

Resource Review

Healing environments for children who have experienced trauma: an IRISS Evidence Search and Summary Service outline. <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/healing-environ-children>

Corresponding author:

Dan Johnston, dan.johnson@kibble.org

This evidence summary attempts to answer the question, 'What are some of the elements of a healing environment for children who have experienced trauma'? The question is a worthy and important one. While the environment that children live in has often been considered it has rarely been from this perspective.

The summary includes evidence from a range of literature, including mental health and architecture and states that the importance of the built environment should not be underestimated. Five themes of healing environments are suggested:

1. Nature: access to and / or views of green and blue space.
2. Connectedness: creation of social opportunities and interactions which can in turn increase inclusion and connection within a group of people. This can include ensuring continued contact with the outside community and creating spaces for group therapeutic activities.
3. Comfort and Safety: the need for felt physical and psychological safety is emphasised. A potential tension between balancing security and comfort or homeliness is acknowledged.
4. Personalisation: the freedom for children to personalise a space to give feelings of control and ownership which can support both well-being and respect of the environment.

5. Stakeholder involvement in planning and design: a collaborative design process based on integrating evidence along with the views of children and staff.

The review is brief and practical and should be accessible to many. This is a real strength and hopefully the summary can add some structure to the design of children's environments. This includes both existing services who wish to adapt existing homes or spaces or those who are designing from scratch.

A weakness of the review is the evidence available; often this is from healthcare and wider well-being research and not specifically children who have experienced trauma. The review therefore should also act as a call for researchers to look into this area more specifically and add some more robust answers to this question.

About the author

Dan is a forensic psychologist who has worked in residential and secure care for over ten years. He has completed research including that which seeks young people's views on their experiences of care. He is currently working to increase trauma informed care in residential and education services.