

**Briefing for Members Debate on Barnardo's Scotland Nurture Week**

**9<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

**Key points**

- A nurturing approach to child development is based on **supporting, caring for, promoting and cultivating** children as they grow.
- There is a clear link between children being raised in a **nurturing way** and a child's ability to **create positive attachments, to learn and to thrive.**
- **Adverse childhood experiences and trauma** can result in poor attachment; those working with children must be able to respond to this.
- A nurturing approach helps to create strong attachments; and strong attachments are the building blocks of **children's emotional resilience.**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes this member's debate and the opportunity it brings to highlight the importance of nurture and attachment in a child's life.

Evaluations of our work demonstrate a clear link between children being raised in a **nurturing, caring and supportive way** and a child's ability to **learn and thrive.** The neuroscience of brain structure and function makes it clear that our brains work best when we feel safe, and **positive attachment** is the key to feeling safe.

Nurturing approaches are based on the recognition that the factors which lead to many young children failing to reach developmental milestones can be addressed by helping parents and those working with children to take relatively **simple measures to improve attachment** and thus the child's development.

**Nurturing, attachment based approaches**

We provide services across Scotland which take an attachment based approach to working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. This includes work in nurseries, primary schools and the early stages of secondary school. Crucially this also includes work with families '**before the school gates**' to ensure that children arrive at the school gate **ready to learn.** This approach helps **parents build strong and healthy relationships** with their children; **and improves educational attainment** and life chances for whole families.

We also work in a number of local authority areas helping to **build the capacity** of the early years and teaching workforce to **take a nurturing attachment based**

**approach** to their work with children and parents. **We believe that an attachment approach to child development should be part of the training of all workers in early learning and childcare settings**, and how this can be achieved needs serious consideration.

### **Raising attainment**

Our work on attainment shows a clear link between a child being raised in a **nurturing, caring and supportive environment** and their ability to learn and achieve in school. This is supported by strong research and evidence, in particular the work in Glasgow around the impact of nurture groups.<sup>1</sup> Our work to close the educational attainment gap focuses on promoting **secure attachment**, promoting **recovery from trauma** and building **resilient communities**.

We understand that many of the children who face inequity in attainment are those who **face the greatest challenges** and will have suffered from **adverse childhood experiences**. These are children who may have experienced broken or disrupted attachment relationships or live in high stress environments marked by poverty, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol abuse. Their behaviour may be challenging and confusing but this is the outward **expression of unmet attachment needs**.

Our approach is strengths based and aims to support parents to understand why what they are already doing is so important for their child's development. In several areas we co-delivering this parenting approach with schools which also helps to upskill school staff in how to implement an **attachment based, nurturing approach**.

### **Mental health and emotional wellbeing**

For many children the result of poor attachment in the early years is that they start school with a significant disadvantage to other children and are at **increased risk of developing a mental health problem**. Even at this stage there will be a gap between the attainment of these children and those from less disadvantaged backgrounds.

Within our own services we are finding that children and young people often find it **difficult to label and regulate their feelings**. They can often lack coping mechanisms and emotional literacy which can lead to anxiety, stress and poor mental health. A nurturing approach helps to create strong attachments; and strong attachments are the building blocks of **children's emotional resilience**.

We would like to see all schools taking a population-based approach, to ensure that they create and foster a nurturing culture for all, which supports good mental health and wellbeing and emotional resilience in children and young people.

Our approach as a country to tackling the growing number of children and young people who are affected by mental health issues should be embedded in how we

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<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268280064> From attachment to attainment The impact of nurture groups on academic achievement

work with children and families in the early years. The importance of nurture and attachment and a recognition of the impact of trauma need to be at the heart of this.

[Read more here](#) about how we are meeting the Attainment Challenge by supporting the development of attachment-aware and trauma-informed practice in nurseries and schools.

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