

THE THRIVE APPROACH: HOW DOES IT WORK?

As described in the paper 'The Thrive Approach: who is it for?' Thrive is an intervention of choice for children whose behaviour is causing concern because it is interrupting their learning or the learning of others.

These children may fall into one of these two categories:

They are:

- (i) Children who, for reasons we may never know, have missed some essential early learning experiences. This can be for many disparate reasons. It may well be that the loving parents are and have been absolutely doing their best but that their life circumstances at some point were overwhelming in ways that made it impossible to be completely attentive and available to the child. **The Thrive Assessment is NOT an assessment of parenting skills. It is an assessment that identifies the child's developmental needs.** These children will need to revisit early learning needs to reshape their stress management system and to give them other options for their behaviour. This may take some time.
- (ii) Children who are currently having difficulty coping with some recent event - like a house move, separation from a parent, a bereavement in the family etc. These children may need to revisit earlier needs for a short time.

In order to provide an environment where the children can be helped it is important to understand that the earliest learning is mostly implicit and processed through the right brain. Such learning is pre-verbal and without language. Instead these early memories are sensory, held in the body (somatic) and called 'sense memories'. This learning determines how quickly the child's body can return to a state of relaxation and peacefulness after an upset. A child who has not been kept safe, calmed and soothed and helped to regulate their feelings, has only 'discharge' of the energy as an option. This looks like going red in the face, sweating, crying, shouting or screaming, flailing arms about, kicking legs out, turning the head away, head-shaking or banging. Once a child has some mobility they can add actions that include crawling away, grabbing and throwing, running and hiding. As the child develops some language, they can add words, shout 'no', 'can't', 'won't' and fall into a temper tantrum. The way the adult responds to these behaviours not only shapes what happens in the immediate situation. It also teaches the child what is acceptable, what is manageable... and how to be the next time something 'bad' happens to get the best response from the adult. These learned behaviours settle into a pattern. Over time, the child gets to know themselves in the light of these responses. "I am a clever boy." "I am naughty." "I'm an angry girl." "I'm rubbish."

At birth the baby's brain is not yet fully formed. The instinctual survival mechanisms are in place (the brain stem and lower brain). The emotional circuitry is in the process of being wired up through the adult-child relationship in the mid-brain (called mammalian or limbic). As the relationship matures and deepens, the child learns to put language to her experience and the lower parts of the brain get connected up to the higher functioning pre-frontal cortex.

The adult needs to be playful, accepting, curious and empathic. They need to provide experiences of shared fun, delight and enjoyment.

This produces a brain fertilizer, called Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor (BDNF) that really encourages the neural networks to grow. They need to use the Vital Relational Functions of attuning, validating, containing and regulating (calming/soothing or stimulating) to build the child's capacity to relax, trust and be able to manage their emotions.

Thrive Licensed Practitioners have been trained to make explicit use of their relationship with the children to grow essential neural pathways and to reshape their stress management systems. They know what to do to encourage the stimulation of particular chemicals in the brain. The assessments identify where the gaps in learning are; the Action Plans tell you exactly what to do to address those gaps and how to do it.



