**The Thrive Approach**

The Thrive Approach brings together four areas of research; neuroscience, child development, attachment theory and creative play. It supports children’s emotional development and builds resilience.

Think of emotional resilience as Jenga blocks. Our emotional resilience is tested all of the time; we lose our keys, our family pet dies, the car breaks down. Our reactions (how much out Jenga Tower Wobbles) will depend on how our stress regulation system reacts (resilience).

For children, life events also cause wobbles in their emotional tower; new baby is born, family member passes away, child starts school. Each event can cause an emotion Jenga block to pop out of the tower. Everybody’s tower wobbles and I’m sure the recent pandemic has caused a lot more wobbling!!!

With resilience, our towers may wobble a little, but with no resilience, towers may completely collapse.

The Thrive Approach looks at the interruptions in earlier emotional development and plugs these holes through meeting these needs in real time. By building the Jenga Tower from bottom up and ensuring the foundations are strong, emotional resilience is created.

**VRFs**

“VRFs” are Vital Relational Functions in response to your child’s emotional dysregulation. These are Attunement, Validation, Containment and Soothing/Regulation and are vital in supporting children’s emotional wellbeing.

**Attune** - You know your child and most likely attune to him/her already; being alert to how they are feeling and understanding facial expression, body language, gesture, voice tone etc.

**Validation** is one of your greatest tools; reassure your child that it is OK to feel things! Feelings are real and are our brains reaction to the situation. Separate the feeling from the behaviour. Examples of validation “I notice you are feeling very angry at the moment because you didn’t get what you wanted and that’s really hard when you don’t get what you want. I imagine you’re feeling quite frustrated”.

**Contain** those feelings; show your child you understand and can bear the emotion they are having – demonstrate it is survivable; “sometimes I feel angry when things don’t go my way too and I have to take deep breaths to calm me down”.

**Sooth and Regulate** your child’s distress, reassure them that you are there for them and they are safe.

Use language such as “I imagine….” “I notice….” and “I wonder….” to encourage your child to link how they are feeling to their behaviour. Often children may not understand the sensations felt when they have a big emotion – they need these sensations to be named.

“I notice you have a big smile on your face and you are jumping up and down! I imagine you are really excited to see your friends today…”.

“I wonder if you have a big heavy feeling in your tummy right now. I notice your face is fierce and your hands are in fists. I wonder if you’re feeling angry because you were told to stop playing. It’s hard when you are enjoying yourself and you are asked to stop. You might feel frustrated because you want to play more…”

**Shining a Light of Behaviour**

Using VRFs does not mean your child should not be disciplined for inappropriate behaviour. Shining a Light refers to separating your child’s behaviour from their emotions and talking through the behaviour (when they are in a calm state) to help your child to find a better way to communicate their distress.

Example: “Woah! I imagine you felt really angry when your friend’s jumped on your like that. You were playing a game and suddenly they all jumped on you! I imagine I would be scared if my friends were jumping on me. I would feel scared and angry and I would want them to get off! You felt angry and scared and that’s ok but it is NOT ok to kick your friends even when you are feeling angry. Can you think of a different way to tell your friends that they are making you angry and scared? Perhaps you could have a code word that your friends know that you could use and everyone knows to stop if someone says it? That would mean that you don’t have to kick when you begin to feel that way.”