



NATP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THERAPEUTIC PARENTS

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Letter to school – re:

Date

Dear

I am writing to you with the support of the National Association of Therapeutic Parents.

I feel we need to communicate around issues of the experience of traumatised children, in relation to the difficulties currently being experienced by my child at school.

Traumatised children will almost always suffer from attachment difficulties, but this is frequently misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all, due to the complexity of diagnosis, and overlapping disorders such as ADHD. Attachment disorder is a very serious and debilitating condition, relating to early life trauma.

My child did not have a safe and trusted adult on whom they could rely as a baby or small child, so my child's brain could not develop in the same way as a healthily attached child. This is because they were often in a fear state and had high levels of cortisol and adrenaline. If you would like to see pictures of brain scans etc. showing how different traumatised children's brains look, then please visit the website of Dr Bruce Perry. (Link below),

Some things you may see in the classroom

You may see notice that my child is very anxious, has problems sitting still or just concentrating. This is because my child is extremely fearful. S/he is always monitoring to ensure they are safe. This is not done consciously; it is an early learned survival mechanism. As you can imagine, this takes up an awful lot of their available brain space, so there's not much left over for learning. You might also see that s/he; *(delete as appropriate)*

- Refuses to complete work/ makes little effort. Occasionally will produce a very credible piece of work
- Responds to instructions one day but not the next, outright refusal
- Constantly interrupts with irrelevant or inappropriate questions
- Steers group discussions to their own agenda
- Complains of hunger/ pain etc
- Seems to have a desire to be 'in the wrong'
- Lacks interest/ engagement in standard behaviour modification techniques
- Deliberately sabotages work

- Does not remember recent topics (implications for tests)

You may also notice;

- Running round, disruptive, damaging items, hiding, lying, stealing, wetting or soiling etc.
- Younger age whole functioning
- Not listening- (Also may have sensitive hearing)
- Finds 'chink in teacher's armour'- perceptive of others vulnerabilities
- They pretend they haven't got their equipment, or often lose/ destroy equipment
- Outbursts of aggression
- Inability to collaborate with peer group
- 'Splitting' of school and home, IE playing one off against the other.

NATP General Advice

Unrealistic expectations

Sometimes, when children are removed from an unsafe environment and placed in a safe one, people expect the child to adapt very quickly and begin to function on a higher level than they are able. It is useful to think about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (which many children of our children have). We would not expect someone with PTSD to be able to ignore stimuli replicating their trauma, so how can we expect children to? Bearing in mind that the source of my child's trauma was normally adults, it is irrelevant to him/her whether you are a good and safe adult or not. They cannot know or accept this for a very long time. We can only help my child to feel safe, lower their anxieties and fear, by consistency, empathy and responding to them at their emotional age, instead of their chronological one.

It is NOT reasonable to expect;

- The child to trust adults
- The child to share your view of reality
- Homework to be completed or if completed, any kind of accurate reflection of the child's perceived ability
- To rely solely on conventional behaviour management systems
- To take everything the child says at face value
- Meaningful demonstrations of empathy or remorse

- Meaningful answers to traditional questions, for example,
 - Why did you...?
 - Do you remember...?
 - What did you say?

Some things the school CAN do

I realise this is very difficult and that my child is not the only person you have to think of, however there are some fairly basic changes you can make to help to ensure my child's experiences at school are more positive. We have also added useful links and books which outline these changes in more detail.

- TA or similar allocated as 'SECURE BASE'. Reliable & consistent adult support with clearly defined expectations. Direct changeover between parent and this person.

- Awareness of impact of changes in routine/ staff and strategies in place to deal with this.
- Regulation of cortisol overload by using exercise, movement, rocking, marching (be aware of sugar dependency)
- Quiet space to escape to/ exit strategy

Quick changes:

Instead of	Try
Asking 'Why did you.....?'	"I wonder if"
Avoid conflict/ confrontation	Create "win, win" situations
Reacting emotionally to the child's behaviour	State what you know; ie "I see you have..."
Struggling to get the child to perform – (you will be drawn into a game)	"That's ok, you can rest until you are ready" (then wait, nothing else happens)
Giving chances (changing rules)	Once x is completed you can do Y

Some useful tips to avoid escalation of behaviours

- Be aware of extreme/ manipulative/controlling behaviours. (Superficial charm)
- Do not become complacent even during times of settled behaviour
- Praise the task, not the child/young person as they cannot manage direct praise well.
- It's not personal! de-personalise any criticism
- Don't take anything at face value. Check and double check with colleagues/ parents etc.
- EXPECT to provide spares for equipment regularly
- Identify triggers and share information

Be aware of POTENTIAL TRIGGERS which might be;

- Changes in class layout. Different Teacher. Transitions (Moving between lessons)
- Birthdays.
- Change in routine ie rehearsals for show, end of term
- Start of a new year
- School visitors
- Unsupervised/ unstructured periods (playtimes)
- Anniversaries
- School Trips
- Noise
- Choosing school teams for sports.
- Contact sessions with the family.
- Tiredness.
- Exams/ tests

- Seeing work for first time
- Poor discipline/ lack of order in lessons.
- Curriculum e.g Family Tree, Father's/ Mother's Day

School can really help the child to manage these triggers by;

- Preparing the child for change. (Any transition)
- Being aware of timings
- Responding to the child's emotional age, not their chronological age
- Supporting other children in the class to understand the behaviours. Books –'The boy who built a wall around himself', 'William Wobbly and the Very Bad Day'.
- Remove the audience where possible. (Think about which audience the child is playing to)
- Use tactical ignoring but WITH empathy. Planned ignoring will escalate child.

The NATP provides useful information and training to schools, parents and supporting professionals, around childhood trauma and therapeutic parenting. As a school you have a duty to ensure that there is a designated teacher who is well versed in issues surrounding attachment difficulties and childhood trauma. Please see below our understanding of current N.I.C.E guidance about how children should be supported in school.

Current N.I.C.E. Guidelines state:

*Schools and other education providers **should ensure** that the designated teacher:*

- *has had specialist training*
 - *to recognise and understand attachment difficulties and mental health problems*

N.I.C.E also states;

Quality statement

Children and young people with attachment difficulties have an education plan setting out how they will be supported in school.

Rationale

Children and young people with attachment difficulties can have stress, fears and insecurities that impact on their experience of school, peer relationships and learning. An education plan for these children and young people can help educational staff understand and respond effectively to the child or young person. This can minimise disruption to their learning, ensure they are supported when at school and make it less likely the child or young person will be absent or excluded from school.

I truly hope that this letter helps us to work more closely together to improve the school experience for my child and other children who may have early life trauma.

Yours Sincerely,

Useful links:

Dr Bruce Perry – Information on impact of trauma on brain development

<http://www.acrf.org/Self-StudyCourses/neglectcourse/n2brain.htm>

Ten things Teachers need to know about Childhood Trauma

<https://www.weareteachers.com/10-things-about-childhood-trauma-every-teacher-nee>

Department of Education- Early Childhood trauma and Therapeutic Parenting

<http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/topics/early-childhood-trauma/>

NICE Guidance for all working with children and young people with attachment difficulties

<http://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/attachment-difficulties-in-children-and-young-people#content=view-node%3Anodes-training-for-staff-and-carers>

Authors on this subject include;

Louise Bomber- Inside I'm Hurting (Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with attachment Difficulties in schools)

Louise Bomber: What About Me? (Inclusive Strategies to Support Pupils with Attachment Difficulties Make it Through the School Day)

Dr Heather Geddes: Attachment in the Classroom- A Practical Guide for Schools

Dan Hughes PhD has written extensively on this subject. Clinical Psychologist, originator of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and also Attachment - Focused Family Therapy. Internationally acclaimed therapist and author of ground-breaking books on attachment and emotional recovery.

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<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-28/december-2015/negative-effects-reward-systems-classrooms-0>

Sarah Naish - 'Therapeutic Parenting in a Nutshell' and 'William Wobbly and the Very Bad Day'.