioner.

Self-esteem/self-worth

Children who have experienced trauma will have been exposed to harsh and repeated forms verbal abuse for the very people who should have been their biggest supporters. Unfortunately, where the traumatic experiences in early childhood manifest as challenging behavior in school and/or in the community, negative messages can be further perpetuated (unintentionally), e.g. “Everyone else managed to understand” or “why are you the only one who hasn’t completed this task” “you will never get a job with an attitude like that”.

Reparative work offers excellent opportunities to build on a child’s self-worth, e.g. by Identifying a reparative activity you know the child will be good at. Reparative activities can also be used to create opportunities for mastery – finding ways the child can feel valued and listen to, e.g. trusting them to pay for the shopping or highlighting an area where you have made a mistake or are less skilled and allow them to teach you something, e.g. “Oh I have dropped paint on the floor, how will I clean that up?”.

In addition, reparative practitioners should consider how to share the child’s identified positive attributes with them. This can be achieved by finding ways to notice, celebrate and praise the child’s positive skills, qualities, talents and attributes, e.g. telling the child, reward/thank you letters, certificates, session journals, panel reports, review meetings, conversations about them to others (within earshot), treats. Professionals

should make deliberate time to reflect and notice with the child the positives and what is going well and what skills they have demonstrated in the undertaken work.

Trauma informed reparative interventions

Make explicit links between trauma and impacts upon the body/behaviour

Reparation work can also be used to make the link between trauma and behaviour explicit for the child so that they can grasp for themselves the relevance to their own experience, e.g. when completing gardening work a reparation worker can explain how important it is to pay attention to the vegetables daily, giving them water and shelter from the frost and ask the child to consider what would happen if we forgot to water the vegetables or didn't attend to them for weeks on end. When working in an animal shelter discussing how the animal's mistreatment may have impacted upon them, making them more prone to barking and mistrusting/scared of humans. Practitioners can emphasis that the vegetables/animals were not responsible for their own care/what happened to them but with the right care any damages caused can be repaired.

Restorative justice/direct reparation

Direct reparation (letters of apology/conferences) require more executive cognitive skills, the ability to think things through; to reflect on personal behaviour; understand the consequences of any actions and the impact of the offence on the victim. Children who have experienced developmental trauma may be unable to do this until they have developed positive relationships, have processed some of their own trauma and have the perception to process its requirement. In terms of location on the TRM, this would be at Level 4 or above.

Children must have experienced empathy to be able to have empathy. You cannot teach a child how to understand another's distress or how to be emotionally warm. Children having had their own experiences of being a victim (e.g. of abuse) validated by a trusted adult is a pre-requisite to them being able to empathise with others. Therefore, it's recommended that significant developmental work is completed before a child is considered for direct reparation. Practitioners will need to assess whether children are able to recognise and label their own feelings, identify a range of feelings, and be able to answer feeling-based questions and name and recognise feelings in others. They will also need to have a stable base and positive adult attachments to support them through the process.

Victim empathy work for a child at Level 1 or two of the TRM would be in the format described above (attunement, co-regulation, intersubjectivity: verbal feelings work). Victim empathy work for a child at Level 4 or 5 could be in the form of a letter to a victim, shuttle mediation or a face to face restorative justice conference. It is important that practitioners deliver the right intervention at the right time determined by the child's developmental need. Community reparative work may be a useful way to prepare a child to undertake more direct reparation at a later stage. The time this make take depends on the individual child, the stability of their base and consistency of access to a therapeutic environment and trusted adult attachments. Practitioners will need to liaise closely with victim workers so that the victims wishes and expectations can be managed accordingly. Timing and sequencing are crucial in this aspect of work as

direct restorative approaches will only be effective when both the child and the victim are ready to engage in a positive way; and should not be used if this is not the case.

Other Considerations for Practice: Introducing a new worker

Children who have experienced trauma can find it difficult to navigate new relationships, and numerous workers can be overwhelming to the child and this is counter-productive to creating a sense of safety. Therefore, it is preferable to keep the number of professionals involved with a child to a minimum, so that interventions are delivered through key consistent professionals. Where introducing a new reparation worker it's recommended the worker is introduced a phased gradual manner via a worker with whom the child has already established trusted relationship.

For example,

Week one – the reparation worker pops into the child's home during the case managers visit to introduce themselves.

Week two – the case manager takes the child to see the reparation site and they stay 10 minutes.

Week three – the case manager takes the child to the reparation session and they stay 30 mins.

Week four – the reparation worker collects the child and takes him to the reparation site and the case manager pops into see the child

Practice Example

The following example demonstrates how reparative approaches can be used to assist a child recover from traumatic childhood experiences and how the focus of the work can shift from relational to cognitive as the child makes developmental progress.

Aiden presented with attachment issues possibly arising from instability and abuse experienced in his early years. His behaviour was challenging from a young age but escalated following the birth of his youngest brother (who had chronic health needs).

There had been issues with Aiden absconding from the family home and involving himself in offending and anti-social behaviour. His temper was problematic, and he would often find himself in physical altercations with peers. There had been numerous safeguarding concerns made about Aiden and the family was at risk of breaking down.

Aiden was not close to any family members and sought belonging with increasingly anti-social peers. He was also misusing substances and there was concern he was vulnerable to exploitation.

Aiden had a conviction for burglary and possession of cannabis and was subject to a nine-month Referral Order. During the initial assessment and Referral Order panel Aiden expressed his frustration of the requirement for him to carry out reparative work (community reparation hours and a letter of apology) and stated in no uncertain terms that he would not complete this element of the programme. The victim liaison officer liaised with the victim of the offence to manage expectations and to explain the type of work that would

need to be completed to enable Aiden to complete the letter of apology in a more meaningful way.

In the initial stages of the Referral Order the YOT delivered the intervention via the YOT worker. A deliberate decision was made not to refer to the reparation worker until Aiden had established a relationship with his YOT worker and was consistently keeping all these appointments.

The principles of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) (Hughes 2021) were used to engage Aiden. Initial sessions would focus on assisting him to recognise and label his own emotions by explicitly naming and labelling his possible emotions during conversation (co-regulation). Increasingly Aiden began to disclose information via stories about peers and the YOT worker sought to develop Aiden's emotional intelligence by showing empathy towards the persons in his chosen conversations. It was noted that Aiden would respond to this 'indirect work' in a more animated manner than when he was asked to talk about himself. This strategy was built upon during the Referral Order.

After a period of two months the YOT worker was able to introduce the reparation worker. A carefully considered plan was followed to introduce the worker in a phased manner. Initially the reparation worker visited Aiden at home and the YOT worker attended the first reparation sessions with Aiden in the community. At this stage Aiden better able to recognise his own feelings and those of others and was evidencing this consistently in conversations and responding to the humour used in sessions. This coincided with a period of stability at home evidenced by safeguarding referrals having ceased and there being no further missing person reports.

The reparation worker was able to build on the work initiated by the YOT worker using Aiden's stories about peers to make explicit the links between trauma and impacts upon the body/behaviour. For example, Aiden would frequently talk about a peer (a child looked after) who had been placed out of county and would abscond to his hometown. The reparation worker was able to use PACE strategies to show empathy for the child, deliberately acknowledging how difficult it must be for a child to live away from their family and being curious to the reasons why the child may have been placed in care, e.g. "it sound like he must have had a very difficult childhood. I imagine he must feel very angry about his situation". This strategy gradually served to increase Aiden's understanding and relevance of his own circumstances.

The reparation worker was able to build on Aiden's self-esteem by noting the positive work he was contributing to the community and whilst he was in earshot reporting back to his mother and YOT worker about the excellent work he had completed on the bowling green. It happened that one of the members of the bowling club also noted Aiden's hard work and rewarded him with a small monetary gift.

The review process indicated that Aiden had progressed from Level 1 (Instability and Chaotic) to Level 4 (Insight and Awareness) on the Trauma Recovery Model. The focus of sessions then shifted to a more cognitive approach.

Aiden subsequently completed a letter of apology to the victim of the offence, choosing to do this in his own time. Despite him having indicated in his initial Referral Order panel that he would not complete his reparation hours, he

subsequently completed them all and received a certificate from the YOT management team for his excellent attitude during sessions.

When Aiden reached Level 5 (Future Planning) of the TRM much of the YOT intervention focused on encouraging future thinking and preparing Aiden to find training or employment. The YOT worker was able to reflect back on the strengths he demonstrated during the reparative work Aiden completed.

References

Hazel, N et al (2020) *Using an Identify Lens: Constructive working with children in the criminal justice system*. retrieved from [Using-an-identity-lens-toolkit.pdf \(netdna-ssl.com\)](#) on 18.6.21

Hughes, D (2021). *DDP Network What I meant by PACE*, retrieved on 14th February 2021 from <[What is meant by PACE? - DDP Network](#)>

YJB, (2019) *Standards For Children in Youth Justice*: London: YJB