Putting Relationships first in schools

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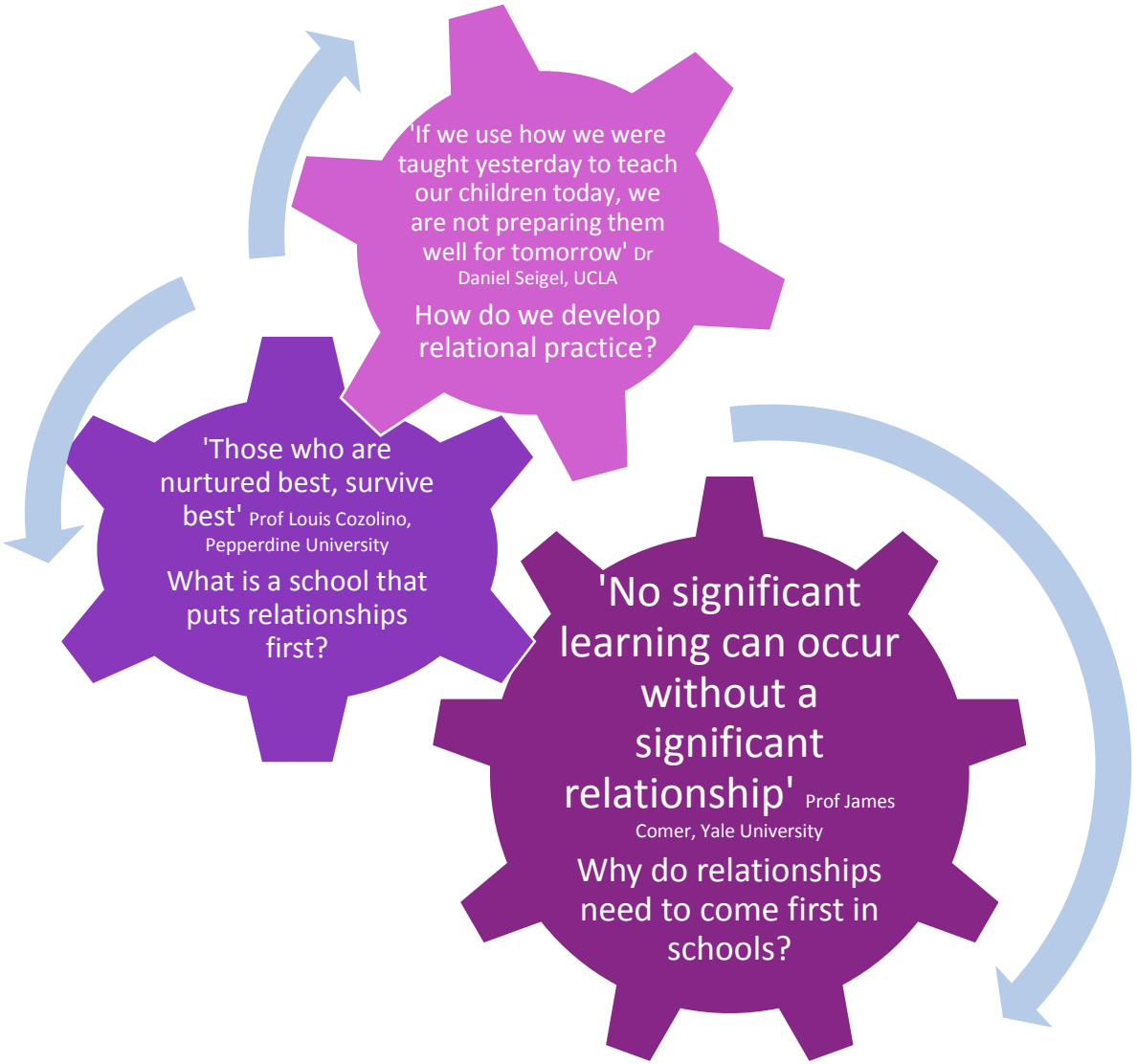
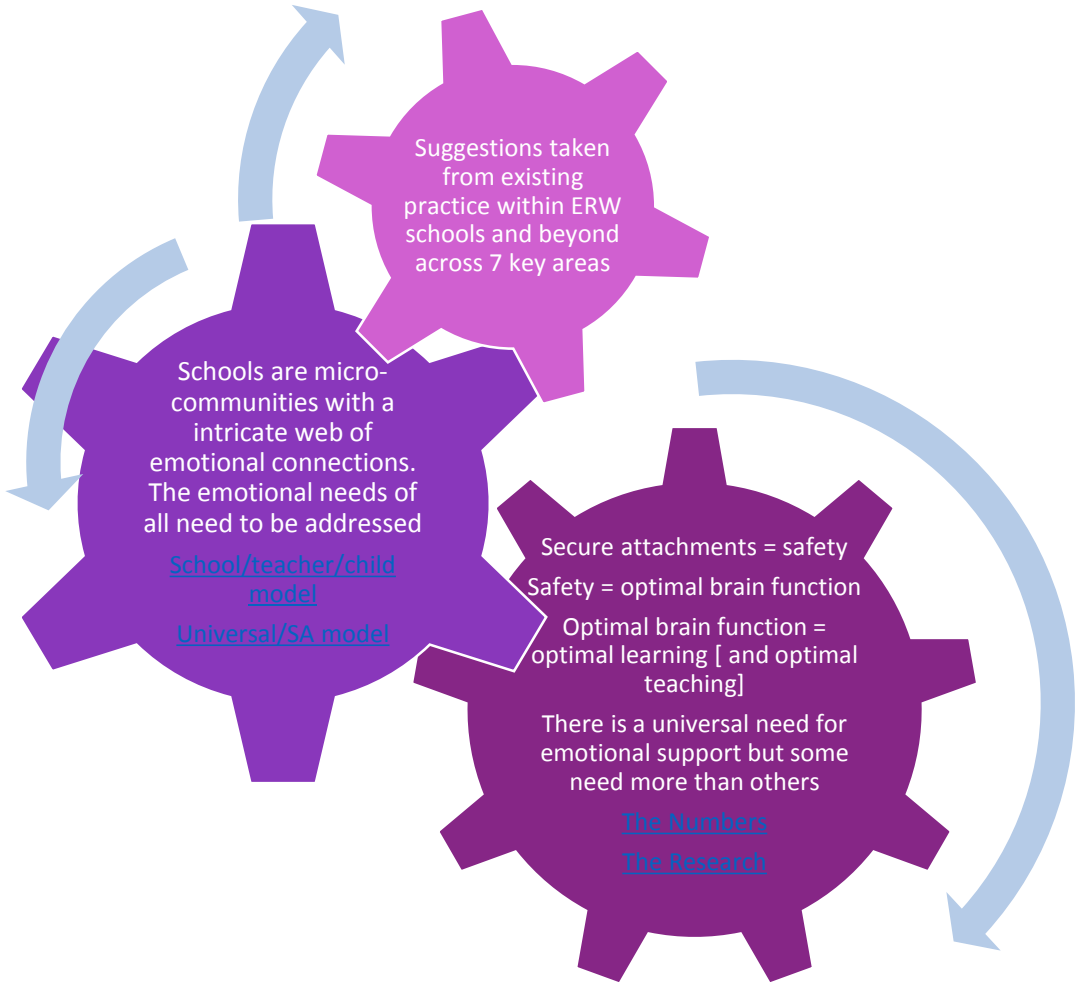
Education through Regional Working



Relationships matter



1. Why relationships matter in education: The Evidence

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The Numbers

- Adverse Childhood Experiences study shows that almost half the population has suffered at least one [ACE], with 14% suffering four or more. [Public Health Wales, 2015]
- One in five adolescents experience a mental health problem each year while 10% of 5-16 yr olds have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem. [Mental Health Foundation, 2018]
- Almost 6000 pupils in Wales have 'looked after' status. Figures suggest that approximately 10% will have had three or more placements in a 12 month period. Nearly 2000 days of school are lost to looked after children through exclusions in a year. [StatsWales, 2018]
- Over 70% of adopted children will have suffered abuse or neglect. [YouGov 2016]
- Levels of stress in teachers have accounted for over 50,000 lost working days in one year across Wales. [National Teachers Union Cymru 2016]

1. Why relationships matter in education: The Evidence

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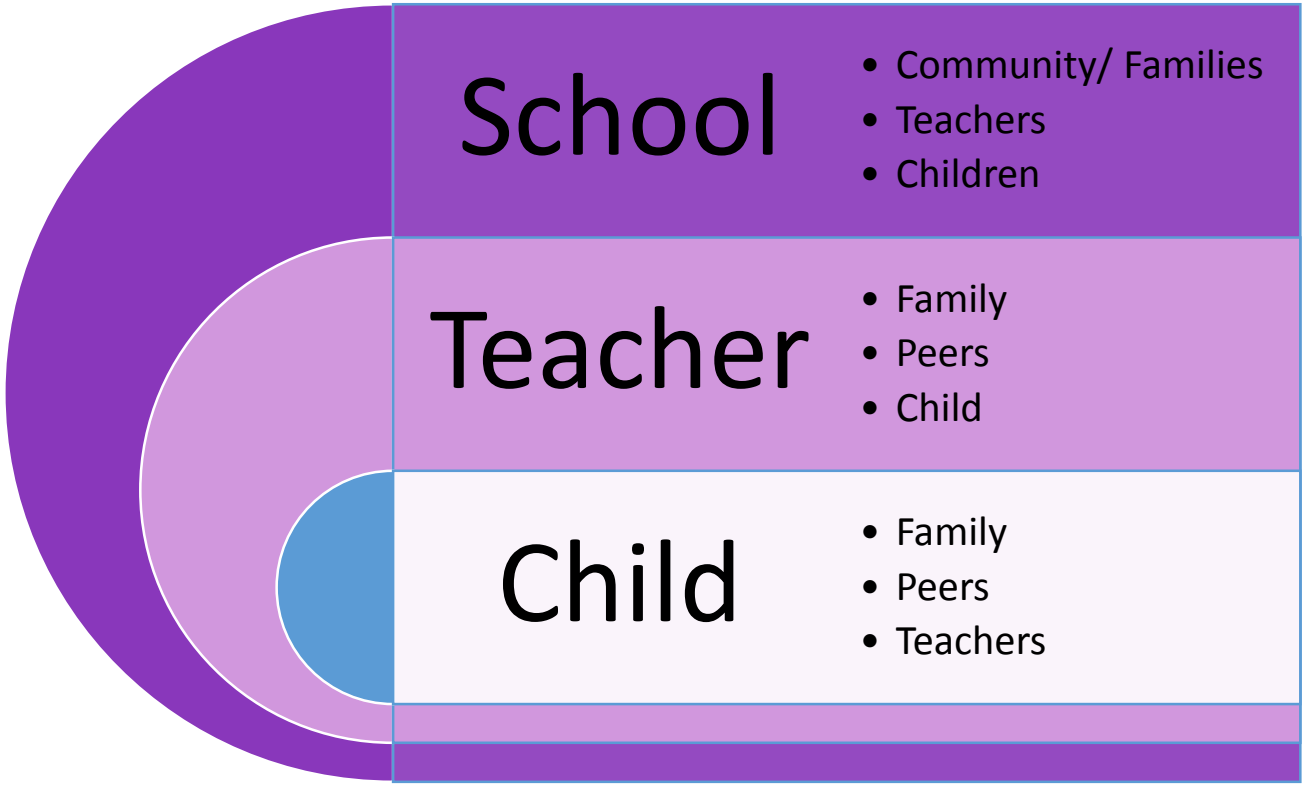
The Research

- Robust correlation between number of adverse childhood experiences and future health and social outcomes and life expectancies [Public Health Wales, 2015, Roffey S. 2016]
- Neurological evidence shows the impact of early childhood experiences and relationships on brain development, hence impacting on physiological, psychological, emotional and social development. [Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University]
- The brain will prioritise the need for survival and feelings of safety over higher-order skills needed for learning. [Corzolino, 2015]
- Strategies that calm the brain, such as Emotion Coaching, have a positive impact on learning [Rose J., Gilbert L., McGuire-Sniekus R., 2015; Lieberman M. 2007]
- The quality of student-teacher relationships is the most critical factor in effective education. [Roffey S. 2015]
- Attachment influences students' school success. Enhancing teacher-student relationships is not merely an add-on, but rather is fundamental to raising achievement [Bergin and Bergin, 2009]
- Relationships build resilience and therefore buffer against adversity [Shonkoff J., et al 2015]. This applies to everyone – children, and adults.

2. What does a relationship-based school look like?

Schools that put relationships first are working from a robust evidence base which shows that learning can only take place in an environment that makes everyone in it feel safe, both physically and psychologically. Neurological evidence shows that the brain is a 'social organ'; its pathways are formed via interactions with others, and therefore nurturing relationships are key to healthy development.

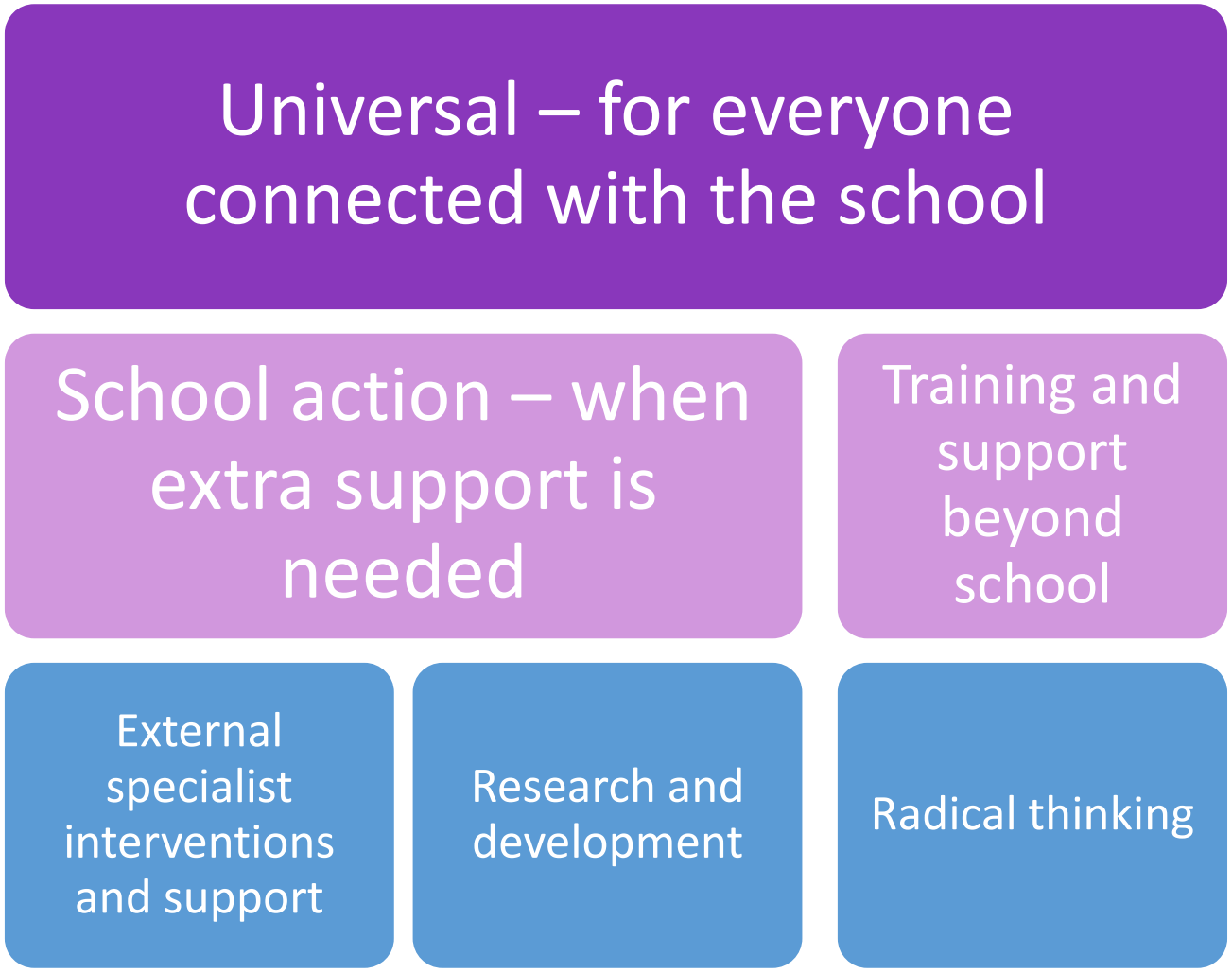
Schools should be working on a model of interconnectedness between pupils, families and teachers. Schools and classrooms are full of invisible connections (Olsen, 2014). **All** in school bring their own micro models of interconnectedness:



2. What does a relationship-based school look like?

This model involves embedding strategies and structures in school that promote positive relationships. Therefore there has be changes made at the whole school, or **universal level**, recognising the value of these strategies for **all** in the school. When these universal strategies are still not enough, more focused strategies should be in place to facilitate the next level of support, similar to **school action**

The model recognises the value of schools working with other schools and this should happen at the universal level. Sometimes local authority or regional support and training will be needed. Occasionally, specialist services will need to be utilised, but this should not mean that schools simply pass on the problem. Rather, new and radical thinking informed by research and professional curiosity should be part of the school's culture.



3. How do schools embed a relational ethos?

3. How? Seven key areas explained

Leadership and Management: universal

- The school's vision and vision statement should be positively worded and clearly reflect relationships and values. The school community has to live and believe these values.
- The ethos needs to be reflected in branding, school motto and vision statement, e.g, prospectus, social media and displayed visually throughout the school.
- Whole school training on attachment awareness and Emotion Coaching (EC), including governors, lunchtime supervisors, administrative and grounds staff, with regular updates and refresher training.
- Whole school use of Emotion Coaching, including '*3 steps*' staff lanyards.
- A relational rather than a behavioural framework for supporting children's behaviour. There will be clear expectations for both pupils and staff. This will be reflected in all school policies
- Relationship building skills, including use of Emotion Coaching as part of performance management and observations.
- Demonstrating an understanding of the emotional aspects of learning is an integral part of recruitment and developed in staff induction.
- Displays around school which reflect its values, e.g. photos of positive interactions
- Promoting a sense of safety through consistent use of
  - ✓ routines /predictability/ continutity
  - ✓ clear expectations and boundaries/
  - ✓ safe spaces/ structured 'unstructured time' through use of yard buddies/mentors and activities during break times.
  - ✓ staff visibility and challenging inappropriate behaviour.
- Reflecting on language and its connotations e.g. *detention, isolation*, and developing a more attachment aware vocabulary which is visible throughout the school.
- A commitment to promoting wellbeing in both pupils **and** staff, e.g whole school mindfulness breaks.
- Systems in place to support transitions e.g. year group change before summer break.
- Systems to promote sensory comfort e.g. areas with soft lighting, calming music in corridors, comfortable places to sit.
- Use of One Page Profiles for both pupils and staff.
- A School Development policy that is committed to developing all 7 key areas.

Leadership and management : school action

- An ethos that sees significant emotional needs as equal to learning and physical needs and therefore, entitled to necessary adjustments and modifications.
- The ALNCo uses an '*attachment lens*' where necessary to assess concerns.
- Designated key adults and safe bases for those pupils that need one.
- '*Teaching staff around the pupil*' meetings to discuss pupils' circumstances, their possible emotions underlying the behaviour, and relational strategies to support the pupil.
- Peer mentoring and peer support programmes available to those who need it.

Curriculum, teaching and learning: universal

- Teaching about emotions and the brain, relationships, meta-emotional and meta-cognitive skills alongside programmes such as SEAL, Incredible Years and P4C. Join Hwb network group **Prosiect Ysgolion ag Ymwybyddiaeth o Ymlyniad ERW Attachment Awareness Schools Project** for resources, videos and information.
- Teaching about safety, e.g. giving safety tours of the school or introducing a Protective Behaviours programme.
- Sensory breaks embedded in the school day, e.g. mindfulness, breathing exercises, active learning, stretching, walking, moving furniture, sorting, left-brained tasks, Cosmic yoga.
- A growth mindset approach – normalising failures and encouraging giving things a go.
- Welcome/ goodbye routines for each day/session/lesson so each pupil feels 'noticed'.
- Clean slate every lesson/ day.
- Developing a sense of belonging through use of names, eye contact and smiles; photographs; remembering and noticing.
- Consistency in language, approaches, routines and visual motifs throughout the school, e.g. daily emotion check-in for both pupils and staff.
- Strategies to support executive function skills such as organising and planning.
- Strategies for coping with test/exam stress such as relaxation techniques, breakfast and drinks.
- Use of One Page Profiles.

Curriculum, teaching and learning: school action

- Increased structure and planning for identified pupils, such as:-
  - ✓ exit plans for when pupil is overwhelmed
  - ✓ strategies to show you are keeping the pupil 'in mind‘ such as the use of transition objects
  - ✓ individual calm boxes
  - ✓ a 'time-in' not 'time-out' ethos
  - ✓ strategies such 'wondering out loud’.
- Use of differentiation and structures to support learning such as:-
  - ✓ success criteria
  - ✓ multi-sensory and concrete apparatus
  - ✓ chunking
  - ✓ mindmaps
  - ✓ writing frames
- Interventions such as:-
  - ✓ social stories to prepare for change and transition
  - ✓ social skills groups such as Talkabout and Lego Club
  - ✓ nurture group access
  - ✓ ‘Beyond Boxall’ strategies [Tina Rae, www.nurtureuk.org]
  - ✓ ELSA work
  - ✓ Relationship-based Play

Pupil Voice: universal

- A whole School Council where opinions are solicited from **all** pupils.
- Roles for pupils in the school that are focused on emotional wellbeing, e.g Emotion Coaches/ peer mentors/ buddies/ Playground Peacemakers, alongside academic peer-to-peer support and tuition.
- Job application process for all pupil roles in the school. Jobs are advertised, pupils apply and are interviewed.
- A structure for pupils to communicate their concerns and anxieties such as Bocs Becso/ Speakr, with an equivalent structure to communicate positives.
- Daily individual emotion check-in. This may be visual, e.g. emotion thermometer with named pegs, or written, verbal or via interactive whiteboard.
- Regular collection of pupil data on views of the school and self e.g PASS, or Listening to Learners, as well as regular wellbeing questionnaires such as Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire [SDQ]. Or create own through Survey Monkey or Hwb.
- Promoting the values of democracy, e.g. through regular formal discussions in assembly, class or groups.
- Quiet zones available.
- Interest based-groups rather than talent-based groups that foster a 'having a go' mentality rather than a 'winning' mentality.
- A Person- Centred approach with One Page Profiles for all pupils.

Pupil Voice: school action

- The option of choice, e.g. choice-based timetable or alternative break times for identified pupils or access to sensory breaks.
- Areas to work if quiet space is needed, and access to designated safe zones such as hafan or nurture groups.
- Person-Centred planning for pupils with IEPs, IDPs, Emotional Support Plans or Statements – see Welsh Government and Helen Sanderson Associates websites.

Staff structure, development and support: universal

- A safe environment which puts relationships first.
- A culture of openness and honesty about workload, wellbeing and coping.
- Frequent meetings to discuss pupils and strategies.
- Flexibility and sharing the load, especially around challenging pupils or classes.
- Structured and consistent opportunities to reflect either in meetings or through a written log.
- Buddy mentors and check-in's for staff.
- Weekly food events in the staff or workroom and regular social events.
- Random acts of kindness – bags with treats left in drawers or pigeon holes.
- Lunchtime walks or exercise sessions after school.
- Training in mindfulness, relaxation techniques or yoga.
- Continuous professional development prioritised.
- Induction for new staff.

Staff structure, development and support: school action

- Peer support, staff support teams and network groups.
- Use of modern technology record interactions to enhance staffs' ability to self-regulate on their relational practice e.g Video Interaction Guidance [VIG].
- Use of Solution Circles to reflect on situations.
- Structured and sustained supervision for all staff at all levels that acknowledges the impact of secondary trauma on staff.
- Counselling for any member of staff that needs it for personal and employment issues.

Identifying need and targeting support: universal

- Strategic planning of effective interventions to support wellbeing e.g. provision mapping and action planning.
- Remain curious by employing a '*What happened to you?*' mindset rather than a *'What's wrong with you?'* attitude when dealing with challenging behaviour.
- Use standard monitoring of attendance and attainment to promote vigilance around those pupils who slip under the radar because they don't visibly cause any problems.
- Using a resilience questionaire to reflect on resiliency within the school and community.
- Regular monitoring of all pupils' wellbeing and relationships for example through Banerjee's 'The Socio-Emotional Profile Questionnaire'.
- Use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ] to screen for emotional problems.
- Use of compulsory seating plans.

Identifying need and targeting support: school action

- A clear system for raising and recording concerns about an individual pupil's needs e.g. SIMS.
- Use of assessment tools such as Boxall profile, Coventry Grid [if unsure whether it is attachment or ASC], and particularly, the Attachment Observation Checklist [Golding, Turner, Worrall *et al.*] to pinpoint specific difficulties, especially for the quiet 'avoidant' pupils.
- Developing relationships with parents to facilitate information gathering, for example use of structured questionnaire such as CAF [Common Assessment Framework.
- Using Relationship-based Play with pupils and parents.
- Person-centred planning to create an IEP, One Page Profile and Emotional Support Plan.
- If whole school relational ethos, such as Emotion Coaching alongside targeted interventions such as Relationship-based Play are having little impact after a long period of time, consider the need for specialist interventions such as counselling or referral to CAHMS.
- Consider staff wellbeing and/or training if a problem seems ‘stuck’ or exclusive to a particular area or lesson. Reflective problem solving or strategies such as Video Interaction Guidance [VIG] could be used.

Planning and monitoring impact: universal

- Relational values and strategies highlighted in the School Development Plan and Departmental Development Plans.
- Collecting data to track for pre and post measures using a school attachment audit tool.
- Developing tracking systems e.g. SIMS to monitor impact of Emotion Coaching on elements such as exclusions, number of incidents, attendance and attainment.

Planning and monitoring impact: school action

- IEP reviews twice a year involving parents/carers and pupils.
- Class based observations.
- Monitor and review the Emotional Support Plan.
- Tracking focused interventions such as Relationship-based Play.
- Participating in Action Research.
- Join the Attachment Research Community [The ARC].

Working with families: universal

- A welcoming reception area with friendly and well-trained reception staff.
- Displays and signage that indicate your school's values – i.e. good relationships with pupils **and families.**
- Freebies, such as supermarket food surplus or second-hand books.
- Family engagement sessions prior to starting school e.g.
  - 0-3 'meet and greet' family breakfasts to chat and glean information
  - letters from families about birth and early experiences
  - home visits, open evenings and playgroups
  - *5 To Thrive* early years classes with One Page Profile entry to school planning.
- Family engagement sessions to aid transition to secondary school e.g. open evenings
- Homework and learning workshops.
- Family helpers in the classroom – reading buddies, knitting sessions.
- Informal sessions to build relationships with parents and staff: eg painting fences and classrooms, gardening, music, choirs, cookery, yoga and exercise sessions and breakfast and coffee mornings.
- Links with local seniors club or old people's home for skills and companionship.
- Regular communication of both school events and child's progress.

Working with families: school action

- A designated room or even separate building e.g cabin, or venue for meetings and sessions as a 'no-man's land area‘.
- Community services in school such as a health visitor, library, rooms for hire etc.
- Relationship-based Play sessions for identified families.
- Single point of contact or a key adult for the parent. In some settings schools may have 'parent practitioners' to act as an advocate and 'go-between' for parents if they have to meet with teaching staff or managers.
- Specialist sessions run by a trained person to build self-esteem and emotional resilience in parents.