

Developing a Relational Approach to School Behaviour: Guidance for Promoting Inclusive Practice

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1. Introduction

The Department for Education guidance for head teachers and school staff of maintained schools, which outlines the statutory duty of schools in relation to developing a behaviour policy, is largely based on traditional behaviour management approaches.

“For all schools, establishing and maintaining high standards of behaviour is not only vital in ensuring that teachers can deliver the curriculum, but also plays a critical role in ensuring that the school is a safe environment for all pupils. The behaviour policy should be aligned with the school’s legal duties and standards relating to the welfare of children.”¹ (DfE, 2024).

Although behaviour policies based on rewards and sanctions can work for the majority of children and young people, they are not successful with all. This is especially true for those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)² – traumatic life experiences that occur before the age of 18. For children and young people who have experienced trauma and loss, including vulnerable groups such as children in care, children at the edge of the care system, and children previously in care, approaches that heavily rely on punitive approaches to unwanted behaviour often serve to re-traumatise them and do not teach them how to behave and to express their emotions in more acceptable ways.

1.1 The Purpose of this Guidance

The purpose of developing this Relational Behaviour Guidance is to promote a move away from traditional behaviour management approaches, which place a disproportionate emphasis on rewards and sanctions (most often punishments) linked to behaviour, towards a more relational and universal approach, which is inclusive for all, and can benefit the whole school community.

The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford³ has published evaluations into three action research projects in three local authorities where schools adopted a relationship-based, relational behaviour approach. The evaluations indicate that adopting these approaches increased attendance, decreased persistent absenteeism, decreased exclusions, improved pupil wellbeing scores (SDQ scores) and increased attainment.

This guidance is intended to encourage schools to develop their behaviour policies in line with Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware (TIAA) principles (see Appendix 1), and to ensure that their Relational Behaviour Policy translates into whole school practice.

It aims to develop a more consistent, county wide approach to including children and young people with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs within local authority provision. It recognises, and aims to take account of, the huge challenges that schools face in including pupils with complex SEMH needs, and meeting targets around attainment and governmental standards and scrutiny, particularly within the current climate of funding pressures. It also acknowledges the responsibility held by head teachers for looking after the wellbeing of all members of the school community, particularly teaching staff, who are often under immense strain because of increased demands. Supporting children and young

¹ [Behaviour in schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff](#)

² <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/adverse-childhood-experiences/>

³ <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Hadleys-AATI-Report.pdf>

people in schools who present with complex SEMH needs, including challenging behaviour, is not an easy task.

This guidance acknowledges that schools across Herefordshire have differing values which are unique to them. Schools across our local authority also face different challenges and are at various stages of developing their behaviour policies and practice. However, we believe that all schools could benefit from further guidance and support to develop an inclusive behaviour policy based on a model that can really work in practice. Furthermore, the evidence base on school exclusion/suspension (Appendix 2) helps to remind us that whilst excluding children and young people with SEMH can relieve pressure on the school, it rarely leads to better outcomes for the child or young person. A key intended outcome of this guidance is therefore to see a reduction in school exclusions across the county, through the increased implementation of TIAA approaches.

2. Acknowledgements

This guidance is intended to be implemented universally and consistently across Herefordshire schools to support all pupils and staff, and to promote the view that *'attachment is everybody's business'*.

Herefordshire would like to thank Brighton & Hove Educational Psychology Service (EPS), and particularly Dr Sarah Ahmed, Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist for their kind permission to use their source material.

This guidance is based on a policy written by Shropshire EPS, and full consent has been given to adapt and promote their work in this document.

In the areas of 'Developing Relationships' and 'Responding & Calming' we are grateful to the work of Stephen Porges, Dan Hughes, Bruce Perry, Colwyn Trevarthan, Margot Sunderland, Heather Geddes and Louise Bomber. In the area of 'Repairing & Restoring' we are particularly grateful to Belinda Hopkins, Luke Roberts and Saar Yaniv.

This guidance has been developed by Herefordshire's:

- Virtual School,
- Educational Psychology Service,
- SEMH Inclusion Service

This guidance should be read in conjunction with 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' (DfE 2018):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755135/Mental_health_and_behaviour_in_schools_.pdf

and 'Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing: A whole school and college approach' (Public Health England 2021)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/614cc965d3bf7f718518029c/Promoting_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_and_wellbeing.pdf

3. Philosophy & Approach

The aim of this guidance is to provide a framework to support schools when developing their own relational behaviour policy. It is expected that schools will carefully look at their current behaviour policies, processes and practices, and review whether these are consistent with the trauma informed and attachment aware (TIAA) approach that is being promoted in this guidance. It is based on a number of key values including:

- A non-judgemental, curious and holistic stance when trying to understand behaviour
- A belief in the importance of mediation and reparation, especially following exclusions

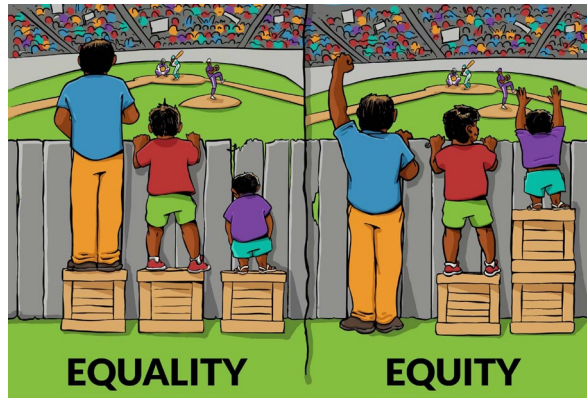
The guidance also warns against practices that can be emotionally harmful (such as public shaming - both verbal and non-verbally - including the use of sad faces against names on classroom boards or 'traffic-light' systems on public display).

A Guide to Introducing a Relational Behaviour Policy in Schools:



3.1 Key Values

Being fair



This is not about everyone getting the same (equality) but about everyone getting what they need (equity).

Understanding that behaviour is a form of communication

An assumption that behaviour has underlying social and emotional causes, reflected in the use of the term Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties as opposed to earlier terms used in education.

Taking a non-judgmental, curious and empathic attitude towards behaviour

We encourage all adults in schools to respond in a way that focuses on the thoughts and emotions that might drive behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself. Children and young people with behavioural difficulties should be regarded as vulnerable rather than troublesome, and we all have a duty to explore this vulnerability and provide appropriate support

Developing relationships

Positive relationships come from a school ethos that promotes and values strong relationships between staff, children and young people and their parents/carers. This type of positive school culture fosters connection, inclusion, respect and value for all members of the school community.

- We all need to feel safe and cared for
- In school, pupils need to have a sense that they belong and are valued
- Relationships are key to achieving wellbeing and academic progress for all pupils.

Maintaining clear boundaries and expectations around behaviour

Changing how we respond to behaviour does not mean abandoning established expectations, routines or structures around behaviour. To help children and young people feel safe, their educational environment needs to be high in both nurture and structure. Children and young people need predictable routines, expectations and responses to behaviour, particularly those who are most vulnerable. These must be in place and modelled appropriately by all staff, within the context of a safe and caring school environment. However, we do advocate 'connection before correction'⁴ and promote strong relationships

⁴ Dan Hughes (2015) children need adults who can connect with the child's experience before, or when appropriate instead of, discipline. This is described as 'connection before correction'. Correction in this context means helping children to develop pro-social behaviours and to find safe ways to express intense emotional experience.

to support children and young people to learn how to understand and regulate their own behaviour.

Not all behaviours are a matter of ‘choice’

Not all factors linked to the behaviour of children and young people are within their control. Therefore, the language of choice (e.g. ‘good choice/bad choice’) is not helpful, and for some children, a zero-tolerance approach will ultimately end in the escalated use of consequences without the desired effect. All children want to do well and do well if they can. Those who are not succeeding either academically or emotionally and socially are likely to have unmet needs.

Behaviour must always be viewed as arising within the context of important relationships

Behaviour occurs between people rather than being the result of an internal problem in the child/young person. The fostering of nurturing and supportive relationships in schools is critical for the wellbeing of both pupils and staff.

Encouraging parent/carer engagement

Family involvement is crucial when addressing and planning support for children and young people’s social and emotional needs.

A whole school approach and relationship-based ethos

Creating an inclusive and positive school ethos around behaviour is something that must be driven by the headteacher and school’s senior leadership team (SLT) for it to be endorsed by, and embedded across, the whole school community. Responding to the SEMH needs of children and young people is not the responsibility of a few staff in school - it is everyone’s responsibility.

Research suggests that when schools place a strong emphasis upon the emotional health and wellbeing of all members of the school community, and this ethos is driven by the school’s senior leadership team and is evident in practice, this leads to better outcomes for all – e.g. staff retention, pupil attendance and attainment, positive home-school relationships (Banerjee, Weare & Farr, 2014). Therefore, this guidance promotes the idea that the SEMH needs of all pupils should be at the heart of the school. School leadership is almost as important as classroom teaching as an influence on the social learning of pupils (Leithwood et al, 2006). Therefore, it is essential for school leaders to drive a whole systems approach to inclusive learning and achievement for all, from the top-down.

An effective relationship-based behaviour policy creates a positive whole school ethos and community, where genuine and meaningful relationships can develop, thereby improving the sense of belonging and positive behaviour of all pupils, and reducing the need for exclusions.

Developing relationships

- **Building Relationships:**
- Developing safety, security and trust through protection, connection, understanding and care
- **Supporting Inclusion:**
- Facilitating access to learning, ensuring social inclusion and developing individual skills
- **Setting Boundaries:**
- Reaching agreements and building a shared understanding of expectations.
- Establishing clear processes for resolving difficulties.

Responding and Calming

- **Keeping Calm:**
- Using everyday interactions to maintain relationships and agreements and promote a calm and supportive learning environment
- **Regulating Emotions:**
- Using key relational skills to regulate strong emotions and calm behaviour, including emotion coaching
- **Managing Crisis:**
- Having clear plans to ensure safety and support

Repairing and restoring

- **Resolving Conflict:**
- Everyday restorative interactions to resolve minor conflicts and disagreements and create a shared understanding
- **Repairing Harm:**
- Restorative encounters to discuss the breaking of agreements, the impact (consequences) on others and to restore relationships
- **Supporting Change:**
- What additional support / action is needed?

4. Implementing Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware Approaches

This Relational Behaviour Guidance sets out how schools can apply Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware (TIAA) approaches, including emotional co-regulation, in their everyday practice, with a particular focus on the central principles of empathy, connection, attunement, trust and co-regulation (Appendix 3). This includes careful consideration of how we communicate with pupils, both verbally and non-verbally.

The guidance is intended to stand alongside an offer of training and support to schools across Herefordshire to promote a whole school TIAA approach and consistent practice throughout the school community. Support to implement a whole school approach can be sought from a number of local authority team including the Virtual School, Educational Psychology Service and SEMH Inclusion Service.

Training in trauma and attachment provides an understanding of early child development and the importance of nurture on the developing brain. It focuses on how to support teachers and key adults in understanding behaviours that challenge and provides strategies to support children to regulate and manage their emotions more effectively. The training offers advice on establishing a key attachment relationship. It also provides staff with strategies to support children to regulate and manage their emotions more effectively. It uses the principles of Emotion Coaching and Restorative Practice. Our training promotes the development of relationships through the use of PACE (see Appendix 3).

Training is available in Herefordshire through the Virtual School, Educational Psychology Service and SEMH Inclusion Service:

[Educational Psychology Service](#)

[Virtual School](#)

[SEMH Inclusion Service](#)

The Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware Pledge

We encourage schools to undertake a TIAA Schools Pledge or sign up to become an [Attachment Research Community \(ARC\) School](#), which outlines the principles we would like schools to sign up to. We believe that by following these key principles we can support schools to develop an inclusive ethos, policy and practice. Brighton & Hove EPS have developed a 'Top Tips for Implementing an Attachment Aware Approach', which Herefordshire endorses.

4.1 Emotional Co-Regulation

Co-regulation occurs when an adult is trusted by a child or young person and through their relationship the adult can confer security and a calm emotional state. This guidance recognises the importance of integrating emotional co-regulation into everyday practice when working with children and young people to support the development of positive behaviour, resilience and wellbeing across the school community.

In Herefordshire we promote Emotion Coaching training as a method of achieving this. Emotion Coaching is an approach that focuses on the development of emotional regulation through supportive relationships. It can benefit not only children and young people but also parents/carers and professionals, to better understand and regulate their emotions, to manage strong feelings and take ownership of behaviour (see Appendix 3).

Emotion Coaching offers practical steps for responding to behaviour, and is linked to key attachment concepts, such as the importance of connection. It is an evidence-based approach that provides an understanding of the neuroscience behind behaviour. Research indicates that staff in schools feel more confident managing behaviour when they have increased knowledge of the link between behaviour and emotion.

4.2 What difference can a Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware Approach make?

Find out more about Attachment Aware Schools in this video by The ARC:

<https://youtu.be/uMbB2I4ut0>

By applying Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware (TIAA) principles we can foster an inclusive approach and together achieve better outcomes around pupil attainment and attendance across our schools including:

- A reduction in exclusions for vulnerable pupils with both identified and unidentified SEMH.
- Better outcomes around staff emotional mental health and wellbeing (EMHWP), such as sickness absence and retention, owing to an emphasis on the EMHWP of the whole school community.
- It is hoped that by following a TIAA approach, which is supported by local processes and procedures, staff will feel empowered to respond in a way that is *empathetic* but *firm* but *kind*.
- We encourage schools to consider what empathy means in practice, and not to confuse empathy with sympathy or with condoning/ avoiding consequences for negative behaviours.
- Schools are required to look beyond the often very challenging behaviours displayed by children and young people and question what emotions might be driving these behaviours. We advocate looking at behaviour through an attachment aware lens. Only when children and young people feel a sense of being heard, understood and cared about, can they begin to express their emotions in a more acceptable way, which will benefit everyone.

Another overarching principle endorsed by this guidance (which comes from Video Interaction Guidance or VIG), is the idea that everyone is doing the best they can at the time with the resources they have. This is a really important principle and value to remember and helps us to avoid blaming others when we feel stuck. Further information on VIG is available from the Educational Psychology Service and Virtual School.

5. A Graduated Approach

This document recognises that schools across our local authority face different challenges, including the level of resources within schools and in the local and wider communities. Some schools have particularly high levels of children and young people with challenging early life experiences. All schools will have pupils who are both challenged and challenging. Notwithstanding these differences, this document aims to support the development of a consistent authority wide approach to the inclusion of children and young people with SEMH.

Within this broader trauma informed and attachment aware framework, schools will need to differentiate according to pupils' SEMH needs, following different levels or waves of intervention following an Assess/Plan/Do/Review cycle of progress⁵.

It is important that indicators of SEMH are clearly recognised, to include both observable and active/ 'acting out' behaviours and more internalised emotional difficulties. Externalised behaviour includes non-compliance, mood swings, verbal and physical aggression, absconding, a lack of empathy or personal boundaries. Passive or internalised behaviours include being withdrawn, isolated, disengaged and/or distracted, and those children and young people who avoid risks, appear very anxious, do not accept praise, are reluctant to speak, and who sometimes go unnoticed because their behaviour can feel less challenging to manage.

However, it is also important to avoid viewing or labelling pupils whose behaviour is externalised, as less vulnerable than those who internalise their emotional distress.

Early intervention is imperative for addressing both active and passive behaviours, to ensure that low level features/difficulties can be addressed early.

It is essential to be aware of the tendency to make judgements around behaviour (e.g. describing children and young people as 'mad'/'bad'), and instead to see all behaviour as an indicator of emotions to which we must respond in an empathic and caring manner. This can be particularly hard to do when children and young people act in a way that hurts or frightens others.

Pupils who are identified as particularly vulnerable will need specific approaches tailored to their individual needs and experiences, strengths and difficulties. These will need to be planned in conjunction with parents/carers and relevant partners, and shared sensitively, as deemed appropriate.

To ensure a graduated approach to SEMH we recommend planning different levels of intervention/support as outlined in the Graduated Approach document produced by Herefordshire as follows:

- Universal approaches for ALL children and young people (actions to be undertaken for ALL children and young people. Much of this is based around Inclusive Quality First Teaching).
- Targeted approaches for SOME children and young people (actions based around Inclusive Quality First Teaching plus additional time-limited support programmes).
- Specialist approaches for A FEW children and young people (actions that include Inclusive Quality First Teaching plus increasingly individualised intervention programmes to accelerate and maximise progress and narrow performance gaps)⁶

⁵ See The Graduated Approach document: [Intervention guidance for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in schools and other settings Graduated approach \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/education/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/inclusive-quality-first-teaching)

⁶ [Teaching children with SEN and disability – Herefordshire Council](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/education/special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/teaching-children-with-sen-and-disability)

6. Developing a Trauma Informed and Attachment Aware Relational Behaviour Policy for your setting

6.1 Next Steps Planning

Please make use of the guidance notes and appendices in this document to review your current behaviour policy and identify the areas that you may need to work on. You may want to utilise the support of the Herefordshire Virtual School or Educational Psychology Service for advice and guidance.

Herefordshire has an exemplar Relational Behaviour Policy which provides prompts and a framework for you to follow, with examples, to support you to develop a policy for your setting.

To ensure that your setting can meaningfully embed the principles and approach advocated in this guidance into school practice, careful thought and reflection will need to be given around where your whole school strengths and current areas of development are.

We recommend that schools complete an annual Attachment Audit or the ARC Audit if your school has joined ARC to review current whole school practice and pinpoint areas of strength and further development, which should be shared with School Governors. It may be helpful for you to involve or seek feedback from a range of Local Authority and other partners, as part of reviewing your current whole school practice and policies – e.g. SEN Team, Virtual School, Educational Psychology Service, SEMH Inclusion Service, Social Care and Health colleagues. This could include using specific case examples to discuss whole school strengths and areas for further development. We also suggest you refer to the Herefordshire Attachment Aware Pledge to remind you of the key principles that we expect schools to sign up to, or your school could sign up to become an ARC School.

6.2 Training support

The policy development and review should be supported by training so that staff understand and are able to implement the policy.

The Educational Psychology Service and the Virtual School are able to provide training on attachment, developmental trauma, restorative practice and emotion coaching.

Schools are urged to consider training at least one member of staff as an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)

There is now a wide range of training available in schools and online to choose from, including those that can be delivered through the Educational Psychology Service, Virtual School and SEMH Inclusion Service.

It is important that action planning and practice review follows any training. Key messages to be embedded into practice should be shared with all members of the school community, including pupils, governors and parents/carers, in a range of ways – e.g. through displays, parent/carers evenings, assemblies, newsletters, etc.

6.3 Policy length

The exemplar policy is available to provide a framework for schools to use. Settings should decide what level of detail (e.g. specific positive behaviour management strategies, use of

rewards and consequences) they wish to include in the content of the policy and which of the appendices are useful to their setting.

We include good practice examples, as well as extracts from school behaviour policies that reflect Attachment Aware principles and practice. Staff developing their behaviour policy will need to familiarise themselves with the appendices and then decide which areas to pick out or adapt to reflect their school's ethos and practice.

We suggest that your Relational Behaviour Policy should be developed and reviewed in consultation with pupils, staff, parents/carers and governors. You may decide to develop a policy statement which is shared with the school community and appropriately displayed. Staff could explore together what needs to be in place to ensure key principles are endorsed and evident in practice.

6.4 Language

It is hoped that this guidance can be adapted by a range of educational settings, including Colleges and Early Years settings. However, the term 'school' is used throughout. We use the term 'Children and Young People' to cover all ages but your setting will choose the language that is most appropriate – e.g. pupil/child/student/young person.

We suggest adopting positive language throughout your policy – e.g. 'consequence' versus 'sanction' or 'punishment'; 'implement' versus 'enforce', 'expectations' versus 'rules', 'attention-needing' versus 'attention-seeking' behaviour. A helpful starting point might be to identify which areas of your current behaviour policy are compatible with Attachment Aware approaches and which are not.

We also suggest very carefully wording (or otherwise avoiding) the language around choice and avoiding simplistic labels – e.g. talking about 'good/bad choices' when referring to specific behaviours or incidents. It is important to remember that not all behaviour is simply a matter of choice. Making a 'positive choice' usually requires being in a calm or 'thoughtful' frame of mind to do so. 'Bad choices' (i.e. often meaning 'inappropriate behaviours') are usually the result of feeling very emotionally dysregulated.

Staff should be aware that pupils experiencing high levels of anxiety may present as avoidant, noncompliant, rude or sullen. They may demonstrate disruptive or challenging behaviours as a means of reducing the high levels of emotional and physiological arousal they feel. Their behaviour could be a means to control their environment and those around them, and to orchestrate a situation they feel more comfortable with (e.g. reduce or avoid challenge). https://youtu.be/waeRP6jzW_U

Behaviour may not always appear as an emotional 'meltdown', especially in teenagers for whom saving face is a key concern. Young people may appear to know what they are doing is wrong, but may have got themselves into a situation where they cannot see a positive way out for themselves. With support to self-regulate and problem-solve, children and young people (and adults) can be helped to behave in more socially acceptable/appropriate ways.

6.5 Data Collection

The language used to record a behaviour should follow the ethos of this guidance, adopting use of language which is non-judgemental, empathic and respectful and acknowledging that behaviour is a form of communication and is not necessarily an action consciously chosen by the child or young person.

6.6 Additional resources

School staff frequently ask for resources to use in and beyond the classroom. It is recommended that schools liaise with the Virtual School or their link Educational Psychologist and other relevant partners to discuss their training and practice needs. A reference/further reading list has been provided at the end of the document, as well as some resources such as the STAR analysis framework. Useful links are included throughout the guidance. Tools and exemplars to support the implementation of a relational approach can also be found on our [website](#).

6.7 Feedback

To provide feedback on this guidance, please email the Virtual School (Amanda.Cotton@herefordshire.gov.uk) or Educational Psychology Service (Kamran.khan2@herefordshire.gov.uk).

Appendix 1 - Attachment: The National and Local Context

National Context

The NHS and the DfE established a national Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce in September 2014 and produced a final report '*Future in Mind - promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing*' which was published by the government in March 2015. This document recognises that attachment relationships have a direct bearing on children's capacity to succeed in school. It emphasises that relationships and a sense of belonging, are key to good mental health for all, but are essential for children who have experienced multiple relational losses and trauma.

NICE Guidance advocates attachment training: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26>

It advises that:

“Educational psychologists and health and social care provider organisations should work with local authority virtual school heads and designated teachers to develop and provide training courses for teachers of all levels on:

- *how attachment difficulties begin and how they can present in children and young people*
- *how attachment difficulties affect learning, education and social development*
- *understanding the consequences of maltreatment, including trauma*
- *how they can support children and young people with attachment difficulties.”*

Local Context

Herefordshire Council has adopted a county wide Restorative Approach to practice and Trauma Informed, Attachment Aware strategic approach across the Education, Learning and Skills Service. Through the work of the Virtual School, the Educational Psychology Service, Behaviour Support Team and Social Inclusion Team we aim to reduce exclusions, increase attendance and improve attainment and wellbeing of pupils.

Herefordshire Council has made a commitment to relational practice as part of its work to improve the way we work *with* children and families.

The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership has approved a development programme for the wider workforce including health and West Mercia Police. This is important to ensure everyone working with children and families has a shared understanding of the way we want to work in Herefordshire.

There are two elements to the development programme:

- 1) **Introduction to relational practice:** this is a half day, single agency training session which aims to give attendees a good grounding in the values, thinking and behaviours of relational working. The session will include the following:
 - a. Relational and restorative working, the social discipline window, circles and behaviours
 - b. Applying relational values and practices in everyday joint working with children and families
- 2) **Relational Practice Forums:** These are tried and tested multi agency small group sessions where we work together to support the development of relational practice skills but also provide time and space to develop active working relationships and working links between services, agencies and partners.

The forums work best with between 10-12 participants across 2-3 hours to enable collaborative reflecting, rethinking and refocussing of practice using examples of ongoing work with children and families . These sessions are led by experienced facilitators from Leeds but can also provide opportunity for others to engage in the leading / facilitation process. It is helpful and encouraged to repeatedly attend these sessions.

Appendix 2 - Exclusion: the evidence base

Attachment Aware Schools and Exclusion

The practice of exclusion and suspension is at odds with Attachment Aware Approaches, particularly for children and young people who have experienced loss and rejection as exclusion or suspension from school is another ACE. For these children and young people, exclusion and suspension (whether formal or informal, internal or external, fixed-term or permanent or whether known by another name such as 'seclusion' or 'isolation') is ALWAYS experienced as something negative, and can be a painful reminder of their earlier life experiences. Exclusion from school does not just place a boundary around certain behaviours to signal that they are not acceptable; it is ultimately perceived/experienced by the individual as a punishment for their behaviour.

Although we recognise that exclusion and suspension are last resort actions that sometimes happen in schools, we recommend that ALL schools, when reviewing their own exclusion processes and practices, should describe how they will by any means possible avoid excluding children and young people. Following any incident that leads to some form of exclusion of children and young people, schools should detail how they will provide opportunities for reparation and rebuilding of trust and relationships. Every reintegration meeting should involve a restorative and reparative approach to help both the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) involved move forward positively.

Research by Professor Tamsin Ford et al, (August 2017) at the University of Exeter found a bi-directional association between psychological distress and exclusion. They recommended that efforts to identify and support children who struggle with school may therefore prevent both future exclusion and future psychiatric disorder.

A study by the Institute for Public Policy Research estimates that of the 86,000 strong prison population, more than 54,000 were permanently excluded at school.

Exclusion: the national and local policy framework

National Context - SEND and Exclusion: Pupils with SEND are disproportionately more likely to be excluded compared to the school population as a whole. There remains a high need to reduce the inequalities in school exclusion

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf

Local Context – SEND and Exclusion [Behaviour and exclusion – Herefordshire Council](#)

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published [guidance](#) in November 2015 urging schools and other education providers to avoid using permanent and fixed-term school exclusion as far as possible for children and young people in the care system with identified attachment difficulties:

Relevant links:

<https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2017/11/CCO-Childrens-Voices-Excluded-from-schools-and-alt-provision.pdf>

Appendix 3 - Principles of Attachment

Attachment Principles

Attachment Theory is increasingly being recognised as one of the key theories within child development that explains why some children and young people do better in school and life than others.

Attachment is central to our wellbeing and affects us all.

This guidance endorses the principle that attachment is everybody's business. We are all shaped by our early relationships and our behaviour is influenced by our attachment experiences.

'All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organised as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures' (Bowlby, 1988)

a) Secure Base

John Bowlby described how a secure base is provided through a relationship with one or more sensitive and responsive attachment figures who meet the child's needs and to whom the child can turn as a safe haven, when upset or anxious (Bowlby, 1988).

'The concept of a secure base is essential to our understanding of relationship formation and children's development. It links attachment and exploration and provides the basis of a secure attachment.' (Schofield and Beek, 2014)

We all need a secure base in life. School is an important secure base for all children and young people, but for some, it may be the only secure base that they have experienced and therefore is hugely important.

b) The PACE Approach – Dan Hughes

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

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

CURIOSITY is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the child know that the adults understand. Without judgement, children become aware of their inner life.

EMPATHY is the adult demonstrating that he or she knows how difficult an experience is for the child. The adult is telling the child that she will not have to deal with the distress alone.

Empathy gives a sense of compassion for the child and their feelings.

More information can be found at: <https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/>

c) Emotional Co-Regulation

Emotional Co-Regulation is inextricably linked to the Attachment Aware framework. Emotion Coaching is a strategy to enable emotional co-regulation. It was originally a parenting strategy (John Gottman, 1997) which has been developed by Dr Janet Rose and Louise Gilbert and applied in the school environment. They took Gottman's five steps of Emotion Coaching and developed a school friendly program that uses four core steps to help engender emotional resilience, empathy and problem-solving skills within children and young people (Rose et al 2015). This is focused at the **whole school level**. Emotion Coaching is based on the latest research from physiology and neuroscience and provides a structure to aid emotional behavioural regulation.

The following principles are central to Emotion Coaching:

- All emotions are natural and normal, and not always a matter of choice
- Behaviour is a communication
- Emotional 'first aid' (calming, soothing) is needed first: 'Connect before re-direct' (Siegel, 2013), 'Rapport before reason' (Riley, 2009)
- 'Emotion coaching builds a power base that is an emotional bond – this creates a safe haven, a place of trust, a place of respect, a place of acceptance, a sense of self. This in turn leads to children and young people giving back respect and acceptance of boundaries' (Rose and Gus, 2017)
- Children cannot successfully self-regulate their emotions unless they have experienced and internalised co-regulation (i.e. an adult tuning in/empathising with their emotional state and thus 'containing' - sharing, supporting and carrying - their emotional state). This also involves explicit teaching and modelling.

The following animation gives a helpful summary of Emotion Coaching for parents and teachers:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KJa32r07xk>

The approach to behaviour endorsed in this Guidance is an Emotion Coaching style.

Appendix 4 - Relationships and understanding behaviour in context

This guidance reminds school staff to consider context when interpreting behaviour. All behaviour, however bizarre it may seem, makes sense at some level – what is the story? There is often a tendency to look for within-child factors – i.e. ‘What is wrong with the child?’ This can often lead to a search for a label or diagnosis, which is not always helpful, especially when planning effective SEMH interventions.

Thinking about the child/young person systemically, within a risk and resilience framework (e.g. child/young person, family, and community) is both helpful and important.

For further information on resilience we recommend:

<http://www.boingboing.org.uk/>

The importance of relationships

Relationships are central to our sense of belonging and to our emotional wellbeing. This includes: staff-pupil, pupil-pupil, staff-staff, staff-parent/carer, child-parent/carer relationships.

Promoting positive school staff relationships and emotional wellbeing

For school staff to be able to effectively build relationships with children and young people and parents/carers, they need to firstly prioritise their own emotional wellbeing and staff relationships. The school ethos and professional practice needs to foster this, through both informal and formal practices, such as: reflective practice opportunities (including workgroup discussions, peer supervision/support using different models such as collaborative problem-solving); team building opportunities; linking with support partners including Local Authority and Health colleagues to develop a whole school approach to EMHWB. Time needs to be built in and protected to enable these planned practices to happen for staff rather than relying on ad hoc opportunities such as informal staffroom discussions with colleagues. A further cautionary note is that there can be a conflict of interest if the only time when reflective practice discussions take place is during performance management.

Appendix 5 - Applying an Attachment Aware Approach

Jones and Bouffard (2012) and Banerjee, Weare and Farr (2014) suggest that interventions for pupils' social and emotional learning should be integrated into the daily life of the classroom rather than provided through discrete programs.

An integrated Whole School Attachment Aware Approach is therefore advocated in this Guidance.

Assessment, Monitoring and Intervention

As outlined in the SEN Code of Practice and our local SEND Guide, we promote a differentiated approach following different levels of intervention using the Assess/ Plan/Do, Review cycle. Appropriate target-setting and information-sharing is extremely important, to ensure that bespoke provision and strategies are recorded using a range of suitable tools such as IEPs, PSPs, Provision Maps and Pupil Passports. These should be jointly developed, agreed and reviewed, involving key adults. Most importantly this must include input and involvement from the children and young people to ensure that they (alongside their parents/carers) remain central to this process and can voice what helps/hinders; what likely triggers might be; strengths and difficulties, etc.

We are aware of the very wide range of resources already being used across our schools to support SEMH identification and to measure the impact of interventions. This includes various assessment and monitoring tools/toolkits, such as:

- The Boxall Profile
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

A wide range of interventions are also used in many of our schools to support children and young people with SEMH difficulties, including:

- Nurture Groups
- Circle of Friends
- Circle of Adults
- Peer Mediation
- Forest School
- ELSA Training
- Specific therapeutic interventions

Our schools should also be familiar with following various processes to ensure holistic support for children and young people with presenting SEMH needs, such as Early Help. When reviewing what is working with children and young people, please refer to the 'Top Tips for Applying an Attachment Aware Approach' and remember TENACITY (i.e. hang in there!)

Monitor the efficacy of strategies and interventions in case what was planned is not working – do you need to try something different or give things more time?

Reparation and restorative approaches

Many schools across Herefordshire are already using restorative practices in their everyday practice. We believe a restorative and reparative approach is particularly important following school exclusions, and should be central to reintegration meetings following any school exclusion. Restorative Practice offers the opportunity for a transformative educational approach that fosters a harmonious and empathetic school environment. Herefordshire Educational Psychology Service offers Restorative Practice for Schools Training as either a

whole day or three 90-minute twilight sessions. The training is designed to empower your school community with the tools to build stronger relationships, resolve conflicts, and enhance overall wellbeing for staff and pupils alike.

Restorative Practice is an evidence-based, proactive philosophy that places relationships at its core. The training equips educators, pupils, and support staff with invaluable skills to communicate effectively, develop empathy, and manage conflicts constructively. This holistic approach transcends mere conflict resolution; it cultivates a culture of trust, respect, and inclusivity throughout your school.

The training has been carefully developed to meet the unique needs of schools and can be further tailored to your needs after discussion. It provides staff with an engaging, hands-on experience, with a good balance between underpinning theory and practical strategies.

The benefits are profound: reduced 'discipline' issues, increased student engagement and a sense of belonging that empowers each member of your school community: promote your primary school's ethos, improve relationships, and inspire positive change.

Reflective practice

As highlighted in Appendix 4, reflective practice opportunities are essential to support staff with:

- awareness of their own emotions and attachment styles
- understanding of the behaviours from others that might trigger a particular response in them
- maintaining appropriate boundaries
- managing secondary stress.

This is only possible within a school culture where staff feel safe and are encouraged as part of good EMHWP practice to express how their work impacts on their emotions and vice versa.

References

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