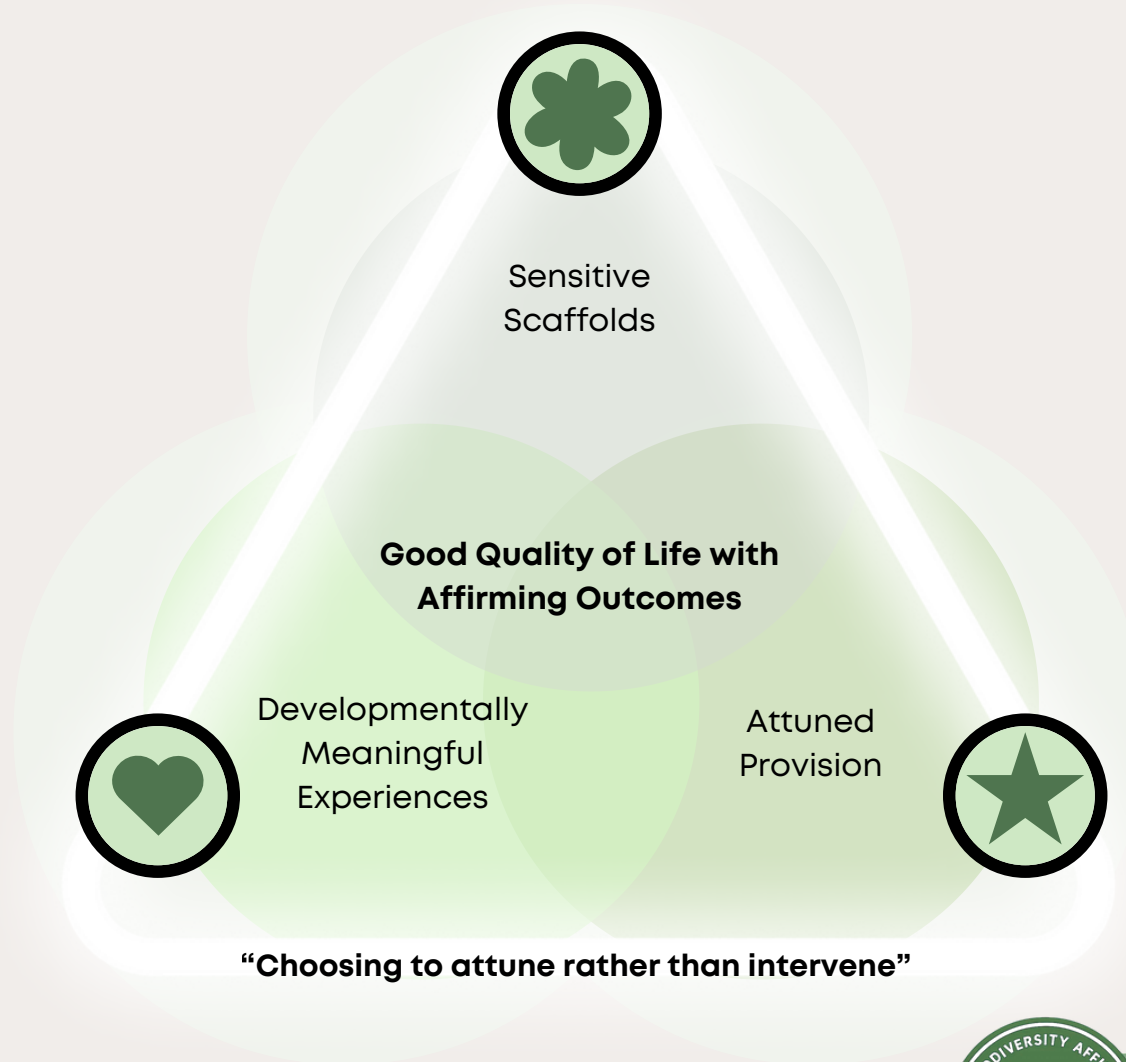


Triangle of Early Attunement

A framework for neuro-informed attunement in the early years and beyond.
Challenging the perceived wisdom of the medical model, pathology paradigm and SMART targets.



How to Implement the Framework...

This framework is designed to enable the user to implement attuned, meaningful support across each area to enable the child/young person to reach success. This should focus on holistic working, to improve quality of life, resilience, understanding of and advocacy for self.



Sensitive Scaffolds

Scaffolding is the process of providing supportive, bridged experiences and activities that help a child access their play, learning, or have needs met.

Sensitive scaffolding means attuning your knowledge of the child to create meaningful supports grounded in strong foundations. In this way, children can build on what they know and develop their own ways of being.

Scaffolding is not only about what we provide but also about how we are in a child's presence, how we connect, honour, and enable them. It includes the thoughtful use of adaptations, resources, supports, and strategies that are attuned to each child's unique strengths, differences, and needs.



Attuned Provision

This refers to things within the environment that we might focus on such as **adapted experiences**, flexible seating, diverse expectations of what **play, communication, regulation and engagement** 'should' look like.

Environments should enable engagement and **promote autonomy** within them, using tools that are individualised to each person's profile of strengths, differences and needs.

This should encompass a **holistic view** that looks at tools to support cognition and learning, communication, sensory and motor as well as social and emotional skills. We need to ensure we are responsive and flexible to children's differences and needs.



Developmentally Meaningful Experiences

This encompasses **strengths-led** approaches that make the curriculum meaningful, accessible, and relevant, creating opportunities for growth on each child's terms.

We attune to each child's unique **developmental pathway**, shaping experiences around their strengths, creativity, and enthusiasms. For some, this may mean thriving through routine and structure; for others, through novelty and playful exploration. Both are equally valid.

It requires flexibility to take pre-defined learning outcomes and translate them into **experiences that are meaningful** and affirming of diverse identities and ways of learning.



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Attuned Goal Setting

Attuned is designed to be used flexibly, which means you may focus on just one aspect rather than needing to cover every element at once. The tool should be used to build on the child's current skill set. For example, a goal might primarily emphasise autonomy or affirmation, depending on what is most meaningful for the child.



Diverse
Pathways
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

A

Affirming

Goals should affirm, respect, honour and validate the child's identity, as opposed to training them out of their difference or disability

For example; 'Jamel will be offered unrestricted access to movement through out their day'.

T

Trust in autonomy

Goals should focus on increased autonomy and equip the child to be able to express needs and wants through early self-advocacy.

For example; 'Lizzie will utilise the "yes", "no" and "maybe" visuals during activities and needs to express her preferences.

T

Time sensitive

Goals will be met when unique success criteria is achieved, at each child's pace, with reviews at relevant stages as opposed to end of assessment periods.

For example; 'Helen will recognise that the music, visual and subtle reminders indicate a transition from self-directed play'.

U

Unique to the child

This avoids use of 'copy and paste' goals. Each child develops at their own pace. Goals should respect this and their own strengths.

For example; "Eugene will have access to his special interest basket during play to incorporate his love of trains into other experiences"

N

Negotiated

A solidarity approach should be taken, incorporating the voice of the child, with all involved and reasonable adjustments made.

For example: 'Omari will have unrestricted access to transitional object to support with morning handover"

E

Engaging and Enabling

Goals should be relevant to the child's current levels of engagement, and they need to make sense to the child to enable progress.

For example; 'Using low-demand declarative question, David will increase comfort in responding to interactions and instructions"

D

Developmentally Meaningful

Goals should reflect developmental pathways (diverse and non-linear), recognising that progress does not always follow typical milestones.

For example; Ross will be supported to communicate that he chooses solitary play when peers initiate social play.

Reflective Questions



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Affirming

- Does this goal affirm and celebrate the child's identity rather than trying to train them out of difference?
- How does this goal validate the child's strengths, preferences, and ways of being?



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Trust in autonomy

- Does this goal increase the child's capacity to make choices or communicate their needs?
- How am I ensuring the child has genuine agency and not just compliance-based options?

Time-sensitive

- Am I setting this goal at the child's pace, rather than rushing to meet external assessment timelines?
- How will I know the child has achieved success in their own way and time?

Unique to the child

- Does this goal reflect this child's unique developmental pathway, or could it apply to any child?
- Have I embedded the child's interests, passions, and sensory preferences into this goal?

Negotiated

- Have I involved the child, family, and colleagues in shaping this goal?
- What adjustments or supports have we agreed together to make this realistic and meaningful?

Engaging and enabling

- Will this goal feel purposeful and motivating for the child?
- Does the goal start from the child's current engagement level, making progress feel possible and enjoyable?

Developmental Meaningful

- Does this goal reflect diverse and non-linear development, rather than forcing a typical milestone?
- How does this goal support the child's broader sense of belonging, participation, and joy in learning?

It all adds up...

Attuned Goals



Intended Impact



Affirming Outcomes



Attuned Goals: Personal, Social & Emotional Development

The child will use a chosen transitional object to support transitions, leading to reduced signs of distress during changes and more at ease behaviours during inevitable changes. (Child demonstrates more at ease transitions, fewer stress responses, and greater willingness to move between spaces).	Where possible, the key person will be available during morning handover, and will provide a transition walk around. (Child shows increased security and consistency, entering the day more settled and ready to engage).	Educator will offer low demand support during play and routines, ensuring that they are adjusted to match child’s current social and emotional state. (Child maintains participation with reduced pressure, showing increased trust and regulation during routines).
Through declarative and low-demand questioning, the child will attempt to engage in necessary routines, for example, the transition to outdoor play. (Child responds with greater comfort and confidence, reducing resistance and increasing cooperative engagement).	The child will use consent visuals to express choices, showing increased autonomy and confidence in communicating preferences during routines. (Child initiates more choices independently, with clearer advocacy of needs and less frustration).	The child will independently choose from different regulation spaces (e.g., rest den, outdoor area) that meet their sensory or emotional needs, leading to improved readiness to re-engage in play or routine afterwards. (Child demonstrates self-awareness in regulation, with shorter recovery times and smoother re-entry into activities).
Child will use familiar scripts to communicate their need for solitary play, supporting self-advocacy and reducing the need to use hitting as a form of advocacy. (Child communicates boundaries more confidently, with fewer stress behaviours in peer interactions).	The child’s personal interests will be embedded into supports, increasing motivation and deep engagement; evidenced by longer focus, greater persistence, and visible enjoyment during play. (Child demonstrates deeper flow states, higher levels of engagement, and increased joy in learning experiences).	Child will use familiar scripts to communicate their need for solitary play, supporting self-advocacy and reducing the need to use hitting as a form of advocacy. (Child communicates boundaries more confidently, with fewer stress behaviours in peer interactions).

Attuned Goals: Communication and interaction

Child's use of both immediate and delayed echolalia will be acknowledged and celebrated, with adults matching intonation to affirm meaning and connection. (Child experiences their communication as valid and is more likely to use echolalia confidently to connect).	A personal communication dictionary will be co-created with the child and family, capturing familiar phrases, words, sounds, and gestures that hold meaning for them. (Adults interpret communication more accurately, reducing frustration and enhancing shared understanding).	Now and next boards will be used as tools of autonomy, helping the child anticipate routines and make choices, rather than enforcing compliance. (Child demonstrates greater independence and reduced anxiety around transitions).
A communication passport will highlight the child's unique communication identity, supporting others to engage respectfully with their preferred styles and needs. (Consistency across environments, with the child's ways of communicating honoured by all adults).	Key adults will attune by mirroring the child's communication and play, affirming that all play and interaction styles are valid. (Child experiences trust and reciprocity, leading to more frequent initiation of interaction).	Child will select preferred mode of AAC to communicate wants and needs spontaneously. (Child chooses to communicate more frequently, in ways that feel joyful and self-directed)
Adults will limit direct questioning, instead using narration and declarative statements to create space for the child's responses. (Child feels less pressured and demonstrates increased comfort in contributing spontaneously).	Supports will respect neurodivergent social communication (e.g. differences in eye contact, turn-taking, or pragmatic skills), without imposing neurotypical standards. (Child engages more confidently, without pressure to conform to neuronormative expectations).	Communication partners will intentionally pause, observe, and wait, allowing the child to lead and shared joy to emerge. (Child demonstrates increased initiation and reciprocity in their own time).

Attuned Goals: Physical and Sensory

Ensure that the child can self-select sensory soothing and seeking tools for self-regulation when offered in a way that honours their preferred communication methods. (Child demonstrates increased independence in regulation, showing reduced stress behaviours and greater comfort during transitions or challenges).	Low demand environmental adaptations will be utilised with a sensory profile in place. (Child engages more consistently in play and routines with fewer sensory-related barriers to participation).	Child will begin to identify bodily sensations with feelings based on interoceptive support. (Child shows emerging awareness of how their body feels, leading to more accurate self-expression of needs e.g., “I need rest,” “I’m hungry”).
Child will begin to select visuals based on bodily sensations for a self-care need (e.g., a toilet visual). (Child advocates for self-care needs with increasing independence, resulting in fewer missed cues and improved wellbeing).	Providing flexible seating for comfort and engagement during familiar routines (e.g., wobble cushions at circle time). (Child demonstrates greater participation and focus during group activities, with reduced signs of discomfort or withdrawal).	To respect and affirm stimming and movement preferences, supporting the child to distinguish between regulation and distress. (Child maintains access to regulating stims without interruption, and adults respond more accurately when distress-based stimming occurs).
Whole-body preferred experiences will be provided to support self-regulation, engagement, and wellbeing. (Child demonstrates joy, persistence, and emotional balance during whole-body play and movement experiences).	Backwards chaining will be used to build confidence in self-care skills with clear praise and affirmation. (Child completes more steps of self-care independently, showing increased confidence and reduced anxiety around new skills).	Adults will offer sensory supports for co-regulation, paired with meaningful visual tools. (Child responds to co-regulation strategies with quicker calming, smoother emotional recovery, and readiness to re-engage in play).



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