



Margaret McMillan Nursery School

(Understanding and Supporting) Positive Behaviour policy

Updated in March 2025 in consultation with ITIPS working group



At Margaret McMillan Nursery School we believe in enabling children to develop a positive self-image, have high esteem and become confident, independent, motivated individuals. We want all our children to respect and feel respected by children and adults. We recognise that ...

all behaviour is a form of communication.

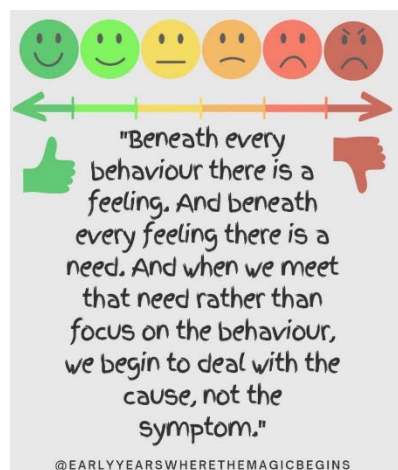
It is therefore very important to us to recognise when a child has a 'need', to understand it, to label the emotion, express it in whatever way they are able, and support children to regulate. We cannot expect children to be able to self-regulate their emotions before we have worked hard in supporting them with their co-regulation. With this approach we believe the children will begin to develop an understanding of acceptable and appropriate behaviour, as well as learning the crucial skill of being able to empathise with others.

We believe that we all do our best when our personal, social and emotional needs are met and where there are clear and appropriate expectations for behaviour.

EYFS statutory Framework October 2024:

Children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world. **Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set themselves simple goals, have confidence in their own abilities, to persist and wait for what they want and direct attention as necessary.**

Through adult modelling and guidance, children will learn how to look after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. Through supported interaction with other children, they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably. These attributes will provide a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.



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Key Points for Understanding Positive Behaviour

- We understand that behaviours are a way for children to express what they want and need and how they feel (BIG FEELINGS). We respect that **all behaviour is a form of communication**.
- We aim to avoid statements such as *'You are okay'* and instead aim to acknowledge a child's feelings with statements like *'It looks like you are feeling....(name the emotion)'*
- We always value **the child** even if their **behaviour** is not appropriate.
- We set clear boundaries and explain reasoning behind them, always talking to children about the **why** eg. *'We should pick up these toys so that no-one trips over them and so we can find them again later when we want to play with them.'*
- When a child is presenting a need; we stop, listen, then respond to the **need** (be in tune), *not* the *behaviour*. The behaviour is addressed after the need is met.
- **Kindness** is always the right response.
- We offer alternatives to the children for saying **'sorry'** as this approach forces apologies that come without meaning or a real understanding of exactly what's happened.
- As adults, we **model** the behaviour we want from the child.
- The adults must **work together** and be consistent.
- We give staff and children space to **problem solve together** and only get involved if a staff member has requested additional support, or if we have noticed that extra help may be useful at that point in time.
- We avoid making threats (even as a joke eg. *'would you like me to throw toys around in your home?'* or promises that can't be kept.
- We recognise achievements and progress through giving **specific praise** eg. *'I loved the way you didn't give up when you were balancing on that plank'*, and positive reinforcement, helping the children to understand and focus on the wonderful things they are doing (rather than the end result) eg. *'Thank you for helping me put those dinosaurs in the box'*, or *'that was great of you to help... when she was climbing'*.
- We listen to the children and understand that **each child is unique** with their own sets of needs, wants and behaviours.
- We view **listening as an active and reciprocal process** ie. getting down to the child's level, making eye contact if they wish, responding to all the child's physical cues and in a way that is appropriate to that individual child.
- We closely **observe children**, such as what they do, what their interests are, where they play, who they play with, how long they stay there etc.
- We offer children **choices** and don't impose our personal preference on them.
- We focus on the **individual progress** the children are making, rather than comparing them to their peers.
- We give praise to the **effort** rather than the end result eg. *'I'm so proud of the way you kept trying to balance on that plank'* or *'well done for keeping trying and not giving up, even though it was a tricky thing to try and do.'*
- We take time to have fun and play with the children.



Islington's Trauma Informed Practice approach (ITIPS):

At MMNS we are using Islington's Trauma Informed Practice approach (ITIPS) to support with interactions, emotional regulation and to better understand and support positive behaviour. This is embedded in all that we do, from the language we use with the children to the support that we give them, as well as the language that staff use with one another and the various ways in which we can all receive support with our self-regulation.

[Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice) – Nov 2022

Trauma and/ or adverse childhood experiences are common in many young people's lives. Experiencing trauma can affect, amongst other areas, children's ability to: relate/ connect with others, regulate their own emotions (ie. understand and manage their own feelings) and develop their attention skills and readiness to learn.

Trauma-informed ideas are incorporated into MMNS's Positive Behaviour Policy with the aim of helping children and their families overcome any challenges they may face, within the Nursery environment as well as the wider community.

Research shows that children learn by example, so we ensure that our own behaviour is a **good model** for them. We give this policy to all our staff and parents with the hope of ensuring that **staff and parents are working together** and share the same ethos. We find this helps in ensuring children are given consistent messages about what is and is not expected of them. This in turn helps to make the children feel safe. Staff have and will continue to have training in this approach and parents will be able to attend workshops to support their understanding of it.

The aim of a trauma informed school is well summarised here:

"A safe school is one in which the total school climate allows students, teachers, administrators, staff and visitors to interact in a positive, non-threatening manner that reflects the educational mission of the school while fostering positive relationships and personal growth...providing freedom from violence, fear, and intimidation."

(Bucher and Manning, 2005, citing Mabie, 2003)

What are examples of childhood trauma, particularly in Early Years?

Childhood trauma can take many forms, ranging from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to complex trauma, including domestic violence. These experiences can have significant impacts on a child's development and well-being, influencing their ability to form relationships, regulate emotions, and cope with stress.

Bear in mind that not all children experience trauma in the same way. The effect of trauma, such as toxic stress, depends on the child's age, the type and intensity of the trauma, the presence of supportive or protective factors.





Understanding and Supporting Positive Behaviour

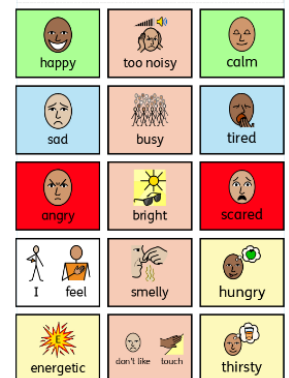
We believe that by understanding child development through the lens of neuroscience, we can support children to build strong healthy brains that enable them to grow in their resilience to becoming happy, healthy and successful individuals. Brain development is most rapid in the early years and a good foundation is of crucial importance for children's development.

This link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2REmvRPUXqk> explains the connection between brain and emotions.

We understand that behaviours are a way for children to express what they want and need and how they feel. **Behaviours are a way of communicating** when we either do not have the words or cannot use them in the moment (sometimes when we are feeling strong feelings like anger, frustration or sadness).

We encourage positive behaviour through **play and learning activities** eg. stories/ songs/ role-play/ outdoor play/ collaborative games and interactions. We help to support children's self-esteem by enabling them to be successful in play experiences and activities and to feel proud of their achievements. We organise both the indoor and outdoor learning environment so it meets the needs of the children, provides appropriate challenges and opportunities for the children to take risks when they feel able to. This in turn leads to a positive impact on behaviour.

We encourage children to **help tidy up** and they learn to put resources back in their correct place after they have chosen to play with them. We explain the **why** in this - so that the resources are looked after and easy to find when they next choose to play with them. In doing so, the children learn to respect the resources and their environment.



Positive ways of communicating

We understand that it is not appropriate to say, 'You are okay' to a child but instead **acknowledge how they are feeling**. We always try and understand what the behaviour is communicating, to be **in tune with the child's emotions**. We recognise that it is imperative that the adult is calm during this time so they are able to model and support a child with their co-regulation. In trying to understand how a child is feeling and naming their emotion, we can then respond sensitively to that communication. We get down to the child's level and be curious about what the child might be feeling and saying, 'It looks like you might be feeling', 'I am wondering if you are feeling....' We work together with a child to understand their emotion. All children receive warm and responsive care and are valued even if the behaviour is inappropriate.



We use **visual prompts** to support the children with their understanding of emotions as well as strategies to support them when they are feeling a certain way (*please see appendix for visuals*). This is to ensure we are fully inclusive and all children are able to express their feelings in a way that is appropriate to their own needs, such as if a child is pre-verbal. For example, 'It looks like you may be feeling cross right now. Would you like to (point to the visuals...) run outside, have a hug, read a story, jump up and down?'

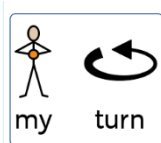


We encourage appropriate behaviour in all interactions, through **specific praise** eg. 'It was so kind when you shared that teddy with Sonny' compared to "good boy", 'good job', or 'well done' This helps children learn what they are being praised for and what we want them to keep doing. It also praises effort rather than the end result.



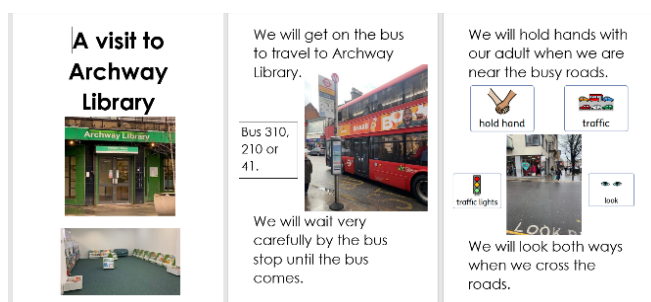
Positive strategies

We focus on activities and routines that encourage children to share, negotiate and co-operate with each other. However, we always ensure that this is done in ways that are appropriate to the age, stage of development and understanding of the individual child. We use the Makaton sign for 'waiting' and offer an alternative such as 'let's play with this first' or 'let's use the sand timer to wait 5 minutes'. **We praise good waiting, listening and turn-taking.**



We ensure that our **routines** are predictable and consistent and help children who might have difficulty following them by eg. using a visual timetable, giving a warning sign before transition times like tidy up time, keeping to consistent and fair routines within the school day so that children are aware of what to expect and what is happening next.

If we change the routine, for example if we go on a trip or have visitors in to do activities with the children, we will ensure we let children know in advance and prepare them for the change. This can be in the form of a social story, visuals or through talking to the children prior to the event. We will aspire to let parents know when this is happening too so that they can also prepare their child for the change, in advance of it happening. We acknowledge that children thrive in routine and in knowing where they need to be and when. This helps them to feel safe and gives them the confidence to engage. However we do want to keep inspiring and motivating the children with new and exciting events!



breakfast	school 9.30	play	story time
lunch	wash hands toilet	wash hands toilet	garden
play	tidy up	story time	home 3.30

We involve children and parents/ carers in establishing some simple, clear **Golden Wishes** for appropriate behaviour.eg. **be kind, be gentle, be curious.**



Wish 1: Be kind to each other.

Wish 2: Be kind to yourself.

Wish 3: Be kind to our Nursery.

We work as a team to plan for and support positive behaviour, looking at **each unique child** and thinking of ways to support them as individuals. We acknowledge that there is no single plan that meets the needs of all the children. **Every child is different** and learns and develops at their own pace. We take a **positive and consistent approach** towards supporting children, which helps them to learn what is and is *not* expected of them.

Rewards

At our setting, our preference is not to use any external rewards or consequences such as stickers or reward charts. We believe that they can interfere with the children's intrinsic motivation to learn. We think that it is better to talk about behaviour with the children to develop their understanding. We acknowledge that although this will work for some children, others may respond well to a reward chart. This will be discussed with parents and staff to find strategies which work the best.

Positive Reinforcement

We offer continual and consistent **positive reinforcement**, praising positive behaviour such as noticing something kind a child (or adult) has done for someone else. We encourage the children to do the same, helping them to become reflective individuals as their awareness grows for what is happening around them.

We have **positive affirmations** displayed in the environment to remind and encourage all staff (including temporary/ supply staff) to use these key phrases with the children, helping to build up confidence, resilience and pride in us all and to recognise our achievements, however small.



We have a **Shout Out wall** in the staff room so that staff can notice these positive approaches in one another too, praising and showing that we are grateful and appreciative of our colleagues.

We discuss with children, where appropriate, what **acceptable behaviour** is whenever the need arises, giving reasons and using a variety of strategies to do so eg. Puppets, stories, role-play. We act on things that happen **in the moment**, rather than waiting, and respond to children as they need it and as the situation occurs.

We help the children to understand the **consequences and effects** of their behaviour on others eg. *throwing blocks in the construction area which could hurt their friends*. We can plan for these children who need to exert energy and throw things in a **safe way**, such as throwing bean bags in a bucket outside. We use positive language to redirect this such as *'I can see you want to throw something right now, perhaps we can go outside and find something to throw in a way where no-one gets hurt.'*

We also encourage children to use actions, such as their hand to signal STOP or to say to their peers in a calm way, *'Stop, I don't like that'*.



We offer the children a choice for how they would like to **say sorry**, or be said sorry to, in ways that are non-verbal, such as a hug, high 5, handshake or a fist bump. This can reinforce the message of gentle and friendly physical gestures, as well as supporting those children who cannot use words or may find it hard to say the word 'sorry'.

If the child does have good understanding and a broader vocabulary, we encourage them to say **why** they are sorry, making it more purposeful for them and for the person who is being said sorry to eg. *'I'm sorry I hurt you'* or *'I'm sorry I knocked over your tower.'*

As adults it is important we model these positive interactions too and recognize when we need to say sorry eg. *'I'm sorry I bumped into you, I did not see you standing there'* or *'I'm sorry you got hurt, can I help you?'* Staff should also be modelling this **positive and reflective language** to one another, particularly in front of the children, where appropriate.

We establish clear expectations and boundaries for behaviour, appropriate to the children's level of understanding. The child may be removed from the group or activity if the behaviour is proving a threat to the safety of others, or if they are too dysregulated to remain in the area they are in. During this time they could be with an adult who will be providing comfort if needed, whilst **being clear on why they have moved them**. This is in no way a punishment or to be identified as Time Out. Instead it is a supportive and reflective time for the child, to help them to regulate their emotions.

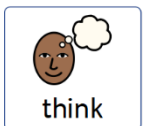


Positive Physical Contact

When children show more challenging behaviours, we try to understand what the child may be communicating and support the child to **co-regulate or self-regulate (see below)**. A child might need more physical touch than others - we may offer them positive touch throughout the day, eg. massage their back, cuddle when reading a story, gently squeeze their shoulder when praising, offer deep pressure on arms and legs. Some children may not like this extent of physical touch and wherever possible, consent from the child should be requested eg. 'Would you like a hug?' Or 'does this feel okay?', "would you like more or stop?"

Where adults are working with **children with severe and complex needs** eg. associated with a learning disability or autistic spectrum condition (ASC), an individual plan may be drawn up in consultation with parents/carers and other professionals where appropriate. This should set out the strategies and techniques to be used and those which should be avoided.

There may be other occasions when a distressed child needs comfort and reassurance and this may involve **physical contact**. For example after a fall, separation from parent etc. Not all children and young people feel comfortable about physical contact. Adults should use their professional judgement to comfort or reassure a child in an age-appropriate way whilst maintaining clear professional boundaries and ensuring the child is comfortable with the contact. During the home visit and via parent meetings, staff will ask parents how their children like to be comforted and what strategies would be useful.



Positive Reflections

As a staff team we will regularly reflect on the events of the day and discuss with one another behaviours that we observed in specific children. Collaboratively we will then seek to find out what the **triggers** were for this behaviour and if we can put **strategies** in place to support the child, to prevent this from reoccurring. This may include **interventions** such as *sensory circuits* to help the child regulate their emotions, *bucket time* to support with their attention and listening skills, having a run around outside after lunch when they have a great burst of energy, or finding a calm and quiet space when they find the environment too overstimulating.

We strive to discuss these strategies with **parents and carers too**, so that there can be consistency at home, where appropriate.

We will also invite other **professionals** to observe the child in the setting, with parental consent, to gain a wider range of perspectives and support. For example an educational psychologist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist etc.



Co-Regulation and Self-regulation:

At MMNS we support children in beginning to develop their **self-regulation skills**. Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions and behaviour in accordance with the demands of the situation. It includes being able to resist highly emotional reactions to upsetting events, to calm down when upset, to adjust to a change in expectations, and to handle frustration without an outburst. It is a set of skills that enables children, as they grow, to direct their own behaviour towards a goal, despite the unpredictability of the world and our own feelings.

Before children are able to self-regulate they need an adult to support them. This is known as **co-regulation**. It is when an adult helps a child self-soothe in times of stress.

Staff will stay calm and model calm responses. They may use breathing techniques to support the child to calm down. There will be calming spaces available within the environment, with resources that support children to regulate. This might be with an adult or independently, depending on where they are in their emotional development.

The RULER approach

At MMNS we use the RULER approach. RULER is an evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning developed by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence.

As an approach, RULER has 4 main aims:

1. To enhance the mindset of all involved e. acknowledging that emotions matter.
2. To develop social and emotional skills.
3. To support healthier emotional climates in schools and homes.
4. To promote Social Emotional learning-infused pedagogy, practices and school-wide policies.

Evidence supports the claim that RULER helps create a positive shift in school climate, enhance learning and reduce negative behaviour.

RULER is an acronym for the 5 steps that it represents:

-  **Recognizing**
-  **Understanding**
-  **Labelling**
-  **Expressing**
-  **Regulating**



<https://rulerapproach.org/ost/resources/video2/>

General video to understand RULER and Social and emotional skills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7M3OPA2lZI>

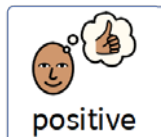
Helping Toddlers Regulate Emotions using 'RULER' (2016) HD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkZd2VKpFrU>

Preschool RULER: The Mood Meter in Early Childhood Classrooms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-H14NNUYwVc>

This link shows example of the RULER method at work when helping young children self-regulate



Positive Mistakes

At MMNS we strive to create a culture where children (and adults) learn from their mistakes and view them as a positive experience. By embracing the mistakes they make and seeing them part of the learning process, children can develop a growth mindset. With this view, challenges can be viewed as opportunities and something to be encouraged without fear of getting it wrong. It is also a great opportunity to do some problem solving together eg. *'I wonder why that happened /why it was tricky/ why it didn't work as we thought it would?'* *'Perhaps we can we try doing it a different way next time?'*

When we make a mistake, our brain works to find solutions, helping us to develop problem-solving skills and resilience.

It is important that as adults we also model that we are all learners, eg. Telling children *'I didn't know the brachiosaurus could live to be 100 years old, Thank you for teaching me that!'*

Or when a child asks a question that an adult doesn't now the answer to, it can be a wonderful opportunity to find out and learn the answer together.

Letting children learn from their mistakes, helps builds resilience and enables them to develop important social and emotional skills.

At MMNS we embed the ethos that **Behaviour is a Form of Communication** and we acknowledge that it is our roles as educators to seek out what that individual child is trying to communicate to us, by behaving in a certain way.

We understand that **understanding positive behaviour** is everyone's responsibility and we all have a part to play in creating a culture of trust, respect, kindness and inclusivity at our Nursery School. We strive to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all, fostering positive relationships amongst everyone who is part of our wonderful school community.

ways to say sorry



hug



handshake



high

5

5







sorry












smile



gentle hands





 sad	 read a story
 hug	 play a game





 happy	 or  dance or sing
 run outside	 play with friends

 angry	 stamp feet
 run outside	 read a story













 tired	 read a story
 rest	 hug

Things we can do when we feel certain emotions.

 play	 run
 jump	 smile

 laugh	 dance
 sing	 cry

			
nappies	lunch	garden	wellies
			
coat	hat	peg	toilet
			
book bag	drink	snack	wash hands

			
stop	wait	finish	more
			
finish	yes	no	sorry
			
good sitting	good listening	good looking	home

story time



good sitting



good sitting



good listening



good listening



good looking



good looking



my



turn



your



turn



good



waiting



good



sharing



Take 5... 5 calming strategies to help with co-regulation and later self-regulation.

1. Read a story
2. Drink some water
3. Talk to an adult
4. Choose a (sensory) toy
5. Breathe (belly breathing technique or blowing the 'candles' out on your fingers)

A child can choose if they would like to do **one** of these 5 strategies, and if they would like to do it with an **adult**, with a **friend**, or **on their own**.