

PACE Model – Staff Training Handout

The PACE model—developed by Dr. Dan Hughes—is a therapeutic approach that helps early years educators build emotionally secure relationships with children. It stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy.

Why PACE Works

PACE helps children feel safe, valued, and understood. It supports emotional development, encourages positive behaviour, and strengthens the bond between adults and children—at home and in the classroom.

Playfulness



A lightness that breaks through disconnection

Using a light, joyful tone to make interactions fun and engaging.

Example: Turning tidying up into a game or using a silly voice during story time.

Why it matters: It helps children feel relaxed and builds positive connections.

Acceptance



Unconditional acceptance of thoughts feelings and needs

Accepting the child's feelings and experiences without judgment.

Example: "I can see you're really sad because you didn't get a turn."

Why it matters: It shows the child that their emotions are okay, even if their behaviour needs guidance.

Curiosity



Trying to understand what's behind behaviour (non-judgementally)

Gently wondering about the child's thoughts and feelings.

Example: "I wonder what made you feel like shouting just now?"

Why it matters: It helps children understand themselves and feel heard.

Empathy



Connecting with the person's inner world with compassion

Sharing in the child's emotional experience with kindness.

Example: "It's hard when your friend doesn't want to play. That must feel really upsetting."

Why it matters: It builds trust and helps children learn to manage their emotions.

P Playfulness

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A Acceptance

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C Curiosity

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E Empathy

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