

Trauma Informed Approaches/ Relationships Policy

Academic Year 2024/2025



THE COURT SCHOOL

Approved by Governing Body – November 2022

Review – November 2024

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Foreword:

The school's Trauma Informed and Relationships Policy must be read alongside:

- Trauma Informed Schools course materials,
- Positive handling policy and
- Team Teach course materials including PowerPoint presentation.

Introduction:

The Court School has made the decision NOT to have a behaviour policy. We see behaviour as a form of communication and work hard within the school's community to provide our pupils with what they need/require on an ongoing basis.

This is our Trauma Informed (TI) and Relationships policy that has replaced the school's behaviour policy. The Court School is a TISUK award winning school and TI approaches are utilised across the school with our complex and vulnerable pupils. These approaches are closely aligned with the school's co-constructed motto and values which are:

Motto:

The Court Special School

'Keep Calm - Keep Learning...'

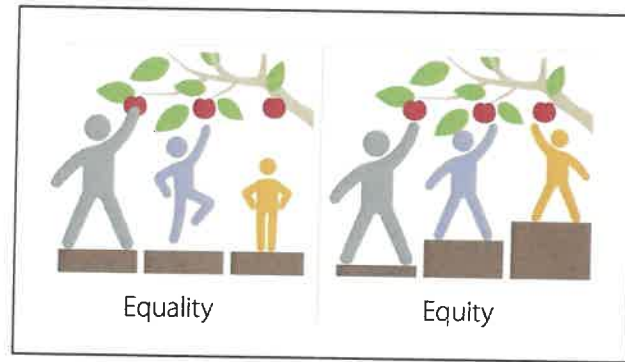
Values:

- Keep everyone safe
- Stay positive
- Communicate effectively
- Respect our differences
- Be flexible
- Maintain high expectations

Our motto and values are reinforced via our school rules. These are deliberately simple and are displayed throughout the school. They are also reflected in the micro-scripts that we use with our pupils on an ongoing basis. See below:

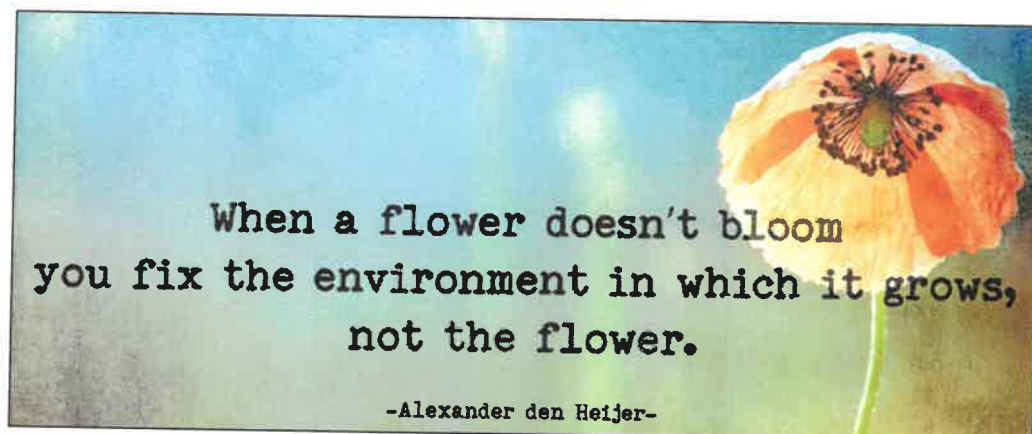
- Pay attention/listen (we are there to support you)
- Be respectful
- Be safe

We get to know our pupils very well and continually strive to build and maintain positive relationships. This is a vitally important aspect of our work. We understand that our pupils are very different and require personalised approaches. These approaches are refined continually and are captured in Supporting Distressed Behaviour (SDB) documents and are discussed within class teams and in whole school meetings. This principle is captured in the phrase equity over equality (see diagram below).



We work collaboratively with similar schools both locally and regionally with a view to learning from one another and providing support where required. In addition, we continually engage with specialists, e.g. the school's psychotherapist, and outside agencies with a view to improving our practice and maximising the potential of our complex and vulnerable pupils.

We are committed to providing ongoing TI training to ensure that the staff who work at the school understand what TI approaches are and feel confident utilising them. We have accredited TI practitioners throughout the school and regularly organise whole school training. In addition, we provide ongoing coaching and mentoring where there are particular barriers or difficulties. We strongly believe that if things aren't working, we need to change what we are doing – not the pupils (see quote below):



In this policy, we will refer to; roles and responsibilities, key TI models and pedagogical approaches/strategies that we utilise. We will then move on to outline our approach to maintaining positive relationships throughout the organisation.

Note: This policy has evolved from behaviour → relationships → TI approaches and relationships. This reflects changes in our pedagogical approaches over the past 10 years. It is vitally important that this policy, and practice, continue to evolve in line with what we feel is working best for the complex and vulnerable pupils with whom we have the pleasure of working with. Therefore, this policy should be reviewed and refined by stakeholders on a regular basis.

Roles and responsibilities:

- The Governing Body, following consultation with the Headteacher, staff and parents, approved this policy and will keep it under review. It will ensure that this is communicated to pupils and parents, is non-discriminatory and the expectations are clear.
- The Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will be responsible for the implementation and day-to-day management of the policy and procedures.
- Staff, including teachers, support staff and volunteers, will be responsible for ensuring that the policy and procedures are followed consistently and fairly. This involves ensuring that a positive reward system for pupils is in place. Mutual support amongst all staff in the implementation of the policy is essential. Staff have a key role in advising the Headteacher on the effectiveness of the policy and procedures. They also have responsibility, with the support of the Headteacher, for creating a high-quality learning environment and teaching and modelling positive behaviours for learning. This is a key role for staff.
- TI practitioners, throughout the school, will provide expert advice and support to their colleagues. They will be able to draw on their knowledge of models such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect (PRRR). TI practitioners will provide whole school training on a regular basis and bespoke and solution focused guidance where required.
- The Governing Body, Headteacher and staff will ensure there is no differential application of the policy and procedures on any grounds, particularly ethnic or national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexuality. They will also ensure that any concerns of pupils are listened to, and appropriately addressed.
- Parents and carers will be expected, encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their child both inside and outside the school. However, staff will be on hand to offer guidance and support where required.
- The school will encourage parents and carers to work in partnership with the school, to assist it in maintaining high standards. Parents and carers will be actively encouraged to raise with the school any issues arising from the policy.



What is a trauma and mental health informed school?

A trauma informed school is one that is able to support children and teenagers who suffer with trauma or mental health problems and whose troubled behaviour acts as a barrier to learning. Our training programmes were born out of a response to major public health studies that have shown that when children who have suffered several painful life experiences, are unhelped, there is a very high chance of them going on to suffer severe mental and physical ill-health. We therefore support schools, communities and other organisations in providing relationships for these children that heal minds, brains and bodies. Key conversational skills in addressing and making sense of what has happened are central to our work as is a major shift in whole school/organisation/community culture.

(From TI schools website)

Key TI models:

- **Model One: The ACE study and protective factors**

The Adverse Childhood Experiences study (ACE study) is one of the biggest Public Health studies of all time (17,000 people). The study found that ACEs are a leading determinant of the most common forms of physical illness (e.g. cancer, diabetes, heart attacks) mental illnesses (e.g. depression and anxiety) and early death, in the Western World.

- **Model Two: The neuroscience of mental health and mental ill-health with particular reference to Panksepp's emotional systems**

The neuroscientist, Jaak Panksepp has been described as the next Darwin. After 40 years of working in a science laboratory, Panksepp identified the neural networks for seven genetically ingrained emotion systems in the brain. These are shared by other mammals. He coined the phrase "affective neuroscience". (The neuroscience of emotion.)

- RAGE, FEAR, PANIC/GRIEF (trigger stress hormones)
- CARE (attachment)
- SEEKING and PLAY (trigger pro-social chemicals)

A balance of the systems underpins mental health.

An imbalance of the systems underpins mental ill-health.

- **Model Three: Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect (PRRR). TI schools evidence-based model**

The components of the Trauma and Mental Health-informed Schools model are supported by evidence-based research showing positive change in and mental health through PRRR.

Protect – Our priority with any child in school is to ensure safety first. It is the foundation on which everything else depends, the ability to learn without fear and without the fear of being shamed in order to relate to others, engage in learning and in peace.

Relate – 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 factors in our quality of life. We can only truly develop ourselves through relationships with others.

Regulate – We know that a high ACE score without the social buffering of an emotionally available adult is likely to damage children's minds, brains and bodies because of stress. One of the most powerful ways of helping children with toxic stress is to talk to them about what is bothering them.

Reflect – Reflecting is about having conversations with a child that support their emotional and mental health. It facilitates the child to make sense of their life, to develop language for their emotions and a coherent narrative that makes sense of how they feel.

Pedagogical approaches/strategies:

(That we utilise at the Court School to support pupils and encourage them to make positive choices). Listed under the Protect, Relate, Regulate and Reflect (PRRR) model.

Protect:

- Consistent boundaries and routines
- Emotionally Available Adults (EAA) - Rita Pierson
- High staff-pupil ratio
- Meet and greet
- Motto and values
- Positive handling (last resort)
- Safeguarding measures
- Staff wellbeing sessions

Relate:

- Big Empathy Drawing
- Supportive touch
- Play
- Psychotherapist
- Staff training

Regulate:

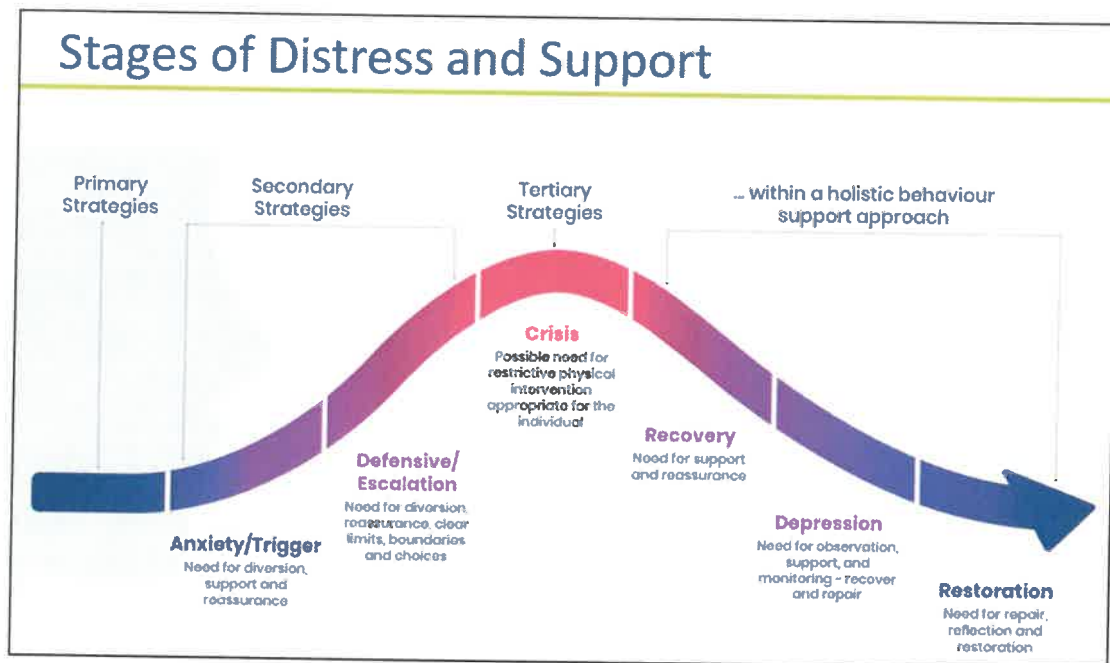
- Biophilia/strong emphasis on accessing blue and green spaces
- Break out spaces
- Change of face
- Contact with animals, e.g. Cariad and staff pets (all risk assessed)
- Co-regulation → self-regulation
- Dan Hughes PACE (Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathetic)
- Distraction
- Food and drink (unmet need)
- Micro-scripts. For example; I've noticed you're struggling today. How can we help you? Take some time – I'm here when you're ready.
- Rest
- Supportive and hands on SLT

Reflect:

- Flipping Their Lid (Dan Siegel)
- Incredible 5 Point Scale
- Reflection book/questions (taken from Paul Dix books, e.g. When the Adults Change). Questions include; What happened? What should we do to put things right? How can we do things differently in the future?
- Sand play
- Supervision
- WINE (I Wonder, I Imagine, I Notice, Empathy)

Pedagogical approaches/strategies - in action:

The diagram below is a visual representation of what often happens when our pupils become dysregulated. It is important to note that this diagram looks different for different people and, in this case, is only being used to demonstrate what support we offer our pupils at different stages of distress.



Primary strategies (universal):

- Consistent boundaries and routines – these help pupils feel safe
- High staff pupil ratio
- Personalised approaches
- Relationships with EAA
- Strong commitment to reducing anxiety not inducing anxiety

Secondary strategies:

- Choices
- Distraction
- Physical environment, e.g. nest swing or time with SLT
- Reinforce rules
- Tokens (for school shop) – Awarded when pupils make good choices, e.g. walking away

Tertiary strategies:

- Change of face
- Staff presence
- Positive handling (last resort). See positive handling policy and team teach course materials

Recovery, Depression and Restoration:

- EAA
- Supportive touch, e.g. cuddle or 'cwtch'
- Distraction, e.g. game to help pupil calm and move on. Doing something physical often helps at this point
- Reflection, e.g. reflection book. This often involves recover and repair

It is important to note that the support that we provide for pupils at different stages of distress is personalised. The class teams will know pupils best and will detail these approaches in the SDB documents (as referred to earlier in the policy).

A Trauma-Informed approach to establishing and maintaining positive relationships:

The Court School is invested 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 taxi door and an open-door policy for informal discussions with parents/ carers.
- Staff are aware of 'PACE' (play, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) methods of intervention (Hughes 2015); being warm emphatic, playful and curious (proven to shift children out of flight/fright/freeze positions and aims to make the pupil feel safe).
- Staff ensure that interactions with children are socially engaging and not socially defensive, to decrease likelihood of children relating defensively (flight/fright/freeze).
- A whole school commitment to cease all use of harsh/loud voices, shouting, put downs, criticism and shaming (proven to be damaging psychologically and neurologically).
- Staff 'interactively repair' occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness.
- 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. 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 a calmer, smaller areas with emotionally regulating adults).

- 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 they feel truly valued and emotionally regulated and in so doing to support them 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, 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 and training in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding (instead of asking a 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.
- 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.

Evidence base for TISUK's theory of change

Creating school ethos and environment to ensure mentally healthy culture for all

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- Evidence base for supporting staff development and staff wellbeing, working with parents, families and carers and for student voice**
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- Supporting staff wellbeing and development**
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- TISUK's own assessment tool *Free to Fly* combines the models of TISUK, based on over 1,000 pieces of published research, into a powerful assessment and development tool that underpins accurate assessment combined with rich guidance on application, school / setting wide processes and ways to be. It is multifaceted, supporting well informed responses to identified needs, as well as compiling a profile of targeted responses and measures of the impact of interventions, drawing on a range of evidence and tools.

Signature of chair of governing body:



Date: 28.3.25

Policy to be reviewed/updated every two years