

**Affinity 2020 CIC Emotional Coaching for Young People with Care Experience and SEND**

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### **Policy on Emotional Coaching for Young People with Care Experience and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)**

**1. Introduction**

This policy outlines the approach to emotional coaching for young people with care experience and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Emotional coaching is an evidence-based approach aimed at supporting young people to understand, manage, and regulate their emotions in ways that are beneficial to their well-being and development. The policy is grounded in the principles of attachment theory, trauma-informed care, and the Power Threat Meaning Framework developed by Dr. Louise Johnstone. This framework offers a clear and insightful way to understand the impact of adversity, power imbalances, and social inequalities on emotional and psychological well-being.

**2. Purpose of Emotional Coaching**

The primary aim of emotional coaching for young people with care experience and SEND is to help them develop resilience, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies. Emotional coaching provides young people with tools to navigate complex emotions, build self-awareness, and create meaningful relationships. By fostering these skills, emotional coaching can significantly reduce the likelihood of emotional and behavioural difficulties, particularly in environments where young people have experienced trauma, neglect, or other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

**3. Core Principles of Emotional Coaching**

1. **Emotional Validation**: Recognizing and validating a young person’s emotional experience, no matter how difficult or challenging, is central to emotional coaching. This principle encourages open communication, trust, and a sense of security.
2. **Empathy and Understanding**: Practitioners need to demonstrate genuine empathy. Emotional coaching is not about fixing emotions, but about supporting young people to understand and express them in a healthy way.
3. **Safe and Supportive Environment**: Emotional coaching should occur within a safe, nurturing environment where young people feel understood, valued, and empowered to explore their emotions without fear of judgement.
4. **Collaboration and Autonomy**: Emotional coaching involves a partnership between the practitioner and the young person. The practitioner should work collaboratively with the young person, respecting their autonomy while guiding them towards healthier emotional regulation strategies.
5. **Holistic Support**: Emotional coaching should be integrated into wider support systems, including education, mental health, and social services. It is essential to consider the young person’s entire context, including their care experience, SEND, family dynamics, and community.

**4. Theoretical Foundations**

This policy is built on several key psychological frameworks and research findings, most notably the Power Threat Meaning Framework developed by Dr. Louise Johnstone.

* **Power Threat Meaning Framework**: This framework challenges traditional diagnostic models of mental health and instead focuses on how experiences of power, threat, and the meanings individuals make of these experiences influence their emotional and psychological responses. For young people with care experience and SEND, this framework is particularly relevant as it helps understand how experiences of trauma, powerlessness, and marginalisation (e.g., from institutional care, disability discrimination, or societal exclusion) can shape emotional responses and behaviours.

Dr. Johnstone’s framework encourages practitioners to consider the young person’s emotional responses not as “symptoms” of a disorder, but as meaningful reactions to life experiences. Emotional coaching, within this context, helps young people reframe their emotional responses as adaptive strategies for coping with adversity, thereby supporting emotional growth and resilience.

* **Attachment Theory**: The early relationships children form with caregivers are crucial for their emotional development. Many young people with care experience may have disrupted attachments, which can affect their ability to trust others and regulate their emotions. Emotional coaching practices, when informed by attachment theory, seek to create a secure base from which young people can explore and process emotions.

**5. Research and Evidence Supporting Emotional Coaching**

A growing body of research supports the effectiveness of emotional coaching for young people with complex needs, including those with care experience and SEND.

* **Emotional Regulation and Behavioural Outcomes**: Studies show that young people who receive emotional coaching are better able to regulate their emotions, leading to improvements in behaviour and overall mental health. According to the work of Gross (2002) on emotional regulation, young people who have been taught to identify, label, and process their emotions in a supportive environment are less likely to exhibit maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, withdrawal, or self-harm.
* **Resilience Building**: Research by Werner and Smith (2001) indicates that emotional coaching can be an essential factor in fostering resilience among young people with care experience, particularly when combined with secure relationships and opportunities for positive reinforcement.
* **Improved Social and Emotional Competence**: Emotional coaching enhances young people’s social and emotional competence, which is vital for healthy peer relationships and successful participation in educational and community activities. As reported by Zins et al. (2004), social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, which include emotional coaching components, result in improved academic performance and reduced behavioural problems.
* **SEND and Trauma-Informed Care**: A study by Luby et al. (2012) demonstrated that children with SEND and trauma histories who receive emotional support and coaching have improved emotional regulation and mental health outcomes. The evidence suggests that trauma-sensitive emotional coaching, when tailored to individual needs, can mitigate the effects of trauma and enhance well-being.

**6. Implementation of Emotional Coaching in Practice**

To ensure that emotional coaching is effective for young people with care experience and SEND, practitioners must be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources. Key implementation strategies include:

* **Training for Staff**: All professionals working with young people, should receive training on emotional coaching techniques and trauma-informed care. This training should also include a strong emphasis on understanding the Power Threat Meaning Framework and how power dynamics affect emotional responses.
* **Individualized Approaches**: Emotional coaching should be tailored to meet the unique needs of each young person, taking into account their developmental stage, care history, and any SEND or mental health challenges they may face. Differentiated strategies for emotional regulation and support should be used to address individual needs.
* **Collaboration with caregivers**: Where appropriate, emotional coaching should involve the young person’s caregivers. Caregivers and professionals play a central role in providing emotional stability, and collaboration ensures that emotional coaching is reinforced both within and outside of formal support settings.
* **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation**: It is essential to monitor the progress of emotional coaching interventions and evaluate their effectiveness. This can be done through regular feedback from the young person, as well as ongoing assessment of emotional regulation, behaviour, and academic performance.

**7. Conclusion**

Emotional coaching provides young people with care experience and SEND the opportunity to build essential emotional and social skills in a supportive and empowering environment. The benefits of emotional coaching are well-supported by research, which demonstrates improvements in emotional regulation, resilience, and social competence. By integrating the Power Threat Meaning Framework and trauma-informed practices, emotional coaching can help young people make sense of their emotions, heal from past trauma, and move towards a healthier, more fulfilling future. Practitioners must approach emotional coaching with empathy, understanding, and an individualised perspective to ensure the best outcomes for these vulnerable young people.

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