

**Awena (To Inspire)**

**Cornwall Virtual School**

PLAC Information

Pack

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Introduction

This PLAC Information Pack has been created to help school staff to think creatively and reflectively about the support offered to Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) in Cornwall. PLAC includes those students who have been adopted, placed under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or under a Child Arrangement Order (CAO), having been in care.

PLAC have often had challenging early life experiences and are likely to have been exposed to some level of developmental trauma. This has long-term consequences on many aspects of their lives including education, their relationships with adults and children and their emotional well-being.

Although this pack will refer throughout to PLAC, many of the resources are also likely to be relevant for Children in Care and other students who have experienced early life trauma.

This resource pack includes information which will be helpful to anyone looking to make their setting more PLAC-friendly and seeking to consider the needs of PLAC students.

We at Cornwall Virtual School are committed to the education and emotional well-being of PLAC students. We hope you find this resource pack useful and welcome any feedback on how it can be improved in the future.

Adoption Friendly Schools Charter

*As an adoption friendly school, we work hard to...*

* *Identify children’s needs*
* *Prioritise relationships*
* *Respond empathically to behaviour*
* *Work in true partnership with parents*
* *Share information sensitively and effectively*
* *Reflect and protect adoptive families*
* *Support our staff*
* *Use our resources wisely*

*We don’t always get it right, so we try again.*

(Taken from p. 19, ‘Becoming an Adoption-Friendly School’ - Dr Emma Gore Langton and Katharine Boy)

Supporting Staff and Self-Care

Supporting PLAC effectively can seem a daunting task. Often they have severe attachment, developmental and trauma difficulties. You want to do the best by the child but challenging behaviours, staff feeling overwhelmed and sometimes a lack of understanding can make this seem a heavy load. Many school staff report that they are eager to help the child, but the reality can be overwhelming.

The key to staff feeling empowered and able to meet the needs of PLAC is through effective staff training and disseminating that training to create a school wide approach. Staff are also likely benefit from supervision (one-to-one or in a group) and on-going emotional well-being support.

Training

When planning your training, consider who needs to know what. Using the phrase *‘everyone needs to know something, but not everyone needs to know everything’* is a good way to approach it. There may be key adults that do not immediately spring to mind; do you need to include the lunch servers if that child consistently struggles with lunch times? Is it worth including the groundskeeper if you have a child who runs and hides? By considering this prior to training, you will ensure that every adult who regularly encounters the child is using the same strategies and feels equipped to help.

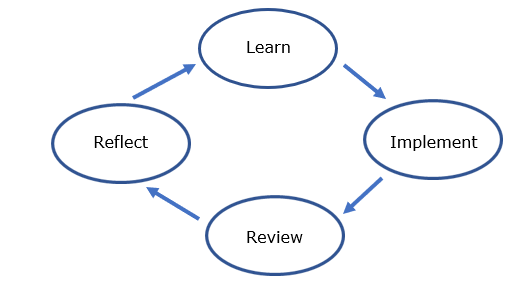
All staff will benefit from acquiring a good understanding of attachment and developmental trauma. Key members of staff will likely need a more in-depth knowledge and skill set, as well as an understanding of how the theory and principles relate to the student they are supporting. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will benefit from developing systemic, whole-school approaches, which can be cascaded to other staff.

Ensuring everyone understands the theory and, where appropriate, specific information about the student, can avoid judgement and blame amongst staff. We have all heard the conversation of *‘why are they getting X when they have just punched Y?!’* Byinforming all, you are more likely to be met with support and improved staff relationships.

Identifying your Training Needs

Many school staff in Cornwall have already received some form of training which will be relevant in supporting PLAC students in school. Therefore, before proceeding with any further training, consider conducting an audit of staff training to ascertain what they already know and do. You could put out a questionnaire to staff asking what they consider the personal, professional and organisational needs of the school are. For example, you might learn that (at a personal level) your staff know who the PLAC are, but they do not know if the children are aware of their status - an easy yet empowering fix!

Research clearly shows that a ‘hit and run’ approach to training does not lead to effective change in schools or for new strategies to be embedded in practise. Consider using an ‘iterative cycle’ instead:



This will help staff to:

* Try new ideas
* Review the impact
* Reflect on the process
* Return to learning to refine their understanding

Supporting Staff

Working daily with children who have experienced trauma and/or abuse and neglect can be extremely hard and can take its toll both professionally and personally. It can make you feel unsettled, worried or even revisit some of your own personal experiences. **Secondary Trauma** is a little discussed issue but can impact on many adults who work in schools, due to their caring and empathetic personalities. Anyone working closely with traumatised children are at risk of experiencing Secondary Trauma and may not even realise it is happening. This is the result of the adult ‘taking on’ the trauma of the child and may present as:

* Intense feelings
* Loss of focus/ concentration
* Emotional numbness
* Irritability and negativity
* Lack of motivation and disengagement

It is important to recognise this in staff and for staff to recognise when this is happening to them. Some ways to mitigate this could be:

* Having time in the day away from a certain child
* Having access to a mentor, buddy or supervisor to discuss these feelings with
* Access to professional counselling
* Spaces in school to relax, debrief and unwind
* Discuss whether they need a break from being a key person for a particular child

Staff Wellbeing

It is no surprise that the most effective, successful schools are full of professionals who feel well equipped, supported, cared about and listened to. It is crucial to ensure an emphasis on staff wellbeing and self-care. This is important for all staff, but particularly so when your staff are dealing with children that need extra nurture.

Find a time in the school year when staff are feeling refreshed and creative and have an informal staff meeting about what the school could put in place to support staff wellbeing. It is helpful to think of the topic of wellbeing as six areas:

1. Physical (e.g. social walking group)
2. Emotional (e.g. regular supervision)
3. Intellectual (e.g. CPD)
4. Social (e.g. celebrating birthdays and achievements)
5. Creative (e.g. encourage staff to share hobbies)
6. Spiritual (e.g. mindfulness or celebration of religious events)

Spend time as a staff body thinking up ideas relating to these 6 areas and plan how this could look through the school year. SLT should also consider more formal levels of support including supervision or counselling and a robust plan should be in place of how and when staff access this (e.g. fortnightly supervision, debriefs following difficult situations).

A Brief Overview of Developmental Trauma and Attachment

As noted above, many of you will likely already have completed some training related to Trauma and Attachment – this might be Trauma Informed Schools (TIS), THRIVE or a general training session introducing you to attachment theory. This section aims to give a brief overview – it will not go into the same level of detail as the above training sessions. If you or your school have not had any training around trauma and attachment, the Virtual School can advise on the routes to securing such training. Remember that all staff across the school will benefit from a level of training and knowledge.

Forming Early Attachments

It was John Bowlby (1969) who first studied and identified the links between a child’s early life experiences and their future outcomes. He noted that a child’s history and experiences influence who they are, both positively and negatively.

Attachments are formed through the cycles of expressing a need and having that need recognised and met. The diagram below demonstrates this cycle.

A drawing of a person

Description automatically generated

In having their needs met as a baby, the child starts to form their early knowledge of others, the world and themselves. The adults around them are trustworthy and predictable, the world is a reasonable, safe place and the child is loved, and therefore lovable. It is from this position that it feels safe to start experiencing the world and making progress towards developmental milestones, taking comfort and support from the relationships which surround them.

For some children, including many PLAC, they do not have these early positive experiences of the world. The cycle outlined above did not occur and therefore their early needs were not met. The world is not a safe place, relationships with others are not positive and they may not see themselves as lovable. It is impossible to go out safely and explore the world because they must focus on meeting their needs for themselves.

Research has shown the lasting impact of negative early life experiences on a child’s brain. In order to protect themselves, a child may be more sensitive to threat, even when this threat may not be apparent to the adults around them. This can include emotional threats, such as shame or threats to their sense of self. Children who have had stressful early life experiences are likely to be heightened to danger and to respond with a fight, flight or freeze response, in order to keep themselves safe.

A positive is that those supporting the child can help to restructure the child’s brain, through predictability, emotional warmth and consistency over time. Parents/carers are an important part of this process, as are school staff, who will become the child’s secure base for exploring learning and the school environment.

Attachment in the Classroom

It is easy to see how some of the behaviours outlined above may present in the classroom. Children might be reluctant to engage in learning or activities where they feel they will not be successful; avoidance being preferable to failure. They might find it challenging to accept help from adults, when in the past adults have been scary and unpredictable. They might be desperate to hold an adult’s attention because in the past they did not know when they would next have their needs met – this can distract from the task in hand as all their energy is put into keeping the adult’s focus on them. The child might appear heightened and on edge – their life has been filled with threats and it is necessary to remain on alert in order to keep themselves safe.

It is important to address these needs for the child to be ready to learn. The following sections in this pack will give ideas and strategies for supporting children and young people. One of the most important elements of support is the relationships that staff form with adopted children, which help to reverse some of their preconceived notions regarding what they can expect from adults. Being open, curious, playful, consistent, predictable and empathetic will go a long way in supporting children in your school.

Understanding Attachment Styles

As touched upon above, children can present in different ways to learning activities and to the adults supporting them, depending on their early experiences. Four attachment styles (Bowlby, 1977) have been identified:

* secure
* avoidant
* ambivalent
* disorganised

These are not distinct categories into which each of us fall, with individuals demonstrating aspects of each style depending on the situation. However, if a child demonstrates one or more of the insecure styles consistently, it is likely to impact their long-term outcomes, emotionally, socially and academically.

The table on the next page provides detail regarding each attachment style, how it is formed, how it might present in the classroom and a few simple strategies for supporting the child.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Attachment Style | Child likely to have experienced… | Child likely to present with… | Adults can help by… |
| Secure | * Adults who are reliable and helpful * Adults who are trustworthy * The feeling that they are ok, adults are ok and the world is ok | * Confidence to explore the world * Curiosity to make the most of learning opportunities * The freedom to concentrate, learn, explore and build relationships with others * The ability to work independently and to seek help when needed | * Offering support as needed whilst acknowledging the child’s ability to confidently and independently explore the world |
| Insecure – Avoidant | * Adults who are rejecting or intrusive * Adults who are annoyed or agitated to the child, and who give priority to their own needs * Caregivers who may be depressed or abusive | * A focus on tasks, rather than relationships, and greater value on achievements * High levels of anxiety, but reluctant to ask for help * Behaviours with endeavour to give them control (as a result of experiencing situations where they have been very out of control) * Difficulties in relationships with peers * Compliance, but may be internalising a lot of their emotions | * Comment on the task rather than the child’s efforts * Find ways to acknowledge work in public in different ways e.g. take a picture or copy it for a wall display * Give praise differently/indirectly e.g. a letter home, or a certificate in an envelope * Notice how the child relates to their peers and try to sit them with helpful ones * Provide models/examples of aspects of the task, or help the focus child, via conversation in explaining the task to a peer |
| Insecure – Ambivalent | * Adults who are unpredictable or inconsistent * Adults who struggle to understand what a child needs and when * Adults who may not have been physically available due to mental health difficulties or domestic violence * Adults who do not hold the child in mind | * Behaviours focused on getting, and keeping, an adult’s attention * Anxiety, which may not be obvious due to on-going chatter or interrupting * Little energy to apply to learning, as they are so focused on retaining adult attention | * Setting short timed tasks, which gradually reduce the child’s dependence on the adult, with a visual way of showing the passing of time * Finding ways to show you are thinking of or noticing the child when not with them – thumbs up across the room, ‘catch me’ cards etc. * Naming their anxiety about not coming back in the allocated time (if this happens) * Choosing tasks which are easily to start, with a familiar pattern * Supporting the child’s relationships with peers wherever possible, to lessen their reliance on the adults |
| Insecure - Disorganised | * Adults who are frightening or abusive * Adults who are frightened * Possibly neglect or chaotic environments | * Behaviours which are erratic, bizarre or extreme, which can often come out of the blue * Behaviours which often have a shock element to them * Unpredictable behaviours, and strategies that work one day, may not work the next * Preoccupation/hyper-vigilance, preventing them from establishing relationships or completing learning | * Ensuring clear routines and consistency * Working closely with other staff to ensure that you are supporting each other, as planning for the child’s needs will be challenging, with their responses changing regularly * Focusing on strategies which ensure structure and safety for the child |

Information in this table taken from:

Delaney, M. (2018). Attachment for Teachers.

Bomber, L. (2007). Inside I’m Hurting.

Identifying Need and Resources

Common Needs and Underlying Reasons

Research shows children who have experienced early trauma often present in the following ways (although not an exhaustive list):

* Difficulty building trusting relationships with adults and peers
* Struggles with social interactions
* Misunderstanding and confusion around their emotions
* Difficulties with transition and change
* Poor sense of identity
* Poor executive functioning skills
* Struggles in managing their own behaviour

Underlying these difficulties is often:

* Complex trauma and the impact of this on neurological, cognitive and psychological development
* Attachment difficulties
* Exposure to alcohol in the womb

Assessing these needs is a complex task and often there can be many overlapping needs.

Identifying Needs

There are many different tools and approaches that can be taken to identifying the needs of children in your school. The behaviour of a child may challenge you and you may struggle to make sense of what they are trying to communicate. Using a tool to explore this behaviour further will likely help to identify targets for the child and appropriate support. School staff may already have access to tools within school, such as THRIVE-online, or Motional if yours is a Trauma Informed School. Below are some further ideas for identifying and tracking the needs of children in your school.

Boxall Profile

The Boxall Profile, created by Marjorie Boxall (Bennathan, M. and Boxall, M., 2019), is a commonly used tool in schools for identifying social and emotional needs in children. There are primary and secondary editions of the Profile, with paper and online versions available. Adults are required to score 68 statements relating to the child, pertaining to a range of areas of need. The profile will help adults to identify the areas of priority and gives ideas for working towards targets in these areas.

Good practice with the Boxall Profile is to score the child every half term to identify what progress is being made and whether support needs to be adjusted, added to or ceased. The Boxall Profile should be used to compliment what is already known about the child and observations completed by adults. The Boxall Profile is also used in association with Nurture Groups, an inclusive, small group provision for children whose social, emotional and learning needs cannot be met within the mainstream classroom.

Observations

Observations of children, particularly across different situations and contexts (structured/unstructured, small group/whole class etc) are a good way of identifying the strengths and needs of a child. Your school may already have pro-formas for completing observations and Cornwall Virtual School can provide further templates and ideas for observations. A commonly used template is the ABC form (Antecedent – Behaviour – Consequence). Here the focus is on thinking about the situation and environment prior to and following a behaviour, in order to identify the causes of the behaviour. When completing an ABC form it is useful to think about (amongst other things):

* The physical environment
* The task/activity
* Who was present
* What happened following the behaviour

The more information recorded, the better chance staff have of identifying the reason for the behaviour or what the child is trying to communicate.

Other observation resources specifically focused on attachment are available. Kim Golding et al. (2013) have produced a series of books for observing children at pre-school, primary and secondary ages, with an observation checklist and additional resources and strategies for planning support.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, also known as the SDQ, is an online and free tool, with items relating to emotional difficulties, peer relationships and hyperactivity/inattention. There is a version for parents and another for teachers. It is possible to score the SDQ by hand for free, or the website offers online scoring for a fee. Follow up versions of the SDQ are available to help in assessing your intervention(s). As with many of these assessment tools, we would recommend completing it on a half termly basis, to assess the child’s progress and the impact of the support in place.

Emotional Literacy Checklist

Created by Southampton Psychology Service, this tool has two versions; primary and secondary and is available in book form with an accompanying CD-ROM. The resource includes three checklists: one for the child, one for parents and one for teachers. A scoring key is included for the parent and teacher versions so that an indication can be provided regarding whether the child’s score is average, below average or above average. The primary version is appropriate for children aged seven to 11 years, whilst the secondary version is for those aged 11 to 16 years. The resource also includes a range of strategies and resource ideas. As with any of these tools, we would recommend selecting one or two areas of need to focus on, setting appropriate, realistic outcomes relating to these. Trying to tackle several areas of need at once is likely to be difficult, unrealistic and unsustainable.

Voice of the Child

The most valuable tool you can use is the child’s own voice and views. The following may be useful in eliciting the voice of the child:

* Scaling activities – scoring of different lessons or times of day
* The use of drawing to facilitate discussion
* Parental reports of what the child has said at home
* The Child’s View section of the PLAC PEP, available through Cornwall Virtual School
* Picture book approaches such as You Choose, Just Imagine or How Are You Feeling Today?
* Puppets and small world play
* The Bear Cards or the Therapeutic Treasure Deck
* ‘Say It Your Own Way’ – a selection of worksheets available online, produced by Barnados

Setting Targets and Measuring Progress

You should be using the ‘assess, plan, do, review’ format for any intervention you put in place for students. This could be your own format, or that set out in the PLAC PEP from the Virtual School. Ensure targets are SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time bound), achievable and frequently reflected upon. We would recommend reviewing targets every half term to ensure that enough time is given for strategies to take effect, but also to prevent you from continuing with support which is not having the desired impact. Using the same tool to review the child’s progress may indicate small steps of progress which are not otherwise obvious when working with the child every day.

Rethinking Behaviour Management

Behaviour as Communication

It can be hard when faced with 30 pupils, limited time, endless paperwork and demands to not get caught in *the ‘why won’t they just behave and get on’* mindset. It’s understandable and frustrating but unfortunately will not fix the problem. The question you need to focus on *is ‘is this poor behaviour is a sign of a problem? How can I help alleviate the problem?*’ because, as we all know, behaviour is just a form of communication.

Many PLAC face a complex combination of sensory needs, emotional regulation difficulties, executive functioning difficulties, find it hard to create and sustain relationships and find hard to deal with loss, change or transition. As a result, you might see some challenging behaviours such as:

* Withdrawing
* Refusing
* Lying
* Sexualised behaviour
* Controlling behaviour
* Throwing or breaking objects
* Hurting themselves or others
* Stealing
* Leaving room or school
* Continually asking questions or making noises

These behaviours are likely an expression of complex emotions such as:

* I don’t feel safe
* I feel threatened/ I need to protect myself
* I don’t trust you
* This reminds me of something negative from my past
* I can’t do what you’re asking of me
* This is overwhelming

Traditional Behaviour Management and the Adopted Child

You may find more traditional behaviour management strategies have very little impact on PLAC as they tend to be based on punishment and public reward, both of which are stress inducing and mirror early childhood experiences. Although most schools have these in place in some capacity, it is worth keeping in mind how they will (or will not!) work with your PLAC.

Tread carefully with ‘reward and consequence’ systems for behaviour management. These rely on promoting a learnt response, which these children have often not experienced. It can also clash with experiences they may have encountered such *‘I am rubbish…Adults can’t be trusted…this is not a safe space’* and go against things they have learnt to be true. These approaches can actually be more harmful to some PLAC, as they are already sensitive to threat and shame.

This can be true for shouting also. Although no school staff rely on shouting as a form of behaviour management, it does happen. Be mindful that the act of shouting (even if not directed at them) can bring on feelings of anxiety and fear and might induce a fight or flight response.

Many schools use exclusion, detention or time outs as part of their behaviour management strategies but again this can be problematic for PLAC as isolating a student who does not have coping strategies will struggle to self-settle and therefore go further into their stress response. They need to feel valued, like they belong and that they are wanted. Exclusions/ detention and time out goes against this and can cause breaks in routine, relationships and education, which can be counterproductive.

Alternative Strategies

Exploring alternative strategies can benefit your whole school, not just adopted children.

Empathic Behaviour Management (coined by Amber Elliot in 2013) is based around 6 key strategies:

1. Sharing the child’s emotions
2. Mirroring emotions in a calm way
3. Reading the child’s motivations
4. Making sense of challenging behaviour
5. Emotional commentary
6. Taking the initiative to repair the relationship

‘Time in’, safe spaces, building key relationships as well as deciding which battles are worth picking should all be prioritised and will hopefully reduce demanding/ challenging behaviours.

Praise and reward can have impact on PLAC, as long as some key points are considered:

* Make rewards instant and always follow through with them
* Ensure the negatives cannot take away the positives
* Ensure the child has the capacity to earn the reward (e.g. match ability to task!)
* Ensure praise is specific and focuses on what they have done well
* Use praise that acknowledges effort, not just achievement
* Recognise some children find it hard to accept praise. Find subtle ways to give this e.g. a post it note, a special hand signal.

‘Restorative Justice’ is a value-based approach to responding to wrongdoing with an alternative to traditional punishment. It focuses on the person harmed, the person who caused harm and the impact on community. It uses the thought process that ‘things can be put right and relationships can be restored’. Modelling and guiding this for PLAC can improve their experience that conflict can be resolved and relationships can be mended.

For example, imagine a child has taken all the coats in the cloakroom in a moment of stress. Instead of punishing the child with missing a playtime (for example), have a conversation with them when calm as to how they can fix the problem and explain how it will impact their wider environment (*‘Your classmates will have wet coats or might lose their things’*)*.* Could they re-hang all the coats? Can you do it with them to help them read the names? Could you model to them asking a friend to help re-hang them and perhaps apologise to that friend for removing all the coats, then play a game together? This would show how the friend will still be there despite the initial incidence.

Developing emotional literacy and regulation will help PLAC learn the skills they missed out on in early life. These should focus on:

* Learning how to label emotions
* Understanding how emotions are triggers and how you respond
* Self-soothing strategies

Dealing with Strong Emotions

Strong emotions follow a predictable pattern for both adults and children and different strategies are helpful at different points.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Phase** | **Looks like…** | **Try…** |
| **Trigger Phase** | Knocks you off your usual emotional baseline.  A response to an action. | Pre-empt! Remove potential triggers.  Emotional regulation strategies.  Emotion coaching. |
| **Escalation Phase** | Emotional response grows stronger.  Physical signs.  Emotional outburst. | Calm, sooth, distract, remain present with the child. |
| **Crisis Phase** | Peak of emotion.  Lack of control.  Dysregulated and cannot listen to others.  Cannot express clearly. | Safe spaces.  Sensory input.  Allow behaviours (e.g. give them soft things to throw or cushions to kick).  Let them burn it out. |
| **Recovery Phase** | Slowly return to emotional baseline.  Very vulnerable.  Physical reaction reduces. | Be gentle.  Give them time to recover.  Do not attempt challenging conversations yet. |
| **Post-Crisis Dip** | Crying.  Sleeping.  Lethargic.  Clingy and need to be held. | Help the child think calmly.  Use a low toned, quiet voice.  Help to problem solve and ‘fix’ the problem.  Repair the relationship. |

Information in this table taken from:

Gore Langton, E. and Boy, K., 2017. Becoming an adoption-friendly school.

What to do when it all goes wrong!

Sometimes, you can try every trick in the book and it just does not work. Fortunately, schools are full of empathetic, supportive adults. You are on this journey with a child and you cannot get it right all the time. Give yourself (or another staff member) some space away from the child as both parties will need it. Allow the child and the adult time to unwind, debrief and collect their thoughts.

Reflect upon what happened with open minded colleagues, discuss what you could do differently next time. You are allowed to recognise that supporting these children can be extremely hard. It does not mean you have failed them if you do not get it right all the time.

Depending on the child, you might want to consider an open conversation with them (after some time has passed and all parties are calm). Use it as an opportunity to model empathy, reflection and how to repair damages. Some examples of this could be:

* ‘I felt sorry for Miss Smith because I was rude to her. I am going to write her a note to say sorry.’
* ‘I think I was feeling frustrated because I did not sleep well last night and was a bit rushed this morning.’
* ‘I really enjoy having you in my class and I’m already looking forward to seeing you again tomorrow.’

As mentioned earlier, a traumatised child may react differently once there has been an unsuccessful event and withdraw or regress as a coping technique. It is extremely important that you reconnect with that child when you feel able. Ensure they know you still care for them and want to be around them.

Sometimes, we hear comments from other children and from staff such as *‘why are they allowed to do that even though they broke the school rules?’* or *‘we can’t just let everyone do what they want!’* Research shows that traumatised children need environments rich in structure **and** nurture. It is not about accepting difficult behaviours but rather responding in a way that meets the needs of the child not just that punishes the behaviour. Have open conversations with staff and pupils about this; allow questions to be asked and involve the whole school in the solution rather than adding to the problem.

Working with Parents and Information Sharing

The relationship between parents and school staff is an important one. Parents are experts in their children and often hold a good knowledge of trauma and attachment, particularly with regard to their child. School staff are experts in their own setting and education more generally. In working together, it is important to acknowledge and welcome each individual’s expertise.

There are times when the relationship between parents and school staff can be challenging. Parents may feel that their concerns are dismissed or minimised because the child is overly compliant or demonstrating ‘pseudo-independence’, whilst in school, demonstrating their anxieties and frustrations once they return home to their safe base. Parents may also feel blamed for their child’s difficulties, although these actually originate from their challenging early life experiences. School staff can also become frustrated, particularly if they are made to feel they are not doing enough, when they are working hard to provide support for a student.

This section seeks to identify some helpful ways of parents and school staff of working together. In addition, if things become strained, it may also be helpful to remember or consider the following:

* The problem is the *problem*, not the child – working to identify the specific difficult is likely to be helpful in finding ways of supporting the child
* The use of PACE is helpful in interactions between parents and school staff, where there is curiosity towards what the child is finding difficult and empathy for the child, and for each other
* If it becomes difficult to find a way forward between parents and school staff, it can sometimes be helpful to bring in a third party to mediate, for example, another relevant or involved service

On the School’s Website

It is helpful to display the following on the school’s website:

* How the school meets the needs of PLAC
* Information on the role of the Designated Teacher, who holds this role in the school and how they can be contacted
* Information on how Pupil Premium Plus Funding is spent and the decision-making process

This information is particularly helpful because many PLAC parents/carers will visit a school before the child or children is home with them. Adopted children have priority admission, or priority on waiting lists. It is important that office staff are aware of this so that parents of prospective students are not discouraged from making contact or visiting.

The First Meeting

It is useful if this takes place proactively, and not after something has gone wrong. This will not only be a helpful opportunity for parents and school staff to get to know each other, but also for school staff to gather the information they need and to agree how this information will be shared.

Cornwall Virtual School have developed a template which could be used to structure and document this first meeting. It is based on the Personal Education Plan (PEP) system used for Children in Care and it is called a PLAC PEP. In addition to the questions and sections within the PLAC PEP, the first meeting is a useful opportunity to discuss key information and with whom this should be shared.

On-Going Communication

It is important for communication to continue between parents and school staff, even when things are going well. Continuing with the PLAC PEP throughout the year (the paperwork is designed for October, February and June meetings, providing on-going goal-setting and review) should ensure effective communication between home and school and a collaborative approach to supporting the child. More frequent, informal communication may also be appropriate – it can be helpful when working with a family or school for the first time, to seek clarification and agreement regarding the frequency of communication, who this will be between and via what method (face-to-face, phone call, email etc.)

Information Sharing Important Points

Below are some ideas and important points to consider with regard to information sharing.

* Children may become less likely to discuss PLAC status as they become older and they may not wish school staff to know.
* It can be helpful to have a question on the school’s admission form regarding the child’s previous care status – it should also make clear on the form who will have sight of this information and where it will be stored.
* Asking for yearly declarations for eligibility for Pupil Premium Plus can also be helpful. For example, the Designated Teacher could send out a letter during the Autumn Term to all parents regarding students’ previous care status. This is also a good opportunity for the DT to re-introduce themselves and their role, as well as signposting to other available support.
* Coffee mornings for parents can be another useful way to share information regarding the school’s approach to supporting PLAC. It also provides an opportunity for parents and school staff to develop their relationship, as well as introducing other PLAC parents/carers.
* It is important to ensure that systems are in place to enable the sharing of information as students transition through the year groups – it is not ideal for parents to have to re-explain the needs and early life experiences when staff change.
* An agreement should be made that ensure relevant staff are aware of important information – sharing information reactively or retrospectively is not helpful.
* School staff should avoid ‘information hierarchies’ so far as possible – this is where key information might be held by senior members of staff, whilst those supporting the student day-to-day are unaware of their past experiences and how these relate to their presenting needs

PLAC families in your School

Curriculum Adaptations

Schools have an important role in promoting, accepting and celebrating difference in family set ups. A PLAC family should be part of this narrative and be recognised as an equally valid way of creating a family. Ways of encouraging this could be:

* Lessons about families that include PLAC families
* Adding books to reading corners and lists that include PLAC families
* Use images of families which do not share similar physical appearance
* Invite adults who were PLAC into school to share their experience
* Use famous PLAC people as examples for your children

Sometimes, lesson content can unintentionally create some anxiety from PLAC and trigger them. Subjects such as creating family trees, celebrations such as Mother’s Day, changing for PE or sex education lessons could make PLAC feel a plethora of confusing emotions and it is worth carefully considering this prior to delivery. Taking these PLAC friendly steps will also benefit other children in the school who come from non-traditional families.

Removing a child from these is not always the best decision. In the case of real ‘one off’ events such as a Children in Need assembly you may make the decision to do this. It is much more preferable to give sufficient prior thought that you are able to adapt the learning to include all pupils. Best practise will see you engaging with the parents and pupils themselves to include them in the decisions around curriculum hotspots.

PLAC Appropriate Language

We are all always learning about the language that helps students and their families to feel comfortable, recognised and accepted in variety of contexts. This is also true with families where the student is PLAC. Below are some initial thoughts regarding language which will help to make your school more PLAC-friendly and are likely to be appreciated by the families you are supporting.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What you might say…** | **Instead say…** |
| ‘Given up’ for adoption/SGO/CAO | Placed for adoption/SGO/CAO |
| Natural or real mother/father/family | Birth/biological mother/father family |
| Adoptive Parent | Parent |
| Chose to keep | Chose to parent |
| Your own child | Birth/biological child |
| Is adopted | Was adopted |
| Adopted Child | Child |

Protecting PLAC Families

Some additional points to consider in protecting PLAC and their families:

* School staff may wish to think about proactive and positive ways of learning about different family set-ups – for example, there is already increased literature and focus on single-parent families and this is incorporated into the curriculum. Staff should think similarly of ways to do this for an PLAC family unit.

* Specific acknowledgement within anti-bullying policies regarding students who are PLAC, demonstrating awareness by school staff of the additional stigma that can be faced by these families.

* School staff often already have clear policies and procedures in place regarding photos, videos and social media. This should particularly be considered and discussed with parents of students who are PLAC. There may be additional safeguarding reasons why measures need to be set to keep the child/young person and their families safe and to safeguard the student's identity. It would be worth setting an agreement regarding:
* Inclusion in class photos
* Involvement in visits from the press and associated photos/videos
* Involvement in visits from other external companies and associated photos/videos, including those that may be places on the external company’s own website
* Inclusion of photos/videos/posts referencing the student’s name in newsletters and on social media
* Filming of school events such as plays and sports day

Funding

Pupil Premium and Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil Premium was introduced in 2011 for children growing up financially disadvantaged with the purpose of narrowing the attainment gap between them and their peers. This is often spent on interventions, training and resources or individual needs such as funding school trips.

Pupil Premium Plus was introduced in 2013 as additional funding for children who are in care or who have left care. Its purpose is to acknowledge that trauma and early life experiences often continues to have impact throughout the children’s school experiences. It differs from Pupil Premium as it enables the school to support children’s emotional, social and academic needs, rather than focus solely on attainment.

Best practise sees these pots of money kept separately as the needs of these different groups of children often differ.

Identifying Eligibility for Funding and Partnering with Parents

Pupil Premium Plus is available for pupils from Reception to Year 11 in state funded education in England if they have been in care in England or Wales. This includes maintained mainstream, special schools, academies and free schools. It is not available for children in private schools or home educated, unless the placement is funded by the local authority.

To qualify for this funding, the child **MUST** have been:

In care for 24 hours or more

**AND**

Then subject to an adoption, an SGO or a CAO.

Some PLAC families may be unaware that their children are entitled to Pupil Premium Plus. Writing a school wide letter to all families at school asking them to make contact with the Designated Teacher if they fall into these categories annually is a good way of ensuring those that should receive it, are.

Some frustrations for PLAC families come when schools are not transparent in how this funding is spent. Completing the PLAC PEP alongside the parents/carers is a good way of negating this problem, as well as making joint decisions on how it can be best spent to improve the child’s experiences.

How to Claim Pupil Premium Plus

As of April 2023, Pupil Premium Plus is £2,345 per eligible child per year.

Schools must apply directly for Pupil Premium Plus for PLAC children, unlike for CiC. To do this, you must declare the child as 'previously looked after’ in the School Census.

Uses of Pupil Premium Plus

The DfE expects schools to use robust evidence when making decisions of how to spend the funding, much like for Pupil Premium. By completing the PLAC PEP at regular intervals, you can ensure the spending is proactive, measured and having impact. Pupil Premium Plus should be used specifically to address the needs resulting from children’s difficult early lives. Areas for how funding could be spent are:

* Building attachment relationships with adults
* Improving social skills and peer relationships
* Managing feelings and behaviour
* Buying in therapeutic services
* Coping with change and transition
* Developing executive functioning skills

When things are going well, a PLAC may not present with any visible additional needs. It is wise to continue to complete the PEP for these children as periods of time where the child is not in crisis are good times to build their skills and resilience.

It is equally important to know what *not* to spend the funding on. Pupil Premium Plus should not be used for:

* meeting children’s special education needs
* meetings the needs of children with low attainment

These should still be addressed through the normal and additional funding streams.

Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

The Adoption Support Fund provides funds to local authorities and regional adoption agencies to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order families. The ASF model is based on the existing statutory framework for the assessment of adoption support/SGO needs and the provision of support services.

Glossary

**Adoption Support Fund (ASF)** Addresses the therapeutic support needs of adopted and SGO families. Families can access the fund via their adoption support service.

**Child Arrangement Order** regulates with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with.

**Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHs)** the NHS services that assesses and treat young people with emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties.

**Child in Care (CiC)** A child who is in the care of the local authority for a minimum of 24 hours (sometimes called LAC).

**Designated Teacher (DT)** Takes responsibility for promoting the educational achievement and wellbeing of children in care and previously looked after children. Point of contact for adoptive families.

**Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** A legal document that describes a young person’s educational health and social care needs and outlines the extra help that will be given to meet those needs.

**Education Welfare Service (EWS)** A specialist education support service which seeks to help young people and their families get the best from the education system.

**Educational Psychologist (EP)** Support schools and the local authority to improve all children’s experience of learning.

**Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)** Support children’s emotional development having undergone specific training.

**Emotion Coaching** An approach where adults help children understand their feelings and how to manage them.

**Family Support Worker (FSW)** Help and advice families with short or long-term difficulties.

**Nurture Group** Assess learning, emotional and social needs and gives the necessary help to remove the barriers to learning.

**Occupational Therapist (OT)** works to support the physical barriers to learning including provision of resources.

**PACE** a therapeutic approach to working with traumatised children to help them feel safe by being playful, accepting, curious and empathetic.

**Personal Education Plan (PEP)** school-based meetings to plan for the education of a CiC (statutory) or PLAC (advised).

**Priority Admission** PLAC and CiC have highest priority for admission to the mainstream school of the parent’s choice.

**Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)** extra funding provided by the DfE to be spent addressing emotional, social and educational needs arising from early life experiences and trauma.

**Social Worker (SW)** Support individuals and families through difficult times and ensure that vulnerable people are safeguarded from harm.

**Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo)** A teacher who is responsible for special educational needs in a school.

**Special Guardianship Order (SGO)** made when a child is being cared for by people other than their parents until the age of 18.

**Speech and Language Therapist (SALT)** provide treatment, support and care for those with communication needs.

**Targeted Youth Worker (TYW)** work in partnership with a young person and other agencies to create sustainable change.

**Virtual School (VS)** acts a local authority champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of children or young people who are or who have been in care so they can achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers.

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Bowlby, J., 1977. *The making and breaking of affectional bonds.* The British Journal of Psychiatry, 130(3): 201-210.

Elliott, A., 2013. *Why Can't My Child Behave?: Empathic Parenting Strategies that Work for Adoptive and Foster Families*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gore Langton, E. and Boy, K., 2017. *Becoming an adoption-friendly school*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Resource List

There is a vast quantity of informative and engaging resources available for supporting PLAC and understanding attachment, trauma and SEMH needs. We have opted to select some of our most frequently used resources and therefore this is not an exhaustive list – we would also love to hear from you if you have found something particular good which could benefit other school staff.

Books

Bowlby, J., 1969. *Attachment and Loss.* New York: Basic Books.

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Knightsmith, P., 2020.  *The mentally healthy schools workbook.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Siegel, D.J. and Bryson, T.P., 2012.  *The whole-brain child*. London: Robinson.

Assessment Tools

Bennathan, M. and Boxall, M., 2019. *Boxall Profile Handbook Revised*. London: The Nurture Group Network Limited.

Golding, K.S., Fain, J., Frost, A., Mills, C., Worrall, H., Roberts, N., Durrant, E. and Templeton, S., 2013. *Observing children with attachment difficulties in school: A tool for identifying and supporting emotional and social difficulties in children aged 5-11.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Southampton Psychology Service., 2003. *Emotional literacy: Assessment and intervention ages 7 to 11.* London: GL Assessment.

Southampton Psychology Service., 2003. *Emotional literacy: Assessment and intervention aged 11 to 16.* London: GL Assessment.