

Our Free Minds

Conflict Management Policy

Note: this is a working document as we develop our processes along with the group members, the current signed copy is our official policy but is regularly amended.

Our Free Minds uses restorative practice strategies to promote the welfare and enjoyment of group members. Working in partnership with members of the community, we aim to navigate challenging situations using honest, clear and consistent language. Agreements (group decided rules) are recorded in the agreements book and discussed regularly.

Relational Approach

Our approach to conflict and behaviour is relational rather than punitive. We understand that children develop self-regulation, responsibility, and social understanding through experience, supported by calm and available adults. Allowing children appropriate space and privacy is part of building trust and helping them practise boundaries in real situations. This is supported by regular, shared conversations and around safety, boundaries, and expectations within the community. Adults do not seek to control or monitor children at all times, but remain observant and ready to support, intervene, or guide when conflict arises or when safety may be compromised.

Whilst at Group we ask all members to try to:

- Comply with the Group Agreements, which are developed by the children and adults attending the sessions
- Use clear language to communicate any problems they are encountering
- Respect one another, embracing differences of race, gender, ability, age and religion
- Develop their independence by maintaining self-discipline
- Ask for help if needed
- Enjoy their time at the Group.

It is inevitable that as children develop, learn and explore, there are times when they may benefit from support and guidance to navigate challenge and conflict.

Staff at the Group will try to determine the cause or triggers of the challenging situations, to prevent them from recurring.

Our Free Minds encourages group members to deepen their understanding of their own (and others') perspectives and emotions. Through this deepened understanding, individuals are better placed to set and maintain clear boundaries and lines of communication.

When faced with challenging situations, staff and group members will try the following:

- Express what is causing the problem in a calm, and firm manner.

- Get some space from the situation or person if that is required.
- If struggling to communicate or regulate, ask for help from another group member or member of staff.
- Give everyone involved a chance to express themselves.
- Be patient if some time is required to settle emotions before finding a resolution.

Other helpful strategies include:

- Putting difficulties into written form and placing them in the challenges box for future discussion (this box is labelled 'A series of unfortunate events' and can be found next to the group whiteboard).
- Finding an activity to help find calm and give time to process challenging events.

The role of facilitators in conflict resolution is:

- Not to take charge of the conversation unless it is clear that it will otherwise escalate
 - To help ensure each involved party has the opportunity to express themselves
 - To help reach a resolution that is satisfactory for all
 - To make note of further actions required such as follow-up conversations or agreement proposals
 - To never threaten or enforce any punishment (see consequences vs punishment guidelines)
 - To use their best judgment to determine whether a satisfactory resolution has been reached, whether the conversation needs to continue and in what format that might work best, e.g. in a wider group meeting or a smaller meeting in a new context
- Facilitators will consult with parents to formulate clear strategies for dealing with persistent concerns or repeating incidents.

Persistent and Repeat Challenge

Should the above strategies not lead to a decreasing frequency of related incidents, facilitators will seek to find alternative means to reach a positive outcome. Examples of methods used to do so are as follows:

- Involving parents in the conversation so that they can help group members process the incidents at home.
- Facilitating small meetings between involved parties.
- Further discussion (particularly conversations outside of the context of the challenging situation).
- Group agreement proposals and discussions.

Consequences rather than Punishments

There is a difference between a consequence and a punishment. At Our Free Minds we encourage the exploration and discussion of consequences but never punishments. A punishment uses shame, discomfort, guilt, and authority to dissuade repeat behaviour. A consequence on the other hand is a natural result of a given action. The differences between the two can be nuanced and difficult to apply. All staff including volunteers are encouraged to take time to discuss the differences and apply this knowledge in practice. Some practical examples have been given below:

- A group member does not tidy up after themselves. A consequence would be being asked to do so. A punishment would be having to tidy up the mess of others.
- If group members engage in an altercation during an activity. A consequence would be the discussions that need to be had to ensure that we and others are able to move on safely and understand how the situation occurred and be prevented. A punishment would be removal from the activity or a ban from it in future.

Physical altercations

Following a physical altercation, facilitators use the following criteria to assess what further action is required

- Was the initiating action provoked
- What actions were taken in self-defense and fear rather than out of a desire to do harm, or in retribution
- Are the actions part of an existing trend
- What is the context of the altercation
- What is the current emotional state of the involved parties
- What injuries have been incurred

Conflicts exist on a continuum of severity and risk, facilitators will discuss the above factors and decide what actions are required on a case-by-case basis without prejudice.

Certain activities carry a higher likelihood of leading to conflict. These activities are not discouraged however facilitators will show due consideration to the need for supervision or mitigating agreements.

Physical intervention

Physical intervention will only be used as a last resort, when staff believe that action is necessary to prevent injury to the child or others, or to prevent significant damage to equipment or property. Intervention must be proportional to the potential risks of not acting. If a member of staff has to physically restrain a child, the manager will be notified and an **Incident record** will be completed. The incident will be discussed with the parent or carer as soon as possible.

If staff are not confident about their ability to contain a situation, they should call the manager or, in extreme cases, the police.

All serious incidents will be recorded on an **Incident record** and kept in the child's file. This may be used to build a pattern of occurrence, which may indicate an underlying cause. If a pattern of incidents indicates possible abuse, we will implement child protection procedures in accordance with our **Safeguarding** policy.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment or the threat of corporal punishment will **never** be used at the Group.

We take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child who attends our Group receives

corporal punishment from any person who cares for or is in regular contact with the child, or from any other person on our premises.

This policy was adopted by: Our Free Minds	Last reviewed and signed by:
Date of last review: 17.1.26 To be reviewed: 30.08.2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Katie Kotting, Chair of the Board of Trustees- Clea Sambrook, Trustee for Safeguarding- Poppy De Witt, Trustee