

Professional Love in Early Years Settings (PLEYS)

‘Attachment Toolkit’

Booklet 1



The **‘Attachment Toolkit’** is a set of Professional Development Materials with an evaluation form which have been developed from the findings of a University of Sheffield funded research project in collaboration with Fennies nurseries, which examined practitioners’ views of *‘Professional Love’* in Early Years Settings. The Attachment Toolkit comes with an evaluation form (and link to the AT website online evaluation) to enable ongoing monitoring of usage and feedback on the contents and is comprised of:

- Two e-booklets: *Booklet 1) Introduction*, *Booklet 2) ‘Attachment in Practice’*
- Two models of reflective practice in the form of:
 - A *‘Cycle of Reflection’* tool,
 - A *Thinking about ‘Professional Love’* tool

These tools are accompanied by case study material – narratives and short 2-3 min video clips of adult: child interaction at key times of the day, including during the settling in process

- A *Reflective Practice* pro-forma for use in early years settings

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INTRODUCTION

Booklet 1



The '***Attachment Toolkit***' is a set of Professional Development Materials which have been developed from the findings of a research project which examined practitioners' views of '*Professional Love*' in Early Years Settings. This ***Introductory booklet*** sets out the rationale for the research which leads into the second booklet ***Attachment in Practice***.

The PLEYS project was led by Dr Jools Page and was funded by the University of Sheffield Innovation, Impact and Knowledge Exchange (IIKE) as Constructions of Intimacy in Early Childhood Education and Care: practitioners' experiences

Rationale for the Research

In recent years, a small number of high profile cases of early years practitioners have been convicted of child abuse, and the continued media exposure of abusive clergy and then of various ‘celebrity’ entertainers has led to a climate of wariness, if not suspicion, which has grown around the general issue of adults’ professional relationships with very young children. A difficulty for those who work in early years settings is thus how to express the affectionate and caring behaviours, which the role characteristically demands of them in their loco parentis, and which very young children need in their development of healthy attachments. Jools Page¹ developed the term ‘*Professional Love*’ to try to understand these intimacies. Though sections of a prurient media are eager uncritically to advertise aspects of rare cases of professional abuses, the real issue, of an appropriate professional love, remains for the most part unexamined in the daily practice of early years settings, because it is obscured in the same climate of wariness. This project aimed to address the research gap and give confidence to early years practitioners who work closely and intimately with young children. This project was led by Dr Jools Page and a small research team² at the University of Sheffield and was co-produced in collaboration with an external partner group of eight nurseries, Fennies, who are located in the South East of England.

The necessarily intimate relationships that practitioners develop with young children have become a matter for scrutiny, and a matter of equally nervous concern for early years practitioners themselves. This is an issue that affects all practitioners, but is particularly pertinent when they are men. One phrase in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) which challenges early years practitioners is, ‘excessive one-to-one attention beyond the requirements of their usual role and responsibilities’ whereas elsewhere in the EYFS it talks about the role of the key early years person having, ‘a settled relationship for the child and build[ing] a relationship with their parents’³. This statement about closeness poses a particular dilemma and challenge for early years practitioners when

¹Page, J. (2011). Do mothers want professional carers to love their babies? *Journal of Early Childhood Research*. 9,(3) 310-323

² Dr Ann Clare,(Research Assistant) Mr Jamal Lahmar, (Quantitative Researcher), Mrs Karen Kitchen, (Project Secretary) & Professor Peter Clough, (Honorary Consultant)

³ Department for Education (2012) Early Years Foundation Stage. DfE (p.18)

considering their familiarity with young children, and in particular with babies. It is important that early years practitioners are helped to recognise this does not mean that they cannot cuddle babies or hold them close, especially at times of settling in, distress and also during personal care routines. Their role is about establishing a close bond but not making it so overly intense that the baby has his or her independence taken from them. Yet, it is understandable that a level of concern may exist amongst even the most well-meaning and thoughtful early years practitioner leading to a heightened level of concern about how to interpret this policy into daily practice. The adults who work with young children define their roles and inform their practices with versions of loving care drawing implicitly on their own experiences as children, adults, parents, professionals. These are derived from traditions and cultures of historical practices; shaped by legal requirement and policy interpretation; and less visibly, but no less importantly, informed by media expressions of the crises of care which now almost routinely attend discussion of child-adult relations. In a climate of safeguarding (and the failure of some such policies and practices), some early years practitioners exhibit and express a professional wariness as they operate, increasingly, in a culture of suspicion. This has led to concerns that early years practitioners are fearful of showing intimacy with young children, often because they fear their affections being misunderstood.

'Professional Love' in Early Years Settings (PLEYS) used a range of methods to reveal the conceptions and practices of love, intimacy and care in early years settings. An open, anonymous online survey was developed to capture the views of early years practitioners on constructions of love and intimacy in early years settings. The resulting data set was greater than anticipated with 793 completed questionnaire responses. These were analysed with the use of specialist software and the findings were used to inform 10 face to face interviews with volunteer early years practitioners. Four focus groups were also conducted with 26 participants from across all eight of Fennies nurseries. Participants included managers, room leaders and apprentices. Social media also generated wider interest in the research project and led to numerous email exchanges from professionals with a range of roles and interests providing a further source of rich data, which is beyond the scope of this project but which will be later developed.

The project findings were used to co-produce an *'Attachment Toolkit'* which includes case studies, narratives and video materials to support early years practitioners in their attachment interactions with young children and in their work with families, particularly during times of parent/child separation. The *'Attachment Toolkit'* situates children as individual and active citizens who have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to have their voices heard and acted upon and to be safeguarded by the adults who have responsibility for them at home and in their early years settings.

The *'Attachment Toolkit'* is comprised of the following:

- Two e-booklets have been produced and are downloadable from the website in pdf format :
 - **Booklet 1:** is the *'Introductory'* booklet which sets out the rationale for the research and how the project can fit with the ethos of an early years setting
 - **Booklet 2:** *'Attachment in Practice'* summarises the findings of the project and then draws on Attachment Theory to preface examples of how early years practitioners are able to respond to national policy, which calls for them to be consistent, sensitive and responsive and to make close, loving and intimate attachment relationships with babies and young children
 - Two models of reflective practice have originated from the research findings and together with the two e-booklets make up the ***'Attachment Toolkit'***. These models are in the form of:
 - A *'Cycle of Reflection'* tool, which is accompanied by case study material – narratives and short 2-3 min video clips of adult: child interaction at key times of the day, including during the settling in process.
 - A *'Thinking about Professional Love'* tool, both of which have been trialled and evaluated by Fennies nurseries

The *'Attachment Toolkit'* comes with an evaluation form (and link to the AT website online evaluation) to enable ongoing monitoring of usage and feedback on the contents.

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