

Psychological first aid training

PHE course aimed at those who care or work with children

Children have been uniquely challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic and the global crisis has highlighted the importance of supporting children and their families during these turbulent times.

The Public Health England (PHE) Psychological First Aid Training course begins with an opportunity for self-reflection, suggesting the learner looks back at one's own experience of trauma – recalling what actions or behaviours helped you, perhaps being listened to or signposted to additional support services. It maintained anyone can use Psychological First Aid and that the aim of the training is to reconnect with our existing skill set as individuals. The course is structured into four segments; Prepare, Look, Listen, and Link.

Prepare, highlights the importance of not making assumptions, knowing the background of the child, as well as respecting the dignity and rights of the child and their family. Everybody has a unique and diverse identity, and this affects how we respond to a given situation or trauma.

Look, focuses on being vigilant and sensitive to signs of distress, as changes in behaviour a child might exhibit, can be a reaction to trauma. As practitioners we are in a privileged position and draw upon our existing safeguarding training.

Listen, emphasise being open to conversations, and paying attention to build on our understanding of a given situation or circumstance and respond with empathy. Time to think and time to talk is key. We explore concerns using an active listening approach with phrases such as "tell me a bit about what worries you" or "it's natural to be sad/angry/upset", naming reactions in order to normalise them. We explore concerns and solutions by communicating, "we can talk about it."

Link, directing families to the further support services, agencies and resources available to them. There where an extensive range of links suggested including; Action for Children, AtALoss, the Childhood Bereavement Network, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (CYPMHS), Every Mind Matters, MIND, and Winston's Wish. My own recommendations comes from the Best Start Resource Centre: 'Building Resilience in Young Children' It contains practical tips around resilience and the ability to get through serious life challenges, finding ways to bounce back and thrive.



Beacon House is a specialist therapeutic service for children and families have shared short video entitled: 'The Window of Tolerance Animation', that can help us all to better understand the behaviour of a traumatised child. Every child has his or her unique window of tolerance; inside they are at their personal best, but each child will have triggers which push them outside their window of tolerance. By staying calm as practitioners, with the right support at the right time, a child's stress response will be reduced.

The course is a valuable reminder to better identify the signs of those who are struggling and give them the effective and timely support they need to stay mentally well. I would advocate the course as an opportunity for anyone working with or caring for children to reflect on the need for us all to stay psychologically well.

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