

VSK's Nurture Principles – Transcript

Title Card: What is Nurture?

The debate around nature and nurture is one of the oldest philosophical issues in psychology. On the one hand we have nature - our genes and hereditary factors influence who we are and who we become - from physical appearance to personality characteristics.

Then we have nurture – that all the environmental variables impact who we are, including our early childhood experiences, how we are raised, our social relationships and our surrounding cultures. We need to consider the environments children grow up in including their school, community, family and friends, as this all affects who they become in later life.

VSK strongly believes that the principles of Nurture are so important to help children to develop, grow and become the best person they can possibly be.

The National Nurturing School Programme features 6 Principles, that together can really influence young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as removing barriers to learning and limiting life chances. VSK has been working with schools, encouraging them to work with nurturing approaches for several years now – and now we are building this way of working into our own school at VSK.

A key feature of VSK's development work is to ensure that we really are true to the Six Principles of Nurture. The whole virtual school has supported this and our younger apprentices in the team have worked to put together VSK's own Nurture Principles into words by young people for young people. Our Principles are:

- Whatever changes you face we are here to guide you.
- No matter what age, everyone is at a different stage.
- VSK can help you find your voice.
- How you behave tells us how you feel.
- VSK can be your safe space.
- Nurture helps you feel happy and healthy.

My name is Laura Hunt and I've been working as an Education Support Officer at VSK for the past four years. Before that, I worked in schools running nurture groups. Nurture groups are based on the Nurture Network's Six Principles of Nurture and I saw first-hand the huge impact they had on the children who attended.

Since I've been working at VSK I've had the opportunity to visit a large number of schools; some who have had nurture groups within them and some who started up with the support of VSK. A few of those schools have taken nurturing values one step further and become classified as nurturing schools. And these schools have taken the Six Principles and really used them to basis their whole school ethos.

The difference I've seen between those schools who do it on a small scale and those who roll it out as core principles and beliefs is huge. VSK is currently on the same

journey to getting accredited to become a Nurturing School; building evidence towards what will become one of the very first virtual schools to get the accreditation.

In our team's meetings, we have now adapted those Six Nurture Principles and have embedded them throughout our practice. We are continually reflecting upon each point in our teams' meetings focusing both on the children and staff alike. We also keep them in mind during any network meeting we attend with other professionals in order to encourage everyone to think holistically as well as educationally.

We have worked with our Children in Care Councils, the Super Council for our primary school aged children and the OCYPC for secondary school aged young people to look at the principles and explore what they mean to them. Looking at how well they understand them and the difference they think it would make to them if professionals working with them really adopt these principles.

We asked young people what they understood about the word nurture and what it meant to them. They told us it meant:

- 'to care for them'.
- 'to help them develop and grow'.
- 'to look after them and help them grow up to be happy and successful'.

We have also explored with young people times when they felt our Principles of Nurture had helped or supported them. Young people had lots to say about this and were keen to share examples and what the principles meant to them:

- 'VSK helped guide me when I moved from one foster care home to another, they help me make sure I stayed at the same school which made a big difference.'
- VSK got me a tutor when I most needed it, and this really helped me to keep up at school. Having lovely foster carers helped too.'
- They helped me realise that everyone's experiences are different. The different opportunities we have had in our life means we are all at different stages, even if we are the same age. We will all get there in the end.'
- 'Even though I'm 10, I still can't tell the time, but that's ok. I know someone will help me at school and I will learn.'
- 'When I first started at Super Council, I was so shy about talking, I was quiet like a mouse, but now I'm not scared to speak up about things.'
- 'I really wanted to do some life story work for ages, and no one listened, VSK helped as Sophia listened to me and helped me make this happen and is still supporting me to do this.'
- 'Bad behaviour at school may be a sign something else is going on in someone's life. It doesn't mean they are bad.'
- 'In terms of our behaviour, if I start being cheeky or rude, it actually means I'm in a bad mood because something has happened and I need help with something, this then gets me out of my bad mood.'
- 'The OCYPC and VSK activities can be a place where you can be yourself. Other people there have been in your situation (like the apprentices). Also other children understand how you feel as we are all in care.'

- ‘You can tell the Participation Team something you don’t want to tell someone at home, and they will help you.’
- ‘It’s unbelievable that VSK look after us so much and what they do for us, all that is extra to what we get at school.’
- ‘Everyone is in care for a reason, we all need people to care for us or we won’t be happy and healthy.’

One young person summed our last Principle up for us in one sentence – he said, ‘if you put all the other 5 Principles together and they work – that is what makes you happy and healthy.’ We couldn’t have said this better ourselves!

Given how important young people have said these Principles are to them and the difference they make, as well as the fact that the Principles of Nurture are embedded in a lot of our school’s everyday practices, we are now asking the question of whether all people who are working with children and young people should also adopt these Principles?