Relational (Behaviour) Policy

More Than Ed | Independent School

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“Thinking of a child as behaving badly disposes you to think of punishment. Thinking of a child as struggling to handle something difficult encourages you to help them through their distress.”

— The Gottman Institute

1. Introduction

Behaviour is a means of communication, and all behaviour has a functional element. 'Challenging' behaviour is often described as communicating unmet needs. Children are communicating something through their behaviour during every moment in every day, even if they are not aware of it. A child's problematic or inappropriate behaviour is a sign that he is upset and that something is not right. Children with complex needs have many unmet needs and often find it difficult to express them. Unexpressed needs can result in a child being perceived as having challenging behaviour, and being labelled as aggressive, antisocial, or offensive

When children behave in a way that challenges us, we need to question why they are behaving in this way, consider the origins of the behaviour and wonder what the message behind the behaviour might be. This will help us to understand the meaning behind the actions and avoid us attaching labels to the child.

2. Statement and Vision

More Than Ed (MTE) has a holistic approach to education valuing all learning both inside and outside of the classroom. We recognise that understanding our emotions is a key aspect of understanding and managing behaviour, enabling everyone to work together with the common purpose and aim to help all children to be the best that they can be. In order for students to feel safe, their environment needs to be rich with both nurture and structure. Our ethos is already grounded with nurture principles, and being Attachment and Trauma-informed, we use our strong relationships with students to structure our Behaviour Regulation strategy.

Our school is committed to the emotional mental health and well-being of its staff, students and parents/carers. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports the social, emotional and mental health of the whole school community. To facilitate this, we provide a safe and nurturing environment where students can be themselves and be empowered to engage and be ambitious in their learning. Furthermore, adult and child relationships are integral for this to occur. Through the development of trust and co-regulation of emotions, students learn to become more independent and develop self-regulation.

The school expects every member of the school community to behave in a considerate, cooperative, and respectful way towards others. Students should be treated impartially and with the Relational Policy being applied in a consistent and attuned way.

This policy is to ensure we have a clear and consistent whole school approach for all staff, students, parents/carers, visitors and partners working within the school and provides guidelines and procedures on how our school supports and responds to behaviour. The development of positive social, emotional and learning (SEL) behaviours is at the heart of our Relational Policy.

3. Aims

Our aim is for all students to:

- feel safe and happy
- develop executive functioning skills, enabling them to regulate more effectively
- build positive trusting relationships with staff and peers
- develop self-worth and self-esteem
- develop self-regulation and resilience skills by creating emotionally positive and calm environments modelling empathy, respect and self-regulation.
- make both academic and emotional progress in line with their starting point

We aim to enable students to experience challenges, succeed in their learning, and have a sense that learning can be fun and relevant to their lives. To become independent and enthusiastic learners with a willingness to take risks. From the earliest opportunity, students will be encouraged to build tolerance, resilience, self-esteem, and take responsibility in readiness for them taking their place in Society.

As a Trauma-Informed school, we are guided by the overarching principles of Dan Hughes' PACE model, and Eva Holmes' and Eve Boyd's Six Principles of Nurture. Jones and Bouffard (2012) and Banerjee, Weare and Farr (2014) suggest that opportunities for students to achieve their SEL outcomes should be integrated into every part of their school day; this we do.

4. Strategies

Zones of Regulation and Linked Emotions****

A shared visual language that helps students name how they are feeling and notice their own arousal level, so that adults can co-regulate with them before distress escalates. Staff use it in everyday conversation rather than as a standalone lesson.

PACE/PLACE

PLAYFULNESS: creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. An open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude.

ACCEPTANCE: actively communicating to the students that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. Unconditionally accepting a student makes them feel secure, safe and loved.

CURIOSITY: wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour of any student.

Curiosity lets the child know that the adults understand. Without judgement, children become aware of their inner life.

EMPATHY: the member of staff demonstrating that he or she knows how difficult an experience is for the student and telling the student that they will not have to deal with the distress alone. Empathy gives a sense of compassion for any child and their feelings

The Six Principles of Nurture

Children's learning is understood developmentally; the classroom offers a safe base; nurture is important for wellbeing; language is a vital means of communication; all behaviour is communication; and transitions are significant in children's lives. The six principles are credited to Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006).

5. Behaviour Practices and Procedures

"When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it is our job to share our calm, not join their chaos"

At More Than Ed we do not have Classroom Codes of Behaviour or Conduct Agreements; we understand that by understanding each students' specific needs, and building trusting relationships, we prevent the behaviour.

We see a student's dysregulation as an opportunity for them to practice co-regulation, and eventual self-regulation. Our young people are not punished or shamed for dysregulating, instead they are comforted and listened to. We do not use Restorative Practice, as it is unlikely that the young person will understand why they became dysregulated or upset, and by discussing the incident further, we simply retraumatise them

Our in-depth knowledge and understanding of our students' needs, alongside our extremely high staffing ratio, allows staff to very quickly identify when a young person is becoming heightened or anxious, and immediately support them in regulating their emotions. This can include distracting the young person with another activity, accompanying them into the garden or for a walk to help them calm down, or simply acknowledging and listening to how the young person is feeling.

Where a young person becomes so dysregulated that remaining in school would be detrimental to their wellbeing, we may take the decision that they are too unwell to continue the school day. This is a wellbeing decision, not a behavioural sanction. The reason for the decision is documented on CPOMS and parents/carers are contacted immediately. On the rare occasion that this does occur, we will contact parents/carers and inform them that we are taking the young person home. If the child is too dysregulated to be safely transported, we will ask a parent/carer to collect them. We are happy to accompany the student home and stay with them for the rest of the school day should this be deemed safe and appropriate by all concerned, however, a parent/carer must remain at home with them.

A decision of this kind is a wellbeing decision and is never used as a sanction, as a way of managing behaviour, or as an informal exclusion. The student's attendance is recorded accurately and coded in line with our Attendance Policy, the decision and the reason for it are recorded on CPOMS, and where such decisions begin to recur for a particular student they are reviewed by the Headteacher, because a pattern of shortened days is a signal that the provision may not be meeting that student's needs.

6. Sanctions and Rewards

At More Than Ed, we do not reward good behaviour, or sanction bad behaviour. Good behaviour is often a result of a young person repressing their emotions and anxieties (Betsy

de Thierry, 2017). A young person can never learn to regulate their emotions if they are not allowed to show them and acknowledge them.

We reward co-regulation and self-regulation with praise and encouragement. We let our young people know that we have witnessed their efforts to self-regulate, even if they failed, and we congratulate them on their effort. We inform students' parents/carers of any occasion where their child has displayed dysregulation or self-regulation, and all incidents are recorded on CPOMS. This informs how staff work with that young person in future.

We do not restrain young people as a way of managing behaviour, and would only ever do so where it is absolutely necessary to prevent injury to the young person or to another person. All staff are trained by React UK so that, if that exceptional moment arrives, they are able to act safely and lawfully rather than improvising. Every such incident is recorded on the React UK School Positive Handling form as soon as practicable and on CPOMS the same day, parents and carers are informed the same day and given the written record, and a debrief is held with the staff. Where an emergency restraint has been required, the circumstances that led to it may prompt a review of the placement. Our full position is set out in the Positive Handling Policy. We do not have any locked doors within the school, and students are never left alone.

7. Behaviour Interventions

When a child is displaying extreme behaviours which may put themselves and others at risk of harm, we recognise that more robust actions must be taken. The incident(s) will be considered carefully and responses will be made following a Professionals' discussion including some/all members of the team around the child.

In most situations we will be able to implement the correct interventions and therapies required to support the child's regulation and reduce their anxieties. There are, however, some situations that will provoke a more serious response from school and could result in the contract for the student's placement being ended. The grounds on which a placement may be ended, both on notice and automatically, are set out in full at sections 7 and 8 of our Ending a Placement Policy and Statement, and that policy is the authoritative statement of them. They include, in summary:

- Physical assault against a student
- Physical assault against an adult
- Verbal abuse / threatening behaviour against a student
- Verbal abuse / threatening behaviour against an adult
- Bullying, including online bullying or abuse, including online bullying or abuse
- Racist abuse
- Damage
- Sexual misconduct (dealt with as a safeguarding matter, see below)
- Theft
- Persistent disruptive behaviour
- Any illegal activities; e.g., incidents involving drugs, alcohol or sharps.

- This summary does not replace the Ending a Placement Policy and Statement. No placement is ended on any of these grounds without the process set out in that policy, which requires us first to satisfy ourselves that our full provision has been delivered to that student and that the behaviour has continued despite it. Abuse between students is not dealt with under this list; it is handled as a safeguarding matter under our Child-on-Child Abuse Policy and section 11 of the Ending a Placement Policy and Statement.

In the case of a contract being terminated, parents and Commissioners will be informed.

Throughout all our responses to behaviour, we recognise that our partnership with parents/carers, external agencies and Commissioners plays a vital role in ensuring good outcomes for students. We will work, wherever possible, in agreement and consult fully on actions and next steps.

A behaviour review will take place at least annually to scrutinise the effectiveness of the school's approaches.

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