



Getting to hope you like me!

We've been exploring our children's inner world and their fundamental needs as they adapt to their world. We've thought about whether the spaces they spend most time in need some tweaking to better support them.

And now it's time to turn the spotlight onto ourselves. Learning to ask,

"Who do you need me to be?"

We believe that every loving carer is FOR their children, often moving heaven and earth to give them the very best we can afford.

Hungry for ideas, we search for ideas, toys, resources, and methods... We begin to compare our children with others and ourselves against other carers. This path is a one-way street to feeling anxious and insecure – are we doing enough?

We worry. Unconsciously, our fears are muddled with hopes and dreams for our children. Teachers have targets, settings have OFSTED. Our little sponges absorb it all. That is why we have spent three audios 'getting to know' our child(ren). We've been learning to 'see' some of what is going on in secret. With fresh eyes, we've begun to get to understand and discern what are their needs.

Their needs include us. We are fundamental to their package of need. As we turn the attention to ourselves, we realised that giving our child(ren) the **best** requires us to attend to our own hearts and attitudes, so that we can become the best that we can BE for them...

Take a little time to...

Remember one of your earliest *positive* memories from nursery or infant school.

Ask yourself:

? What was the adult doing to make it so special?

? How did the adult make me feel?

Enjoy the recollection. Stay with it for a while. Jot down any other thoughts that slip into your consciousness.

Before moving on, take time to notice your feelings (NOW).

? How have your emotions been affected by the recollection?

We hope is that as you wallow in your memories, you too feel the warm company of the adult who was supportive without being domineering. They were our *allies*, delighting in what delighted us as little people. Their presence 'lifted' the experience. Primarily, they were partners, not carers or teachers.



Adults who realise this offer children a rare gift.

Working WITH...

As we know, children have a powerful life force urging them to experience and adapt to their world as they grow in confidence and independence. Their early years offer windows of opportunity, times when they absorb as much as they can from their experiences! It is as if an internal guide drives them.

Adults are significant influences in their developing years, but importantly, the quality of our influence depends on whether we will work WITH what is going on within – or not!

This understanding is key and has the potential to change us. They grow in humility and confidence as they choose to observe and learn from their child(ren).

The title of this set in **Delving a Little Deeper** is taken from the Rogers & Hammerstein musical, 'The King & I'. Archaic, yes, but the words are rich

'Getting to Know You.'

It's a very ancient saying,
But a true and honest thought
That if you become a teacher
By your pupils you'll be taught

...

Getting to know you
Getting to know all about you
Getting to like you
Getting to hope you like me

...

Getting to know you
Getting to feel free and easy
When I am with you
Getting to know what to say

Haven't you noticed
Suddenly I'm bright and breezy?
Because of all the beautiful and new
Things I'm learning about you
Day by day!

Working WITH...

Adult carers who recognise this will want to ally themselves with their child(ren)'s internal guide. The alternative is we quash it. And the consequence of both is significant. If a child is *consistently* prevented from certain experiences (especially in windows of opportunity), the energy is repressed and *MUST* find expression somewhere.



Clearly, it is not always possible to allow full expression whenever the child wishes. However, carers who are aware of this will want to **work with** the child's internal guide as much as possible, looking for opportunities to support and maximise the fleeting windows of opportunity. If children are consistently denied such experiences, they are lost.

Remember Giulia and her multilingual upbringing? Had her family decided that she should only hear Italian spoken, the window for absorbing language would have passed. She would then have had to learn other languages the hard way, studying vocab and grammar. She would likely never attain the fluency that she enjoys today.

The phrase 'following the child' is often used by those who follow a child centred method. But what does it mean? Most adults are uncomfortable with the idea of trailing around after a demanding child, giving in to everything they want. We completely agree. This is NOT in the child's best interests!

More accurate is the phrase *working with* the child's *Inner Guide*. It presumes that the adult is tuning into their child(ren)'s inner motivations, sensitivities, schemas etc. As we *work with* these, we can be confident that our children can optimise their 'windows of opportunity'.

When things go wrong

Let's look at this vital question and in doing so we grapple with some difficult ideas. First, we need to acknowledge that neither we nor our children are perfect. We also live in an imperfect world. We hope the illustrations below encourage and inspire hope.

Filipe was born prematurely. His birth was stressful and left his mother physically and emotionally drained. Although he was safe, swaddled in an incubator, his mum, Ivanka was not doing so well. She thought that she had let him down and even struggled to express enough milk, which he was fed by tube.

The hospital staff involved her as much as possible in his care; but they were busy, slick, and practised; she was not. Feeling isolated and inadequate, she quietly began to slip into post-natal depression.

When they were safely at home, Ivanka became anxious and nervous. Isolated and lonely, she feared that she was not caring for him properly. When he cried, she quickly slipped him a dummy. Sometimes it was easier to leave it in.

After the trauma of his birth, Filipe's first experience of his new world was of tubes and incubators. His mother's timidity and depression meant that she rarely talked to him. As a new-born, he absorbed the anxious atmosphere around him. His physical needs may have been met but some sensitivities were unsupported in these critical early weeks and months.

How were Filipe's needs unsupported?

Some windows of opportunity were neglected in Filipe's earliest years. Let's consider three (language & music, using senses, and routine & order).



In the womb, Filipe had become familiar with the sound of his mother's voice, the cadence of her Slovak language, the music she listened to and the songs from her homeland that she sang over him. After the birth, all of this stopped. With a dummy in his mouth, he could not make mouth movements and sounds; muscle movements that are necessary for good speech development. Neither was he hearing his mother's native language spoken potentially denying him the opportunity to effortlessly absorb two languages.

Filipe experienced tastes, sounds and smells whilst he was being carried in Ivanka's womb. At birth, they were dramatically exchanged for the unfamiliar, sterile surroundings of the hospital. This affected how he was able to order (make sense of) his new world and the sensory stimuli he experienced. This would be further impacted with the transition home.

What would have happened if none of this happened?

Had Filipe not been born prematurely, had Ivanka's mental health not been impacted, had he had a 'normal' birth, his earliest experiences would have been very different, a more 'normal' path of development.

Ivanka was not in a good place, and Filipe was too weak to demand forcefully. And so, he began to adopt passive patterns of behaviour. He was quiet, passive, and 'good'. Another child might be more demanding. Both responses are reactions to having some needs unmet.

What can be done?

Although this may read as a stark story, it helps to illustrate something significant. No infant enjoys the perfect life, with no obstacles to their path. Every child needs to react to the difficulties they encounter in the early years.

We take up the story again as Filipe (now 2½) starts nursery. He is introduced to Toni, his key person.

Filipe did not cry even in the early days but was extremely timid and remained set apart from others. He was an unusually passive child, watching but never joining in. When Toni introduced him to an activity, he would watch with interest but did not play himself. He did not even select his own snack.

Toni simply observed and waited patiently. She allied herself with Filipe's fragile internal guide. At snack time, she did not force him to choose but **always** offered him the plate, interpreting the slighted nod as his choice, naming his choices in both English and began to learn some Slovak words.

Over several months, Filipe tentatively began to choose his snack. That was just the start...

He diffidently began to use some of the activities that he had seen others using. As his hands became busy, he began to choose more of activities. He had watched for so long that he just got on and quickly became confident and competent.

Within a few months, Filipe made a friend – interestingly with another child with Slovak parents. Toni had learnt some Slovakian greetings and used them not just with Felipe and Ivanka, but also with the rest of the children in small groups. Toni encouraged Ivanka to speak Slovakian to Felipe at home and she introduced her to the parent of Felipe's new friend.



After six months, Filipe was transformed. The obstacles he had encountered on his early pathway were slowly removed... he was soon full of fun and mischief as most of his friends.

Despite the effects of birth trauma and Ivanka's depression, this is not the end of Filipe's story. Toni gently helped him find his way to the child he really was. Aged 3, he was friendly and confident, completely transformed from the timid child who arrived at nursery just 6 months previously.

Toni's patience, humility, and hopefulness was rewarded. She found a way, without any coercion or control. Beautiful.

Another example!

At 17 years of age, Lucy was a trained childcare practitioner. This was her first week in a new nursery and she had prepared a fun activity that she had used previously – shaving foam messy play!

The manager walked past and noticed that Lucy remained entirely focussed on the 5 children around her craft table. She was introducing them to the activity that she had prepared for them. Nothing special - just some shaving foam squirted into messy-play trays.

What was significant was that Lucy gave the children her undivided attention! The manager continued to observe; she was captivated...

So were the children who were clearly intrigued, listening and watching her clear, short introduction. She then expressed genuine wonder as she said,

“I wonder what you will do with your tray of foam!”

as she gently pushed a tray towards each child. Four of the five needed no further invitation! In no time, they began some exuberant mark making.

One child, Millie (aged just 2), did not. Millie was also new to nursery and her tense body propped closely against the side of Lucy's body. Lucy remained where she was, 'present' for all five children. She occasionally responded to the mark-makers, enjoying their discoveries, with phrases such as,

“wow, look at that!”.

After some time, she quietly placed two paint tubes onto the table (lifted from underneath the table). The 4 immediately squirted colour to shaving foam, exploring more possibilities.

Millie leaned against Lucy, who could now give her focussed attention. Using no words, she simply took her own index finger and ever so slowly lowered it into Millie's tray of shaving foam. As the tip of her finger touched the foam, she swiftly lifted it out. There was a small blob of foam on the tip of her finger, which she showed Millie with a wondering smile that seemed to say,

‘Oh... some stayed on my finger!’

She repeated this slowly, each time with the same fingertip. After a while, she very slowly tapped the shaving foam fingertip with the index finger of the other hand. She then looked from one finger to the other – beaming! She again smiled at Millie. Millie smiled back and the finger dips and taps became a shared, silent conversation – just between the two of them!



Millie slowly began to turn her attention to the shaving foam in her tray. As it did, her body began to detach from Lucy.

By now the other 4 children continued with their discoveries. Lucy had prepared further resources, which were readily accessible under the table. Realising that they could do more if they had more space, she squirted fresh foam directly onto the table and produced additional resources. The 4 children now had full control of the direction of play. They were extending their understanding of colour combinations. Letters and shapes began to emerge as they gave meaning to their marks and patterns.

Lucy managed all this without jeopardising Millie's early flickers of interest in her tray.

Her manager reluctantly left the room for 10 minutes returning to an astonishing scene! All 5 children were all still engaged in the same activity - laughing, stretching, and using whole body movements to make ever larger marks and merge colours. Millie was now completely detached from Lucy. Both her hands were covered in foam as she made her own discoveries in parallel with the others. Still present, Lucy was free to observe. Something miraculous had happened in 30 magical minutes!

So, what had just happened? We will use this cameo to help us understand the complex role of child carers. What is encouraging is that Lucy had no special equipment, she simply shows us how she adapted her role to the changing needs of all the children.

Preparation

Lucy had prepared the space and resources. Everything she thought might be useful were kept under the table so they would not be a distraction (but accessible when/if they were needed). She had other resources stored under the table as well, but she showed restraint and judgement – maybe next time? She introduced new resources only to sustain their interest, increase their curiosity and make further discoveries.

She also prepared *herself*,

Whatever Lucy's personal situation (nervous in a new job), preoccupation (shyness) or distraction (her new manager was watching!), she closed her mind to these and focussed on the children. She was attentive. This is a rare gift for our children. In a digital world of electronic notifications and social media feeds, there are constant claims on adults' attention. It takes huge effort every day to rid ourselves of our own preoccupations and so be focussed and present for our children.

Children's behaviours are often ones that we recognise in ourselves. It can be like having a magnifying glass on something in our own experience. Millie was a tightly coiled spring of anxiety. In her new job, Lucy also felt nervous and shy. **But** she understood that actively engaging with the children was a way to turn focus away from her own emotional preoccupations. She understood that Millie also needed to re-focus on a hands-on activity, and it helped her too.



Inviting and Involving

Children need hands-on engagement with stimulating resources. The care's role is to connect the child with these learning materials (yes, shaving foam can be a learning resource!) Lucy invited and involved these children. They took over. This is when real learning happens.

Lucy brought out just enough to maintain their interest and extend their learning. She did this so that the children kept control of the direction of play!

She needed to use a different approach for the group of 4 more confident children. They were older and more social. They still benefited from occasional encouragements from Lucy as she remarked on their own discoveries.

Millie needed more time. Lucy subtly showed her a different (safer?) way to touch the foam. It took time but that was all Millie needed to emerge from crippling shyness. She needed no cuddles, comforter, dummy, or soother. Such things would in fact have got in the way. Lucy's actions gave her the permission to watch, for as long as was needed, before she felt able to touch the shaving foam. And because her hands and body were free, there was no barrier to prevent her getting involved.

Getting the language right

Apart from a very brief introduction, Lucy spoke little. She only needed to remain attentive and know the right moment to introduce additional resources. She did not 'teach' and interrupt their spontaneous learning by saying something like,

"If you add some red to the yellow shaving foam, it will turn orange!"

Instead, Lucy responded to their cries of discovery, allowing the children to 'teach' each other what they know...

Sam: "look, it's changed colour!"

Leon: "mine's turned orange!"

Sam, "yes, mine's going orange too!"

She did not need to add her voice to this rich dialogue. If she had, her interruption may have destroyed their exciting discoveries!

With Millie, the silent communication of dipping a finger into shaving foam, sharing the experience of dabbing two fingers together was eloquent. Words were not needed.

Interestingly, Lucy did **NOT** praise. The children were motivated to explore the materials and learn. Any interruption – including praise – could spoil this. Even Millie needed to learn that the enjoyment was for her own sake. Instead, we see that Lucy's subtle, non-intrusive focussed attention was enough.

Finishing well

The manager did not see the end of the activity. She might want to ask her:



SET 1 Delving *a little* Deeper
Getting to hope you like me!
Caroline in conversation with Dana & Jo

Set 1 Audio 5
Companion Notes

Did you involve the children in finishing the activity, hanging up their aprons, cleaning the resources and placing the resources in the correct place so that they knew where to find everything another time?

Finishing activities are important. Children are invited and supported to maintain **their** so that the space is clean, ordered and inviting for others.

Final reflections...

There is a lot to absorb in this episode. We suggest you listen again and read the companion notes several times.

Try Lucy's simple activity with some children in your care.

CELEBRATE & SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OTHERS ON THE MEMBERS FORUM!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones &

Delving a little Deeper

Delving a Little Deeper

Set 2 'Involve me, show me, let me!'

is now available

see website for details