

High School (anti-behaviourism) Behaviour Management Policy

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1. Introduction

Welcome to our high school's relational behaviour policy, which is founded on the principle of holding unconditional positive regard for every young person within our community. At the core of this approach is the profound belief that each student possesses inherent worth and potential. We are committed to fostering an environment where students feel genuinely seen, respected, and supported, irrespective of their backgrounds or challenges. By embracing a culture of unconditional positive regard, we aim to create a school community that not only prioritises the wellbeing of its members but also recognizes and nurtures the unique strengths and qualities each student brings. Through this relational lens, we aspire to cultivate an inclusive and uplifting atmosphere that empowers young individuals to flourish academically, socially, and personally.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a detailed framework for behaviour management at our school. It not only outlines our principles but also why we believe in them. By adhering to these principles, we aim to create an environment that fosters growth, self-determination, and wellbeing while rejecting traditional methods of rewards, punishments, behaviourism, and restrictive practices, which are not aligned with our philosophy.

2. Rejection of Rewards, Punishments, Behaviourism, and Restrictive Practices

We categorically reject the use of rewards and punishments as behaviour management strategies. Research and experience have shown that these traditional methods are ineffective in addressing the needs of young people and can have negative consequences. Rewards may encourage short-term compliance but do not foster long-term growth or self-regulation.

We understand that rewards and punishments appear to motivate some young people to do well, enabling them to comply with school expectations. However, we recognise that this is because they are already able to adhere to these expectations. Young people who are unable to meet these expectations for whatever reason (such as underlying needs, lagging skills, high stress levels) will need a different approach. We also recognise the anxiety that rewards/consequences can create for some young people who work extra hard to comply.

WHY REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS DON'T WORK

1

INTERNALISING NEEDS

They make people internalise their needs: You may see a change in behaviour in the short term, but this is because young people try to internalise their needs. Short term change leads to long term dysfunction as it creates masking, trauma, hypervigilance and burnout.

FEELINGS MATTER

They are designed for when your feelings don't matter: But when it comes to supporting young people, thoughts and feelings DO matter. If a young person is punished for their behaviour, they may change their behaviour, but their underlying stress, unmet need or skill gap will still exist. This often leaves people feeling worse, not better.

2

3

DECREASING MOTIVATION

They are proven to DECREASE motivation: There is a lot of evidence that shows that rewarding people for their behaviour decreases their internal drive. People start doing things to comply, rather than because it feels good. Over time, people can become dependent on rewards, and lose their sense of self.

UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT

Young people need UNCONDITIONAL support, love and encouragement: Young people are usually trying their very best. Rather than rewards being conditional on "good behaviour" - shouldn't trying their best be enough?

4

The use of rewards and punishments stigmatises and disempowers young people, hindering their overall wellbeing. Rewards do not address the underlying needs and motivations driving behaviour, while punishments can lead to physical and emotional harm.

Behaviourism, with its focus on external control and conditioning, is not a suitable framework for supporting the complex needs of autistic young people. It ignores the individuality of

experiences and the importance of understanding the unique context in which behaviours occur. We reject behaviourism in favour of more holistic and compassionate approaches, which reflect what is now known from neuroscience about the process of how self-regulation is developed.

We also reject the use of restrictive practices such as seclusion, restraint, or any form of coercion or aversive intervention (unless there is a risk to life or serious injury). These practices are not only harmful but also unethical, infringing on the autonomy and dignity of individuals (read more about the impact of this practice in [the 2023 ICARS report](#)). Our school is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment that respects the autonomy and individuality of every participant.

3. A Foundation of Trust and Positive Relationships

3.1 Trust as a Building Block

Trust is the cornerstone of our approach. We recognise that building trust between staff, students, and families is essential for positive outcomes. Trust fosters a sense of security, empowerment, and emotional well-being.

3.2 Unconditional Positive Regard

We hold unconditional positive regard for all students, valuing them as unique individuals deserving of respect and acceptance. Regardless of challenges or differences, we maintain a positive and non-judgmental attitude.

We subscribe to the philosophy that "young people do well IF they can." This perspective assumes that all individuals, including autistic young people, possess the innate capability to succeed when provided with the right support, understanding, and opportunities.

Unconditional positive regard promotes self-esteem and a positive self-image in young people. When they feel valued and accepted, they are more likely to develop a sense of self-worth and confidence.

This principle serves as a foundation for growth, self-acceptance, and the development of trusting relationships between participants and practitioners. It creates an environment where young people feel safe to express themselves and explore their potential.

It also promotes self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to achieve goals. Young people are empowered to take an active role in their learning and development, knowing that they have the potential to succeed.

3.3 The Role of Positive Relationships

Positive relationships play a pivotal role in establishing trust. We prioritise the development of strong, supportive, and respectful relationships amongst everyone at our school. These relationships are built on open communication, empathy, and active listening. We recognise that it is our responsibility to develop trusting positive relationships, not the responsibility of young people and their family members.

3.4 Creating a Nurturing Environment

Our school is committed to creating a nurturing environment where trust and positive relationships can flourish. Educators model trustworthiness, respect, and empathy, setting the tone for interactions among all participants. We believe that when trust and positive relationships are present, challenges can be effectively addressed with compassion and understanding. This means our staff are able to self-reflect and apologise to young people when they get something wrong, modelling in a healthy way that making mistakes/ errors is human and is perfectly okay.

4. Neurodiversity Affirming Practice

4.1 Embracing Neurodiversity

We wholeheartedly embrace the concept of the neurodiversity paradigm, recognising that neurological differences, including autism, are natural variations in the human experience. We respect and value the diverse perspectives and strengths that neurodivergent individuals bring to our school. Our school is committed to creating an inclusive environment where all participants can engage in meaningful activities, and learn in a way that works for them. We adapt our practices and approaches to accommodate the unique needs and preferences of young people. We actively normalise diversity in all its forms throughout the school, at all levels, taking opportunities as they arise to reinforce messages of acceptance.

4.2 The 5 As of Neurodiversity Affirming Practice

We believe in the 5 As of neurodiversity affirming practice, from [The Autistic Advocate](#), and ensure these values are embedded into our practice. These values do not just apply to young people who have a diagnosis, but all young people, as we recognise that many young people experience barriers to diagnosis:

Authenticity – A feeling of being your genuine self. Being able to act in a way that feels comfortable and happy for you.

When neurodivergent people are in a setting where it feels safe to be authentic, it is common to behave in ways that are different to societal norms. Neurodivergent people naturally communicate, act and behave in different ways to the majority and embracing this is really important for their wellbeing.

These differences are often seen as a negative thing and something to change or fix. But when neurodiversity is openly discussed and embraced, we see that neurodivergent people have their own culture based around their thoughts and interests, and we can see that enabling and embracing these differences is key for wellbeing.

Acceptance – A process whereby you feel validated as the person you are, not only by yourself but by others too.

Acceptance is the process where you can feel validated as the person you are not only by yourself but also by others.

We believe in openly talking about neurodiversity with young people. 'Breaking the ice' can cause discomfort in the short term, but this is really important for enabling acceptance and discussions for young people in the longer term. It makes neurodivergent experience normal and day to day instead of a shameful private thing.

Agency – A feeling of control over actions and their consequences in your day-to-day life.

We try not to do things for young people, but instead act as facilitators. Young people learn by being able to try things out. As adults, we often think we know what is best, however we recognise that when young people are given the opportunity to try things for themselves, that learning is maximised as a result.

We can work with young people to identify and minimise risks, offering safety options as appropriate, but at the same time let young people take control of what they do and how they act.

We believe that young people know what they are capable of and are able to challenge themselves. We also recognise that if a young person is struggling to do something or take part, this is often because we need to make changes to how we run the session, so it better meets their needs.

Autonomy – A state of being self-directed, independent, and free. Being able to act on your ideas and wants.

Young people should be able to take the lead and follow their passions, interests and goals. Having structure and making people do activities removes a sense of autonomy. Having opportunities in school for young people to follow their interests, take part in enquiry-based learning, explore a wide range of subjects and take part in collaborative goal setting is important for young people's wellbeing.

Advocacy – To speak for yourself, communicate what is important to you and your needs or the needs of others.

Self knowledge is an important step towards self advocacy. Supporting young people to explore how they naturally learn, process and interact will help to develop self-advocacy - so helping young people to understand more about themselves and their needs is a core part of our practice. Our staff aim to listen and validate young people's experiences such as respecting expressions of difficulty/discomfort and “refusal” to do an activity, in all forms before supporting them to self advocate in other ways.

We also believe it is important for young people to have a say in how our school runs, so meaningful pupil voice work is embedded throughout our school community. All students are given opportunities to share views and ideas, and not just those who are confident and voice these to adults and peers already.

5. Trauma Informed Care

5.1 Using a Trauma Informed approach

We adopt a Trauma Informed approach, recognising that past experiences may influence behaviour.

Trauma can have a profound and lasting impact on individuals' emotional and psychological well-being. By understanding and addressing the potential impact of trauma, we aim to create a safe and predictable environment where young people are supported with the healing process.

Our school strives to create a safe and predictable environment where autistic young people can feel secure and supported, following the 6 key principles of trauma-informed practice (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022):

- Safety: Prioritising the physical, psychological and emotional safety of young people.
- Trustworthiness: Explaining what we do and why, doing what we say we will do, expectations being clear and not overpromising.
- Choice: Young people are supported to be shared decision makers and we actively listen to the needs and wishes of young people.
- Collaboration: The value of young people's experience is recognised through actively working alongside them and actively involving young people in the delivery of services.
- Empowerment: We share power as much as we can, to give young people the strongest possible voice.
- Cultural consideration: We actively aim to move past cultural stereotypes and biases based on, for example, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, geography, race or ethnicity.

5.2 Trauma Informed Language

The language we use is significant. Words carry a sense of hope and possibility or can be associated with a sense of negative beliefs and low expectations, both of which can influence outcomes for young people.

We actively avoid:

- Language that reinforces staff control, for example 'enforce', 'punishment', 'isolation', 'naughty corner', 'removal', 'rule', 'power', 'control', 'confiscate', 'challenging behaviour' and 'impose'
- Language that places negative judgement on a child or young person or their behaviour, including 'attention seeking', 'malicious', 'choice', 'poor behaviour', 'misbehaviour', 'manipulative', 'naughty', 'immoral'
- Language that reinforces negative gender stereotypes, such as 'naughty boy', or 'bossy girl'.

Instead, we aim to use language that promotes trauma informed approaches and acknowledges the need behind stress related behaviour, for example 'emotionally dysregulated', 'stress related behaviour' 'what is the need behind this behaviour?', 'attention needing', 'feeling unsafe', 'presenting as distressed', 'requiring co-regulation support'

5.3 Understanding the Needs Behind Behaviour

Young people may exhibit stress related behaviours to express their emotions, sensory sensitivities, or unmet needs. Our approach is rooted in understanding the needs behind behaviour. As a result, we usually look at behaviour in three different ways:

A result of environmental stressors

When a young person is stressed, it becomes harder for them to think rationally, and their brain starts struggling to cope with the situation.

Stress related behaviour is often caused by environmental stressors. This can include but is not limited to having too much sensory input, expectations and demands, having too much uncertainty and being around people they do not know and trust. Identifying the causes of any stresses and working out how to reduce them is really important. This includes stressors from both the physical and the social environment.

Having unmet needs

A young person may be struggling because of unmet needs, and this can include needs that are external to school (for example, if they haven't had much sleep). A young person may also struggle because of how they are thinking or feeling (for example, trauma making a young person feel the environment is unsafe).

When someone is struggling because needs aren't being met, it is really helpful to identify what these needs are and to put accommodations or adjustments in place to rectify this.

Not having the skills to deal with a situation

All young people have a range of strengths and difficulties. This means a young person may excel at some things, but find other things that are relatively easy to most people, incredibly difficult.

Young people's brains are also still growing and developing, so they will have other skills that are also undeveloped.

When it comes to not having the skills for a situation:

- Some skills can be taught: If a young person is new to our school, it may be unfamiliar to them so it may take a lot of time for them to 'learn the ropes' and understand how the community works. They may not currently understand how to navigate the space, but they can be supported to understand this.
- Some skills develop with time, or are not part of a young person's individual skills profile: No matter the reason for the skill gap, it is always helpful to identify what the skill is, and put support in place so that it does not become a barrier. When there is a skill gap, there is usually a pattern of stress related behaviour. You can then work with the young person and their family to problem solve.

Adults should always remain curious rather than judgemental in their approach to behaviour.

6 Using the NEST Approach for Supporting Young People in Distress

6.1 The NEST Approach

The NEST Approach (Nurture, Empathise, Sharing Context, Teamwork) is an approach that has been developed by the Spectrum Gaming community, as a result of autistic young people sharing the negative impacts of support that has been offered while they are experiencing meltdowns.

We worked together with them to create this guidance around meltdowns, using the insight of the community, plus the best practice work of [Studio 3](#), [Dr. Ross Greene](#) and [The PDA Society](#).

All of our staff receive training on the NEST Approach. It is an approach that has a sense of joint ownership and is championed by our whole community.

[You can find our published written version of the NEST Approach here.](#)

6.2 Nurture

The Nurture stage of the NEST Approach is adapted from the Low Arousal Approach, a key component of our philosophy. It prioritises de-escalation and safety during challenging situations. Rather than responding with force or coercion, we focus on creating a calm and supportive environment.

The Low Arousal Approach, in which all of our staff receive additional training, involves techniques for de-escalating situations when young people are in distress. This includes techniques such as providing personal space, using calming language, and reducing sensory stimulation.

6.3 Empathise, Sharing Context, Teamwork

EST of the NEST Approach revolves around Collaborative Problem Solving. We believe that collaboration is a powerful tool for addressing stress related behaviour. Collaborative Problem Solving involves young people, their families, and practitioners working together to identify difficulties, set goals, and co-create possible solutions.

Young people are active participants in the problem-solving process. We value their input, preferences, and insights into their own experiences, empowering them to be co-designers of their school journey.

Our approach also respects the autonomy and choices of autistic young people. It encourages them to communicate their needs and preferences in a way that is free from judgement, empowering them to make decisions that affect their school experience.

This video is a great introduction to this way of problem solving with young people:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPTae0rwkGg>

7. Understanding Motivation and Behaviour through Self-Determination Theory

7.1 Autonomy

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) underscores the importance of autonomy in motivation and behaviour. Autistic young people are more likely to engage positively when they have choices and control over their actions. Our school environment is designed to provide opportunities for autonomy, such as choosing activities and setting goals.

7.2 Competence

Competence is another key component of SDT. We recognize the importance of providing opportunities for young people to develop and showcase their skills and abilities. This fosters a sense of competence and achievement. We take an asset-based approach: identifying key strengths that our pupils have and fostering these strengths rather than solely focusing on their challenges. As a result, pupils feel empowered to further develop their own skill sets and recognise their unique contributions.

7.3 Relatedness

Relatedness, the third component of SDT, emphasises the significance of positive social connections. Our school promotes acceptance, teamwork, and relationship-building among participants, creating a sense of belonging and relatedness.

7.4 Integration with Our Principles

The principles of SDT are integrated into our behaviour management approach. By supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness, we enhance motivation, engagement, and overall wellbeing of our students.

8. When is our school not right for a young person?

8.1 Recognising our school may not work for everyone

While we are proud of our Behaviour Management policy and its active rejection of rewards and punishments, we do recognise that there are limits to this approach, so there are set circumstances where we have to make the decision that our school is not the right setting for a young person. We have set out our criteria for when our school is not the right setting, as there are some specific circumstances where it may not be a conducive environment for a young person.

8.2 If a young person is experiencing significantly high levels of stress, or is making other students feel unsafe

There are times when young people may be struggling significantly, and when this happens it is much more difficult to have positive behaviour. Some young people may continually experience crises and display stress related behaviour. When this happens, we always try our best to support them in the best way we can within our school. We know that young people often experience high levels of shame when they are distressed, and it can be transformative for them to be able to continue to be a part of our school, despite their distress.

But it is important that we are able to recognise when a young person's needs are not best met by our school environment at this current time. For example:

- A highly individualised curriculum is needed, which we do not have capacity to offer
- Smaller class groups and consistent attachment figures are needed for a young person to feel safe
- Specialist therapies are required
- A greater level of flexibility is needed within the curriculum/structure of the timetable
- Higher levels of autonomy are needed than we can provide
- More practical or therapeutic interventions are required to re-engage an individual.
- When a young person threatens the safety of other students

8.3 Considerations before agreeing our school is not the right place

Before agreeing that school is not working for a young person, we have a duty to:

- Work together with young people to identify possible solutions to the challenges they are facing.
- Try our best to gather the views of a young person, or ask a trusted person if they can do this on our behalf, and ensure their views are championed.
- Contact parents and work collaboratively with them.
- Look at if there are any structural changes we can make that meet their needs, without impacting negatively on the experience of others.
- Seek external input from professionals/ specialists.
- Apply for an EHCP
- We may in these instances suggest a short programme of support through an Alternative Provision or an in house suspension in which an intensive pastoral intervention can be used. If these routes are unsuccessful we may unfortunately need to consider the safety of our school community as a whole and the sustainability of a young person attending our school.

If this is not successful, it is really important to recognise that this is not the young person's fault and it doesn't mean that we don't care a lot about them. It usually demonstrates a failure from services/ professionals and us as a school, not the young person:

- If they had more support outside of school, they are likely to struggle a lot less within the school community.
- If they had more support within school, it could have worked better.
- If we were set up in a different way that was more suited to their needs, our school would be more likely to work for them.

9. Supporting Witnesses of Stress Related Behaviour

9.1 Increasing Peer Understanding of Stress Related Behaviour

When a young person is distressed, it is quite usual for their peers to see them as naughty, mean or choosing to misbehave. This means that a young person's distress has a negative impact on their relationship with their peers, in addition to how safe peers may feel in our school. We believe it is our role to not just support the young person in distress, but to help the people around them to understand their distress, so they are less likely to see it as a choice and reduce the impact of this behaviour on their feelings towards the distressed person and our school. Over time, this contributes to a culture of acceptance and mutual support.

9.2 Collaborative Problem Solving with witnesses

We believe it is important to support peers to process any difficult emotions or thoughts they may have as a result of witnessing someone else's stress related behaviour, if they say this is what they would like to do, or if we notice that the incident has had an impact on their sense of safety or wellbeing or feelings towards other young people.

The EST of the EST approach can be used to enable the witness's views to be heard, to share insight with them around the young person's distress, and to Collaboratively Problem Solve. This will enable the young person to process their feelings, develop a more understanding perspective and there may be changes in practice that we need so that distressed behaviour has less of an impact on them in the future.

When talking about a young person's distress, it is incredibly important to not share any personal information or context without their consent. It is often helpful to share possible reasons behind distress, rather than giving specific reasons to protect the privacy of the person who was distressed.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

10.1. School Staff

Staff at our school have the following responsibilities:

- Implement our behaviour management principles consistently.
- Create a nurturing and inclusive environment.
- Facilitate collaborative problem-solving and non-violent communication.
- Uphold unconditional positive regard for all participants.
- Foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness through activities and interactions.
- Implement the Low Arousal Approach for de-escalation and emotional regulation.
- Reject the use of rewards, punishments, behaviourism, and restrictive practices.
- Be reflective practitioners, whilst also being self-compassionate and holding unconditional positive regard towards themselves.
- Ensure all incidents are recorded securely on our system, in line with the school's wider Policies and Procedures.

10.2. Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers play an essential role in their young person thriving at school. Their responsibilities include:

- Collaborating with staff to understand and support their child's unique needs.
- Participating in collaborative problem-solving processes.
- Contributing insights into their child's experiences and preferences.
- Encouraging autonomy and self-efficacy at home.

10.3. Management

Our Senior Leadership Team is responsible for:

- Ensuring the Behaviour Management Policy is upheld.
- Providing necessary resources and training to school staff.
- Monitoring and supporting the continuous improvement of behaviour management practices.
- Promoting a culture of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among staff.
- Implementing the Low Arousal Approach for de-escalation and emotional regulation.
- Rejecting the use of rewards, punishments, behaviourism, and restrictive practices.
- Ensuring staff receive adequate support for managing stress in relation to their role and supporting positive wellbeing.

11. Review and Evaluation

This Behaviour Management Policy is subject to annual review to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Feedback from school staff, families, students, and relevant professionals will be considered in this process. Necessary adjustments will be made to better support our school's community.

We aim to create an inclusive environment where young people can thrive, grow, and develop to their full potential. This comprehensive approach supports their autonomy, competence, relatedness, and emotional wellbeing, hopefully leading to the best possible outcomes for them.

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