



Corbridge C of E First School **Relational Policy**

Inspired by Jesus, we make a difference in God's world by being 'the best that we can be'.

To be read and implemented alongside the Corbridge CofE First School Behaviour Policy.

At Corbridge First School, we feel that positive relationships are the root of positive behaviour and attitudes to learning and we all have a part to play in building that positive foundation. The policy should be regarded as a "live" document; it should be readily available and be referred to as needed.

This policy has been written after consultation and thorough discussion with staff, parents, governors and pupils and it reflects the 5 core Christian values that underpin everything we do in school. We serve to provide a Christian school community in which our children can feel secure and happy and thrive, both emotionally and academically, on a daily basis.

We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication and we therefore take responsibility for listening to the needs a child is expressing through their behaviour, whilst setting consistent boundaries and expectations. We recognise the link between understanding of the needs of our pupils and how this contributes to their ability to self-regulate. We use this knowledge to build resilience by managing their behaviour in a positive manner so they can be ready to engage with their learning. It is imperative we understand how, as caregivers, we can offer pupils the security and relationships needed to meet the individual wellbeing and mental health needs and guide them along their journey in becoming independent, resilient, lifelong learners and safe adults.

Values underpinning the policy are:

- 1) All members of the school community are responsible for their own behaviour and for fostering positive relationships and communication with others. We firmly believe that children learn by example and adults must act as positive role models in their behaviour and relationships. This is outlined clearly in 'The Corbridge CofE First School Code'.
- 2) We believe that we all respond better to encouragement and support than to a negative response. By focusing on positive behaviour and relationships and on the gifts and capacity that each member of the community brings to the school, we can support each other to make Corbridge First School a truly inclusive school where all members are equally valued.
- 3) We believe that learning, teaching and behaviour are inextricably linked. We strive to ensure all pupils have full and equal access to the curriculum and know that by teaching social and emotional skills to our pupils we will make it easier for them to do so.
- 4) We are all members of a learning community and regard any adult or child asking for help in any area as displaying a strength rather than a weakness. We strive to create a community where all members feel safe to learn, whatever their role.
- 5) This policy, along with all policies in school, will be applied equally to all members of the school community regardless of their gender, race, religion, sexuality or any disability. (Please refer to the school's Equalities Policy for further details).

Reviewed by the Governing Body: October 2025

Next review date: October 2026

The focus and implementation of the CFS relational model will depend on the level of need presented by the child.

Tier 1: Whole school relational approach

1. Use of the VRFs (Vital Relational Functions). This is our state of being in all interactions with the children. The VRFs will involve all staff ATTUNING, VALIDATING, CONTAINING and SOOTHING when interacting with learners;
2. Maintaining a PACE stance – remaining PLAYFUL, ACCEPTING, CURIOUS and EMPATHIC;
3. Teach, promote & model positive social interactions;
4. Design enabling, proactive & predictable environments.

Tier 2: Focused support (1:1) or small group support

Where children present a moderate developmental need, these children will need focused support. This may look like:

- Group Thrive – where Thrive approaches are embedded into the curriculum.
- 1:1 baseline reparative Thrive sessions and profiling.
- Thrive behaviour profiling.
- Sessions with the Academic Mentor/external support.
- Environmental changes – classroom space, sensory space.
- Possible support with the family.

The Relate/Rupture/Repair Cycle

Inevitably there will be times when there is a break in the nurturing connection between the adult and child. For example, if the adult is tired, busy dealing with something else or is emotionally unavailable due to a major life event. While we might do our best to minimise these breaks in connection, when they do happen, they can be repaired, and learning can come from this experience. Research scientist Suzanne Zeedyk shares with us that, “Making up is more important than messing up.” Dr Zeedyk refers to the everyday scenarios where relationships between two people go through a rhythm of relating (in relationship), a rupture happening in the relationship and then making a necessary repair to the rupture in order to return to relationship. The repair not only rewires patterns of behaviour; it also establishes trust. This is known as the relate–rupture–repair cycle.

When we look at each element of relate, rupture and repair, we examine the specific skills we, as adults, can use to help support these interactions with the children we work with. We are also modelling and providing opportunities for children to learn from their mistakes.

Relate

The ‘relate’ phase refers to the times in a relationship when we feel connected and attuned with one another, things are going well and we are making efforts to maintain this positive and mutually beneficial relationship. In this phase, we are effectively building a bridge of connection between ourselves and the other person. In the relate phase of the cycle, the adult can monitor their own emotional state and can regulate themselves physiologically, relationally and cognitively to be optimally present and accessible for the child. The adult can connect with the child and focus on their needs being met. The adult is present and can contain the child’s emotional experience for them. The connection between the two is reciprocal.

Rupture

The 'rupture' phase refers to those times in a relationship where there is a misunderstanding or misattunement, in other words, when we don't get it right for the other person and we feel like the relationship experiences a setback. At this point the bridge of connection might feel weakened or more vulnerable. Although we might think of ruptures as being problematic and therefore to be avoided where possible, in fact, they are an inevitable part of any relationship. **They become a crucial component in the relationship when the rupture is subsequently repaired because this helps to develop the child's resilience.**

When a rupture happens, it is likely that we will see the child's behaviour change. The child no longer feels the presence of the adult as supportive or alongside them, and their nervous system quickly reacts to the withdrawal of these cues of safety with survival responses of fight, flight or freeze. These are associated with distressed behaviours we describe in Thrive as passive or non-problem-solving behaviours. If an adult is able to stay regulated themselves, they will be able to notice subtle changes communicated by the child, stay attuned to the child and repair the rupture effectively with compassion.

Conversely if they are triggered and become dysregulated, they won't be able to attune to the child and this could also trigger them into further dysregulation. It is therefore important for adults to be aware of their triggers and possible reactions and have access to ways they can stay regulated in challenging circumstances. It is important that ruptures in the relationship are noticed so they can be repaired. If the adult is unable to or does not notice the rupture, then it can't be repaired. This is a lost opportunity to build the child's capacity for relationship and regulation.

Repair

The 'repair' phase of the cycle involves correcting the misunderstanding or misattunement of the rupture by trying to share understanding of intentions, feelings, thoughts and actions in order to come back into relationship. The repair part of the cycle is an essential component of healthy growth, boosting our resilience and helping us to cope with challenges by giving us greater trust that difficulties can be resolved.

Awareness is key. The emotionally available adult becomes aware that there is a misattunement between him/herself and the child. The adult is able to deal appropriately with their own reaction, in that moment, to stay regulated and is then able to reach out to the child and repair the rupture in their relationship. The adult may do this by apologising and reaffirming the attuning and validating stance, and by demonstrating acceptance, curiosity and empathy to the child. In this situation, the adult has the capacity to stay steady and regulated in the presence of the dysregulated child. By repairing the relationship, the child's arousal state can settle and the relationship can continue in an attuned way. The adult must always repair the relationship, not the child.

PACE and the Vital Relational Functions

To support the rhythm of this cycle in Thrive we use the stance of PACE and the communication skills of the Vital Relational Functions (VRFs). PACE is the acronym used by psychologist Dan Hughes to describe the optimal adult stance when working with children to reduce stress, enhance connection, promote safety and engender the learning of new social and emotional skills.

1. **Playfulness:** sensitive and appropriate playfulness helps the child feel safe and promotes positivity;
2. **Acceptance:** unconditionally accepting the child makes them feel safe, secure and loved;
3. **Curiosity:** genuine and non-judgemental interest in the child helps them become aware of their inner life;

4. **Empathy:** demonstrating compassion for the child and their feelings supports the child's sense of self-worth.

The VRFs represent the key techniques that we consciously apply in relationships.

- **Attunement:** matching the energy of the child with non-verbal, prosodic, energetic and behavioural communication;
- **Validation:** acknowledging the validity of the feelings the child is experiencing;
- **Containment:** predictability, routine and experiencing safety and security both relationally and environmentally;
- **Regulation:** transforms what was too much to bear alone into an experience that can be tolerated together.

WIN - Wonder, Imagine, Notice

In order to help children engage with us in relationships, we need to reshape some of our language. A non-confrontational approach will yield significantly more regulated results and use of the WIN acronym is a strong way to engage with children without them feeling confronted. Here are some useful sentence starters:

- "I'm noticing you seem really tired..."
- "I wonder if Mrs Smith is aware that you are struggling with this task..."
- "I imagine that must be a really strong feeling for you right now, that must be really tough..."

At CFS we will:

- Model how to build strong, steady and secure relationships at all times;
- We will work as a team, so that in moments where adults are not emotionally available, there will be others to help alongside;
- Focus on the **values** of the school when establishing boundaries in **conversation** with children;
- **Model** positive behaviours and always highlight the behaviour we want to see in positive terms;
- **Plan** lessons that engage, challenge and meet the needs of all children;
- Promote intrinsic motivation by rewarding the process of learning (behaviours for learning);
- Seek both resolution and learning when dealing with incidents;
- Follow up every time, retain ownership and engage in restorative dialogue with children to repair the rupture;
- Always remind children about the expectations.

Senior leaders are not expected to deal with behaviour referrals in isolation. Rather they are to stand alongside colleagues to support, guide, model and show a unified consistency to the children. **The member of staff who has the strongest relationship with the child is best suited to address the behavioural incident.**