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Working together to inspire, nurture and motivate everyone to fulfil their potential.

## Relational Policy

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Policy review: September 2024

### WHAT WE BELIEVE:

- At TPRS we integrate Therapeutic Practice including Attachment Aware and Trauma Responsive interventions into our everyday practice.
- From research we are aware that any disruption within the early years from pregnancy onwards can impact minds and bodies in three key areas: **affect regulation, attachment and executive function.**
- From research we understand that the toxic stress involved in ACEs impacts the nervous system of human beings.
- From research we know that over-compensatory, rich, relational interventions can bring about recovery so that children and young people can function well at home, school and out in their communities.
- We view ourselves as an important part of any student's recovery journey. We believe in recovery in community.
- We will not discriminate how we relate to the students in our care as we believe each student is worthy of our time, energy and patience. However we will differentiate, according to need.
- We will approach all students and their needs with compassion and an unconditional and positive regard.
- We will provide a predictable and secure environment which promotes security through consistent routines and clear boundaries.
- We understand that positive regard at TPRS is removing judgment, giving second chances, having high expectations matched with high levels of support.



## WHO WE ARE:

- We see it as our responsibility to be **stress and shame regulators** for the students in our care.
- We see it as our responsibility to learn all about our assigned student: what they have lived through to date, their resilience factors, their stressors and their calmers [Student Profile].
- We do all we can to ensure that our assigned students do not lose their thinking capacity.
- We will be wise with our words, ensuring we do not label any of the students in our care.
- We will be gentle with our strength and strong with our gentleness, remembering that some students in our care have a very fragile sense of self.
- We see it as more important to always prioritise maintaining connection with our assigned students than aiming to prove a point or to get our point of view across.
- We utilise all and any opportunity to communicate delight to the students in our care, rather than relying on conditional acceptance (a compliance behaviour model).
- We see it as our responsibility to remain regulated throughout the school day, and be aware of our Window of Tolerance (Personal Plan).
- We see it as our responsibility outside of school to attend to our own regulation and relationship needs, to keep healthy and well in both our bodies and minds.
- We remember that everyone is doing the best they can, with what they have lived through to date.
- We try really hard to remember not to take personal insults and rejection personally, or get triggered, as we know that some students have experienced intimacy betrayal and do not trust adults in the moment.
- We will engage in relentless care.
- We will let others know if we are struggling, so that we can engage in safe, quality practice.
- We will do all we can to ensure we stay connected to our family, friends and colleagues so that we can experience the relational buffering we need to do our work well.
- We will be aware of the boundaries of our skills set and refer on to therapists and counsellors, as and when appropriate, for specialist advice and support.



## HOW WE WILL WORK WITH OUR STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED RELATIONAL TRAUMA AND LOSS

- The child is at the heart of everything that we do.
- We will know their story (Student Profile).
- We will trace back to what a child or young person has lived through, from pregnancy onwards, taking special note of any relational disruptions, ACEs and toxic stress.
- We will try and find out whether there were any others around the child at the time of difficulties, who were physically and emotionally present, attentive, attuned and responsive, for example an auntie, or a neighbour or a youth leader.
- We will provide relational buffering
- We will allocate an Emotionally Available Adult to all those who have experienced disruption in their early relationships, and a formalised team of 4 or 5 significant adults will be created around them in school.
- We will prioritise spending quality time with our assigned students, being physically and emotionally present, attentive, attuned and responsive.
- We will always prioritise maintaining positive relationships with our students whatever other demands are going on, engaging in quality moments.
- We will intentionally use warm and open faces and body language, a varied tone of voice, humour and playfulness, in order to support felt safety.
- We will not problem-solve or reassure our assigned students before first really communicating that we have heard what they are trying to tell us about their internal feelings and thoughts.
- We will use the 4 Rs and ensure we are mindful of the order needed: Regulate, Relate, Reason, Repair, as well as acknowledging the need to circle back through the stages if our student's stress levels and state indicate they are not yet or are no longer ready for a particular stage.

## HOW WE WILL SUPPORT OUR STAFF

### United and Supported Teams

Staff resilience and wellbeing is essential to support them to remain emotionally available, attuned and responsive to their students, and for them to be able to help their students to manage their own emotions (provide co-regulation). It is therefore highly important to support staff in order to develop the most therapeutic environment for our children. Staff support and opportunities for reflection are prioritised, and these are held outside of the school day so that staff are more easily able to attend. We promote **psychological safety and understanding** within the system, so that staff can feel more able to say if they are struggling or need additional support.

We provide **supervision** for staff, to enable them to **reflect** upon how they support young people and the potential impact upon themselves. In addition, we have a 'Feel Good Friday' **staff wellbeing events, daily 'Check In**, and can help staff to access outside **additional support** where appropriate. All staff in each school are offered the opportunity to undertake **Window of Tolerance** and **Personal Understanding Plans**



## Resilience and Regulation

The ability to better understand, describe and regulate emotions, reflect upon your own experiences, and understand the thoughts, emotions and behaviours of others, are key factors of resilience in young people. We recognise that resilience is not an individual trait, but incorporates **systemic factors**, so we aim to provide an environment which is safe, stable, supportive, has positive relationships, provides opportunities for growth and development, and has opportunities for individual skill development in terms of emotional or social learning.

## TRANSITIONS

- If an adult needs to change their regular commitments with their assigned student, we will take all necessary efforts to communicate this change to the student directly and with compassion. The adult will also give the student something to support them to manage the separation or change of plan; for example a note or a card, or will swap something like a pen or a pencil case.
- If an adult needs to leave the school for whatever reason, we will make all efforts to ensure the assigned student has a carefully thought through and staggered goodbye.
- If the student needs to leave suddenly, for whatever reason, genuine care will be communicated and a sense of them 'not being forgotten'.

## PROVIDE RELATIONAL REPAIR

- We will never leave a student on their own after a difficulty or a relationship rupture. This is the time they need us the most.
- If there is a difficulty between ourselves and our assigned student or another member of staff, we will do all we can to resolve it so that we can be at peace with one another.
- If an interaction with a student becomes difficult for the adult, the adult will take time out to get themselves regulated before re-engaging at a later stage: another familiar adult will swap in, to be with the student.
- As adults we will always apologise directly to the student if we mis-attune to them, and their state becomes aggravated.
- When a student is aggravated we will match the intensity of the student's affect so that the student feels heard and validated.
- If something needs to be repaired we will join in too, even if we don't consider the difficulty to be our own personal responsibility.
- If we notice a student becoming stressed by any of our interventions we will switch what we are doing, recognising that relationships can be stress-inducing for students who have experienced relational trauma or loss.
- If there is a tension build-up in a classroom we will ensure we check in with our assigned student with a smile, and a 'It's going to be OK.'
- If something goes wrong we will seek understanding from the student themselves, rather than making our own assumptions. We will communicate curiosity: 'Help me to understand ...' or 'I wonder what was happening for you.'
- We will use restorative practices to resolve and repair all situations as they occur.



## HOW THE BEHAVIOUR REGULATION MODEL IS APPLIED

We understand that positive behaviour can be taught and needs to be modelled. We understand that negative behaviour can signal a need for support which we will provide without diluting our expectation. We aim:

- To maintain a caring, orderly community in which effective learning can take place and where there is a mutual respect between members.
- To help children develop a sense of worth, identity and achievement
- To support children to develop their emotional regulation skills, which in turn will impact upon their ability to regulate their behaviour.
- To support all children to learn effective, safe, ways of communicating their needs.
- To help all children become self-disciplined, able to accept responsibility for their own actions and make positive choices.
- To develop in all children the ability to listen to others; cooperate and appreciate other ways of thinking and behaving.



## The 5 Steps of a Relational Approach

### 1) Protect

Ensure that the environment is safe, recognise the emotion, empathise and soothe to calm.

The first step to de-escalating the stress is to remove the child from the situation, to a space that is calm. This is not a punitive measure, it is done in a non-shaming way, protecting their dignity while they are in the super-heightened state of anxiety, stress and anger. Very often, in the moment, the child is completely unaware of their actions. The child or young person is always taken 'somewhere with someone' - to a quiet place with an Emotionally Available Adult (EAA) or a present, focused care-giver, who can help them self-regulate and lessen the stress levels.

### 2) Relate

Validate the feelings and name what you see (e.g. the emotion is likely to be underlying the child's behaviour). For example, "Bradley, you look really angry today."

The EAA is non-judgmental, empathic and curious about what happened, and accepts and validates the child's emotions beneath the behaviour – 'I can hear that it is very annoying when that happens. Yes, I can see why that might make you very angry.' They create a connection with the child or young person before any attempt to address the issue - connection before correction.

### 3) Regulate

Support the child to use their regulation strategies (e.g. kicking a football, having a cold drink, eating something crunchy, time in a calm room). The give praise for use of regulation skills.

The child must feel safe to move from the highly stressed fight, flight or freeze response to social engagement when they can be supported to co-regulate. The EAA co regulates with the child or young person, helping them to relax and be calm. Often, play-based or art-based activities are used to help decrease the high levels of stress hormone the child or young person is experiencing. This does not reward poor behaviour, it is a necessary developmental experience to enable the capacity to reflect.



#### 4) Reflect

Problem-solve with the child. When the child is ready to reflect, be curious about the possible reasons behind their emotion e.g. “I wonder if these angry feelings are because you’re feeling left out”. Show empathy and acceptance of the feelings e.g. “I get it. I would feel angry if I was feeling left out too.”

Often, children and young adults who have experienced ACEs or other trauma, suffer from alexithymia and are unable to identify, explain or describe their emotional state. They have no previous experience vocalising or talking about what is happening to them, or what has happened in the past. They literally don't have the words to explain it. The EAA helps them to mentalize - interpret and understand their behaviour psychologically, in terms of underlying thoughts, feelings, wishes, and intentions.

Once the child is regulated, with the support of the EAA, they begin to reflect and 'unpick what happened, running through the series of events and their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Set limits on the behaviour. Use correction or problem solving where appropriate e.g. “But it is not okay to kick the door like that. Let’s think about what you could do next time that you are feeling angry.” This will enable the child to learn from their experience.

#### 5) Repair

Where there has been a rupture in the relationship between a child and a member of staff, the staff member should lead the act of repair of this relationship, so that the child knows that the ‘relationship is bigger than the act.’

It is important to repair the relationship. The EAA models how to take responsibility for their part in what happened - “I'm so sorry I had to remove you from the classroom. I imagine that was difficult for you, but I could really see you weren't managing.’

Where appropriate, together with the EAA, they can reflect on how to put right what went wrong. This is instigated by the child at an appropriate time and allows for reconnection and recovery, re-joining the class and reconnecting with their teacher. It is not about forcing a child to apologise - this can be detrimental and further shames the child.

Every child has a Student Profile which will include every aspect of the child, from academic profile to their emotional context. This document lists the emotional regulation strategies, triggers, warning signs and what others can do at each stage.



## OUR AIMS INCLUDE SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS TO:

- Function well at home, school and in their communities.
- Experience safety, security and stability with us.
- Reduce their blocked trust.
- Increase their tolerance of intimacy.
- Increase their comfort zone.
- Increase their stress tolerance.
- Increase their self-awareness.
- Strengthen their sense of self.
- Increase their internal controls.
- Strengthen their resilience.
- Feel confident and secure enough to explore, experiment, be curious and open to learning (enable their exploratory system to come fully online).
- Develop a personalised tool kit that will support them to move from alarm to social engagement.
- Integrate their body and mind.
- Integrate their past experiences into a coherent narrative.
- Move towards interdependency with others

## WE WILL MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS BY:

- Checking our attendance data.
- Asking the children and young people themselves to complete My Profile.
- Completing Staff/Student profile panels. (see over).
- Seeking the student's own views about their mental health and wellbeing.
- Measuring their learning progress, in comparison with themselves, not their peers.
- Logging any transitions made between classes or schools mid-year





## The 5 Principles of Relational Inclusion

### 1) We believe that if a child could do better they would

Many children and young people don't know why they behave the way they do. As a result of early negative experiences, their autonomic\* nervous system is convinced that adults cannot be trusted and all environments contain hidden threats. We understand that we all play a role in supporting a child to do better.

\*involuntary or unconscious

### 2) Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

By relationships we mean:

- RELATIONSHIP from the student's perspective
- RELATIONSHIP from the teacher's perspective
- The priority given to RELATIONSHIP formation and maintenance from school leadership' (Riley 2011)
- The RELATIONSHIP we have with ourselves and our own well-being.

We understand that positive teacher–student relationships have been shown to contribute to students' attendance, academic grades, psychological engagement and reduced disruptive behaviours. We know that supportive teacher–student relationships can also help in overcoming family education disadvantage.

We know we must recognise *blocked care*\* and our risk of slipping from our social engagement system.

\*When it becomes difficult to remain open and engaged

### 3) We accept all emotions but not all behaviours

We see all behaviours as an opportunity to learn. We believe in the unconditional acceptance of the emotional experience that lies behind behaviour, while communicating that the behaviour is indeed unacceptable for the child's life as it gets in the way of healthy relationship development or learning.

We believe that discipline is based on the needs of the young person not our adult wants.

We develop strategies aimed to work with a student's biology instead of against it.

We understand that co-regulation must occur before self-regulation can be learnt.

We know that a child must 'feel safe' and not be told they are safe.

### 4) We identify and address the cause not the symptoms

Beneath every behaviour there is a feeling. And beneath each feeling is a need. And when we meet that need rather than focus on the behaviour, we begin to deal with the cause not the symptoms. We understand that complicated behaviour deserves a more complex response which involves a 'state dependent' intervention rather than a one size fits all.

### 5) We foster a culture of compassion and repair

Compassion to accept the individual experience: why people are suffering and what has happened to them.  
Compassion of understanding: every function is an adaptation and everyone is doing the best they can with the resources they have inside them and around them.

Compassion of possibility in the here and now: every interaction is an opportunity for repair, reattunement and growth for a positive vision of the future and self.

Compassion for the importance of voice, choice and empowerment: we give voice and offer choice within our relationships with children, families, staff and are inclusive in the process of transformation.