



Series 1. Episode 26
Turning *Little Stones* show notes.
with **Sue Gascoyne**

Episode 26
**Living Well...with life's
ups & downs!**

Sue Gascoyne (MBACP) is a Play Therapist, Mental Health Practitioner and Creative Arts Counsellor. She has written and co-authored several books (see below) and founder of PlaytoZ Ltd, a supplier of environmentally friendly sensory play resources.

The podcast is a perfect follow-on from an earlier episode with guest, Rachel Divall (www.turninglittlestones.co.uk Series 1; Episode 22).

No family is immune from difficulties.

Sue's work is now primarily in the field of Play Therapy and Creative Arts Counselling, supporting children, teenagers, and families who have experienced difficulties. These may be short-term or more significant longer-term trauma.

When confronted with challenges and difficulties, adults often respond by sub-consciously disconnecting from their environment and relationships, including children. Sue explains that in therapy, families can recognise this disconnection and repair relationships through re-connecting. This fresh insight, understanding and acceptance offers children, and their families, HOPE and an opportunity to move on.

Learning to re-connect and repair is not limited to counselling and therapy. In our day to day lives, we can all learn to recognise our typical disconnecting responses to life's challenges and difficulties and make repairs through empathy or self-care.

PACE & SPACEE

Dan Hughes, the inspirational counsellor, and therapist developed the idea of PACE, an acronym that offers 'Attachment-focussed Treatment for Childhood Trauma and Abuse'. Sue explains the acronym initially looking at A-C-E.

A Acceptance. Recognising, knowing, and naming emotions is vital if we are to understand them and move on. Young children do not have the experience to understand or interpret their big emotions. Bewildered by their feelings, children need adults who validate and accept how they feel. When adults are able to accept how tough things feel for the child without criticism, judgement or blame, the child experiences **acceptance** – a fundamental human need and the sense that they are loveable. By connecting rather than correcting the child's behaviours, the relationship remains intact. The child experiences comfort and acceptance and the adult can then support the child by giving a name to the emotion and finding better ways of expressing themselves. Crucially, a positive connection with the child is maintained.

C Curiosity. Every behaviour is a way of communicating feelings. While we may not accept certain behaviours, it is important for parents and carers to accept and validate the feelings behind the behaviours. Children need adults who choose to be



curious about the child's behaviour, curious enough to consider what triggered it. Adults can also be curious about their own behaviours. Adults who are self-aware, may wonder how their words and actions are affecting their child and whether they feel disconnected. Simple low/no-cost gestures, such as a note, hug, favourite food, text etc, can help repair the adult/child relationship.

E Empathy. When difficult and unwanted behaviours are seen as 'cries for help' rather than children being 'bad', adults may be able to step back from their personal feelings of hurt, anger or shame and try to put themselves in the child's shoes. Being curious about and connecting with the underlying feelings, rather than correcting the unwanted behaviours, means that children experience acceptance and empathy. In turn this creates a solid base for building self-esteem. Adults may also be more able to empathise with themselves, recognising their need for self-care as well.

P Playfulness is key to Sue's work and the start of her journey. Her books and company Play to Z, celebrate the importance of sensory, heuristic, and messy play. Open-ended play gives children the chance to become absorbed, explore their ideas and experience satisfaction. Playfulness can also be a great distraction and offer a way out of confrontation in daily situations!

I practise PACE every day... but I felt, something was missing...

Recognising this, Sue has expanded the acronym to SPACEE with...

S-Soothing. This includes the idea of nurture calming the brain's amygdala responsible for 'unwanted behaviours' triggered through fight and flight responses. Adults can help soothe their child through intentional acts, such as a note, a treat, a hug or high five. These show their child that they are loved and special. They realise and that the adult understands and accepts what they are going through and that they are not alone.

E Engagement is the additional E in the acronym SPACEE. Quality engagement includes anything that demonstrates to the child that they have the adult's attention, they are likeable and worth spending time with. Actions may include a shared fun-filled activity (either pre-planned or spontaneous), a cosy snuggle-up time. Anything that communicates to the child, "I thought about you, I'm here for you, we can do it together!"

For Sue, being outdoors and engaging in tactile, sensory rich playful activities is a given and more widely accepted than when Sue initially set up this part of her business. As Sue's work in the field of Play Therapy and Creative Counselling has increased, and the cost-of-living crisis has hit so many families and businesses, her award-winning company Play to Z has also needed to change. Loyal and new customers can continue



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to expect the core values of quality, inclusivity, ethical and environmentally friendly credentials, but with fresh approaches to how these wonderful sensory resources are offered. Watch this space to find out more! <https://playtoz.co.uk/> and @playto_z.

For more information about Sue's work as a therapist and counsellor, go to

<https://www.stablesplaytherapy.com>

Books & Articles by Sue Gascoyne

Sensory Play (Play in the EYFS) (ISBN 978-1909280304)

Messy Play in the Early Years (ISBN 978-0815377146)

50 Fantastic ideas for Treasure Baskets (ISBN 978-1472943514)

Treasure Baskets and Beyond: Realising the potential of sensory-rich play (ISBN 978-0335246441)

Schemas in the Early Years (2 chapters) (ISBN 9781032123967)

International Handbook of Play, Therapeutic Play and Play Therapy (Chapter)

The Physical Development Needs of Young Children (Chapter)

Patterns and Attributes in Vulnerable Children's Messy Play. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal. 25 (2): 272-291. (Routledge)

International Handbook on Early Childhood Education (Springer)
Play in the Reception Classroom (EYE).

2012/13/16 1st, 2nd, 3rd editions *Sensory Play (Practical Pre-School (ISBN 978-1909280304).*

Cross Cultural Perspectives on Early Childhood (Chapter).

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through,

Turning Little Stones Podcasts and Show Notes (Series 1, Episode 22) &

Delving a little Deeper

www.turninglittlestones.co.uk