

## Think S for success with attachment building

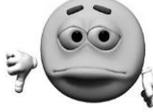
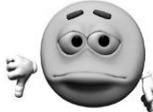
Attachment therapist Dr. Dan Hughes offers these 24 Ss as a way of caring for children who have experienced, neglect, abuse and multiple losses. Practice the first 16 more and the last eight much much less...

### INCREASE

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| <br><b>Safety ✓</b>                              | <p>Being physically present with a child and emotionally available to him helps to develop a secure base and builds attachment. It also provides effective discipline, helps the child develop skills and reduces shame by letting him know he is good to be with. It is important not to isolate the child or get angry, <i>especially</i> when he is distraught and /or behaving badly.</p>  |
| <br><b>Structure, choice, routine, rituals ✓</b> | <p>Reduce the child's stress by structuring their activities and routines and making choices for them or by limiting choice to 'this or that one'. Be predictable by always accepting and validating a child's thoughts, feelings and behaviours, but surprising with the consequences you provide for misdemeanours. Re-attune quickly after any separation, discipline or dysregulation. Be directive and firm with instructions, while remaining attuned and empathetic to the child's difficulties.</p>                            |
| <br><b>Soothing ✓</b>                            | <p>A traumatised child who becomes distressed may be more likely to show rage or fear than to ask for comfort, so stay with the child and introduce soothing in tiny steps, remaining empathic when your care is rejected. Regularly soothing a child helps to co-regulate their distress, teaches self-regulation and self-care. If it is not appropriate to hug, comfort verbally or send home a 'hug token' to parents.</p>   |
| <br><b>Smiling ✓</b>                           | <p>This refers to the atmosphere of your home/school as much as the look on your face. The idea is to create a space where life feels good, where you focus on the positives, e.g. at an aggressive outburst try, "Listen to you! You really know how to show me you are angry." Keep your interactions playful and accepting.</p>   |
| <br><b>Supervision ✓</b>                       | <p>Intensive supervision creates opportunities for a child to succeed, thereby reducing the child's shame response and emotional outbursts. Supervision means being with a child as if they were a toddler, structuring the environment, engaging in a playful way and helping to regulate the child's emotional response. Provide supervision that's a gift not a punishment.</p>   |
| <br><b>Success ✓</b>                           | <p>Children with attachment issues often expect to fail. Help them succeed by matching your expectations to their developmental, not chronological age. If Sasha pinches her sister after sitting beside her for five minutes, practice sitting nicely for two minutes. Stay with her and appreciate how well she's doing. These children also find it hard to learn from routine mistakes. Reducing shame lets a child acknowledge, rather than deny, routine mistakes. Once acknowledged mistakes become learning opportunities.</p> |
| <br><b>Storytelling tone ✓</b>                 | <p>Speaking with a tone of voice like that of telling a story tends to engage a child and hold his attention. He is also likely to be more receptive to your guidance than if you were to use a lecturing tone. Children pay little attention to lectures; they may comply verbally, but there is less true engagement. Ultimately, lectures have less influence on behaviour.</p>   |
| <br><b>Sleep ✓</b>                             | <p>Getting to sleep and staying asleep may be difficult for a child because of fears associated with night-time, separation, the bedroom, the state of being less in control, and because there are few distractions in bed. Not getting enough sleep can seriously affect daytime performance and behaviour levels.</p>   |

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| <br><b>Soup</b> ✓             | <p>Accepting food and sharing family meals is a big part of accepting nurture and feeling like part of the family. Feeding your child gives them the message that they are cared for. In the past they may have been left hungry, fed inappropriately, or roared at to eat. Providing comfort food (for Dan its soup!) can mend a bad day.</p>  |
| <br><b>Seeking meaning</b> ✓  | <p>When you and your child begin to understand why they do certain behaviours it can be easier to change those behaviours. Likewise, it is easier for them to accept your boundaries and consequences, when they understand you are motivated by a desire to care for them and not because you want to punish them. Explaining boundaries to the child in terms like, “because you are worth it”, teaches them that they are worthy of care, reduces shame, makes explicit your intentions, and supports your relationship with them.</p> |
| <br><b>Special</b> ✓          | <p>Every child needs to know they are amazing – it’s what babies learn from good enough birth parents. Your child needs to know that you feel this way about them, that by being your child they are unique, special and separate from every child who is not yours. Discover what is unique about your child and accept them for who they are. This form of acceptance is much better than praise in building self-esteem. As Dan says, “<i>Discover the song that is in their heart and sing it to them when they forget it.</i>”</p>   |
| <br><b>Sense of humour</b> ✓ | <p>A sense of joy, playfulness and humour is connecting and repairing. Humour should never be directed at the child but should be about having a shared sense of fun. Humour helps us all take conflict less personally. It is often part of the repair of relationships and helps create good memories. Humour puts problems in perspective.</p>   |
| <br><b>Stretching</b> ✓     | <p>As parents and carers we may need to stretch and modify our childrearing beliefs and practices to meet the individual needs of a child who has experienced trauma. The way our parents raised us or the way we have raised birth children may have been ‘good enough’, but is unlikely to match the level of intensive, specialised care a traumatised child requires.</p>   |
| <br><b>Sorry</b> ✓          | <p>Sorry is one of the most powerful words in your vocabulary. Apologising when you get it wrong increases your child’s respect for you, models repair and shows that everyone makes mistakes. It also teaches the child that they are important to you. Saying it and meaning it can help to calm the worst battles or prevent them taking place.</p>  |
| <br><b>Sensory</b> ✓        | <p>Because sensory motor skills develop early in life, they can be compromised by neglect or abuse in infancy. An affected child may have difficulty regulating behaviour and emotions, paying attention, or may have problems with co-ordination, balance, movement, pressure and touch. A sensory integration assessment can often help with all of these.</p>  |
| <br><b>Self care</b> ✓      | <p>Caring for traumatised children is hard work and if we don’t take care of ourselves we can have trouble regulating our emotions or feeling good about life. We need to protect ourselves and our adult relationships, participate in activities and spend time with people who help us feel good about life. Why? Because we’re worth it!</p>  |

## DECREASE

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|  <p><b>Shame</b> ✘</p>         | <p>Children often have such a deep sense of shame caused by how they were treated in the birth family that they can't understand why you would want to care for them. You can't talk a child out of his shame. You need to express empathy for his sense of feeling bad, and gently explore how it feels, how he manages it, and where this belief may have come from.</p>  |
|  <p><b>Sarcasm</b> ✘</p>       | <p>When adults try to limit their anger over a child's behaviour, they may express it as sarcasm. Sarcasm triggers greater shame within the child than a direct expression of brief anger. This is because he becomes confused as to how genuine the adult's thoughts and feelings are toward him and he is less able to trust them. When using PLACE, always do so with genuine empathy, curiosity and sincerity to avoid sounding mocking or sarcastic.</p>   |
|  <p><b>Shouting</b> ✘</p>      | <p>Anger from adults confirms a child's belief that he is bad. To change this belief we need to avoid threats, swearing, name calling and angry, negative or ambiguous facial expressions. Children with attachment difficulties tend to read ambiguous faces as sad or mad; they may interpret mild annoyance as rage, and hear adult disapproval as, "You hate me". If you get angry, express it directly about a specific behaviour. Give a quick alternative, not a lecture and repair the relationship asap.</p> |
|  <p><b>Smacking</b> ✘</p>     | <p>It may seem obvious but it still needs to be said that smacking a child is likely to activate terror, shame and/or rage within the child who may associate the smack with being physically abused in the past. A traumatised child may not trust adults who smack and may struggle to resolve the effects of past abuse and neglect.</p>   |
|  <p><b>Stimulation</b> ✘</p> | <p>Neglect and/or abuse in infancy causes deficits in brain function that make it hard for children with attachment difficulties to regulate their emotions - even positive ones! These children need life to be low key so they don't become hyper aroused or stressed. When a child becomes distressed or behaviour deteriorates ask yourself, "Was he over stimulated?" A big party, a funfair, or too many presents at Christmas may be as difficult to manage as a problem at school.</p>                        |
|  <p><b>Secrets</b> ✘</p>     | <p>Children need to know their history, so don't keep secrets about their past because you think it is too difficult to share. They need to know how they got to be who they are and where they are. Difficult information can create challenges in the short term but ultimately it will build a relationship of trust. Obviously, we need to consider carefully when, how and who should do the telling.</p>  |
|  <p><b>Seclusion</b> ✘</p>   | <p>Time out for bad behaviour is likely to leave a child feeling abandoned and unsafe. We don't isolate children for being sad so why do it when they're angry? Staying calm and present can help a child stay regulated. Avoid lecturing, staring or controlling behaviour. Let her know you are available if she needs anything.</p>  |
|  <p><b>Shoulds</b> ✘</p>     | <p>Expecting that a child should be able to do something because of his chronological age is setting him up for failure and shame. Match your expectations to the child's developmental age and what he can achieve consistently, then gradually encourage a bit more, while remaining patient. Children with attachment difficulties may be age appropriate in certain skills and behind in other, less obvious, skills that can cause continuous challenges for them.</p>   |

## The PLACE attitude – in parenting and caring for attachment-resistant children

In his book *Building the Bonds of Attachment*, Dan Hughes talks about 'The PLACE Attitude' that adults need to help a hurt child. When adults work in this way children can make huge progress even in the absence of other strategies. It is not easy, but it can make a huge difference to relationships when practised most of the time.



### Playful Loving/Liking Accepting Curious Empathic

Being **playful** can be achieved by keeping the tone light and upbeat, smiling, ruffling a child's hair when walking past, playing hide'n'seek when they get in from school, or giving a quick hug for no specific reason. Appreciation is better than praise yet praise can be positive when it is kept specific, short, low key or done with pizzazz – a pretend fanfare, whistle, or victory dance when they get their spellings right or remember to pick up their toys.



**Loving/liking-** Adults should show the child that they love or like them *especially* when the child misbehaves. This helps to move the child from the damaging effects of shame to the healthy development of guilt. If you do lose your temper, apologise and reconnect with the child quickly afterwards.

**Accepting** the child for who they are, not what they achieve is important for hurt children. This does not mean that their behaviour has to be accepted! Remain calm and say something like, 'I can see you are upset about this. That doesn't mean you are allowed to hurt people.'

Being **curious** - wondering aloud why the child is behaving in a certain way - can be helpful. 'I wonder why you are shouting so much today', 'Isn't it amazing that you just remembered that (particular event) today,' can help a child reflect on their actions and is usually more effective in raising awareness than asking directly what's wrong. A child who has 'switched off' their feelings may not know what is bothering them, they may say something trivial, or withhold the information through lack of trust. Being curious, or making an educated guess (not assuming you know for sure), 'I'm thinking you might be worried about the spelling gala on Friday' can be an excellent way to open a discussion, in which you can listen attentively and not interrupt.

**Empathy** is **the** most important quality we can have when working with hurt children. To understand the child's needs we must put ourselves into the child's shoes. It is important not only to feel empathy but to convey it to the child, 'I can see that this is hard for you', 'Your knee is really red, I bet it hurts.' Empathy allows the child to feel their feelings, not suppress them. It encourages the release of grief and rage which, if buried, can continue to cause emotional and behavioural problems. Adults should empathise with the child before putting disciplinary measures in place and while employing those measures (eg, consequences). The adult must be genuinely empathic, not flippant or sarcastic.