



The road to happiness.  
Achieving sustainable  
harmony.  
A biochemical perspective.



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## Foreword

Our technological revolution has enabled access to worldwide academia at the slightest touch. Yet our advances often remain unable to craft its knowledge into a sense of meaning applicable to our human soul. For translating and interpreting the necessarily questionable truth into the actual space of social human existence requires the involvement of subjective emotion. And technology can think, do, create and advise, but technology can't feel. Despite the abundance of words written, it remains rare to read helpful content that combines the knowledge of thinking and feeling in a manner that creates both logical and helpful application. We know this when we determine to assemble the bookshelf according to the written guide, which typically does not contain reference to the emotional rollercoaster which might ensue. The estimated time for construction does not include reference to the likely need for calming breaks or the possible, sometimes probable, relationship conflict. To maximise our understanding of the complex and sensitive development of our souls, we are required, not only to know and to think, but also to be aware, remain in tune and to feel. This is perhaps most pertinent to the population group most currently significant within our education, health and care systems, and not only for the children and young people who highlight this fragility, but also for their parents and families whose circumstances are usually more widely challenged. Whilst we have learnt to think about how to help, which we sometimes do, and are learning to feel the surrounding emotions, which we often do, the act of combining the two in a sense of joint purpose frequently remains an undeniable challenge. And it is within this space that this document most beautifully sits, harmoniously crafted with a perfect balance of theory, emotion and practical application, a thoughtful, reflective consequence of combined knowledge, understanding, interpretation, application, and feelings. This may well be the document that flicks a switch to shed light where so often, darkness remains.

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## Introduction

As an organisation that has at its core, the desire to help emotionally damaged children overcome their traumas and improve their lives, now and in the future, it is important to understand the basics of what's going on and how this can be achieved.

Ultimately, we want our children to be happy now and in the future. To achieve this, we need our community to be happy. Partly because it is a moral responsibility but also in the belief that children cared for by happy people, are more likely to be happy as a result of being in their care.

Therefore, whilst I have used all my creative energy to provide a therapeutic environment, the overwhelming direction of energy in terms of how we live in that environment is in the pursuit of harmony.

Harmony for the children, harmony in the adults who care for them.

- Is the group dynamic correct?
- Is the education timetable well balanced incorporating both educational and therapeutic need?
- Is the holiday timetable correctly balanced? Does it provide the structure and routine the children crave, along with the opportunity for staff and children to explore other aspects of life and visit other places.
- Are children's school lives balanced?
- Are staff's work lives balanced?
- Do we have the correct number of people at work to fulfil our responsibilities?
- Do they have the right amount of balanced time to do this?
- Do we manage our time effectively and ensure we don't create unnecessary stress?  
Do we ask people to do things they either don't have the skill set or ability to do what is asked of them. Do we allow enough time to do the set tasks?

Whilst we analyse these elements, it is important to recognise a fundamental aspect of our situation. How the context of this desire is impacted by the following differences between what we provide and what others perceive we should be doing.

Also, what other organisations are doing and how and why we differ in our approach and methodology.

From its starting point, Pear Tree has been about helping children get better and improve their life chances in the future, as adults.

That means creating change!

On admission, the current direction of travel of a child's development is woefully inadequate. Not only are their life chances limited but they may also present a varying degree of risk to others, in a way that will negatively impact on others life chances.

Therefore, there is a need to facilitate change. To do this, children have to be receptive to change and adults have to be committed to facilitate this change.

In running an effective organisation that can continually achieve change year on year, it is important to ensure that the people in the service, both children and adults, can facilitate this. At times it is necessary to remove those that can't.

In the case of children, it is important to continually assess their progress. Whilst there are many that reach the peak of their potential, which is to be expected, others, despite everyone's best efforts may not be able to change. This has to be viewed against the impact of their presence on the potential and ongoing progress of others. In our situation, a review of their impact risk assessment is an important indicator. This may result in the acceleration of their discharge to other providers, who's aims are not to facilitate change but to accept current needs as ongoing needs.

In the case of staff structure, those that present obstacles to change or undermine the efforts of others to facilitate change, may need extra support. If not acted upon, those staff will need to be removed.

- Pear Tree is about the recovery and development of children, which means creating change.
- Other providers offer an acceptance of the current needs and manage this as being a constant, unlikely to change.

Professionally, my concern is that others are unaware of the concept of change or are unaware of their ability to encourage it. This results in children with the capacity to change not getting the opportunity to do so, due to institutionalised practice.

The above difference has a huge impact on the strategies available and the lifestyle for those in each setting. This will become more apparent within this document.

The ability for outside agencies who scrutinise to understand these points has never been as limited as it is now, however, it does fall within a professional divide.

Professionals from social care are unlikely to understand or appreciate the differences, particularly if it is their child who is oppositional to change. They are also only focused on their child and the concept of group management is alien to them.

Professionals involved in education, where the concept of change through progress is fundamental to the concept of education, understand and appreciate the methodology.

Pear Tree has a school, other providers of residential care usually don't.

The difference this has on the methodology of the staff team from macro to micro level, is clearly apparent. It is no more obvious than in their dress and presentation.

Pear Tree staff expect children to respond to our environment and make improvements. They are often visibly upset when it goes wrong and often damaged by the process. This is not because they lack resilience but that the experience doesn't match their expectations. The fact they put themselves forward for the same potential disappointment time and time again, is testament to their resilience.

Staff working for other providers will always come to work psychologically prepared for the worst, prepared for the fight that will come and dressed accordingly. Track suit and baggy clothes to make restraining children more comfortable and trainers to chase after them should the need arise.

I prefer to see our staff in walking boots or wellies, as it indicates we expect things to go right and they are prepared for the variety of environments they may encounter in a positive way.

#### HOW DO WE ACHIEVE HAPPINESS?

It has always surprised me that working with children does not come with a need to know about the animal "Homo sapiens"!

The grooms who look after the horses, the farm staff that look after the farm animals, all have to know about their animals inside and out, as a prerequisite to working with them. Not just their physical requirements but also their biology and psychology.

This doesn't seem to apply to social workers or teachers. Their training seems to focus on what are thought to be more important issues such as the law and acts of Parliament, case reviews and measuring minute progress in a specific area.

The arena is dominated by academia and in my view, academia often forgets important practicalities. It has taken me all my working life to find out the fundamentals, which are known, just not known to those working at the coal face, the ones who should be enlightened in this area as a priority.

Having knowledge of the animal Homo sapiens has always been encouraged by myself, for all our staff. The first amazing book I read on this subject was 'The Naked Ape' by Desmond Morris. It moulded my early understanding of human beings when I first read it in the 1990's and has guided me ever since.

In 2022 I came across the work of Professor Yuval Noah Harari, in his remarkable books 'Homo Sapiens' and 'Homo Deus', which as you may guess, gives us important information about ourselves and what makes us tick. The following is taken from his work, mixing my understanding of his details, with my own and our corporate experience.

Theory knitting is a passion of mine. Finding information from a variety of perspectives and pulling together the salient points that I feel are important for our staff team to know and understand. In my quest to ensure we are the best we can be, I have identified and drawn

parallels with the animal world as I have always had a good understanding that we are just complicated animals.

In Yuval Noah, I have found not just a kindred spirit but vindication for doing so. He explains that in the 1950's a social scientist called Harry Harlow conducted experiments with monkeys. He produced two structures that resembled adult monkeys. One made of wire the other of soft materials. The wire one had a food source to feed the orphan monkeys, the soft cuddly one, however, did not. They expected the orphan monkeys to cling to the wire model because it provided food.

To their surprise (why it was a surprise I don't know), they clung to the soft cuddly one and went without food. Their need for emotional comfort was so overwhelming it was more important than basic food available elsewhere.

Follow up research discovered that these orphan monkeys, deprived of emotional support, grew up traumatised, manifesting itself in great anxiety and anger.

Wow, what a surprise! Not to us. But important proof if needed of the importance of emotional support and the damage done if it is not available.

I don't think it is any coincidence that throughout years of looking after emotionally deprived children, I have warned that the most underestimated element of their well-being was anxiety. Most issues can be traced back to an overlooked anxiety. While it often manifests itself in challenging behaviour, the need to release their anger can also be overwhelming.

For years we have focused our analytical energy in a belief that, within the arena of sexually harmful behaviour, a traumatic experience, most probably sexual abuse, must lie at the source. If we consider the above information, the source needn't necessarily always be a traumatic event or abuse but could simply stem from the absence of something.

Emotional warmth!

Following the absence of emotional warmth, as they reach adolescence they experience sexual urges that they cannot yet understand or manage, from which they find comfort and stimulation.

This, combined with an absence of empathy for others because it has not been a feature in their lives, produces the perfect storm of factors resulting in huge social problems. These social problems govern their lives and often those around them for the rest of their lifetime as the cycle continues.

These are the negative forces we encounter as we look after traumatised children.

If we change the subject to positive thinking - how can we achieve happiness and harmony?

To answer this question perhaps the first question should be what is it?

To consider the quest for happiness we must also consider what makes us unhappy.

Here we can consider some important facts. How do our lives compare now to our lives 500 years ago, which by modern standards of health care, is only five lifetimes ago? The following is striking and yet also leaves as many questions to ask, as it answers.

- Child mortality down from 30% to 1% worldwide.
- Violent death is down from 15% to 1%.
- More people die from suicide than from violence, including terrorism and world wars.
- More people die each year from obesity than from famine.
- Sugar is more dangerous than gun powder.

So, the world has never been safer yet, what we enjoy can also cause us harm.

The answer to what makes us happy is not going to McDonald's, winning the lottery or finding a new partner. What makes us happy or unhappy is biochemistry!

"Happiness and unhappiness is determined by a complex system of nerves, neurones, synapses and various biochemical substances such as serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin".  
(Professor Yuval Noah Harari)

Once you can understand that there is a disconnection between stimulation and experience and that the experience felt within is purely chemical, the world looks very different.

We are an evolving species. Evolution has created many systems to ensure our survival. To do this it has created the ability to be influenced by our nervous system.

"Evolution controls us with a broad range of pleasures. Sometimes it seduces us with sensations of bliss and tranquillity, while on other occasions it goads us forward with thrilling sensations of elation and excitement". (Professor Yuval Noah Harari)

For example, a squirrel needs to find nuts to live. These are its main diet. When it finds a nut, it experiences joy in the form of chemicals which flood its brain.

Joy when he finds it and well-being when he eats it. But these feelings don't last for long. It is important they don't last for long, if they did, he wouldn't try to find any more nuts and would simply starve to death.

In the same process the businessman is continually seeking the next deal, not because it will change his life but the sensation achieved from the last deal doesn't last long. If it did he would not grow his business.

It is also believed that if the joy of sex was not experienced with an orgasm, we would have died out years ago, as this is the only reason the male Homo sapiens would contemplate having children. Likewise, the pain of childbirth is quickly forgotten by the female but the overwhelming sensation of the joy of parenting is remembered.

It is also important to understand that negative sensations keep us from harm and danger. As the organiser of what many would consider high risk activities for children, I have long loved the saying “break a bone and save a life!”

This means that by allowing children to experience danger and the pain that goes with making mistakes, the children learn how to risk manage their lives.

From my experiences of encountering the First Nation American (Native Americans) culture in my own childhood, their children were never stopped from climbing trees or anything they wanted to do as young children because they believed in this concept.

This is in stark contrast with the health and safety culture of modern Britain, which seeks to reduce all risks, without understanding the damage it does to childhood development.

Whilst the business of taking risks to learn from, may be a deliberate strategy from those that understand these concepts, the acknowledgment of negative stimulation keeping us from danger, is slipping from modern British society.

The parent who slaps the hand of a young child, who is about to touch the heat of the cooker and injure themselves, risks criticism of using corporal punishment, even though the motivation is to provide negative stimulus to keep the child safe as nature intended. A professional carer doing the same thing would undoubtedly have their career ended.

In the quest to remove negative consequences, we risk bypassing nature’s way of keeping us safe.

The consequences are that many children in the care system grow up without a correct understanding of dangers or managing risks.

Self harm behaviours strive to create and usually result in the stimulus for others to provide care, further promoting the self harm behaviour.

One of the reasons why suicide rates may get higher in the modern world, may well be the disconnect between modern society as people are shielded from the realities of death. Those that undertake attention seeking behaviour may ‘sail too close to the wind’. As they don’t really understand the risks they take or the consequences of their adventures, their behaviour can unintentionally be fatal. Hence the term ‘misadventure’.

Encounters with dangers are also often hidden and experienced in the presumed safety of their bedroom. In one experiment rats were given good sensations when they pressed a pedal. Although food was available, they ignored the food and kept pressing the pedal to the point of starvation. This as Yuval describes, is the same as the children who play computer games and don’t come down for their meals.

The issue with computer games, as with too much fantasy television, is that it gives false stimulation. It is imperative that any good parent controls false stimulation and ensures worthwhile experiences, from which children can learn and develop.

The other aspect is that children can become familiar with these false stimulations through artificial experiences and struggle to create or find any kind of similar experience in real life. Also, managing the difference between fantasy and reality can be confusing where the child's reactions in the real world, are rehearsed in the fantasy world and these don't then match the real life situation. Outbursts of violence, anger and aggression, acceptable in virtual reality, are neither appropriate nor acceptable in the real world. As children learn to live as adults through play and mirroring role models, for some the ability to differentiate between fantasy and reality, is simply too difficult. This manifests itself in extreme behaviours ranging from difficult to manage challenging behaviour, to school shootings, now common place in the USA.

In my view, technology and societies desire to embrace it, has gone faster than our understanding of ourselves and what makes us grow and develop as well balanced rounded human beings.

“The key to happiness is finding the right doses of excitement and tranquillity.”  
(Professor Yuval Noah Harari)

Let's look at some behaviours and activities and see what's going on -

- Children who abscond. It has been my long held belief that children either run away from something or run to something. During our referral and assessment process we try to identify if there is absconding behaviour and what the motivation is. Where children are still placed at home or with suspicious individuals, the motivation may well be to escape abuse. If so, it is clearly understandable and we should try to rescue them from their situation. Where they are in a safe place and they appear to be motivated by excitement and adventure in the form of other negative stimulation, as Yuval puts it, their biochemistry goads them forward with “thrilling sensations of excitement”. It is unlikely therefore, that anything we offer in terms of therapeutic activities, which by their nature do not provide that same level of high stimuli, are going to help that child replace the stimuli they are striving for. The police officers who return these children, have on more than one occasion added to the problem by being extremely kind. They take the children for rides in the police car and show them how to work the flashing blue lights. The result is negative behaviour reinforced with what the children perceive as positive high-stimulus experiences. The only outcome is that the behaviour will be repeated. Also, whilst on the run other experiences are likely to occur.
- Alcohol, smoking and drugs. These activities may vary considerably, however, even if taken in moderation have the same issues. To start with. children in the looked after system who abscond, usually haven't learnt how to use moderation and take things to excess. Secondly, they all produce a false high, biochemical sensations that are exciting, and an escape from reality. They produce these effects for a short time and then crash. The child is seduced by the immediate gratification, regardless of both the crash to come and the fact they are hugely detrimental to their health and overall wellbeing. They are also addictive, adding to the drive to repeat the experience. These activities are not going to be undertaken in the presence of a

social worker or carer, so the only way they can be repeated is by further episodes of absconding. As adults, in relation to alcohol and smoking, we know the importance of moderation. In terms of drugs, it is clear why they are illegal as they are so harmful. All of the above are illegal to children because they are so damaging.

- Self harm. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways but the different activities have the same effect. Let's take a look at scratching and cutting. Cutting starts with superficial scratches. This usually results in sensations being redirected from the fog of worry and anxiety to a slight adrenaline rush, as the biochemistry systems in the body prepare for dangers to avoid. A carer sees the scratches and takes the child to one side and demonstrates, by their actions, care and concern. This may move on to identifying other issues and the child understands they are being listened to. The only outcome is a positive experience to a negative behaviour. This results in repeated behaviour that will have to intensify as the reactions of the carers begin to wane over time. Showing concern and addressing fundamental issues is really important. The correct strategy would, however, be to completely ignore the scratches and put a gap between the self harm behaviour and the subsequent counselling. Children who feel loved and listened to are unlikely to start this behaviour in the first place, therefore the importance of proactive nurturing cannot be understated. Once this cycle is started and the carers continue to react and feed the situation, it is more than likely to result in cutting. Superficial to start with but the line of travel can lead to serious cuts. During these episodes the same kind of sensations described above are repeated but much more intensely. Adrenaline rushes in, taking over any other biochemical sensations. Participants in this activity describe the initial rush, followed by stress release, as endorphins kick in to counteract the pain. Blood is released, carers panic and sensations of being taken care of and nurtured are overwhelming. Strategies as described above, of keeping calm and avoiding conversation about the behaviours, are required. Insist the child cleans up their own wound and the mess that goes with it. Any analysis of the behaviour must not take place at the time but after a break from the behaviour, where the attention can be given as a result of positive behaviour, not the act of self harm. This is extremely difficult as the carers biochemistry is telling the carer to react quickly to the sight of blood and protect the child. It is my belief that, bearing in mind the population we look after, the rates of self harm are really low. This is due partly to the way staff correctly manage these situations when they arise and partly due to the fact the children feel loved and cared for in the first place.

Case studies - The following is taken from our experience in managing these situations.

The first point to make is the importance of knowing the children you care for and what motivates them to behave the way they do. Dr Graham Hills model of motivation discussed in other documents is very helpful to understand. In summary, all of human motivation is divided into three areas

“Control” - “Autonomy” - “Relationships”.

Children with a serious desire to harm themselves often keep this hidden from those around them. This is a huge concern and one to watch out for in other behaviour changes and requires a very careful multi agency approach. Our initial assessment process would identify this as a sign of organic mental health issues at the point of referral and this would indicate they would be unsuitably placed in our environment for a multiple of reasons.

The children in our population are the ones who are motivated to self harm or even the threat of self harm by 1, 2 or all three of the motivational areas.

We had a young male who learned that he could engineer a night at the hospital by swallowing glass. The motivation was clearly control as he wanted to access the much better Wi-Fi system in the hospital. When he was stopped from taking any devices with him he moved on to other ways of controlling but there was no longer a need to go to hospital.

The older adolescent who sat down at the table to eat his evening meal who had just cut his forehead enough to draw blood but with very little damage. Enough to put everyone off their food he hoped, clearly to control those around him. To his surprise no one noticed a thing and carried on without saying a word. He would later discuss his shock at the lack of response and how he learned not to do that again. He didn't.

Whilst in another home where the staff showed great concern, took photos of the scratches and offered academic material on the awareness of self harm, the incidents continued and other copy cat cases developed not just in that home but another home also where the young male had a friend.

This other home showed what in my view are the correct responses and that became a brief isolated case. The initial case continued until the staff were able to get the message about the importance of their reactions and this situation began to improve but the behaviour continued to be relevant on occasions and the staff continued to demonstrate huge anxiety when he does, perhaps unconsciously.

The situation was brought to a conclusion when the young person engaged in self harm. This was minor scratching and he presented his wounds to his contemporaries and staff and said "you wouldn't do as I said, now look at what you made me do! "

This overt example of control was so obvious to everyone that the issue of his need to control was addressed. This behaviour had also been demonstrated with a girlfriend. The damage of such behaviour to relationships was explained and the strategy of self harm as a form of control was never given any credibility or attention again. The behaviour immediately stopped.

The idea that those around the person who is self-harming, provide perpetual sympathy whatever the circumstances, is counterproductive. In essence it feeds the behaviour and encourages further self-harming.

This idea can stem from a misinterpretation of therapeutic models. PACE, as an example, encourages acceptance (A) and curiosity (C). Curiosity in this model is identifying the motivation for the behaviour. The PACE model does not advocate the avoidance of challenging unacceptable behaviour or of implementing consequences. Acceptance is about actively communicating to the child that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. Therefore, you continue to be 'accepting' and following the PACE model when you are challenging unwanted behaviour and imposing consequences.

It is important to remember that the PACE model is a general context. In our situation we have to deal with specific contexts and these always take precedence over a general context.

In my experience with this kind of self harm behaviour there is a very simple formulae -

In homes where the staff remain calm, show no anxiety and ignore the negative behaviour and reward the positive behaviour the self harm stops often totally.

In homes where the staff unknowingly show anxiety and attempt to manage the behaviour rather than viewing it as symptomatic of other behaviour, the self harm continues and can escalate.

- Being restrained. Child engages in negative behaviour that will be, by its nature, a danger to themselves or others. Also, but less likely, property may be damaged. Feelings of anger are expressed and adrenaline takes over. Anger is released. A carer takes hold of the child and restrains their actions in a safe hold. These safe holds by nature, brings the carer into close physical contact and the child feels safe, contained and still able to express their anger and frustration. When the child feels calm, the safe hold is released. Carers continue to be supportive and talk through the event. The incident comes to a head when the child begins to cry. At this point the carers brains are flooded with emotion, as nature pre-programmed us to react and protect children in distress. In some circumstances the incident will conclude with a cuddle. Very positive consequences to what started as very negative behaviour. Once this kind of behaviour starts and a dependency is created, it is almost impossible for those carers to correct this. On receiving a child into your care that displays behaviour which requires restraint, it is important that the force used is cold, not cuddling. Avoid any unnecessary talk and even talk to others around as if the incident hasn't happened or isn't happening. Use your calm breathing to help the child connect with and regulate their breathing. Insist on complete compliance before moving forward. Control your emotions and remain disconnected from the process. Provide a brief debrief and then get the child to demonstrate remorse by tidying things up, repairing damage, or just sitting quietly. Give the child the opportunity to do something positive. Only then re-engage in a positive way and provide further counselling and debriefing. There must be a gap between the negative behaviour and the positive responses, so the child understands the positive responses are as a result of their positive behaviour, not the initial incident. If not,

the behaviour will only be repeated. Again the child who feels loved and cared for and carers who can spot the decline in attitude or behaviour and step in with support hugs and simple reassuring physical contact, are much less likely to have to deal with any subsequent restraint. Even a child who's behaviour results in a verbal reprimand, may enjoy the process of their adrenaline increasing because of the perceived threat. As a result, the only correct course of action is usually 'keep calm and carry on', - calm, calm, calm!

When to reengage and give positive responses, physical warmth.

As explained not giving positive responses to negative behaviour is really important. However, it is equally important not to ignore the need for emotional warmth, getting the timing right is so important and requires a professional judgement at the time.

So below are some indicators that may be helpful

Don't give positive responses if you feel the child is

- Disingenuous, controlling or manipulative.
- Still threatening violence or has just stopped from threatening violence.
- Still being negative.

It is important that any form of physical comfort, appropriate touch and hugs must be heart felt and not what I used to hear being called 'plastic cuddles'. Your natural responses are important. If they are forced or 'plastic' the child will feel that and this will add to their confusion about appropriate relationships and attachment.

We must also remember that children who are survivors of abuse often have an innate fear of physical contact and a mistrust of adults' intentions. Therefore, once again there is an important professional judgment to make about how and when or if at all to make physical contact.

Do give positive responses if the child is

- showing signs of remorse
- Wanting put things right
- Responsive to adult support and direction
- Listening to instructions.

Whenever possible positive warmth and reassurance should be forthcoming recognising that it is needed much more than usual due to the child's circumstances. If the child is resistant to physical contact show warmth in other ways, verbal praise, reminders of past successes or by doing something for them that will be recognised as a positive gesture.

Other documents explain the process we have come to know as PICNIC.

- Positive Immediate Consequences. (For positive behaviour.)
- Negative Immediate Consequences. (For negative behaviour.)

This sounds simple but as the above demonstrates it is so easy for these to become inverted. When they are, negative behaviour is reinforced and the behaviour promoted.

Looking at more positive actions (or are they?).

- Visits to Theme Parks. Recently I heard of another provider who was taking children to theme parks twice a week during the school summer holidays. By contrast, we allow this as an end of holiday treat, as a reward for good behaviour during the holidays. It has to be earned. A visit to a theme park creates false adrenaline rushes as you experience controlled danger on the rides. This is repeated throughout the day, creating a consistent high. On the journey home those feelings crash, as they return to reality. Our own observations over the years, clearly indicate that our children struggle to deal with the anti-climax as the body's biochemistry returns to a pre event normal. The other providers manage this by buying into the same experience again and again, kicking the can down the road and avoiding reality. In terms of helping children learn and develops it has nothing to offer other than a bit of fun that needs to be managed in a controlled way. Our armed forces learned of the importance of managing this process with soldiers returning from war. During the war in Afghanistan, soldier returning were sent to Cypress as part of a decompression process. In our example, calling for a 'nice good quality meal' on the way home can help.

Visits to Theme parks.  
Case study.

Over the course of many years we have had much experience of this as we have often engaged in these kinds of activities. As time goes on, we've learned from the experiences. One house manager who knew my concerns arranged a trip to a theme park many miles away. It was offered as an end of holiday treat. Once there the three girls she took showed signs of anxiety in their behaviour. One girl did so by becoming very controlling and refusing to engage at key times to stop the manager from going on the rides with the other two girls. They became more challenging toward the end of the day and on the way home another girl projectile vomited from the back seat of the car covering a remarkable area.

Feedback from the manager "I see what you mean now, I won't be doing that again".

Activities like this need to be prepared for by doing smaller less significant trips less far away that raise levels of excitement in a controlled way helping children manage the anti-climax slowly over time and build up to the theme parks in stages. They are by definition meant to be a one off or occasional experience because of its intention to be exciting and exhilarating and because it's unfamiliar. Therefore, regular visits are inappropriate and undermine the purpose of being there.

- Social worker taking children to McDonald's or KFC. (Other fast food outlets are available.) Recently, a House Manager told me of a review meeting with a child which he sat through. This meeting spent quite some time and detail in exploring

the child's healthy eating plan. When the meeting was over, the social worker took the child to McDonald's. The hypocrisy was explained, but they simply didn't care. On many occasions social workers have come to discuss negative behaviour with children and have done the same thing. The food laced with sugar, provides a sugar rush that lasts as long as their visit. Just like eating chocolate. The child's attention is effectively bought by the social worker. The child then associates the contact with the pleasures of the sugar rush. There is no thought to the proceeding crash or the positive reinforcement to negative behaviour. The next time the social worker comes and doesn't have time to go to McDonald's, is when they pay for it.

### Managing biochemistry in education.

Whilst in my view, there is a complete lack of understanding around biochemistry and stimulating the correct responses and balances at the right times. In some areas there is the desire to bypass our parental and teacher responsibilities and artificially manage children's behaviour with medication. In Britain in 1997, there were 92,000 children taking Ritalin. This rose to 786,000 in 2012. (Professor Yuval Noah Harari, Homo Deus)

In our experience, many children arrive in our care with high levels of medication and we have a good track record of having this reduced, if not stopped altogether. Living in an environment where the stimulation is managed appropriately, goes a long way to achieving these goals. Likewise, on the rare occasions that children have genuinely needed help, this is rarely available when they need it, if at all.

The processes within the mental health services, are so dysfunctional, we don't count on their contribution as part of the potential cocktail that may help. It simply isn't there to have any worthwhile contribution.

As Yuval explained, one thing most people are agreed on, is instead of having an education system that has further and further expectations, perhaps it would be better to change the education system. He then explains, this debate has gone on for thousands of years in different societies, which means we all need to manage our expectations.

In terms of managing our expectations, Yuval explains that most people's ability to be happy, is regulated by our biochemistry, within a range of possibilities, but limited by that range. One individual may have a range of 1 to 10, functioning between 6 and 8. When good things happen they are at 8 and when bad things happen they drop to 6, but always function within that range, as that's the range their bodies biochemistry functions at. Others may function between 4 and 6. Even if they won the lottery, they wouldn't be as happy as the other guy on a bad day because they simply aren't predisposed to being so. Therefore, in our setting, managing our own expectations for children, is as important as helping them manage their own.

What should we be doing?

Buddha claimed the way to attain real happiness was to slow down the pursuit of pleasant sensations and importantly, not accelerate it. This methodology from the past is in correlation with current science around the biochemical view.

In my opinion, the first important step is to understand what's going on in our bodies and design effective strategies accordingly.

In respect of the children in our care, we need to realise they have had excessive stimulation. Their bodies have been flooded with biochemical influences, much more than is considered normal and in all the wrong ways. Fear, anxiety, adrenaline, just to start with.

The first step to recovery is to experience our therapeutic environment where these stimuli have been considered and are controlled. Let things calm down, not a little but a lot!

Move forward with therapeutic activities that provide alternative stimuli in a positive controlled way. For example, going for a walk, working on the farms and riding horses are all designed to provide that calming stimulus. At the same time, stimulate the brain to grow by simply being involved in new experiences or seeing new places.

Protect children from ongoing negative stimuli such as excessive use of video games, or at least restrict and manage it.

After a period of time and again in a controlled way, we can re expose them to the negative stimuli as they need to learn to manage these themselves. But give them a chance to recover and yourself time to appreciate where you are and what's going on around you.

Be aware of the importance of positive relationships. Consider the power of a hand on a shoulder or a supporting hug in resetting appropriate stimuli. Be aware of how this changes your body chemistry and makes your feelings change from frustrating to worthwhile.

Modern life is complex and confusing, full of stimuli. In order to calm everything down we need to look at the needs of our basic animal requirements and connect with our natural selves. As basic animals we are pre-programmed to get satisfaction from the things we need in life and from those we live with. For example, food, shelter, emotional warmth. We are social beings.

A brief history.

70,000 years ago, or thereabouts, on a Tuesday, (incorrect as Tuesdays or any other form of time measurement didn't exist then) the ape that is 'us' went through what scientist call the 'cognitive revolution'. This is when we came down out of the trees in the Savannahs of Africa. (Savannah hypothesis)

Their brains began to expand, possibly as a result of an expanding diet. At this stage we were all hunter gatherers, in small self-contained tribal units, thought not to be more than a hundred in each group. (The size of a small company or village. This is still considered to be the optimum size for effective communication in any kind of organisation).

We walked the country, learned where all the animals lived. We fished from the rivers and the sea and caught bigger animals wherever we could. We worked together to achieve this. Not dissimilar to how the wolf pack hunts today.

It is thought our brains at this point in time, were bigger than they are now as there was no one to think for us and no one to compensate for our mistakes. If we got it wrong, it was likely we wouldn't survive. We had to get it right.

The hunter gatherers knew their country inside out and focused on great detail. The weather, the seasons, the migrating wildlife. What time of year to pick berries, what time of day to go fishing. Where to collect honey.

It is thought life at this time was good. People lead satisfying rewarding lives.

About 10,000 years ago, we underwent the agricultural revolution. We began to capture certain animals and instead of hunting them, we kept them in pens to remain fresh until we wanted to eat them. We began to grow crops and learned which we could improve the productivity of by collecting seeds and growing these closer to where we wanted to build shelters. Instead of always being on the move following the herds of animals, we built shelters and kept everything closer to us. We learned that if we put the slow moving birds in an enclosure, they bred even more slowly moving birds. We could collect their eggs and eat a few as and when we wanted as they were always available. We also began the process of creating new variations of breeds by selecting specific animals to breed from, thus creating domesticated breeds. This gave us more leisure time and more food which meant we could breed more easily ourselves and we had the food to feed the many offspring. Our population began to grow.

Then about 280 years ago the industrial revolution started. Social scientists divided this into two parts as initially it was confined to Britain. Then nearly 200 years ago in a North East town called Shildon, George Stephenson put Locomotion 1 on the tracks for the first time. It was as a direct result of this invention that the industrial revolution was transported to the rest of the world.

We are currently going through the Digital Revolution, where the transportation of information through the global network, the internet, is transforming our lives again.

Why is this relevant at this point in our discussion?

In our very complex lives, what do we do when we get time off work and want to relax?

Those that can go to the beach or to a river go fishing, others walk up mountains. Many millions of people try to reconnect with the landscape and their ancestors and return to old behaviours that connect us to nature.

In our setting, the outdoor instructors are the hunters roaming the countryside getting to know it in as much detail as they can. Their time is enhanced if they pick berries on the way. They collect the honey and manage the bee hives.

The garden instructors are the gatherers, picking fruits and beginning farming by growing vegetables and plants to eat, closer to the homestead. Often feeding the pigs in the kitchen garden.

The Farm instructors are the farmers working with the animals in hen houses, small enclosures and large fields. Gathering the harvest, whatever that may be, in terms of meat, grass and corn and of course potatoes.

The cooks in the different kitchens convert this to satisfying food.

The wood workshop and forge are the beginnings of our limited industrial activities.

The teachers help students learn how to read and write and the IT people make the most of the digital revolution.

Focusing on our early history, we are pre-programmed to take satisfaction from our own survival skills and to do this we perform the activities listed above. By doing so, we are stimulating the children's senses with gentle rewarding stimuli, instead of harsh high stimuli like adrenaline. They have experienced enough harsh high stimuli when escaping the dangers of their home lives, prior to coming to us.

These activities are of course excellent educational activities, stimulating the brain to want to learn more. With that comes the very things that make us different from other less complicated animals, reading, writing and arithmetic.

As we evolved, we learned to communicate in larger and larger groups. To facilitate that, we developed writing skills that could be read and understood by many people in many locations. These skills also required us to communicate in numbers. Today any human being is going to struggle fitting into society if they can't read, write and understand basic maths.

Our school reflects the development of humanity and in doing so allows our population to reconnect with the very essence of what makes us happy and healthy. These factors also encourage motivation for learning and the combined effect is a therapeutic approach. In my view, this helps to reset the child's biochemistry, stimulates learning and increases skills to aid recovery, sustain development and enable them to function in the modern world. How do these activities and experiences stimulate learning?

Yuval sets out his view that:

- Knowledge = Experiences x Sensitivity. To have knowledge we must go through an experience. If that experience does not include sensitivity there is no increase in knowledge.
- Therefore, a child must be sensitive to the world around them to allow the experience to be worthwhile and increase knowledge.

Traumatised children are often desensitised to the world around them. This equation makes clear the importance of allowing a process of recovery to take place, to enable the child to allow their senses to be reset. Imparting knowledge without this process being successful, is simply ticking boxes on the part of the teacher, as there are learning experiences being offered but these don't get the opportunity to be turned into knowledge.

For years I have described the brain of a traumatised child to be like a snow globe. Constantly shaken by the events of their lives. We need the kind of experiences described above, to allow their brains to settle. Only then can the experiences we offer, combined with increased sensitivity, be converted to knowledge. This is how all of the therapeutic activities increase learning in all lessons, not just the ones they appear at first hand to address.

Whilst many thought they were just going for a walk or double digging for exercise, they were in fact increasing their sensitivity which allows them to convert their experiences in all areas to knowledge.

End note.

I hope this document has brought about an awareness of an often unknown and rarely considered perspective. This is the kind of knowledge I hope you can use to help children in many practical ways, to feel calm, settled, recover from their pasts and move forward. I also hope you can use this knowledge and apply it to your own situations and improve your own lives. To have a greater understanding of what makes us tick as human beings and understand how we can strive for happiness in our quest for harmony.

David Bartlett MBE  
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## **Reading List and References**

Professor Yuval Noah Harari - Homo Sapiens

Professor Yuval Noah Harari, Homo Deus

The Biophilia Effect

Clemens G Arvay

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