It's all about relationships:
Embedding relational, trauma sensitive approaches in education settings

Accompanying film notes

Why children and young people's mental health is so important

The Scottish Government has an ambition that Scotland should be the best place in the world to learn and grow up in and to ensure that every child has an equal chance to succeed. Protecting and improving mental health and wellbeing at an early age is vitally important to ensure all aspects of future positive wellbeing and life chances. Around half of mental health difficulties are established by age 14, therefore protecting and improving children and young people's mental health at the earliest stage is a priority for our society and not just the responsibility of specialist services. Children and young people's mental health must be considered within all contexts of where they live, learn and play.

It's all about relationships

There are many ways that a child and young person's mental health can be nurtured and supported, and evidence increasingly shows that relationships must be prioritised. Good quality relationships are vital for wellbeing, growth and health; especially when a child has experienced adversity or trauma. Education staff are often 'experts' in building relationships and have the power to create and foster a culture of warmth, nurture, kindness and positive relationships within their school environments. However, sometimes they do not realise or recognise the significance of this.

Simple things

"Simple things" is a phrase often used to describe actions that make a significant difference to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Examples of "simple things" include: always using children's names, consistently providing a warm welcome, using compassionate language, noticing and commenting on how children are doing, being inquisitive and interested in them and their lives. "Simple things" are examples of relationally informed practices; the foundations of good quality relationships.

Children and young people recognise the importance of these interactions as being crucial to their mental health and wellbeing in education settings.

It can all feel a bit confusing

Certain words and terms used to describe children and young people's mental health can feel confusing and cause uncertainty in how to best respond. Terms such as 'trauma' and 'adversity' can feel 'clinical' and 'specialist' and cause feelings of fear of making things worse or not doing the right thing. Often when we use these words we feel unsure what actions we can take to support children best but we know building and nurturing relationships is key and extremely important. Education staff have a wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise to share in the power of relationships and the difference good quality relationships make to children's lives.

Aims of the film

- To highlight some key principles of trauma-sensitive practice and show how these are linked to other relationally informed approaches.
- To showcase examples of good practice in terms of "simple things" as part of building relationships and to explore why relationships are so important.
- To help explore and celebrate what you are doing very well in terms of building and nurturing relationships.
- To explore the importance of relationships as part of wider climate and culture and how this is relevant to supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Suggestions for using this film

This film is intended for use with *all* education staff: senior leaders, teachers, support staff, janitorial, catering and secretarial staff.

The film can be used in the following ways:

- As a stand-alone resource for a short awareness session
- As part of training relating to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing
- To inform planning/development regarding mental health and wellbeing
- To inform improvement plans
- As a template to producing something specific for your own school/learning community

## Before watching the film you may wish to consider the following points…

Think about how you support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing within an education setting – what do you do? What is important? Who else is involved?

Have you heard about 'ACE aware' practice or trauma-informed or sensitive approaches within Education? If so, what is your understanding about what this means for your practice? Do you think these approaches are for all children or only those who've experienced trauma or adversity?

Why do you think relationships are important in education settings?

What do you do as an individual to help build relationships with the children in your school?

What do you do collectively as a school or learning community to build relationships?
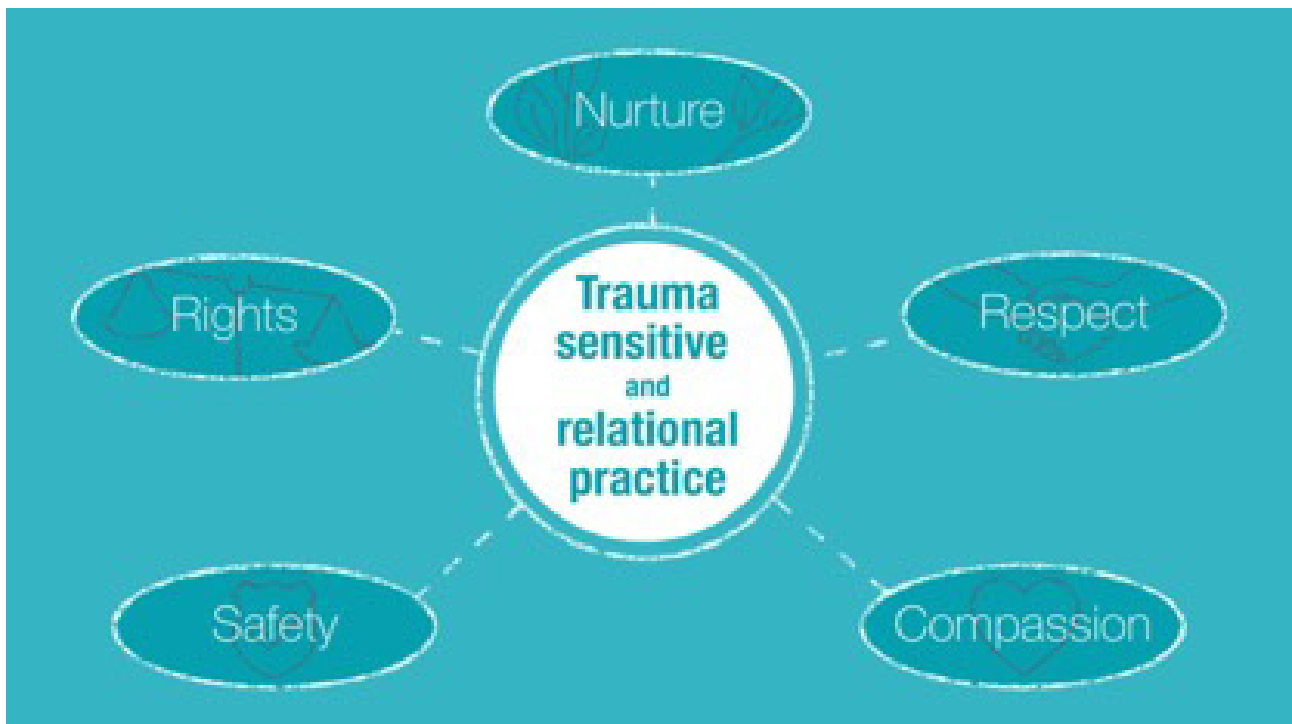
Chapter 1: Building strong relationships

In chapter 1 we look at the importance of building strong relationships and what you might notice as a result of doing this. Here, *trauma sensitive* is described as "not looking out for trauma in every child" and instead "having wonderful relationships with everyone in our school community". We also explore the importance of helping everyone to feel included. The idea of understanding how children may be feeling is discussed and giving them the words to explain their feelings and help conversations and actions. Think of your nursery or school, if a new person arrived, what things would they see and feel from the moment they step through the door in terms of how you promote and celebrate relationships?

Suggested discussion points:

- We hear about the importance of welcomes and how *"Everybody coming into our school feels welcomed, loved, included"* What are your thoughts on welcomes? What do welcomes look like at your nursery or school/ within your class/ dinner hall/ play ground? Why is this so important?

- *"It is not about specific interventions, it is just about an approach, about who you are"* What does this mean to you as an individual and as part of your nursery or school?

- *"If a pupil says to me, 'oh hello Mrs Conington!' it brightens up my day. I feel much better. I feel included and I feel valued. And it's the same, it's reciprocal."* What things have you noticed the pupils do in terms of relationships that make you feel good? What are your thoughts on it being reciprocal? Does it work both ways?

- "Smile" – the most popular of the 'simple' things we heard. Children and young people highlighted this as **very** important. Why does this simple thing feel so important for children and young people? Why do they value it so much? Do we sometimes forget or overlook the importance of smiling?

Chapter 2: Reframing and modelling behaviour

"See a child differently and you will see a different child", Dr Stuart Shanker. In this chapter we explore the idea of modelling and reframing behaviour and hear specific examples of changes schools have made, as well as their reflections on the impact these changes have had. We hear the importance of not assuming that a child comes to school with the skills they may need to help develop and deepen relationships and so modelling these skills are very important. We also hear the impact of 'reframing' behaviour; trying to better understand behaviour in order to support a child or young person. We acknowledge that some of this takes time and how we must be prepared for this.

Suggested discussion points:

- *"Showing the children positive interactions with other adults is very very important and it is maybe a skill we cannot assume that our children are learning that we have to model and teach them as well"* What behaviours do you model for the children you work with? What do you notice as a result of this? i.e. using compassionate language, showing kindness, good listening, recognising the skills needed to develop and deepen relationships. Does this apply within and across staff interactions too?

- *"I think now that we have reframed the way in which we look at things and how we use certain terms, actually it has changed the whole culture. People are more understating, more caring and as a result, the behaviour here had changed drastically"* What are your thoughts on trying to "reframe" or see behaviour differently? Does it help you understand what may be going on for a child? What impact does this have on you as an individual? And in terms of the culture of where you work? Mrs Conington mentioned a change in the terms they use to describe behaviour – what are your thoughts on this?

- We hear reflections on taking a different approach and the impact this has had: *"they are all our young people, and it is up to us to change and to work differently and to understand better so we can support every young person"*. What changes (big and small) have helped you reframe/ understand better children's behaviour? Has this changed how you respond? Has this changed how you feel?

- *"We are trying to build children for the future, we're trying to make a difference over that long time. So, we need to be prepared that some of the things we are doing will take that time, such as developing empathy"*. Would you agree? How does it feel to think that some of the things we are doing will take that time? How do you think we could track progress if it is going to take time? How do you look after yourself and support your colleagues when it feels like it is taking time?

Chapter 3: Creating a safe environment and a positive culture

In this chapter we look at the important role of culture and ethos in supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Here, examples are given of specific changes which have been made which have had an impact on school culture. We also explore the importance of safe, supportive environments, children's rights, as well as emotions and regulation. In this chapter it's noted that these things are often 'difficult to measure' – can you think of ways in which you measure the impact of these interactions and interventions in your school?

Suggested discussion points:

- We hear this quote from a child in primary 7 *"The values have been here since ages and ages ago. When everybody's new to the school, through time they learn what they are and why we have them"* Do you have school values? How do you embed these, how are they brought to life within your school?

- We hear that safe and supportive environments are a crucial part of trauma-sensitive approaches. We hear examples such as 'time out cards' and 'safe breakout spaces' 'worry monsters' and 'calm colouring' Do you have any of these in your school? What do you think the benefits of these approaches and activities are for children and young people?

- "Pupils are becoming more aware of what their rights are, and they are ready to talk about that" How do you take a children's rights approach in your school? How do you think a children's rights approach can contribute to creating a safe environment and a positive culture?

- We hear this example from a teacher *"We do a daily check in, just to catch up and give them that time to chat and express how they're feeling"* What role do you think social and emotional learning has in helping children and young people feel safe and supported? Do you think being aware of feelings and emotions is important for children and young people's mental health?

- We hear the quote *"We all look through our eyes in a different way because we've had different experiences"* and an explanation about why self-regulation is so important for pupils – do you implement activities that support pupils to be regulated? Do you think this is important to enable them to learn? Do you think this is important for their mental health and wellbeing?

- In this chapter we also see an image of a teacher giving a child a hug – how does this make you feel? Do you think this is an important element of trauma-sensitive practice? Do you have any reservations or concerns?

Chapter 4: Supporting staff health and wellbeing

In this chapter we consider the importance of staff health and wellbeing, we hear *"we know that to give care you've got to look after yourself"* and we hear examples of good practice about how some schools have started to introduce ways of supporting staff health and wellbeing. We explore why making staff health and wellbeing a priority is so important in ensuring the best care and support can be provided for children and young people.

Suggested discussion points:

- In this section we hear *"Before you can have a safe environment for children......staff need to feel safe and supported"* Do you agree with this? Why is this important?

- *"Supporting these young people and trying to get them to fulfil their potential is a tough job"* We hear that ensuring positive staff health and wellbeing is crucial in order for them to appropriately support highly vulnerable young people. How is staff health and wellbeing addressed in your school? Do you think it's important to have an open and honest culture within your staff group? Do you think this has a beneficial impact on your pupils?

- We hear examples such as having emotional check-ins for staff, using compliments, leaving chocolate bars on desks as well as the introduction of staff wellbeing sessions – Do you have any examples of initiatives like these in your school? Why do you think they are important? What works well and what doesn't?
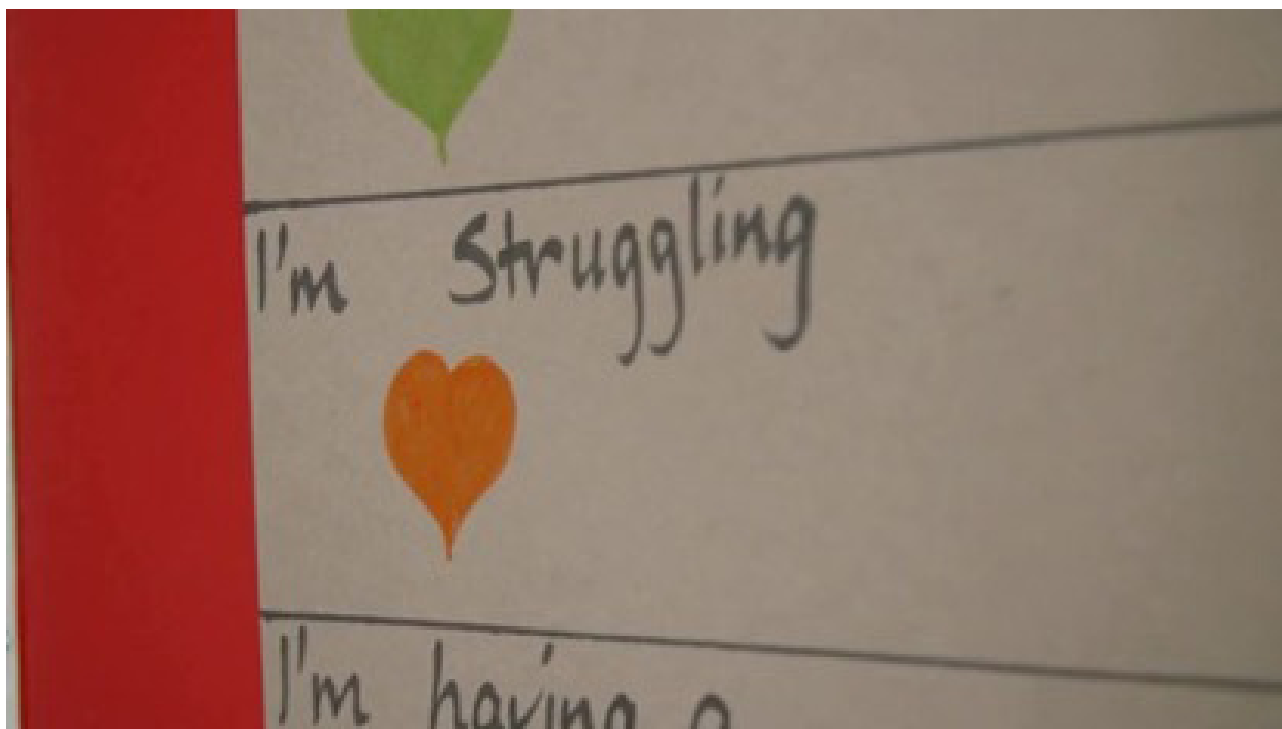
Now you have watched the film, please consider the points from page 3.

Links to further reading:

https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/
Supervision%20in%20Education%20-%20Healthier%20
Schools%20For%20All%20-%20Main%20report_0.pdf

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-
resources/compassionate-and-connected-classroom

https://www.gov.scot/publications/developing-positive-whole-
school-ethos-culture-relationships-learning-behaviour/

http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-topics/mental-health-
and-wellbeing/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health

http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/
adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces

http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/
children/education

https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/
by-discipline/psychology/multiprofessional-psychology/
national-trauma-training-framework.aspx

https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/
by-discipline/psychology/multiprofessional-psychology/
national-trauma-training-framework/trauma-informed-
resources-opening-doors-and-sowing-seeds-animations.aspx

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