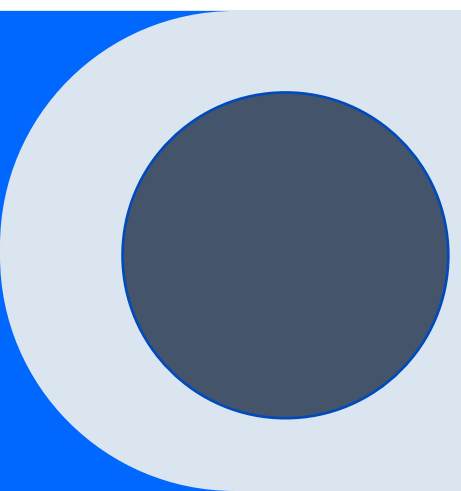




ACES & Trauma Focused Practices In Schools

Rebecca Smith



Adverse childhood experiences

An adverse childhood experience (ACE), is a traumatic event that occurs during childhood (Fellitti et al., 1998)

ACES can have negative effects on a child's nervous system causing a state of continued fight, flight or freeze, without intervention. This can become toxic stress. This can negatively influence how a child feels and behaves in the environments around them (Franke, 2014)

Children with ACES often have difficulties with behaviour within school environments and can have issues with academic functioning (Walsh et al., 2019)

Trauma focused schools & Approaches

Social Emotional Learning (SEN) supports children in school to understand and manage emotions, build relationships, social awareness, self awareness and supports children with making good decisions (Walter & Wynard,2024)

Trauma informed approaches (TIA) in schools starts by recognising the effects of an ACE and instead of asking what is wrong with this child, asks what do they need (Gov.uk, 2025)

Teachers that take a trauma informed approach understand the impact trauma has and the consequent behaviour, they respond to the child's behaviour in ways to avoid re-traumatization (Walter & Wynard, 2024)

Attachment Theory

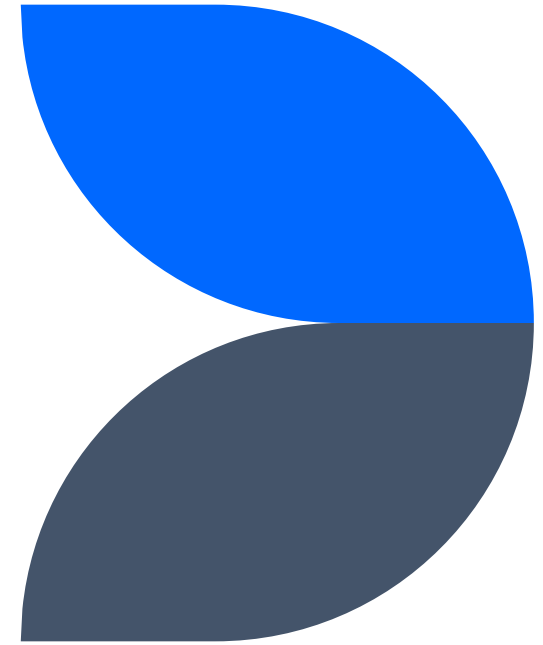
ACEs damage a child's trust in the people around them, making it difficult for them to make healthy attachments (Bowlby, 1980)

Children without healthy attachments are more likely to have misunderstood behaviours such as disobedience, aggression and to struggle with academic functioning (Downey & Greco, 2024)

Healthy attachments can be developed through play (Naish et al., 2024)

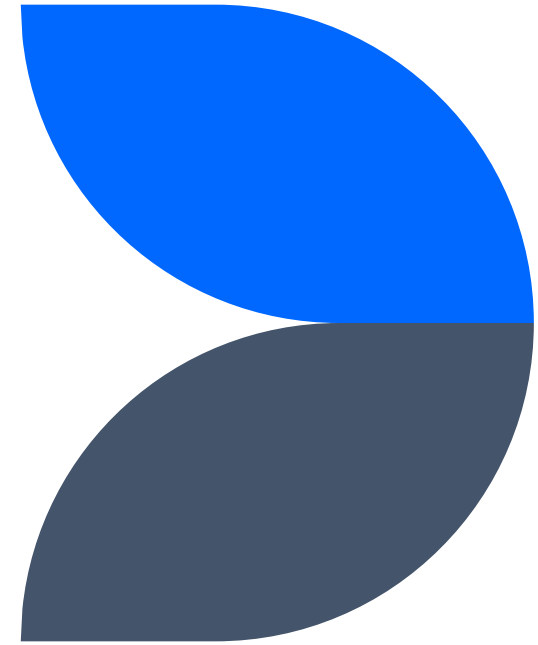
Play Therapy

Play can support children to develop healthy relationships and to express difficult emotions, it is also considered a safe way for children to re-enact traumatic events so as to be able to heal from them (Schaefer & Drews, 2024)

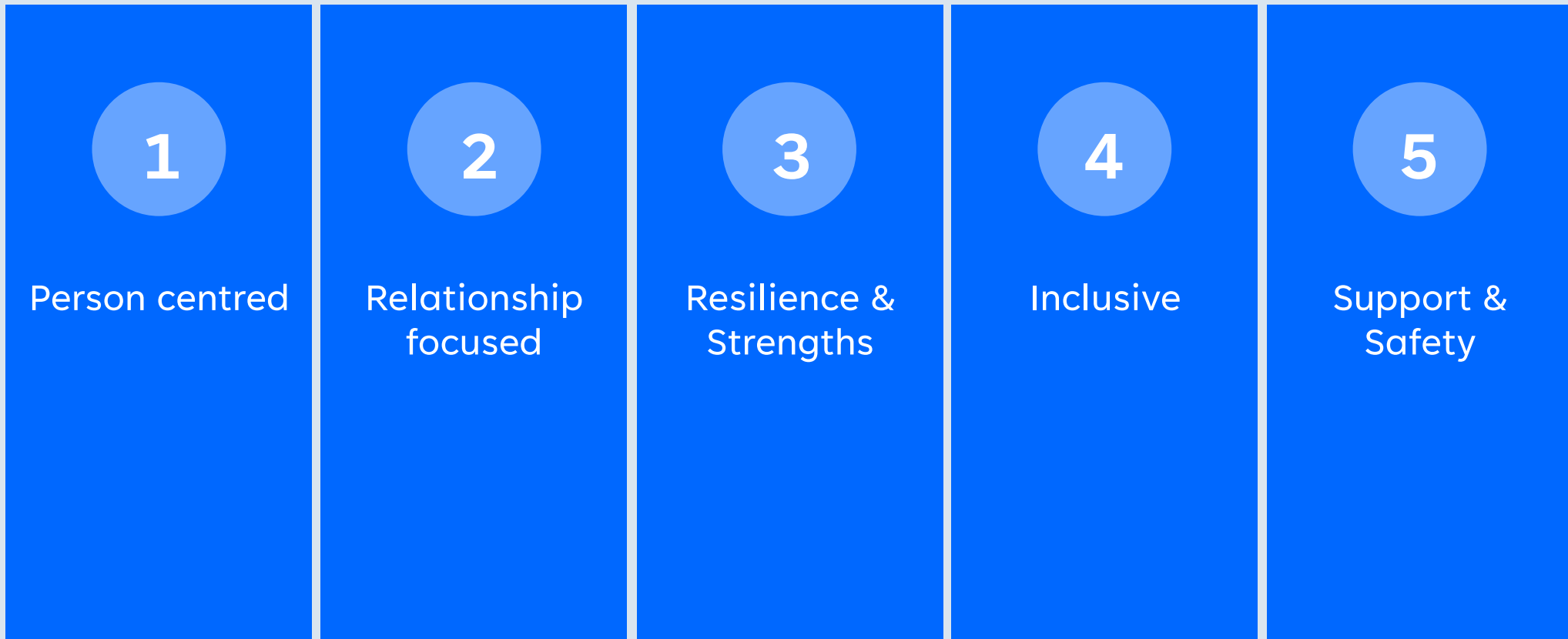
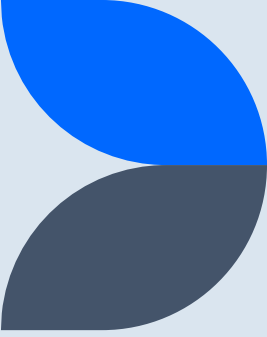


Resilience

Children who were supported to develop a healthy attachment were shown to have higher levels of resilience and were more likely to chose better coping strategies when challenged. Improvements were also seen in academic results, relationships with others, behaviour and in the child's confidence (Giboney wall, 2020)



Wales Trauma Informed Framework



Person centred

A person-centred approach focuses on how to support a child with an ACE, by recognising that the child is an individual who is unique, it focuses on approaches that are most suitable to the child (Sanderson et al., 2024)

A person-centred approach recognises that a child with an ACE may not respond to discipline as other children do, as it may be re-traumatizing and have a negative influence on the child behaviour (Emerson, 2022)

Focusing on strengths and positives within a child builds trusting relationships, confidence and resilience (Sanderson et al., 2024)

The Influence of Positive School Experiences

Children who had safer environments at school were shown to experience fewer negative effects caused by their ACE in adult life (Huges et al., 2025)

Children feel like they have an adult they can trust and talk to (Estyn,2020)

Children with ACEs have better mental health outcomes when schools use TIA in schools (Public Health England, 2021)



Conclusion

TIA in schools support children to build healthier attachments. This influences the child's resilience, confidence, relationships and academic achievements as well as having positive effects on a child's behaviour.

Positive experiences in schools means children experience less of the ill effects of an ACE in adulthood.

The Welsh trauma informed framework is supporting consistency across Wales with educating professionals on how to recognise and respond to trauma.



Thank you

Rebecca Smith

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Declaration of AI usage

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