



Relationship Policy

2023 - 2024

Introduction

The Bryn y Deryn and Carnegie Centre 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 school community to include our staff, our learners, parent(s)/carers and all other agencies working with Bryn y Deryn and the Carnegie Centre.

Purpose

In Bryn y Deryn and Carnegie Centre 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 learners to achieve, develop and reach their true potential.

We are committed to ensuring that our school develops a Trauma and Mental Health Informed Approach to ensure that all our learners 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 school by creating an environment of safety that has strong, positive and supportive relationships at its heart.

Our priority as a school 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 school. This requires emotionally regulated and available adults who can provide essential calming and containing of our learners, 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 learners 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 learners and each other, our school 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.

Whole school approach



As a school 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. Learner and adults can be affected by toxic stress. Providing an environment that has safety, connection and compassion at its heart ensures that our school environments never unwittingly re-traumatise any of our school members and act to maximise protective factors through the conscious use of our relationships.

All permanent adults in our school 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 Learner Engagement Policy and Relationship Policy reflect a trauma informed approach and our engagement 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 learner 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 learner 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.

Learner are identified for additional support by a number of methods. We universally assess all learners through our induction programme upon entry to school. This includes a learner voice questionnaire which measures feelings towards previous school(s) and highlights areas that may concern the learner.

Learner do not always present through their behaviour when life is becoming difficult for them, our pastoral support system ensures that no child is missed. All learners have at least two allocated emotionally available adults with whom they are able to spend time with each day including break and lunch times. Learners may also be referred for further support through our bespoke interventions programme.

All staff are responsible for adhering to positive practise that promotes a Learner's ability to engage in, and access their learning. This is based on the understanding that Learners best achieves, develops and reaches their true potential when staff are; fair, flexible, trustworthy, respectful, and model positive relationships. It is the expectation at Bryn y Deryn and Carnegie Centre that all staff, regardless of role act in this way.

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

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



- parent(s)/carer and child
- learner & learner
- learner and school staff
- parent/carers and school staff
- school staff
- school staff and senior leaders
- learners, parent(s)/carer and other agencies
- school staff and external agencies

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

Protect

- our school aims to increase 'safety cues' in all aspects of the school day for our learners and each other, for example designed and timetabled interventions that create opportunities for the emotionally available adults to be alongside our learners across the school day
- open door policy for informal discussions with parents/ carers
- we aim to increase our staffs' understanding in nurturing attachments and the PACE approach (Hughes, 2015). This means that our learners 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.
- as a school we ensure that interactions with learners, their families/carers, other agencies and each other are socially engaging not socially defensive
- punitive approaches are not being used under any circumstances in response to learners' 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)
- all members of our school aim to interactively reflect and repair occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness
- Our school staff adopt ways of developing relationships and understanding of our learners, 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 learners).
 - Our school staff adjust their expectations for our learners, their families and carers in accordance with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This sometimes involves removing vulnerable and traumatised learners 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.

- The use of a robust debrief system. De-briefing opportunities are available in several ways for staff and learners to assist them in managing situations that have caused or may cause distress.

An incident debriefing meeting assists people, particularly staff and learners, to overcome the effects of an incident by:

- talking about what happened
- expressing how they feel as a result of the incident
- identifying any individual stress reactions (i.e. physical, emotional, thinking, behavioural)
- identifying some ways of dealing with stress reactions
- if appropriate, independent referrals can then be made to outside agencies and professionals such as Education Support, which offers individual support, information and counselling to hour staff 7 days a week/ 24 hours a day

Relate

- a whole school approach and commitment to enable our learners, families/carers and staff to see themselves, their relationships and the world positively, rather than through the lens of threat, danger or self-blame
- our school 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'

Regulate

- as a school 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
- in our school 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
- our school 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 prosocial neurochemicals (opioids and oxytocin)
- relational interventions specifically designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable) in vulnerable learner, enabling them to feel calm, soothed and safe

Reflect

- the adults in our school feel confident to develop relationships with learners, their families and each other and to have the courageous conversations about their experiences so far



- Our school promotes the exploration of conversations with our learners 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 learners 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.
- staff development and training to help learner move from ‘behaving’ their trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences
- a positive behaviour management policy based not on punishment, sanctions, resolution and interactive repair (e.g. restorative conversations)
- Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff learners 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.
- 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 Schools and Communities Delegate Programme Handbook (TISUK, 2019)
- Positive Behaviour Management Policy (Bryn y Deryn and Carnegie Centre, 2019)
- Creating Loving Attachments: Parenting with PACE to Nurture Confidence and Security in the Troubled Child (Daniel Hughes, 2015)

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Definitions – Glossary

Definitions – Glossary

Relational Environment	This kind of environment that can provide a safe place for young people to be transparent and vulnerable. As trust between adult and young person grows deeper, this kind of environment encourages accountability and spiritual growth. The aim is to develop close, nurturing individual relationships with the learner and facilitate an emotionally safe and secure milieu that fosters an effective and challenging learning environment.
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Behaviours that challenge	Any behaviours that interfere with learning. These behaviours may include non-compliance, passivity, task avoidance, aggression or stereotyped behaviours.
Toxic Stress	Toxic stress response can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support.
Tolerable stress	Tolerable stress activates the body’s alert system to a greater degree and generally occurs within a time-limited period. If it is buffered by supportive caregivers/relationships that assist the person to adapt, this gives the brain an opportunity to recover from potentially damaging effects.
Traumatic stress	Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, motor vehicle accident, plane crash, violent crime, or terrorist attack.
Emotional Literacy	Emotional Literacy is the term used to describe the ability to understand and express feelings. Emotional Literacy involves having self-awareness and recognition of one's own feelings and knowing how to manage them, such as the ability to stay calm when angered or to reassure oneself when in doubt.
Self-regulation	Self-regulation involves controlling one's behaviour, emotions, and thoughts in the pursuit of long-term goals. More specifically, emotional self-regulation refers to the ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses.
Learning disability	A reduced intellectual ability which affects someone for their whole life. People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complicated information and interact with other people.
Executive functions and skills	Executive function is responsible for a number of skills, including: Paying attention. Organizing, planning, and prioritizing. Starting tasks and staying focused on them to completion. Understanding different points of view. Regulating emotions. Self-monitoring (keeping track of what you're doing).
Interventions	Interventions provide students with the support needed to acquire the skills being taught by the educational system and address functional skills, academic, cognitive, behavioural, and social skills that directly affect the child's ability to access an education.
Relational Interventions	Intervention that is designed for learner who have experienced relationship-based trauma.
De-brief	Debriefing (reviewing an experience) through a structured process aids staff through reflection, by sharing experiences, gathering information, and developing ideas moving forward. Whether things went well or not all involved have likely learned

	from the experience. By debriefing we can capture lessons learned to ensure better outcomes.
Secondary Trauma	Secondary trauma can be incurred when an individual is exposed to people who have been traumatized themselves, disturbing descriptions of traumatic events by a survivor, or others inflicting cruelty on one another.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)	There are three direct and six indirect experiences that have an impact on childhood development. The more adversity a child experiences the more likely it is to impact upon their mental and physical health.