

Bringing PACE to ACE

In the last issue of ACE Space, Dr Billy Smythe (Clinical Psychologist and DDP Consultant with Phoenix Psychology) introduced some key points about DDP and shared the news that ACE are committed to embedding DDP ideas and principles across all the services we offer. [In this issue, we ask Billy about DDP-informed parenting.](#)

What is DDP-informed parenting?

“DDP-informed parenting is an approach that has been developed to help children who have experienced trauma and disruption within their early relationships. It isn’t a therapy...but it is sometimes called a ‘therapeutic’ approach to parenting, meaning that it is a way of helping these children to overcome past trauma as well as supporting them to develop positive behaviours and healthy patterns of communicating and relating.”

How does it work?

“Safety within relationships and emotional connection is taken for granted by many children; however, adopted children who have lived through traumatic and scary experiences in their early years can often be frightened of building close relationships and connection within their new families. Often, adopted children find it frightening to be open to the influence of a new parent, find it hard to trust and feel much safer resisting and being the one in control. This is why the focus on building an emotional connection is at the heart of a DDP-informed approach to parenting. DDP suggests it’s only when a child

who has experienced trauma begins to feel a level of safety and trust in a two-way relationship that they can start to develop resilience. This provides a foundation on which developmentally appropriate behaviour support (by this I mean discipline, structure and boundaries) can build.”

How does PACE fit in?

“In DDP-informed parenting PACE is key to helping children to develop safety in connection. PACE is a stance of playful parenting, acceptance of their child’s inner world (acceptance of their thoughts, feelings, perceptions; which is separate from their behaviour), curiosity about the meaning of behaviour and empathy for the child’s emotional state.”

What is it like to try and parent in this way?

“Because the approach is built upon a parent’s ability to make sense of their child’s emotional experience it can be incredibly hard for parents to remain PACE-ful when dealing with upsetting and stressful situations involving their children – this is completely understandable and normal; indeed, DDP-informed parenting isn’t ‘normal’ parenting at all. It’s not the way many of us have been parented ourselves, it’s not the sort of ‘super nanny’ parenting that we hear so much about – it is different and so it is well recognised that trying to bring these ideas into parenting does take not only practice, but space and support too. ACE can support adoptive parents to find their way with this and offers workshops for parents at different stages of the adoption process. All staff in ACE will be trained in developing their DDP skills. Parents can find out more about what support is available by speaking to their social worker or

*contacting ACE on 0300 369 0556 or emailing
enquiries@aceadoption.com.*

*“An excellent book to take a look at if you want (and have time!)
to read more, is ‘Everyday Parenting with Security and Love’ by
Kim Golding.”*