

Policy Name: Relationships Policy

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Member of staff responsible: Ian Read, Claire Bradley, Emma Wayper, Jayne Senior

Next Review date: See Governor Hub Date

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Governors Present: Strategic Group – Lee Hilton Brammer, Margaret Anderson, Sally Pearse, Jason Hutson, Ian Read, Claire Bradley, Gillie Lane, Kerry Heap, Emma Wayper

Kind words are short and easy to speak but their echoes are endless - Mother Theresa.

At Watercliffe Meadow we know that relationships are the basis for everything, developing and sustaining positive relationships is central to the success of our school.

We believe that trusting, honest and caring relationships must exist between all members of the school community and most importantly between adults and children.

We use the Trauma Informed Schools approach and our Golden Model (see attached flowchart) to build these relationships. We have two members of staff trained by Positive Regard and relational practice is at the heart of all we do.

'It is the small stuff, the daily acts of care, the perpetual generosity of spirit, the interest that you show in (Students') lives that matters most – what my friend Hywel Roberts calls botheredness.'
(When the Adults Change, Everything Changes by Paul Dix)

Everyone at Watercliffe Meadow understands that they have a responsibility to support the growth of positive relationships, that constant maintenance is required to maintain them and that there will be times when relationships rupture but that we all have a duty to help repair these.

Staff all know that *behaviour is understood as communication* and that socially unacceptable behaviour is as a result of an unmet need. All staff have been trained in ways to be relational with children, and each other, that helps everyone work together in a positive and productive way to support the emotional needs of our children and nurture positive behaviour.

Our approach to relationships is based on the teachings of Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK), Positive Regard and the Jenny Mosley Golden Model. It is underpinned by educational practices which 'Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect'.

Protect

Our priority is to ensure that children are safe. In this context that means not only physical safety but also within the relational environment. We reduce the stress for the child by creating a warm and calm environment

that is consistent, accepting and optimises social engagement. We do not place children in situations that they cannot manage and focus on creating both physical and psychological safety.

Specifically;

- All adults are taught about the impact of toxic stress on learning, wellbeing and behaviour.
- Regular whole school training to ensure that all adults have a comprehensive understanding of PACE (Hughes 2016), whole school awareness of Social Engagement Theory (Porges 2017) and Panksepp's Emotional Systems (2012).
- Ensuring that there are emotionally available adults in school and that children know who they are and where to find them.
- Well established listening systems are used within school – circle time, bubble time, 'I wish my teacher knew,' feelings scores and zones of regulation to make sure that all children feel listened to.
- Adults are aware of facial mobilisation and are expected to present as open, warm and engaged at all times.
- Adults are consistent and adjust their expectations around vulnerable children to meet their needs. They ensure that their interactions are socially engaging and not socially defensive.
- All staff understand the importance of being curious when with children.
- Staff are on the yard every morning to ensure contact with families.
- All children are greeted on the door at the start of each day.
- All children have an emotional 'check in' at the start of each morning and afternoon.
- We have numerous ways in which we support the emotional well-being of adults (see Support Network flowchart). Adult only spaces and time to reflect is encouraged. We have a staff wellbeing team and 'golden weeks' throughout the year. Staff are all also accessing 'Skills for life' training through the chimp management model.

Relate

At Watercliffe Meadow, our understanding of 'relate' is underpinned by the knowledge that the ability to form meaningful relationships is fundamental to mental health and happiness. We understand that relationships are crucial in promoting the optimal development of the frontal lobes of the brain associated with the executive functions key to emotional regulation, emotional intelligence, planning, problem solving and ultimately learning. There will be children in our schools who, for many reasons, have not benefitted from these positive relational experiences. Research indicates that the brain retains plasticity and repeated, positive, relational experiences can repair and reverse this cycle.

Our school provides everyone, including staff and students 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'.

- All adults are attachment aware.
- All adults know about the key relational skills (Affect Attunement, Empathy, Containment and Calming and Soothing) and use these when supporting all children.
- Adults ensure that children have daily positive relational experiences to help them to become trusting, help-seeking individuals. PACE is embedded in all interactions.
- Children and adults are helped to express their emotions and are not shamed or undermined when acknowledging their anxieties.
- Staff are curious about the functions of behaviour.
- Adults have daily opportunities to engage with each other in environments that are supportive and pleasant.

We have a range of interventions to support pupils – daily check ins, zones of regulation, self-esteem work, Lego therapy, theraplay, sand play therapy.

Regulate

We know that leaving children (and adults) in a state of toxic stress can result in physical ill health as well as making it impossible to engage productively in the activities taking place around them. We have a duty to support children and adults in school to ensure that they are not left in toxic stress. We know that one of the most powerful ways to do this is to talk to children and help them to talk about what is bothering them. At Watercliffe Meadow, we are committed to doing this through the relationships we have with children and each other.

Specifically;

- Trained Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) staff to support all students with Emotional Literacy – enabling them to communicate their feelings without expressing through anger or behaviours that challenge
- Providing children with time-in with an adult who they trust to help them calm down, ready to reflect
- Teaching children strategies to support them in self-regulation.
- Ensuring that interactions are emotionally regulating, playful and enriched.
- Ensuring that we do not engage in socially defensive behaviour with children, especially when correcting behaviour.
- We provide and value staff-only spaces, designed to promote regulation and reflection.
- Adults are aware of each other's needs and support each other through rich, trusting relational experiences.

Reflect

At Watercliffe Meadow, we believe that children and adults need to be able to 'reflect' on their feelings in order to fully understand them and their behaviour. Without the opportunity to do this we are far more likely to act out our feelings. Reflection enables us to make sense of our life, develop language for emotions and have a coherent narrative that makes sense of what we are feeling and what has happened to us. There are times following troubling incidents that children and adults need to be helped to reflect in order to make sense of them and if necessary, to repair ruptures in relationships that may have resulted. Such reflection takes place *only once the child is calm and regulated*, with a trusted and emotionally available adult who is able to *offer non-judgemental support*. We recognise this as being 'connection before correction' (Dan Hughes 2017).

Specifically:

- Staff are trained in the art of good listening with a particular focus on empathy and acceptance of the feeling if not the behaviour.
- Children have opportunities to work with trusted adults to make sense of painful experiences through creative, therapeutic approaches.
- Behaviour is understood to be a form of communication and adults respond to socially unacceptable behaviour by asking not 'what did you do' but '*what has happened to you?*'
- Restorative conversations take place when children are ready and able to think about what has happened and are supported to repair.
- PSHE is informed by current research and teaches children about mental health, emotions, relationships and how to live life well.

Roles and Responsibilities

Every adult that works within Watercliffe Meadow, whether employed or voluntary is required to conduct themselves in keeping with this policy. It is the responsibility of all adults in the school to model the behaviours described and ensure that they are supporting the promotion of positive behaviour. New staff, visitors and volunteers will be expected to read the policy and training will be given to enable them to understand the principles upon which the practice is based.

