



A CHILD AND ADOLESCENT
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Children who have experienced trauma, abuse
and neglect in their early lives

Nurturing: filling in the gaps and why it's so important

Children who have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect in their early lives often need time to successfully complete previous stages of development that they did not have the opportunity to do at a younger age. This is best achieved through special times of nurturing which is part of the healing process for traumatised children.

What do we mean by nurturing?

- Looking after, playing and cherishing children of any age as if they were far younger children once more
- An opportunity to be helped to experience a safe, close, trusting relationship with their carers that they have missed out on and so badly need to learn about

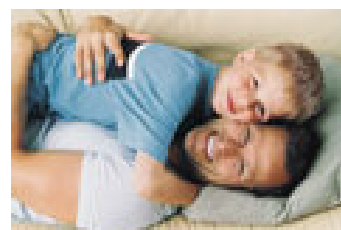


What will this achieve?

- By learning to be close and trust you, the child's attachment to you will grow and be strengthened. This means the child is more likely to flourish in the care that you are offering
- Experiencing "magic" moments enables further cognitive, social, emotional and moral development
- In these moments, children will learn how to be soothed by you and then begin to learn to soothe themselves
- By playing with you as very young children do, they will catch up with essential play skills
- By experiencing close loving moments with you, children will feel more confident and secure

Who will benefit from nurture?

- In fact, **any** child or young person of **any** age but particularly
 - Children who you know to have "grown up too fast"
 - Children who have been neglected in their early years
 - Children who have "parented" their own brothers and sisters
 - Children who sometimes seem far younger than their years but at other times seem much older
 - Children with whom you are struggling to connect because they seem so distant
 - Children who are anxious or nervous
 - Children whom you find playing with the baby's toys with great enjoyment or spend hours in the bath playing with the water!
 - Children who have difficulty calming themselves
 - Children who are overly clingy
 - Children who play with other children much younger than themselves
- Carers! It can be enjoyable for you too, bringing you closer to your child





How to do it

- Make a special time every day to have a moment of close loving nurture with your child - your child may prefer to know when this is so they can count on it
- This should be time for just you and the child with no interruptions and with your whole attention. If you have more than one child, ensure each child has their own time with an adult
- Touch or closeness is crucial - holding, rocking, cuddling, stroking, ruffling hair. Sometimes more rough and tumble play may develop but needs to be brought back down to close, quiet cuddling as you end
- Eye contact is also very important - do as much as possible face to face & looking into your child's eyes
- Think about the kinds of activities toddlers may enjoy - peek-a-boo, songs, cuddling up under blankets, feeding them or giving them a drink, bubble baths with toys. Some older children may need to have "acceptable" alternatives - rubbing in hand lotion, snuggling up to watch a film together - but do try the younger type of activities- they may well surprise you!
- Sometimes, you and your child may prefer to play a game or play with toys - as long as they have your full attention and you are close together, touching and cuddling if possible, this can still be nurture



Yes but.....

How does this fit with the safer caring policy?

Clearly, you need to discuss this with your child's social worker and your own fostering link worker and agree how to manage safer caring in a way that allows this type of caring to take place

Will people think I am being inappropriate with my child?

You may wish to use this leaflet to explain to those close to you what you are doing and why. The nurturing will be a special time for you and your family so others may not even be aware unless you choose to share with them

I'm worried that my child needs to progress not go backwards...

For children who have missed out, it is crucial they have the opportunity for experiences that are essential for development. Allowing the time to catch up on these lost experiences will speed their development not delay it

My child doesn't like being close to me...

Try starting slowly with games with which they are comfortable. These will give opportunities to gradually get the child used to being physically closer, giving lots of empathy about their difficulties with this. You could try this for small periods of time which you gradually lengthen as they progress. Suggest cuddle practice!

My child clings all the time so I don't want to encourage it more...

You can remind the child of their special nurture time and ask them to save their cuddles for then!

My child will get teased about being a baby...

As above, these times are just for you and your child. You may need to take care to tidy away special toys and perhaps talk over with your child whom they want to tell about it

How long will I need to do this for?

Each individual session can be as little as a few minutes or as long as you both feel comfortable. They need to continue over the months for as long as your child engages with them. For both length and duration, take your lead from your child as to when to stop - the child will tell you, lose interest, move on.....

