Beacon House
Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team
www.beaconhouse.org.uk

When "I'm fine…" really means
'I've learnt to blend in to survive'

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For babies, attachment is all about keeping people close enough (or far enough away) to survive and stay safe emotionally and physically. We all know kids whose BIG behaviour is designed to keep people close; to be attachment and connection seeking. They stand out and demand a lot of our attention. Their needs are often easier to see (although not always easy to meet).

What about the kids who have learnt that BIG behaviour distances people, or that showing emotions and vulnerability doesn't help keep people close? Or those who have learnt that to survive they need to be compliant, quiet, look after themselves? Those children learn that blending in, staying under the radar or wearing a 'smiley mask' is the best way to keep people close enough to meet their needs.

We all know kids like this too, but we don't always see them. What we see is an independent kid, a kid who has their head in a book, a zoned-out kid, an "I'm fine" kid, a kid who never makes any demands, a kid who makes us feel redundant or unwanted, an 'always does what they're told' kid.

What these children haven't discovered yet is that they can be close to people AND stay safe; that they can express their needs and people won't leave and they won't get hurt; that expressing a need to an adult can grow safety rather than increase danger. So, they stay camouflaged and fit in to survive; just like a chameleon.

I please and match your colours so I stay safe and get what I need
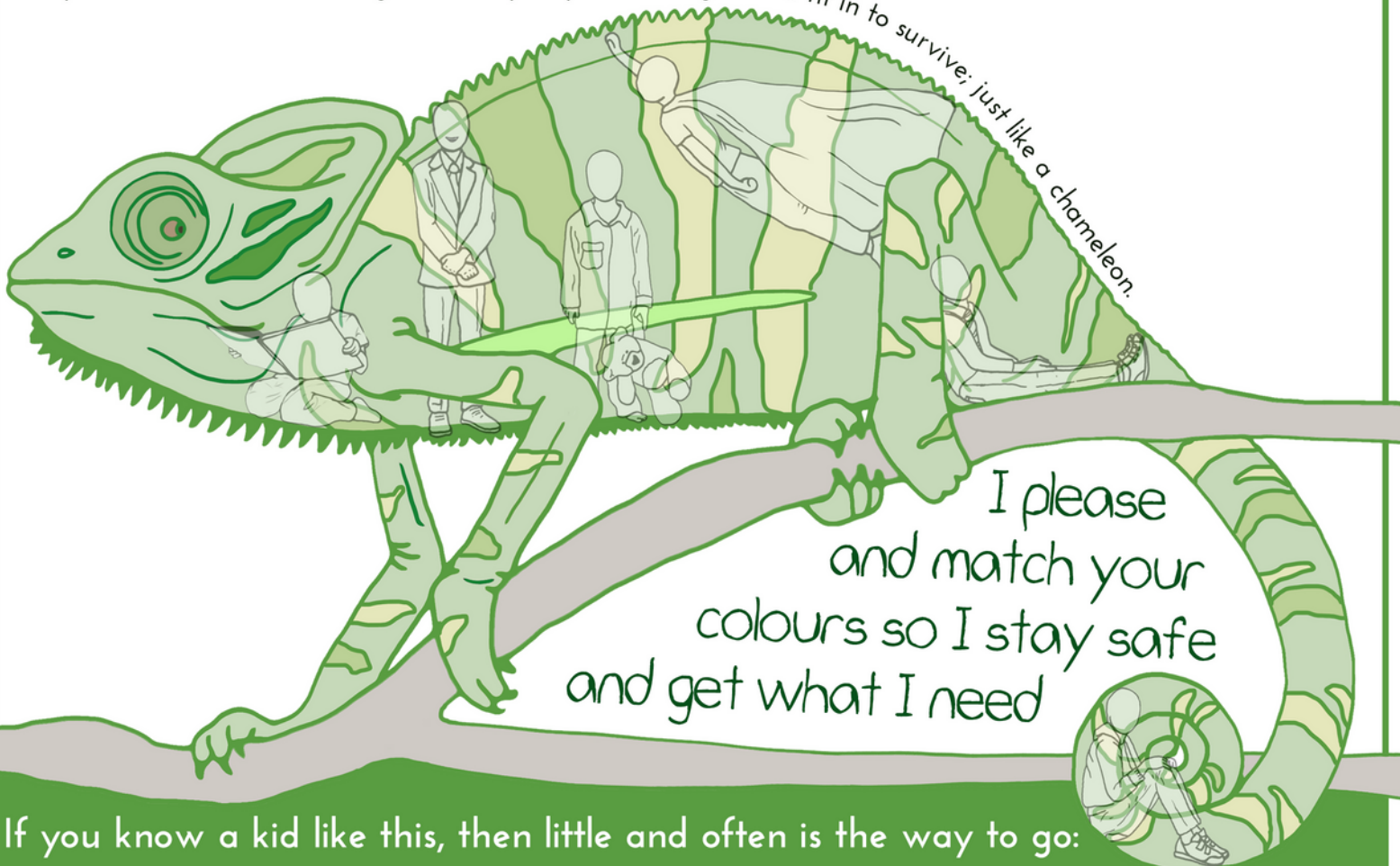
If you know a kid like this, then little and often is the way to go:

- Help name emotions by asking "I wonder if"
- Use characters from films or books to demonstrate different emotions and to show asking for help can be ok
- Avoid activities which are about winning to encourage and show value in taking part
- If things are going wrong, stay close and help them to get back on track
- Hold them in mind during transitions and separations by giving them something special of yours to hold onto
- Leave space for them to ask for help and offer it in bitesize bits
- Notice emotions and efforts rather than only achievements and successes
- Help them learn that they can make mistakes, feel yuck AND be okay. Then, help them to fix things.

...to blend in I....