Facilitators Guide

SIREN FILMS | Developing an effective key person approach

Session 1.4

Providing a secure base and a safe haven

This session explores two distinguishing features of attachment behaviour, a secure base and a safe haven. These two types of attachment behaviour are often seen together. Practitioners will have the opportunity to observe children displaying these behaviours and the responses they receive from their carers and to reflect on what they as practitioners can do in their daily practice to ensure that they are providing all of their key children with a secure base and a safe haven and support their attachment.

Video - Providing a secure base and a safe haven

John Bowlby who developed the initial theory on attachment, describes 4 distinguishing features:

- *A secure base*
- *A safe haven*
- *Proximity maintenance*
- *Separation distress*

In this session we explore the first 2 features and in the following session (1.5) we explore the last 2 features.

A secure base: *Key person is available to the child. The child has a strong sense of security with key person and feels able to explore his environment knowing key person is there for him, developing independence by feeling secure.*

A safe haven: *Whilst exploring their environment and relationships there will be times when the child needs reassurance or comforting and will return back to their key person to recharge and feel secure again before moving away again to explore.*

> "There is a subtle skilful balance to be made between helping a child have the confidence to be adventurous and stretch their capacities, from a secure base with their key person, and trying to force the child to do these things by not allowing him to have a secure base with his key person in the first place."
>
> Peter Elfer et.al.2012

You may wish to pause the video at this point to ask practitioners what they understand by this statement. The statement refers to the understanding that a child needs to feel secure and 'at home' with their carer to then feel confident enough to venture further or to try something new. When a child needs security, comfort and nearness to their carer they are dependent on their carer. Pushing a child to be independent will not work unless their needs for dependency have or are being met.

Task 1

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 1

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 2

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 3

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 4

The following clips show children at play using their key people as secure bases and safe havens. The video clips run back to back so you may wish to pause the video at various points to discuss what practitioners are observing or you may prefer to run the whole video and discuss at the end. Whilst watching these clips practitioners are asked to jot down their observations and thoughts from the next 2 questions.

- What evidence do you see of children using the key person as a secure base to explore from and begin to take risks?

- What evidence do you see of children seeking out their key person as a safe haven when they need comfort and reassurance?

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 1

- More daring when key person very close. Needs help with interaction from keyperson
- Runs back to key person each time she feels unsecure

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 2

- Copying the older child, is unsure with her risk of sliding backwards but knows key person is near by, immediately tells key person of the risk she's taken
- Happy when she's doing what feels like a really difficult thing on the tyre, knowing her key person is totally supporting her

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 3

- Says he can't do the climbing wall but with support from his key person verbally, he carries on
- Looks round to check key person is there when unsure

Secure base & safe haven - video clip 4

- Socialising confidently with a small group
- When things go wrong immediately runs to key person. Tells his key perosn he's upset but he's relying on her to sort out his upset. Although five years old - he still needs a secure base and support to help him develop self-regulation

  Note: Does adult fully acknowlegde child's feelings here? She says"that seems fair enough..." But it doesn't seem fair to Finn and he's very upset about it.

Reflection

- What do the practitioners do to provide a secure base and a safe haven for these children?

  Possible thoughts: Available and near when child is distressed or lacking confidence, nearby but not so close as child is developing confidence and exploring, available to sort out problems and upsets

- What differences do you see in the way these children use their key person to feel secure and as a safe haven?

  Possible thoughts: Younger or more dependent children need carer nearer to feel secure and return to more frequently as a safe haven.

Action to be taken

From the discussions that you have had with your staff team in this session, are there any issues with organisation, environment or personal that need attention?

Perhaps ask the team to discuss what they would like to change in daily practice that would support them in being more 'available'…

Can any of the points raised be actioned? - Today? Next week? Over the coming months?