

NAC Blog for Tacpac

NAC: Dedicated to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and adults with severe and profound intellectual disabilities

Mental health problems can affect anyone at any time. More than 1 in 10 people across the world will experience a mental health disorder at some time. But for those with severe or profound intellectual disabilities, the incidence is more than 1 in 4. People with severe or profound intellectual disabilities are dependent on others to meet all of their care needs, 24 hours a day. They are at high risk of suffering from trauma, pain, loss and abuse, for which they are unable to ask verbally for help. Families strive for the world to see that limited understanding and language does not equate to lack of feeling and emotion. However, this fact often goes unrecognised, leaving mental health needs unmet.

Caring for people who don't use words, but use their facial expressions, movements and behaviours to communicate, is highly skilled, requiring training and support to carry out this critical role. This is why Non-Verbal Affective Care (NAC) was created - to work with families towards better knowledge and understanding and to provide information, training, guidance and support.

'It can't be overstated how reassuring it is to find expertise as a family member. I'm so delighted to have found NAC.' (Parent Carer)

When families and carers are empowered with the resources and skills they need, lives flourish and thrive. As a society we can all benefit from the many gifts that people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities bring to our lives including; a sense of deep connection, presence and appreciation, and as one parent said, *'teaching us the power of compassion, humility and humanity'*.

NAC is a registered Community Interest Company (CIC), operating on a not-for-profit basis from the UK and providing services worldwide. We are professionals and family members whose vision is for the emotional and mental health needs of children and adults with severe and profound intellectual disabilities to be properly recognised and cared for.

We produce guidance on safe, natural approaches that can be used to create emotionally enriching experiences. Everything we do is suitable for people who use ways other than words to communicate, is informed by evidence and our values. We offer training and support on emotional and mental wellbeing, as face-to-face or online workshops, support sessions, courses and 'hands on' experiential coaching.

Throughout the last century, approaches to addressing mental health problems have been mainly in the form of medication and 'talking therapies', such as cognitive behavioural therapy and psychotherapy for which a level of cognition and receptive and expressive speech and language are required, making them inaccessible for people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities.

However, over more recent years, in Western societies there has been an increased understanding of the inextricable mind-body link and of the body, relationships and the senses being a route to tending to the effects of trauma and to mental health problems. (See, for example Bessel Van Der Kolk's ground-breaking book - *The Body Keeps the Score, What Happened to You?* By Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey, the *Pocket Guide to the Polyvagal Theory* by Stephen Porges, *An Unspoken Voice: How the body releases trauma and restores goodness* by Peter Levine and the extensive body of literature by psychiatrist and neuroscientist Daniel Siegel on *Interpersonal Neurobiology*). The body-oriented, interactional and sensory based therapeutic approaches that are espoused by these scientists and clinicians can, arguably be adapted to be accessible and effective for people who are non-verbal, including those with severe and profound intellectual disabilities.

NAC collates and provides guidance on wellbeing experiences for people with severe and profound intellectual disabilities that is easily and freely accessible and implementable by caregivers, parents, and educators. The experiences do not require specialist equipment and are organised in the following categories:

- Arts and Creativity
- Interactions and Relationships
- Mindfulness
- Movement
- Music
- Nature
- Sensory
- Touch

For more information, free 'how to' guides and training and consultancy please visit www.nacwellbeing.org or contact julie@nacwellbeing.org.

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