

## ■ kca exercises

# What is a Five to Thrive approach?

Recent research on the structure and function of the human brain makes it clear that our brains work best when we feel safe. The key to optimal brain function lies in the regulation of stress hormones.

Brains develop in response to challenging experience but only when we can regulate the stress that is produced by challenges. If for any reason we cannot regulate the stress it becomes toxic and brain activity closes down. At that point we need access to someone else who will hold us in their own mind (mindfulness), connect with us and self-regulate (soothing, co-regulation) and prompt integrated brain activity (stimulation, co-learning).

Five to Thrive identifies a sequence of five activities that build healthy brains through mindful co-regulation and mindful co-learning: RESPOND – ENGAGE – RELAX – PLAY – TALK. This sequence can be observed whenever humans are relating with loving connectedness, so Five to Thrive identifies a key sequence in the formation of attachment relationships. Feeling safe relies on brain functions that are developed through secure attachment relationships. And feeling safe enables our brains to function optimally throughout life.

### ***A Five to Thrive approach creates services which support optimal brain function – services in which everyone feels safe***

Ensuring optimal brain function is a health and safety issue. When brains are closed down by unregulated stress people are traumatised. Traumatized people are at risk of physical and mental health problems, losing the ability to self-regulate their feelings and behaviour, being unable to think clearly or process information accurately, and becoming unable to participate in positive social relationships. Settings that provide services for children and families are at risk of harm from the behaviour of traumatised people, and from the contagion of stress spreading throughout the establishment. Every service provided for human beings needs to be able to demonstrate that it is supporting optimal brain function.

Services need to be able to demonstrate that every significant group of stakeholders feels safe within the service provision. Since attachment is the key to feeling safe, and therefore the key to optimal brain function, service providers need to be able to establish a structured and evidenced Five to Thrive approach to address the needs of each group of stakeholders, and then to show the impact of this approach in practice. Establishing an evidence base for this approach within a service would:

- Identify each stakeholder group
- Show a structured approach to meeting the optimal brain function needs of each of these groups
- Provide examples of the outcomes of this approach for each of these groups

## ■ kca exercises

### **Stakeholders and relational approaches**

We identify five key groups for whom service providers need to be able to demonstrate that they are providing a service within which people feel safe. Five to Thrive provides a relational approach promoting positive outcomes for each stakeholder group:

- Vulnerable children
  - Promoting recovery from trauma
- All children
  - Promoting positive behaviour
- Parents
  - Promoting positive parenting
- Staff (everyone who works in, or in association with, the service)
  - Promoting staff well-being
- External stakeholders (other professional settings and the wider community)
  - Promoting shared knowledge and practice knowledge and practice

## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 1: Your experience of theory in practice

Think individually about your own experience of using an understanding of attachment, trauma and resilience in your day to day provision of services to children and families, and jot down examples of situations or events where a relational approach has been used. What happened? What was the outcome?

With vulnerable children	Enabling vulnerable children to stabilise (mindful co-regulating so that the child can self-regulate), to integrate their experience (mindful co-learning so that the child can process experience and make sense of their world), and to become socially adaptive (mindful co-learning to help the child to gain empathy and develop social skills)
With all children	Responding to behaviour with both mindful co-regulation (empathy) and mindful co-learning (guidance)
With parents	Enabling parents to understand the part they play in building and maintaining healthy brain function through their relationship with their child

## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 1 continued: Your experience of theory in practice

With staff	Staff at all levels having access to a relationship which enables them to maintain optimal brain function
With external stakeholders	Sharing knowledge and practice with other relevant professionals and with the wider community
Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?	
Make a note of any key points	

## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 2: Respond

Read the 'Respond' section in the Five to Thrive guide. Now jot down some examples of how your own service promotes, or could promote, responsiveness:

- in direct work with children and young people
- in work with parents
- in relationships between staff
- in team-working with external stakeholders

Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?

As a group, decide your top three practice tips for promoting responsiveness in work with children and young people and their families

## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 3: Engage

Read the 'Engage' section in the Five to Thrive guide. Now jot down some examples of how your own service promotes, or could promote, engagement:

- in direct work with children and young people
- in work with parents
- in relationships between staff
- in team-working with external stakeholders

Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?

As a group, decide your top three practice tips for promoting engagement in work with children and young people and their families

## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 4: Relax

Read the 'Relax' section in the Five to Thrive guide. Now jot down some examples of how your own service promotes, or could promote, self-regulation:

- in direct work with children and young people
- in work with parents
- in relationships between staff
- in team-working with external stakeholders

Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?

As a group, decide your top three practice tips for promoting self-regulation in work with children and young people and their families

## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 5: Play

Read the 'Play' section in the Five to Thrive guide. Now jot down some examples of how your own service promotes, or could promote, playfulness (non-verbal communication activating right-brain activity):

- in direct work with children and young people
- in work with parents
- in relationships between staff
- in team-working with external stakeholders

Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?

As a group, decide your top three practice tips for promoting playfulness in work with children and young people and their families



## ■ kca exercises

### Exercise 6: Talk

Read the 'Talk' section in the Five to Thrive guide. Now jot down some examples of how your own service promotes, or could promote, verbal communication:

- in direct work with children and young people
- in work with parents
- in relationships between staff
- in team-working with external stakeholders

Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?

As a group, decide your top three practice tips for promoting verbal communication in work with children and young people and their families

## kca exercises

### Exercise 7: Next steps towards a Five to Thrive approach

What will you take away from this workshop to help your service become a more attachment aware service which promotes healthy brain function so that everyone can feel safe and children can achieve their full potential? What is your plan for the next steps to take?

What steps will you take next?

By when? What is the time-scale for what you plan to do?

Who will support you or help you with this plan?

Who else do you need to involve or engage with the plan?

What outcomes will show that the plan is making progress?

Share your ideas with colleagues. Are there any shared themes? Any differences? Any new ideas emerging?

Make a note of any key points