

Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest



Relationships Policy

“Achieve, Belong, Thrive”

Date of Adoption by the Governing Body:	18th May 2026
Next review date:	September 2027 or earlier if new guidance becomes available



Relationships Policy

Rationale

A Relationships Policy within a Maintained Nursery School and birth to two provision is essential in ensuring that all children experience safe, secure, nurturing and respectful relationships during the most significant stages of their early development. At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that young children's behaviour, emotional wellbeing, communication and social development are intrinsically linked to the quality of the relationships they experience with adults and peers.

The early years are a critical period for brain development, attachment, emotional regulation and social understanding. Children learn best when they feel emotionally secure, valued and understood. Our Relationships Policy is therefore rooted in the understanding that positive, consistent and responsive relationships form the foundation for all learning, development and wellbeing. We believe that children thrive within environments where adults are warm, emotionally available, respectful and attuned to children's individual needs and stages of development.

As a Maintained Nursery School and birth to two provision, we acknowledge that many young children are still developing the ability to communicate their emotions, regulate feelings and understand social expectations. We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication and that children require supportive adults who can help them to understand emotions, build self-regulation skills and develop positive relationships with others. Our approach moves beyond managing behaviour and instead focuses upon understanding the child, co-regulation, emotional development and relational practice.

This policy is underpinned by the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the SEND Code of Practice, Keeping Children Safe in Education and the Equality Act 2010. It is also informed by current research and evidence relating to attachment theory, child development, trauma-informed practice, self-regulation and high-quality interactions within the early years. The policy reflects the school's commitment to inclusion and recognises that children may require differing levels of emotional support depending upon their experiences, developmental stage and individual needs.

Emotion Coaching and relational approaches play a central role within the policy and wider practice across the school and the Nest. Staff support children to identify, name and manage feelings through calm, consistent and developmentally appropriate interactions. Adults act as co-regulators, modelling empathy, emotional language and problem-solving strategies to help children gradually develop resilience, confidence and emotional security.

The Relationships Policy also promotes strong partnerships between school, families and external professionals. We recognise that consistency between home and setting is important in supporting children's emotional wellbeing and social development.

Through collaborative working, reflective practice and shared expectations, we aim to create a community where children, families and staff all feel respected, valued and supported.

Ultimately, our Relationships Policy supports our vision of ensuring that every child feels they belong, can build positive relationships, develop emotional wellbeing and thrive within a safe, inclusive and nurturing environment.

Ethos

This Relationships and Behaviour Policy outlines the approach taken by Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest to promote positive behaviour, emotional wellbeing and secure, nurturing relationships across our provision. We recognise that children learn and develop best when they feel safe, valued, respected and understood, and when the adults around them provide consistent, warm and responsive support.

Within the early years, we understand that behaviour is a form of communication. Young children express their needs, feelings, experiences and developing understanding of the world through their interactions, behaviours and relationships with others. Our role as practitioners is to support children in understanding and managing emotions, developing positive relationships and building the self-regulation and social skills that will support them throughout their lives.

This policy is underpinned by the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), inclusive practice, child development research and safeguarding responsibilities. It reflects our commitment to creating an environment where children experience positive relationships, clear and consistent boundaries, emotionally available adults and a strong sense of belonging. Through high-quality interactions and relational practice, staff support children to feel emotionally secure, confident and ready to engage in learning.

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we promote a nurturing and reflective approach that focuses upon co-regulation, emotional development and understanding the individual child. We recognise the importance of strong partnerships with families and external professionals to ensure consistency and support for children's wellbeing and development. Through this collaborative and inclusive approach, we aim to help all children develop empathy, resilience, confidence and the foundations of positive behaviour, enabling them to achieve, belong and thrive.

Aims of the Relationships Policy

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we aim to:

- Create a safe, nurturing and inclusive environment where every child feels secure, valued, respected and ready to learn.
- Foster warm, trusting and positive relationships between children, staff and families, recognising that secure relationships are fundamental to children's emotional wellbeing, development and positive behaviour.
- Support children's personal, social and emotional development through high-quality interactions, consistent guidance and developmentally appropriate expectations.

- Help children to develop self-regulation skills by supporting them to recognise, understand and manage their emotions, while learning positive ways to communicate their needs and feelings.
- Promote kindness, empathy, cooperation and respect, enabling children to build positive relationships and develop a strong sense of belonging within the school community.
- Ensure consistent, fair and supportive approaches to behaviour across the provision, rooted in early years best practice, safeguarding principles and an understanding of child development.
- Recognise behaviour as a form of communication and respond with curiosity, empathy and appropriate support, rather than punishment or shame.
- Use relational and restorative approaches, including Emotion Coaching and co-regulation strategies, to support children's emotional wellbeing and social understanding.
- Work in close partnership with parents, carers and external professionals to ensure consistency of support and to promote positive outcomes for all children.
- Identify and respond to children's individual needs at the earliest opportunity, ensuring inclusive and adaptive approaches that enable all children to thrive.
- Promote reflective practice amongst staff and regularly review behaviour and relationship approaches to ensure they remain effective, equitable and responsive to the needs of the school community and current guidance.

Key Principles and Expectations for Children, Staff and Parents

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, our approach to relationships and behaviour is underpinned by the following key principles:

1. Behaviour is a Form of Communication: We recognise that young children communicate their needs, feelings, experiences and emotions through their behaviour. Staff respond with empathy, curiosity and understanding, seeking to understand the meaning behind behaviours rather than simply reacting to them.

2. Positive Relationships are the Foundation for Learning: Warm, secure and consistent relationships are central to children's emotional wellbeing, confidence and development. We believe children thrive when they feel emotionally safe, valued and connected to the adults who care for them.

3. A Nurturing Approach Supports Wellbeing and Development: Children learn best within environments where they feel supported, respected and emotionally secure. We promote nurturing and relational approaches that prioritise children's wellbeing, sense of belonging and emotional development.

4. Consistency and Predictability Help Children Thrive: Clear routines, consistent expectations and predictable responses help children feel safe and secure. Staff work together to provide calm, structured and supportive environments that enable children to engage positively in learning and relationships.

5. Adults Model Positive Relationships and Behaviour: Staff act as positive role models, demonstrating respectful communication, kindness, empathy and emotional regulation. Children are supported through high-quality interactions and consistent relational practice.

6. Expectations are Developmentally Appropriate: We recognise that children develop at different rates and that behaviour expectations must reflect children's developmental stage, individual needs, experiences and level of emotional regulation. Responses to behaviour are always age and stage appropriate.

7. Inclusive and Equitable Practice: We are committed to inclusive practice and ensuring all children are supported to succeed, regardless of background, ability, need or experience. Approaches may be adapted to meet individual needs and remove barriers to participation, wellbeing and learning.

8. Emotion Coaching and Co-Regulation Support Self-Regulation: Emotion Coaching and co-regulation approaches play an important role within our practice. Adults support children to recognise, name and manage feelings, helping them gradually develop self-regulation, resilience and positive coping strategies.

9. The Environment Influences Behaviour: Calm, well-organised and enabling environments support children's emotional wellbeing and engagement. Accessible resources, thoughtful routines and purposeful provision help to reduce stress and promote positive interactions and independence.

10. Partnership with Families is Essential: Strong relationships between home and school are fundamental in supporting children's wellbeing and development. We work closely with parents and carers to promote consistency, share strategies and build a shared understanding of children's needs.

11. Early Identification and Timely Support: We are committed to identifying emerging needs at the earliest opportunity and providing timely support and intervention. Early support helps children to develop positive relationships, emotional wellbeing and successful engagement in nursery life.

12. Safeguarding Underpins All Practice: Children's safety, wellbeing and emotional security remain paramount at all times. Behaviour and relationships are always considered within a safeguarding context, with staff remaining vigilant to children's individual experiences, vulnerabilities and needs.

What is Behaviour?

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that behaviour is a normal and important part of children's development. In the early years, children are still learning how to communicate their needs, manage emotions, develop relationships and understand the world around them. As a result, behaviour is viewed as a form of communication rather than something that simply needs to be controlled or corrected.

Young children, particularly babies and toddlers, are still developing the skills needed for self-regulation, impulse control, emotional expression and social interaction. Their behaviour is often influenced by a range of factors including their developmental stage, communication abilities, emotional wellbeing, sensory needs, relationships, routines, experiences and environment.

Behaviour can communicate many different needs or feelings, including:

- excitement or curiosity
- frustration or confusion
- tiredness or hunger
- anxiety or insecurity
- sensory overload
- difficulty communicating needs verbally
- a need for connection, reassurance or support
- difficulty managing transitions or changes in routine

Within our provision, we understand that behaviours such as biting, pushing, throwing, crying, withdrawing, shouting or becoming unsettled are often developmentally appropriate responses for young children who are still learning how to regulate emotions and interact with others. Staff respond calmly and consistently, supporting children to understand feelings, develop language, build positive relationships and learn socially appropriate ways to express themselves.

We believe that children should never be labelled by their behaviour. Instead, we focus on understanding the reasons behind behaviours and supporting children through nurturing, relational and developmentally appropriate approaches. Our practice is rooted in co-regulation, where adults help children feel safe and supported before gradually developing the skills to regulate independently over time.

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we promote positive behaviour through:

- secure and trusting relationships
- emotionally available adults
- consistent routines and expectations
- high-quality interactions
- enabling environments
- Emotion Coaching and co-regulation approaches
- inclusive practice and early intervention
- strong partnership working with families and external professionals

By understanding behaviour within the context of child development, relationships and emotional wellbeing, we aim to support every child to feel safe, valued, understood and able to thrive.

Brain Development in Early Childhood and how this can affect Behaviour- The Window of Tolerance

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that children's behaviour, emotions and ability to regulate themselves are closely linked to early brain development. During the first five years of life, children's brains develop rapidly, with experiences and relationships shaping the foundations for emotional wellbeing, communication, social development and learning.

Young children are still developing the parts of the brain responsible for:

- emotional regulation
- impulse control
- attention and concentration

- communication and language
- problem-solving
- managing stress and strong emotions

Because these areas of development are still emerging, babies and young children often rely on supportive adults to help them manage feelings, cope with challenges and feel emotionally safe. This process is known as **co-regulation**, where calm, responsive adults help children gradually learn how to regulate their emotions and behaviour over time.

The Window of Tolerance

The “Window of Tolerance” is a helpful way of understanding children’s emotional regulation and behaviour. It describes the emotional state in which a child feels calm, safe and able to engage positively with learning, relationships and experiences.

When children are within their Window of Tolerance, they are more likely to:

- feel emotionally secure
- engage in play and learning
- communicate effectively
- manage feelings and frustrations
- build positive relationships
- respond to guidance and support

However, young children can move outside of their Window of Tolerance when they feel overwhelmed, anxious, tired, overstimulated, frightened, frustrated or emotionally dysregulated.

Hyperarousal - “Fight or Flight”

When children become overwhelmed, they may move into a heightened state of stress known as hyperarousal. Behaviours may include:

- shouting or screaming
- hitting, kicking or biting
- running away
- becoming highly emotional or distressed
- difficulty listening or calming

Hypoarousal - “Freeze or Shut Down”

Some children may respond by withdrawing or shutting down emotionally. Behaviours may include:

- becoming quiet or withdrawn
- avoiding interaction
- appearing disengaged
- becoming floppy, tired or unresponsive
- finding it difficult to communicate feelings

In both situations, children are not “choosing” to behave negatively. Instead, their developing brain is signalling that they need support, connection and regulation from trusted adults.

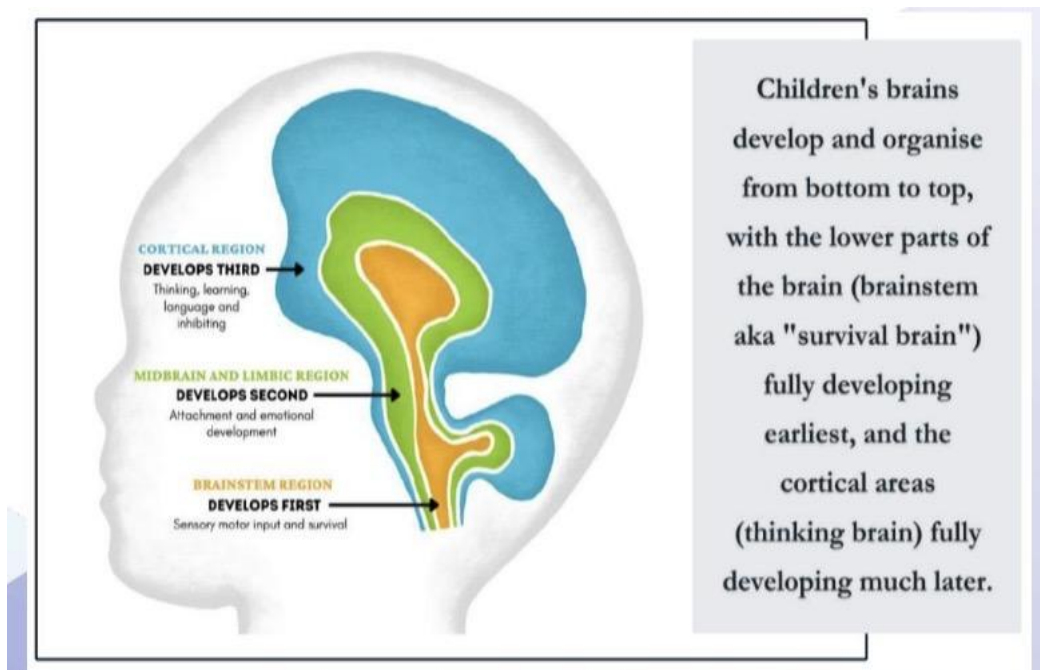
Our Approach

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, staff support children by:

- building secure, trusting relationships
- responding calmly and consistently
- using Emotion Coaching and co-regulation strategies
- recognising signs of stress or dysregulation early
- providing predictable routines and nurturing environments
- supporting children to name and understand feelings
- adapting environments and expectations to meet individual needs
- working closely with families and professionals where appropriate

We understand that children cannot successfully learn, play or regulate emotions when they do not feel safe. Our approach focuses on helping children return to a calm and regulated state before supporting reflection, problem-solving and learning.

Through nurturing relationships and emotionally responsive practice, we aim to help children gradually widen their Window of Tolerance, supporting resilience, emotional wellbeing and positive behaviour over time.



The Hand Model of the Brain

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we use child development research to help us understand children's behaviour, emotions and self-regulation. One approach that supports this understanding is Dr Dan Siegel's "Hand Model of the Brain."

The Hand Model of the Brain is a simple and visual way of explaining how the brain responds when children feel calm, stressed or overwhelmed. Using the hand as a model helps adults understand why young children may sometimes struggle to regulate emotions and behaviours.

In this model:

- The wrist and palm represent the brain stem, which controls basic survival responses.
- The thumb represents the amygdala, often referred to as the "emotional brain," which reacts quickly to stress, fear or strong emotions.
- The folded fingers represent the thinking brain (prefrontal cortex), which helps with reasoning, problem-solving, emotional regulation and decision-making.

When children feel safe, calm and regulated, the "thinking brain" stays connected and children are more able to:

- communicate effectively
- manage emotions
- engage in learning
- solve problems
- build positive relationships

However, when children become overwhelmed, anxious, frightened, overstimulated or dysregulated, they can "flip their lid." This means the thinking brain becomes less accessible and the emotional brain takes over. During these moments, children may struggle to regulate emotions or behaviour and need calm, supportive adults to help them feel safe again.

This understanding underpins our relational and nurturing approach to behaviour. Staff use co-regulation, Emotion Coaching and supportive interactions to help children return to a calm and regulated state before supporting reflection or problem-solving.

A helpful explanation of the Hand Model of the Brain can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx7PCzg0CGE>

Creating an environment designed to keep Children within their Window of Tolerance

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that the environment plays a significant role in supporting children's emotional wellbeing, behaviour and ability to regulate themselves. Young children thrive within environments that feel safe, calm, predictable and nurturing. When children feel emotionally secure and supported, they are more likely to remain within their Window of Tolerance, enabling them to engage positively in play, learning and relationships.

We understand that babies and young children can become dysregulated when environments feel overwhelming, unpredictable, overstimulating or emotionally unsafe. Our environments are therefore carefully designed to reduce stress, support emotional regulation and promote a strong sense of belonging for every child.

We support children to remain within their Window of Tolerance by:

Building Secure Relationships

- Ensuring children develop strong attachments with key people and familiar adults
- Providing warm, responsive and emotionally available interactions
- Supporting children through co-regulation and Emotion Coaching approaches
- Helping children feel seen, heard, valued and understood

Creating Calm and Predictable Routines

- Establishing consistent daily routines and transitions
- Using visual timetables, now-and-next boards and predictable structures
- Preparing children for changes and transitions in a developmentally appropriate way
- Supporting children to feel safe through familiarity and consistency

Providing Enabling and Nurturing Spaces

- Designing calm, welcoming and well-organised environments
- Reducing unnecessary noise, clutter and overstimulation
- Creating cosy spaces and quiet areas where children can rest and regulate emotions
- Ensuring resources are accessible, purposeful and developmentally appropriate

Supporting Sensory and Emotional Needs

- Recognising that children experience and process sensory input differently
- Providing opportunities for sensory play, movement and outdoor experiences
- Adapting environments and routines to meet individual sensory and emotional needs
- Supporting children who may become overwhelmed by noise, transitions or busy environments

Promoting Emotional Literacy

- Helping children to recognise, name and understand feelings
- Using stories, visuals, songs and interactions to explore emotions
- Modelling calm language and positive problem-solving strategies
- Supporting children to develop confidence in expressing needs and feelings

Using High-Quality Interactions

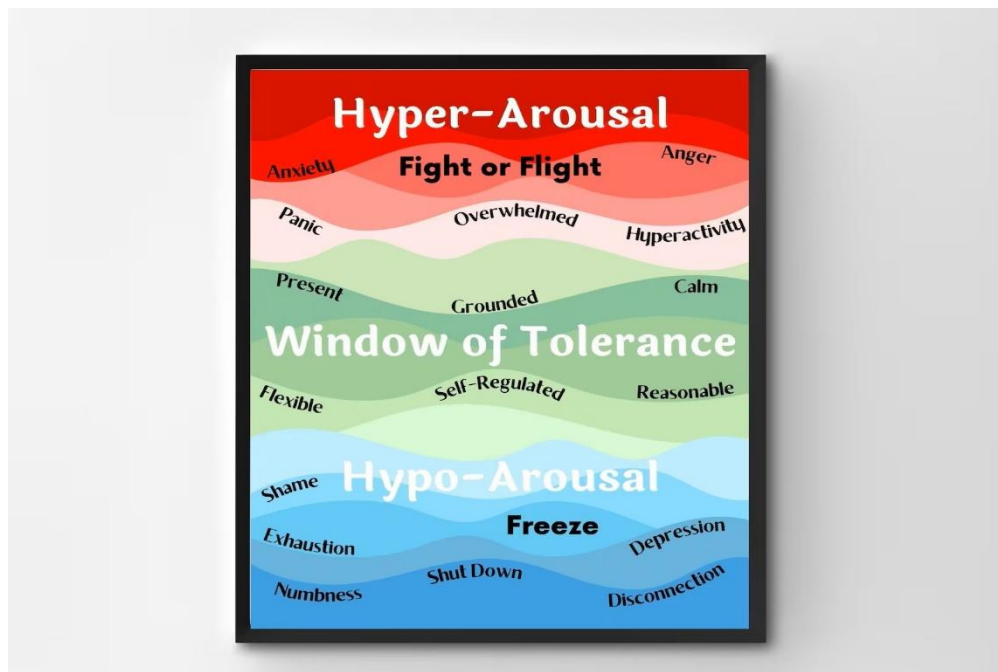
- Remaining calm, attuned and emotionally available during moments of dysregulation
- Responding with empathy, curiosity and reassurance
- Supporting children to regulate before expecting discussion or reflection

- Recognising that connection and safety are essential before learning can take place

Working in Partnership with Families

- Sharing information about children’s routines, interests and emotional needs
- Maintaining consistency between home and nursery where possible
- Working collaboratively to support children through transitions, changes or challenges

We believe that emotionally safe and nurturing environments are essential for children’s wellbeing, development and behaviour. By creating environments that support children to remain regulated and emotionally secure, we help children to build resilience, confidence, independence and positive relationships over time.



Meeting a Child’s Basic Human Needs

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that children’s behaviour, emotional wellbeing and ability to engage in learning are strongly influenced by whether their basic human needs are being met. Young children are more likely to feel calm, secure and able to regulate emotions when they experience environments and relationships that support both their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Our approach is informed by **Self-Determination Theory** (Deci & Ryan), a theory which suggests that intrinsic motivation drives behaviour; we need to be motivated by interest and enjoyment of a task. This theory highlights three core psychological needs that support wellbeing, motivation, emotional security and positive behaviour:

- **Connection and Belonging (Relatedness)**
- **Independence and Autonomy**
- **Competence and Achievement**

When these needs are consistently supported, children are more likely to develop confidence, resilience, emotional regulation and positive relationships with others.

Connection and Belonging (Relatedness)

Children need to feel safe, connected and emotionally secure within relationships with trusted adults and peers. Secure attachments and nurturing interactions help children develop a strong sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing.

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we support this by:

- Building warm, trusting relationships with children and families
- Providing consistent key people and emotionally available adults
- Creating welcoming and inclusive environments
- Supporting children to feel valued, respected and listened to
- Helping children develop friendships and positive social interactions

When children feel connected and emotionally safe, they are more likely to remain regulated, engage positively in learning and develop confidence within the nursery environment.

Independence and Autonomy

Young children have a natural desire to explore, make choices and develop independence. Supporting autonomy helps children feel capable, respected and motivated.

We promote autonomy by:

- Offering children meaningful choices throughout the day
- Encouraging children to take manageable risks and solve problems
- Supporting independence within routines such as self-care, tidying and mealtimes
- Valuing children's interests, ideas and child-led play
- Providing opportunities for children to express preferences and make decisions

When children feel a sense of control and ownership within their environment, they are more likely to develop self-confidence, resilience and positive engagement.

Competence and Achievement

Children need opportunities to experience success, mastery and achievement. Feeling capable helps children build self-esteem and motivation to continue learning.

We support competence by:

- Providing developmentally appropriate challenges
- Celebrating effort, persistence and progress rather than outcomes alone
- Scaffolding learning through high-quality interactions and encouragement
- Supporting children to develop new skills at their own pace
- Creating environments where children can revisit and practise skills through play

When children experience success and feel capable, they are more likely to persevere, manage frustrations and develop positive attitudes towards learning and relationships.

Meeting Children's Wider Needs

We also recognise the importance of meeting children's physical and emotional needs as part of supporting positive behaviour and wellbeing. Staff remain responsive to children who may be:

- tired
- hungry or thirsty
- overwhelmed or overstimulated
- anxious or unsettled
- experiencing changes or challenges at home
- finding transitions difficult
- struggling to communicate needs or emotions

By understanding children holistically and ensuring their needs are met through nurturing relationships, responsive care and enabling environments, we help children to feel emotionally secure and able to thrive.

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we believe that when children experience belonging, autonomy and competence within safe and supportive relationships, they are more likely to develop emotional wellbeing, resilience, self-regulation and positive behaviour.

What is Co-Regulation?

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that babies and young children are still developing the ability to manage emotions, cope with stress and regulate their behaviour independently. Before children are able to self-regulate, they first need supportive adults to help them feel safe, calm and emotionally secure. This process is known as co-regulation.

Co-regulation is the way in which calm, responsive and emotionally available adults support children to understand, manage and recover from strong emotions and feelings. Through repeated experiences of being soothed, reassured and supported by trusted adults, children gradually begin to develop the skills needed to regulate themselves over time.

In the early years, children's brains are still developing and they are not yet able to consistently:

- manage impulses
- regulate strong emotions
- calm themselves independently
- communicate feelings effectively
- problem solve when distressed

When children become overwhelmed, dysregulated or move outside of their Window of Tolerance, they rely on adults to help them feel safe again. During these moments, children need connection before correction.

Co-Regulation in Practice

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, adults support co-regulation by:

- remaining calm and emotionally available
- using warm, reassuring and predictable responses
- acknowledging and validating children's feelings
- using simple emotional language to help children understand emotions
- offering comfort, reassurance and physical proximity where appropriate
- supporting children to breathe, pause and recover from overwhelm
- modelling positive ways to manage emotions and solve problems
- reducing demands when children are distressed
- helping children feel safe before discussing behaviour or expectations

Staff understand that dysregulated behaviour is often a sign that a child is struggling emotionally rather than deliberately "misbehaving." Our approach focuses on supporting children with empathy, patience and understanding while maintaining safe and consistent boundaries.

Why is Co-Regulation Important?

Consistent co-regulation helps children to:

- feel emotionally safe and secure
- build trusting relationships
- develop emotional literacy
- learn how to manage stress and frustration
- strengthen resilience and confidence
- gradually develop self-regulation skills
- engage more positively in play, learning and relationships

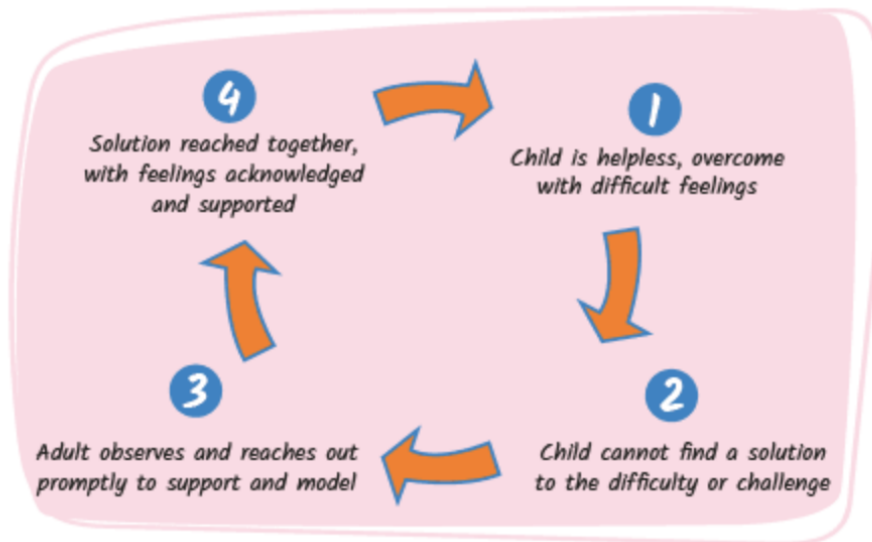
Over time, repeated experiences of co-regulation help children develop the internal skills needed to regulate emotions more independently.

The Role of Adults

Adults play a crucial role in co-regulation. Children learn emotional regulation through relationships and by experiencing calm, supportive interactions with emotionally regulated adults. Staff therefore prioritise:

- reflective practice
- calm and consistent responses
- understanding behaviour through a developmental lens
- emotionally attuned interactions
- nurturing and relational approaches

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, co-regulation is central to our Relationships and Behaviour Policy and underpins our commitment to supporting children's emotional wellbeing, behaviour and development through safe, secure and nurturing relationships.



Co-Regulation Plans

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that some children may require additional personalised support to help them feel emotionally safe, regulated and able to engage positively within the learning environment. Co-regulation plans are used to provide a consistent, supportive and individualised approach for children who may experience difficulties with emotional regulation, transitions, communication, relationships or behaviour.

A Co-regulation plan is developed collaboratively between staff, parents and, where appropriate, external professionals. The plan helps adults to better understand the child's individual needs, triggers, communication styles, emotional responses and effective support strategies. The focus of the plan is not on "managing behaviour," but on understanding the child and supporting their emotional wellbeing and regulation through nurturing, relational approaches.

Co-regulation plans may include:

- the child's strengths, interests and preferred calming strategies
- known triggers or situations that may cause dysregulation
- early signs that a child may be becoming overwhelmed
- strategies adults can use to support regulation and emotional safety
- approaches to transitions, routines and sensory needs
- communication supports and emotional language
- agreed responses to support consistency across the provision
- partnership working with families and external professionals

Staff use Co-regulation plans to ensure children experience calm, predictable and emotionally responsive support from all adults within the provision. These plans help to create consistency across home and nursery and support staff in responding with empathy, understanding and appropriate intervention.

Co-regulation plans are reviewed regularly to reflect children's changing needs, development and progress. Through this personalised and supportive approach, we aim

to help children develop emotional security, resilience, confidence and the foundations for self-regulation over time.

Co-regulation Plan

Child's name:

Date:

To keep me regulated I need...
Triggers for Dysregulation...
When I'm dysregulated it look likes this...
Adults should respond by... 1. Reducing demands 2. Remind yourself, this is not the time for conversation or reasoning
Things that don't help...

Tools to Support Co-Regulation

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that young children need calm, responsive adults to help them understand emotions, manage feelings and develop self-regulation skills over time. Co-regulation is supported through consistent relationships, emotionally available adults and the use of developmentally appropriate tools and strategies that help children feel safe, secure and understood.

We understand that every child is unique and may require different approaches to support emotional wellbeing and regulation. Staff use a range of nurturing and evidence-informed strategies to help children remain within their Window of Tolerance and successfully engage in relationships, play and learning.

Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching is used to help children recognise, name and understand their feelings. Staff validate emotions, support children to feel heard and guide them towards safe and appropriate ways to express themselves. This helps children gradually develop emotional literacy, resilience and self-regulation skills.

Co-Regulation Through Relationships

Warm, consistent and trusting relationships are the foundation of co-regulation. Staff remain calm, attuned and emotionally available, helping children to feel safe and supported during moments of dysregulation or distress.

Visual Supports

Visual timetables, now-and-next boards, emotion cards, choice boards and visual cues help children understand routines, transitions and expectations. These supports can reduce anxiety, increase predictability and support communication and independence.

Sensory Support

Some children may require additional sensory support to help regulate emotions and behaviour. Staff provide access to calming sensory experiences such as:

- cosy or quiet spaces
- sensory play
- movement opportunities
- outdoor play
- soft furnishings and calming resources
- sensory objects or fidget tools where appropriate

Predictable Routines and Transitions

Consistent routines help children feel secure and emotionally safe. Staff support transitions carefully through visual prompts, warnings, songs, reassurance and familiar routines to reduce stress and uncertainty.

High-Quality Interactions

Staff use calm tone of voice, simple language, reassurance and sustained shared thinking to support emotional wellbeing and communication. Adults remain emotionally regulated themselves, recognising that children often “borrow” the calm of trusted adults.

Stories, Songs and Emotional Literacy Resources

Books, stories, puppets, songs and visual resources are used to help children explore feelings, relationships and problem-solving in developmentally appropriate ways. These experiences help children build emotional understanding and empathy.

Safe and Enabling Environments

Calm, organised and nurturing environments help reduce overwhelm and support children to feel emotionally secure. Spaces are carefully designed to provide opportunities for both active play and quiet regulation.

Calm Zones

Children have access to calm and cosy spaces within the provision where they can go with support from an adult when they may be feeling overwhelmed, upset, anxious or dysregulated. Calm Zones are carefully designed to feel safe, nurturing and emotionally supportive and may include:

- soft furnishings and calming resources
- sensory items
- books and emotion visuals
- breathing prompts
- low lighting or quieter spaces
- comforting and familiar resources

Adults may support children within these spaces through co-regulation, reassurance and Emotion Coaching. Calm Zones are not used as a consequence or isolation space, but as a supportive environment where children can feel safe, regulate emotions and reconnect with others when ready.

Colour Monsters

Staff use the “Colour Monster” approach to help children recognise and talk about feelings in a simple, visual and developmentally appropriate way. Children are encouraged to begin identifying emotions such as:

- happiness
- sadness
- anger
- worry
- calmness

Using stories, visuals, puppets and daily interactions, staff support children to understand that all feelings are valid and that emotions can change throughout the day.

The Colour Monster approach helps children develop emotional vocabulary, self-awareness and confidence in expressing feelings and asking for support.



Traffic Light System for Emotional Regulation

A visual traffic light system may also be used to support children in recognising and talking about their emotions and level of regulation throughout the day. This approach is used sensitively and positively to encourage emotional awareness and support children in accessing help and regulation strategies when needed.

At the beginning of each day, all children start on **green**, reinforcing the message that every day is a fresh start and that all children are welcomed positively into the setting. The system is not used to shame or punish children, but to help adults and children recognise feelings and identify when support may be needed.

For example:

- **Green** – calm, settled, ready to learn and engage
- **Amber/Yellow** – feeling worried, frustrated, unsettled or needing support
- **Red** – feeling overwhelmed, dysregulated or needing immediate co-regulation and calming support

Adults support children to identify how they may be feeling and use co-regulation strategies, calm spaces, sensory support, reassurance and Emotion Coaching to help children return to a calm and regulated state. Children are supported to understand that emotions change and that adults are there to help them feel safe, calm and ready to learn again.

This approach forms part of our wider nurturing and relational practice and is used alongside high-quality interactions, co-regulation and emotionally responsive environments to support children's emotional wellbeing, resilience and self-regulation over time.

Partnership Working with Families

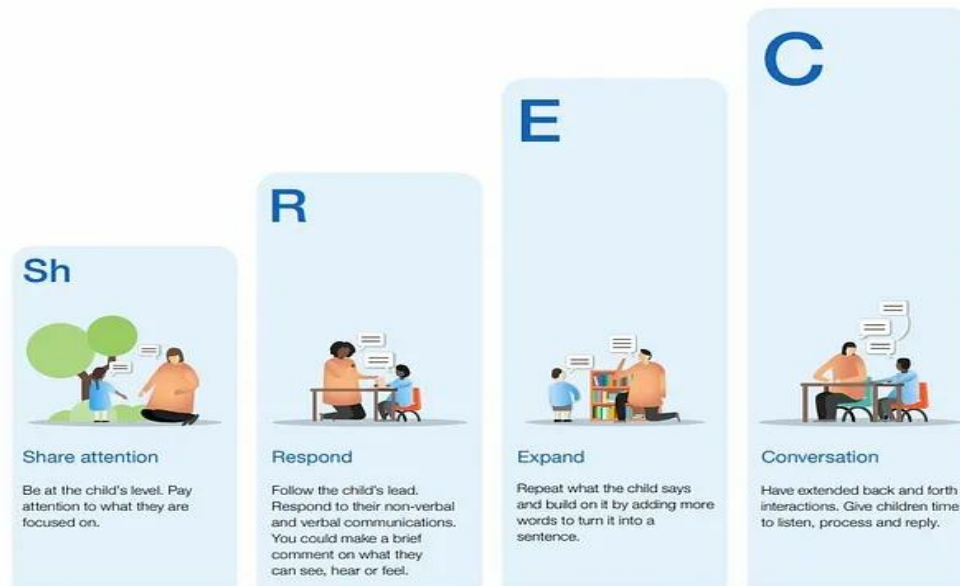
We work closely with parents and carers to ensure consistency between home and nursery. Sharing strategies, routines and understanding of children's needs helps provide joined-up support for emotional wellbeing and regulation.

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, co-regulation is viewed as an essential part of children's development and wellbeing. Through nurturing relationships, emotionally responsive practice and supportive environments, we help children gradually develop the confidence and skills needed to manage feelings, build relationships and thrive within the early years environment.

The EEF ShREC Approach in the Early Years

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that high-quality interactions between adults and children are fundamental to children's learning, development and emotional wellbeing. Our practice is informed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the ShREC Approach, which supports adults in developing children's communication, language, thinking and understanding through meaningful interactions.

The ShREC Approach focuses on four key strategies that adults use consistently throughout the day:



These approaches are woven through play, routines, daily interactions and curriculum experiences across both our nursery and birth to two provision.

Share Attention

Adults tune into children's interests, focus and play experiences by being physically and emotionally present. By joining children in their play and following their lead, staff help children feel valued, connected and ready to communicate and learn.

Respond

Staff respond sensitively and appropriately to children's verbal and non-verbal communication, recognising that babies and young children communicate in many different ways. Responsive interactions help children feel understood and support emotional security and language development.

Expand

Adults build upon children's language, ideas and experiences by modelling new vocabulary, extending sentences and introducing new concepts in meaningful ways. This helps children develop communication skills, understanding and confidence.

Conversation

High-quality back-and-forth interactions help children develop thinking, language and social communication skills. Staff create opportunities for sustained shared thinking through conversations, storytelling, singing, questioning and play.

How the ShREC Approach Supports Children

The ShREC Approach helps children to:

- develop communication and language skills
- build confidence in expressing themselves
- strengthen thinking and understanding
- develop positive relationships with adults and peers
- feel emotionally secure and listened to
- extend vocabulary and understanding of the world
- engage more deeply in play and learning

For babies and younger children, the approach also supports:

- attachment and emotional wellbeing
- early communication and interaction
- attention and engagement
- turn-taking and shared experiences

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, the ShREC Approach underpins our commitment to high-quality interactions, inclusive practice and communication-rich environments. Staff receive ongoing professional development to ensure interactions remain warm, responsive, purposeful and developmentally appropriate, supporting every child to achieve, belong and thrive.

Expectations of the Children

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, our expectations for children are simple, developmentally appropriate, consistent and communicated using positive language that young children can understand. Expectations are taught and reinforced through nurturing relationships, high-quality interactions, modelling, play experiences and consistent routines.

We encourage children to:

- be kind to themselves and others through gentle hands, kind words and respectful interactions
- listen and respond to adults and peers within their stage of development
- begin to share and take turns with support from adults
- care for resources, the environment and shared spaces
- use words, gestures, signs or visuals to communicate feelings and needs
- seek support from trusted adults when needed
- follow routines and boundaries that help keep everyone safe
- explore, investigate and engage positively in learning experiences
- respect the personal space, feelings and safety of others

We recognise that children will meet these expectations with varying levels of support depending on their developmental stage, emotional regulation, communication abilities, experiences and individual needs. Staff provide consistent guidance, reassurance and co-regulation to help children gradually develop these skills over time.

Expectations are reinforced through:

- positive role modelling
- visual prompts and reminders
- praise and encouragement
- predictable routines
- Emotion Coaching and co-regulation
- consistent relational approaches
- calm and supportive adult responses

Strategies to Promote Positive Behaviour

Be Kind to Others

Children are supported to develop positive relationships and early empathy through:

- using kind hands and gentle touch
- using kind words, signs or gestures
- recognising and responding to the feelings of others
- learning to share and take turns with adult support
- developing friendships and cooperative play skills

Use Safe Bodies and Safe Choices

To support safeguarding and emotional security, children are encouraged to:

- move safely within the environment
- use resources and equipment appropriately
- keep hands, feet and objects safe
- follow simple safety instructions and routines
- begin to understand how to keep themselves and others safe

Listen and Respond to Adults

Children are supported to:

- listen and respond when adults are speaking
- stop and respond when their name is called
- follow familiar routines and expectations
- develop increasing independence within everyday nursery life

Adults understand that listening and responding are developmental skills that require modelling, repetition and support.

Look After Our Environment and Resources

Children are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility and belonging within the nursery environment by:

- helping to tidy toys and resources
- caring for books, equipment and outdoor spaces
- using materials respectfully
- learning to take pride in shared environments

Try Their Best and Keep Going

Children are supported to develop resilience, confidence and perseverance by:

- trying new experiences and activities
- persisting with challenges with encouragement from adults
- developing simple problem-solving skills
- understanding that mistakes are part of learning
- asking for help and support when needed

Express Feelings Appropriately

Children are supported to develop emotional literacy and self-regulation through:

- identifying and naming feelings
- using words, signs, visuals or gestures to communicate emotions and needs
- accessing calm spaces or regulation support when feeling overwhelmed
- using taught calming strategies such as breathing, sensory support or seeking adult reassurance

Play Cooperatively

Children are encouraged to:

- join in with others' play
- take turns during shared activities and games
- begin to resolve conflicts with adult support
- use phrases such as "stop" or "I don't like that"
- work alongside others with increasing confidence and independence

Responding Calmly to Behaviour That Challenges

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, adults respond to behaviour that challenges through calm, nurturing and relational approaches. Staff recognise that children may become dysregulated when overwhelmed, anxious, frustrated or unable to communicate needs effectively.

Adults will:

- approach children calmly and at their level
- use low arousal and reassuring communication
- validate children's feelings before addressing behaviours
- prioritise emotional safety and co-regulation
- support children to return to a calm and regulated state before reflection or problem-solving
- maintain children's dignity and self-esteem through respectful and private support where possible

Where appropriate and developmentally suitable, restorative conversations may include:

1. What happened?
2. How did this make people feel?
3. What can we do to help or make things better?

Staff avoid punitive approaches, public reprimands or responses that may shame or isolate children. Instead, children are supported through connection, guidance and emotionally responsive interactions.

Partnership with Parents and Carers

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that strong partnerships between home and nursery are essential in supporting children's emotional wellbeing, relationships and behaviour. We value parents and carers as children's first educators and work collaboratively to ensure consistent and supportive approaches.

We aim to:

- share the Relationships Policy with all families when children join the provision
- communicate expectations and approaches using clear, parent-friendly language
- explain the importance of nurturing relationships, emotional wellbeing and consistency
- encourage open and respectful two-way communication
- celebrate children's successes, achievements and positive behaviour with families
- provide practical strategies that can be used consistently at home and nursery
- share emotional language and approaches such as Emotion Coaching and co-regulation
- offer guidance, support and resources where appropriate

For children requiring additional support, staff work closely with parents and external professionals to develop personalised approaches, including co-regulation plans or

targeted strategies where needed. Families are actively involved in reviewing progress, sharing information and supporting consistent approaches across home and nursery.

We are committed to ensuring all conversations with families remain supportive, collaborative and solution-focused, promoting positive relationships and shared understanding for the benefit of every child.

Staff Training and Professional Development

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, we recognise that high-quality relationships and emotionally responsive practice rely upon knowledgeable, reflective and well-supported staff. Ongoing professional development is therefore central to the successful implementation of this Relationships and Behaviour Policy.

All staff receive guidance, support and training to ensure a shared understanding of child development, emotional wellbeing, behaviour as communication and relational approaches to supporting children within the early years. Training and professional dialogue help ensure that practice remains consistent, nurturing, inclusive and developmentally appropriate across both the nursery school and birth to two provision.

Staff training may include:

- child development and brain development in the early years
- attachment and trauma-informed practice
- behaviour as communication
- Emotion Coaching
- co-regulation and self-regulation
- the Window of Tolerance
- inclusive practice and SEND
- sensory needs and emotional wellbeing
- safeguarding and emotional vulnerability
- high-quality interactions and the EEF ShREC Approach
- positive behaviour support strategies
- reflective practice and staff wellbeing

Professional development takes place through a range of approaches including:

- whole staff training days
- team meetings and professional dialogue
- coaching and mentoring
- learning walks and reflective observations
- safeguarding updates
- external training opportunities
- partnership working with external professionals and agencies

Leaders recognise the importance of staff wellbeing and emotional regulation within relational practice. Staff are encouraged to reflect upon their own emotional responses and are supported to maintain calm, consistent and nurturing approaches when working with children.

The implementation of this policy is regularly reviewed through monitoring, professional discussion, reflection and feedback from staff, children and families. This ensures that approaches remain effective, inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of the school community and current early years research and guidance.

Monitoring and Review

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, this Relationships Policy is viewed as a working document that supports the emotional wellbeing, safety and development of all children across the provision. Leaders and governors are committed to ensuring that the policy is implemented consistently, reflects current legislation and guidance, and continues to meet the evolving needs of the school community.

The effectiveness of this policy is monitored through a range of quality assurance and reflective practice approaches, including:

- learning walks and observations of practice
- professional dialogue and staff reflection
- safeguarding monitoring
- behaviour and wellbeing records
- pupil progress discussions
- feedback from children, staff and families
- review of co-regulation and support plans
- monitoring of inclusive practice and provision for children with SEND
- governor visits and leadership oversight

Leaders monitor how effectively staff promote positive relationships, emotional wellbeing and co-regulation across the setting, ensuring approaches remain nurturing, inclusive and developmentally appropriate. Particular attention is given to consistency of practice, safeguarding, children's emotional security and the quality of adult-child interactions.

The school and nest also recognises the importance of listening to families and working collaboratively with parents and carers to review and strengthen approaches where necessary. Feedback from the wider school community helps inform ongoing developments and improvements to practice.

This policy is reviewed regularly by leaders and governors, or sooner if required due to changes in legislation, statutory guidance, safeguarding requirements or the needs of the provision. The review process ensures that the policy remains aligned with:

- the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Birth to 5 Matters
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)
- SEND Code of Practice
- Equality Act 2010
- current early years research and best practice
- Ofsted expectations and inspection guidance

Through ongoing monitoring, reflection and professional development, Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest aim to ensure that relationships and behaviour practice

continues to support all children to feel safe, valued, emotionally secure and able to achieve, belong and thrive.

Safeguarding

At Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest, safeguarding is at the heart of all relationships, behaviour support and emotional wellbeing practice. We recognise that children's behaviour, emotional responses and ability to regulate can often reflect their experiences, relationships, wellbeing and sense of safety. All behaviour is therefore considered within a safeguarding context.

We understand that babies and young children may communicate distress, anxiety, trauma, unmet needs or safeguarding concerns through changes in behaviour, emotional presentation, play, communication or relationships with others. Staff remain vigilant to these signs and respond with curiosity, empathy and professional concern where appropriate.

Our approach to relationships and behaviour is rooted in creating emotionally safe environments where children feel secure, valued, listened to and protected. Staff build warm, trusting relationships with children and families, helping children to develop a strong sense of belonging and emotional security within the provision.

All staff receive safeguarding training in line with statutory guidance, including:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children

Staff understand their responsibility to:

- identify concerns early
- respond appropriately to children's emotional and behavioural needs
- record and report safeguarding concerns promptly
- maintain professional curiosity
- support children through nurturing and consistent relationships
- work in partnership with families and external agencies where appropriate

We also recognise that some children, including children with SEND, children who have experienced trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), attachment difficulties or significant change, may require additional support with emotional regulation and behaviour. Staff are trained to respond in developmentally appropriate and inclusive ways, ensuring children are supported rather than punished for behaviours linked to distress or dysregulation.

Positive relationships, co-regulation, Emotion Coaching and emotionally available adults are viewed as protective factors that help children feel safe and supported. Through this policy, we aim to promote children's emotional wellbeing, resilience and sense of safety while ensuring safeguarding remains central to all aspects of practice.