**Introduction to ‘Safe to Learn’ – an eight-session training course**

comprising 8 PowerPoint sessions and one pupil profile sharing and discussion session.[[1]](#endnote-0)

The course is based on ‘*Understanding, nurturing and working more effectively with vulnerable children in school’,* subtitle: *“ Why can’t you hear me?”* Angela Greenwood Routledge 2019, and is accessible when you buy the book.

The ‘Safe to Learn’ course is included for trainers, Educational Psychologists and school staff, and others working with adults involved with vulnerable children. Of course many tutors may wish to develop their own courses, but some may be less familiar with the thinking and material and appreciate the summary in ‘Safe to Learn’ as well as the details in the book. The original version of the course was written by Senior Educational Psychologist, Dr. Tina Axup and myself several years ago. It was delivered locally to a range of professionals, promoting the nurture ethos in Southend schools. The Educational Psychology Service have continued to evolve and deliver Safe to Learn. This version is my own, although the subject matter is similar, and designed to be used in conjunction with the book.

**Safe to Learn** includes:

**-**  A theoretical base, briefly outlining some of the theories underpinning nurture - attachment theory, emotional containment, unconscious processes including defense mechanisms and the need for integration, and appreciating transference and counter transference as a tool for understanding, rather than a trigger for reactivity[[2]](#endnote-1). There are also sessions on neuroscience and the effects of trauma on the brain, and on understanding behaviour.

**-**  Addressing the links between inner and outer worlds, both historically and in the present, within ourselves and within the child; within adult/child relationships, and within the dynamics of the whole school and the home.

**-**  An introduction to the three insecure attachment categories with differentiated ways of responding to each.

**-** Understanding children’s learning in relation to their particular attachment pattern, their emotional development and gaps, and the importance of a secure base.

**-**  The value of using significant relationships in school as second-chance attachment experiences for the more damaged and deprived children.

**-** The value of a relationship based approach to working with vulnerable children, understanding transition difficulties and behaviour as communication, offering practical ways to contain their powerful communications and projections, and calming and containing ways of *being* with them.

**-**  Many practical and relationship based ways of working with and nurturing children towards becoming ‘Safe to Learn’, and how to alleviate and manage difficult relationships and triggered outbursts. Some sessions suggest photocopiable pages from the book are given to participants as handouts (see below)

**-**  An introduction to nurture groups, the therapeutic use of play, and creative arts and stories in the school setting.

**-** Having thought about the crucial importance of understanding and relationships for healing, nurturing and openness to learning, we consider what a secure nurturing school might look like.

The final strand of the course is for each participant to compile a ‘pupil profile’ on a pupil who puzzles or challenges them. Through observation of the pupil’s attachment patterns and their behavioural communications, through reflecting on their own and other people’s typical reactions to the pupil, and on the feelings they evoke, participants come up with some helpful ways of relating to, understanding, nurturing and teaching them, in the light of the course material. The last session is devoted to sharing these in small groups.

**-** A ‘Pupil Profile Form’ and a ‘Pupil Profile Sharing and thinking together in 3’s’ paper are included if tutors would like to make use of them.

**Photocopiable Handouts** (Exercise and Box numbers are from the book)

To be emailed to participants prior to course:

**Self-assessment of skills in emotional holding, containing and strengthening (**Appendix 2)to be completed with a pseudonym and brought along to the first session. Tutors to collect and keep them, and return them to participants in session 7.

**Pupil Profile**

**- Session 1**

**The links between our own emotional growth and the emotional growth of children we work with (**Exercise 2) – optional to complete at home.

**Holding in Mind comments and gestures** (Box 8)

**- Session 4**

**Examples of emotionally containing statements** (Box 4)

**Growing stronger conversations** (Box 18)

**Some possible *indicators* of ending/transition anxieties** (Box 20)

**Emotionally containing or ego supportive statements?** (Exercise 3)

**- Session 5**

**Examples of empathic responses to children’s behaviours**  (Box 12)

**Examples of ways you might express curiosity about a child’s puzzling behaviour** (Box 13)

**Nurturing ‘you statements’**  (Box 10)

**Generalised empathic sentence stems**  (Box 9)

**- Session 7**

Filled in **Self-assessment of skills in emotional holding, containing and strengthening (**Appendix 2)to be placed on table for participants to collect and review and keep.

Angela Greenwood 2019

1. This is a version of **Safe to Learn** for readers of “Why can’t you hear what I’m (not) saying?” and for trainers to deliver in conjunction with the book. It relates closely to the book with many references to more detailed descriptions and to case examples in the book. It is essential to have and read the book in order to deliver the course. [↑](#endnote-ref-0)
2. These terms are explained in the PowerPoints [↑](#endnote-ref-1)