

Pimperne CE VC  
Primary School



# Pimperne CE VC Primary School

## Relationship Policy

*Recognising the modelling and teaching of social skills and the development of good mental health, in developing children.*

Reviewed: **July 2023**



At Pimperne CE VC Primary School we aim to create a physically and psychologically safe environment within a compassionate Christian ethos whereby each child can be physically and mentally healthy, in order to reach their full learning potential. In order to achieve this we will develop strong and supportive relationships with our children, parents, volunteers and within our staff team.

To create strong relationships with our children we will remove punishment, shame, blame and harsh voices (power over) from our children's school experience and will correct them through playfulness and non-defensive interactions, favouring restorative conversations and the implementation of consequences, when rules are broken.

Our aim is to teach, model and promote the social skills needed for children to learn to manage their own relationships and behaviour. We believe that children's behaviour is a reaction to inner feelings. Therefore, we endeavour to understand the behaviour through being curious of the underlying feelings and therefore address each child's needs accordingly-thus teaching children how to manage their relationship next time.

We believe this approach to be the best way to reduce undesirable behaviour and for our children to develop a 'Growth Mindset' to take on new challenges; show perseverance and become resilient future adults, equipped to manage their future relationships. We aim to achieve this through a series of consistent systems and practices, throughout our school:-

### **Consistent Staff Approach-**

#### ***Our staff team have been trained in:-***

- Trauma Informed protective practices – PRRR. Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect
- To greet each child with a smiling face and positive personal comments to support the development of identity; of being valued and relationships. (See Relationship building skills)
- To adopt a 'way of being' using PACE-Play, Acceptance, Curiosity & Empathy. (Dan Hughes)
- To be Emotionally Available Adults. To listen and remain non-judgemental when a child has become dysregulated (See EAA poster). To Validate feelings and **Relate** to where the child is in the moment. To model and teach how to **Regulate** over whelming emotions so the child is ready to **Reflect** on their actions.
- To use 'Time in' as opposed to 'Time out' (a punishment). To teach and model self-regulation when a child has lost control (Co-regulation). Staff are trained in how a child's brain cannot access the reasoning area of the brain when a child has lost control (melt down).
- To teach and support the child to reflect on their experience and then learn through reflection-how to repair relationships through restorative conversations.



- Repair relationships when mistakes are made and say sorry.
- To teach and promote pro-social skills in the moment using equitable response for individual need. (Reference to ACE's)
- To consistently implement containment (boundaries) as set out in whole school three Rules and consequences system (see rules and consequences) and if necessary, in line with Trauma Informed School's Safe Touch policy. (see separate policy)

### **Rules & Consequences-**

***We have created three key School Rules (Children have difficulty remembering more than 3) (Paul Dix) and have developed a consequence system for when a rule might be broken. The rules and consequences are clearly illustrated and displayed to enable all children to know them and therefore, what is expected of them.***

For example- If a child were to hit another child (as developing children do) they will have broken the rule 'Care for everyone'.

1. Consequence 1 - listen to an adults **help** (not chastisement) to stop this happening again and say sorry. ***If the child were to repeat the action they would...***
2. Consequence 2 -'Time In' with class adult supporting **Regulation and Reflection** during playtime and say sorry.

***If the child were to repeat the action they would...***

3. Consequence 3 -'Time In' with senior adult e.g. Mrs Waller or Miss Lee, during playtime and say sorry. At this point parents would be consulted and an intervention e.g. ELSA may be suggested.

### **Reward systems**

***We understand, to form good relationships with our children they need to know that we notice them. Also, we know that children thrive when adults notice their efforts and achievement's at their individual level. Therefore:-***

- Staff are trained to frequently verbalise and highlight a child's strengths with ***descriptive*** praise. It can be damaging to say e.g. 'you are clever.' (See Relationship building skills)
- When a child shows exceptional effort relating to our school values or a target set, they may receive stickers or meet with another member of staff to acknowledge this.
- Our school motto-Celebrate, Believe Aspire- Children's achievements may be recognised and celebrated in Collective Worship. Children may also perform their unique talents in collective worship to inspire other children to Aspire to similar heights.
- Class Rewards-Children contribute to class rewards and a class may receive 'special time' when a certain number of rewards are reached.



- Recognition board-Children are encouraged to celebrate a classmate by adding to a display celebrating that individual.

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### **Formal Teaching of PSHE, Circle time, Mindfulness, including self-regulation**

***The teaching of good quality PSHE, where children learn about feelings and empathy, will support the development of children's relationships with each other, their siblings, their parents and carers and their future relationships.***

- Teachers teach Personal. Social. Health. Education from the Jigsaw resource.
- Children will be taught Mindfulness to learn how to relax their bodies and minds.
- Staff are trained in supporting children to **Regulate** (calm) themselves before they attempt to discuss any incident, as we understand the brain cannot take on new information when a child is dysregulated.
- We understand how important it is for a child to be heard and have the opportunity to express their views, feelings and thoughts so our school will give time to regular activities such as 'circle times' and 'What I wish my teacher knew'.

### **Mental Health**

***In order to maintain and create good relationships children need to understand how to look after their own mental health:-***

- To maximise the benefits of nature on the brain we aim to use our outside environment for learning as much as we can rain or shine
- Each term a whole day is planned for every class to learn outside
- Children will be taught how their brain works with regard to their understanding of their own emotions and subsequent reactions e.g. Fight Flight Freeze response

### **High expectations of conduct and attitude to learning for all**

***To maintain a high standard of conduct:***

- **Our school Values are: Perseverance, Courage, Compassion, Justice, Respect, Forgiveness, Trust and Selflessness.** Our staff are trained to incorporate this language in their everyday interactions to help children learn the meaning of each value in real context.
- **Class Charters**-At the beginning of a new school year children look at the ways they can maintain and learn respect for each other and their resources during their everyday interactions within their classroom and create a classroom charter as their guide.
- **'Switched On'** - is a scheme we developed at our school to further explain the skills required to become 'good learners' and 'good citizens.' Staff are trained to encourage our children



to use the 'switched on to learning' goals to emphasise good learning skills and use the phrases to support the children's sense of self and well-being through descriptive praise as they identify in them in the children.

#### **Development of the child's voice:**

***We understand the importance of children having 'a say' in what happens to them in their school life. We therefore create opportunities for our children to participate in–***

- **School council**-representatives from each class meet to present the views and ideas of the children in their class
- Children are taught through many different mediums to maximise learning opportunity.

#### **Staff Supervision to support staff relationships:**

***As a school we recognise the importance of sharing information and having the opportunity to express personal views and ideas.***

- Staff will be supported to reflect on their needs and challenges when working with individual children and have the opportunity to express their views and ideas to support the child.

#### **Parent Support to support parent/carer/school relationships-**

***We believe supporting children is a responsibility for the community around the child and therefore our door is always open:-***

- Parents are welcome to 'Parent 'Drop Ins', where home challenges can be shared and ideas can be exchanged to support parent/carers and children's relationships at home.
- Parent/carers are invited to attend workshops where Trauma Informed School's protective practices can be shared. We have developed 'The importance of Play' workshop, 'Language and Communication' workshop and 'An Anxiety' workshop for Parent with children who are anxious or nervous.
- Further support for families can be arranged through Family Link workers from the North, Family Partnership, Zone.

***Further information for Individual needs can be found in the following separate policies or pathways:***

**SEND Policy**

**Graduated Response to Individual Need**

**Social & Emotional Support Pathway**



This Relationships Policy works in conjunction with our Behaviour Policy. Together, when both are used efficiently, scientific research determines that through positive interaction, the impact of negative behaviour will be rare. It is our understanding that behaviour is the outward demonstration of feelings and/or needs. Positive interaction has been academically and scientifically proven to activate learning systems in the brain, and positive social learning can follow. Both policies are expected to be used in conjunction with each other. We, as adults, must seek to acknowledge how a child is feeling (although we can often assume) and ensure that we are non-judgmental in our response.

Our school is investing in supporting the very best possible relational health between:

- Parent and child
- Child and child
- Child and school staff
- Parent and school staff
- School staff
- School staff and senior leaders
- School staff and external agencies.

To this end, our school is committed to educational practices which Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect;

### **Protect**

- Increased 'safety cues' in all aspects of the school day; 'meet and greet' at the classroom door for each individual child and an open door policy for informal discussions with parents/carers.
- Staff trained in 'Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy' = 'PACE' modes of interaction (Hughes 2015 – See Appendix 1); being warm emphatic, playful and curious (proven to shift children out of flight/fright/freeze positions).
- Staff ensure that interactions with children are socially engaging and not socially defensive, to decrease likelihood of children relating defensively with a flight/fright/freeze response.
- A whole school commitment to cease all use of harsh voices, shouting, put downs, criticism and shaming both in direct communication with children and any negatively phrased staff communications in communal spaces. Any concerns around children will be voiced to the TIS Leads or Leadership teams discretely.
- Staff 'interactively repair' occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness. (Staff able to say they got it wrong and apologise).
- Pedagogic interventions that help staff to get to know children better on an individual basis e.g. 'I wish my teacher knew'. (What matters to them, who matters to them, their dreams, hopes). This is key to enabling children to feel safe enough to





talk, if they wish, about painful life experiences which are interfering with their ability to learn and their quality of life.

- Vulnerable children have easy and daily access to at least one named, emotionally available adult and know when and where to find that adult. Adults assume their allocated role is working within their class team - If the child does not wish to connect with the allocated adult, an alternative adult is found.
- School staff adjust expectations around vulnerable children to correspond with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This includes removing vulnerable and traumatised children in a kind and non-judgmental way from situations they are not managing well (e.g. children who are continually triggered into alarm states in the main playground can access calmer, smaller areas with emotionally regulating adults). Staff must ensure any relevant information is passed on to cover /supply / weekly provision teachers in order that they are aware, and to the Breakfast and After School Club staff.
- Provision of a clear, confidential and non-shaming system of self-referral for children's help/talk time. The nurturing of staff in such a way that the child feels truly valued and emotionally-regulated and in so doing the staff to support the child to interact throughout the school day with positive social engagement rather than defensiveness.

## Relate

- A whole-school commitment to enabling children to see themselves, their relationships and the world positively, rather than through a lens of threat, danger or self-blame.
- Vulnerable children provided with repeated relational opportunities (with emotionally-available adults) to make the shift from 'blocked trust' (not feeling psychologically safe with anyone) to trust, and from self-help to 'help seeking'.

## Regulate

- Relational interventions specifically designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable) in vulnerable children, enabling them to feel calm, soothed and safe. This is to support learning, quality of life and protect against stress-induced physical and mental illness, now and in later life.
- Evidence-based interventions that aim to repair psychological damage and brain damage caused by traumatic life experiences (See Appendix 2 – Types of Trauma/Adverse Experience), through emotionally regulating, playful, enriched adult-child interactions.
- The emotional well-being and regulating of staff is treated as a priority to prevent burnt-out, stress-related absence, or leaving the profession through stress-related illness, secondary trauma and/or feeling undervalued, blamed or shamed.



## Reflect

- Staff training and development in the art of good listening to, dialogue with, empathy with and understanding of children (instead of asking an adult series of questions/ giving lectures).
- Provision of skills and resources to support parents and staff in meaningful, empathetic conversations with vulnerable children who want to talk about their lives. This is to empower children to better manage their home situations and life in general.
- Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff (working alliance), children are given the means and opportunity to symbolise painful life experiences through images as well as words, as a key part of 'working through' these experiences and memory re-consolidation. Means include the provision of different modes of expression, e.g. art/play/drama/ music/sand/emotion worksheets/emotion cards.
- PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and psycho education as preventative input, informed by current research psychological and neuroscience) on mental health, mental ill-health (full range of specific conditions), relationships (including parenting) emotions, social media and tools for how to 'do life well'. Curricular content enables children to make informed choices about how they relate to others, how they live their lives and how they treat their brains, bodies and minds – and protect future good mental health.
- Staff development and training to help children move from 'behaving' their trauma/painful life experiences to reflecting on those experiences. Staff learn to do this through empathetic conversation, addressing children's negative self-referencing and helping them develop positive, coherent narratives about their lives.
- A positive behaviour policy based not on punishment, sanctions, resolution and interactive repair (e.g. restorative conversations).





## Appendix 1

### Information about PACE (Hughes 2015)

#### What is meant by PACE?

Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe. It is based upon how parents connect with their very young infants. As with young toddlers, with safety the child can begin to explore.

With PACE, the troubled child can start to look at himself and let others start to see him, or get closer emotionally. He can start to trust.

#### Playfulness

This is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice, like you might use when storytelling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone. It's about having fun, and expressing a sense of joy.

It is similar to parent-infant interactions when both parent and infant are delighting in being with each other and getting to know each other. Both are feeling safe and relaxed. Neither feels judged nor criticised. Playful moments reassure both that their conflicts and separations are temporary and will never harm the strength of their relationship.

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 what is positive in their life, one step at a time.

Sometimes a troubled child has given up on the idea of having good times and doesn't want to experience and share fun or enjoyment. Some children don't like affection or reject hugs. A playful stance can allow closeness but without the scary parts.

When children find it hard to regulate their feelings, anger can become rage, fear, terror, and sadness, despair. If this is the case, then children may also find it hard to regulate feelings of excitement, joy and love. Feeling these emotions can sometimes turn to anxiety.

Playfulness allows children to cope with positive feelings. It also gives hope. If you can help the child discover his own emerging sense of humour, this can help him wonder a little more about his life and how come he behaves in the ways that he does. When children laugh and giggle, they become less defensive or withdrawn and more reflective.

A playful stance adds elements of fun and enjoyment in day-to-day life and can also diffuse a difficult or tense situation. The child is less likely to respond with anger and defensiveness when the parent has a touch of playfulness in his or her discipline. While such a response would not be appropriate at the time of major misbehaviour, when applied to minor behaviours, playfulness can help keep it all in perspective.

#### Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance is at the core of the child's sense of safety.

Acceptance is about actively communicating to the child that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, their inner life. The child's inner life simply *is*; it is not *right* or *wrong*.

Accepting the child's intentions does not imply accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. The parent may be very firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour.

One hopes that the child learns that while behaviour may be criticised and limited, this is not the same as criticising the child's *self*. The child then becomes more confident that conflict and discipline involves behaviour, not the relationship with parents nor her self-worth.

Curiosity is the foundation of acceptance of whatever underlies the behaviour. Making sense of how the child has learnt to behave in certain ways can help with acceptance.



## Curiosity

Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware of their inner life, reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it to their parents or therapist. Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the child know that the adults understand.

Children often know that their behaviour was not appropriate. They often do not know why they did it or are reluctant to tell adults why.

With curiosity the adults are conveying their intention to simply understand *why* and to help the child with understanding. The adult's intentions are to truly understand and help the child, not to lecture or convey that the child's inner life is *wrong* in some way.

Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child: "*What do you think was going on? 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.

It is not interpretation or fact gathering. It's just about getting to know the child and letting her know that.

Curiosity must be communicated without annoyance about the behaviour. Being curious can, for example, include an attitude of being sad rather than angry when the child makes a mistake. A light curious tone and stance can get through to a child in a way that anger cannot.

You might make guesses about what a child may be thinking and feeling, saying this aloud, and keeping it connected to the present. It can be about having a conversation, almost with yourself, with the child in the room, without anticipating a response.

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. As curiosity is non-judgemental, this can help the child to be open to how she, and other people, are thinking and feeling. Curiosity lets the child stay open and engaged in conversations.

Children then start to reflect upon their own inner life with their parent and therapist and start to understand themselves. As the understanding deepens, the child can discover that her behaviour does not reflect something *bad* inside her, but rather a thought, feeling, perception, or motive that was stressful, frightening, or confusing and could only be expressed through her behaviour.

As the child communicates this to the adults, the need for the behaviour may reduce, and with that the behaviour itself. The child's feelings about the behaviour may change, with less defensiveness and shame but more guilt, leading to less of the behaviour.

## Empathy

Empathy lets the child feel *the adult's* compassion for him/her. Being empathic means the adult actively showing the child that the child's inner life is important to the adult and he or she wants to be with the child in her hard times. With empathy, when the child is sad or in distress the adult is feeling the sadness and distress with her and lets the child know that.

The adult is demonstrating that he or she knows how difficult an experience is for the child. The adult is telling the child that she will not have to deal with the distress alone.

The adult will stay with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support, and will not abandon him/her when he/she needs the adult the most.

The adult is also communicating strength, love and commitment, with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much. Together they will get through it.

## The impact of communication using the principles of PACE

PACE focuses on the whole child, not simply the behaviour. It helps children be more secure with the adults and reflect upon themselves, their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, building the skills that are so necessary for maintaining a successful and satisfying life. The child discovers that they are doing the best that they can, and are not *bad* or *lazy* or *selfish*. Problems diminish as the need for them reduces.



Through PACE and feeling safer, children discover that they can now do better. They learn to rely on adults, particularly their parents, and trust them to truly know them. They learn that their parents can look after them in a way that they could never do on their own.

When children experience the adults doing the best they can to understand them and trying to work out together more effective ways for the child to understand, make sense of and manage their emotions, thoughts and behaviour they start to believe that the adults really will keep on trying until things get better for all of them.

For adults, using PACE most of the time, they can reduce the level of conflict, defensiveness and withdrawal that tends to be ever present in the lives of troubled children. Using PACE enables the adult to see the strengths and positive features that lie underneath more negative and challenging behaviour.



## Appendix 2

### Types of Trauma or Adverse Experiences

1. Being exposed to verbal abuse, humiliation, threat
2. Physical abuse
3. Sexual abuse
4. Felt unloved unimportant and not special to anyone
5. Felt that parents didn't love or understand or help with problems or worries
6. Neglected- unwashed, no clean clothes, not protected, parents drunk or high
7. Separation and Divorce
8. Bereavement
9. Witnessed to violence, threatening behaviour and or with a knife or gun, towards mother or carer
10. Living with a problem drinker or drug abuser
11. Living with someone who was depressed or mentally ill, or did a family member attempt suicide?
12. Did a family member go to prison?
13. Did you experience multiple school or home moves?
14. Were you ever bullied attacked or experienced discrimination (e.g. race, religion ethnicity)
15. Witness a sibling being abused, bullied
16. Witness to threat with a gun or knife or actually attacked with gun or knife
17. Did you ever have to leave your home country or your home because it was not safe to stay there?
18. Did you ever live in an unsafe neighbourhood?
19. Have you ever been extremely ill or injured?
20. Have you ever been taken in to foster care?
21. Experiencing significant changes eg a pandemic, prolonged school closure

