



Supporting a child's actions through P.A.C.E - Playfulness - Acceptance - Curiosity - Empathy

P.A.C.E is an approach that adults can have towards children that encourages thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving to make children feel safe and comfortable in themselves and their environment. The P.A.C.E method can support a child in their development towards self-awareness, emotional intelligence and resilience. It provides opportunities for children to reflect upon, understand and manage their emotions. PACE can enable adults to see the strengths and positive features that can sometimes lie underneath challenging behaviour.



P.A.C.E is a model developed by Dan Hughes, Author, Clinical Psychologist & Founder of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)

Playfulness

Creating an atmosphere of lightness & interest with an open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude. When children laugh and giggle, they become less defensive and more reflective. Being playful is about having fun and getting to know each other in a safe and relaxed environment, where a child feels neither judged nor criticised.

Playful moments can diffuse a tense situation and reassure children that conflicts and separations are temporary but will never harm the strength of your relationship with them.

Curiosity

Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware of their thoughts and reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it.

It is about keeping an open mind about why a child may behave in a certain way and not jumping to assumptions or blame.

Phrasing questions like the below can help children express and explore their feelings;
“What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about?”

These are different from asking “Why did you do that?!” which trigger a defence response.

Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance of a child without judgment or evaluation makes them feel secure, safe and loved. Acceptance is when you communicate to a child that you accept their wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions despite whether you agree with their behaviour or actions. While there are times when you might discipline due to misbehaviour, communicate to children that they are not being disciplined for being themselves.

It's about accepting the feelings which have caused a behaviour and opening the discussion to how they can express those feelings differently.

Empathy

Empathy helps children to build a sense of security and stronger relationships. Through showing empathy, a child will feel your compassion for them. It demonstrates that you understand certain experiences are difficult for them and you are there to support them through these times.

Through empathy, a child will take comfort in knowing they don't have to deal with distress alone.

