

# Relational Behaviour Policy Framework

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# 1. Introduction, Aims and Purpose

The aim of this document is to support schools and settings to move towards a more relational, restorative and inclusive approach that promotes the social and emotional wellbeing of the whole school community. The guidance supplements training available on NYES to support schools to develop relational approaches to behaviour and discipline.

Many children and young people experiencing SEMH needs find it difficult to engage in a ‘reward and consequence’ behaviour system as it doesn’t offer them emotional support around how to express themselves in a more appropriate way; these are the pupils who find themselves in detention or excluded time and again, exacerbating their SEMH needs. For children and young people who have more developed SEMH needs (for example, those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences) behaviourist approaches often serve to re-traumatise and do not teach how to express emotions in a more appropriate manner.

A more effective approach would combine setting clear expectations of behaviour alongside the promotion of social and emotional well-being. In schools and settings where a more restorative, relational approach has been adopted, indicators of poor SEMH (such as high exclusion rates, poor attendance and disruptive behaviour necessitating detention or other sanctions) are much reduced or non-existent.

We have designed the following materials to support schools to establish an inclusive culture built on trusting relationships between pupils and staff. This document advocates an approach that fosters positive relationships, offers pupils opportunities to right wrongs and gives time and space for pupils and staff to reflect on their behaviour and find alternative ways of expressing themselves.

## 2. Principles and Approach

“Developing good relationships and positive behaviour in the classroom, playground and wider community is essential for creating the right environment for effective learning and teaching. Where children and young people feel included, respected, safe and secure and when their achievements and contributions are valued and celebrated, they are more likely to develop self-confidence, resilience and positive views about themselves. This applies equally to all staff in the learning community.”

*Scottish Government Guidance (2013)*

The intention of this document is to advocate a general, relationship-based approach and provide a framework to support schools to build inclusive policies, processes and practice.

Crucial to the adoption of a relationship-based approach is the creation of an inclusive and positive school ethos around behaviour. The School Leadership Team must drive this in order for it to be universally adopted and embedded across the whole school community. This guidance promotes the idea that the SEMH needs of all should be at the heart of the school and leaders adopt a whole system approach to inclusive learning and achievement for all.

The approach set out in this and other key documents (such as the NYCC *Ladder of Intervention*) is guided by a few specific principles. These are that:

- Behaviour must be recognised as communication. Specifically, conscious or unconscious communication of a social or emotional need that requires both validation and a response
- Responses should be personalised. In a relationship-based approach, equality is about all pupils getting the response they need not all pupils getting the same response
- Attitudes towards challenging behaviour should be non-judgmental. All adults in school should try to respond in a way that focuses on the feelings and emotions that might drive certain behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself. Pupils with behavioural difficulties need to be regarded as vulnerable (requiring support) rather than troublesome (requiring punishment)

- The school ethos must promote strong relationships between staff, pupils and home, within a positive school culture and climate that fosters connection, inclusion, respect and value for all members of the school community
- Boundaries and expectations around behaviour should be rock solid. Moving away from a behaviourist approach does not mean abandoning expectations, routines or structure but rather creating an educational environment that is high in nurture and structure. Pupils need predictable routines, expectations and responses to behaviour, modelled appropriately within the context of a safe and caring school environment. Natural rewards and consequences attached to certain behaviours can be made explicit without the need to enforce punitive sanctions that can shame and isolate, leading to a cycle of negative behaviour
- Not all behaviours are a matter of choice
- Behaviour must be viewed in context. If a pupil is presenting with challenging behaviour, it is likely that this is a relational communication pattern
- Parental engagement and involvement is crucial when addressing and planning SEMH support

### 3. A Graduated Approach

“An ethos and culture where good mental health is valued, prioritised and supported for all adults, children and young people is essential. Schools should prioritise an absolute commitment and drive to develop a physically, socially and emotionally safe and secure environment for both adults and children/young people.”

*NYCC Ladder of Intervention (2019)*

The North Yorkshire *Ladder of Intervention* was introduced in response to non-statutory guidance from the DfE (Mental Health and Behaviour In Schools, DfE 2018). It advocates that schools take a graduated approach to SEMH needs and contains tools and guidance schools can use to support pupils at the earliest opportunity. It is designed to ensure those requiring additional support receive it as early as possible and can identify a person within the school they can trust and rely upon. It also provides a framework for ensuring that when school based strategies and support have been exhausted, schools can easily navigate support from a range of services across the Local Authority.

The many tools and approaches advocated in *The Ladder of Intervention* complement the relational, restorative and inclusive approach promoted by this guidance and so they should be considered together when developing school policies and procedures that promote the social and emotional wellbeing of the whole school community. There is evidence that where pupils are learning within a school

that has adopted a more relational behaviour policy, SEMH needs are not as challenging. However, such pupils still require support through a graduated approach to their needs.

It is also important that there is whole school awareness and recognition of the range of SEMH indicators to ensure it is not simply the pupils who display highly observable behaviours (such as non-compliance, verbal and physical aggression, etc.) that are identified for support. Pupils who exhibit more passive behaviours (such as being withdrawn, isolated, disengaged, distracted, anxious, quiet, etc.) sometimes go unnoticed because their behaviour is less obviously challenging. Early intervention is imperative for addressing both active and passive behaviours. The graduated approach set out in *The Ladder of Intervention* will help to identify vulnerable pupils and the specific approaches they will need. A relational behaviour policy will also actively support these pupils.

### 4. Developing a School Relational Behaviour Policy

“Schools may be the optimum sites for buffering the impact of stress, building resilience and enhancing individual capacities for learning.”

*Mind the Mind: Understanding the Links Between Stress, Emotional Well-Being and Learning in Educational Contexts Michael Nagel (2009)*

School communities across the Local Authority are diverse and face very different challenges. Yet, all schools would benefit from introducing a consistent and inclusive approach to relationship – rather than behaviour – management. Indeed, by adopting the principles advocated here, it is likely that more challenging behaviour will reduce, which could have benefits for teaching and learning, staff morale and pupil achievement. Schools in North Yorkshire that have shifted away from sanction-based responses (that aim to *manage* behaviour) and towards a more relational approach have noticed the development of a more respectful climate, better relationships amongst pupils and staff, greater honesty and willingness to accept responsibility when things go wrong and a calmer, quieter and more productive learning environment. This matches evidence from research (see Appendix D).

#### Auditing Current Practice and Attitudes

To ensure that each school can meaningfully embed the principles and approach advocated in this guidance, careful thought and reflection should be given to current school strengths and areas of development. Use of an audit is a good starting place to review current whole school practice, pinpoint areas of strength and identify development areas. For an audit to be successful, it must be shared with all stakeholders, including Governors. It may also be helpful to involve or seek feedback from external partners, including the Local Authority. *Examples of audits that could be used to measure current practice and attitudes have been signposted in Appendix A.*

#### Raising Awareness and Sharing Information

Prior to completing any audit, it will be useful to provide some context to colleagues by highlighting the principles of relational approaches to behaviour management. *A brief guide to Relational Behaviour Management and Restorative Approaches has also been included in Appendix B.* This can be used to

discuss the approach at a staff meeting. When choosing to adopt this approach, it might also be useful to make contact with another local school that has done so successfully. Local schools that have adopted and embedded a relational, restorative approach, report:

- A more respectful climate
- A shift away from sanction-based responses that aim to ‘manage’ behaviour, toward a more relational approach
- Better relationships amongst children and staff
- People being more honest and willing to accept responsibility
- People feeling more supported when things go wrong
- A calmer, quieter and more productive learning environment

**Improvement Planning and Delivering Training**

Once an audit has been completed, action planning and practice review should follow. It is worthwhile to consider what training is required at this point. Several providers offer relational behaviour training (including Pivotal Education) although it is not necessary to seek this out so long as key staff (including the leadership team) can confidently take the principles and use them to inform planning, develop training and policy and, ultimately, change practice.

**Developing a Policy**

It is vital that schools develop their own policies that reflect their unique characteristics and the needs of their pupils and community.

*However, to support schools to do this, an example policy is included in Appendix C.*

The key difference between a relational approach and a standard behaviour policy is the bespoke nature of the former. A generic behaviour policy, perhaps found using a search engine, will have very general rules, rewards and sanctions. There is nothing inherently wrong with clarity in this area. Indeed, pupils need predictable routines, expectations and responses to behaviour, but these must be modelled appropriately within the context of a safe and caring school environment. Natural rewards and consequences attached to certain behaviours can be made explicit without the need to enforce punitive sanctions attached to arbitrary rules.

Therefore, staff members charged with developing a relational behaviour policy will need to decide which areas (including rules and what happens when the rules are broken) to pick out or adapt to reflect their school’s ethos and practice. Any new relational behaviour policy should be developed and reviewed in consultation with pupils, staff, parents/ carers and governors. As part of this, it will be useful to develop a policy statement that can be shared with the school community and appropriately displayed to ensure key principles are endorsed and evident in practice.

Words have energy and power with the ability to help, heal and honour but also to hinder, harm and humiliate. Therefore, they should always be chosen carefully! A relational approach requires the use of positive language, starting with the policy. Use of ‘consequences’ rather than ‘sanctions’ or ‘punishments’ is an obvious but important distinction. Talking of ‘expectations’ rather

than ‘rules’ is also key. A helpful starting point might be to identify which areas of your current behaviour policy are compatible with relational, restorative approaches and which are not.

Schools should also be careful when wording the language around choice and should try to avoid simplistic labels, such as making ‘good or bad choices’ when referring to specific behaviours or incidents. As stated in the principles (above), not all behaviour is simply a matter of choice. Making a ‘positive choice’ usually requires being in a calm frame of mind. ‘Bad choices’ are usually the result of emotional dysregulation, which is not a choice but a condition that – with support to self-regulate within a supportive environment – can be alleviated.

*Additional information and signposting to relevant research to inform a relational behaviour policy can be found in Appendix D.*

**Communicating the Vision**

Once a policy has been developed, it is vital that key messages are embedded into practice and shared with all members of the school community, including pupils, governors and parents/carers. Informative displays, parent/carers evenings, assemblies, newsletters and the school website and social media can all be used to promote the relational approach and its benefits.



# 5. Appendices

## Appendix A – Examples of audits that could be used to measure current practice and attitudes

### National Children’s Bureau Audit

*A whole school framework for emotional well-being and mental health A self-assessment and improvement tool for school leaders* by Sue Stirling and Dr Hilary Emery (2016)

This comprehensive tool provides a good starting point to identify actions to prevent, identify and respond effectively to the mental health of their staff and pupils through a ‘targeted’ approach. It proactively promotes a model of positive social and emotional wellbeing through a universal approach.

[https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Policy\\_docs/Briefings/NCB%20School%20Well%20Being%20Framework%20Leaders%20Tool%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Policy_docs/Briefings/NCB%20School%20Well%20Being%20Framework%20Leaders%20Tool%20FINAL.pdf)

### Young Minds Academic Resilience Audit

*Academic Resilience – beating the odds for better results* is an approach for schools devised by Lisa Williams and Professor Angie Hart and adopted by YoungMinds, based on Professor Hart’s collaborative resilience work at the University of Brighton.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/what-we-do/our-projects/academic-resilience>

### Compass Buzz

Schools that have accessed the free training and support from Compass Buzz will have access to an interactive resilience framework for pupils, staff and parents/carers, which may be useful.

<https://www.compass-uk.org/services/north-yorkshire-compass-buzz>

# Appendix B – A brief guide to Relational Behaviour Management and Restorative Approaches

Inclusive Education

Relational Behaviour Management and Restorative Approaches

Managing behaviour can be one of the most time-consuming activities undertaken in schools. A much more effective approach combines the setting of clear expectations for behaviour alongside the promotion of social and emotional well-being and positive, restorative relationships. In schools and settings where a more restorative, relational approach has been adopted, indicators of poor SEMH (such as high exclusion rates, poor attendance and disruptive behaviour necessitating detention or other sanctions) and time spent resolving difficulties are much reduced.

What are Restorative Approaches?

The **Restorative Approach** offers school leaders an alternative way of thinking about addressing discipline and behavioural issues and a consistent framework for responding to these issues. However, it is much more than a behaviour management tool. Restorative Approaches are values based and needs led. They must be part of a broader ethos or school culture that identifies strong, mutually respectful relationships and a cohesive school community as the foundations upon which teaching and learning can flourish.

Authoritarian vs Restorative

There are a few key differences between the more traditional, authoritarian approach and a restorative model of discipline. Both systems focus on accountability but where the authoritarian approach looks for someone to punish, the restorative approach looks to understand why something went wrong and to put things right so everyone can move on and no one is left damaged.

<b>Authoritarian Focus / Restorative Focus</b>
<b>Rule-breaking / Harm done to individuals</b>
<b>Blame / Responsibility</b>
<b>Adversarial / Dialogue and Negotiation</b>
<b>Punishment to deter / Repair and reparation</b>
<b>Impersonal / Interpersonal</b>

What is a Restorative Response?

When things go wrong, those affected are invited to share what happened, to explore the impact on those involved (i.e. who has been affected and in what ways they have been affected) and find out what needs to happen to put things right (or to make things better in the future). This approach will not only resolve the dispute but will help stop further issues arising. Just as with a more authoritarian approach, accountability is vital but with a restorative approach this is about things being put right, not punishment.

What are the key elements of Relational Practice?

**Relational Practice** is built on cohesive values, a sound understand of needs of the community and an ethos that identifies strong, mutually respectful relationships as the foundation upon which learners can thrive.

In schools that have take a restorative, relational approach, learners are given a lot of responsibility for decision-making on issues that affect their lives, their learning and their experience of school.

Restorative Approaches build upon a few fairly basic principles and values, including:

- **Genuineness** (honesty, openness, sincerity)
- **Respect** (valuing each other for who they are)
- **Empathy** (understand another’s experience)
- **Responsibility** (being accountable)
- **Growth Mindset** (Optimism that people can learn and change for the better)

These principles and values should be practised in informal, day-to-day interactions with others. Teachers (and all adults in school) should model effective ways of building and maintaining emotionally healthy relationships and promote helpful, sociable attitudes. This will help to provide a positive social learning context that may not be available to some young people in other areas of their lives.

What needs to be restored?

Anything from more effective communication, a friendship, understanding of a different perspective to respect, understanding the impact of one’s behaviour on others or reparation for material loss or damage. Something may need to be restored within an individual, e.g. a sense of security, self-confidence, self-respect or dignity. Ultimately, the process should result in the restoration of everyone’s place within class, peer group or school community.

# Appendix C – An Example Policy

## School motto/slogan/vision statement

(Your policy should reflect your school’s ethos. This section should include something around your school’s values/ principles and the philosophy behind your decision to adopt a Relational/Restorative Behaviour Policy).

**Example 1:** “School A has a holistic approach to education, valuing all learning in and out of the classroom. We focus on building relationships between children and staff and children with their peers to support positive working and social relationships.”

**Example 2:** “Philosophy of the behaviour policy at Primary A: At Primary School A, we recognise that understanding our emotions is a key aspect of understanding and managing behaviour. Through our relational behaviour policy, both children and adults are able to both manage their behaviour and to create an environment that is conducive to learning. We understand that part of our role, in partnership with home, is to help pupils to understand what is right and wrong. Underpinning the behaviour policy is the belief that everyone can learn to self-manage/self-regulate their own emotions and behaviour. Through this we encourage reflective thinking and do not accept prejudice in any form. Ultimately, we wish to give our children confidence about their capacity to think for themselves and to make sense of their own lives and experiences, hopefully beyond school and into the “real world”.

## Policy Statement

**Example wording:** This policy is based on guidance provided by North Yorkshire County Council and has included input from: members of staff, representatives from the governing body, parents and carers, pupils / students, etc. [adapt as appropriate].

## Policy Scope

**Example wording:** This policy is for all staff, pupils / students, parents and carers, governors, visitors and partner agencies working within the school and provides guidelines and procedures as to how our school supports and responds to behaviour.

## Policy Aims and Objectives

**Example wording:** Our school is committed to the emotional mental health and well-being of its staff, pupils / students and parents/ carers. We wish to work towards this in all aspects of school life, and to provide an ethos, environment and curriculum that supports the social, emotional and mental health of the whole school community. We acknowledge that members of the school community will have very different experiences and views on behaviour. However, the aim of our Relational Behaviour Policy is to bring us all together to adhere to some basic key principles and practices that reflect our school ethos.

**Example 1:** School A treats **all** children with **unconditional respect** and has **high expectations** for both **adults’ and children’s learning** and **social** behaviours. Our school is calm and purposeful. It prides itself on excellent relationships and a high level of

care. We understand that positive behaviour can be taught and needs to be modelled. We understand that negative behaviour can signal a need for support which we will provide without diluting our expectations. We aim:

- To maintain a caring, orderly community in which effective learning can take place and where there is mutual respect between members
- To help children develop a sense of worth, identity and achievement
- To help all children to become self-disciplined, able to accept responsibility for their own actions and make positive choices
- To develop in all children the ability to listen to others; cooperate and to appreciate other ways of thinking and behaving

We hope to achieve these aims through a school behaviour policy based on **rights, responsibilities and respect**. Praise, rewards, privileges, and positive role-modelling support the development of **self-discipline** and the capacity to make **positive choices**.

**Example 2:** The Relationships Policy at Primary School A is a statement of good practice that contributes to the positive ethos at our school, in line with the school’s mission statement “Learning to Lead Our Lives”. The policy promotes high quality learning relationships for all. At Primary School A we have clear systems and structures to support staff in knowing their students well. We have an approach to learning that builds security through recognising strengths in learning and celebrates success leading to good classroom relationships. Our systems and structures make a large school personal, providing the scaffolding for good learning and for independence and character building.

- **Our ethos** builds relationships by recognising every child, building self-esteem and self-awareness.
- **Our curriculum** allows each individual to follow a pathway of learning that builds on their interests and strengths and supports their academic aspiration.
- **Our approach to learning** supports recognition and inclusion for all within the local, national and international community.
- **Our work with the community** builds sustainability in relationships and connects our students with relevant learning opportunities as well as supporting the maxim “it takes a village to raise a child”.

## Policy Links

(You should add links to other relevant policies at this point, ensuring that all other policies reinforce the ethos/ philosophy of a relational approach)

**Example:** This policy links to the following other policies we hold in school:

- PSHE Education Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Equality Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Restraint Policy
- E-safety policy
- Cyber-bullying policy
- De-escalation and positive-handling Policy
- Child running-off policy



Roles and Responsibilities

(You should emphasise that building and maintaining positive relationships and supporting the development of positive behaviour) it is not just the role or responsibility of a few key staff; it is a **shared responsibility**).

*Example 1: “Maintaining good behaviour is the responsibility of **all** staff, governors and parents. We expect our staff and parents to be a good role model for our children as we develop their attitudes for all aspects of life”.*

(Outline roles and responsibilities in dealing with behaviour, including the role of the governing body; the role of the Headteacher and senior leadership team; the role of parents/carers/guardians, etc. It is also helpful to add different responsibilities across the school, aside from lead members of staff, e.g. the role of form tutors, classroom teachers, subject leaders, lunchtime supervisors, etc.

Approach

(You should refer to THIS document and the information in the other appendices to describe the rationale for your approach so that users can gain an understanding of the principles behind a Relational Policy. You should also lay out very clearly the specific procedures, processes and practices you will adopt, which will be unique to your school. This is where a traditional, behaviour policy would list rewards and sanctions. You can add such detail here but the emphasis should be on restoring relationships and not describing punishments).

Policy Review Process

(There should be a continuous – and at least annual – process of review of your school’s Relational Policy. This should involve an ongoing cycle that involves applying restorative principles into practice and policy development, disseminating through frequent training, reviewing effectiveness/identifying weaknesses and/or lack of clarity, problem-solving to further develop practice).

*Example Wording: “School A’s Relational Behaviour Policy functions as a practice guide and is therefore reviewed whenever issues arise which generate new ways to articulate our approach, and otherwise annually”.*

Appendix D – Research and Resources

Attachment

Attachment is a relational bond. This bond is intended to serve two functions; a protective function and an exploratory function. The **protective function** is intended to keep the small, weak, defenceless, vulnerable child close to a grown-up, using proximity-seeking behaviours. The **exploratory function** is intended to allow the grown-up to serve as a safe base from which to go off and explore. Babies, toddlers and children use their parents/carers in this way. As children, we lay down **templates** for how the world works. This includes how we feel about ourselves, how we feel about other people and how we feel about the world. If we’ve had attachment to adults who were attuned to our needs, empathised with our feelings and emotional states, and who have been reliable, consistent and able to repair their relationship with us when things go wrong, our template will be secure and positive.

However, if a child grows up experiencing relational traumas and losses, parental addiction, domestic violence, different kinds of abuse, neglect and so on, they may develop insecure patterns of attachment and grow up feeling negatively about themselves, about other people and about the world in general. Their behaviour may communicate their pressing need to survive in what they experience as a hostile world, even when immediate threat is no longer present. It is these children for whom attachment aware policies and practice (such as a relational behaviour policy) will be essential. For further information and resources, visit: [www.attachmentleadnetwork.net](http://www.attachmentleadnetwork.net)

PACE

The PACE approach (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) is a useful tool to support all learners and well worth considering when building a relational behaviour policy. For more information, visit: <https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace>

Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching is an approach that focuses on the development of emotional regulation skills through supportive relationships. It can assist pupils, parents/carers and professionals to better understand and regulate their emotions in order to manage strong feelings and take ownership of their behaviour. Emotion Coaching offers practical steps for responding to behaviour and is linked to key attachment concepts, such as the importance of connection. Over four steps, the emotion coach attempts to recognise and calm emotions, before moving to validate the feelings being experienced, set limits on any unhelpful behaviour and problem-solve with the child/young person to move forward.

Research indicates that staff in schools feel more confident to manage behaviour when they have increased knowledge of the link between behaviour and emotion. As such, this guidance advocates integrating Emotion Coaching into everyday practice when working with pupils to support the development of positive behaviour, resilience and community well-being.



Emotion Coaching training is available on request from the North Yorkshire EP team, via NYES. To enquire about training, please visit: <https://nyestraining.co.uk>

For more information about Emotion Coaching, visit: [www.emotioncoachinguk.com](http://www.emotioncoachinguk.com) or [www.ac-education.co.uk](http://www.ac-education.co.uk)

**Other Useful Sources of Information**

**Restorative Justice Council**  
<http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk>

**Transforming Conflict (Restorative Approaches)**  
<http://www.transformingconflict.org>

The Restorative Classroom: Using Restorative Approaches to Foster Effective Learning. Belinda Hopkins (2011). Optimus Education ISBN: 1906517290

Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice. Richard Hendry (2009). Routledge ISBN-10: 0415544270

Mediation and Restoration in Circle Time. Teresa Bliss (2008) Milton Keynes; Teach to Inspire: a division of Optimus Publishing ISBN: 978-1-906517-05-2

Restorative Solutions: Making it Work. Colin Newton and Helen Mahaffey (2008). Inclusive Solutions UK Limited ISBN-10: 0954635140

Just Schools: A Whole School Approach To Restorative Justice. (2004) Belinda Hopkins. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN: 1843101327

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