

Encouraging the parent or carer to allow the child to bring a photograph or a small item from home can help develop security, but it is best that this is not an item of high sentimental value in case it gets lost! Notes from home in the lunchbox can be beneficial, too.

It is important to foster good working relations with the child's primary carers. Family Futures promotes a partnership between parents, teachers and ourselves as the best way forward for the child. As part of their need to control their lives, these children sometimes thrive on keeping school life apart from home life. They need to learn that the adults in their lives can be trusted to provide for their needs. Regular communication between all the parties will foster this understanding.

Within the school day, a sense of security can be promoted by ensuring the pupil has a visual outline of the day's events. Routine is important for these children so outings, book week, the school dentist etc. can cause alarm and they need plenty of warning. Seating arrangements can have an effect on learning. A position close to others but where the child is not worrying about what is happening behind him may be of help. An individual workstation with few distractions where the child feels safe works for some children.

Consistent strategies for moving from one activity to another can help with shift problems. Short physical breaks stimulate the functioning of the brain and these can be applied as a classwide strategy. Availability of drinking water is important too.

These children may also need extra support with their organisational skills. They may not be as able as others to look after personal equipment or remember necessary items. They may not yet have acquired the skills of independence expected at their chronological age. Visual lists and reminders can help.

The child in your class may exhibit some or all of these difficulties. Family Futures is supporting this child and family, and our services include support for the child's education.

Our partnership with parents and teachers is integral to our systematic treatment approach.

**For more information  
contact the Education Consultant  
at Family Futures  
Tel 020 7354 4161 Fax 020 7704 6200  
education@familyfutures.co.uk  
www.familyfutures.co.uk**



**Family Futures™**

## Won't Do or Can't Do?



Supporting children whose early life experiences have affected their ability to function effectively and responsibly within the school environment

## THE IMPACT OF EARLY TRAUMA ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Children who have experienced loss or trauma in their early lives often find the school situation intimidating, and sometimes frightening.

Emotionally, they are usually less mature than their peers. Maternal deprivation, abuse and neglect often affect the development of executive functioning skills. Executive skills are the thinking skills necessary for a child or adult to function at the level of his/her intellectual capability. These are the skills that control behaviour inhibition, emotional control, self-organisation, planning, initiation, shift, working-memory and self-evaluation.

These skills begin to develop at the baby stage and continue developing through adolescence to adulthood.

For a variety of reasons, these children may have missed out on the attachment patterns necessary to develop certain neural pathways and they now need support and consistent strategies to enable them to develop their executive skills, and thus be able to function to the best of their intellectual ability.

These children often experience a desperate need to control their own lives, and this inevitably involves their environment. This need for control stems from an acute fear of a repetition of the trauma they

experienced early in their lives. They can feel an overwhelming sense of shame and have little self-esteem. They may be hyper-vigilant, never being able to concentrate fully on the task in hand. Triggers, perhaps not even known to the children themselves, can cause a reaction of fight, flight or freeze - an early survival strategy that only makes sense in terms of their history.

Within the school environment, these children can present a challenge to the effective running of the school.

### How do we recognise these problems?

The emotional age of many of these children is not representative of the school year in which they are working.

Although some can cope academically, they may have difficulty maintaining friendships. Playtime is sometimes exceptionally hard for them.

For some children, leaving their primary care-giver can be especially difficult. They may have experiences of losing people close to them, and lack the secure knowledge that their mother or father will come back for them.

Lunchtimes can be traumatic. Food issues can sometimes be traced back to very early neglect and abuse. Toilet problems, too, can be an issue.

Some children have heightened sensory perceptions so busy classrooms, full of bright displays, fluorescent lights and

hanging mobiles can affect them. Conversely, some children may need extra stimulation.

Some pupils may appear to be coping well and are able to portray an image of confidence, working hard to please their teachers and peers. Deep down, they may be quite traumatised, suppressing unpleasant memories and desperate not to be rejected again.

### How can we help these children?

Teachers are seldom aware of the full life-history of a child in their care. For some of these children, even the adoptive parent or foster carer does not know all the details. Understandably, the parents may not want to share their existing knowledge.

Certain topics, like sex education, and some P.H.S.E. lessons can be particularly challenging and we suggest speaking to the carer before these lessons take place

An open mind and an empathic approach are the stepping stones for helping these children. They must conform within the school setting and need to follow the rules to keep themselves and others safe, but they usually need more support than their peers to do this.

Acknowledging to the child that you know he or she has difficulties in some specific areas assists him or her to clarify the situation in his or her own

mind. It helps the child to know that you understand. It is important that you involve him or her in any strategies that are employed. Roleplaying possible scenarios and outcomes helps the pupil to be prepared. Anger management is often a key issue. The child needs support in recognising his reactions, and strategies to deal with these himself. He or she may need extra adult attention in the playground situation. Having the opportunity to calm down with an adult in a safe environment before he or she has reached a volatile state is invaluable. 'Time in' with an adult can be a valuable learning experience. 'Time out' as punishment adds to the destructive shame cycle.

These children may well need extra support to access the National Curriculum. They may have difficulty beginning a piece of work, and need adult encouragement and a structured plan.

Some children will not yet have built a strong attachment with their adoptive or foster parent. This leads them to feel very insecure.

Both the carer and the child may benefit from occasional days at home together, especially if the child has been placed with siblings all vying for quality time with the parent. Although regular school attendance is obviously important, the need for the child to develop a secure attachment is key to his or her performance at school.