

## A Psychological and Developmental Understanding of the AS Tracking Factor Trust of Others

### A psychological definition of the factor *Trust of Others*

The factor Trust of Others refers to the degree to which a person trusts or questions the qualities, skills, ideas and opinions of other people. In trusting others, we see them as available and reliable, responsive and supportive of our needs. Subsequently, we trust what they do or say, and are responsive to their requests. In questioning others, we are more circumspect about whether a person is available and reliable, and responsive and supportive to our needs. We are more cautious about what they do or say, and are less responsive to their requests.

It is important to note that healthy trust of others must incorporate an appropriate degree of questioning and caution if an individual is to be discerning in their relationships, exert appropriate boundaries, exhibit age appropriate independence and develop skills of critical analysis.

Developmental psychologists suggest that the degree to which we trust or question others is shaped by our early attachments with our significant caregivers; a theory introduced by Bowlby as Attachment Theory (Bowlby 1997, 2005). Attachment Theory is built upon the premise that infants have a universal need to seek close proximity to their caregiver; when caregivers respond sensitively and appropriately to the infant's needs, it brings a sense of safety and security. Caregivers act as a secure base from which an infant can begin to explore the world around them, knowing they can return to their caregiver at any time to seek comfort and reassurance. Bowlby believed this reciprocal interaction provides an explanation of how the caregiver – infant relationship develops and influences the growing infant's development.

Subsequent psychologists, building on Bowlby's work, suggest that infants form different patterns of attachment with their care-giver which shape, though not necessarily determine, infants' expectations in later relationships (Cassidy, Cassidy-Shaver 2008). Infants who develop a secure attachment to their early care-givers build a working model which expects others to be appropriately responsive and sensitive to their needs (Schaffer, H.R., Emerson, P.E, 1964). Infants who develop an insecure attachment to their early care-givers develop patterns of behaviour to cope with a lack of caregiver responsiveness and sensitivity. Insecure attachment can manifest in three different attachment patterns, as described by Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Bell 1970) (Ainsworth)

Whilst the degree to which a pupil trusts or questions other people's qualities, skills, ideas and opinion may be **informed** by a pupils' attachment pattern, it is not necessarily **indicative** of their attachment pattern. It is also important to recognise that a person's expectations of others are not fixed; they continue to evolve in response to subsequent experiences throughout childhood and adolescence.

### A developmental understanding of the factor *Trust of Others*

The establishment of an **appropriate** trust of others in early childhood is foundational to healthy social, emotional and cognitive development (Prior, Glaser 2006; Parkes et al.). When a child experiences an early caregiver as reliable and supportive it develops their emotional self-regulation, empathy for others, social skills and learning to learn skills. For example, when a caregiver sensitively attunes to an infant's high emotional arousal, and provides secure and calm emotional scaffolding to bring the infant to a place of emotional regulation, the infant begins to build their own neural network to support emotional self-regulation. Early emotional self-regulation is seen as a predictor of future healthy psycho-social functioning (Trentacosta, C.J., & Shaw, D.S. 2009; Sroufe 2005; Kopp, C.B, Neufeld, S.J. 2003; Eisenberg et al. 2010; Eisenberg et al. 2000; Gross 2002).

Infants who have experienced their earliest caregivers as reliable, available and supportive of their needs develop an internal working model which will extenuate those expectations to those around them at nursery and at school. For example, a child who experiences early caregivers as reliable and predictable is likely to assume peers and teachers at nursery are also reliable and predictable. This expectation shapes the child's responses. She expects the teacher to follow through on what has been said or promised; she assumes a peer will share the sand tray with her; she anticipates a consistent response when she asks for help when she is struggling to do a task. Infants who experience earliest caregivers as unreliable or inconsistent are more likely to assume the same of their nursery peers and teachers, perhaps developing patterns of behaviour to compensate. He might dominate teachers' attention for fear of losing it; he might ignore requests and affirmation, doubting people means what they say; he might hoard all the toys in the sand tray – assuming that others' will not share with him. It is important to note that an infant who has experienced a caregiver as extremely reliable and predictable may struggle in the wider social grouping of nursery where behaviours are more erratic. They might assume a degree of adult reliability and support which is inappropriate, leading to depleted coping and problem solving skills; for example, expecting immediate help when stuck, or assuming immediate gratification of his needs.

As children enter mid childhood they become increasingly independent, yet remain assured of peer or adult support if required. The role of the caregiver moves towards modelling and scaffolding, teaching the pupils a wider range of self-strategies (Bandura 1977b). Children learn to self soothe in healthy ways in times of distress or discomfort whilst knowing that support is available should they need it. They begin to tolerate struggle when something is difficult before reaching for support. They look for an appropriate time to make a request, rather than assuming that a teacher is perpetually available to meet their needs. They become more discerning about others' words and behaviours, rather than assuming that what everyone does or say is necessarily right or kind. Throughout the middle years of children, peer relationships play a particularly significant role in pupils' trust of others. Children who experience peer rejection, isolation or denigration of some kind are more likely to lower their trust of others, which may have a determining influence on their wider relationships (Kupersmidt, Dodge 2004).

As children move towards and through adolescence, they exhibit increased independence from their family caregivers and actively seek relationship beyond the family home (Perry 2010). It is a necessary time of increased autonomy and exploration in which adolescents seek to define their identity and see the extent of their power (Erikson 1968; Steinberg 1990). Parents, teachers and peers play a different role; it is one of guidance, reciprocal discussion and emotional connectedness (Tokic, Pecnik 2011; Juang, Silbereisen 1999; Leaper et al. 1995). At this developmental stage, it is appropriate that adolescence develop a greater questioning of those around them. They begin to engage in more robust discussions in which they learn the skills of compromise and negotiation. They are expected to read and write in a more analytical and critically reflective way. They create more distinct relationships in which they make judgements about what they disclose and to whom (Prager, K. J. et al 1989; Jourard 1971; Rotenberg 1995). To balance the inevitable balance of risk and exploration, they must make wise choices about how to respond to requests of their friends. They learn to take greater personal responsibility and develop self-management skills, rather than relying on others to organise things for them. They learn to struggle in their learning, develop learner resilience and resourcefulness before seeking support from others (Bandura 2010; Bandura 1977a; Zimmerman 1990). Whilst learning to be increasingly independent of others, and more discerning of others' actions and words, adolescents are encouraged to remain connected and open to others. Healthy adolescents continue to trust others when appropriate - asking for advice when facing a difficult dilemma; acting on feedback, accepting limits and boundaries; acknowledging the need for age appropriate monitoring and supervision; seeking and accepting comfort when distressed. Healthy future psychosocial relationships will require both the ability to trust and question others.

It is important to note that an individual's trust of others is not fixed or static; it can change in response to both context and experience. Children and adolescents who develop an unhealthy low trust of others in their earlier years, perhaps in response to stressful circumstances or unavailable or inconsistent caregiving, will not necessarily develop a low trust of others in their later years. Improved circumstances and supportive, consistent relationships can have a significant impact on how an individual views and responds to others. (Cicchetti, Cohen 2006). Conversely, it cannot be assumed that children and adolescents who develop a healthy trust of others in their earlier years will continue to do so. A significant

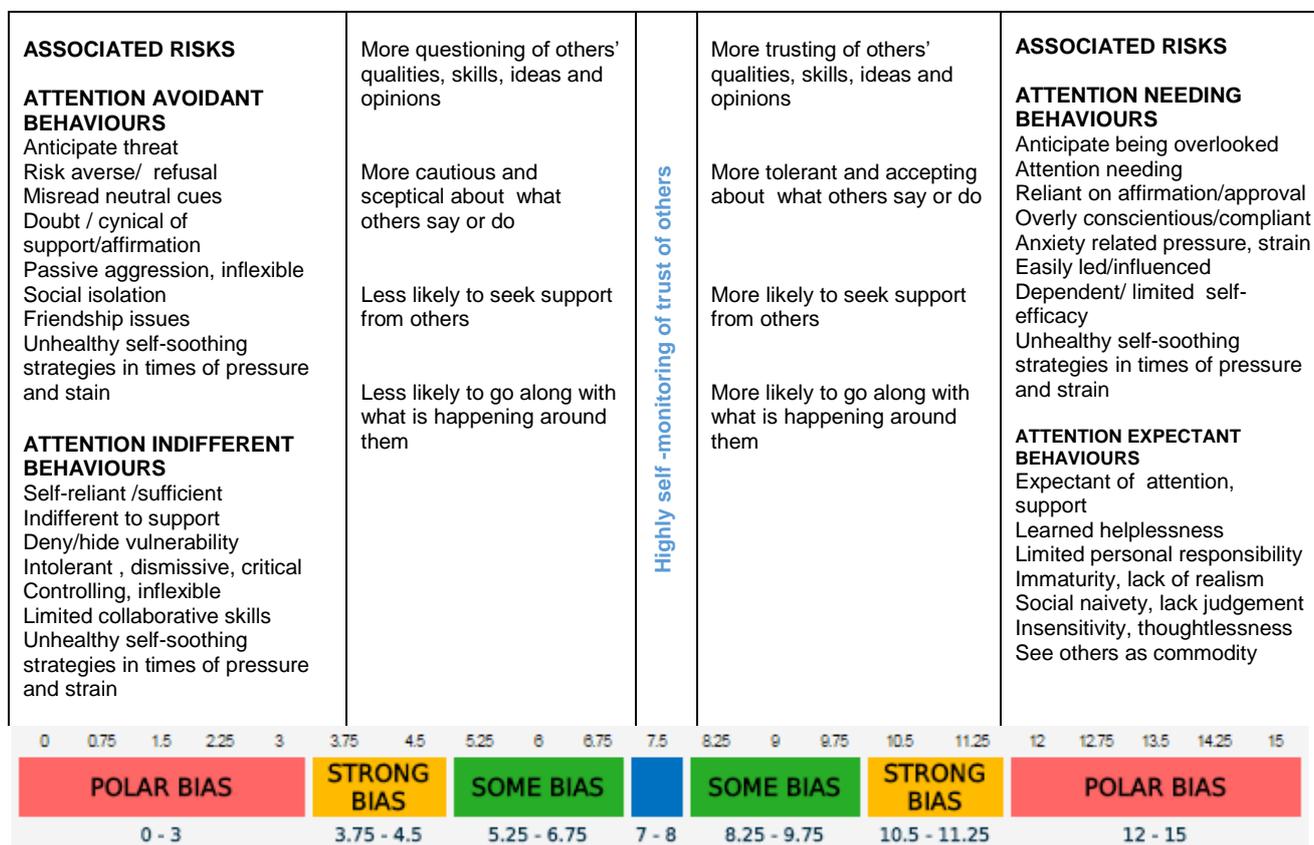
event such as bullying, divorce, illness or some other trauma can have a significant deleterious impact on the way an individual sees and responds to others (Worden, Silverman 1996; Raver 2004; McMunn et al. 2001) . As such, the journey throughout childhood and adolescence can be seen as a second developmental window of opportunity and risk, in which individuals' healthy self-regulation of their trust of others may significantly improve or diminish (Sroufe 2005).

### Self-regulation of *Trust of Others*

The AS Tracking assessment measures pupils' bias towards trusting or questioning others' qualities, skills, ideas, thoughts and opinions at a particular point of their development, and continues to track fluctuations over time. The assessment takes two measures. It measures pupils' generalised bias (how they regulate change when not in any particular context); secondly pupils' contextual bias (how they regulate change when in their particular school or school boarding house). To understand how the assessment elicits this bias, refer to the paper 'How the AS Tracking Assessment measures Steering Cognition'.

Most children and adolescents will have some degree of bias towards either trusting or questioning others' qualities, skills, ideas and opinions. However, this bias is not necessarily fixed. Pupils who self-regulate their trust of others purposefully adjust the degree to which they trust or question others in relation to the particular context they are in. They pay attention to the cues around them, as well as their own internal cues, and make a judgement about whether this is a time to lower or increase their trust of others. Knowing when to trust or question other peoples' qualities, skills, ideas, thoughts and opinions is critical if children and adolescents are to make wise, emotionally healthy, pro social choices as they engage in different tasks, interactions and social contexts.

Pupils with a polar low or high bias are those who at this point in their development strongly trust or question others' qualities, skills, ideas and opinions. Their bias suggests that they are more likely to ignore or misread the cues which suggest that the need to increase or lower their trust of others in a particular context. Pupils who develop a polar, habitual bias towards high or low trust of others have an increased risk of developing future affective-social difficulties.



## **The incipient risks associated with a polar bias towards low trust of others**

Pupils with a polar bias towards low trust of others are those who at **this point of their development** strongly question others' qualities, skills, ideas and opinions. Their assumption is that others are not available, reliable, responsive or supportive to their needs. They assume that others' words and actions cannot be trusted; subsequently they are less flexible and responsive to others' requests.

Drawing on Bowlby's attachment theory, we might describe these pupils as having an insecure attachment to those around them. Because they doubt and question others, they are more likely to develop a pattern of thinking and behaviour which is avoidant of or indifferent to the attention or support of others. This may manifest itself in two distinct patterns of behaviour: **attention-avoidant** behaviours, or **attention-indifferent** behaviours.

Pupils who develop **attention-avoidant** behaviours anticipate threat; to avoid this threat they look to safeguard their perceived vulnerability. This pattern of thinking may lead to a number of associated risks. In avoiding the attention of others, they may purposefully stand on the side lines rather than getting fully involved; they may sit at the back of the class to avoid the gaze of the teacher who might catch them out; they may avoid committing to something or taking on responsibility because they anticipate failure. Because these pupils anticipate social responses such as shame, rejection and being ignored, they are more likely to use refusal as protection strategy. Over time, they may become increasingly risk averse, closing down opportunities to engage in wider social grouping and take new opportunities. This may have a limiting impact on their social skills, and ability to work in different learning contexts. Their expectation that others will not be supportive may lead to an over sensitivity to the social cues around them; they may misread or misinterpret neutral cues. They may see deliberate mal intent in what others see as an accident; they may sense mocking and humiliation when other see only light-hearted banter. Over time, they may be seen as prickly and tetchy; they may struggle to form and sustain healthy friendships. They may read others' requests as manipulative or exploitative, which may lead to passive aggressive behaviours and inflexibility. Their assumption that others' words cannot be trusted may lead them to doubt the sincerity of affirmation, and reject the limit setting of those who try to keep them safe. Because they doubt the availability and responsiveness of those around them to show empathy and offer comfort in times of adversity, they may be more inclined to develop unhealthy self-soothing strategies.

Pupils who develop **attention-indifferent** behaviours are indifferent to the support that others could offer them; they rely on themselves. This pattern of thinking may lead to a number of associated risks. They may be seen as intolerant and critical; more likely to ignore or diminish the ideas of their peers. They may struggle to develop collaborative learning skills, conflict resolution skills and develop mutual reciprocal relationships. Because they dismiss the requests, or challenge the authority of others, they may be seen as arrogant and defiant – perhaps developing a win lose mentality which backs them into a hole. Their scepticism of others' skills may lead them to develop autocratic and controlling behaviours in which they dominate tasks and activities. Over time this may lead to social isolation, or conversely idealisation from those pupils who gravitate towards powerful social figures. Their assumption that others are not supportive may lead some pupils to deny or conceal any indication of weakness or vulnerability. This could lead to withholding of the truth, refusal to apologise, and a dismissal of others' feelings whom they have hurt. Their pride may prevent them from asking for help when struggling with a task; their response may be to diminish the task rather than develop the perseverance to stick with it. In doubting others' emotional availability and sensitivity, they may reach for unhealthy self-soothing strategies rather than seek help from others. Their dismissal of others' ideas and opinions coupled with their self-assurance may lead some pupils to reject feedback from teachers which would guide their learning; they may not achieve what they could. They may not take on board the opinions of others which could support more rounded, analytical perspectives in their learning. In dismissing the opinions and viewpoints of others, they may not temper unhealthy personal viewpoints which might place themselves and others at risk.

### **Emerging AS Tracking data trends amongst pupils with a polar low Trust of Others bias**

- There may be an emerging cultural trend amongst particular ethnic groups and low trust of others, though more data would be needed to verify this.

- Feedback from LPs suggest those pupils who have experienced significant adversity perhaps through bullying, parental divorce or absent/ neglectful parenting have a higher incidence of developing low trust of others.
- There is a correlation between polar low trust of others and low self-disclosure, suggesting that low trust of others is a limiting factor for pupils' choosing not to self-disclose. Note that it is not the only limiting factor.
- There is an emerging trend between pupils with polar low trust of others and lower seeking change, indicating that low trust of others may be linked to caution and risk aversion.
- There is a clear gender bias emerging between girls and lower trust of others when in school, suggesting that in a social context, girls become more questioning of those around them.

### **The incipient risks associated with a polar bias towards high trust of others**

Pupils with a polar bias towards high trust of others are those who **at this point of the development** strongly trust others' qualities, skills, ideas and opinions. They assume others are available, reliable, responsive or supportive to their needs. They assume that others' words and actions can always be trusted; subsequently they are instinctively flexible and responsive to others' requests.

Drawing on Bowlby's attachment theory, we might describe these pupils as having an insecure, or in some instances *inappropriately secure* attachment to those around them. Because they trust others, they are more likely to develop a pattern of thinking and behaviour which is expectant or needy of the attention or support of others. This may manifest itself in two distinct patterns of behaviour: **attention-needing** behaviours, or **attention-expectant** behaviours.

Pupils who develop **attention-needing** behaviours seek others' availability and support in order to feel attached and connected. Their own self-doubt causes them to fear being overlooked so they look for ways to elicit and sustain the attention of others. This pattern of behaviour can lead to a number of associated risks. They may elicit others' attention through attention needing behaviours such as over exaggeration, showing off or drawing attention to themselves; this could lead to peer frustration and possible social isolation. They may begin to rely heavily on the approval and affirmation of others, rather than developing their own self-belief. They may become dependent on the praise and recognition from others, positioning themselves centre stage in the classroom, and seeking to carry favour with teachers and peers alike. They may be particularly responsive to the demands of others, leaving them vulnerable to unhealthy social influences or controlling peers. Their need to please others may lead to strain, burden and over compliance - struggling to say no and maintain healthy boundaries. In an age of social media, they may be vulnerable to issues of grooming and inappropriate disclosure, trusting others more than is judicious. Their assumption that others are available and supportive may hinder their own self-efficacy and coping skills; their response to struggle may be to seek the support of others rather than finding their own solution. As learners, they may struggle to work independently, preferring to lean on others for direction. They may not develop their own voice or critical reflection and analytical skills, iterating instead the views of others. They may be overly conscientious in their approach to learning which may lead to pressure and anxiety related behaviours.

Pupils who develop **attention-expectant** behaviours assume others' availability and support because it is all they have known. Their experience to their earlier caregivers might be described as overly attached; in which caregivers are over responsive, attentive and supportive. Consequently, they presume the same of others. Whilst younger pupils may adopt this thinking pattern, increased maturity often lead to a more appropriate, realistic expectation of others. Pupils who retain this thinking pattern are vulnerable to a number of associated risks. Their expectation of others' attention may lead to self-indulgent or narcissist behaviours such as monopolising conversation or taking assuming leadership of a task. Pupils who assume others' availability and responsiveness may see others as a commodity, perhaps assuming that what others have is available to take. They may not develop their own problem solving strategies, assuming that others will help them as soon as they are stuck or struggling. They might become increasingly complacent; waiting for someone to do things for them that they could reasonably be expected to do for themselves. This may lead to learn apathy, assuming success without putting in sufficient effort or being content with low expectations. Because their needs have been met by supportive caregivers, they may seek to have their physical needs and emotions instantly

gratified. This may lead to limited qualities of patience and perseverance. They may respond to times of struggle and discomfort by deflecting, rather than develop mature problem solving skills or healthy self-soothing strategies. Their unquestioning view of others may lead to social naivety that may place them at risk, or an unrealism that lead them to make inappropriate, thoughtless demands of others. They may not develop personal responsibility or age appropriate self-management skills, assuming someone else will organise things for them.

### **Emerging AS Tracking data trends amongst pupils with a polar high Trust of Others bias**

- There are a greater number of younger pupils with polar high trust of others than older pupils, indicating that social discernment may increase with age.
- Pupils with generalised polar high trust of others tend to continue exhibiting this bias when in school.
- There is a correlation between polar high trust of others and higher seeking change indicating that pupils with high trust of others may be particularly drawn towards change, novelty and risk. This correlates with wider research suggesting the link between risk taking and social kudos.
- There is a correlation between polar high trust of others and higher self-disclosure, suggesting that trust of others is a contributing factor for pupils' self-disclosure.
- There is a gender bias emerging between boys with higher trust of others when in school, suggesting that when boys are in a social context, they may become more trusting of others. The reverse is true for girls.

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