

Attachment based classroom strategies

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Objectives

- ▶ To support classroom practice in working with children who have experienced trauma/attachment difficulties.
- ▶ To support adults in developing interventions to lessen the impact of the children's behaviour on classroom environment.
- ▶ To support proactive behaviour strategies that afford the children containment and builds resilience.
- ▶ To support good learning outcomes for children with attachment difficulties.

The
following
presentation
is based on
the works
of:

- ▶ John Bowlby
- ▶ Dan Hughes
- ▶ Kim Golding
- ▶ Louise Bomber
- ▶ Heather Geddes
- ▶ John Gottman

Behaviourism in schools

- ▶ The behaviourist paradigm is strongly engrained in English schools and much of the educational world (Harold & Corcoran, 2013; Hart, 2010).
- ▶ Current government policies (Department for Education, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) and a school inspectorate system (Ofsted, 2014a) that explicitly endorse behaviourist principles have combined to reinforce a traditional view that children's behaviour should be managed through a system of sanctions and rewards in order to improve their classroom performance and promote pro-social behaviour. It is fair to say that such a system can work ... for most of the children, for most of the time. But what happens when it does not work?
- ▶ It reflects an inflexible, “one size fits all” perspective that does not take into consideration the holistic, constructivist nature of human learning or the power of intrinsic motivation. Nor do such approaches embrace more post-modern perspectives of human agency and the “child's voice,” since they encourage passivity, control and obedience rather than empowerment, autonomy and self-regulation.

- External Frameworks



External regulation
(Sanctions and Rewards)

- Internal Frameworks



Internal regulation
(Emotion Coaching)

Behaviour is self-determined
It comes from within

“Much of today’s popular advice ignores the world of emotions. Instead, it relies on child rearing theories that address the children’s behaviour, but reject the feelings that underlie that behaviour.”

(Gottman, 1997)





Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil

by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up
Because we ain't got an alarm clock
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,
Cause the lights ain't on
Even got my baby sister ready,
Cause my mama wasn't home.
Got us both to school on time,
To eat us a good breakfast.
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed
Cause I ain't got a pencil.

Attachment theory as an alternative to behaviourism in our schools

- ▶ If a child comes to a school with a wheelchair, a school has to put in a ramp. These children have a different need. We need to make sure the environment is good for them. It's basically inclusion...; It's had an influence on the whole school, making us more sensitive to particular needs. We have much more empathy now. (Rose, et al, 2014)

Why is attachment important in schools?

- ▶ There is a population of pupils in schools who seem unable to access learning, to engage and achieve, and to move on into adulthood with confidence; children whose diminished self-esteem and resilience are limitations on engagement in relationships and emotional and cognitive development.
- ▶ Early attachment research clearly indicated that secure attachment is the factor linked to children's more successful engagement in school, in terms of social competence, curiosity, effective play and investigation, sympathy towards others and so a secure enough start prepares the child to become the pupil.

**“You can’t teach
children to behave
better by making
them feel worse.
When children feel
better, they behave
better.”**

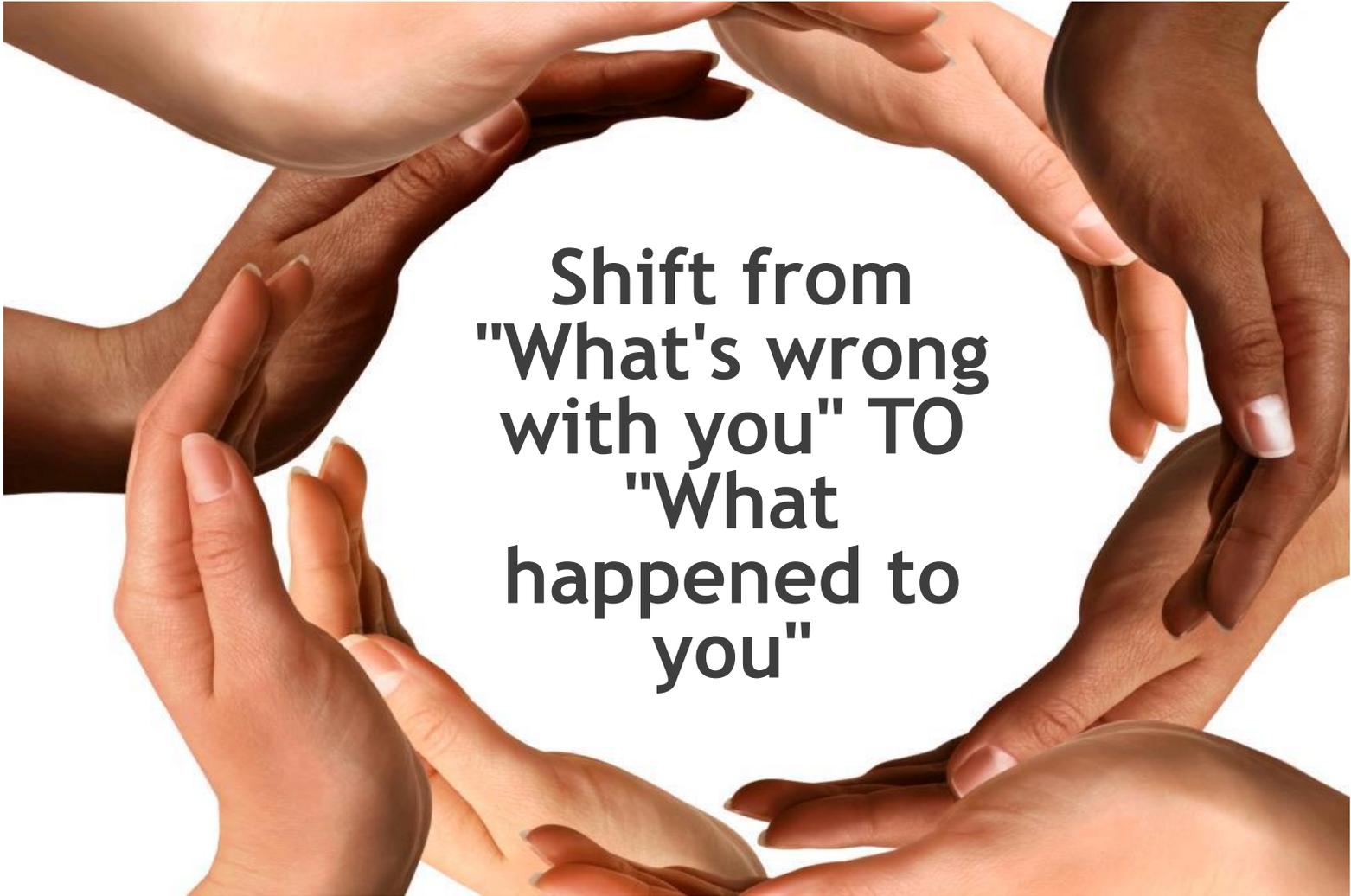
- Pam Leo



Why is attachment important in schools?

- “**Attachment influences students’ school success.** This is true of students’ attachment to their parents, *as well as to their teachers.* Secure attachment is associated with higher grades and standardized test scores compared to insecure attachment. Secure attachment is also associated with greater emotional regulation, social competence, and willingness to take on challenges, and with lower levels of ADHD and delinquency, each of which in turn is associated with higher achievement” (Bergin and Bergin, 2009)
- ‘Teaching is a social, interpersonal, **attachment-based** endeavour’ (Conzolino, 2013).





**Shift from
"What's wrong
with you" TO
"What
happened to
you"**

What would be
useful for an
Educator to have
an understanding
of?

An Understanding of:

- > Attachment theory
- > Psychological Trauma
- > Basic Neuro-development
- > Basic Neuro-science of Attachment and Trauma

Stay close

“Key Adults act as a ‘surrogate secure base’ which can contain the inevitable anxiety engendered by the challenges of learning”

(Geddes 2006)

- ▶ Physically and psychologically close to pupils
- ▶ Being close communicates acceptance, containment, safety, attunement, attentiveness, responsiveness, structure and supervision

Stay close

Being actively present

Practising relative dependency

Encourage selective attachment

Resistance

Relational withdrawal

'Time in'

Stay calm and bring calm

- ▶ “Our emotional states are so contagious! When we’re tense, others around us tend to become tense. When we are happy, we tend to make others a bit happier. If we as educators are feeling angry, our pupils will tend toward anger, or at least toward a tense, defensive state, raised to protect themselves from our anger. Such states reduce our vulnerable pupils’ readiness to learn and our ability to influence them, without resorting to power and control.

(Bomber and Hughes, 2013)





Stay calm and bring calm

Maintain our own emotional stability

Calmness with energy

Co-regulation

The shock factor

“Emotional regulation is important as it allows learning to occur and enables greater variety of thinking strategies to be available.”

(Schofield et al 2012)

Facilitating calmness

Create pauses

Settling to learn

Watch out for sensory overload

Sensory breaks

When is enough

Swap-ins

Emotion Coaching

Based on research by John
Gottman (1997)

Emotion Coaching is helping
children and young people
to understand the different
emotions they experience,
why they occur, and how to
handle them.

the adult actively
the child's inner life
acher and he or she
child in her hand

he child is sad or in
feeling the sadness
and lets the child

strating that he or
it an experience to
cher is telling the
have to deal with

with the child
comfort and
abandon her when

Emotion Coaching

5 Steps of Emotion Coaching

1. Be aware of child's emotional responses
2. Recognising emotional times as opportunities for intimacy and teaching
3. Listen Empathically and Validate child's feelings
4. Help child verbally label emotions - helps sooth the nervous system and recovery rate
5. Set limits while helping the child to problem solve

In Practice

Step 1

Recognising, empathising, validating the child's feelings and labelling them



Step 2

if needed) - Setting limits to behaviour



Step 3

Problem-solving with the child

Step 1- Empathise, Validate and Label

- Recognise all emotions as being *natural and normal* and not always a matter of choice
- Recognise behaviour as communication (relational vs behavioural model)
- Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt
- Take on the child's perspective (mentalising/mind-mindedness)
- Use words to reflect back child's emotion and help child/young person to label emotion
- Affirm and empathise, allowing to calm down
- Provide a narrative/translation for the emotional experience (creating cognitive links)



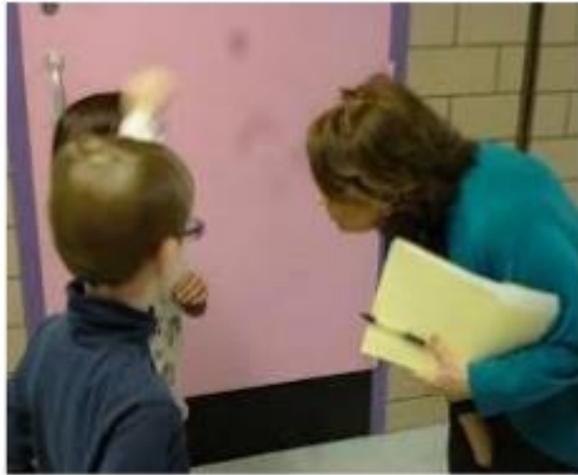
Emotion Coaching Scripts

Step 1: Examples

- *'I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would feel angry if that happened to me. It's normal to feel like that'*
- *'I can see you're frowning and you're kicking the wall and you're expressing a lot of energy. I would be feeling like that too if I didn't want to do something'*
- *'I noticed you looking around at the other who are working on their projects. I think you might be feeling nervous right now about whether your work will be ok. Have I got that right?'*

Step 2 : Setting Limits (if needed)

- State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour
- Make it clear certain behaviours cannot be accepted
- But retain the child's self-dignity (*crucial for responsive behaviour and well-being*)



Emotion Coaching Scripts

Step 2: Examples

- *'These are the rules that we have to follow. Doing that is not ok'*
- *'We can't behave like that even though you are feeling annoyed because it is not safe'*
- *'You didn't put the ball away as we agreed. You're probably angry that you can't play with Billy now because you have to stop now'*

Step 3: Problem Solving with the Child

- When the child is **calm** and in a relaxed, rational state:
- **Explore** the feelings that give rise to the behavior/problem/incident
- **Scaffold** alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes
- **Empower** the child to believe s/he can overcome difficulties and manage feelings/behaviour



Emotion Coaching Scripts

Step 3: Examples

- *'This is not a safe place to be angry. Let's go to a safe place and then we can talk'.*
- *'Next time you're feeling like this, what could you do? How do you think you will react next time or if this happens again'.*
- *'You need to sit either by Ruth or sit by your key adult in front of me – which do you want to do?'*

Instead of denying the feeling ...



Empathise, validate, label...



“Do these pupils really need more access to study opportunities, better teaching, different reading schemes, more computers, more effective discipline? What if they just needed more access to you and to me? A genuine relationship. Is this a possibility? What if it really wasn't more complicated than that? What if the tool that we had overlooked - ourselves - was the bridge into a world of possibilities, that a genuine relationship with us, perhaps acting as a buffer, could switch on the pupil's 'thinking brain' and integrate it with his 'emotional brain'?”

Bomber & Hughes (2013)

Playfulness
Acceptance
Curiosity
Empathy

Developed over 20 years by Dr Dan Hughes

It is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make pupils experience security and safety.

It is an approach of four personal qualities which allowing adults to support a child's develop their own self-awareness, emotional intelligence and resilience. Over time, and with practice, a child will gain strong tools to better understand and regulate their emotions.

Key to this approach is a deep respect for the child's own experiences and their inner life.

Playfulness - an open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude

- ▶ This is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice, like you might use when story telling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone. It's about having fun, and expressing a sense of joy.
- ▶ When teacher and student are feeling safe and relaxed. Neither feels judged nor criticised. Playful moments reassure both that their conflicts and separations are temporary and will never harm the strength of their relationship.
- ▶ Having a playful stance isn't about being funny all the time or making jokes when a child is sad. It's about helping children be more open to and experience what is positive in their life, one step at a time.
- ▶ When children laugh and giggle, they become less defensive and more reflective. Playfulness can help keep it all in perspective... It can also diffuse a difficult or tense situation when the teacher has a touch of playfulness in his or her discipline.

Acceptance -
unconditionally
accepting a child
makes them feel
secure, safe and
loved

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. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, her inner life. The child's inner life simply *is*; it is not *right* or *wrong*.

Accepting the child's intentions does not imply accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. The parent may be very firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour.

The child learns that while behaviour may be criticised and limited, this is not the same as criticising the child's *self*. The child then becomes more confident that conflict and discipline involves behaviour, not the relationship with teacher nor his/her self-worth.

Curiosity - without judgement children become aware of their inner life

- ▶ Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware of their inner life, reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it to their parents or therapist. Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the child know that the adults understand.
- ▶ With curiosity the adults are conveying their intention to simply understand *why* and to help the child with understanding. The adult's intentions are to truly understand and help the child, not to lecture or convey that the child's inner life is *wrong* in some way.
- ▶ Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child: "*What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about?*" or "*I wonder what...?*"



Empathy - a sense of compassion for the child and her feelings

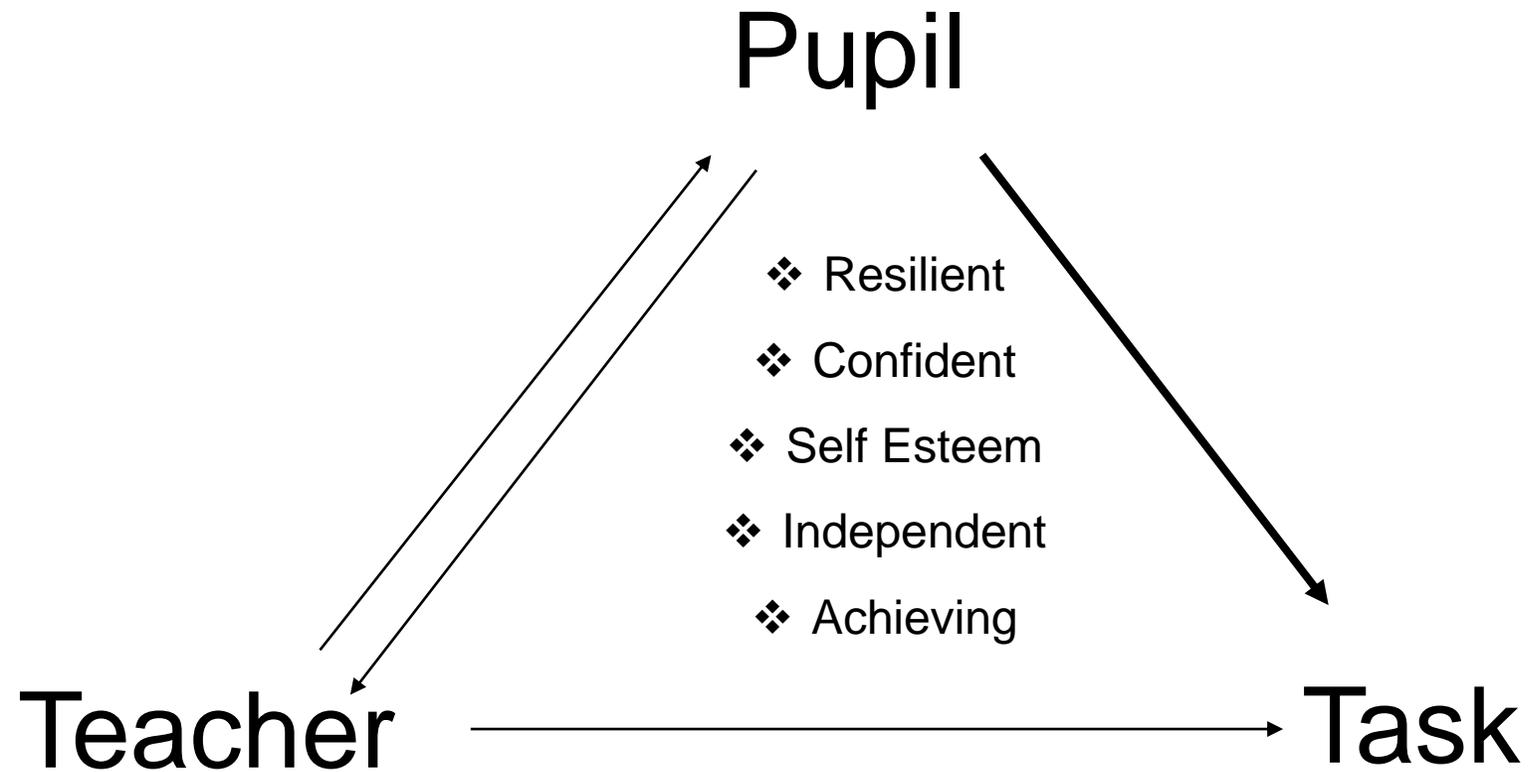
- ▶ Being empathic means the adult actively showing the child that the child's inner life is important to the teacher and he or she wants to be with the child in her hard times.
- ▶ With empathy, when the child is sad or in distress the teacher is feeling the sadness and distress with her and lets the child know that.
- ▶ The teacher is demonstrating that he or she knows how difficult an experience is for the child. The teacher is telling the child that she will not have to deal with the distress alone.
- ▶ The teacher will stay with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support, and will not abandon her when she needs the adult the most.
- ▶ The teacher is also communicating strength and commitment, with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much. Together they will get through it.

Attachment Difficulties in School Setting

Kim Golding

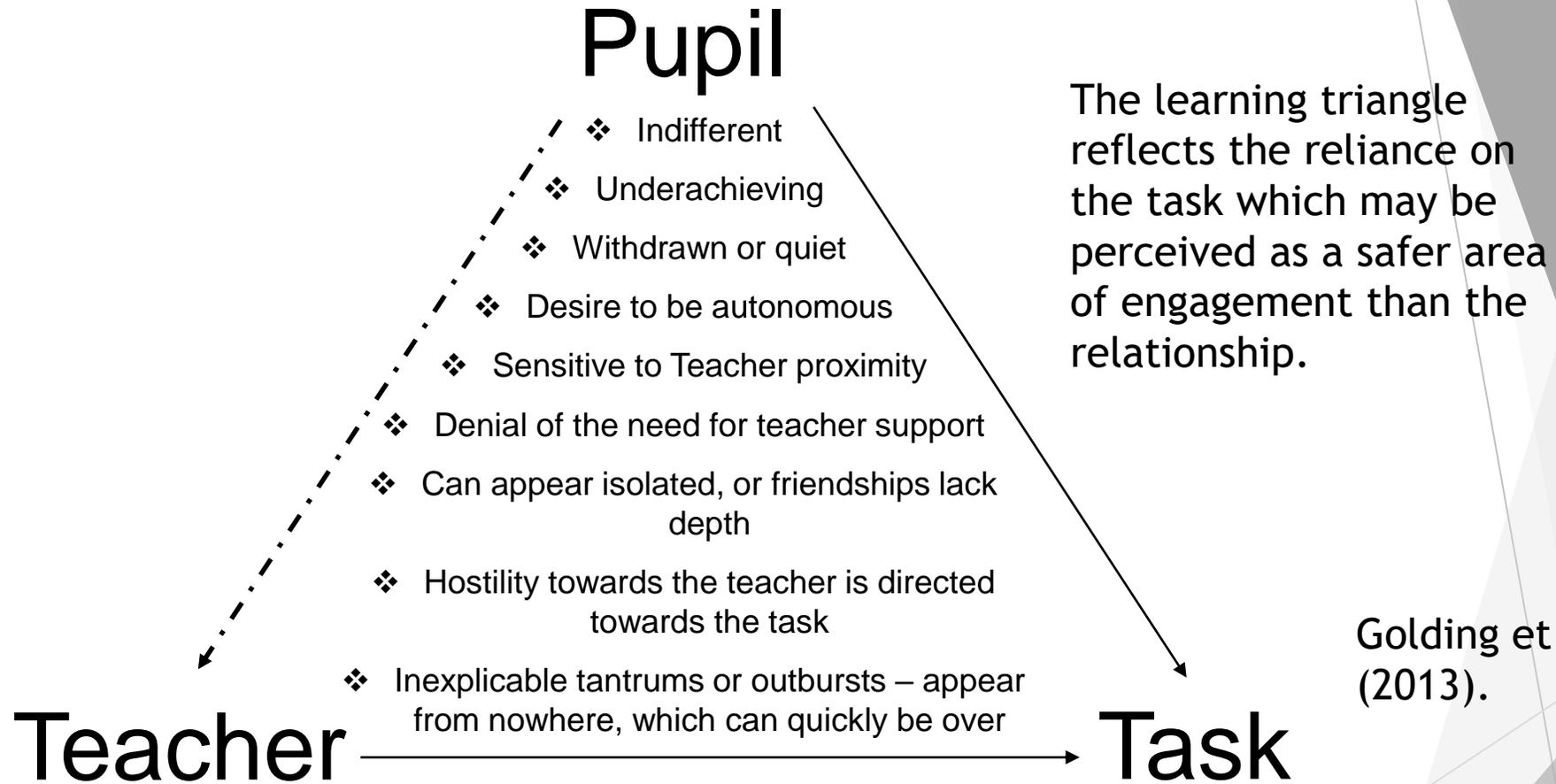


Learning Triangle - securely attached child



Golding et al (2013). *Observing Children with Attachment Difficulties in School.*

Insecure - Avoidant attachment style



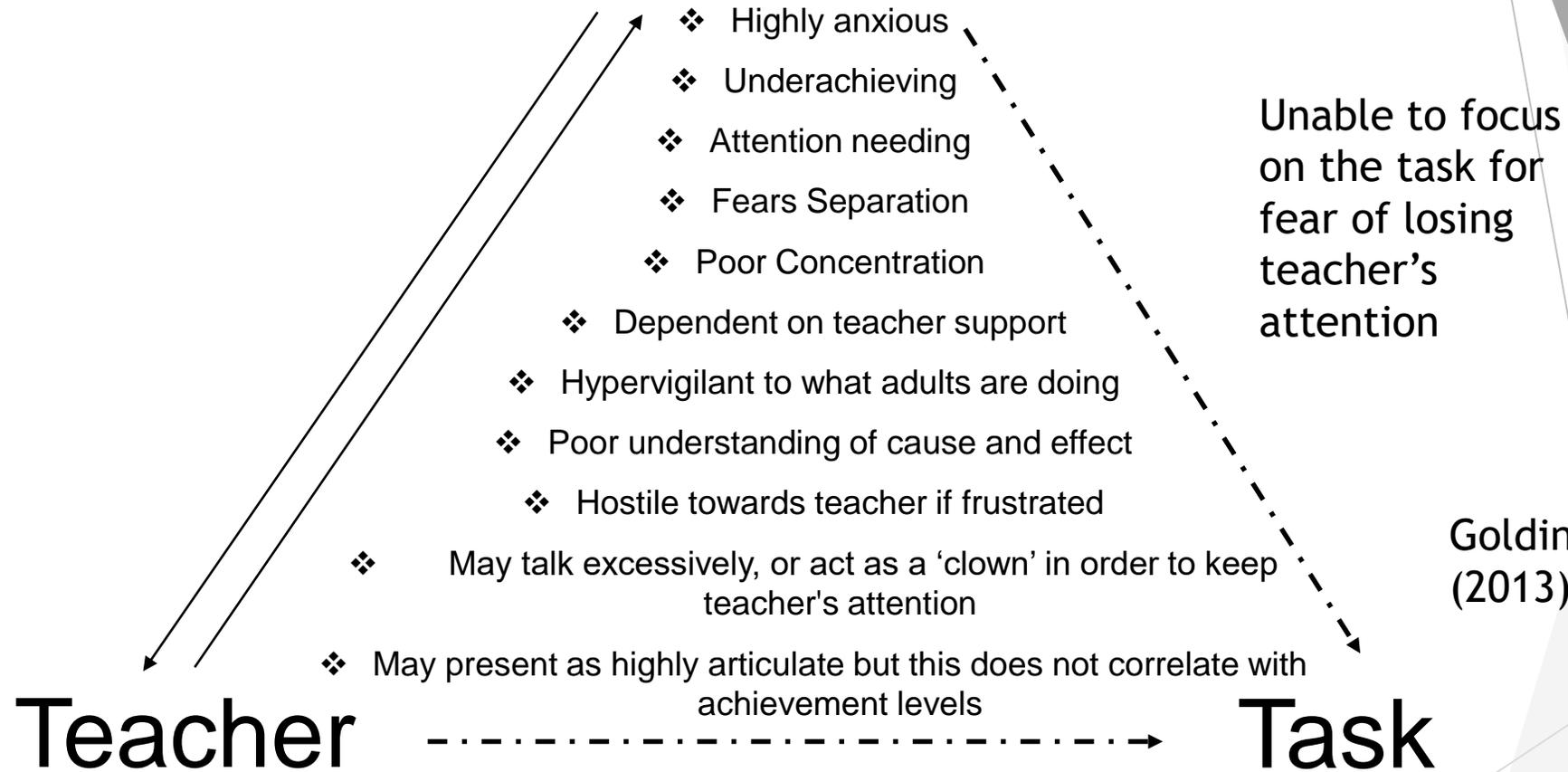
Golding et al (2013).

Strategies for Insecure - Avoidant

- ▶ Ask the child to help the teacher with specific tasks
- ▶ Gently encourage child to seek help from adults
- ▶ Get the child to participate in highly structured games but avoid those with strong winning/losing element (eg team games)
- ▶ Have the child work in pairs or small groups with an adult
- ▶ Structured writing tasks, mind-mapping, fast access to resources
- ▶ Use concrete structured activities (left brain functions)
- ▶ Use metaphors to describe emotions
- ▶ Demonstrate that child is held in mind (eg I was thinking about you when...)
- ▶ Gradually develop their ability to trust adults and express themselves

Insecure - Ambivalent attachment style

Pupil

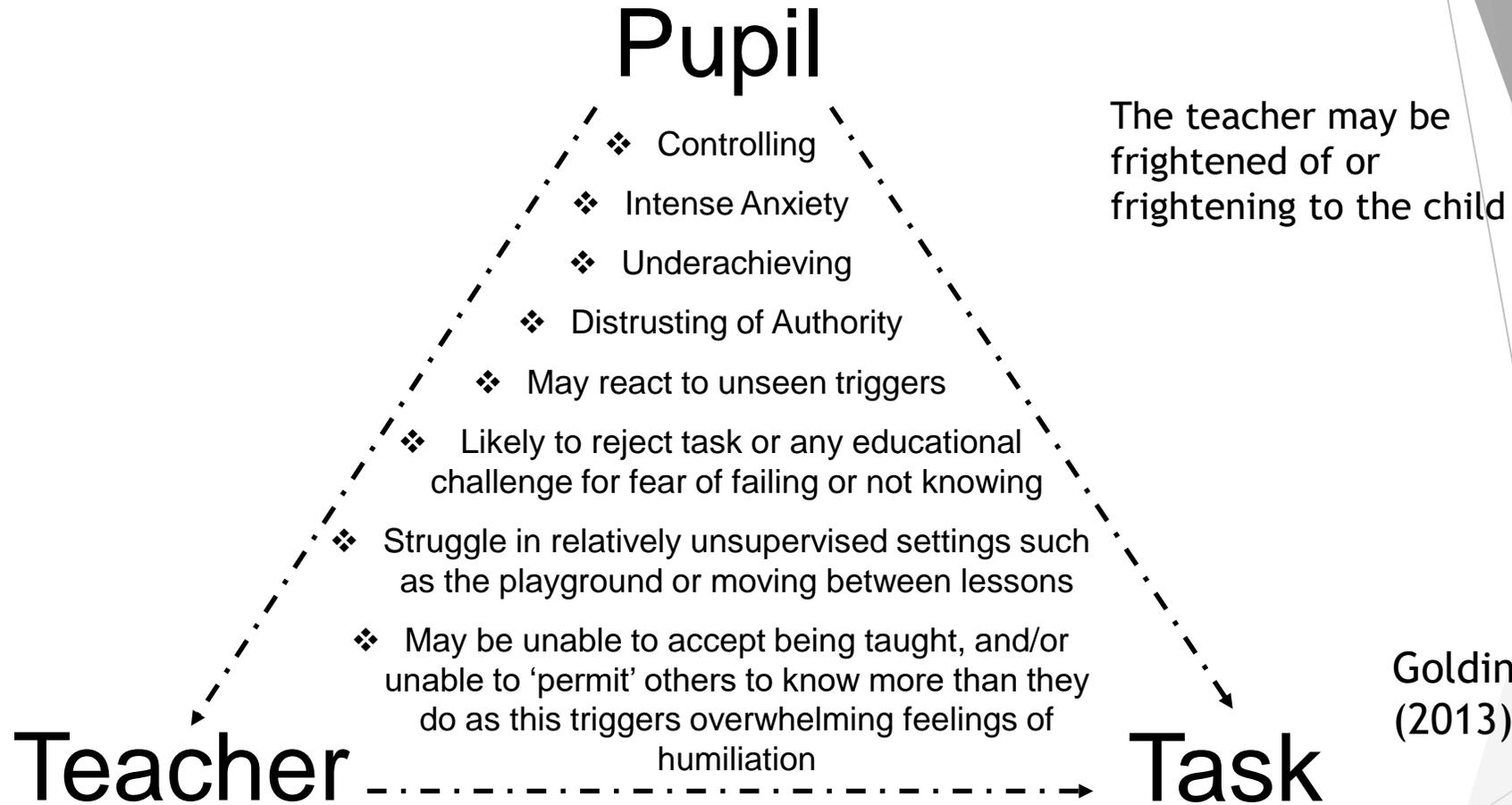


Golding et al (2013).

Strategies for Insecure - Ambivalent

- ▶ Break the task into smaller steps
- ▶ Use of a timer to delineate tasks and aid concentration
- ▶ Use board games to help develop shared control and enjoyment
- ▶ Special objects to support transitions and to reassure
- ▶ Have the pupil be responsible for a task
- ▶ Small group work to improve social skills and awareness
- ▶ Plan and prepare the child for beginnings, separations and endings
- ▶ Identify a 'Key person'
- ▶ Involve the parent in the pupil's education
- ▶ Gently teach the child to regulate their emotions and build resilience

Insecure - Disorganised attachment style



Golding et al (2013).

Strategies for Insecure - Disorganised

- ▶ Needs a key attachment figure with whom to link daily
- ▶ Provide frequent positive feedback in class and around school
- ▶ Avoid threats to safety, self-image and kudos
- ▶ Reduce proximity and engagement in crisis situations
- ▶ Contain child's emotions calmly and predictably
- ▶ Provide cool-down and relaxation procedures including music and exercise
- ▶ Give closed choices to allow limited control
- ▶ Match emotional development of the child with strategy to support
- ▶ Use concrete and mechanical activities in between work tasks
- ▶ Consistent boundaries, rules and routines - calm and predictable
- ▶ Ensure all school staff are aware of child's needs and agreed procedures



General insecure
attachment style
school interventions

Allocate a key person

- ▶ Create a secure base (active presence, helping the child become dependent before becoming independent)
- ▶ Providing emotional support (build relationships with the child at the emotional age he/she is displaying and set emotional tone, provide relationship repair)
- ▶ Providing behavioural support (usual positive behavioural support and use 'time in' rather than 'time out')
- ▶ Providing learning support (consistent boundaries and routines and help build self-esteem)
- ▶ Looking after the key person (ensure that you look after yourself, colleagues to look after the key person)

Shield against shame

Blame
It's his fault



Lie
'I didn't do
it'

Minimise
'It wasn't so
bad'

Rage
'You always blame me'
'I'm rubbish'

Golding and
Hughes 2012

Provide support for transitions

Transitions are particularly hard for pupils with insecure attachments

Child is likely to try to reject you (less emotionally painful for the child to reject you before you reject them)

Let them know that you are still there for them

Keep the school day routine as normal as possible

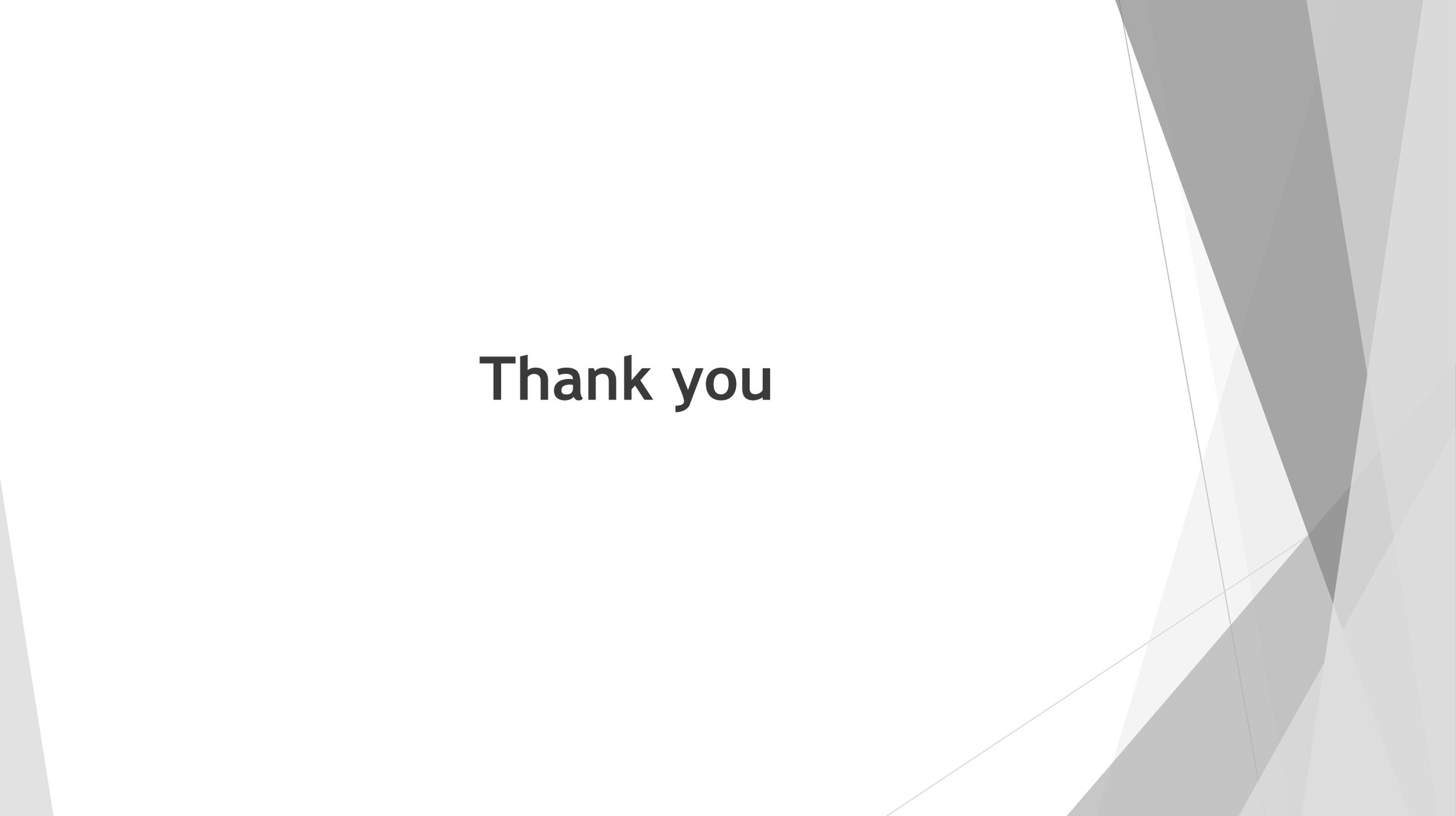
Provide structured and mechanical work (e.g. word searches, calculations, handwriting practice, jigsaws and pattern completion)

Let the child know that change does not mean loss

Tell them that you will remember them, recall times that you have enjoyed together

Provide a transition programme, social story and special objects

Thank you

The background features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent gray geometric shapes, primarily triangles and quadrilaterals, on the right side of the frame. These shapes create a layered, architectural effect. A few thin, light gray lines intersect across the composition, adding to the abstract design.