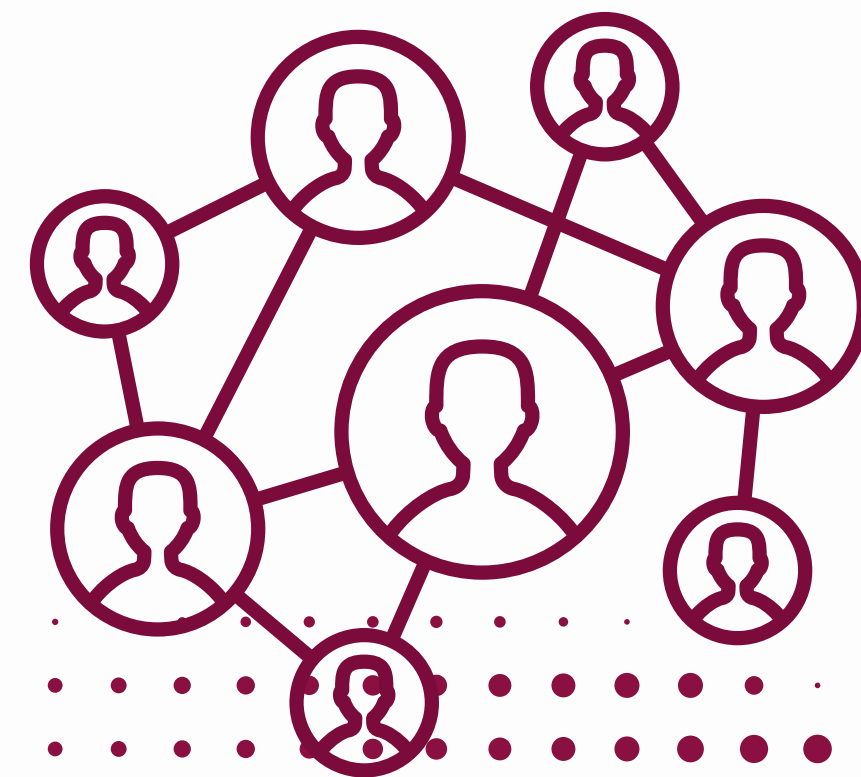




# RELATIONSHIP MAPPING: A TOOL TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND PROMOTE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Professor Sally Pearse



# RELATIONSHIPS

“Sometimes those children in your inner circle, you feel that they need you and you need to protect and you need to look after them. Sometimes they’re the hardest children in your inner circle but they’re there because you put so much more of yourself into them.”



# SESSION Aims

- The importance of relationships
- What the research tells us
- Why this matters now
- Background to the map
- How to use the map
- The benefits of using mapping
- Questions



# THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

- The EYFS highlights the importance of 'strong, warm and supportive relationships' (DfE, 2024, p.9).
- A biological necessity for human beings.
- Provide us with safety and essential care.
- "If you want to improve the world, start by making people feel safer." Stephen Porges
- The work of Jools Page "Professional Love"
- Currently very little guidance on how we develop and maintain positive relationships.







# WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

Loving relationships are rarely discussed explicitly in early years practice.

There are however a range of studies that indicate that they support young children's learning and development and are identified as a key aspect of practice by early years educators themselves.

The absence of positive relationships also has an effect.

## Language development

Establishing warm, supportive relationships between educators and children benefits language acquisition, reading, and grammar skills.

## Settling into school

Warm, supportive relationships between educators and children help children adjust to school and develop a positive view of education.

# RESEARCH

- Research indicates that conflicted and dependent relationships between educators and young children could be linked to challenging behaviours (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Schmitt, Pentimonti & Justice, 2012; Murray, Murray & Waas, 2007).
- As positive relationships can improve child outcomes they can also be used as a measure of the quality of the ECEC provision (Burchinal et al., 2021; Paschall et al., 2023).
- Positive attachment to preschool educators and the impact this has on children's school readiness and the ability to make best use of the learning environment has also been highlighted (Commodari, 2013).

# WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT NOW

- **Trauma Informed Practice**

Our growing understanding about the impact of adverse childhood experiences and how positive, loving relationships can act as a buffer against these.

- **Multiple challenges families are facing**

The pandemic exposed our whole society to adverse experiences, followed by a cost-of-living crisis that is affecting many.



# LIVING WITH MULTIPLE CHALLENGES



ILLUSTRATION: LAURA SORVALA



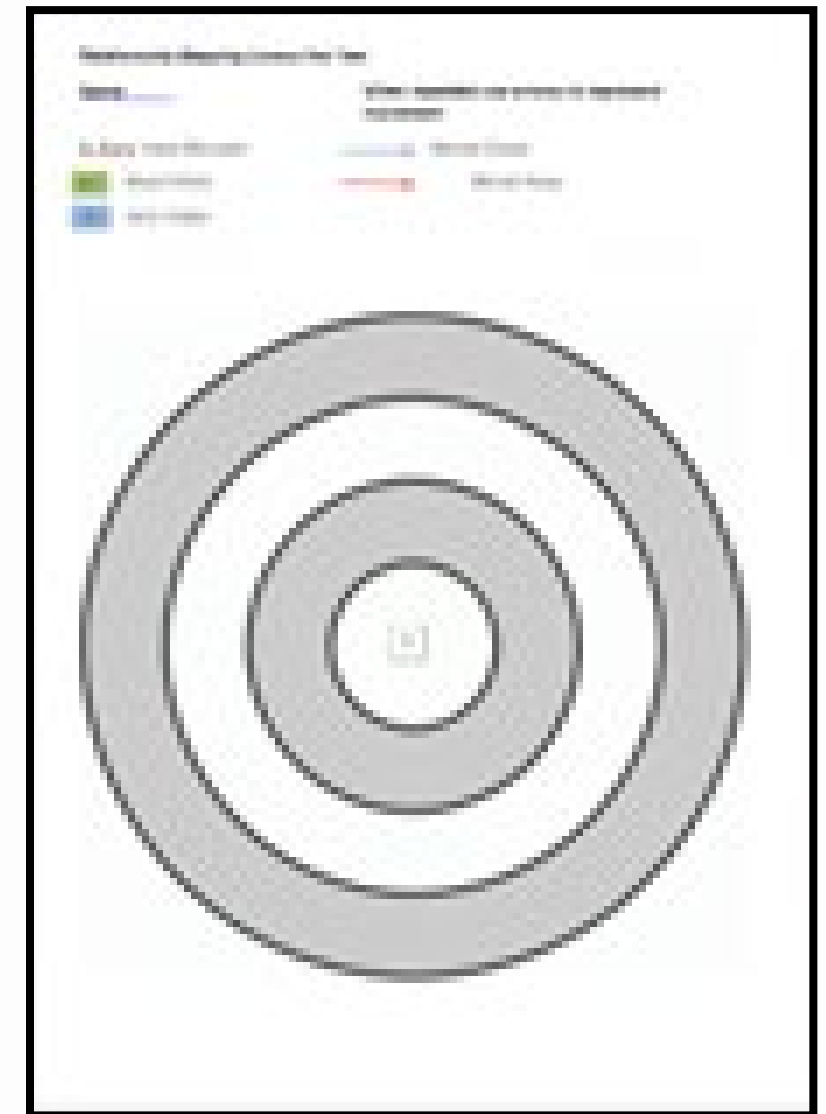
# THE MAPPING TOOL: SOCIOGRAM

- Used to map complex social relationships
- Moreno developed the concept of the 'human atom' - the smallest unit of humanity (Buchanan 1984)
- Sociograms are used to map relationships between people within a group
- Usually represented through drawing and visual depictions of relationships
- Means of exploration – not just data
- Brings to the surface what sits below our conscious level
- Increased interest in benefits of close relationships – increased use of visual maps
- Harvard 'Making Caring Common' project in high schools



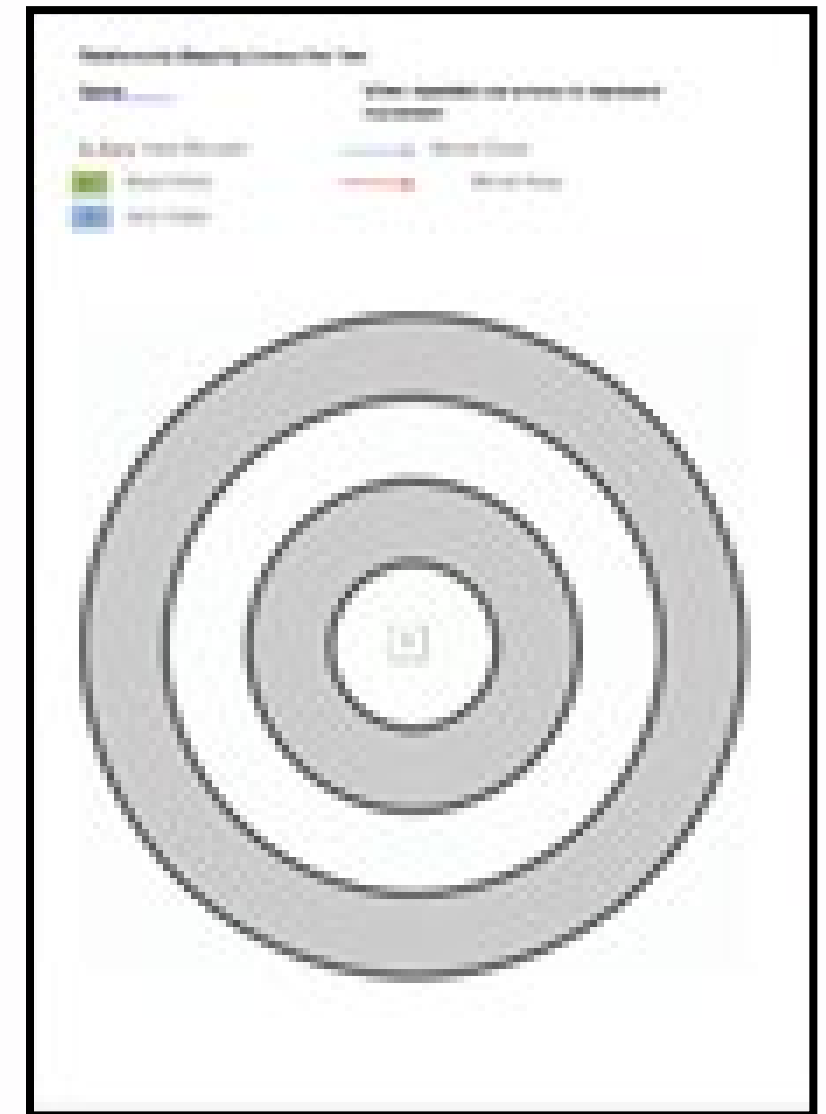
# THE MAPPING TOOL

- Preparation with the team - need to create a safe space to talk about relationships
- Agree the ground rules in your teams and be honest
- Each person has a map and maps the whole group / room they work with.
- There are no right, or wrong answers when using the map
- Guidance for practitioners:
  - Think how emotionally close or distant you are to each child in your group / class and place them on the map accordingly
  - This is simply how you feel at this moment in time
  - Use your 'gut' instinct and do not over-think

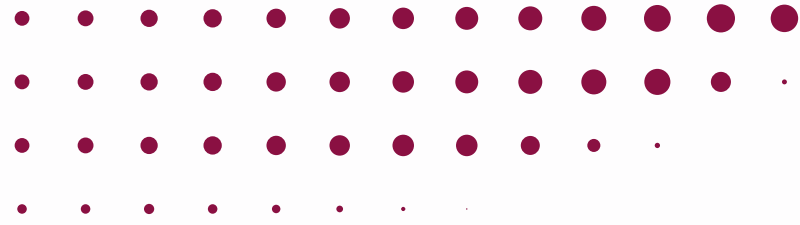


# THE MAPPING TOOL

- The map can be completed as the basis for self-reflection or for a team discussion
- In a team participants can compare maps and see if any children are on the edge for everyone.
- The team can then create an action plan to help build connection with children who are isolated.
- The mapping can be repeated each term to see how children move closer or further away.
- The team may also want to map connection with parents / carers
- The map discussion also supports assessment and planning







# MAPPING IN PRACTICE

## ● Introduction

The map should be introduced at the start of the year and the ground rules for use set by setting / room leaders.

## ● Mapping 2

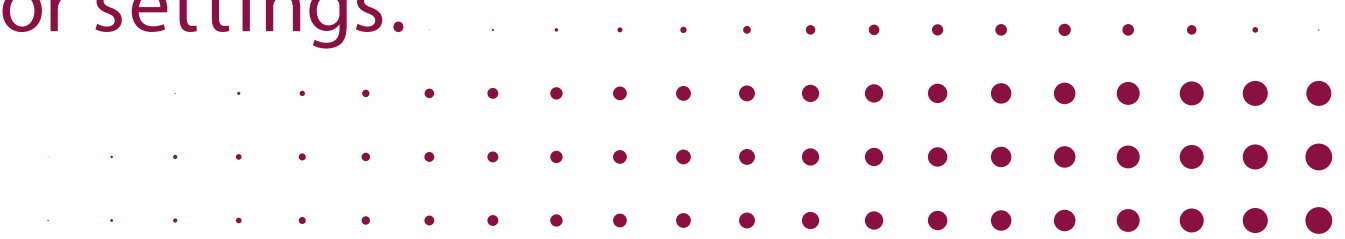
The second map is completed in January and at this mapping comparisons can be made to the first map to see what changes have happened.

## ● Mapping 1

The map should be completed as a room / class team once the children have settled in (2-3 weeks).

## ● Mapping 3

This should take place soon after Easter so that there is still time to take action before children transition to other groups or settings.



# WHY USE THE MAP?

## Space and time for professional discussion

Using the map makes this 'hidden' area of practice visible through the map and discussion. The discussion reveals motivations, preferences and skills that would not otherwise come to light.

## Safety net for children and families

The map makes all children visible and highlights children and families that may need the support of a close connection. It can reveal additional needs and changes in behaviour that need a response.

The map has a range of uses, both in terms of professional development in reflective practice and in terms of ensuring all children and families receive the support they need - including those who may remain 'under the radar' without this process.


Practitioners positive views of mapping




# RESULTS OF MAPPING

Three main outcomes:

- Makes all children visible
- Supports practitioners to learn about relational practice
- Helps practitioners to build closer connections with children and families



“Its definitely made me reflect more on how I feel about the children and why I feel that way, whether in a good or a bad way.”





# NEXT STEPS

If you would like to introduce Relationship Mapping in your setting please email:

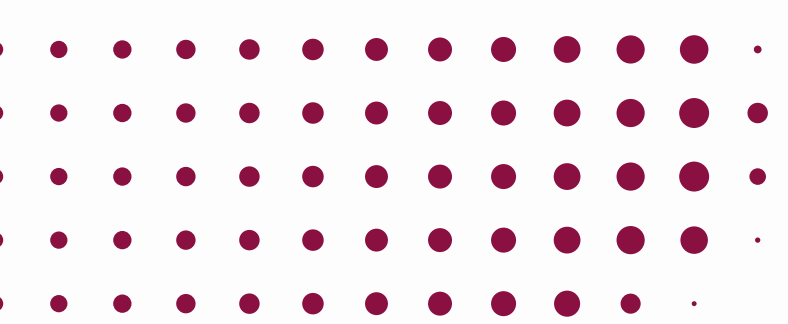
[s.pearse@shu.ac.uk](mailto:s.pearse@shu.ac.uk)

I will send you the guidance and the blank maps you need to get started.



# QUESTIONS





# REFERENCES

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