The Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools' Federation

Regulation and Behaviour Policy and Guidelines

Vision

Setting higher standards for what early education can achieve, we will challenge expectations, empowering every child to achieve their best and become active contributors to a more inclusive and compassionate world.

Mission

We are Better Together! In a safe, nurturing and respectful environment our dedicated, passionate teams and amazing families will work together to provide exceptional early education and care; enabling everyone in our diverse community to thrive and succeed!

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Our Ethos:

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, we believe that people who can self-regulate are better equipped to deal with a range of emotions in a positive way. The ability to self-regulate helps us to think, act and feel better and supports us to engage better in social situations and learning.

What is Self-Regulation?

'Self-regulation involves children's developing ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behaviour to enable them to act in a positive way towards a goal.'
(Birth to 5 Matters 21)

'Self-regulation is a brain AND body thing – it's about knowing when we are over stressed and knowing what to do about it'. (Susan Hopkins)

Emotional self-regulation is part of Personal, Social and Emotional Development but other aspects of self-regulation link more closely to the Characteristics of Effective Learning.

Supporting children in the Characteristics of Effective Learning goes hand in hand with supporting their self-regulation skills. We will support children to; be able to make choices, make connections, face challenges, take responsibility and think flexibly and creatively.

Self-regulation is NOT self-control and compliance and it is NOT about being able to sit 'nicely' on the carpet and listen to the teacher.

Children are not born with the ability to self-regulate. This is something that they learn and develop through co-regulation with the support of an emotionally available adult.

What is Co-Regulation?

'Self-regulation depends on and grows out of co-regulation, where adults and children work together toward a common purpose, including finding ways to resolve upsets from stress in any domain, and return to balance'. In its earliest stages, co-regulation involves a carer helping a baby who is overwhelmed by feelings – perhaps from being hungry, uncomfortable, or unhappy for any reason – to return to a state of calm. Through voice, sensitive handling, and tuning in to respond promptly to a baby's signals, the adult helps the baby experience returning to balance after being in a state of emotional arousal. Each experience of co-regulation helps to build the neural pathways that regulate emotion. Cognition interacts with emotions, as the baby learns to recognise and interpret situations, which then results in a different emotional response.

For young children, co-regulation has both emotional and cognitive aspects. It includes the adult modelling calming strategies, naming and talking about feelings and ways to manage. This helps children learn to recognise their feelings and builds their cognitive awareness of strategies to reduce or manage extremes of emotion.
(Birth to 5 Matters 21)

Why is self-regulation important?

Self-regulation is finding ways to cope with strong feelings so they do not become overwhelming; learning to focus and shift attention; and successfully controlling behaviours required to get along with others and work towards goals. Supporting self-regulation development in early childhood is an investment in later success, because stronger self-regulation predicts better performance in school, better relationships with others, and fewer behavioural difficulties.

Moreover, the ability to regulate thoughts, feelings, and actions helps children successfully negotiate many of the challenges they face, promoting resilience in the face of adversity

How do we support children to self-regulate?

A pedagogy, which includes co-regulation strategies, will help children develop self-regulatory skills.
At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools' we ensure:

- Positive Relationships: Warm, responsive relationships enable children to feel safe, respected, comforted and supported in times of stress and confident that they are cared for at all times. Children need to form attachments with caregivers and ideally a particular person with whom both they and their family can form a special bond. At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, we support this through our Key Person System. Children also need to build relationships with their peers and begin to experience the joys and challenges of friendships and being in a group

- Enabling Environments: We create environments that make self-regulation manageable. This means an environment that is structured in a predictable way, physically, and emotionally safe for children to explore and take risks without unnecessary stressors

An environment needs to provide opportunities for intellectual and physical challenge. Children need to be able to push boundaries and learn new things. Our environments encourage independence, decision making and choices. We ensure a range of spaces to be together or alone, calm or stimulated and with an access to outdoors and nature.

- Learning and Development: We teach self-regulation skills through modelling, suggesting and scaffolding. We provide lots of time and frequent opportunities for children to practise their developing self-regulation skills

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, we support children to self-regulate by:

- Interacting in warm, responsive ways
- Recognising and responding to a child's cues
- Showing empathy
- Encouraging face watching
- Providing physical and emotional comfort when a child is dysregulated
- Modifying the child's environment to decrease demands and stressors
- Providing consistent routines and structure
- Modelling self-calming strategies
- Teaching rules, redirecting and using effective positive behaviour management strategies that are age-appropriate
- For preschool children (3-5s): intentional modelling and monitoring and coaching of specific, targeted self-regulation skills such as identifying and expressing emotion, calming down, waiting, planning and problem solving

Dysregulated behaviour

"…whenever the child behaves in a way that does not please us we are ready to act. We do so out of our own good or bad humour in the moment, out of a habit of doing so, out of our principles, but rarely out of a full knowledge of what in the child's mind has led him to do the thing we don't like. Yet without that knowledge we cannot be sure we are dealing with him in the way most likely to help him"
(Susan Isaacs 1929)

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, we recognise that any type of behaviour is communication and that dysregulated behaviour is not 'misbehaviour'. When children are unable to self-regulate they will communicate this through their behaviour. Reframing our thoughts about a child's behaviour will help us see that the child is out of balance, that the child is not 'looking for attention' but seeking connection. A 'tantrum' is a type of self-regulation but it is the body and brain taking over. The child is not choosing to do it, it is happening to them. Dysregulated behaviour tells us that the child is not coping.

Children are not trying to give us a hard time; they are having a hard time!

An adult needs to think: What is causing this unmanageable stress? What is the trigger? How can I see things differently? What is it that I do not understand?

Strategies to support a child in a dysregulated state may include:

- Being present, staying calm, showing empathy
- Offering a gentle touch and validating their feelings
- Helping them become self-aware, guiding them through sensory experiences and calming strategies
- Being supportive and encouraging

- Helping children feel safe, cared about, valued, and understood as they learn to regulate

We do not try to reason with a child who is in a highly dysregulated state because they are unlikely to be able to hear us, they cannot respond to logic or reason and will be unable to process or understand what we are saying.

Some strategies to support self-regulation need to happen in the moment, some can be planned for but all can be reflected upon.

Adults should check that what they are providing or doing is actually working to reduce stressors and support a child to become more balanced. Adults should reflect on their own reactions/behaviours as well as the child's. We need to work as a team. How can we work together to support the child/children? We need to work with the child. How can we help them to notice their different states? How can we support them to make the important connections between their behaviours, emotions and the factors that contribute to them?

Well-regulated adults and healthy adult relationships help children to find their way. We have to lend children our calm. We cannot do this if we are not calm ourselves. It has to start with the adult. We all need to consider how we ourselves self-regulate. We need to support each other, notice each other's stress and help each other to regain balance.

The Brain

The 3 parts of the brain need to be connected and this takes time and the right experiences and support. Children can be stuck in their survival brain – reacting physically to stressors with no control over their actions or what their body is doing. We certainly do not always have access to our thinking brain – it becomes disconnected as the emotional brain takes over.

Although manageable stress may build coping skills, severe stress that overwhelms children can create toxic effects that negatively impact development and produce long-term changes in the way the brain functions.

Trauma and Toxic Stress

The development of self-regulation can be affected by prolonged or pronounced stress and adversity, including poverty and trauma experiences.

Previous exposure to toxic stressors may sensitise a child to have more difficulties self-regulating when faced with stress later.

Children who live in conditions of adversity can experience tremendous challenges in developing the self-regulation skills to function in more 'normal' environments such as school or nursery.

However, there is evidence that positive changes have the potential to reverse negative stress effects and change developmental trajectories for children. Self-regulation is malleable and placing maltreated children in supportive environments is associated with self-regulation improvements.

Working with families

It is important that we work in genuine partnership with the families of all our children. We build strong relationships from the start, our key person system enabling us to get to know people really well. Home visits provide an initial opportunity for families to share information with their key person and as we get to know them better, we hope to build our understanding of any family circumstances that may impact upon their child's self-regulation, wellbeing and learning.

We aim to support families to understand the significance of self-regulation for everyone. We share with them our knowledge of child development and positive behaviour management and discuss any personal circumstances that may be affecting family life. We respectfully help families to reflect upon the strategies that they use when supporting their child through times of stress and offer additional strategies that they might consider. It is very important that we work with families, offering advice sensitively and ensuring that we are very careful to never make a parent or carer feel guilty.

Self-Regulation Plans (Appendix 1)

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, we have developed Self-Regulation Plans for children who need additional help in developing self-regulation skills. These plans are devised in partnership with families to provide consistent support for a child both at home and in Nursery.

Best Practice

Using our knowledge of self-regulation to support our classroom practice is essential, the key being knowing all our children and families well so that we understand their stressors, behaviours and regulators. Whilst we know that generally and individually, this will have a profoundly positive effect on relationships and behaviours within the setting, we also know that there will be many times when children become dysregulated and will need support and guidance.

Some key elements guide our practice:

- We remain calm
- We listen to children
- We give children time
- We are genuinely interested in what children are doing and what they have to say
- We are respectful towards children

- We communicate clearly at the right level for the child
- We provide clear and consistent boundaries
- We acknowledge emotions and do not try to suppress them. We would say 'it's OK to feel sad because mummy has gone' rather than 'don't cry, you're a big girl now'
- We have high expectations of all children and model the behaviours we want to promote
- We do not use strategies that involve shouting, humiliation or rejection
- We avoid negative comments which are directed at the child rather than the behaviour i.e. 'Stop being so bossy', 'you are mean'
- We frame our requests positively i.e. "walk please" as opposed to "no running"
- We consider a child's stage of development when setting out our expectations i.e. we would not expect a 2 year old to take turns with a spade, we would get them another spade
- We use specific praise linked to effort as well as outcome such as 'you kept trying even though it was hard' or 'you lined up the blocks so neatly' rather than general comments about the child as a person such as 'good boy' or 'clever girl'
- We do not give children stickers or other rewards. We prefer children to be motivated to do things because they want to, they know it is the right thing, it helps others, it makes them feel good!
- We do not intervene too soon when conflict arises and we teach children strategies to enable them to manage conflict independently

Managing conflict

Experiencing and managing conflict is an important part of growing up and early education.
Our aim is to help children to learn the skills they need to manage conflicts, through guidance and modelling. We encourage children to be assertive and to say/sign "no" clearly, for example say "no, I don't like that" or "no, stop". Where a child appropriately asserts "no" and the other child responds, it is not usually necessary for an adult to get involved.

If conflict requires adult intervention in order to be resolved, our approach is:

- Listen to both children
- Encourage children to say how they feel ("it hurt" … "I'm sad")
- Ask the children how they could solve the problem and try to find a solution based on their ideas. If necessary, impose a solution and explain why
- If a child has hurt another, ask them to find a way to help the other child feel better. This could involve comforting the other child
- Avoid a situation where a child expresses a grudging "sorry". Never insist that a child says sorry, they should only say it if they mean it
- If a child has been hurt or is distressed, initially we focus attention on that child and deal with the behaviour of the other child next. Remember, all behaviours are communication – try to figure out why the incident has happened
- If necessary, state a clear boundary. "Remember, no hitting in the nursery."

- If necessary move one child away from the other's play
- It is important to spend time settling the children back into positive play – don't deal with an incident and walk away too soon
- Where possible, notice positive behaviour shortly afterwards and praise it
- Bilingual staff play a key role in helping with incidents where children are new to English

We hope to reduce conflict using the following strategies

- Making sure that we have enough resources for everyone
- Modelling language/approaches like "me next"; "can I have a turn?"; "you can have it next, when I've finished"
- Modelling taking turns, sharing and learning. Modelling simple approaches like "I'll do one, you do the next one."
- Modelling self-regulation strategies i.e. taking deep breaths, moving away from a stressful situation and explaining what we are doing 'I am starting to feel angry so I'm going to take some deep breaths to help me stay calm", "I don't like the loud noise here so I'm going to move away"
- Scaffolding developing self-regulation in steps using co-regulation that can be removed as a child becomes ready. When supporting a child to wait their turn you might:
  1. sit them on your knee and hug them
  2. sit them next to you and use words to reassure and support
  3. use a reassuring touch and a one word reminder
- Support and promote open-ended experiences that encourage collaboration, e.g. block play
- Point out praise and promote kindness, friendship and supportive behaviours between children

"Every day, in 100 small ways, our children ask, 'Do you hear me? Do you see me? Do I matter?' Their behaviour often reflects our response." (L.R. Knost)

"If children feel safe, they can take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, learn to trust, share their feelings, and grow." (Alfie Kohn)

At Lilycroft and St Edmund's Nursery Schools, we want all our children to feel safe and cared for. We want them to know that their emotions are a part of who they are and we want them to begin to understand what it is that causes them to feel the way they do. We want children to begin to learn how to cope with strong feelings and what supports them to return to balance.

We support children patiently and sponsively on their journey towards self-regulation and we know, expect and understand that this journey will not always be an easy one and that it will be different for every child. Our staff will consider their own self-regulation and appreciate that they too are on a journey. We will support one another and know that we will not get things right every time. We will reflect, ask questions and learn and in doing so will develop our understanding of the essential role that self-regulation plays in all of our lives.