



## Relationships Policy

This policy is reviewed biannually by the Provision Committee.

To be read in conjunction with but not limited to:

Staff handbook, and other relevant policies and procedures

### History of Document

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## SENDAT Relationships Policy

### 1. STATEMENT OF INTENT

SENDAT is a Multi Academy Trust specialising in the care and education of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This policy should be considered in the light of this context and the complexity of need that is accommodated within the Trust and its constituent schools / Alternative Provisions (APs).

### 2. Relationship Policy

The SENDAT relationship policy embodies our culture and ethos developed through a Trauma Informed approach where relationship is at the heart of every interaction and supports the whole Trust community to include our staff, our pupils, parent(s)/carers and all other agencies working with SENDAT.

### 3. Purpose

At SENDAT we believe in providing every child with the opportunity to experience an outstanding education academically, emotionally and socially. We strongly believe that by identifying the barriers to learning, we can provide an inspiring and relevant curriculum that considers the whole child and provides the necessary support for pupils to achieve, develop and reach their true potential.

We are committed to ensuring that all our Trusts/APs develop a Trauma and Mental Health Informed Approach to ensure that all our pupils develop positive mental health and resilience, enabling them to fully engage in life and learning. There is a growing body of research and understanding of the impact of Childhood Adversity Experiences (ACE) on long term mental and physical health and the protective factors that mitigate the potential impact. It is our aim to maximise the protective factors of Trust by creating an environment of safety that has strong, positive and supportive relationships at its heart.



Our priority as a Trust is to ensure psychological and environmental safety first; it is the foundation on which everything else depends. The ability to learn without fear in order to relate to others and engage in learning. Through a trauma informed approach our focus is not only the physical environment, but the relational environment and the very culture and ethos of our Trust. This requires emotionally regulated and available adults who can provide essential calming and containing of our pupils, their parents/carers or each other when they are overwhelmed by an event, a situation or their feelings. In some circumstances, this may mean that literal physical containment of each other to keep all safe.

In practical terms it means that we try to not place the pupils in situations that they are unable to manage. It is vital that our response to their distress and often behaviours that challenge is supportive and focusses on how best to support the brains frontal lobe functioning to be able to relate to the world and each other in a healthier way, rather than employing punitive sanctions that are detrimental and inappropriate to the child's development. If we are truly to protect our pupils and each other, our Trust approach needs to reflect a differentiated and developmentally appropriate response to behaviour by recognising that behaviour represents an unmet need, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and/or particular neurocognitive or neurochemical profile.

#### **4. Whole Trust Approach**

As a Trust we have embraced a wider definition of trauma to encompass any event that is experienced as frightening, painful or out of control, characterised by there being no one available to support or mitigate the impact of traumatic toxic stress. As such, even the day-to-day exposure to events such as divorce, loss of a loved one, illness within the family, moving house can be experienced as traumatic. Children and adults can be affected by toxic stress. Providing an environment that has safety, connection and compassion at its heart ensures that our Trust environments never unwittingly re-traumatise any of our Trust members and act to maximise protective factors through the conscious use of our relationships.

All adults in our Trust are aware of how to create an ethos and environment of both physical and psychological safety and have the skills to respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress. We fully understand and support the impact that connection with a trusted, emotionally available adult has on a child and seek to maximise this for those who are identified as requiring additional support.

Our positive behaviour management and relationship policies reflect a trauma informed approach and our behaviour strategies are both developmentally and trauma- informed. We do not operate a 'zero tolerance' or 'one size fits all' approach to distressed behaviour, however, we have high expectations of behaviour for all and support is offered to those having difficulty meeting those expectations.

We have specially trained Trauma and Mental Health Informed Practitioners to support children who are identified as requiring additional support. This support may be offered in 1:1 sessions, in class or in small groups. Our aim is to support children to make sense of their experience, find ways to manage their emotions and feelings and ensure that they maintain the capacity to learn, despite difficult events that may happen for them.

Children are identified for additional support by a number of methods. We universally screen the emotional and social development of some of our children using Motional three times every year. This assesses key executive functions and skills, emotional literacy and self-regulation. Children do not always present through their behaviour when life is becoming difficult for them, our screening program ensures that no child is missed. Children may be referred by their class teacher or highlighted through a significant change in their behaviour in Trusts or through a parental concern when behaviour changes at home or a significant life event impacts the family.



All staff are responsible for adhering to positive practise that promotes a pupils ability to engage in, and access their learning. This is based on the understanding that pupil's best achieve, develop and reach their true potential when staff are; fair, flexible, trustworthy, respectful, and model positive relationships. It is the expectation at SENDAT that all staff, regardless of role act in this way.

We believe that our parents know their children best and we are committed to working in partnership to identify the best ways of providing support for everyone within Trust. We aim to develop positive, non-judgemental working alliances with all our parents.

***“The ability to form meaningful relationships is fundamental to mental health and happiness. It’s the quality of contact we have with other people that is arguably the most important determining factor in our quality of life. We can only truly develop ourselves through relationships with others” (TISUK 2019)***

***“Just one emotionally available adult in the Trust, community or home can make all the difference” (TISUK 2019)***

Therefore our Trust is invested in supporting the very best relational health between:

- Parent(s)/carer and child
- Pupil and pupil
- Pupil and Trust staff
- Parent/carers and Trust staff
- Trust staff
- Trust staff and senior leaders
- Pupils, parent(s)/carer and other agencies
- Trust staff and external agencies

## **5. protect, relate, regulate and reflect**

Our community adopts relational and educational practices which **protect, relate, regulate** and **reflect** as follows:

### **a. PROTECT:**

- i) Our Trust aims to increase ‘safety cues’ in all aspects of the Trust day for our pupils and each other, for example designed and timetabled interventions that create opportunities for the emotionally available adults to be alongside our pupils across the Trust day.
- ii) Open door policy for informal discussions with parents/ carers.
- iii) We aim to increase our staffs’ understanding in nurturing attachments and the PACE approach (Hughes, 2015). This means that our pupils are met with a warm emphatic, playful and curious staff team that will enable them to move out of flight/fight or freeze and into relationship and trust.



- iv) As a Trust we ensure that interactions with pupils, their families/carers, other agencies and each other are socially engaging not socially defensive.
- v) Punitive approaches are not being used under any circumstances in response to pupils' behaviour, challenging or otherwise such as the use of harsh voices, shouting, isolating, secluding, denying curriculum access, withholding food and shame evoking behaviours (which are proven to be damaging psychologically and neurologically).
- vi) All members of our Trust aim to interactively reflect and repair occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness.
- vii) Our Trust staff adopt ways of developing relationships and understanding of our pupils, their families/carers and each other. Holding at the heart of our approach relationship as the key to personal, social and emotional development, (as well as academic achievement for our pupils).
- viii) Our Trust staff adjust their expectations for our pupils, their families and carers in accordance with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This sometimes involves removing vulnerable and traumatised pupils in a kind and non-judgemental way from situations they are not managing well. As a staffing team we are also able to do this for each other.
- ix) The use of a robust debrief system. De-briefing opportunities are available in several ways for staff and pupils to assist them in managing situations that have caused or may cause distress. An incident debriefing meeting assists people, particularly staff and pupils, to overcome the effects of an incident by:
  - x) Talking about what happened
  - xi) Expressing how they feel as a result of the incident
  - xii) Identifying any individual stress reactions (i.e. physical, emotional, thinking, behavioural)
  - xiii) Identifying some ways of dealing with stress reactions,
- xiv) If appropriate, independent referrals can then be made to outside agencies and professionals such as Education Support Partnership, which offers individual support, information and counselling to our staff 7 days a week/ 24 hours a day.

### **b. RELATE:**

- i) A whole Trust approach and commitment to enable our pupils, families/carers and staff to see themselves, their relationships and the world positively, rather than through the lens of threat, danger or self-blame.
- ii) Our Trust provides everyone with repeated relational experiences (alongside emotionally available adults) to support everyone to move from 'blocked trust' (not feeling psychologically safe with anyone) to trust, and from self-help to 'help-seeking'.

### **c. REGULATE:**

- i) As a Trust we use evidence based interventions that aim to repair psychological damage and brain damage caused by traumatic experiences, through emotionally regulating, playful and enriched interactions.
- ii) In our Trust the emotional well-being of and emotional regulation of staff is treated as highly important to prevent burn-out, stress-related absence, or leaving the profession through stress-related illness, secondary trauma and/or feeling blamed or under-valued. This includes access to reflective practice and clinical supervision sessions with Psychodynamic qualified practitioners.



- iii) Our Trust provides staff wellbeing spaces which are there to enable staff to take the space they need to reflect and rejuvenate which supports the release of natural anti-stress and pro-social neurochemicals (opioids and oxytocin).
- iv) 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.

#### **d. REFLECT:**

- i) The adults in our Trust feel confident to develop relationships with pupils, their families and each other and to have the courageous conversations about their experiences so far.
- ii) Our Trust promotes the exploration of conversations with our pupils that helps to make sense of their life, to develop a language for their emotions and a narrative that makes sense of their experiences and how they feel. Supporting our pupils to understand their thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and reactions and in doing so enables them to identify and explore new options and strategies for ways forward with their challenges.
- iii) Staff development and training to help children move from 'behaving' their trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences.
- iv) A positive behaviour management policy based not on punishment, sanctions, resolution and interactive repair (e.g. restorative conversations).
- v) Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff pupils 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. Means include the provision of different modes of expression, e.g. art/play/ music/sand/emotion worksheets/emotion cards.
- vi) Staff training and development in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding (instead of asking a series of questions/ giving lectures).

#### **References**

- Trauma and Mental Health Informed Trusts and Communities Delegate Programme Handbook (TISUK, 2019)
- Positive Behaviour Management Policy (SENDAT Trust, 2019)
- Creating Loving Attachments: Parenting with PACE to Nurture Confidence and Security in the Troubled Child (Daniel Hughes, 2015)