Resilience for learning :

Mental Well-being and Attachment

A presentation by

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Activity (part 1)

- Reflect on a new learning situation in which you felt uneasy / uncertain. As you entered this situation:

    - What went through your mind?
    - How did you feel?
    - How did you react?

Activity (part 2)

- Write down:
  - What helped you stay with the learning
  - What made it difficult to manage appropriately
  - What did you think, feel afterwards 're achieving or not achieving the learning

Risks in Learning

- To enter into the learning game one must take the risks of:
  - Non *consistency* (you may do / find things that don't fit with your idea of yourself)
  - Loss of *control* (you must tolerate not knowing and discovering)
  - Feeling less *comfortable* (learning is accompanied by a level of anxiety)
- So a strong sense of self (**identity**) helps one take risk and manage the change implicit in learning

Guy Claxton

Why Consider These Issues?:
the importance of the adults' role in school

"I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanised or dehumanised."

Haim Ginott

Overview

1. Attachment theory and patterns of attachment in infancy

2. Risk and resilience factors

*3. What can we do about children in our school?*

Attachment Theory

- Bowlby and research on maternal deprivation

- the secure base

- maternal sensitivity

                 proximity

- empathetic attunement (mirror neurones)

- internal working model

- patterns of attachment behaviour

Children in a secure attachment will:

- engage in play and learning

- communicate

- engage in relationships

Pupil

Teacher

Task
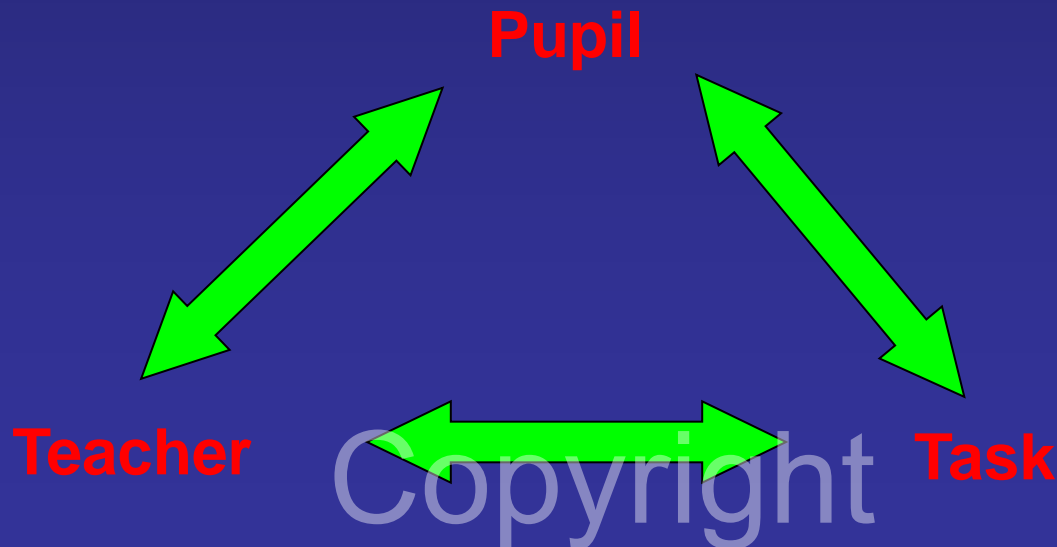
Working with Secure Children

- Generally we (adults) feel:
  - Confirmed
  - Heard
  - Able to trust the student behaviourally and 're learning
  - Know when he/she asks for help it is required and sensible
  - Calm, engaged and fulfilled by teaching him/her
 - 'symbiotic'

Attachment Patterns

Secure Attachment: Across cultures 55-65 percent of people have a secure attachment (and lower in the caring professions!)

Anxious avoidant (15-20%): can result from insensitivity to needs and feelings of the infant - rejection

Ambivalent (10-15%): relationship meets needs of parent rather than those of infant, therefore inconsistency for child – separation anxiety

Disorganised (5-10%): secure base not available e.g. prolonged separation in adverse conditions, intense marital conflict, depression, family mental health issues etc.
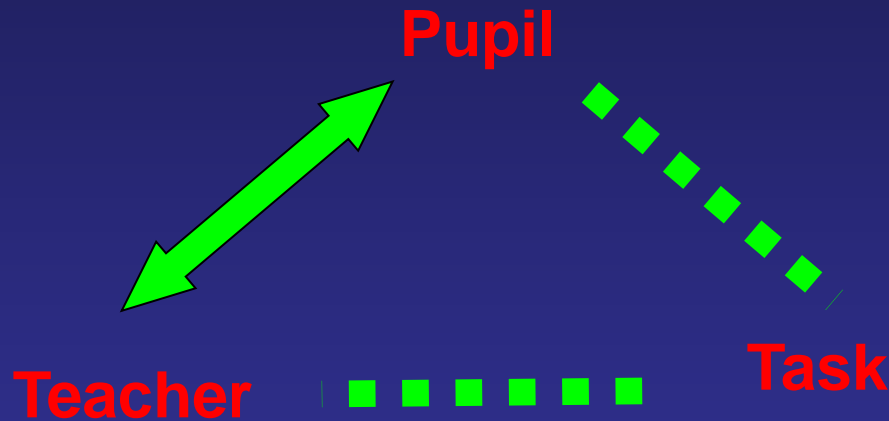
Can lead to the following interactions (1: anxious / avoidant):

Pupil
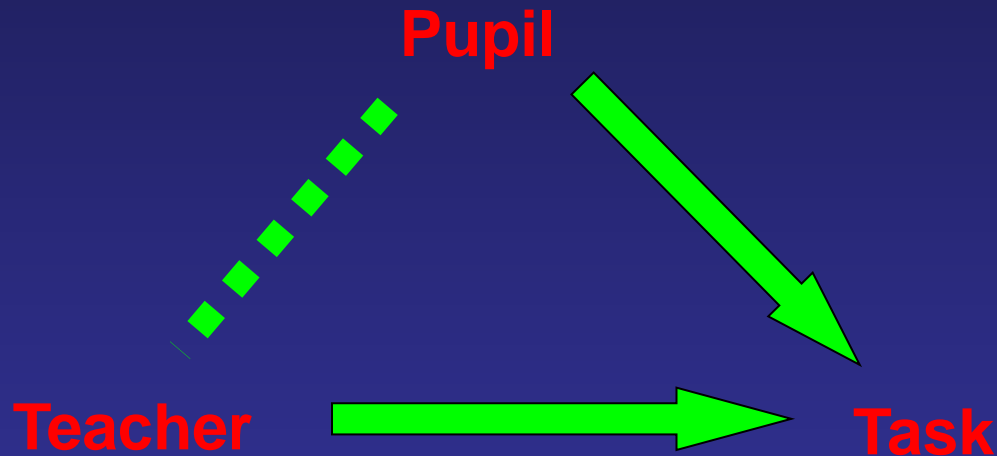
Teacher

Task

(Child lets teacher work with them through task but not through relationship.)

Can lead to the following interactions (2: Ambivalent):

Pupil

Teacher   **Task**

(Child is afraid to tackle task alone without CT's attention.)

Can lead to the following interactions (3: Disorganised):

Pupil

Teacher

Task
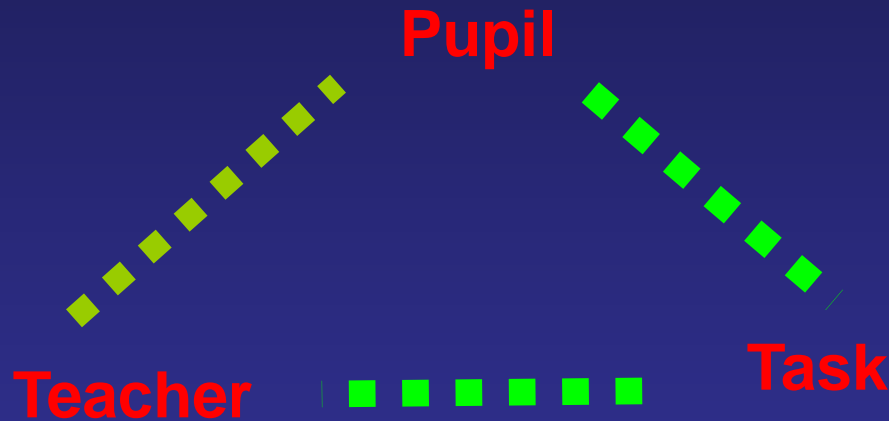
(Child is not able to form an effective relationship and acts purely for self or not at all or 'randomly'.)

Working with Insecure Attachments

- You may be left feeling:
  - Deskilled and worthless (because of his own feelings about himself)
  - Overtly rejected or more subtly that he doesn't really need you at all
  - Pushed to your limits
  - That he is perfectly fine to get on with things
  - Disengaged
  - Made to feel vulnerable
  - Made to act out of character (screaming …)
  - Confused or feeling slightly mad
  - Shocked by his level of taking control / out of control behaviour
  - Turn on you to communicate to him how he feels, thinks …

Children with anxious/avoidant attachment are likely to show some of the following

➢ separation anxiety

➢ difficulty in tolerating uncertainty

➢ heightened state of anxiety

➢ undue dependence on adults

➢ constant state of vigilance

➢ lack of trust in authority of adults

➢ difficulties with transitions / change

➢ asocial behaviour

Children with ambivalent attachment are likely to show some of the following

➤ overwhelming sense of affect which has no apparent meaning

➤ extreme sensitivity to criticism and implied humiliation

➤ little development of capacity to reflect

➤ absence of self awareness and empathy with others

➤ need to be in control to cope with helplessness in face of anxiety induced by presence of adults

➤ Separation anxiety

Children with disorganised attachment are likely to show some of the following

- children may be alternatively clingy <u>and</u> avoidant
- there is a lack of ability to organise at all
- extremes of behaviour that seem to come out of the blue
- exhibiting contradictory behaviour 'patterns'
- displaying bizarre behaviours that can be very distressing for the adult

Activity (part 1)

Think of a student(s) who you think presents with a secure attachment style:

- What do you notice about the child/young person?

- How do you respond to him / her (personal & professional)?

- How might your own attachment style be affecting this relationship (what are your needs here and how might they affect what you do!)?

Activity roleplay (part 2)

Reflect on a student who staff say 'pushes their buttons':

- Decide one member who will be role playing the student

- Describe the child/young person to the group

- Allocate one person to role player the student from a chosen starting point scenario

- Others role play 'managing' the student

Activity (part 3)

In your groups discuss:

- What was helpful for the 'student'?
- What seemed to make things worse?

- What felt helpful for 'staff'
- What stuck in 'staff's throat' (& why)?

What you need to know

- We all have capacity for resilience
- Risk factors are cumulative
- Half to 2/3 of children overcome adversity and adapt
- Acute episodes of stress have less long-term impact
- Transition points are both threats & opportunities
- Changes occur slowly and incrementally over time & circumstance

Protective Factors

Family **Individual** **School**

Community
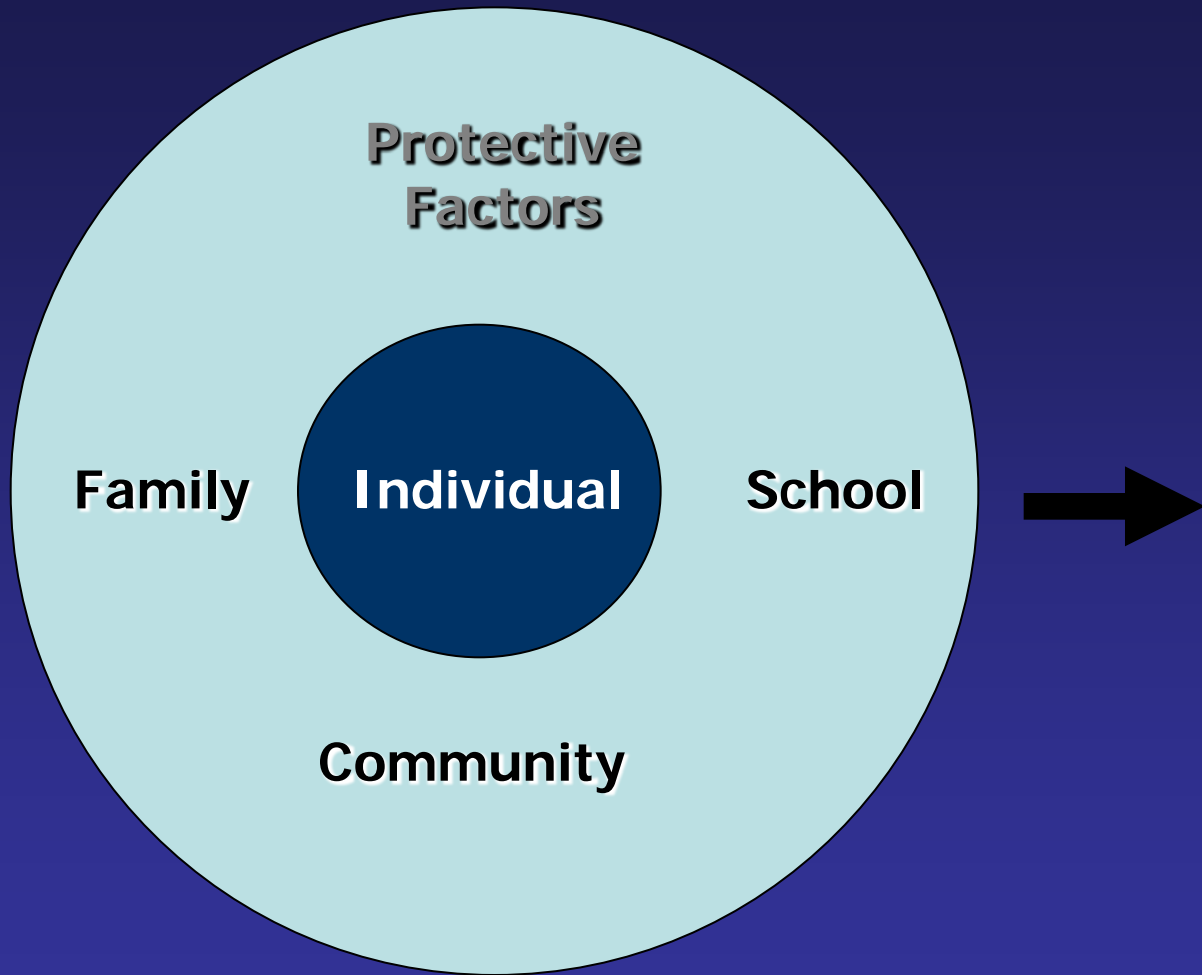
Resiliency

– Social competence

– Problem solving skills

– Autonomy

– Sense of purpose

Protective Factors within the Individual

- Secure early relationships
- Being female
- Higher intelligence
- Easy temperament when infant
- Good communication skills
- Good problem-solving skills
- Good health
- Age – depending on adversity

Protective Factors in family, school, community

- Caring and supportive relationships
- Positive and high expectations
- At least one key adult who 'sponsors'
- Opportunities for meaningful participation

Protective factors in the Family

- At least one good parent-child relationship
- Clear, firm and consistent positive discipline
- Assertive based relationships
- Support for education
- Absence of severe discord
- Absence of mental health issues
- Affection

Protective factors in the community

- Wider supportive network
- Good housing
- High standard of living
- Range of positive sport/leisure activities
- High morale school with positive policies

Individual Aspects:
Secure early relationships
Being female
Higher intelligence
Easy temperament when infant
Good communication skills
Good problem-solving skills
Good health (physical & mental)

Family Aspects:
At least one good
parent-child relationship
Clear, firm and
consistent positive discipline
Assertive based relationships
Support for education
Absence of severe discord
Absence of mental
health issues
Affection

Assessing

Protective

Factors

Environmental Aspects:
Safe community
Good social opportunities
Good play opportunities
Good housing
Good income level
Integrated community
Engagement in spiritual,
    cultural activities

School Aspects:
Effective school
Positive ethos
Staff consistency
Attainment & achievement orientated
Listens to students
Gives positive academic & social
opportunities

Some factors for consideration

- Early identification of vulnerable children

- Safety, reliability and predictability as priorities

- Appropriately differentiated task as starting point for safe learning

- Change results from continual positive resolution following 'breakdown'

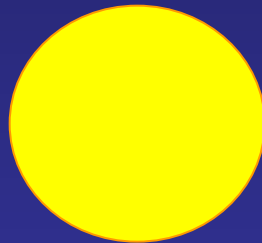# Some factors for consideration

- Clear opportunities for reparation <u>always</u> with the person directly involved in the breakdown

- Interpreting the possible meaning of behaviour

- Recognition that people are operating at an automatic level even when it seems consciously deliberate
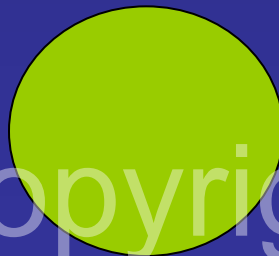
- Network of support for staff

Activity: 3 mins. self reflection
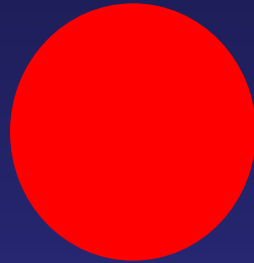
🔴 We need to stop

🟡 We want to continue

🟢 We need to start / increase

Reaching an independent, resilient learning style

- 4 stages of development
  - Complete dependency
  - Relative dependency
    - 'fragile' exploration
    - Secure but vulnerable exploration (feel safe and then it 'all goes wrong')
  - Interdependency
  - Independency

Activity: key stage groups

- What might you want / need to do:
    - Yourself
    - Your key stage
    - The school
    - In relation to the families / community

- What support would you need to enable these changes?

Active Listening: an interesting quote

'If you really want to help someone first of all you must find him (her) where he (she) is and start there….Helping somebody implies you must understand more than he (she) does, but first you must understand what he (she) understands. If you cannot do that, your understanding will be of no avail.'

Kierkegaard, 1849

Useful references

- Karr-Mosse, Meredith & Brazelton (1998): Ghosts from the Nursery: tracing the roots of violence.

- Oliver James (2002; 2006): They F*** You Up: how to survive family life.

- Sue Gerhardt (2004): Why Love Matters: how affection shapes a baby's brain.

- Heather Geddes (2006): Attachment in the Classroom: the links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school.

- Louise Bomber (2007): Inside I'm Hurting: practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in school.