

Supporting Emotions and Behaviours in Early Years Settings Policy

Statement of intent

We believe that children flourish best when their personal, social and emotional needs are met, where there are clear and developmentally appropriate expectations for their behaviour and their feelings are acknowledged and supported. We recognise and value that all behaviour is a form of communication.

Aim

At _____ we take a developmentally appropriate approach to support children to begin to understand and label their emotions and to enable them to begin to regulate their behaviour.

We promote prosocial behaviours through a range of strategies that support the child's self-esteem and sense of self, for example emotion coaching, giving positive feedback and setting clear expectations.

We are working towards creating a culture where everyone is aware of trauma and its effects and are committed to supporting children who have experienced trauma. This includes training educators in trauma informed practices, raising awareness among families about trauma and its effects, and being open about the support available.

When behaviour raises concerns, the INCCO, keyperson and colleagues will work in partnerships with parents/carers to explore what the child is trying to communicate. We will put in place plans that address the needs of the child in a respectful way whilst keeping them, their peers and staff both physically and emotionally safe and secure. Our supporting emotions and behaviour support policy and techniques are promoted to; parents/carers students, volunteers and visitors. We ensure that all of our staff implement this policy and supporting techniques to ensure continuity throughout the setting.

Method

We will meet this aim through the following procedures:

- We have a named person, *[insert name here]* who has overall responsibility for promoting prosocial behaviour strategies. Our Wellbeing lead- (*insert title chosen by setting*) has the necessary skills to advise other staff on supporting emotions and behaviour as they have attended specific training and regularly attends Local Authority inclusion training such as North Somerset New INCCO, inclusion clusters and workshops.
- This designated staff member is required to:
 - Keep up to date with legislation, research and thinking on promoting pro-social behaviour and on responding effectively to children's behaviour, promoting children's personal, social and emotional development and recognising when a child may require additional support.

- Access relevant sources of expertise on promoting prosocial behaviour within the curriculum for supporting personal, social and emotional development.
 - Check that all staff have relevant in-service training on understanding that all behaviour is communication and promoting prosocial behaviour. Keep a record of staff attendance at this training.
- We recognise that codes for interacting with other people may vary between cultures and ensure these are respected and valued. However, any codes that do not fit within Fundamental British Values will need to be respectfully challenged.
 - We familiarise new staff, students, volunteers and parents/carers with our supporting emotions and behaviours policy. This information is included within staff/student/family induction packs, and the policy is displayed and highlighted to parents.
 - We expect all members of our setting - children, parents/carers, staff, volunteers and students - to adhere to these guidelines, requiring them to be applied consistently at all times.
 - We work in partnership with children's parents/carers. The child's keyperson regularly engages parents/carers in discussions about their child's emotions and behaviour. If we feel a child needs support around their emotions and behaviour we will ensure we have gathered observations to share with parents/carers and work with them to support the child appropriately in the setting and at home.
 - We use specific praise and encouragement to acknowledge prosocial behaviour.
 - We build respectful relationships between children and families through our keyperson system and our EYFS Unique Child Positive Relationships principles.
 - We anticipate when behavioural issues may occur, and all staff are aware of agreed strategies to support the child.
 - We support children to understand boundaries within the setting and all staff apply these consistently.
 - We ensure that our routines enable children to feel safe and secure.
 - Staff use visual timetables, now/next boards, and/or objects of reference to support children's transitions throughout the daily routine.
 - Adults within the setting model prosocial behaviour to others. We report achievements and prosocial behaviours to parents/carers within earshot of the child. Most importantly we smile at children and make it clear that we like them and enjoy spending time with them, whilst making time for fun, laughter and joy.
 - We recognise the impact of our language and think carefully about the words we use. We avoid using language that reinforces staff control, for example:
 - 'enforce', 'punishment', 'isolation', 'naughty corner', 'removal', 'rule', 'power', 'control', 'confiscate', and 'impose'
 - We avoid language that places negative judgement on a child or young person or their behaviour, including:
 - 'Attention seeking', 'malicious', 'bad choice', 'poor behaviour', 'misbehaviour', 'manipulative', 'naughty',
 - We avoid language that reinforces negative gender stereotypes, such as:
 - 'Naughty boy', or 'bossy girl'.

We aim to use positive pro-active strategies to promote prosocial behaviour in children, and set these strategies within our curriculum for personal, social and emotional development. These include:

- supporting each child in developing self-esteem, confidence and feelings of competence;
- supporting each child in developing a sense of belonging in our group, so that they feel valued and welcome;
- acknowledging and celebrating considerate behaviour such as kindness and willingness to share, resilience, responsibility;
- acknowledging children's considerate behaviour towards another who is hurt or upset
- providing activities, games and opportunities that encourage co-operation and working together;
- ensuring that there are enough popular toys and resources and sufficient activities available so that children are meaningfully engaged without the need for unnecessary conflict over sharing and waiting for turns
- avoiding creating situations in which children receive adult attention only in return for inconsiderate behaviour;
- looking at the children's needs during levels of high intake and adjusting our daily routine accordingly.
- Supporting transitions throughout the day effectively
- Creating enabling environments that consider a child's need for rest and retreat

If a child's behaviour is causing concern, adults working within our setting will explore why a child may be communicating in a particular way will and use this information to inform the strategies to be implemented by all.

Some examples of where behaviour may cause concern;

- Verbal and physical aggression towards another child or member of staff
- Dangerous or uncontrolled activities
- Risky behaviour which includes harm to self-care

We do not:

- Use or threaten to use physical punishment, such as smacking, shaking, or any punishment which could adversely affect a child's well-being.
- We do not use language or strategies intended to shame a child.
For example, we avoid statements like "You're such a silly girl" or mocking a child out in front of others for mistakes. These situations may appear as light hearted humour to adults but to children can cause emotional harm.
- Use physical restraint, such as holding, unless to prevent physical injury to children or adults and/or serious damage to property.
- Shout or raise our voices in a threatening way to children.

At _____ we take all reasonable steps to ensure that corporal punishment is not given by any person who cares for and is in regular contact with a child. If we are concerned that this is taking place, we will follow our Safeguarding Children Procedure. Where an adult is using actions intended to humiliate a child, we will follow NSPCC guidance on responding to low level concerns about staff.

[Low-level concerns | NSPCC Learning](#)

Partnership with the Area SENCO

The Area SENCO works for North Somerset Early Years Team and helps make the links between education, health and social care to facilitate appropriate early provision for children with SEN and their transition to compulsory schooling. The role of the Area SENCO can include support with monitoring children's behaviour; this may not always be around a Special Educational Need or Disability. The Area SENCO can help by looking at contributing factors, observation and techniques to support positive, prosocial behaviour. If additional support or resources for the child are required, this may be carried out in conjunction with our SEND and Inclusion Policy.

On the rare occasions when physical restraint of a child has been necessary (usually only when a child is in immediate physical danger) we will log details within an incident form for that child and inform the parent/carer at the end of the child's session and ask them to sign in agreement that they have been informed.

Policy Date

Signed

Policy review Date

Appendices

We use the following strategies to support children in managing their own emotions and behaviours

1.Nurture Pack toolkit

This pack has been developed to help Early Years educators identify when a child seems to have some differences with social and emotional development. These differences can often lead to high levels of anxiety that can have a negative impact on learning.

The materials in the pack are designed to support provision and progress in these cases, and to ensure maximum parental involvement and partnership working. We will use the Nurture Pack to focus on the emotional and physical environment and to help develop strategies to support and monitor the well-being of individual children.

2.Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution is a problem-solving approach 6 steps developed by the High Scope approach

1.Approach calmly and stop hurtful actions

The first step is to approach the situation calmly. If there are any hurtful actions happening, the adult to stop them immediately. The adult places themselves between the children and uses a calm voice and gentle touch to help them feel safe. It's essential to remain neutral rather than taking sides to avoid escalating the situation.

2.Acknowledge feelings

The second step is to acknowledge children's feelings. The adult will say something simple such as "you look really upset" to let them know that you understand how they're feeling. Also, let them know that you need to hold any object in question to avoid any potential harm.

3.Gather information

The third step is to gather information about the situation. The adult will ask "what's the problem?" and avoid asking "why?" questions. The adult wants to know what the problem is rather than understanding the reasons behind it, so focuses the children on "what?" to get a clear understanding of the situation.

4.Restate the problem

The fourth step is to restate the problem. The adult uses the children's vocabulary and substitutes neutral words for hurtful or judgmental ones if needed. For example, if they used the word "stupid," it is replaced with a neutral word like "difficult." This helps them understand the situation and shows that you are paying attention to what they are saying.

5.Ask for solutions

The fifth step is to ask for solutions and the child's choice always wins. Ask "what can we do to solve this problem?" and encourage children to think of a solution. If they're unable to come up with one, offer options to help them choose. It's essential to involve them in the decision-making process to help them develop problem-solving and that they make the final decision.

6. Be prepared to give follow-up support

The adult will acknowledge the children's accomplishments in finding a solution e.g. 'together you solved that problem' and stays nearby in case anyone is not happy with the solution. If so; just repeat the process until fully resolved.

A useful video to watch about the benefits of using conflict resolution strategies can be found on [YouTube](#)

3. Emotion Coaching

Emotion coaching is an approach developed by John Gottman to help children to understand the different feelings they experience, why they occur and how to handle them.

1. Recognising, empathising, soothing to calm

The adult supports the child to recognise that all emotions are natural and normal and takes on the child's perspective, for example;

I can see that you get angry when that happens, I would feel angry too if that happened to me.

2. Validating the feelings and labelling

The adult uses words to reflect back the child's emotions, using a narrative for the experience to help them label their emotions, for example;

I wonder if you are feeling angry because Gail took your toy, Its Ok to feel like that.

3. Setting limits on behaviour

The adult states the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour, so making it clear that certain behaviours cannot be accepted, whilst retaining the child's self-dignity for example;
We can't behave like that even though you are cross because it's not safe

4. Problem-solving with the child

When the child is feeling calm, the adult will explore the feelings that gave rise to the behaviour, scaffold alternative ideas and actions that could lead to a more appropriate outcome and empower the child to believe they can overcome difficulties and manage their feelings, for example;

Next time you're feeling like this, what could you do?

A useful video to watch is Dan Siegal explaining regulation through his '[hand model of the brain](#)'

4. Boundaries and Consequences: Reducing the risk of harm

When behaviour poses a risk of harm to a young person or the people around them, we respond with a calm, proportionate, and consistent approach that prioritises safety for all. Our policy focuses on harm reduction, appropriate consequences, prevention, and collaborative problem-solving. We want to ensure that children receive the guidance and support they need to develop positive self-regulation skills while maintaining the wellbeing of everyone in our setting.

4.1 Immediate Safety and Intervention

- Staff will intervene calmly and promptly to prevent harm, using clear language (e.g., "I can't let you do that. That hurts.").

- Consistency in response will be developed through the use of shared 'scripts,' e.g. "Stop. I can't let you do that. It's not safe," "I need to keep everyone safe. I'm going to help you move away."
- Any objects causing risk will be removed, and if necessary, the child will be gently guided to a quieter space to calm down.
- The well-being of any affected child will be prioritised. They will be offered comfort and reassurance.

4.2 Developmentally Appropriate Consequences

Where appropriate, children will experience logical and restorative consequences that help them understand the impact of their actions and learn safer alternatives. These may include:

- Natural Consequences – If a toy is thrown and breaks, the child will not be able to play with it. If another child's work is disrupted, they will be encouraged to help rebuild or tidy up.
- Restorative Actions – Encouraging children to make amends in an age-appropriate way, such as helping to comfort a peer, assisting in tidying up, or using simple verbal or non-verbal apologies.
- Temporary Removal from Activity – If a behaviour is unsafe (e.g., throwing blocks), the child may be redirected to a different activity until they are ready to engage safely.
- Time to Regulate with Support – If a child is struggling to manage their emotions, they may be given time in a quiet, supervised space with adult support to help them calm and re-engage positively. This is not a 'time-out' as a form of punishment but an opportunity to regulate emotions.

4.3 Preventative Strategies

- We will analyse the possible triggers of behaviour which poses a risk of harm (e.g., frustration, sensory needs, feeling unsafe).
- We will assess the potential risks and adapt the environment (e.g., reducing sensory overload, adding visual supports, creating places for 'retreat').
- Increased supervision may be provided in situations where a child is more likely to engage in high-risk behaviour, e.g. off-site trips and activities which require sharing and turn-taking.
- Staff will support children in developing alternative behaviours by teaching emotional regulation techniques, modelling positive social interactions, and using visual supports where appropriate.
- We will support children to name their emotions through simple scripts: "I can see you're really upset."
- Positive reinforcement will be used to encourage safer choices (e.g., "Well done for asking for help instead of grabbing.").

4.4 Parental Partnership and Additional Support

- Parents/carers will be informed of any significant incidents in a sensitive and constructive manner.
- Records will be kept of behaviour which poses a risk of harm in order to aid discussion with parents/carers and analysis of the triggers and functions of the behaviour.

- Records will form the basis for referral, where necessary, to external professionals (e.g., Early Years Area SENCO, Speech and Language Therapist, Educational Psychologist).

A useful video to watch is 'teaching rules and boundaries' which can be found at the [North Somerset Educational Psychology Service online resources library](#).

5. Spaces for Safe Retreat to support children in their emotional regulation

We recognise that young children sometimes need quiet, comforting spaces to support their emotional regulation and wellbeing. To meet this need, we suggest providing designated areas for safe retreat—calm, enclosed spaces where children can go when they feel overwhelmed, upset, or simply need a moment to themselves. These spaces are informed by the work of several early childhood experts, including Elizabeth Jarman, who has pioneered the use of small, enclosed environments to create a sense of safety and calm. Thoughtfully designed to be secure, inviting, and sensory-friendly, these retreats support children in self-regulating and re-engaging with their surroundings at their own pace. For more on Elizabeth Jarman's work, visit www.elizabethjarman.com.

6. Useful videos and resources from the NS EP service

The North Somerset Educational Psychology Service has a range of useful short online training videos on a range of advice and strategies to nurture the social, emotional, and mental well-being of young children during their early years.

[Early Years Social, Emotional and Mental Health \(SEMH\) | North Somerset Council](#)