



Relational and Behaviour Policy

Date of issue: August 2026

Date for renewal: August 2027

Author: Jenny Mills

1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Learning Sanctuary is committed to providing a safe, respectful, inclusive and adult environment in which service users are valued as individuals. Our approach is relational and person-centred. We understand that behaviour is a form of communication and that distress, dysregulation, withdrawal, anxiety or behaviour that challenges may reflect an unmet need, communication difficulty, sensory need, fear, frustration, previous experience or changes in wellbeing.

Our role is not to control people. Staff build positive professional relationships, promote choice and independence, model respectful behaviour and support each service user to participate meaningfully in their day.

This policy should be read alongside The Learning Sanctuary Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedure, Mental Capacity Act 2005 Policy and Procedure, Positive Support, De-escalation and Physical Intervention Policy, Leaving the Service Unexpectedly (Absconding) Policy, individual support plans and risk assessments.

2. OUR FUNDAMENTAL APPROACH

- Service users will be treated as adults and with dignity, respect and kindness.
- Relationships, communication and understanding the individual are central to our practice.
- Staff will promote choice, participation and independence rather than compliance.
- Support will be adapted to the individual's communication, sensory, cognitive and emotional needs.
- Staff will recognise and celebrate progress, including small steps towards independence, confidence, social interaction and participation.
- The Learning Sanctuary does not use force as a behaviour-management strategy.
- Punitive, humiliating, intimidating or unnecessarily restrictive approaches are not acceptable.
- Where risk increases, staff will use prevention, de-escalation and the least restrictive response available.

3. AIMS

- To create a positive, welcoming and inclusive environment where service users feel safe, listened to and valued.
- To develop trusting professional relationships between staff and service users.
- To promote independence, confidence, communication, social interaction and participation.
- To recognise behaviour as communication and seek to understand what may be happening for the individual.
- To support service users to make choices and develop strategies for managing difficult situations.
- To maintain the safety and wellbeing of service users, staff, animals and other people.

- To ensure responses to risk are person-centred, proportionate and consistent with safeguarding and the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

4. STAFF EXPECTATIONS

- Meet and greet service users positively and take a genuine interest in their day.
- Model calm, respectful and positive communication.
- Build professional relationships while maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Know the individual's support plan, communication needs, preferences and risk assessment.
- Provide meaningful activities and practical opportunities suited to the person's interests and abilities.
- Encourage service users to complete tasks as independently as possible and avoid doing tasks for them unnecessarily.
- Encourage appropriate peer interaction and working alongside others where beneficial.
- Use humour, conversation and music appropriately as tools for connection where welcomed by service users.
- Notice changes in presentation and respond early rather than waiting for a situation to escalate.
- Seek support promptly where concerns exceed the staff member's role, competence or the person's agreed plan.

5. CHOICE, CAPACITY AND UNWISE DECISIONS

Under the Mental Capacity Act 2005, a person aged 16 or over must be presumed to have capacity unless it is established that they lack capacity for the specific decision at the particular time. Staff must take all practicable steps to help the person make their own decision.

A service user must not be treated as lacking capacity simply because they make a decision that staff, relatives or others consider unwise. Where there is a genuine reason to doubt capacity for a specific decision, staff must follow The Learning Sanctuary Mental Capacity Act Policy.

Where a person lacks capacity, any act or decision on their behalf must be in their best interests and staff must consider whether the outcome can be achieved in a less restrictive way. Sections 1, 4, 5 and 6 of the Mental Capacity Act are particularly relevant.

6. POSITIVE AND RELATIONAL SUPPORT

Staff should focus on what helps the person to engage successfully. This may include:

- clear, accessible communication and giving one instruction or piece of information at a time where helpful;
- offering genuine choices and allowing sufficient processing time;
- using familiar routines while remaining flexible to the person's needs;
- positive acknowledgement and specific praise;

- breaking activities into achievable steps;
- reducing sensory or environmental demands;
- offering a change of activity, quiet space, movement or time away where appropriate;
- using familiar staff relationships and known interests to reconnect;
- supporting the person to communicate that they need help, a break or a change.

7. RESPONDING TO DISTRESS OR BEHAVIOUR THAT CHALLENGES

When behaviour becomes difficult, staff should first consider what the person may be communicating and what has changed. The priority is to reduce distress and risk, not to win an argument or secure immediate compliance.

Staff should:

- remain calm and use a low-arousal, non-confrontational approach;
- reduce unnecessary demands and avoid crowding the person;
- use simple, respectful language appropriate to the person's communication needs;
- give time and space for processing and regulation;
- offer choices and realistic alternatives;
- avoid repeated instructions, threats, ultimatums, shaming or power struggles;
- consider environmental, sensory, physical, emotional and communication factors;
- follow individual support and risk-management strategies;
- seek additional staff support early where risk is increasing.

8. BOUNDARIES AND SAFETY

Being person-centred does not mean that unsafe behaviour is ignored. Staff should communicate boundaries calmly and clearly where behaviour creates a risk to the service user, another person, staff, animals, property or the safe operation of the service.

Responses must be proportionate and tailored to the individual. Staff should redirect, explain the concern, offer an alternative and support the person to regain regulation. Removal from an activity should not be used as a punishment. Where an activity cannot safely continue, the reason should be explained and an appropriate alternative offered wherever possible.

9. DE-ESCALATION AND PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

The Learning Sanctuary does not use force to manage behaviour, enforce instructions or punish a service user. Our approach is prevention, communication, relationships, de-escalation and least restriction.

In a genuine unforeseen emergency, immediate proportionate action may sometimes be necessary to prevent imminent harm. Any such action must be exceptional and managed in accordance with The Learning Sanctuary Positive Support, De-escalation and Physical Intervention Policy.

Where a person lacks capacity and an act may amount to restraint, section 6 of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 is relevant. Restraint can only fall within the Act's protection where the person taking the action reasonably believes it is necessary to prevent harm to that person and it is proportionate to the likelihood and seriousness of that harm.

10. LEAVING THE SERVICE UNEXPECTEDLY

If a service user leaves or attempts to leave the service or an agreed activity unexpectedly, staff must follow The Learning Sanctuary Leaving the Service Unexpectedly (Absconding) Policy and the person's individual risk assessment.

Staff must not automatically physically prevent an adult from leaving. Capacity, the person's rights, the immediacy and seriousness of risk, safeguarding concerns and the least restrictive response must all be considered. Where safe and appropriate, staff may maintain observation or follow at a safe distance rather than actively pursue.

11. SAFEGUARDING

Changes in behaviour can be a safeguarding indicator. Staff should remain alert to the possibility of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, exploitation, coercion, domestic abuse, financial abuse, bullying or other harm.

Any disclosure, allegation or concern must be responded to in accordance with The Learning Sanctuary Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedure. Staff should listen, reassure, record accurately and report concerns promptly. Behaviour must not be used to dismiss or minimise a safeguarding concern.

Inappropriate, punitive, humiliating, excessive or unnecessary physical or behavioural interventions may themselves constitute a safeguarding concern.

12. SELF-HARM, MENTAL HEALTH AND ESCALATING RISK

Where a service user's presentation indicates possible self-harm, suicidal thoughts, significant deterioration in mental wellbeing, serious risk to others or another crisis, staff must prioritise immediate safety and follow the person's risk assessment, crisis arrangements and safeguarding procedures.

Where risks are escalating or repeated incidents suggest that the person's needs may no longer be safely met through existing arrangements, the Director should liaise with the service user, their social worker, health professionals, commissioners and other relevant people to consider additional or multi-agency support.

13. POSITIVE RECOGNITION

Positive recognition is an important part of relational practice. Staff should notice effort, participation, kindness, independence, perseverance, care for animals and others, communication and progress towards individual goals.

Recognition should be meaningful and age appropriate. It may be as simple as specific verbal praise, acknowledging an achievement, sharing success with an appropriate person with the service user's agreement, or recording progress. Staff should avoid systems that infantilise adults or create unnecessary competition.

14. REFLECTION AND RESTORATIVE CONVERSATIONS

After a difficult incident, staff should allow sufficient time for the service user to become calm before attempting reflection. A restorative conversation should be supportive, not punitive, and should seek to understand the person's perspective.

Where appropriate, discussion may explore:

- what happened from the service user's point of view;
- what the person was feeling or trying to communicate;
- what helped and what made things more difficult;
- whether anybody was harmed or upset;
- what could help next time; and
- whether the support plan or risk assessment needs to change.

15. RECORDING AND REVIEW

Significant incidents, safeguarding concerns, emergency interventions and material changes in risk must be recorded accurately and reported in accordance with the relevant The Learning Sanctuary policy.

Repeated patterns should trigger review rather than simply repeated responses. The Director should consider whether changes are needed to communication approaches, activities, staffing, environment, support planning, risk assessment or multi-agency involvement.

16. RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

- The Learning Sanctuary Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedure.
- The Learning Sanctuary Mental Capacity Act 2005 Policy and Procedure.
- The Learning Sanctuary Positive Support, De-escalation and Physical Intervention Policy.
- The Learning Sanctuary Leaving the Service Unexpectedly (Absconding) Policy and Procedure.
- The Learning Sanctuary Handling People's Money Policy.
- Individual support plans, risk assessments and crisis plans.

- Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Code of Practice.
- Care Act 2014 and Care and Support Statutory Guidance.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Current West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and City of York Joint Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures.

17. MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner where legislation, safeguarding arrangements, commissioning requirements, learning from incidents or The Learning Sanctuary's service model changes. Practice will be reviewed to ensure it remains person-centred, proportionate, least restrictive and consistent with the rights and safety of service users.