



INTRODUCTION TO THERAPEUTIC PARENTING



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Families



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THERAPEUTIC PARENTING



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Definitions and abbreviations

TP - Therapeutic Parenting

Standard Parenting - Parenting typically used in today's society

Neurodivergent - Those whose neurological development and functioning differ from what is considered typical, or "neurotypical". This can encompass a range of conditions including autism, ADHD, learning disabilities like dyslexia, and Tourette's syndrome

Trigger - A stimulus that can cause a strong emotional or behavioural re-action, often related to past trauma or difficult experiences

Regulate - Getting into a state of having the appropriate energy for a situation

Co-regulate - The process where one individual helps another manage their emotions and behaviours, especially when they are feeling overwhelmed or dysregulated

Compassion Fatigue - The physical, emotional and mental exhaustion and overwhelm from the demands of parenting/caring

Sensory Regulation - The ability to effectively process and respond to sensory input from the environment, maintaining an optimal level of arousal and enabling participation in daily activities

Attachment - The emotional bond between a child and their primary caregiver





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What is Therapeutic Parenting?

Therapeutic Parenting (TP) has come from a fostering and adoption back-ground and is helpful for all care experienced children. We believe it is also helpful for all children, especially children who experience trauma, are Autistic, have ADHD or high anxiety for any reason.

Throughout this handbook we use the phrase "**our children**" to reflect the children who are autistic, have ADHD or high anxiety for any reason. The TP team are all therapeutic parents, and we hope you find it a helpful introduction to these concepts. We use the phrase parenting to reference anyone who has or is going to have a parenting role in a child's life.

None of us are perfect parents, **we all get it wrong**. However, we hope that some of the concepts and strategies of TP are helpful for you as tools to **understand** your child's needs and behaviours, **build connection** with your child and to **manage distressed behaviours**.

Therapeutic Parenting is an approach that looks at what is going on underneath for the child along with appropriate strategies to manage their behaviour. It is based on an understanding of the impact of high anxiety on the brain.

Therapeutic Parents use a lot of **empathy** alongside **clear boundaries and routines**.

These strategies help the child to reduce their stress levels and help them to get back into their **thinking brain**.



Therapeutic Parenting



Why not Standard Parenting?

“Isn’t TP just letting them get away with it?”

We hear this phrase a lot, but TP is about recognising that our children need a different approach to help them **heal and manage the world around them**. Standard Parenting often does not work for them.

Standard parenting requires children to be able to access **their thinking brain** and not be in their survival response. Our children cannot always access their thinking brain and are not always in control of their behaviour.

Standard Parenting can spike the **stress hormones**, however, our children already have high levels of these, so they often struggle to manage things such as shouting, demands and instructions.



Standard parenting requires the child to **trust** the adult and is based on **secure attachments**. However, our children often don't trust others to keep them safe. This could be through experience, attachment disruption or prolonged periods of time in their **survival response**.

Standard Parenting requires children to see things from other perspectives and **manage “shame”**.

Very often our children struggle with **theory of mind**, they struggle to see things from other people's perspectives, and they have a heightened response to shame, so they need an approach that supports them.

In summary, Standard Parenting often works against our children's brain development and needs. **TP meets a child where they are at to help them heal.**



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"With my older children I used Standard Parenting, including strategies such as the naughty step, taking away treats, reward charts and threats of punishments.

This worked fine for them, but my youngest child has experienced trauma and has Autism, PDA and ADHD. Standard Parenting really didn't work for him.

However, I have found Therapeutic Parenting to be a total **lifeline**.

It has strategies that **really work** and over the past 10 years we have used it, we have seen **incredible improvements** in his attachment and his behaviour that we never could have imagined before."

Reflections



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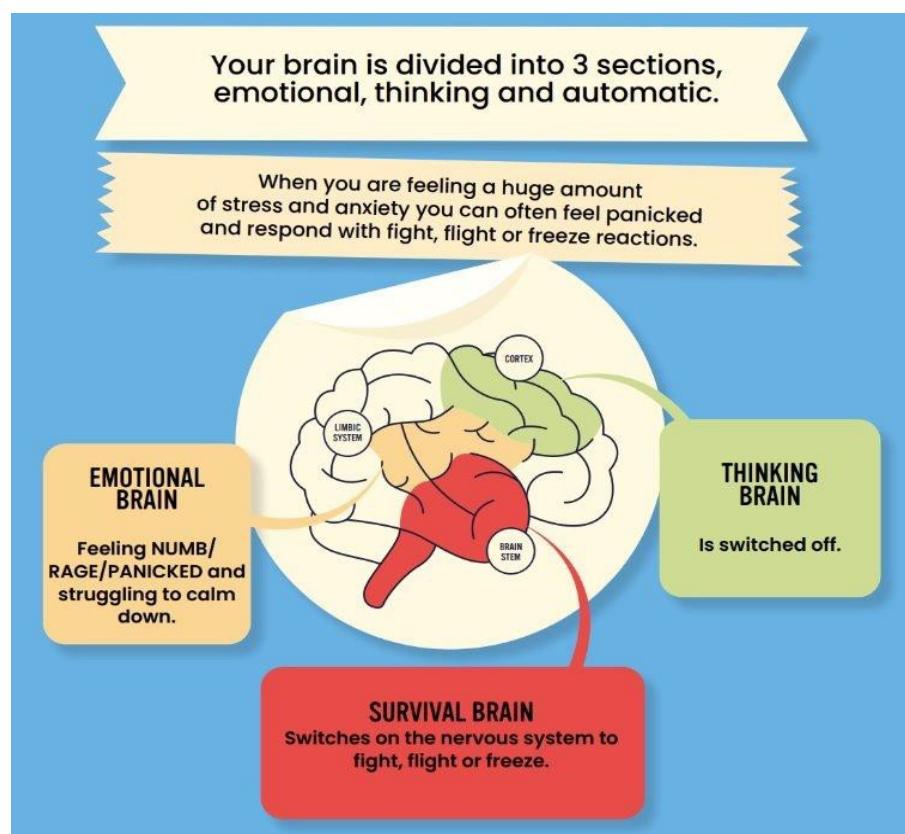
The 'fight, flight, freeze' response (survival response)

The **fight, flight, freeze** response is the **survival** response we are triggered into when our lives are under threat for example a **Tiger** coming towards us.

The part of our brain called the **amygdala** detects **danger**, it floods our brain with the **stress hormones** adrenaline and cortisol. This gets us ready to fight, flight or freeze to stay alive.

In order to respond quickly for survival, the access to our thinking brain is **blocked**.

For our children their survival response becomes **oversensitive**. Like a **faulty smoke alarm**, going off because the toast is burnt rather than there is an actual fire.



Our children can be **triggered** into this response even though their lives are **not under genuine threat**

When they are triggered, it is as if there is a **Tiger** in the room. They are **unable to think logically** as they are in their survival response.



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Underneath the behaviour

Knowing that our children are in their **survival response** helps us to put ourselves **in their shoes** and understand where the behaviour is coming from.

When we are **triggered** into our survival response it's because our brain thinks there is a threat to our life. This is an **awful experience** for anyone. These images from our anxiety booklet show how it might feel for ourselves and our children and how we might act because of this.

Knowing our children are in their survival response can help us not to take the behaviour **personally** or **react** to the surface level behaviours.

**WHEN OUR ALARM IS TRIGGERED
IT CAN BE SCARY**

YOU MIGHT FEEL...

- Frightened
- Tearful
- Scared
- Worried
- Frozen
- Dizzy
- Disconnected
- Angry
- Aggressive
- Shaky
- Wobbly

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WHEN OUR ALARM IS TRIGGERED

YOU MIGHT....

- Shout
- Push people away
- Hide under a blanket
- Run away
- Throw things
- Headbang
- People please
- Completely freeze
- Bite
- Break things
- Say rude things

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Reflections



Therapeutic Parenting



The 3C's

We now know that our children cannot access their thinking brain when they are in their survival response.

So, **what do we do?**

The 3C's is a strategy to use when a child has been triggered into their survival response. It is based on Dr Bruce Perry's 3Rs.

Calm - Regulate

Connect - Relate

Consider - Reason

1. Calm

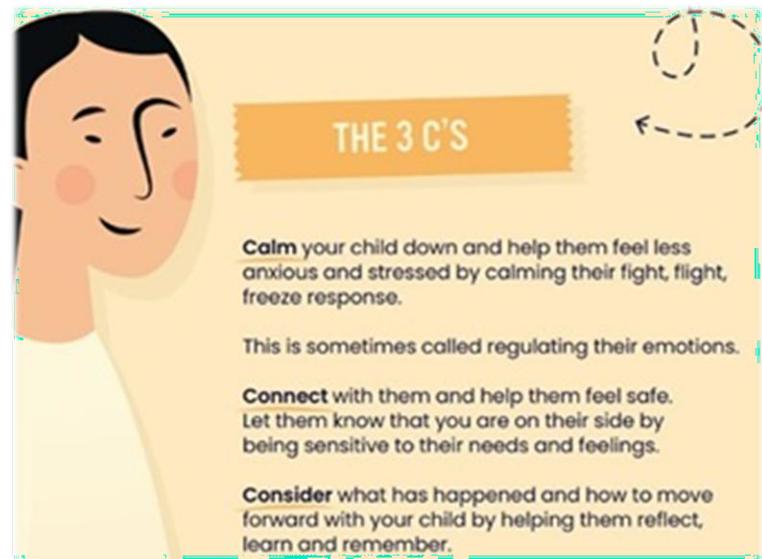
It is important for first us as the parent to **be calm before** we are able to calm our child. Then we need to **help them calm** (regulate). Not yet talking about what has happened. Use a few words as possible. Concentrate on calm and safety. Think about their sensory needs.

2. Connect

Our children need to **feel safe again** in relationship with us. Connect shows them that we love them and we are **there for them** after the tricky time of the trigger.

3. Consider

A chance to **reflect on what has happened** and what we can maybe do differently next time. Not time for a lecture, can be **one sentence**. Only to be done after **Calm** and **Connect** as it requires the thinking brain and the child to feel safe again with us.





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WHAT COULD CALM LOOK LIKE FOR OURSELVES

Run hands
under cold
water

Having a
mantra

Breathing
exercise

Using a script

Using a
diversion

Pretending you
need the loo

Scheduled self
care

Stress ball

Drink or snack

Notice
childlike
ness

Text a friend

Step outside

Sensory needs

Humming

Singing

WHAT COULD CALM LOOK LIKE FOR CHILDREN?

Going outside

Fidget/sensory
toys

Calm space

Weighted
Blanket

Drink/snack

Breathing
Exercise

Special interest

Music/podcast

Lego

Colouring in

Ripping leaflets

Compression
items

Cushion
punch/kick

Animal walk

Bubbles



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Ideas for **Connect**

- A hug
- Sitting next to them
- Saying "I'm here for you"
- A text
- A drink/snack
- Watch something together
- A game
- An enjoyable activity
- A walk

Ideas for **Consider**

- "I wonder if..."
- "It looked like..."
- "Let's tidy it together"
- "Shall we get a drink for X to show we are sorry"
- "I can imagine..."
- "Instead next time lets..."



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Ideas for 'calm'

Ideas for 'connect'

Ideas for 'consider'



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PACE

Developed by Dr Dan Hughes, PACE is a way of thinking, feeling and behaving in a way that helps children to **feel safe**.

We can use PACE every day to help parent our children, it is a great way to de-escalate conflict, manage difficult conversations and build strong relationships.

P.A.C.E


P.A.C.E


PLAYFULNESS

How can I be, or make this, more fun and light-hearted?

ACCEPTANCE

Accept the thoughts, wishes and feelings that are underneath the behaviour.

CURIOSITY

Wonder what is going on using open-ended questions.

EMPATHY

Put yourself in their shoes and show you care.



Safe Families



Here are some helpful ideas of how you can use PACE with your child.

PLAYFULNESS

- Soft facial and body language
- Thumb wars
- Dance parties
- Toilet humour
- Games
- Watch a funny video

ACCEPTANCE

- Let them have their say
- Listen with your full attention
- "I understand that this is tricky for you"

CURIOSITY

- "I wonder if you're feeling..."
- "What are your thoughts about..."
- "It looks like you might be..."

EMPATHY

- "That must be a really tricky feeling"
- "I can imagine that's really difficult"
- "I'm so sorry you're feeling like this"





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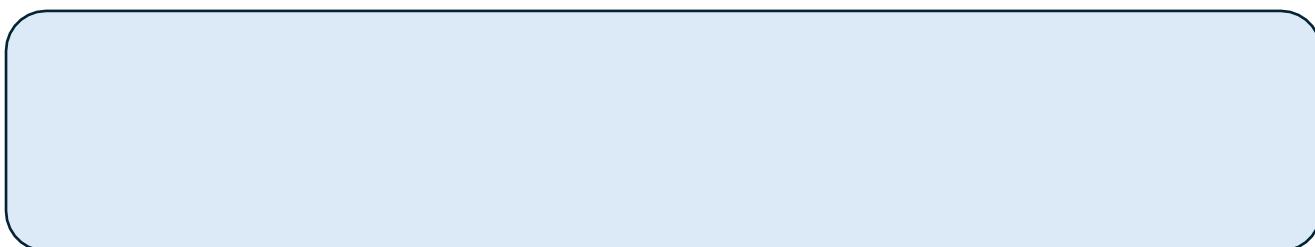


Think about how you might be able to use PACE

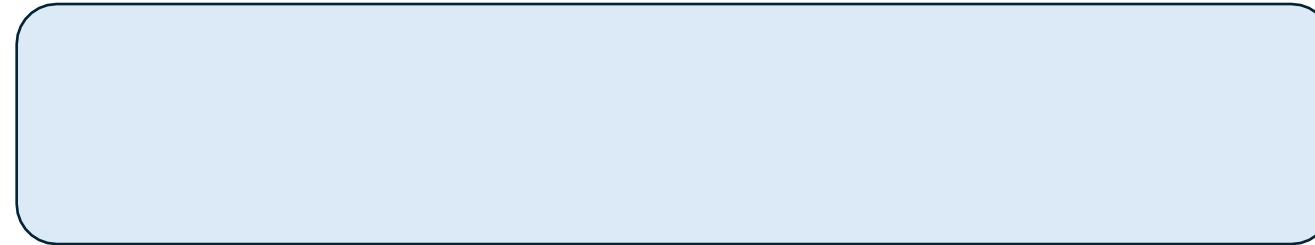
Playfulness is all about bringing fun into the relationship



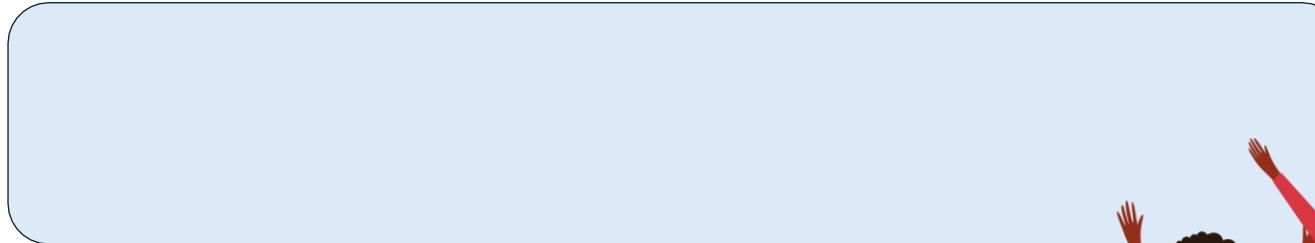
Acceptance is accepting who they are and how they are feeling.



Curiosity helps us to look what's going on underneath behaviour.



Empathy helps us connect with how they feel



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WHAT COULD PLAYFULNESS LOOK LIKE?

Playing Simon says

Give a silly/light hearted response

Being flexible and changing direction

Sending funny reels or gifs

Appealing to special interest

Robot instructions

Inside jokes

WHAT COULD ACCEPTANCE LOOK LIKE?

"I know you're disappointed ... "

"I can see you're finding it hard to listen today. I can help you"

"It's ok to be cross, it's not ok to rip up books. Let's find something you can rip"

Having realistic expectations

Accepting the child in front of you

Validating them even if it seems trivial to you



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WHAT COULD CURIOSITY LOOK LIKE?

"You seem really frustrated. I wonder if..."

"I can imagine that was tricky but ... isn't ok."

"I wonder if you're feeling wobbly about ... would you like to take your blanket or a chew toy with you?

"It looks like you're worried about... and that's why you're struggling to listen."

WHAT COULD EMPATHY LOOK LIKE?

"If I had a test tomorrow, I would be feeling a bit wobbly too"

"I know it's really tricky for you coming off your game"

"That wasn't what you were expecting and that's so hard"

"I find Fridays really wobbly because I get so tired!"

"That sounds really difficult, I am so sorry you feel like that"



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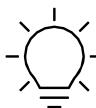


Routines

Routines help build a sense of **predictability** for our children which can support them to feel **safe**.

Being able to know what is happening next, having **consistency** and not having any surprises **reduces stress levels** and helps **reduce triggers**.

Routines should be



- Visual
- Simple
- Around "pinch points"
- Consistent

Think about

- Visual accessible timetables
- Keeping mealtimes the same time and place
- Talking about change ahead of time
- Splitting activities/tasks into NOW NEXT THEN

Reflections



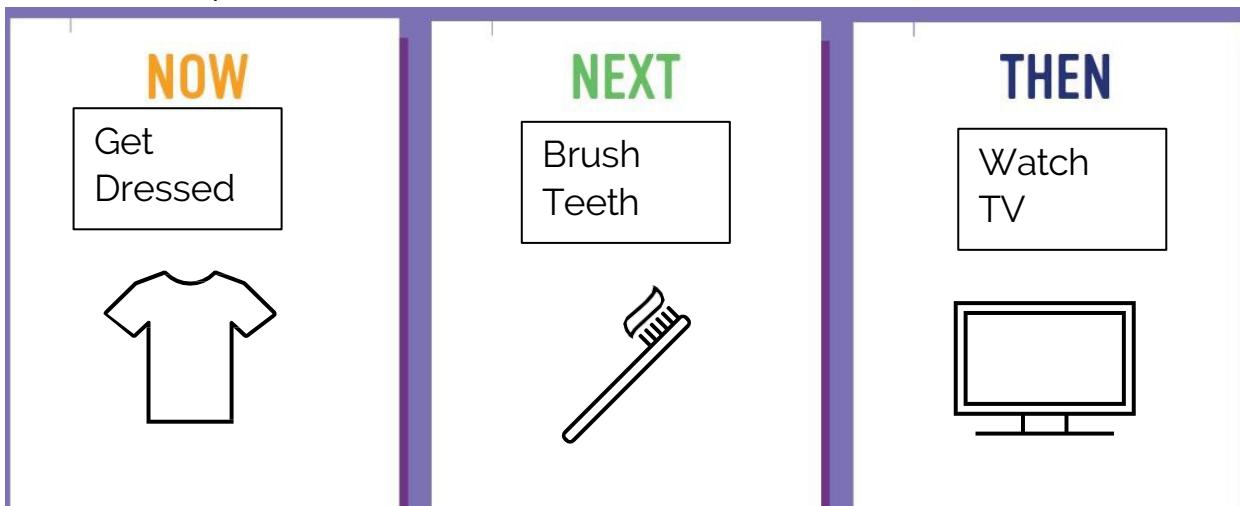
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NOW NEXT THEN

A helpful tool to show a visual routine is to split the day, task or activities into **NOW** **NEXT** and **THEN**. Adding a simple **drawing** next to the writing can be helpful as often our children struggle to picture places and tasks.

Some examples of **NOW** **NEXT** **THEN**



Therapeutic Parenting



Natural consequences and logical consequences

Punitive punishments require children to be in their **thinking brain** but often the behaviours we want to change are coming from times they are overwhelmed or in their survival brain.

Punitive punishments *might* stop the behaviour in the moment but doesn't help a child learn for next time.

Our children very often struggle with "demands" punishment **triggers their survival response** rather than acting as a deterrent.

It is useful to use **natural and logical** consequences to help our children learn to link cause and effect

We use **natural consequences** by **letting** consequences happen and not stepping in to "fix" it (if it's safe to do so. Then narrating to our child **what happened because of their choice or action.**



We use **logical consequences** by **linking** a **directly related** consequence we will impose to the choice or action of the child.

This is to help them **learn and build new pathways in the brain.**

When thinking of logical consequences they should be:

Reasonable - It should be **proportional** to what has happened

Respectful- It should be **manageable** for the child and told **calmly**

Related- It should be **directly related** to the behaviour or choice



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Natural consequences are what happens naturally without the adult getting involved. They are narrated to the child to help them link cause and effect.

Logical consequences are linked to the behaviour and are adult imposed. They are narrated to the child to help them link cause and effect.

Punitive punishments are unrelated to the behaviour and are adult imposed. They are used as deterrents and to teach a lesson.

NATURAL, LOGICAL OR PUNITIVE?

PUNITIVE

Child loses the TV remote and doesn't get to go to a friend's party at the weekend.

NATURAL

Child is mean to someone at school so the friend doesn't want to play with them anymore.

NATURAL

Child refuses to wear a coat so they get cold on the way to school.

NATURAL

Child stays up all night playing games and gets in trouble at school for falling asleep in class.

LOGICAL

Child breaks their Ipad so they have to contribute some pocket money for a new one.

PUNITIVE

Child calls you stupid so you ban all screen time for a week.



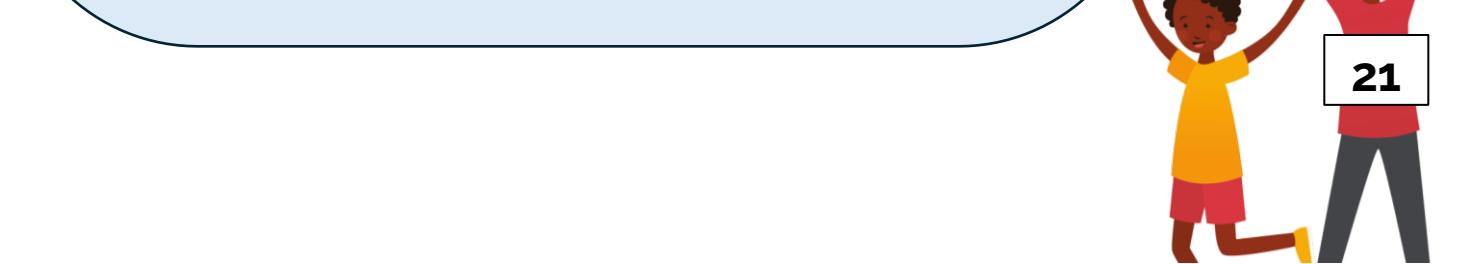
Remember it is easier to use natural and logical consequences when we are calm



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Reflections



Therapeutic Parenting



'Time in' not 'time out'

In TP we use **time in** not time out

Time in can help our children to feel safe, they often need us to **co-regulate** with them. Meaning they need us to help them calm down. Time in shows we are there for them and **not rejecting them**. Time in shows that you are there to help them.

Some children may need some "**space**" to regulate. It can be helpful to say that you are going to give them some space and say **where you will be when they are ready** to be near you again.

TIME IN

I SEE YOU'RE FEELING IT AND I WANT TO HEAR WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO SAY... LET'S JUST TAKE A DEEP BREATH FIRST.

It's so important to show love consistently, that your care isn't based on 'good behaviour' from the child or young person in your home, school or community.

Let them know you care because of who they are, not what they do.



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Time out

For our children, time out can often **escalate a situation** as they cannot manage **the shame, rejection and separation** of being sent away.

They often struggle to calm by themselves and reflect on what has happened, they **need adult support**. Time Out does not help our children learn and can **reinforce negative views** that they already have about themselves and their connection with us.



NOT TIME OUT



If calming down is needed, it is helpful for them to hear that you see their emotion, that you're ready to listen and that you can help them calm first, sending them off leaves them to potentially deal with a big emotion on their own.

When they are overwhelmed by these emotions, it's your calm presence that will help them know how to handle the big emotion, as you stay with them.



Therapeutic Parenting



Building connection

Sadly, very often our children struggle with low self-esteem and or their attachment to us.

To **build their self-worth** we can grow our connection with them through small acts of kindness and words of encouragement in some way every day.

It isn't about grand gestures, it's about little moments of **connection** and **appreciation** of them that can make a huge difference. It is **specific** to your child, how they feel connected and loved. Sometimes this takes trial and error. It **is not dependent on "good behaviour"**

If your child struggles to accept compliments you could say it to someone else in front of them, write it down, send a text message or avoid compliments all together and focus on doing things and talking about topics with them that they enjoy.

It can make such **a difference** to their confidence when we intentionally say encouraging words.

I ENJOYED THAT CONVERSATION WITH YOU

- Look them in the eyes and smile
- Point out their kindness/courage/caring heart
- Watch the film/programme of their interest and reflect on it together
- Let them know you've seen their good intentions



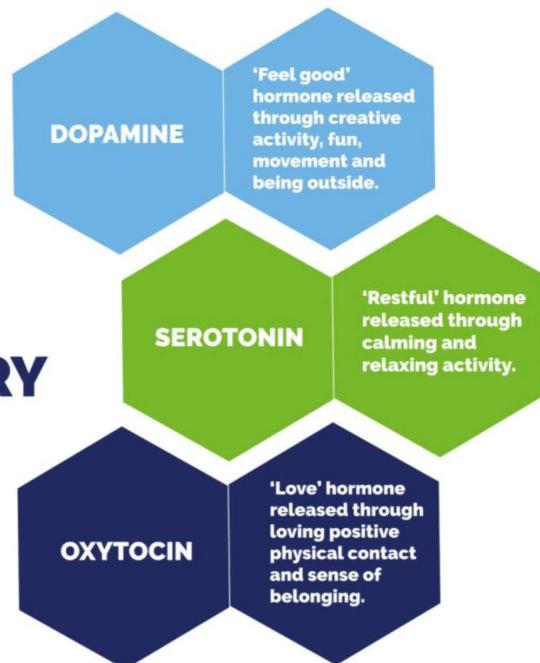
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When thinking about building connection it can be helpful to think about healthy biochemistry



HEALTHY BIOCHEMISTRY



Adrenaline and cortisol are **stress** hormones that get released when we feel under threat. They are acidic but the happy hormones dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin are alkaline and help neutralise these.

We can support our children's brains and build connection by doing things to boost their **'happy hormones.'**

What are some ways you could build connection?



Therapeutic Parenting



Compassion fatigue

When we are looking after children with challenging behaviour and are exhausted from the **demands of 24/7 care**, we can become **overwhelmed** and feel as though we can't carry on. This is called Compassion Fatigue. It is **an incredibly difficult** and isolating place to be but **you're not alone**. Many parents and carers suffer from this.

It can feel like **exhaustion**, but it also can feel like starting to take your child's behaviour personally, or as if they are deliberately ruining your life. Sometimes you might even feel as though it would be easier if someone else had your child and you didn't have to parent any more.

Compassion fatigue happens when you are **constantly** having to meet the **needs of others** without meeting your **own emotional needs**. It's like pouring from an **empty cup** – you can't keep doing it without topping it up. The good news is that **you can recover** from this, recognising that you're in it is the first step.

Some signs that someone may be in compassion fatigue:

Lack of empathy	Exhausted and no joy in parenting	Low energy and motivation
Takes the child's behaviour personally	Sense of disconnection to the child	Anger and frustrated (oversensitive survival response)
Feels that there is nothing good in life	Perceives the child's behaviour as personal rejection	Feels there is no point to life

We would always recommend that you speak to your GP if you are struggling to cope.



Therapeutic Parenting



Self-care is essential

To **recover** from compassion fatigue, you need **to look after yourself** and to practice **self-care**. This may feel like a big ask, but it doesn't have to look like a day at the spa!

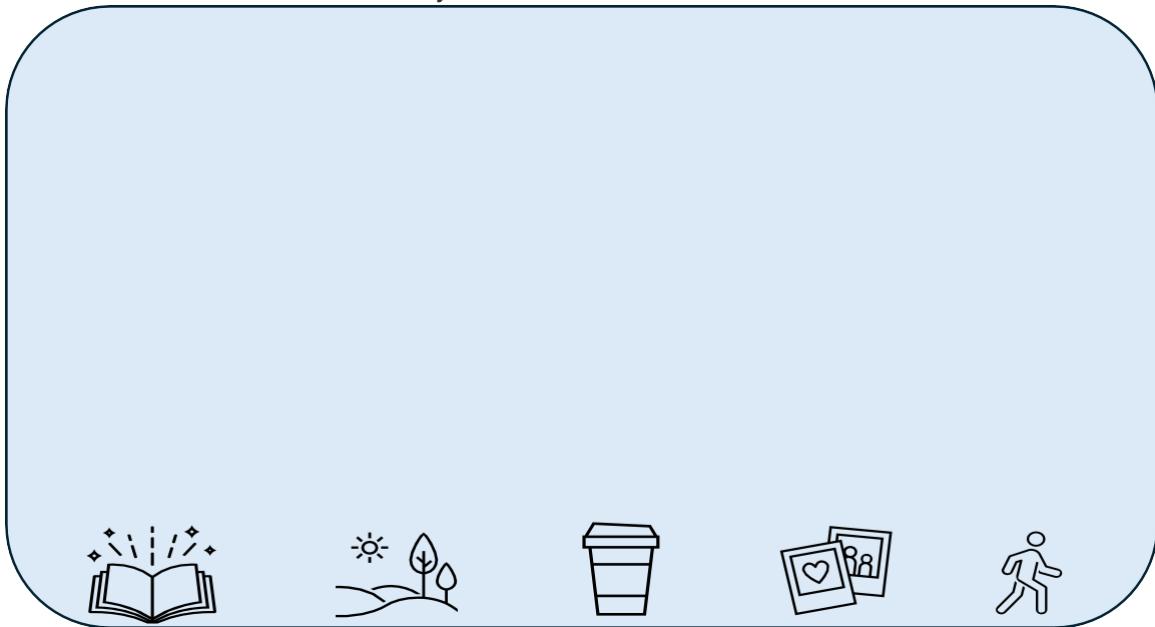
Instead, you could try and make just a small amount of time to watch your favourite show on tv, have a chocolate bar, paint your nails, have a bath, or go for a run.

It's about doing anything **intentional and realistic** for your situation, that is looking after you and your needs.

Self-care is **not a luxury, it is essential** for Therapeutic Parents. We won't be able to Therapeutically Parent if we are not looking after ourselves.

Think through what self-care could look like for **YOU**, here are some questions that could help.

- What do you **enjoy** doing?
- What do you do to **relax**?
- What makes you feel **calm**?



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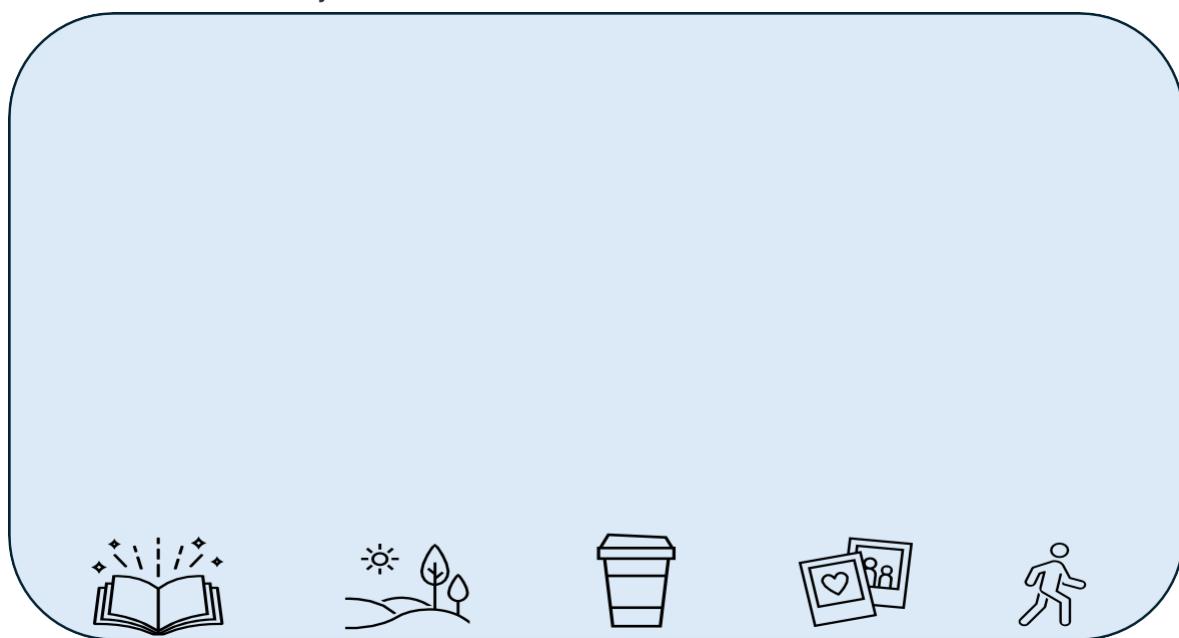


Supporters

Self-care also means reaching out to **supporters** who can **cheer** us on, be a shoulder (virtually or in person) to **cry on** or in some cases provide some much-needed **respite**.

Think through who your supporters are and how they could support you. Here are some questions that could help:

- Who **listens** to you in a non-judgmental way?
- Who has **encouraged** you in your journey?
- What could someone do **practically** to lighten your load?
- Would going for coffee or doing an activity **with someone** refresh you?
- Is there a way someone could give you **respite** even if you need to stay in the house too?



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References

'Let's think about...' booklets – written by Fiona Eve and Rae Morfi

Compassion Fatigue Research- Ottaway, H., & Selwyn, J. (2016). 'No-one told us it was going to be like this': Compassion fatigue and foster carers. University of Bristol.

Autism and Trauma overlap- wpspublish.com/blog/is-it-autism-trauma-or-both-understanding-the-overlap

Dr Dan Siegal Hand Model of the Brain-
drdan-siegel.com/hand-model-of-the-brain/

Logical Consequences- <https://helpfulprofessor.com/logical-consequences-examples/>



Therapeutic Parenting



Further Reading

A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting - Sarah Naish

Inside I'm Hurting - Louise Bomber

Building the Bond of Attachment - Dr Dan Hughes

The Explosive Child - Dr Ross Greene

Connective Parenting NVR Approach - Sarah Fisher

Parenting with Theraplay - Vivien Norris

The Unofficial Guide to Therapeutic Parenting for Childhood Aggression and Violence - Sally Donovan and Carly Kingswood

Further Help

Mind's Infoline - call 0300 123 3393 (9am - 6pm weekdays except bank holidays) www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/

Samaritans - call 116 123 (24 hours a day)

Calm - call 0800 58 58 58 (5pm - midnight)

Child on Parent Violence

Capa First Response - <https://capafirs response.org/contact>

Pegs - <https://www.pegssupport.co.uk/contact>