

Relational Policy

Introduction to Policy

At Warmley Park School and College (WPS & C) we aim to create a welcoming, caring environment where relationships are based on respect and develop positive self-esteem in each child. Relational education is much more than an approach to behaviour management. Rather, it is a value-based approach which describes how an understanding of our relationships with each other, both as a school and as individuals can enhance both academic and social learning, and as such is a cornerstone of our commitment to our school ethos, beliefs values and attitudes. At WPS & C we believe that learning happens best when there are strong relationships: between our staff, between our pupils, within the learning spaces and beyond, with parents and carers and with our wider community. To ensure this all staff seek to establish a calm and supportive environment where our children feel safe, valued and listened to.

Beliefs, Values and Attitudes

At WPS & C the beliefs, values and attitudes which underpin our school ethos are:

- **Behaviour is a form of communication and the expression of underlying needs.** It is not possible to support a child's behaviour without addressing these needs. We view behaviour as a communication of an emotional need (whether conscious or unconscious) and responding accordingly.
- **Being 'fair' is not about everyone getting the same (equality) but about everyone getting what they need (equity).** Children need personalised responses to supporting their personal development and well-being. Consistency does not always mean responding in the same way to each child or behaviour, it means responding in a way which is consistent to our beliefs, values and attitudes. Whilst each individual child benefits from a consistent approach, being consistent and fair is not about everyone getting the same, but everyone getting what they need.
- **Taking a non-judgmental, curious and empathic attitude towards behaviour.** We encourage all adults in school to respond in a way that focuses on the feelings and emotions that might drive certain behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself and we all have a duty to explore this vulnerability and provide appropriate support.
- **Putting relationships first.** This requires a school ethos that promotes strong relationships between staff, children and their parents/carers. It also relies on creating a positive school culture and climate that fosters connection, inclusion, respect and value for all members of the school community.
- **Maintaining clear boundaries and expectations around behaviour.** In order to help our children feel safe, the learning environment needs to be high in both nurture and structure. Children need predictable routines, expectations and regulated responses to behaviour. These must be in place and modelled appropriately, within the context of a safe and caring school environment.
- **Natural rewards and consequences that can follow certain behaviours should be made explicit,** without the need to enforce 'sanctions' that can shame and ostracise children from their peers, school community and family, leading to potentially more negative behaviour. Responses to behaviour should ensure that all children feel safe and that all needs are met.

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- **Behaviour must always be viewed systemically and within the context of important relationships.** Relational, regulatory and restorative approaches are more effective in supporting their development of internal control and regulation. Not all behaviours are a matter of choice and therefore external control will not be effective in changing behaviour.
- **All children wish to belong, achieve and contribute to their school community.** Child centred approaches, where the children's voices are central and where learning utilises their strengths, resources and qualities are integral to their success.
- **Encouraging parental engagement and involvement is absolutely crucial when addressing and planning support for children's needs.** "The parent-child connection is the most powerful mental health intervention known to mankind" (Bessel van der Kolk).

Approach

What is a Relational Approach?

Relationships are vital for all children in school. It is through relationships that children learn to feel safe, belong, understand themselves, others and the world. It is our way of being together that is most important. The relational approach is a universal approach to teaching and learning which influences whole school ethos, systems and policy as well as everyday practice. It is also a targeted approach to support those children who are most in need.

We increasingly understand the long-term importance of connectedness and positive, safe relationships in supporting emotional, social, and academic outcomes for young people. Relationships and interactions are a vehicle through which we can:

- Develop openness to trust
- Build a sense of security, belonging and connection
- Teach and embed skills to manage and regulate difficult emotions

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- Develop awareness of ourselves and the emotional needs and perspective of others
- Resolve conflict
- Repair and restoring relationships following conflict

In general, the relational approach places emphasis on relationships, respect, responsibility and restoration, which have been shown to be more effective in addressing issues of discipline and conflict than traditional behavioural approaches, where systems rely on the use of rewards and sanctions to encourage compliance. Such approaches are understood to garner short term compliance and have the potential to be shaming and to have adverse effects on young people, particularly those with vulnerabilities as a result of earlier / current life experience.

James McTaggart (EP) highlights the key differences in approaches, in the table below:
(Table reproduced with thanks to James McTaggart @JamesEdPsych)

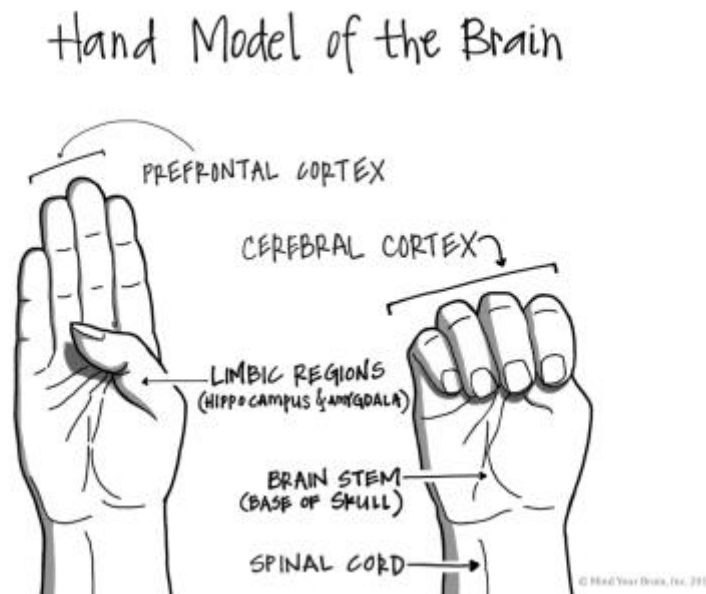
Behaviour Model	Punitive/ Rule-based	Behaviourist/ Consequence-based	Relational/ Developmental
<i>Main means of behaviour management</i>	Fear	Consequences	Relationship
<i>Children & young people are</i>	responsible for their actions	learning	developing, error-prone & highly responsive to environment
<i>Boundaries are to</i>	indicate right and wrong	make standards clear	try to meet everyone's needs
<i>Rules should be</i>	enforced without exception	clearly communicated	developed together and adapted where needed
<i>Behaviour is something to</i>	control	manage	listen to
<i>Consequences are</i>	sanctions & punishments	ways to shape behaviour	a last resort, only used within a process of rupture & repair
<i>"Inappropriate" behaviour is</i>	wrong-doing, deliberate	learned, not necessarily voluntary	a sign either of an unmet need, difficulty coping, or lack of knowledge
<i>The causes of difficulties are</i>	lack of compliance, insufficient discipline	learned poor responses, lack of appropriate reinforcement	mostly in the environment, felt relationships or developmentally appropriate
<i>Solutions lie in</i>	the child	adjusting consequences	understanding what the behaviour tells us about the child & their needs
<i>Children who don't manage should be</i>	excluded or fixed	helped and given intervention	understood & included
<i>Policy effectiveness is measured by</i>	compliance	behaviour change	well-being

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The relational approach provides an emotionally safe way to support behaviour and development, rather than a system to manage it. It views behaviour as telling us something about the needs and regulatory systems of an individual, rather than viewing behaviour as choice and intention. Dan Siegel's 'Hand Model of the Brain' is a useful way of explaining what happens within the brain when we get angry or stressed. This model highlights that during these times a person is not able to use

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problem solving, logic or reasoning because they have ‘flipped their lids’. It is only after the event that someone can begin to use these skills and learn from them.



<https://drdansiegel.com/hand-model-of-the-brain/>

Trauma informed practice:

Whilst relational approaches are effective in meeting the needs of all students, they hold additional value for children and young people who have been affected by adversity at some stage during their childhood, or who continue to experience difficulties of this nature. Relational approaches are at the heart of trauma informed practice, due to the emphasis placed on the importance of secure and trusting relationships in school and the sense of safety these provide.

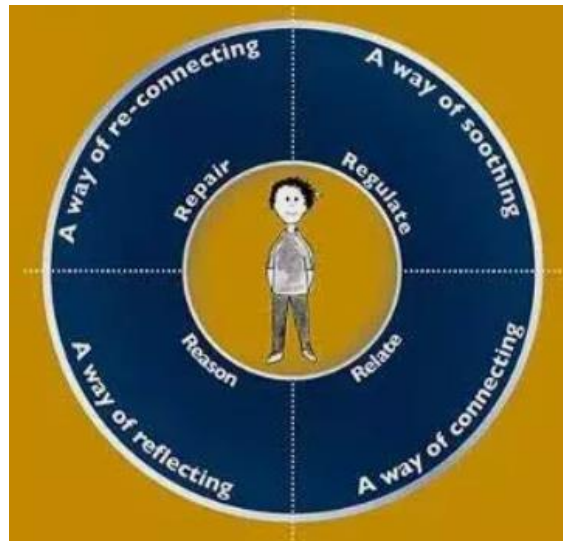
The benefits of a relational approach:

Increasingly we understand the power of relationships and the potential they cultivate. A relational approach is not just a more ‘human approach,’ but one we professionally advocate to be more effective for all involved. Research offers an optimistic perspective that focusing on relationships between teachers and pupils has wide reaching implications, offering the potential to:

- Support development of a positive emotional climate (Rucinski et al, 2018)
- Increase positive behaviours, as well as behaviour for learning (Driscoll and Pianta, 2010; Lei et al, 2016)
- Result in positive changes in emotional regulation, social competence and resilience to academic challenge, leading to increased academic achievement (Bergin and Bergin, 2009; Roorda et al, 2017)
- Enhance a pupil’s sense of school belonging (Quinn, 2017; Allen et al, 2018)
- Increase wellbeing for teachers and staff involved (Split et al, 2011)

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The 4 R's:



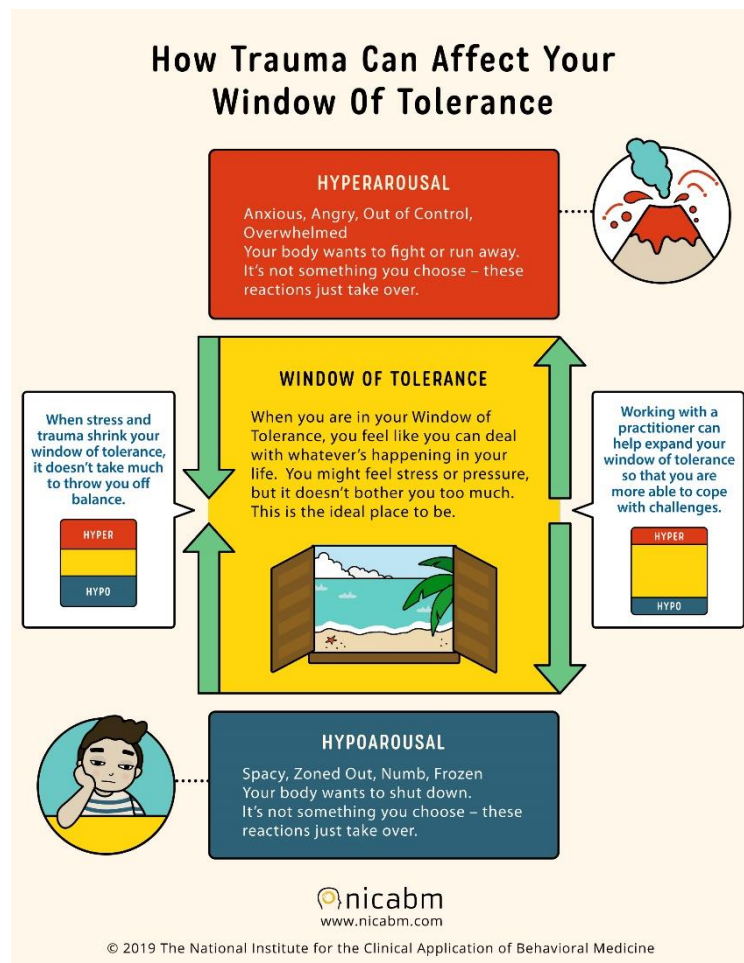
Here at WPS & C our relational approach is based on Louise Bomber's 4 R's of: regulating, relating, reflecting and repairing.

Regulating:

'Every time we regulate together with a child or young person, we teach our pupil that it's possible to shift states, sensations and feelings by engaging with something on a sensory level. That all important life-changing message that it's possible to learn how to soothe, quieten and calm the alarm system in each one of us, so that we can then use our social engagement system.' *L Bomber 2020*. Adults must develop a list of regulating activities that work for each pupil individually. Frequent, regulating activities must be offered throughout the day. Where possible, ask the child or young person to help develop the list of activities. Some activities will be used as a preventative measure while others will be used reactively when an issue occurs. The activities will be written into their PBS plan. Over time we are hopeful that a pupil may begin to move from co-regulation to self-regulation.

All pupils have times when they are more receptive to learning. As educators, we need to be able to identify when a pupil is at their most open to a learning experience. When a pupil is in a receptive state we must take advantage of this. These are the times where we can push and challenge a pupil in confidence that they will take on board what we are attempting to teach and not become dysregulated. The diagram below describes these moments as the pupil's 'Window of Tolerance'. If a pupil's 'Window of Tolerance' is very narrow, then we must support them through regulation activities to enlarge their 'Window of Tolerance'. 'Window of Tolerance' is another way of talking about making sure the pupils are well regulated.

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Relate:

'Every time we relate through quality moments together with a child or young person we teach them that connection is paramount, that relationships are necessary in order to live well. That relationships can be safe and positive, and can bring safety and comfort, love and joy. The message of health and wellbeing.' *L Bomber 2020*. Adults at WPS & C must go out of their way to make sure that each pupil feels valued and respected. This could mean giving a pupil a 'High 5' as they arrive at school in the morning or ask them about their weekend while walking down the corridor with them. Adults must adapt a PACE-ful approach with each pupil e.g. be playful, accepting, curious and empathetic in our interactions with each pupil. Further information about PACE can be found in the techniques section below. Adults must be proactive and go out of their way to find a way to relate to each pupil no matter what barriers the pupil might put up.

Reason:

'Every time we reason together with a child or young person, we teach them to pause, reflect and consider something in the higher part of their brain, their thinking and cognitive brain. The message that it's possible to override the emotional limbic brain from time to time, to extend ourselves outside what is known and familiar, to tap into our exploratory system, be curious, interested, excited: to settle to learn.' *L Bomber 2020*. Adults at WPS & C must develop a strategy that works for each pupil at their cognitive level. For example, how do we get the message across to a pupil that the other pupil also believed that they had a right to take the ball, and that they were not trying to upset you on purpose, but they believed that they had a right to take it, as did you. This step may be challenging cognitively for many pupils at WPS & C, but try we must, and hopefully over time the

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pupil will begin to understand. Remember, we are playing the long game to teach the pupils to manage their own emotions and understand the importance of this.

Repair:

'Every time we repair a relationship together with a child or young person we teach them that there is usually an exit strategy. That it's usually possible to put things right and that we are often made stronger as a result of difficulties. So there is no reason to panic or be afraid of ourselves or of each other. The message of hope.' *L Bomber 2020*. Pupil's at WPS & C are going to need support to repair a relationship once an incident has occurred. Our pupils are not going to know how to put things right, they will need this modelled to them and it may take a long time for them to take this onboard.

It is likely that the adults at WPS & C will need to support pupils through this cycle time after time. This is likely to be emotionally draining, and the adults will need support to help them maintain their 'Unconditional Positive Regard'. It is important that adults working with pupils that may demonstrate dysregulated behaviour, behaviour that challenges or behaviour of concern have the skills to maintain their calmness in the face of such behaviour so that they can support the pupil to regulate and work through the cycle. WPS & C will support adults through the use of the following meetings: 1:1 sessions with SLT, class team, department or supervision.

At WPS & C we do not use sanctions after a pupil has demonstrated behaviour that challenges. Sanctions are likely to shame and ostracise a child which may lead to further negative behaviour. Instead, where possible, we will use natural consequences. For example: writing letters/cards of apology; repairing damage to property; helping to tidy up; completing missed work with an adult; random acts of kindness – e.g., watering the plants. The natural consequence will need to individual to the pupil and for an appropriate duration. Time during the consequence should be

How to be Relational:



It is our interactions with the pupils that sets the relational tone of the school. One technique that we use at WPS & C is Emotion Coaching. This technique supports pupils to manage their emotions in the heat of the moment and to work through the above cycle of the 4 R's. Emotion Coaching has 4 steps:

Step 1: Recognise and empathise with the feelings.

This takes place before you say anything to the child or young person. Pay attention to emotions, from happiness to sadness to anger. Observe, listen, and watch for changes in facial expressions, body language, posture, and tone of voice. Show your child that you understand what he or she is feeling.

Step 2: Label and validate the feelings.

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Identify and help to name the emotions your child is experiencing. For example, “You have gone all quiet. I wonder whether you are worried about something...”. Telling him/her that you understand the situation and that the feelings are OK. If possible, get in there sooner rather than later i.e. before levels have escalated to a crisis.

Step 3: Set limits on behaviour (if needed)

Carry this out when the child is calmer. Find somewhere else to go if appropriate e.g. let’s sit over there to discuss this. Keep the feelings and behaviour separate. For example, “I know you are feeling angry because you wanted to finish the game you were playing. Throwing the game was not okay because it has to be tidied up and it’s time to go out.”

Step 4: Explore and agree solutions for the problem.

What did he/she want at the time things went wrong? Helping children think through possible solutions to this. If they are stuck, be ready to offer them some suggestions. Talking ideas through with questions such as “will it work?”, “how will you feel?”, “how will it make others feel?”. Help your child to feel positive about the outcome. When appropriate, reviewing alternative ways of handling a similar situation next time.



Here at WPS & C we expect adults to display a PACE-ful attitude when they interact with the pupils. PACE is an approach to interaction, developed by Dr. Dan Hughes (Clinical Psychologist). Whilst PACE was originally developed as a way of responding to children with experience of trauma, there is now a widespread understanding of the effectiveness of this approach in meeting the relational needs of all children and young people, providing co-regulation through an empathetic and attuned response to emotional arousal and challenge.

Playfulness:

This is about creating a fun, light and playful atmosphere when communicating with the child. It means using a light tone of voice, like you might do when storytelling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone. It is about having fun and expressing a sense of joy. Relating with a playful attitude keeps the interaction light and upbeat. It can help diffuse a difficult or tense situation. Children are less likely to respond with anger and defensiveness when the adult has a touch of playfulness in their communication. Being playful could mean having fun with shared games or a shared activity that involves you both. Having a playful stance isn't about being funny all the time or making jokes when a child is sad. It's about helping children be more open to and experience positive connection. While such a response may not be appropriate at the time of risky or distressed behaviours, when applied to low level behaviours, playfulness can help keep it all in perspective.

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Acceptance:

This is about accepting that whatever the child (or you) are feeling right now is ok. You are accepting their thoughts, feelings and perceptions without judgement. You may not agree with their interpretation, but you accept their feelings about it. It is their experience and this is important. Don't minimise or invalidate it. Show them it's ok to feel the way they do – actively communicate to the child that you accept their feelings and thoughts underneath the observable behaviour. For example, a child may tell you "I know you hate me". It is tempting to respond with "that's not true" or "don't say that" but this may leave the child feeling that you really don't understand what it's like for them. Instead, through using PACE we could respond with "I'm sorry you think I hate you, that must feel awful, no wonder you're angry with me" or "I didn't realise that you feel like that, I'm sorry it feels that way to you". Acceptance does not mean you have to accept the behaviour if this is harmful to themselves or to another person. You can limit the behaviour while at the same time understanding and accepting the motives for the behaviour. Convey your acceptance through your tone of voice - try using a 'storytelling' or gentle tone, showing your interest, showing your understanding and maintaining a non-judgemental stance. Acceptance is most clearly conveyed through non-verbal communication.

Curiosity:

This is about approaching children with an air of curiosity. Seek to understand what it is that drives them. What is important in their life? How can you get to the core of who they are and bring out the best in them? Curiosity means you don't judge them so quickly. You can ask more questions of them, as you are curious to know more about them. Improving life chances for all www.fife.gov.uk/educationalpsychology Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone: "What do you think that was about?" or "I wonder what...?" You say this without anticipating an answer or response from a child. This is different from asking the child, "Why did you do that?" with the expectation of a reply. Children often know that their behavior was not appropriate. They often do not know why they did it or are reluctant to tell adults why. If an adult can stay curious about why their child is behaving as they are, the child and adult are less likely to feel cross or frustrated. With curiosity we are trying to show we simply wish to understand why. We hope to convey that our intentions are to truly understand and help the child, not to lecture.

Empathy:

Empathy is about putting yourself in someone else's shoes and allowing yourself to feel what they must be feeling. It gives us a sense of compassion for the child and their feelings. This is essential in helping a child feel understood. When someone really understands you, it can make a big difference to how you cope. Being empathic is not about reassuring the child (which tries to make the problem go away) but about being with them in the moment, carrying and containing their big emotions. This lays the foundation for connection. With empathy, when a child is sad or in distress, we are feeling the sadness and distress with them and letting them know that. We demonstrate that we know how difficult an experience is for them. We are telling them that they will not have to deal with the distress alone. Together we will get through this. The adult will stay with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support, and will not abandon them when they need the adult the most.