



Behaviour Policy

Purpose of the policy

At Wildwood Nature School, we believe that children flourish best when their needs are met and they have a sense of security. This enables them to feel their emotions fully, engage meaningfully with their learning, build strong relationships with their peers and adults and to participate fully in the school community. This policy sets out how we proactively create an environment conducive to well-being and learning, as well as the procedures we have in place when a child's behaviour affects the well-being and learning of the school community or creates an unsafe situation.

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1. Behaviour

We are reframing what we have previously known as *challenging* behaviour as *stressed* behaviour. We recognise that this kind of behaviour is an expression of an unmet need. Our role as adults is to think deeply about the child, their past experiences and present needs and then to figure out how we can change the environment, learning, or anything else to help the child meet their unmet needs.

We see these as the common needs all children have:

1. Physical nurturance
2. Attachment/Relationships/Belonging
3. Autonomy/Agency/Choice
4. Capacity to feel and express authentic emotions
5. Competence
6. Play/Freedom
7. Meaning/Purpose
8. Wonder/Mystery/Spirituality
9. Rest/Peace/Stillness

Part of reframing behaviour means reframing our responses. There has been a huge amount of research to show that punishments, rewards and even praise have a negative impact on children's self-esteem, ability to learn and their motivation (see [Alfie Kohn](#)). Instead of imposing rules from above, with consequences applied if they are not followed, we are seeking to build an interdependent community where the children get to be a part of the decision-making around what boundaries and limits we need to keep everyone safe and happy. This process gives children a sense of autonomy and belonging, builds their ability to think for themselves, and also helps them to see how their efforts and actions affect others' well-being, and supports them to grow into ethical and compassionate people.

2. Our ethos

We place the children's needs and sense of security at the centre of the school's ethos. We do this by:

- Learning about each child's individual needs
- Taking time to develop strong relationships between each child and their teachers through a key person system and regular 1:1 check-ins
- Building an interdependent community and caring for others
- Explicitly teaching children about their emotions, how to feel them in their bodies, how to express them
- Teaching children how to practise mindfulness and compassion
- Providing opportunities for children to release trauma (see below)
- Designing learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate and follow each child's interests and learning style
- Spending time in nature which has a known calming effect on the nervous system
- Opportunities for physical movement and play throughout the day
- Establishing strong and positive relationships with families through frequent communication

- Observing children's learning so that we can support them to achieve competence and succeed at their own learning goals
- Involving children in decision-making about how things work at the school including necessary boundaries through regular class and school meetings
- Assessing risk before activities and constantly monitoring risk and being mindful of the need to maintain safety at all times
- Ensuring that adults are always modelling positive and compassionate responses and use non-judgemental, caring language (Nonviolent Communication/Giraffe language, see below)
- Teaching children how to resolve their own conflicts and about the concept of restorative justice

We believe this proactive approach will reduce the frequency of stressed behaviour.

3. Trauma

At Wildwood Nature School, we take a trauma-informed approach. We have come to the understanding that most adults and children in our society have experienced trauma at some point in their lives and have not had the experience of releasing the trauma from their bodies. This results in trauma energy becoming 'stuck' in the body and being expressed in the form of physical and mental illness, pain in the body and non-social behaviours. The actual facts of an incident are not what causes trauma; instead, trauma occurs when the body's nervous system is overwhelmed by a specific incident or ongoing experiences.

Our trauma-informed approach:

- We respond to each child with the understanding that their behaviours are a nervous system response and are often beyond their conscious control
- We co-regulate alongside children when they are experiencing overwhelming feelings and support them within the context of trusting, compassionate relationships
- We take a proactive approach by facilitating particular activities and games that help the nervous system to release stuck trauma from the body
- We teach children how to feel sensations in their body and techniques to be able to ground themselves and allow sensations and natural releases to occur when they experience heightened emotions or an event that could cause trauma

4. Responses

When a child expresses behaviour that might impact upon their own learning or well-being, or the learning or well-being of others, we will need to take action. Our response and actions will look different depending on the needs of the child but we always follow these guidelines for de-escalation:

- Adult takes a deep breath, takes one step back, and grounds self first (this can take just a few seconds)
- Adult adopts a neutral stance and is conscious of their own body language; sometimes it can help to mirror the child's body language to show empathy
- Adult adopts a soothing tone of voice as raising the voice provokes more adrenaline
- Adult states the behaviour observed without shaming, exaggeration or judgement
- Adult takes whatever steps necessary to make the child and others safe, including using protective physical handling if necessary (depending on the severity of the situation, this step may need to come first)
- Adults shows understanding by reflecting child's overwhelming feelings to them with empathy e.g. "I'm wondering if you're feeling angry..."
- Adult makes a statement about how the behaviour is making them feel e.g. "I feel scared when I see [state specific behaviour observed] because I have a need to feel safe and keep you safe from harm"
- Adult makes a reassuring statement about their close relationship with the child and that it hasn't been affected by the behaviour
- Adult makes a statement that shows the possibility of resolution or solving the problem
- Adult supports the child to release any cortisol and adrenaline from the incident with e.g 'shaking it out', walking, running etc.
- Adult works with the child to identify what need is unmet (using list of needs above) and helps them to meet that need

Later that day or possibly the next day:

- Adult works with the child to resolve conflict, restore justice, solve problems or take other actions necessary to remedy the situation e.g. fix a broken item
- Adult ensures there is time and opportunity for the child to reflect on the incident, their behaviour and all the different feelings that may have arisen for them

Below are examples of 4 different levels of stressed behaviour and our possible responses to them:

1. Child struggles to stay focussed on one activity; can't engage in cooperative play with others; appears unhappy or voices discontent; is uncooperative with the needs of the community.

Example

A child is refusing to come and join circle time. An adult goes and talks to them.

"Hey, I can see you're not coming to circle time. Is there anything I can help with?"

Child doesn't respond. Adult reflects on the fact that this child's mum has gone away for the week and so might be needing some 1:1 time to meet their need for attachment and relationship.

"Would you like to read a book with me over there while the rest of the group does circle time?"

Child enthusiastically says, "Yes!"

2. Child is disrupting others' play and learning (e.g. taking things from them, bothering them with words or actions); engaging in activities in a way that makes it unsafe (e.g. climbing trees beyond their own limits, using tools without following the established safety guidelines); running beyond the defined physical boundaries.

Example

Child is using the hammer in the tool circle but after a few minutes of engaging with the task appropriately, begins to swing the hammer all around and shouts to a friend in another area.

Adult says, "I see you're swinging the hammer in an unsafe way. Please could you go back to using the hammer safely?"

Child continues unsafe behaviour.

Adult carefully takes hold of the hammer and says, "I'm taking the hammer because I don't want you to get hurt. My tummy feels wobbly and I feel scared when I see you swinging the hammer that you might hit yourself with it. It looks like you have some big energy. Do you want to go and swing on the rope swing or hit that big stick against the tree? We can come back to hammering a bit later."

Child says they want to go on the rope swing. Adult monitors the child to see when they're ready to return to the toolwork.

If the response needed is *Conflict Resolution* between 2 children - see below.

If the response needed is *Positive Physical Handling* - see below.

3. Child demonstrates extremely stressed behaviour that could be a significant danger to themselves or others e.g. throwing heavy items towards other people; breaking other children's work; violence towards other children e.g. pushing, hitting.

Example

Betty has taken Amy's model. Amy erupts in anger and picks up a big stick and looks like she might throw it at Betty and the rest of the group.

Adult swiftly takes the stick from Amy. At this level, action to ensure safety may have to be the first step in the de-escalation process.

"Amy, I'm taking this stick to keep you and everyone else safe. That must have made you so angry when Betty grabbed your model. It took us all by surprise. I felt worried when you were holding the log because of my need to feel safe and make sure everyone else is safe from being hurt. It's okay now, Betty has put your model down. I just want to help you feel calm again. Let's go for a little walk."

Another adult sits with Betty to understand her needs.

When both children have calmed down, they can come together to resolve the conflict using Giraffe language (Nonviolent Communication) with or without a mediator, as necessary. The incident will be recorded by the adult/s who witnessed it in the *Behaviour Log*.

4. Persistent and ongoing targeting of a specific child; physical / sexual / prejudicial / homophobic bullying (please see our [Anti-Bullying Policy](#) for examples of earlier stages of bullying and Wildwood Nature School's responses)

Example

Amara and Joey have been experiencing conflict for 2 months. There have been incidents of Amara excluding Joey from games and calling him names at school, and Joey has brought in examples of harassment online from Amara. These incidences of bullying (in person and cyber) have been addressed with both children and their parents. Two attempts have previously been made at resolving conflict between the children, which seemed to work for a short time but then issues arose again.

Today, an incident arose that involved elements of physical, prejudicial and sexual bullying (name-calling that led to physical assault) by Amara towards Joey, while in the woods.

One adult takes Amara off for a walk in the woods to help her calm down, release her anger and possibly find out what has sparked her behaviour today.

Another adult sits with Joey and his close friend. The adult helps Joey to release the shock and trauma of the incident with some gentle shaking and breathing exercises. He has some hot chocolate and food around the fire.

Because of the severity of the situation, both sets of parents are called. It's decided that it's best for everyone if Amara's parents come to collect her and she stays at home for the rest of the day.

After school, all staff and the co-head of school meet to discuss possible options. It's decided that Joey and Amara will be put in separate learning groups for a month or until they feel they can be around each other again. This means they will have minimal contact with each other at school. This incident is recorded in the bullying log, as were the previous incidents. Because of the nature of this incident, it's also recorded as a safeguarding concern for Amara.

Amara's parents have agreed to stop her online activity until the situation is resolved.

The school has recommended a course of 6 art therapy sessions for both students.

After a month of having some space and some therapy sessions, another attempt at conflict resolution will begin between Amara and Joey. This will then be followed by a restorative justice session involving the children in their phase. In each of their learning groups, a big focus will be placed on activities that support self-esteem and relationship-building.

Note: we recognise that even with the best intentions and training, adults might not always be able to offer an empathic response. In the rare instances where an adult has responded to a child with judging, critical or shaming language, or other responses such as threatening consequences, the adult will later take the time to apologise to the child and take necessary steps to rebuild their relationship.

5. Online behaviour

At Wildwood Nature School, we recognise the growing presence of online activity in our children's lives. We have a very clear [Online Safety Policy](#) and all children and parents are required to sign an acceptable use agreement. Online use is always supervised when in school and we expect that the acceptable use agreements will extend into children's online use at home.

When unacceptable behaviour happens online outside of school hours, such as sending unkind messages to other children, it can affect relationships between children at school, as seen in *Example 4* above. As with all behaviour, our approach is to respond to the individual children involved, considering the specific situation and their needs. Children are explicitly taught about appropriate online behaviour in the computing element of our curriculum. Our well-being curriculum also teaches them how to communicate with kindness and compassion, as well as how to take responsibility for their own actions.

The culture at Wildwood Nature School is one in which children feel safe to bring any concerns to their trusted teachers, including possible abuse they might be receiving online. Possible responses to varying degrees of infringements in online behaviour can be seen in our [Online Safety Policy](#). Any online behaviour that is considered to be abusive and bullying will be responded to immediately. Please see our [Anti-Bullying Policy](#) for further details.

6. Conflict resolution

At Wildwood Nature School, we promote peaceful conflict resolution between children where everyone can get their needs met. We approach conflict from the lens of restorative justice; this approach repairs harm, allows for any shame to be navigated through in a safe and supportive environment, all while maintaining relationship and a sense of community.

We use Giraffe language (Nonviolent Communication) - or the language of the heart (giraffes have the biggest hearts of all land animals). Giraffe language uses the language of feelings

and needs rather than judging, criticising, analysing, accusing or shaming. Children will be taught how to use this language and the 5-step process of conflict resolution, so that when a conflict arises, they know how to resolve it. It can be carried out between the 2 children who have been in conflict, or a mediator (an adult or another child trained in the approach) can be present to state each step, and remind both parties to keep using Giraffe language.

Below are the guidelines for conflict resolution using Giraffe language:

1. **BODY** – each child needs to take a moment to come into their bodies and notice what sensations they can feel. Use known strategies to ground and centre e.g. using the breath or a somatic anchor.

Now, child 1 goes through the following 4 steps while the other child listens empathically – receiving what they are saying without hearing blame or criticism.

2. **OBSERVATIONS** – What I observe/see/hear/remember/imagine free from my evaluations and judgement that does or does not contribute to my well-being.
“When I see/hear...”
3. **FEELINGS** – How I feel (emotion or sensation rather than thought) in relation to what I observe.
“I feel...”
4. **NEEDS** – What I need or value (rather than a preference or a specific action) that causes my feelings.
“...because I need/value...”
5. **REQUESTS** – clearly requesting that which would enrich my life without demanding. The concrete actions I would like taken.
“Would you be willing to...?”

Child 2 can be invited to reflect back to child 1 that they have understood their observations, feelings, needs and requests (sometimes this can be nonverbally when offering empathy). Child 2 can then state their observations, feelings, needs and requests while child 1 listens and receives empathically and then reflects back their understanding.

Then see if both children can find a way to get everyone’s needs met.

7. Restorative justice

At Wildwood Nature School, our focus is on creating community. Conventional approaches to managing behaviour involving punishment and sanctions serve to stigmatise and exclude the perpetrators of 'unacceptable' behaviour. This can make the individual feel unacceptable and separate from the community. Given that one of our most basic needs as humans is for belonging, this approach is not a healthy way to support children to grow as individuals or to develop prosocial behaviour.

Restorative justice is an ancient technique of conflict resolution, one still used by many tribes around the world, as well as within political contexts, such as post-Apartheid South Africa. Rather than perceived 'wrongdoing' or an act of stressed behaviour being seen as the individual's problem, restorative approaches view harm as a wound in the community; a wound which the whole community needs to repair together. This is different to the legalistic approach which establishes rules or laws, and when these are broken, punishments are meted out.

Punishments and sanctions like detentions or the removal of a perceived benefit or treat, actually decontextualise the harm done to others. Restorative justice is an approach which seeks to bring together the harmed and the harmer in dialogue. It allows for the individual to confront the impact of what they have done on the community they belong to and navigate through their shame in a safe and supportive environment. If the needs and emotions behind a behaviour are ignored in favour of punishment, then those needs and emotions will continue to be present, and probably worsen, leading to further incidents of stressed behaviour.

At Wildwood Nature School, group restorative justice sessions are held as necessary, and we call them Giraffe meetings. Some instances of behaviour are better suited to restorative justice instead of the 1:1 conflict resolution technique described in Section 5 above. In some cases, both techniques might be used. Restorative justice might take place with a small group of children, with a learning phase, or possibly with the whole school. The questions asked are:

- Who has been harmed?
- What are their needs?
- Who is responsible for meeting those needs?

Adults facilitate as appropriate and children are encouraged to use Giraffe language (Nonviolent Communication) to ensure that dialogue is respectful and compassionate. This approach is powerful and teaches children how to truly take responsibility for their actions, by genuinely acknowledging the harm done to others and meeting the necessary obligations to repair that harm. The most important benefit of restorative justice, is that an individual is

never made to feel as though their behaviour has jeopardised their belonging in the school community.

8. Protective physical handling

We recognise that there may be rare occasions where adults need to physically intervene when there is a risk to a child's safety, but this is a last possible resort. We seek to minimise the likelihood of this happening and only physically restrain or handle a child when their actions put their own or others' safety at risk. Physical intervention is never used to gain compliance, to punish, or for any other reason whatsoever other than to maintain safety and ensure the well-being of the child and others.

When physical handling is used, the adult:

- will always use the minimum force for the shortest period required to ensure that the child or children feel safe
- will very clearly state to the child why they are doing what they're doing and that it is in no way punitive but only to protect
- will then support the child to release tension, calm down, resolve the conflict or problem solve as necessary

The protective physical handling forms part of our guidelines for de-escalation (see above).

9. Recording and reviewing

All incidents of highly stressed behaviour will be recorded in our *Behaviour Log*. This is so that we can document any patterns of behaviour and ensure that we have adapted our care and environment to support those involved and affected.

Specific incidents will also be recorded on an *Incident Report Form* as necessary.

The *Behaviour Log* will be reviewed by all staff and the co-head of school termly to discuss any patterns that need attending to or additional support put in place.

10. Roles and responsibilities

At Wildwood Nature School, we believe that behaviour is a collective responsibility that arises, and is responded to, within the context of a nurturing, supportive community. The staff that are in daily contact with the children have the responsibility of modelling empathy, kindness and compassion for the children. They closely observe the children and recognise when a child might be expressing an unmet need through their stressed behaviour. Their response, as described above, is always unique - dependent upon the child and the situation - and relational - ensuring the child always feels the strength of their relationship with the adult, whatever the behaviour they have expressed. It is the responsibility of the staff member who has witnessed and responded to a behaviour incident to record it, inform the parents, and inform the SEND Lead, DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead), co-head of school, or outside agencies as necessary.

The co-head of school ensures that one staff meeting a term is dedicated to reviewing any incidents and patterns of behaviour and to review the school's responses. If a child expresses stressed behaviour on a continual basis, it is the responsibility of both the child's key person and the SEND Lead to identify a plan to support the child, to review the plan, and to liaise with outside agencies as necessary. If a child's behaviour raises safeguarding concerns, it is the responsibility of the child's key person and the DSL to record and monitor the concerns and liaise with outside agencies as necessary (see our [Safeguarding Policy](#)).

We also place a great emphasis on empowering children to recognise their own needs and reactions. This is not an attempt to control their behaviour, but a chance for them to understand how their own needs can be met within the context of an interdependent community where everyone tries to take care of each other's needs. This means that children take responsibility when their behaviour may have caused harm to others. Children learn how to engage with the processes of conflict resolution and restorative justice, so that they can reflect upon their behaviour, and make amends if necessary, all while feeling part of a supportive community.

Families play a crucial role in creating our school community. We invite them to be as involved as possible in their child's learning and school life. We communicate regularly with families about their child's behaviour, and when there are issues, families are involved in the process of supporting their child and coming up with solutions (see below). We support families to understand our approach to behaviour as a communication of an unmet need, so that there is as much consistency as possible between school and home.

11. Communicating with families and outside agencies

We will always communicate openly and honestly with families about their child's behaviour at school. An important element of the school's ethos is that families are very much a part of the school community and they are invited to speak with the teachers about how their child is doing as often as they like. We want to work with families as partners in making sure their child's needs are met.

If we notice a change in a child's behaviour we will:

- speak with the child's families to see if there have been any changes at home
- communicate clearly about how we are responding at school
- ask the families about their opinions on how our responses may or may not be meeting their child's needs and what else we can do
- offer any support to the families, if needed, with finding ways to meet their child's needs at home

We will work closely with any outside agencies that might already be involved with a child (e.g. social services, local authority SEND coordinator, educational psychologist). We will communicate clearly and frequently with them to ensure the best support for the child. If we think outside agencies should be involved with a child, we will discuss this with their families and ensure that everyone is in agreement about what's best for the child. Whatever measures have been put in place to support meeting a child's needs will be reviewed regularly.

Policy review

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