



Relational Support Policy (Positive Behaviour Policy)

Policy Information	
Policy Owner	Matt Hughes
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Adoption of the Policy

This Policy has been adopted and reviewed by the Mount Tamar Interim Academy Board, part of Transforming Futures Trust.

Signed:

Date: 25.09.24

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Burgess'.

Chair, Mount Tamar IAB

Relational Support Policy

Values and Beliefs

At Mount Tamar School, we believe that every child has a fundamental desire to belong, achieve, and contribute to their school, family, and community. This policy reflects our commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive environment through a relational approach to teaching, learning, and behaviour management. Our approach shapes the overall ethos and systems of the school, influencing daily practice and targeted support to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to succeed.

We recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication, often expressing underlying needs that must be addressed to effectively support each child. Behaviours can be unconscious responses rooted in the nervous system, influenced by past experiences. Our relational approach emphasises the importance of understanding and responding to these needs, rather than merely focusing on the behaviour itself.

We acknowledge that each child is unique and requires personalised responses to support their personal development and well-being. Relational approaches are proven to be effective in helping children develop internal control and self-regulation, promoting long-term growth over short-term compliance. Consistency in our approach does not mean responding to every child or situation in the same way; rather, it means ensuring that each child receives what they need to thrive. Being fair and consistent is about recognising individual needs, not enforcing a "one size fits all" approach.

While punitive measures may produce short-term changes in behaviour through fear or shame, they do not foster the internal self-regulation necessary for young people to make positive choices on their own. In fact, punitive approaches can re-traumatise vulnerable children and reinforce the very behaviours that are of concern. Instead, we focus on building trust, understanding, and support through relational practices that help children feel safe and connected.

This policy was created in response to ongoing concerns about young people's mental health and well-being, as well as the national trend of disproportionately excluding vulnerable children. To create a truly supportive and inclusive environment, we are committed to a whole-school approach, with systems and practices that reflect our dedication to nurturing relationships and fostering a culture of understanding and support. This will include:

- Establishing consistent thinking, understanding and beliefs and values across all school staff, parents/ carers and partner agencies.
- Whole staff training, continual professional development and induction for new staff in relational theory and practice. Ongoing staff support through regular meetings and individual supervision and coaching to support the development and maintenance of skills.
- The consistent implementation of relational practice by all staff which is supported through clear systems and processes as well as active support and modelling by line managers and
- senior leaders.

- Systems and provision to support a clear graduated response to supporting children’s needs which is child centred and involves parents and external agencies.

Theory and Research

This policy is informed by research from a range of disciplines, including Neuroscience, Attachment Theory, Trauma Studies, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Intersubjectivity, Restorative Practices, and Classroom Behaviour Management.

In the areas of **Developing Relationships** and **Responding and Regulating**, we draw particularly on the work of leading experts such as Stephen Porges, Dan Hughes, Bruce Perry, Colwyn Trevarthen, Margot Sunderland, Heather Geddes, Louise Bomber, and Bill Rogers.

For **Repairing and Restoring**, we are especially grateful for the contributions of Belinda Hopkins, Luke Roberts, and Saar Yaniv. Their work has shaped our approach to repairing relationships and restoring a sense of connection after conflict.

See Appendix 5 for references and further reading.

Key Components of the Relational Support Model

Our Relational Support Model is built on three key components: **Developing Relationships, Responding and Regulating**, and **Repairing and Restoring**. These components form the foundation of both our universal and targeted approaches to support.

Each of these components has implications for both whole school universal support and targeted interventions for students who require additional help. Universal support ensures that all students benefit from a nurturing environment, while targeted support addresses the specific needs of those most vulnerable, providing tailored strategies for their personal development and well-being.



School Culture and Curriculum

While this policy outlines our Relational Approach as a distinct component, it is crucial to understand that it should be read and applied in conjunction with our other school policies. Our Relational Approach is not an add-on or separate entity but is seamlessly integrated into our school culture and curriculum.

There is a strong alignment between our educational approach, as detailed in our curriculum policy, and the principles outlined in this policy. They support and complement each other and should be viewed as an interconnected whole.

Our Relational Approach and Safeguarding

Our relational approach is fundamentally grounded in safeguarding. By building and maintaining strong relationships with our children, we are able to understand them better, observe subtle changes, and develop trust. This trust enables them to feel safe sharing their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and allows us to support and contain them effectively.

There will be times when staff, while working closely with young people, may have concerns about aspects of their lives, whether current or related to the past or future. All staff are trained in safeguarding, are familiar with the school Safeguarding Policy, and are knowledgeable about the relevant sections of the latest version of Keeping Children Safe in Education. Staff are aware of how to report their

concerns, and the school has robust procedures in place to ensure that all concerns are addressed thoroughly.

Our Expectations

Our relational approach is supported by our school expectations, which are intentionally few, simple to understand, and designed to give everyone the opportunity to thrive within our school community.

- **Ready** (be ready to learn, be ready to let others learn)
- **Respectful** (respect yourself, respect others, respect your environment)
- **Safe** (keep yourself safe, keep others safe)

Prohibited Items

Students are not permitted to bring the following items into school buildings unless they have prior permission from the Head of School and/or the Executive Headteacher:

- Weapons, including but not limited to knives, blades, and guns
- Any item that could be used as a weapon, including tools
- Drugs or drug paraphernalia
- Alcohol
- Tobacco products, including cigarettes, lighters, or matches
- Vapes
- High-caffeine energy drinks
- Aerosols
- Any clothing, symbols, or colours associated with gangs

If any of these items are brought onto school premises, students must hand them to a staff member at the start of the school day, and they will be returned at the end of the day. Exceptions include items that are illegal for the student to possess or if staff believe the item is intended for illegal activity. In such cases, the item will be confiscated, and staff will determine whether to contact parents/carers to retrieve the item or, in more serious circumstances, involve the police.

To help ensure everyone's safety, staff may occasionally use a handheld metal detector to check for metal items, such as smoking equipment, when students arrive or during the school day. This measure is not intended to single anyone out but to maintain a safe environment for all. We approach these checks with care and respect, ensuring students feel supported and understand that the purpose is to help everyone stay safe. If there is deemed to be a risk associated with bringing prohibited items onto the school site, the student's Relational Support Plan will be updated to reflect this.

As Part of **Developing Relationships**, our expectations around prohibited items are designed to help children understand the boundaries that keep them safe, support their success, and foster a positive environment for all.

In our approach to **Responding and Regulating** we may refer to these expectations to explain our response and remind students of the guidelines.

During **Repairing and Restoring**, we use these expectations to support reflection and learning, helping students understand the reasoning behind the rules and how they contribute to their overall well-being.

Mobile Phones

We recognise the importance of maintaining open communication with key adults for some pupils, as this supports their emotional well-being. To ensure a focused and secure learning environment, we ask pupils to hand in their mobile phones upon arrival at school. Staff will securely store these phones and return them at the end of the school day.

Understanding that maintaining contact is important for some pupils, particularly those with trauma-related needs, staff can facilitate access to phones in designated spaces, such as the Pastoral Office, when previously arranged.

For pupils who use music or sound as a sensory regulation tool, we will support this need by providing suitable technology, like a laptop or MP3 player. If a pupil wishes to bring a personal music device from home, it must not have internet connectivity or a camera to ensure it aligns with our school's guidelines.

Part One: Developing Relationships

For all children to succeed in school, they must develop secure relationships that make them feel safe, valued, and confident in who they are. To foster this sense of security, relationships must be central to the life of the school.

For some children, particularly those with insecure attachments or challenges to their well-being, the process of building relationships needs to be intentional, meaningful, and clearly understood. These children require a key adult or a small team of adults who can offer them a consistent, secure relationship that fosters a sense of safety, trust, belonging, and being heard.

Through these supportive relationships, children can learn to regulate their emotions and behaviour, better understand social situations, and develop positive self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Establishing strong, caring boundaries, promoting inclusion, and prioritising these relationships are essential to creating an environment where all children can thrive.

Our approach to developing relationships is based on providing:

- **Protection**
- **Connection**
- **Understanding**

- **Care**

Protection

All children need to feel safe and secure, as their sense of safety is fundamental to their ability to explore, play, learn, and interact with others. Without this foundation, children may become hyper-vigilant and struggle to regulate their emotions, which can lead to defensive behaviours that are challenging to manage.

A child's sense of safety primarily comes from the people around them. Every child requires relationships with adults in school who can provide a sense of security. For some children, this need is greater, and they require a close relationship with one adult or a small group of adults who can serve as a safe base. Trust and reliability in these relationships are crucial, as children need to feel that they can depend on the adults around them. For children who have not experienced the security of being dependent on others, practicing dependency is essential before they can develop true independence. A significant adult's role is to support this process by allowing the child to experience and build trust in such relationships.

To create a protective and nurturing environment for children, we must be a source of safety through the relationships we build. This involves being consistent, predictable, reliable, and trustworthy, while also providing structure, routines, clear boundaries, and emotional containment. Change, uncertainty, and challenges can threaten a child's sense of security, and these need to be managed with care and sensitivity.

Non-verbal cues play a significant role in conveying safety to children. Friendly, warm facial expressions, a calm, modulated voice, like the singsong quality of early caregiver-child interactions, and unthreatening body language that mirrors the child's own movements signal safety. In contrast, a lack of these safety cues may be perceived as a threat by the child.

It is important that we let the child know that they are safe through our 'way of being' with the child and the way we manage the environment. We will do this by:

- **Being predictable, reliable and trustworthy:** Telling a child that you are those things will not be enough they need to be shown that you are by what you do. If things change and you are not able to do what you have said that you will do make sure that you explain why that this has happened, acknowledge and validate the difficult emotions that this may have evoked and put in place an alternative plan.
- **Providing safety cues:** Being aware of the cues you are giving is very important, particularly through your facial expression and frequency and modulation of your voice. Interact using a sing song / story telling voice with no trace of crossness. Consider other safety cues such as movements which could make them feel safe. Take care to ensure open and friendly body language.
- **Containing their emotions:** Let them know that you have 'got it'. Let them know that you can bear their emotions and hold on to them so that they do not escalate. Don't deflect into your own emotional responses. It can be useful to help them to organise their thinking and emotions by listening and then feeding their thoughts back to them in bite-size, manageable chunks.

- **Providing structure and boundaries:** These need to match the child's needs and be communicated to them in a way that they understand and which is meaningful to them. Visuals and timers can be helpful in establishing structure and boundaries.
- **Anticipating things that may be picked up as threat or danger:** Unfamiliar sounds in the environment, unfamiliar people or situations, change in routine, unfamiliar physical contact or sudden movement can all trigger feelings of fear. Sometimes just a lack of safety cues can trigger a defensive response. Managing transitions, both large and small will be particularly important, even transitions such as moving from activity to activity within the classroom may need to be supported.

Connection

Children need to connect and engage socially to avoid isolation. When children struggle to connect, it may be due to delays in interaction, speech, or language skills, or because they emotionally withdraw or react defensively to social approaches. Every child has the right to feel connected.

Connection can be understood on multiple levels. Children need to feel connected to the adults in their school environment. Some may require a close relationship with a significant adult or a small group of adults. Additionally, children need to feel connected to their peers, their class, the school as a whole, their surroundings, and the curriculum. Developing a sense of connection and belonging is crucial for social skill development, self-esteem, and a sense of agency.

It's important to connect with children at their developmental level and in ways that are meaningful to them. Interaction and communication should not just be functional but should foster genuine, reciprocal, and social engagement, where children feel a connection imbued with emotional significance.

We must also consider the child's developmental level and stress levels to ensure meaningful connection. Children with limited experience of connection may struggle with activities that require reciprocity. They will need substantial support through consistent, synchronised interactions and a gradual introduction to turn-taking.

We all require opportunities for connection at various levels to feel connected to others and develop a sense of belonging. Children, in particular, need these connections to enhance their ability to interact with others and build meaningful relationships. We will do this by:

- **Being physically and emotionally available:** Give them your time and opportunities for them to experience undivided attention.
- **Attuning to the child by mirroring their tone and mood:** Seeing themselves reflected in you lets them know that you 'get it' and enables them to 'see' how they feel.
- **Being responsive, expressive and interactive:** Encourage expressive interaction using facial expressions, voice modulation and movement. Opportunities to do things in time and rhythm, to experience turn taking, activities with joint focus, enjoyment and anticipation will all be helpful.
- **Being playful in your interactions:** Have fun, stimulate shared joy and joint laughter. Play games and sing songs, especially games which encourage shared anticipation and response. Children enjoy the security of repetition and being able to anticipate events.

- **Showing them you like them and are interested in them:** Do things together. Explore, make things and learn about things together.
- **Support wider connection:** Provide opportunities for connection with peers and to develop connection with the school community and place. Doing and experiencing together, opportunities for contribution and responsibility will support connection. Support the development of skills needed for positive relationships such as valuing one another, acknowledgement, encouragement, listening, sharing ideas, acceptance, tolerance and compassion.

Understanding

Understanding is a fundamental element of any meaningful relationship. By understanding, we mean being genuinely curious about the child, seeking to grasp what they are experiencing, and interpreting their behaviour as a form of communication that reveals their needs. It also involves conveying to the child that they are accepted, that we are making an effort to understand them, and helping them develop their own self-awareness.

Children who have experienced disruptions in their relationships or trauma often struggle to understand and process their emotions, making self-regulation difficult. Many children face significant challenges with self-regulation, which is essential for emotional and behavioural control.

To learn self-regulation, children first need to experience co-regulation with a trusted adult. Through repeated experiences of co-regulation (where the adult helps them manage and make sense of their emotions) children gradually develop the ability to regulate themselves.

All children benefit from being shown understanding. In our everyday interactions, we must demonstrate acceptance, curiosity, and empathy. By understanding their needs and emotions, we can help children remain calm and regulated, especially when challenging situations arise.

Children need to feel accepted and understood. By being shown understanding, they gradually learn to understand themselves. This process not only fosters emotional awareness but also supports the development of the cortex and higher-level thinking skills, enabling children to engage with their emotions on a cognitive level. We will do this by:

- **Being curious about their feelings, thoughts and behaviour:** It is important that we understand the thoughts and feelings that are driving the behaviour so that we address these unmet needs. Managing behaviour alone is unlikely to bring about sustainable change.
- **Accepting their feelings and experience:** Accept without action, judgement, contradiction or persuasion. Resist the urge to minimise their feelings, distract or cheer them up.
- **Thinking for them - try to work it out:** Big behaviours are caused by big feelings but children are not always aware of the feelings they are experiencing. Thinking from their perspective will help to raise their self-awareness and will also support the understanding and empathy of others working with the child.
- **Expressing Empathy:** Wonder aloud, validate, and show them you 'get it'. Respond empathically; imagine how it is for them, empathise and then express it
 - *"I can see that this situation is very hard..."*
 - *"That sounds as though you were really worried..."*
 - *"When that happens I wonder if it is very frightening for you..."*

- **Helping them to process their feelings:** Help them to link their physical sensations to emotions. Children at an early stage of emotional development are not able to distinguish between basic physical sensations and emotions and will initially need your help to do this. Model and provide an emotional vocabulary for them to describe how they feel. Be creative in your approach. Allow them to make up their own words, use metaphors, stories, pictures, models, real life examples etc to enable the child to express, understand and process their feelings.

Care

Children need to experience relationships where they feel valued, cared for, and remembered. Some children may not have had their basic needs consistently met, and for them, your care is shown by ensuring they are not hungry or thirsty, are kept warm, and know that someone is looking out for them.

When children experience adults who are genuinely interested in them, caring, and demonstrating that they are liked and supported, it helps them develop a positive sense of self-worth. This reinforces their belief that they are deserving of attention, capable, and able to form meaningful relationships.

Dan Hughes describes the qualities that adults need to demonstrate in order to form good relationships as **PACE (Playful, Loving, Accepting, Curious, Empathic)**. Using this framework enables the adult to show unconditional regard, where the child feels warmth, nurture and connection.

- **Playfulness** involves creating a sense of lightness and engagement in communication. It's about maintaining an open, calm, and relaxed demeanour, which helps children manage and embrace positive feelings. Playfulness isn't about constantly being funny; rather, it's about encouraging children to recognise and experience the positive aspects of their lives gradually. It fosters hope and can help children develop their own sense of humour, leading them to reflect on their lives and behaviours in a more curious and open way.
- **Acceptance** means actively conveying to the child that their feelings, thoughts, urges, and perceptions are acknowledged and accepted. Unconditional acceptance helps children feel secure, safe, and loved, and offers them a fresh start each time. While accepting a child's inner life means understanding their intentions without judgement, it does not mean condoning behaviour that is harmful to themselves or others. The child should feel neither judged nor criticised.
- **Curiosity** involves demonstrating genuine interest in the child's experiences and a willingness to understand their perspective. This approach should use a calm, accepting tone that conveys a desire to comprehend the child's feelings and thoughts, rather than simply agreeing with their viewpoint. Instead of asking "Why?", consider questions like:
 - *"Is it alright if I share my thoughts on what might be happening?"*
 - *"What do you think was going on?"*
 - *"What do you think that was about?"*
 - *"I wonder what...?"*
 - *"I imagine that..."*
 - *"I noticed that..."*
- **Empathy** means showing the child that their feelings are important to you and that you are present with them in their experience. It involves managing strong emotions alongside the child

and striving to understand their feelings deeply. Often, expressing your own feelings about the child's experience can be more impactful than offering reassurance.

Part Two: Responding and Regulating

The art and skill of teaching involve using everyday interactions to nurture and sustain relationships within the classroom, thereby fostering a calm, harmonious, and supportive learning environment.

It is natural for children of all ages to be playful, challenge authority, and test boundaries. Most children will occasionally push limits and require reminders about agreements and expectations. In these moments, our relationships and relational skills should be our primary approach. Effective, skilled interactions can often resolve minor disruptions without needing to escalate the situation.

Regulating Emotions: Using key relational skills responsive to the emotional need.

Unhelpful, harmful, or challenging behaviour often stems from strong emotions triggered in the moment or underlying adaptive behaviours. To maintain a calm learning environment and help children process and regulate their emotions, we must be able to co-regulate them in the moment and provide experiences that support their development of self-regulation.

When children experience intense emotions, they need co-regulation to help them calm down. Repeated experiences of co-regulation are essential for children to learn self-regulation. Those who have not had enough co-regulation may struggle with self-regulation, and children who have experienced trauma may exhibit high levels of dysregulation, requiring understanding and responsive co-regulation.

For effective self-regulation, children must integrate their physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Attuning to and validating their experiences helps children understand their feelings, feel accepted, and connect their emotions to an emotional vocabulary. This process supports them in expressing and reflecting on their feelings and emotions.

- **Attunement:** Meeting the child's emotional intensity (positive / negative) on an energetic level, so as to connect with the child in their pain or their joy, reflecting the same emotional energy. The child will experience this as connection with the other. It will help them to understand how they feel and will show them that you 'get it'.
- **Accepting and validating:** Validating how the child is experiencing the event, even if it is very different to how you are experiencing it. Not trying to persuade the child out of having the feelings they are experiencing, rather affirming, understanding and recognising that the child is feeling what they are feeling. Not just empathy, but finding the right words / language of feeling / tone of voice to convey that empathy. Accepting and validating can help to stop unhelpful behaviour as when the child understands that you understand their behaviour and that their feelings are accepted and valid so there is not a need to go on showing the feelings through behaviour.
- **Containment of feelings:** Being able to stay thinking and feeling about a child's intense feelings (e.g. rage, power plays, anxiety, distress) without deflecting into your emotional response or action. At times this will mean being able to bear their unbearable pain – being a container for it. Containment is also achieved through clear structures, boundaries and clear and understandable

consequences, which are explained and understood. Soothing. Soothing and calming the child's emotionally dysregulated states.

- **Soothing** in conjunction with addressing the other relational needs above, can develop stress regulating systems in the brain which control the body's defence pathways. Some children spend the majority of their time in a stressed state. We need to soothe them in order to calm their defence pathways. This will make it less likely that their defence pathway will trigger and also more likely that they will be able to self soothe when they are feeling stressed.

Part Three: Repairing and Restoring

Dan Siegel's book *"No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind"* (2014) highlights the importance of fostering internal discipline through understanding and guidance rather than relying on external control. Our relational approach aligns with this philosophy, recognising that all behaviour communicates something, often pointing to an unmet need.

Instead of focusing on assigning blame or sanctions, we prioritise exploring the underlying thoughts and feelings behind a behaviour. This approach helps us understand the child's experience and work towards meaningful repair and restoration. Many behaviours, particularly in children with a history of trauma or neurodiverse needs, are not conscious choices but are linked to prior life experiences or neurological differences.

Our goal is to support reflection and deepen understanding, offering alternative ways to meet needs without inducing toxic shame—an all too common consequence for children who struggle in traditional school settings. Restorative conversations are key to helping children learn how to manage overwhelming emotions. These dialogues focus on increasing self-awareness about unsafe choices and offer strategies for change, ensuring that children understand they have options for meeting their needs in positive ways.

Rather than simply enforcing compliance, our priority is to enhance relational safety and engagement. By fostering strong, supportive relationships and facilitating restorative conversations, we create an environment where children feel understood, valued, and empowered to make healthier, more constructive choices. This not only addresses immediate behavioural challenges but also promotes long-term emotional growth and resilience.

'Repair and Restore' Interactions

- **Valuing Every Child:** They consistently demonstrate that every individual, regardless of their behaviour, is valued, heard, and respected.
- **Curiosity and Perspective:** Acknowledging that each person's perception is unique, they approach situations with curiosity, inviting children to share their perspectives and validating their right to hold differing views.
- **Attunement and Compassion:** They embrace and validate emotions without judgment, attuning to and compassionately containing the child's feelings.
- **Understanding Connections:** Team members reflect on how thoughts, feelings, needs, and behaviours are interconnected for both the child and themselves, fostering greater empathy and understanding.

- **Relationship-Focused Communication:** Communication is focused on building, maintaining, or repairing relationships, facilitating mutual understanding and constructive ways to address challenges.
- **Developmentally Appropriate:** The child’s developmental stage is taken into account, especially in understanding physical sensations, emotions, and feelings.

Children must trust the process and feel secure, knowing they are supported in navigating and resolving challenges. With a trusted adult by their side, the ‘Repair and Restore’ approach invites the child to reflect on:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking?
- How were you feeling?
- Who else has been affected?
- What do you need, and what needs to happen now, so we can ‘Repair and Restore’?

Recognising that many of our children find it challenging to engage with these questions, personalised approaches are key.

Personalised Approaches

A variety of strategies can help children access the ‘Repair and Restore’ interaction meaningfully. These may include:

- **Changing the Environment:** The setting of the conversation is crucial. Meetings in formal offices or with authority figures can evoke anxiety due to associations with past trauma. Letting the child choose the meeting place or opting for a neutral location, such as a ‘walk and talk’ or off-site meeting, can ease tension.
- **Familiar Relationships:** While there’s often a belief that the conversation should involve the adult most connected to the incident, it may be more appropriate for someone with a stronger relationship to lead the process.
- **Involving Others:** Sometimes, involving parents or carers in scaffolding the conversation at home may be necessary if the child hasn’t yet developed enough trust with school staff.
- **Preparation:** Preparing the child in advance—by explaining the topic, possible outcomes, and logistics—can empower them to engage more readily.
- **Adapting the Format:** A verbal conversation may be too overwhelming for some children. Alternatives such as writing notes, using visual aids, or engaging in creative activities like art, crafts, or role-play can make the interaction more accessible.
- **Group Conversations:** For some children, group meetings can help foster accountability and understanding, though support may be required to facilitate this.

Learning for Adults

In the 'Repair and Restore' process, it's important to remember that learning is not just for the child. There's also an opportunity for the adults and the school to grow. Our team members are encouraged to model humility, acknowledging what they might do differently in the future, and openly discussing this when appropriate.

The policy also acknowledges that just as children need support, adults may also require their own 'Repair and Restore' processes. The school is committed to providing the necessary support structures, ensuring that team members can reflect, develop, and engage effectively in this approach.

Relational Approaches in the Classroom

Good quality first teaching is essential in supporting children to manage their behaviour, and all adults in the school share responsibility for working with children who have high levels of need. Classroom staff have a range of relational approaches to draw upon in managing these needs. Teachers who are skilled in these approaches and supported by wider school systems are likely to manage the needs of most students without resorting to exclusion. Effectively addressing low-level disruption through relational methods and high-quality inclusive teaching creates a calm and supportive environment conducive to learning for all.

We employ a whole-school relational approach that includes a robust system for staff support and intervention coordination. All students will have a personalised Relational Support Plan which is written and reviewed in conjunction with staff, students and families. Key roles, including SENDCOs, Site Leads and pastoral leads, collaborate to provide ongoing staff development and early intervention strategies. A graduated response process ensures that students' needs are met, and all support is mapped out in a detailed provision plan to guide consistent implementation.

Using praise and feedback effectively

Feedback plays a crucial role in both learning and personal development, and it is important to help children reflect on their behaviour in ways that best support their growth. Encouragement, positive feedback, and genuine, specific praise are key components of effective feedback. Research on what makes feedback impactful in learning is equally valuable when applied to behaviour.

Research suggests that the most effective feedback is:

- **Specific to actions:** *"You stayed really focused today, even when it got tricky,"* rather than, *"You were great today."* This helps children understand exactly what behaviour is expected.
- **Action-oriented rather than personality-focused:** *"It was kind and thoughtful of you to let others go first,"* instead of, *"You are kind."* This encourages a mindset that behaviour can change and improve, rather than being fixed.
- **Personal and individualised:** Quiet, individual feedback or a postcard home is preferable to a public announcement. This allows children to reflect on their behaviour without comparisons or peer pressure, which can protect their sense of self-worth.

- **Clear and actionable:** *"You need to wait your turn when talking in a group,"* rather than, *"You need to be better next time."* This provides children with a clear understanding of expectations and the next steps they can take.

Children benefit from thoughtful and reflective feedback on their behaviour. It is essential that feedback aligns with the relationship, as insincere feedback is likely to be dismissed, and manipulative feedback can harm the trust and connection that has been built.

In a genuinely warm and empathetic relationship, there should be ample opportunity for meaningful and positive feedback. Showing curiosity about behaviour by asking questions such as, "That went really well, how did you manage to do that?" encourages deeper reflection and more productive conversations about behaviour. This approach fosters greater self-awareness and understanding, helping children develop positive habits.

Responding to incidents

Sanctions or punishments in response to incidents often alienate and ostracise children, leading to feelings of humiliation and shame. Crucially, sanctions can remove the very element essential for a child's development—relationships. For this reason, we do not advocate for the use of sanctions as a response to incidents. However, following certain incidents, the school will need to respond to ensure the safety of everyone involved.

For example, if a child exhibits violent behaviour on the playground on Monday, it is unlikely they will be sent back out on Tuesday. This is not intended as a punishment but rather as a preventative measure. We recognise that without developmental support, placing the child back in the same environment could set them up to fail and compromise the safety of other children. Our approach in such instances is relational, ensuring the child understands that this is not a form of rejection. We advocate for 'time in' rather than 'time out,' focusing on inclusion rather than exclusion. The work conducted with the child during Tuesday lunchtime aims to support their readiness to return to the playground, rather than punish them for their behaviour.

We understand that different children have different needs and are at varying stages of development. Just as in teaching, personalisation is key to supporting their social and emotional growth, as much as their academic progress. In order to be fair, we must respond to individual needs, recognising that equality means providing each child with the support they require, rather than treating all children the same. Responses to incidents will therefore be tailored to the specific needs of the children involved.

When a child persistently disrupts the learning of others, it signals that we may need to reconsider our approach. The child's behaviour is communicating underlying needs that must be addressed. Our priority should always be to focus on these needs when planning any intervention or provision. Exclusion is rarely a constructive solution in meeting the child's developmental needs.

For some, this may represent a shift in mindset. There may be concerns that children are 'getting away' with inappropriate behaviour if sanctions are not applied. However, in our experience, children feel more secure when they know support is in place to help them improve, and parents appreciate knowing there

are effective processes to ensure their children are safe, happy, and engaged in learning. When these assurances are clear, the need for sanctions is greatly reduced.

A Graduated Response

We are committed to a graduated response approach to effectively support our pupils. This involves adapting interventions based on each child's unique needs and circumstances, ensuring that support is aligned with their specific challenges and strengths. The process begins with early identification and assessment, followed by targeted interventions that increase in intensity or specialisation as required. We continuously monitor progress and adjust our strategies to provide timely and responsive support, fostering growth, resilience, and success for all pupils throughout their educational journey. This approach not only addresses immediate concerns but also promotes long-term well-being and achievement.

Our responses may include:

- Adjusting peer group composition and increasing adult-to-child ratios.
- Modifying timetables, teaching methods, or activities to enhance learning success.
- Offering additional one-on-one or small group sessions to develop key learning management skills.
- Increasing oversight from leadership or extending time with the child's core support team.
- Seeking specialist advice from multidisciplinary teams to better understand the child's needs.
- Providing extra staff training to improve the quality of support.
- Strengthening collaboration with parents and carers to ensure consistency in approaches.
- Enhancing multi-agency involvement, including social services, mental health professionals, or law enforcement, to provide holistic support.
- Implementing community-based interventions to reduce environmental triggers within the school setting.
- Conducting Emergency Annual Reviews for comprehensive, multi-professional evaluation and planning.
- Using fixed-term suspensions as a reflective period to facilitate a successful reintegration.
- Considering permanent exclusion or ending a placement only as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted.

Sanctions / Consequences

We do not advocate for punitive sanctions or punishments, as research shows they are ineffective in changing behaviour and can reinforce negative feelings, such as shame, inadequacy, and unworthiness. These emotions do not promote meaningful learning or the development of necessary skills. Instead, we focus on natural consequences that help children understand the impact of their actions on themselves and others.

Natural consequences, applied through the 'Repairing and Restoring' approach, may include:

- **Loss of availability.** If something is broken, it is no longer available for use.

- **Restoration of the environment.** If a child causes damage or disruption, helping to repair or rectify the situation can be a valuable learning opportunity.
- **Restorative actions.** If a child harms another, an attempt to restore and repair the relationship may be an appropriate natural consequence. However, it must be genuine and not forced, as insincere apologies hold little value.
- **Timetable adjustments for safety.** If a child's behaviour in a particular context is unsafe, we may adjust their timetable to allow for skill development. For example, if a child is not safe on school transport, the risk assessment and relational support plan may be updated to temporarily suspend their use of school transport while they work on improving their safety skills.
- **Restricted access to equipment.** If a child misuses school equipment, such as scissors or IT tools, and poses a risk to themselves or others, a temporary restriction on access may be implemented. This is always accompanied by efforts to teach safe use in the long term.
- **Parental involvement.** Staff may contact parents or carers to inform them of concerning behaviour. This is not intended to punish or embarrass the child but to ensure clear communication and a consistent approach in supporting the child's development.

Our focus remains on helping children understand their behaviour in a supportive way that encourages growth and positive change.

Flexible Arrangements

When planning individualised and creative support packages, including time with off-site partners to prevent exclusion, decisions should be made in consultation with the child, family, and relevant partner agencies. It is important to clearly outline the purpose of these alternative arrangements, addressing the following:

- **Meeting needs.** What specific needs are being addressed that cannot be met within the school setting?
- **Desired outcomes.** What outcomes are being worked towards, and how does the provision support these goals?
- **Connection to school.** How will the child remain connected to the school community during this time?
- **Positive return to school.** What steps will be taken to ensure a smooth return into school?

It is crucial that school staff maintain a positive relationship with the child during any time spent off-site, ensuring that when the child returns, they are welcomed back into an environment that is prepared to meet their needs.

Suspensions and Exclusions

A fixed-term suspension (exclusion) is only used as a last resort and must be a proportionate response when no other alternatives are available. In the rare event of a fixed-term suspension, the purpose and potential impact on the child are always carefully considered.

Fixed-term suspensions (exclusions) should be short-term and aim to improve outcomes. They provide an opportunity for reflection, further planning, and assessment for both the child and the staff involved. Relational approaches, as outlined in this policy, are used to guide and support the child's return to school.

While we do not advocate permanent exclusion, we recognise that in exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary if a child's needs cannot be met in school or if their presence compromises the safety of others.

The decision to exclude, either temporarily or permanently, is made by the Head of School in consultation with Executive Headteacher. The length of a fixed-term suspension (exclusion), which is up to 45 days in one year, will be determined based on the specifics of each case. In the event of a second suspension (exclusion) for a similar incident, the suspension (exclusion) period may be extended. All exclusions are documented in writing, with copies sent to all relevant parties, including the local authority, within 24 hours.

For more information, please refer to our Exclusions Policy.

Working in Relationship Together

Children and young people should feel respected, valued, and considered an equal part of the school community. They must have continuous opportunities for meaningful dialogue with trusted adults, which should influence all aspects of their school experience. This approach must be integrated into the whole school ethos, involving all staff and students, and should not be seen as a one-off activity.

It is essential that time and care are taken in listening to children with curiosity and empathy. Providing opportunities for meaningful self-expression supports children in processing their emotions and aids in the early identification of their needs.

Additionally, all stakeholders—including parents, carers, staff, and external agencies—should be engaged in this process. Their collective involvement ensures that children receive comprehensive support, as their feedback helps shape and refine the approach to meet the needs of every child effectively.

Listening to the Child

- **Support for Self-Expression:** We provide children with various opportunities to express themselves, including regular one-on-one check-ins with trusted staff, suggestion boxes, and age-appropriate feedback tools. We actively listen to their voices and incorporate their feedback into our school practices, policies, and individualised support plans.
- **Incorporating Voices into School Practice:** We integrate student feedback into our school policies, classroom practices, and the overall school environment. We involve students in discussions about school rules and curriculum changes to ensure their perspectives are valued and considered.
- **Individualised Graduated Support:** We develop personalised support plans based on students' feedback and needs assessments. For example, if a child reports difficulty with a specific subject or aspect of school life, we create tailored strategies to address these challenges.

Working with Parents and Carers

- **Involvement and Information:** We keep parents and carers informed about their child's progress, school events, and relevant changes in school policies through regular newsletters, parent-teacher meetings, and digital communication platforms.
- **Access to Support:** We offer workshops and resources for parents and carers on topics such as supporting their child's learning, managing behaviour, and understanding school policies. Clear contact points are provided for parents to seek additional support or advice.
- **Clear Communication Systems:** We have established clear communication channels, including a dedicated school liaison officer, regular parent meetings, and accessible online platforms, to ensure parents receive timely updates and can easily provide feedback.

Working with External Agencies

- **Accessing Additional Support:** We identify when a child requires support beyond what the school can provide and refer them to appropriate external agencies, such as mental health services, speech and language therapists, or special educational needs coordinators.
- **Collaborative Approach:** We work closely with external agencies to develop and implement effective support plans. For instance, if a child requires speech therapy, we coordinate with the therapist to integrate their recommendations into the child's educational plan.
- **Monitoring and Review:** We regularly review the effectiveness of external support and make necessary adjustments in partnership with the child and the external agencies to ensure the support effectively meets the child's needs.

Supporting Staff Well-being and Professional Development

We are committed to ensuring that all staff are supported, valued, and respected in a nurturing and professional environment. We recognise that the well-being and professional growth of our staff are essential to the success of our school community.

- **Staff Well-being:** We prioritise the mental and physical well-being of our staff by providing access to well-being resources, including counselling services, stress management workshops, and regular staff well-being check-ins. Flexible working arrangements and workload management are also implemented to help maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- **Continued Professional Development (CPD):** We offer a comprehensive CPD programme that includes in-house training sessions, external courses, and opportunities for further qualifications. Staff are encouraged to take part in ongoing learning to enhance their skills, knowledge, and career progression, ensuring they remain at the forefront of educational practice.
- **Individual Reflection Opportunities:** We provide dedicated time for staff to reflect on their practice through supervision, coaching, and mentoring schemes. These opportunities enable staff to receive feedback, develop their professional skills, and reflect on their personal and professional growth in a supportive environment.
- **Having Their Voice Heard:** We ensure that staff have regular opportunities to contribute to school decision-making through open forums, surveys, and staff meetings. Their input is valued and

incorporated into school policy and practice, ensuring that they feel respected and included in shaping the future of the school.

- **Engagement of All Stakeholders:** All staff members are encouraged to work collaboratively with other stakeholders, including leadership, parents, and external agencies, to ensure a cohesive approach to the well-being of the whole school community. This collaboration further strengthens the support systems available to staff.

Appendix 1 - Our Planning Documents

The Relational Support Plan

Our Relational Support Plan is essential for delivering coordinated, effective support and ensuring consistent engagement across our community throughout the child's school day. It includes:

- Identification of the dedicated support team for the child.
- Strategies to address the child's relational needs, focusing on creating safety, connection, empathy, and nurturing.
- Recognition of the child's strengths, qualities, and interests.
- Implementation of approaches to build and maintain strong, trusting relationships.
- Guidelines for supporting the child during 'Repairing and Restoring' processes.

The Individual Pupil Risk Assessment

To maintain a safe and supportive environment, each child undergoes an Individual Pupil Risk Assessment upon admission. This assessment outlines tailored measures for managing each child's needs, especially those who need additional support in handling emotions and reactions during distress or dysregulation.

Aligned with our personalised care approach, the assessment details individualised strategies for team members to effectively respond to specific needs and situations. Both the Relational Support Plan and the Individual Pupil Risk Assessment are dynamic documents, updated as necessary to reflect current circumstances and provide relevant support. Post-incident reviews often prompt updates to ensure continued effectiveness and relevance.

Appendix 2 - Practical Strategies and Top Tips

- In our efforts to support children, we must be mindful of how our own feelings and stress levels can impact our ability to help. If we find ourselves becoming overwhelmed or if a child prefers support from someone else, it's important to acknowledge this without ego and arrange for a colleague to step in.
- **Seeking Additional Support:** When responding to challenging situations, it's often beneficial to involve a more experienced colleague or one with a stronger relationship with the child. This additional support can provide valuable guidance and improve outcomes.
- **Avoiding Overcrowding:** While collaboration is essential, having too many people involved can be counterproductive. It's important to clearly define roles and responsibilities and to ensure that the number of people involved is appropriate for the situation. The lead person should communicate their needs to the team, which may include asking others to step back.
- **Embracing Imperfection:** It's okay if our interventions don't always achieve the desired effect. Misjudgements or missteps are part of the process. Demonstrating humility and a willingness to try again helps model resilience and adaptability.
- **Maintaining Privacy:** To support a child who is distressed, removing the audience can significantly reduce feelings of shame and anxiety. Ensuring privacy and dignity is crucial, and this includes managing the number of adults present.
- **Recognising the Value of Inaction:** Sometimes, providing space and time is more effective than taking immediate action. Allowing a child time to process and absorb communication often requires periods of purposeful stillness.
- **Addressing Basic Needs:** Often, early signs of distress can be linked to unmet basic needs such as hunger, fatigue, or discomfort. Checking and addressing these needs—like adjusting the environment or providing a drink—can have a significant positive impact.

- **Effective Communication:** When a child is distressed, their ability to communicate and interpret social cues may be diminished. We should use visual or written prompts that align with their communication needs, and avoid expecting them to fully engage or process our intentions immediately.
- **Listening Without Interrupting:** It's important to let children express their feelings without interruption. Even when correcting or reframing their comments, it's best to choose the right moment carefully to avoid disrupting their emotional flow.
- **Referencing Expectations:** During moments of distress, referring to our expectations can provide a sense of structure and boundaries. Our expectations are clear and simple; we should avoid introducing new or unpredictable rules in the moment.
- **Using Distraction and Humour Carefully:** While distraction and humour can be helpful, they should not replace the goal of helping children learn to regulate and process their emotions. Ensure that these methods don't prevent the child from addressing their feelings.
- **Understanding Behaviour:** When addressing secondary behaviours, it's crucial to first understand the primary behaviour that triggered the response. For instance, if a child leaves a classroom and then causes damage, identifying why they left initially is key to effectively addressing the subsequent behaviours.
- **Avoiding Shouting:** While raising our voice may sometimes be necessary to connect with a child, it should not be confused with shouting. Many children have negative associations with shouting, and it can undermine trust and the supportive relationship we strive to build.

Appendix 3 – Debriefing Staff Post-Significant Incident

Debriefing staff following a significant incident is a crucial aspect of maintaining a supportive and effective environment for both staff and students. This process is grounded in relational principles, focusing on collaboration, empathy, and reflection. The goal is to ensure that staff can process the event, address any concerns, and enhance their approach to support students in future situations.

Debriefing Process

1. Immediate Response

- **Ensure Safety:** Confirm that all involved staff and students are safe and secure. Address any immediate needs for support or counselling.
- **Initial Reflection:** Allow staff a brief period to collect their thoughts and emotions before engaging in the debriefing process.

2. Organise a Debriefing Meeting

- **Timing:** Schedule the meeting as soon as possible after the incident, ensuring it is soon enough to be relevant but not so immediate that staff are still processing their emotions.
- **Facilitator:** Appoint a neutral facilitator, such as a senior leader or trained mediator, who can guide the discussion with empathy and respect.

3. Conduct the Debriefing

- **Provide Context:** Outline the purpose of the debriefing and remind staff of the relational framework guiding the process.
- **Discuss the Incident**
 - **What Happened:** Review the incident factually and without assigning blame. Encourage staff to share their perspectives and feelings.
 - **Emotional Impact:** Acknowledge and validate the emotional responses of staff. Allow time for them to express their thoughts and feelings in a supportive environment.
- **Reflect on Responses:**
 - **What Worked Well:** Identify strategies and actions that were effective in managing the situation and supporting the child.

- **Areas for Improvement:** Discuss what could be done differently and how staff responses could be adjusted in future incidents.

4. Explore Learnings and Next Steps

- **Identify Lessons:** Discuss key takeaways from the incident, including insights into the child's needs and staff responses.
- **Plan Adjustments:** Develop actionable steps for improving practices, including adjustments to the Relational Support Plan or Individual Pupil Risk Assessment if necessary.

5. Support and Follow-Up

- **Offer Continued Support:** Ensure staff have access to ongoing support and resources, such as counselling or peer supervision.
- **Review and Monitor:** Schedule follow-up meetings to review the implementation of changes and provide additional support as needed.

6. Documentation

- **Record Outcomes:** Document the key points from the debriefing, including agreed actions and any updates to support plans. Ensure that this documentation is shared with all relevant staff and stored securely.

By adhering to these steps, the debriefing process will support staff in reflecting constructively on significant incidents, enhance their relational practice, and contribute to a positive and collaborative school environment.

Appendix 4 – Repair and Restore Framework

This framework serves as a guide for team members to help the child reflect on and learn from an incident. Emphasising explicit safety cues and the PACE framework throughout the process enhances its effectiveness. A collaborative, curious approach helps the child engage in meaningful reflection and learning.

1. What Happened?

Encourage the child to share their version of events, listening with genuine curiosity and without judgment. Use the following techniques:

- **Mirroring:** Reflect facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice to align with the child's mood.
- **Validation:** Accept and acknowledge the child's experiences and feelings.
- **Reflection:** Repeat back what you hear in clear, manageable segments to aid understanding.
- **Soothing:** Use calm, reassuring tones.

2. What Were You Thinking and Feeling?

Support the child in expressing and understanding their thoughts and emotions:

- **Empathic Listening:** Respond with empathy, exploring feelings and thoughts together.
- **Developmental Approach:** Start from the child's developmental level, discussing physical sensations and possible emotions.
- **Validation:** Show understanding of their feelings by acknowledging that big behaviours often stem from strong emotions.

3. Who Else Has Been Affected?

Help the child understand the impact on others and explore different perspectives:

- **Empathy Building:** Use stories, role play, and visual aids to help the child see from others' viewpoints.
- **Exploration:** Discuss and reflect on how others might have been affected.

4. What Do You Need, and What Needs to Happen Now?

Guide the child in identifying steps to repair the harm and move forward:

- **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** Ask, “*How can we make things right?*” or “*What have we learned?*” to involve the child in finding solutions.
- **Reparation:** While apologies and restorative actions can be part of the process, they are not always the immediate goal. Focus on what the child needs to progress.
- **Support:** Provide short-term interventions, mediation, and reassurance to ensure safety and prevent recurrence. Offer a structured environment that supports the child’s well-being and recovery.

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