

Supporting Positive Friendships with Looked After Children

Friendships and Playground Time: Facilitating Looked After Children to make friends is a great opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills, because it gives us an opportunity to revisit and consolidate different developmental stages. It provides the child a chance to modify their attachment template and hopefully adapt/update/improve it with new positive experiences of those who are close to them.

For children with attachment difficulties structure will need to be provided especially during free/play time. They will tend not to have a healthy framework to manage play time. Adults may need to initiate and supervise games and activities or conversations between peers, with a view to having less supervised times as they develop their skills to manage such interactions independently.

Sometimes, these children will require support to get rid of the 'naughty child' label in the playground. As a way of changing their peer's perceptions, the teacher could engage them in a research project, paired with a good role model to find out what games the other children like to play on playground. They would investigate what equipment, space, time is needed. They could help organise (with teaching support) different groups to play at playground times, with rules being explicitly taught. Allowing the Looked After Child to lead this research project would help themselves and others to see them in a different social role in the playground.

The 'Talkabout' series by Alex Kelly offers explicit social skills training on body proximity, eye contact, and managing conflicts and is a good resource for use in school with Looked After Children. It must also be noted that restorative justice practises and resources are often very useful when working with Looked After Children.

