

# EmBRACE A vehicle to change culture through an ACE lens

Emotionally & Brain Resilient to Adverse Childhood Experience

*EmBRACE is an established, consultant led, school improvement approach for schools/colleges*

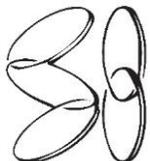
*A paradigm shift is needed in our education system to overcome the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences and, become a local and national priority. EmBRACE is an innovative programme, taking the emerging evidence on childhood adversity together with the neuroscience, and is implemented within an educational setting. Through EmBRACE, schools and colleges are provided with a structure to become ACE-informed, bringing about a culture change through an ACE-informed lens that not only improves outcomes for our students and institutions, but also supports our staff and parents / caregivers.*

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are a complex set of related childhood experiences which can either directly affect a child/young person (sexual, emotional and physical abuse; physical and emotional neglect) and, indirectly affect them due to the environment in which they live, often referred to as household dysfunction (such as living with a parent/caregiver who has mental illness; is incarcerated; has substance dependency; where there is domestic abuse or, loss due to separation / divorce).

The research provides a strong dose-response relationship between ACE and poor physical and mental health, chronic disease, lower academic success in childhood and, into adulthood. It also shows the relationship between ACEs and violence; if we could prevent ACEs, violence would be halved – for both victims and perpetrators of violence. Children and young people who are exposed to ACEs have increased – and sustained - levels of stress.

When exposed to stressful situations, the fight, flight or freeze response floods our brain with corticotrophin-releasing hormones (CRH), a normal and protective response. However, when repeatedly exposed to ACEs, more CRH is produced by the brain, which results in the child being constantly in heightened state of alert, constantly in fight, flight or freeze mode and do not reach the natural recovery mode. In this heightened neurological state a young person is unable to think rationally and it is physiologically impossible for them to learn.

**EmBRACE** (Emotional and Brain Development to Adverse Childhood Experiences) within an educational setting is an innovative programme which provides a framework for educational settings to meet the challenge of addressing the factors which directly affects brain development and subsequently learning as a result of repeated exposure to ACEs. EmBRACE provides a school or college with a structure to become ACE Informed, bringing about a culture change through an ACE-informed lens - that not only improves outcomes for students, but also supports



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staff and parents too. One key area of EmBRACE focused on working with staff to build strong relationships with students and/or parents to help them understand how resilience can be developed to combat the negative impact of ACEs – therefore reducing the consequences of ACEs.

EmBRACE is different to other wellbeing programmes. EmBRACE is not a process or a training package. EmBRACE focuses on a change management approach, creating the conditions in which an ACE-informed culture is developed and enhanced. EmBRACE is a vehicle that leads to a cultural change of our staff and clients, all through an ACE lens.

The strength of EmBRACE is that it is implemented over a time period to embed the thinking, the understanding, the responses and consider how the 'organisation' becomes ACE-informed. EmBRACE also challenges resistant to change and recognises that each establishment is unique. Particular emphasis is given to leadership and managing change which impacts positively on teaching and learning and builds capacity within a school, contributing to the monitoring of progression and individual needs of the child/young person.

The delivery model supports staff in recognising how childhood adversity impacts on brain development. Once staff understand this, which is a challenging learning curve for many, they will be guided to identify effectively the 'fight, flight or freeze' behavioural patterns in children, young people and families who they work with. This approach allows them to look at their approach and to implement ACE-informed and trauma enforced strategies, including the building of strong relationships, within their own working environments. Recognising that staff can change their practice, resulting in a positive contribution to culture change is a significant step forward, as is educating parents and families. There are various components to the EmBRACE programme in order to provide a structure to inform the action planning, monitoring, evaluation process and meet the current national Ofsted standards for schools.

Examples of the various change tools implemented in order to shape culture change through an ACE lens are provided below:

- Audit and strategic planning
- Phased training cycle for all staff
- Consultant-led development group



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- Coaching model which supports staff to 'buy into' a trauma-informed approach and also challenge staff, in a constructive manner, who are resistant to the change process
- Student focus group
- Setting up a trauma informed team, which includes informing and supporting parents
- Sharing of good practise through case studies
- Monitoring and evaluating

When schools engage with EmBRACE they are demonstrating their commitment to continual self-improvement and driving forward their vision for cultural change. There are advantages for staff, students and the opportunities that arise for auditing polices under a new lens. Staff may have significant ACE scores that have influenced/ continue to influence their lives. As a result of this some staff often mismanage situations and escalate rather than de-escalate. Subsequently, staff have been helped to understand their own actions and there have been opportunities to reinforce behaviour management strategies.

There have been different conversations, instigated by the pupils themselves who have recognised the impact that their ACEs are having on their behaviour within school and how they are behaving. Previously, these discussions would not have taken place and these very students would have remained undetected and struggled with their school work and, their behaviour.

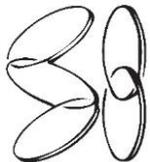
Staff attending the workshops have been able to consider their teaching groups from a wellbeing perspective, subsequently identified students that were potentially of concern. In each case students felt able to open up to discuss their levels of anxiety and stress due to their adversities.

Some staff felt scared when students opened up to them and did not feel comfortable as this exposed them to safe guarding procedures that they may not have experienced before. Support was offered to those staff who were then able to develop their own confidence and model strategies which could be used in the future.

## School Adoption of ACE principles, leading to a significant cultural change

- ✓ Creation of an EmbrACE working group of teachers sharing good practice and able to lead by example.
- ✓ Consistency of approach and reinforcement of school behaviour and de-escalation techniques.

- ✓ Amendment of whole school policy to embed ACE approach.
- ✓ Whole school well-being survey to identify areas of specific focus and supplement existing PCSHE curriculum, pastoral and behaviour management systems.
- ✓ Bespoke training package for learning support staff.



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**This is what one Year 10 Male Student, who is identified as both an Able Learner and Pupil Premium, had to say about his experience:**

'The workshops are helping. They are making me think more and I need to develop more of a growth mind-set. After the brain workshop I knew what was happening when you get stressed out, so when it happened it was less scary. I now want to push myself. I still stress and worry about the expectations from my teachers and parents. Since the workshops started my teachers have made comments about how happy I have been and could see that I was in a better mood. I am now learning things better. In English I have been in more of a productive mood and listened more carefully. In the past I have never got a mark which was *'a good piece of work'* before. I know I get stressed and do need help. I now feel more confident to talk to one of my teachers'.

**This is what one Year 10 Male Student, who is identified as both an Able Learner and Pupil Premium Student, had to say about his experience:**

'The growth mind-set workshop was informative and it has helped me. I can now decide what I need to do.

For example, with my football. I was not in the football team but because I applied a growth mind-set I am now on the football team. I feel happy and proud after achieving this.

People said that I was rubbish but I didn't listen to them and I continued to turn up for training and then got into the team.

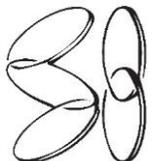
A growth mind-set has helped me with my English work and learning vocab etc. I never learnt spellings before and winged it, but now I check them every day. (At the beginning of the year: Spelling 7, Meaning 6, Sentence 0 now 10/10 for each aspect).

At the beginning of the year I wasn't learning. I would copy somebody else's work but now I have motivated myself and am on target. The workshops have helped as I have been stressed out. In English sir talks about GCSE and I can see the connection'.

I have also used the breathing techniques once or twice at home and have had less arguments. They have helped me build stronger relationships with siblings. I now want to concentrate on time management'.

**This is what one Year 10 Female Student, who is identified as both an Able Learner and Pupil Premium, had to say about his**

'I used the breathing techniques today when I had a French speaking test as I got nervous for it. The breathing helped me calm down. I managed to stay calm and then think clearly. Whilst breathing in preparation for the French exam I kept saying to myself 'I can do this'. I did really good on the test. I will continue to use the breathing techniques.



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'I'm picking up on signs and reading body language'

'It's about knowing a child and knowing something's up without them having to say anything.'

'I'm listening more'

'More children have opened up because I am now more aware of the impact of positive relationships.'

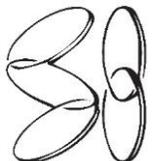
'I understand it is not just about a student getting away with something. I realised how important it is to be consistent, fair and set clear boundaries. It is important that you do follow through with everything. This provides a safe environment as the student know what s/he can and cannot do. Once a student knows how much empathy you have for them they respond better.'

## What the Staff Say:

'Children will become more resilient if they are treated with empathy, consistency and respect.'

'Give the students positive affirmations to help them build up resilient skills.'

'Have faith and believe in the students, even when they don't believe in themselves.'



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