

# Understanding Behaviour & Relationships Policy



## Oastlers Policy

<b>Approved by Governing Body On</b>	<b>17 October 2022</b>
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<b>Signed on Behalf of the Governing Body</b>	<b>Sue Mawson</b>

## **Essential values and relationships in Oastlers**

A trauma informed approach is central to everything that we do here at Oastlers.

It's essential to all of our values and how we relate to each other.

Being trauma informed brings out the best in all of our learners and gives them the best chance to access the education we have to offer them.

Oastlers School is also an accredited Nurture UK school.

We are also a school fully committed to the UN Convention on the rights of the child. We believe that all children have the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and be protected from abuse and harm. Because of these most important rights, we will support our learners and their families so that their right to be protected and cared for is a given at Oastlers School, and embedded in this policy.

### **What is a trauma informed approach?**

A trauma informed approach looks carefully at evidence-based research to understand how children and teenagers can become mentally unwell and troubled, including challenging behaviour and learning difficulties, because of trauma and difficulties they have experienced.

Oastlers works hard to be sensitive to the impact of trauma on its learners, in order to help them in their recovery. We want them to become emotionally healthy and able to establish healthy relationships so that they can be the very best version of themselves, find joy in life and fulfil their learning potential.

Oastlers offers specific therapeutic services, on a sessional basis, to a number of learners.

But this is only part of the story. Enabling learners to have easy access to an emotionally available adult, on a day-to-day and often informal basis, is a cornerstone of Oastlers' trauma informed approach. Research tells us that this makes a massive difference in helping children and young people feel safe and protected.

Our trauma informed approach includes everybody - learners, their parents and carers, staff and even the physical environment and the way the school day is organised.

In this way, we create a deep-rooted culture and understanding within the school community, that is not trying to blame and punish individuals when they make mistakes or lack confidence in themselves. Instead, Oastlers is all about safety, recovery, respect and restoration.

### **Feeling Safe**

By keeping up-to-date with evidence-based research, staff at the school benefit from a deep understanding of the impact of early trauma and adverse childhood experiences on our learners. We recognise it is imperative that the school is a safe space for young people who critically do not feel safe. Strong relationships between all members of the school community mean that we can support positive emotional health and wellbeing.

We know how crucial the curriculum is in supporting the best academic achievements for our learners. But we also know that when learners continue to have unmet developmental and emotional needs, they may not be emotionally available to learn.

Our school offers a range of learning experiences and supportive mechanisms that are intended to prevent learners from escalating into a state of toxic stress. Toxic stress occurs when there is a prolonged activation of the stress response systems in a child or young person. This can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years.

Some of the ways in which Oastlers tries to prevent the build-up of stress in its learners include vocational, outdoor education and experiential learning alongside a variety of therapeutic experiences. These address those chemical responses that children and young people exhibit when they experience fear, rejection, shame, humiliation and other complex emotional responses.

Being safe is the fundamental aim of the school, as safety is the springboard to successful child development.

### **Relationships are everything**

We believe that the school operates a strong relational approach to our community. What this means is that, at all times, there is an emotionally available adult to support those who need it.

Staff at Oastlers are attuned to the health and well-being of learners. It's definitely one of our strengths.

We know our community well, so we are able to pick up troubled children the minute they walk into school, simply by knowing them well.

We have adopted the PACE approach, designed by Dr Dan Hughes, which provides a consistent approach towards our learners. PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy.

Additionally, we offer a number of talking, relaxation and physical therapies that enhance our empathic approach to children who need that extra care and attention.

### **Responding to emotional dysregulation**

By emotional dysregulation we mean those times when a learner may display an emotional response that is not within a range of typically accepted emotional reactions among young people. Dysregulation can lead to significant mood swings, significant changes in mood, or emotional lability. It can involve many emotions, including sadness, anger, irritability, aggression and frustration.

It is important that we successfully interpret complex situations, because getting that right will inform the most appropriate response and recovery. The predictability of the school's response ensures that learners sense the very stability and predictability they seek.

This is where the Cycle of Repair is important.

### **Cycle of Repair**

The Cycle of Repair has been thoughtfully designed and developed over recent years, to respond in the most child-centred and trauma informed way to the needs of our learners when they become dysregulated.

If a child becomes unsettled in class, the initial response includes the opportunity for the learner to leave the space for a short period to calm and reflect upon what triggered their anxiety.

This is non-shaming and protects the learner's dignity.

It is known as the **Protect** phase.

The period of time needed for this phase is variable, and dependent upon circumstances. This will take place in an appropriately calm space and with an accessible emotionally available adult.

Very rarely, a learner's emotional dysfunction may be such that they present a physical risk to themselves or others. In these circumstances, it may be necessary to use a physical intervention to protect them. This will only be undertaken by staff who are highly trained in such interventions.

It is never punitive. It is only ever protective.

The *Protect* phase will be followed by the *Relate* and *Regulate* phases.

In the **Relate** phase an emotionally available member of staff will draw alongside the learner, offering emotional coaching. This may be something as simple as a calm conversation using affect attunement, empathy, soothing and containment.

This is closely connected to the *Regulate* phase. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to separate the two.

In the **Regulate** phase an emotionally available member of staff will use interventions designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable), enabling learners to feel calm, soothed and safe. This may include a simple game or physical activity.

This will ultimately lead to the learner's safe return to class.

There are two other phases in the Cycle of Repair, which may not occur immediately but will be offered to the learner at an appropriate time.

These are the *Reflection* and *Repair* phases.

In the **Reflection** phase, staff who are skilled in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding will help learners move from 'behaving' the trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences through empathic conversation. This will also draw on the interventions/activities used in the *Regulate* phase as some learners respond better to activity-based communication rather than 'across the table' conversation. This phase addresses negative self-referencing and helps them to develop coherent narratives about their lives.

The final phase, **Repair**, is likely to take place sometime after the incident which prompted the Cycle of Repair to be initiated. This will focus on how 'to put it right', how to repair damaged relationships and restore mutual respect. This sometimes includes restorative conversations, or even written letters, between learners and staff.

### **Oastlers' therapeutic offer**

An extension of our trauma informed approach, in addition to our Cycle of Repair, is the offer of therapeutic interventions which take place in specified safe spaces. We offer physical, relaxation and talking therapies. Of equal value is the tailoring of the curriculum which includes forest school, outdoor education, residential opportunities, experiential learning and community-based activities. This provides learners with that essential connectivity to all things nature and a sense of belonging in their community.

There is increasing evidence that connection with the outdoors, nature and animals has a very positive effect on human immune systems, mood, mental health and interest in learning.

## **Being heard**

Being able to express views, debate and discuss important matters is an essential part of our school. Being a 'talking school' is fundamental because we know some of our learners have not been heard in the past and therefore have gaps in their understanding and knowledge base.

Many have felt overlooked and ignored, which has a detrimental effect on their self-esteem and their trust in the life enhancing experiences of collaborative relationships and community life.

Some conversations with and between learners are complex, but with trusted staff and secure processes in place, learners know that their voice is important.

The student council alone is not the only vehicle by which we seek out the views of learners, but through all our lessons, activities and after school activities we encourage children to feel confident enough and safe enough to take back control of their often-confusing circumstances.

Staff use the PACE approach which provides a gentle, effective approach to helping children to feel at ease. Ours is a 'no blame' culture, which is an essential ingredient for children with complex needs, to flourish.

## **Essential building blocks to support trauma informed practice**

This is what Oastlers is aiming for, to benefit every single one of its learners:

- ✓ To promote positive attitudes to learning and life including honesty, tolerance, justice, courtesy and respect for others, regardless of their religious belief, race, culture, gender, sexuality, ability and family background.
- ✓ To promote a nurturing culture that supports learners to develop respect and self-worth
- ✓ To promote an understanding that behaviour is a learner's own responsibility
- ✓ To promote an understanding that the responses to behaviours towards others is a collective responsibility
- ✓ To promote respect for the school environment
- ✓ To promote the ability for self-reflection and take part in restorative justice practises to repair incidents when they have impacted on others
- ✓ To ensure the school has a clear and consistent understanding of behaviour
- ✓ To establish responses that support learners who find it difficult to manage their emotional responses positively
- ✓ To create a safe, secure and successful learning environment for all learners

## **Classrooms, praise and reward**

The classroom is the most fundamental space in the school where expectations of trauma informed practice and positive behaviour will be explained to all learners.

Positive relationships at Oastlers are praised in a variety of ways. Praise can take the form of a smile, stamps for younger learners, points that are collected over time for end of term trips and visits, nominations for acts of kindness certificates, weekly achievement

certificates, letters home, individual awards, verbal approval from staff, a gentle reassuring touch and other more individual reassurances that ensure learners understand that the way in which they have communicated, is positive.

Staff in school will be looking for every opportunity to praise positive relationships. Particularly thoughtful or responsible behaviour will be pointed out and praised for its own merit. There will be plentiful opportunities to seek out an opening for praise - such as when a learner has complimented another, supported another, been helpful in class, done a voluntary activity or a random act of kindness. Staff will take into account those learners who behave consistently well and those who do so more intermittently.

When rewards and praise are used consistently and effectively, they are a very powerful tool to maintain a positive learning environment. Oastlers school is committed to the belief that:

**'What you pay attention to, you get more of'**

Children have a need to develop friendships and companionship and learn how to foster mutually satisfactory relationships with others. They also need to develop a spiritual awareness, an interest in the wider world, in nature, in faith and a sense of awe and wonder.

To be able to fulfil this they need to have plenty of nutritious food, sleep and exercise so that they are physically and emotionally well enough to embrace the world around them.

They also need to develop intellectually and inspire new ideas, thoughts and mental stimulation. Children are naturally creative, they enjoy doing things, making things and expressing themselves and all this is to be encouraged through being loved and showing love, empathy, understanding and laughter.

The scientific evidence and practice wisdom of trauma informed practice are working closely with Oastlers to provide such an environment in our school, so that our learners can flourish.

### **Break and lunchtime clubs**

Supporting learners to behave in the manner, which makes everyone feel safe, extends to break and lunchtimes – those 'unstructured' times. At Oastlers, breaks and lunchtime clubs are offered to all our learners with the expectation that everyone will opt into a club of choice.

Again, the emphasis will be to reward learners who make positive choices and behave in a responsible way. If learners do not make a choice of club they wish to attend, they will be allocated a club. This is to ensure that activities are supported by staff who model enjoyment and take part in games and activities in a fun way.

It is a well-known scientific fact that the production of serotonin, oxytocin and dopamine (the feel happy, good mood enhancing chemicals) that occur when anyone is having a nice time or taking part in pleasurable activities helps to regulate an otherwise dysregulated mood. Clubs and social activities at Oastlers are an important part of the offer for managing emotional dysregulation.

### **The language we use to communicate**

In accordance with the trauma informed approach, staff at Oastlers are careful in the way in which they talk to learners and are encouraged to use phrases that are reassuring.

It is well known that we communicate via verbal and non-verbal methods. Staff are aware that gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, the way they stand as well as the words they use can be filtered and interpreted both positively and negatively by the listener.

A mismatch between social communications may lead to anxiety, confusion or distrust in children. Therefore, staff will endeavour to ensure that learners do not feel criticised, even at times when guidance is required to reaffirm boundaries. This may take place when we are trying to help learners regain composure if they are becoming anxious or even at the point of emotional crisis.

### **Taking a break**

At times, when the emotional climate in the classroom is such that learners are over excited, restless or distracted, staff will use their initiative to introduce a 'work break activity'.

This can successfully change the pace of the lesson, increase concentration, break up negative spirals, change the emotional temperature, reduce adrenaline charged atmospheres or fill time until the lesson is ended or whilst waiting for others to join the group.

These are positive, unexpected, activities that successfully bring about a calm, positive learning environment with little or no conflict. Activities may include quizzes, games or discussions that are entirely different from the planned lesson content.

### **Moving around school and between lessons**

These are times when learners move around the school between lessons, which can be the source of challenge if not managed efficiently.

Staff at Oastlers are required to be present during these routine transitions, to prevent low levels of difficult behaviour occurring. Staff will be present at 'stations' during these critical times.

In Y7 and Y8, learners are classroom based, enjoying a primary model so movement is somewhat reduced. This provides time for our younger learners to become familiar with school and its routines. Our approach means that children who find change difficult are provided with time to adjust, thus developing much needed confidence by introducing movement about the building gently, over time.

### **Supportive Exits**

The school operates a system that allows learners the opportunity to leave a lesson for a time limit of no more than five minutes, in order for individuals to calm themselves. Learners will be accompanied by support staff to talk through their difficulty before returning to class.

### **The Oastlers Award Board**

In each classroom there is a clearly displayed board that outlines the expectations and consequences of behaviours called the 'Step Board'. The system works on the principle that all learners enter the lesson placed in the golden zone where maximum points are awarded for behaviour, with points lost only when responses fall below expectations:

- Golden Board – 5 points
- Warning – 4 points
- Reminder – 3 points
- Final reminder – 2 points
- Exit – 1 point

There are 10 points per lesson available (five for work and five for behaviour) which ultimately affects the available rewards.

The system assumes all learners start each lesson anew and can access the full number of points available for that lesson. Points can be lost. In the case of repeated incidents of below desired behaviours, 'steps' will be incurred that can ultimately lead to sanctions. We do this so that learners can reflect more fully on the consequences of what has occurred and how things could have been different, particularly when behaviour may have harmed others.

### **Oastlers Help Call**

When a situation becomes unsafe or affects the health and safety of others in the classroom, teachers will summon help from our designated support team, who will manage the crisis. This allows the lesson to continue with little or no disruption. The guiding principle behind this is to maintain the dignity of the learner at all costs so that the situation can be successfully restored.

### **Reiterating the Oastlers Cycle of Repair**

Protect - *Somewhere with someone*

Remove the young person from the situation – non-shaming, protecting dignity.

Relate - *Connection before correction*

Availability of staff trained in emotional coaching and in relating to learners using affect atonement, empathy, soothing and containment.

Regulate - *Emphasis on co-regulation*

The use of interventions designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable), enabling learners to feel calm, soothed and safe.

Reflect - *Help me understand*

Staff skilled in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding to help learners move from 'behaving' the trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences through empathic conversation/activities. This addresses negative self-referencing and helps them to develop coherent narratives about their lives.

Repair - *Reconnection and recovery*

How to put it right, restorative work, at an appropriate time.

### **Safety Intervention**

Please see our Care & Safety Intervention Policy.

### **Being safe online**

Please see our E-safety and ICT Acceptable Use Policy.

### **Adult role modelling**

Staff are role models for all our learners therefore, it is important staff follow some simple rules:

- ✓ Model how to use your voice and stay calm. Shouting is only permitted when someone is in danger. Use other methods to attract attention such as clapping, raise your hand or



use music to gain attention. If you shout then expect learners to raise their voice. If you are not calm then your learners will not be calm.

- ✓ Model how to cope in difficult or challenging situations. Modelling means staying calm and maintaining control of the situation. Model how to diffuse situations drawing attention away from the challenging learner or those making poor choices.
- ✓ NEVER discuss incidents with another adult in the presence of the learner or other learners. Ensure that the discussion or reflection about an incident takes place in a dignified manner.
- ✓ Agree with the class what your expectations are from the outset. It is accepted that learners are more likely to stick to classroom agreements if they have had a say in developing them.

### Self-reflection

The most effective teachers are those who self-reflect and seek out reflective supervision.

Ask yourself this kind of question:

*“Could I have managed the situation any differently?”*

*“Did I say or do anything that provoked the response?”*

*“Was I confrontational?”*

*“Did I confuse the situation?”*

*“Was my reaction responsible for the outcome?”*

*‘Working with children can be one of the most demanding jobs and to enjoy it we need to think about our own emotional health and mental well-being. Thinking about your own also shows the children how much you value theirs’*

The Teaching Puzzle – Your Guide to Social and Emotional Learning, 2017.

### Policies that must be read in conjunction with this document:

- Relationships at Work Policy
- Care & Safety Intervention Policy
- Safe Touch Policy
- Safeguarding and Code of Conduct Policy
- E-Safety and ICT Acceptable Use Policy