

Closing Gaps: Social Disadvantage Adverse Childhood Experiences

Please enjoy the complimentary banana during this session!

Pre-Training Challenge

Prior to the training you were asked the following questions:

1. Rather than apples, why might this be a better saying for a child: 'A banana a day keeps the doctor away!'"
2. What is the difference between a mentor and a coach?
3. What is the amygdala and what is an amygdala hijack?
4. When are four aces less than a good hand?
5. What is an Emotional Schema?

My Reasons for the Quiz

'Pre-learning'

In education, **pre-learning** (also known as *pre-teaching* or *preparatory learning*) refers to the process of introducing students to key concepts, vocabulary, or skills **before** they encounter them in formal lessons. The goal is to **build background knowledge** and **boost confidence**, making it easier for learners to engage with new material when it's formally taught.

Key Features of Pre-learning:

- **Introduces foundational concepts** ahead of time.
- **Reduces cognitive load** during the main lesson.
- **Supports differentiated instruction**, especially for students who may need extra help.
- Often used in **flipped classrooms**, where students explore content at home before applying it in class.

Examples:

- Watching a short video on photosynthesis before a science lesson.
- Reviewing key vocabulary before reading a complex text.
- Practising basic arithmetic before tackling word problems.

Benefits:

- Improves **comprehension and retention**.
- Encourages **active participation** in class.
- Helps **close learning gaps**, especially for students with additional needs or those learning in a second language.

Strategy: Explore the potential of pre-learning for 'homework'. Sensitive handled and resourced in can be especially advantageous to disadvantaged learners.

A **form tutor** or **class teacher** can use pre-learning in the morning or after school to provide **targeted, supportive, and confidence-building interventions** for individual students—especially those who may be disadvantaged or need extra help. Here's how it can be done effectively:

Morning Sessions (Before School or During Tutor Time)

These are ideal for **light-touch, confidence-boosting activities**:

Quick Previews of the Day's Lessons

- Go over key vocabulary or concepts that will appear in lessons later that day.
- Use flashcards, short videos, or mini whiteboards for interactive engagement.

Guided Reading or Vocabulary Work

- Pre-teach tricky words from a text they'll read in English or history.
- Discuss meanings, pronunciation, and usage in context.

Mini Quizzes or Retrieval Practice

- Use low-stakes quizzes to activate prior knowledge and build familiarity.
- Tools like Quizlet or printed question cards work well.

Confidence Coaching

- Talk through what's coming up in lessons and help the student set small goals.
- Reassure them that they've already seen some of the material.

After-School Sessions

These can be slightly longer and more in-depth:

Preview Next Day's Content

- Introduce new topics with diagrams, videos, or simplified explanations.
- Let students ask questions in a low-pressure setting.

Use of Technology

- Assign or explore interactive resources (e.g. BBC Bitesize, Oak National Academy).
- Let students practise using apps or tools they'll use in class.

One-to-One Scaffolding

- Break down complex tasks (like essay writing or maths problems) into manageable steps.
- Model how to approach them and let the student try with support.

Link to Homework

- Help students understand homework tasks by previewing the skills or knowledge needed.
- This builds independence and reduces frustration at home.

- Keep sessions short- 20 minutes or less. If after school 20 minutes, then a movement break then last twenty minutes.
- Concentrate on one or two elements- don't overload.
- Use visuals, manipulatives and real life culturally sensitive examples.
- Track progress informally to see what works.
- Individual students or small groups.

Quiz Answers

Cognitive Overload Warning ! Perhaps just listen: you can read the notes later.

1. Why Bananas Are Great for a Growing Brain!

Here's why bananas are considered brain-boosting superfoods:

1. **Rich in Vitamin B6:** Vitamin B6 helps produce neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which support mood, memory, and attention. It also aids in nervous system development.
2. **Natural Source of Glucose:** bananas provide natural sugars that give the brain a steady energy supply—perfect for staying focused during school.
3. **Contains Potassium:** Potassium supports healthy nerve function and brain activity by helping with electrical signals and blood flow.
4. **Provides Magnesium:** Magnesium helps the brain form new connections and manage stress, both important for learning.
Contains Fibre: Fibre helps regulate blood sugar levels, preventing energy crashes that can affect concentration.
5. **Easy to Digest and Portable:** Bananas are a convenient, no-prep snack—great for breakfast or a quick energy boost.

2. Mentoring = guidance from experience Coaching = support to unlock potential Teachers can act as both.

Strategy: giving up a few minutes of your time in a regular and structured way to an individual child can be highly valuable. It might be done through asking the child to help doing something regularly- e.g. getting books prepared for the afternoon/a lesson etc.

The **amygdala** is a small, almond-shaped cluster of nuclei located deep within the brain's **temporal lobes**. It plays a crucial role in processing **emotions**, especially those related to **fear, threat, and survival**.

What Does the Amygdala Do?

The amygdala is part of the **limbic system**, which is involved in emotional regulation, memory, and arousal. Its main functions include:

- **Detecting threats** and triggering the body's **fight, flight, or freeze** response.
- **Processing emotions** like fear, anger, and pleasure.
- **Forming emotional memories**, especially those linked to survival.
- Influencing **decision-making** under stress or emotional pressure.

3. What Is an Amygdala Hijack?

An **amygdala hijack** occurs when the amygdala **overrides the brain's rational thinking** (prefrontal cortex) in response to a perceived threat. This can lead to:

- **Impulsive reactions** (e.g. shouting, hitting, running away).
- **Emotional outbursts** or shutting down.
- Difficulty thinking clearly or solving problems.

It's a survival mechanism—but in modern life, it can be triggered by **non-life-threatening stress**, like a harsh tone of voice or a challenging classroom situation.

Why Is It More Common Among Disadvantaged Children?

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are **more likely to experience chronic stress**, such as:

- Poverty

- Unstable housing
- Food insecurity
- Exposure to violence or neglect
- Lack of emotional support

This **toxic stress** can cause the amygdala to become **overactive** and the prefrontal cortex (which helps regulate emotions) to develop more slowly. As a result:

- The brain becomes **hyper-alert to danger**, even in safe environments.
- Children may **react emotionally** or aggressively to minor triggers.
- Learning becomes harder because the brain is in **survival mode**, not learning mode.



4.The Negative Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur during childhood, such as abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction. These experiences can have serious and lasting impacts on a child's development, health, and future outcomes.

Impact on Brain Development

- Disrupts brain architecture and development.
- Impairs emotional regulation, memory, and decision-making.

Mental Health Challenges

- Increased risk of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts.
- Higher likelihood of behavioural and emotional disorders.

Physical Health Problems

- Greater risk of chronic illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.
- Stress-related changes in immune and hormonal systems.

Educational Difficulties

- Lower academic achievement and concentration.
- Increased school absences and risk of exclusion.

Risky Behaviours

- Higher rates of substance misuse and early sexual activity.
- Increased likelihood of criminal behaviour.

Social and Emotional Struggles

- Difficulty forming healthy relationships.
- Increased aggression or social withdrawal.

The Importance of Early Support

Early intervention through safe relationships, mental health support, and trauma-informed education can significantly reduce the long-term impact of ACEs and help children thrive.

5. Emotional Schemas

Children from deprived backgrounds are more likely to suffer from NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL SCHEMAS.

Emotional Schemas are beliefs we hold about ourselves. Often these beliefs are accepted regardless of how damaging they might be to the individual who holds them. Such negative emotional schemas can persist throughout life and get replayed in many situations such as by young people in their schoolwork and their friendships and by adults in their relationships and views about the world and others.

Negative schemas seem to be most frequently acquired in childhood and adolescence with young people adopting firm ideas about themselves that they have learnt through parents, teachers and other adults. If you are constantly being treated as something or called something for long enough then you begin believing it, even if the belief is self-damaging and self-limiting. Many people believe themselves to be stupid or lazy or even wicked because of this effect. Abused kids can come to believe they must be to blame in some way for the horrible things that happen to them.

Strategy

As a teacher, realistically, you can't help every student in your class in developing positive emotional schemas. Maintaining a confident and calm demeanor, showing your care and interest can, of course, significantly impact children's feelings of trust in you and their overall feelings of safety in the environment you create for them.

You might also reflect how the ethos of your classroom and the way you facilitate and respond to children might impact specific schemas related to confidence, self-esteem, resilience and self-empowerment.

You can also help one or two children at a time in a more proactive and focused way and have a significant impact on many over the course of a year.

Activity

Working in Pairs Select one of the children below. Discuss how their negative emotional schema might present in school and reflect upon the question that follows.



Thomas has a negative security schema. Young people who hold such schemas may be constantly afraid of relationships ending due to fights, breakups, affairs, divorces, or death even. Or they may believe that anyone who would want them must per se be physically or emotionally unhealthy, and will therefore be unable to take care of them. How might you help Thomas alleviate his issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and his peers?



Ellie has an issue to do with trust. Young people with a negative trust schema may be constantly afraid of being physically or emotionally hurt by other people, through physical bullying or violence or through words or lying about them. They might even believe that other people always do this to harm them on purpose. How might you help Ellie alleviate her issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and her peers?



Charlie has issues to do with self-perception. Young people with a negative self-perception schema might believe that they are so different from everyone else that they will never be able to fit in or be accepted by others. How might you help Charlie alleviate his issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and his peers?



Aymee has issues to do with support. Young people with a negative support schema can believe that they will never get the care and support they need. How might you help Aymee alleviate her issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and her peers?



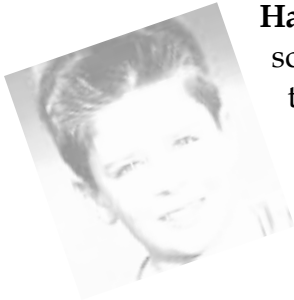
Aroon has issues to do with independence. Children with a negative dependency schema can believe that they can't live or enjoy life without the constant emotional support of someone else, usually someone of importance in their life like a parent or a friend. Sometimes the child with such an issue doesn't even feel whole without that other person close by. How might you help Aroon alleviate his issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and his peers?



Chantelle has issues to do with fragility. Children with a negative fragility schema can believe that they are exceptionally at risk of getting physically or mentally hurt or contracting some type of disease or illness. How might you help Chantelle alleviate her issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and her peers?



Manny has issues to do with failure. Children with a negative success schema might believe that they have never succeeded, nor can they ever succeed, no matter what the task. How might you help Manny alleviate his issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and his peers?



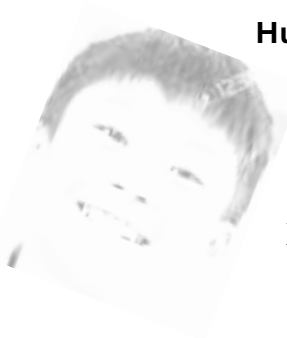
Harry has issues with self-regulation. Children with a negative self-regulation schema might be unable to tolerate any type of discomfort or setback when trying to achieve something and so they simply give up. Alternatively, they may be unable to control their emotional outbursts and impulses. How might you help Harry alleviate his issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and his peers?



Danielle has issues with assertiveness. Children with a negative self-assertion schema might feel they are constantly forced to give up their own needs by others who threaten to do something or withhold something if they don't comply with their wishes. People with this schema willingly give up their own needs in order to meet someone else's needs. Often, they feel guilty and are afraid that if they don't meet the needs of the other person that person will suffer in some way or will not like them. How might you help Danielle alleviate her issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and her peers?



Sue has negativity issues. Children with a negativity schema may only pay attention to the sad and difficult parts of life, such as troubles, grief, pain, destruction, and the loss of life. They also fail to see, or ignore, anything good that might happen. How might you help Sue alleviate her issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and her peers?



Hu has issues to do with self-assurance. Children with a negative self-assurance schema may be constantly trying to gain the appreciation and support of others. As a result, they fail to develop a sense of valid self-worth because all of their value is dependent on what other people think of them. How might you help Hu alleviate his issues through everyday classroom interactions with you and his peers?

Sharing of Ideas

A space has been left for you to make notes from your colleagues' reflections:

Do you know of a student who might have potential issues related to emotional schemas?

How can you help alleviate their issues?

What are you going to try?

Pro Bono

I am trained as a Childline counsellor and provide coaching to children and young people. I am happy to provide you with **free** confidential support and advice to help you assist an individual child or children. Email me initially and we can arrange a telephone call or Facetime etc-
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