The Buckinghamshire Primary Pupil Referral Unit

Perseverance Respect Understanding

Relational Behavioural Policy

This policy was agreed by the Management Committee: Autumn 2026

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This policy should be read alongside the Behaviour Principles, Use of Reasonable Force Policy, Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

Contents

Section	Title	Page
1a	**The Power of Relationships**	4
1b	**The Impact of Disruption**	5
1c	**Our Corporate Responsibility Towards Recovery and Resilience**	5
1d	**The Significance of Differentiation**	5
1e	**The Need for State Dependent Interventions**	6
1f	**The Four Key Elements of Our Journey Together as a Community**	6
	Know the Story	6
	Increase Felt Safety	7
	Soothe the Alarm	7
	See the Child	8
2a	**Expectations for Staff**	10
2b	**Expectations for Pupils**	11
2c	**How We Measure Effectiveness**	11
3	**Using PACE as an Attitude at All Times**	12
	Playfulness	12
	Acceptance	12
	Curiosity	12
	Empathy	12
	Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP)	12
	The Principles of Team Pupil	13
	Differentiated Support for Relational Trauma Recovery	13
	When Children Don't Reciprocate Our Connection	14
	When There Are Minor Infractions	14
	When There Are Serious Incidents	14
	Staff Self-Regulation	14
	Attunement	15
	Self-Reflection	15
	Regaining Balance	15
	Relational Repair	16
4	**When the Going Gets Tough: Some Key Considerations**	17
	Connection Before Correction	17
	The Tricky Conversation: Engage Not Enrage	17
	The Golden Nugget: Name It to Tame It	18
	Reparation: Building Bridges	18
	DDP Examples	19
	Stealing	19
	Collecting	20
	Swearing	20
	Aggression	21

Section	Title	Page
	Bragging, Exaggerating and Lying	22
	Running Away	23
	Need for Control	24
	Receiving Feedback	26
	Safety Matters	27
	Sabotaging	28
	Loyalty Issues	29
	Separating Environments	30
	Food Matters	31
	Travel Matters	31
	Family Matters	31
5	**Vulnerability vs Shame**	33
	Defence Possible	33
	Developmental Vulnerabilities and Sensitivities	34
	Parts Language and Pictures	35
6	**Celebrating Relationships: Examples from the PRU Team**	37
7	**Case Study Example 1: Child B**	38
8	**Statutory Framework and Procedures**	39
8.1	Legal framework and guidance	39
8.2	Roles and responsibilities	39
8.3	Our expectations of pupils	40
8.4	Consequences	40
8.5	Bullying and child-on-child abuse	41
8.6	Safeguarding	41
8.7	SEND and reasonable adjustments	41
8.8	Reasonable force and restrictive intervention	41
8.9	Searching, screening and confiscation	42
8.10	Suspension, permanent exclusion and off-site direction	42
8.11	Behaviour outside the PRU and online	43
8.12	Mobile phones and devices	43
8.13	Allegations against staff	43
8.14	Recording, monitoring and reporting	43
8.15	Working with parents/carers and home schools	44
8.16	Staff training and support	44
8.17	Monitoring, review and linked policies	44
Appendix 1	**Sequence of Engagement**	45
Appendix 2	**Mountain Climb Picture**	46
Appendix 3	**My Team Circle of Safety**	47

Our Core Beliefs

Section 1a: The Power of Relationships

The power of the positive relationships we build and foster with our children is at the heart of our relational policy. 'The quality of relationships is the single biggest predictor of resilience.' – Attributed to Dr Bruce Perry. We acknowledge that all the children at the PRU will have received different early childhood experiences depending on the love, care and nurture they will have received at home and so far in their educational journey. To support children to thrive and re-engage whilst at the PRU, our children need our adults around them to be safe, consistent, show unconditional positive regard, emotionally attuned and restorative.

The PRU's vision is to create a 'community of safe lifelong learners'. At the heart of this vision are the positive relationships we build between adults, children, families and the wider school community.

Perseverance

We continue to work together and support each other, even when things are tough.

Respect

We are respectful to all and treat them well.

Understanding

We always try to understand the unmet need and ask "What has happened to this child, and what do they need right now?"

Alongside our core values, all adults are curious, courageous and creative. They demonstrate curiosity because they understand all behaviour is a form of communication, they ask themselves what might be causing that behaviour, and don't judge. They are courageous by adapting their approach to meet individual children's needs. They adapt their teaching, try new things and ensure the child remains at the centre of all decision making. They show creativity in approaches to building positive relationships and planning interesting lessons which help all to achieve.

Section 1b: The Impact of Disruption

Disruption, trauma, and adverse experiences can have a significant impact on a child or young person's emotional wellbeing, relationships, behaviour, and ability to learn. Experiences such as loss, instability, neglect, exclusion, family breakdown, or interrupted education can affect a child's sense of safety, trust, belonging, and self-worth. Children who have experienced disruption may find it difficult to regulate emotions, manage stress, build positive relationships, or engage consistently in learning. A trauma-informed relational approach recognises that behaviour is often a communication of need and that children require safe, consistent, compassionate, and trusting relationships with adults in order to build resilience, develop regulation, and experience success. Through understanding, predictability, and connection, we seek to reduce re-traumatisation and create an environment where all children feel valued, supported, and able to thrive.

Section 1c: Our Corporate Responsibility Towards Recovery and Resilience

All members of the PRU team share a collective responsibility to build and sustain positive, consistent, and trusting relationships with children and young people. We recognise that recovery and resilience are developed through safe, attuned, and reliable adult relationships.

It is the responsibility of all staff to care for, nurture, and actively connect with our children and young people, recognising that they thrive when they feel seen, heard, and understood. We are committed to creating a relational environment where every interaction contributes to emotional safety, belonging, and trust.

We expect staff to be warm, playful where appropriate, emotionally available, and intentional in creating meaningful, positive relational moments throughout the school day. These everyday interactions are central to supporting regulation, engagement, and long-term recovery.

Section 1d: The Significance of Differentiation

The PRU will ensure that relational practice is implemented equitably and without discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. We recognise that all children and young people are unique, with individual histories, experiences, needs, and strengths. We understand that many of our learners have experienced disrupted or adverse life experiences, and therefore arrive with different levels of readiness for learning, regulation, and relationships.

We value and celebrate diversity, and we actively promote a culture where difference is respected, understood, and accepted. We support children to develop an understanding that being different is not only okay, but also a strength.

We recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective. Children require flexible, responsive, and individualised approaches to support their emotional, social, and academic development. Staff therefore adapt not only teaching and learning, but also relational approaches, communication styles, expectations, and levels of support to meet individual needs.

Through consistent relational practice, we aim to ensure that every child experiences the right balance of structure, nurture, and support to enable them to feel safe, engage positively, and achieve their potential.

Section 1e: The Need for State Dependent Interventions

Brain and behavioural functioning is state-dependent, meaning that a child or young person's ability to think, learn, and engage is influenced by their current emotional and physiological state. These states can shift rapidly in response to perceived safety or threat within their environment.

Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011) explains how the autonomic nervous system responds to cues of safety and danger, shaping emotional regulation, behavioural responses, and social engagement. At any given moment, individuals are continuously and often unconsciously assessing their environment for signals of safety, connection, or threat.

When a child is in a heightened state of stress or perceived threat, access to higher-order thinking, reasoning, and learning is significantly reduced. In these moments, state-dependent approaches are essential, with a primary focus on regulation, felt safety, and relational connection before cognitive or behavioural expectations can be effectively addressed.

Dr Bruce Perry describes common neurophysiological states as calm, alert, alarm, fear, and terror. These states influence how a child thinks, feels, learns, and behaves. Ideally, children should spend most of their time in the calm and alert states, where they are regulated, receptive, and able to engage positively with learning and relationships.

Staff at the PRU follow Dr Perry's Sequence of Engagement, prioritising regulation and connection first, in order to support children to return to calm and alert states where learning and reflection become possible.

A trauma-informed relational approach therefore prioritises co-regulation, attuned and responsive adult interactions, and supportive interventions that help children regain a regulated state. Only once regulation is restored can cognitive, behavioural, and academic expectations be meaningfully addressed. Staff seek connection before correction!

Section 1f: The Four Key Elements of Our Journey Together as a Community

<u>Know the story</u>

We see every child at the PRU as unique with their own story. We invest in relationships with families and mainstream schools to understand their story. When a child begins an inreach placement, we will ask what the child has lived through, from pregnancy onwards. Significant periods of relational disruptions, ACEs and toxic stress will be specially noted. Research demonstrates that children who have experienced relational disruptions can be developmentally stuck; meaning a child is continually in a survival state and accessing their primitive brain, and it is harder for them to access the higher parts of the brain which are responsible for problem solving, processing and retaining new information, reasoning, sharing and empathy.

Increase felt safety

Creating an environment of felt safety is paramount to children being successful and reaching their potential. Many of the children who are placed at the PRU do not have a feeling of safety in school and this contributes to children being developmentally stuck and accessing their primitive brain. We are committed to achieving felt safety in a number of ways:

Staff Stability

We value every member of staff at the PRU and believe they each have a unique set of skills that they contribute to the overall effectiveness. We are dedicated to ensuring that all staff have ongoing professional development including accessing training, observing in different settings and individual coaching as required. We value staff wellbeing and are committed to working together to ensure that workload is monitored and practices are regularly reviewed. Members of the DSL team access supervision through the Educational Psychology service, both individually and in groups; this is a safe reflective space. Relational permanency and staff stability benefit all the children.

Structure

All children benefit from structure and routines. Wherever possible we aim to stick to timetables and routines. When a change is necessary, we ensure that children are pre-prepared and support this with visuals and explain why something has needed to change. We focus on all the things that will remain the same as opposed to all that will be different.

Bespoke timetabling

All the children attending the PRU are unique and require different support at different times. We respond proactively to individual circumstances and will provide them with the level of support and interaction that they require depending on their state at the time.

Safe spaces

We know that some of the children attending the PRU benefit from accessing safe spaces. Classrooms are busy environments with high levels of demand and children can become overwhelmed and dysregulated. Each of the classrooms has a safe space in them and an adjoining regulation room. Children can access them throughout the day as they require, or they can be directed to use it by a PRU member of staff if they think it would be beneficial for them to do so.

Soothe the alarm

Babies begin to develop memories through repeated sensory experiences. Long before they can use words, their brains store information through touch, sound, smell, movement, facial expressions and the emotional responses of caregivers. When a baby experiences consistent nurturing care, these sensory memories help build a sense of safety and trust. However, when there is early disruption such as neglect, inconsistent caregiving, trauma, separation from primary caregivers or exposure to stress, sensory memories may become associated with fear and uncertainty. As a result, the child's developing brain can become more focused on detecting danger than on learning, exploring and building relationships.

Children who have experienced early disruption may spend more time in a state of heightened alertness, often referred to as being in "fear mode" or "survival mode". Their nervous system is primed to look for threats, even when they are safe. This can look like hypervigilance, difficulty trusting adults, impulsive behaviour, emotional outbursts, withdrawal, controlling behaviours, difficulty concentrating, or an exaggerated response to seemingly minor triggers. Sensory experiences such as a raised voice, an unfamiliar smell, a particular tone of voice, or changes in routine may unconsciously remind the child of earlier experiences of stress or insecurity. As a result, their responses may appear disproportionate to the situation. Rather than deliberately choosing challenging behaviour, the child is often reacting from a brain and body that have learned to prioritise protection and survival. Understanding these responses through a trauma-informed lens helps adults respond with empathy, predictability and co-regulation, supporting the child to gradually develop a greater sense of safety and emotional security.

At the PRU, our way of responding to ‘soothing the alarm’ is by being continuously curious about their behaviour, wondering aloud to try and identify what the underlying experience could have been and providing sensory intervention to help calm the child down.

Sensory activities can include:

- **Proprioception (perception or awareness of the position of the body)**- activities that involve lifting, pushing or pulling heavy objects.
- **Vestibular (sense of balance associated with the inner ear)**- activities that involve spinning or swinging e.g. dancing, playground spinning tops and cartwheels.
- **Tactile (sense of touch)**- activities that involve deep pressure, messy play activities such as sand, water or slime.
- **Auditory (sense of hearing)**- listening to music or natural sounds.
- **Visual**- this may involve removal of visual clutter, using calming colours or stimulating attention with favourite things.
- **Olfactory (sense of smell)**- removing odours that may upset the child or using smells that calm the child.

Breathing-focused sensory strategies are also utilised, such as blowing bubbles and cotton wool, which help the child slow their breathing, develop breath control, and achieve a calmer state.

<u>See the child</u>

We recognise each child is a unique individual with their own personality, strengths, needs, experiences, relationships and understanding of the world. Adults seek to communicate unconditional acceptance by listening with curiosity, validating the child's lived experiences, feelings and interpretations of events, and responding with empathy rather than judgement. Through attuned and respectful interactions, adults help children feel seen, heard and valued for who they are. Opportunities are intentionally created throughout the day to celebrate the child, notice their qualities, share moments of joy and connection, and enjoy being in their company. The focus is on building relationships that affirm the child's inherent worth, ensuring they feel valued not for what they can do, produce or achieve, but simply for who they are.

Section 2a: Expectations for Staff

- Staff recognise the significant responsibility they hold in the lives of children and are committed to believing in every child's potential, worth and capacity to thrive. This responsibility requires adults to consistently invest their time, energy, patience and empathy, especially when children are distressed, dysregulated or presenting behaviours that challenge. Staff understand that these are often the times when children need supportive relationships the most. By working together, maintaining a shared understanding of the child's needs and responding with compassion, curiosity and consistency, adults provide the safety, connection and co-regulation that enable children to feel understood, valued and supported.
- Staff prioritise connection before correction, recognising that positive relationships are the foundation for learning, growth and behaviour change. Adults seek first to understand the child's emotions, needs and experiences before addressing behaviour, particularly during times of distress or dysregulation. Through warmth, attunement and genuine curiosity, staff build trust and maintain connection, helping children feel safe, valued and understood. When children experience a strong relational connection, they are more able to accept guidance, reflect on their actions and develop the skills needed to make positive choices.
- Staff take active steps to be kind to themselves and prioritise their own regulation, recognising that children benefit from calm and supported adults. This includes making use of breaks, seeking support from colleagues and leaders when needed, and reflecting on their own emotional wellbeing. By supporting one another and looking after themselves, staff are better able to respond to children with patience, empathy and consistency.
- Staff engage in regular self-reflection, considering how their thoughts, feelings, experiences and responses may influence their interactions with children and colleagues. Through honest reflection and open dialogue with others, staff continually develop their practice, strengthen relationships and ensure they respond to children with empathy, curiosity and understanding.
- Staff are committed to ongoing learning and professional development, recognising that building strong relationships and meeting children's needs requires continual growth. Staff engage in training, reflection and shared learning opportunities to deepen their understanding, strengthen their practice and ensure they provide the best possible support for every child.
- Staff are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce, recognising the value that different backgrounds, perspectives, skills and life experiences bring to the organisation. While staff may come from a wide range of experiences, they are united by shared core values and a collective commitment to building positive relationships, supporting children and upholding the principles of this policy.

Section 2b: Expectations for Pupils

- We know that our children are unique and all have had different experiences and will come from different starting points.
- The PRU team have learnt that all engagement is dependent on the state that children are in. Children can quickly move between states, moving from calm to fear or terror. Children will respond to stress, threat or perceived threat by moving to more reactive parts of their brain, the amygdala, and their cortical system becomes less dominant.
- We know our pupils all have different sensitivities, vulnerabilities and experiences. It is our responsibility to learn about our pupils and provide them with the support that they require.
- By understanding individual children's stresses, we are able to consider adaptations to remove or reduce their anxiety.
- We respond to our pupils with kindness and care. We ask the staff at the PRU to be psychologically and physically close to the children. This means being actively present throughout the day in both structured and unstructured times. We know that relationships are the most powerful tool we have.

Section 2c: How We Measure Effectiveness

- We check key data at half termly intervals; attendance, restrictive intervention including use of reasonable force and pupil safety surveys.
- We will monitor how engaged children are in lessons. Are they confident joining in and sharing their ideas?
- We use anxiety trackers to monitor children's visible stress level throughout the day or throughout individual lessons.
- We ask the young people attending the PRU to complete the Mountain climb picture (see Appendix 2) and 'My Team' circles of safety (see Appendix 3) at half termly intervals throughout placement.
- We talk to our children and young people, in age- or state-appropriate ways about their mental health and wellbeing.
- We measure children's achievement on an individual scale with bespoke targets created at the beginning of each term for every child.
- We use learning walks to focus on relationships in the classroom and genuine, authentic connections between staff and children.
- Throughout placement, parent, school and pupil voice is collected and shared in review meetings. Pupil progress charts will measure the impact on attendance, social interaction, behaviour and academic achievement at both the PRU and their home school.
- Termly review of reintegration destination and a 12-week review of progress following reintegration to measure longer term impact.
- Parent, school and pupil evaluations following placement.

Section 3: Using PACE as an Attitude at All Times

PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) is a key element of **Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP).** We use **PACE** because children learn best when they feel safe, understood and connected to the adults who care for them. Our children need to feel safe in school; it isn't enough for children to be told they are safe.

Observing **PACE** in schools involves:

Playfulness

Adults using appropriate humour, warmth, and a light-hearted approach to help children feel relaxed and connected. Staff may use games, storytelling, playful language, or shared enjoyment to reduce anxiety and build positive relationships. Children are encouraged to experience school as a safe and enjoyable place.

Acceptance

Adults communicating that all feelings are welcome, even when certain behaviours need to be addressed. Staff separate the child from the behaviour, helping children feel valued and understood without judgement. This creates a sense of belonging and supports positive self-esteem.

Curiosity

You will hear adults wondering about the reasons behind a child's behaviour rather than making assumptions. Instead of asking "What's wrong with you?", staff might ask "I wonder what's happened that's making this feel difficult right now?" This helps children feel understood and encourages reflection and problem-solving.

Empathy

You will see adults responding with genuine understanding and compassion when children are distressed, worried, or struggling. Staff acknowledge children's emotions and experiences, helping them feel heard and supported. Through empathy, children learn that their feelings matter and that trusted adults can help them manage difficult situations.

Dyadic Developmental Practice

Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) is a trauma-informed approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes that helps children and young people who have experienced adversity, trauma, loss, or disrupted attachments. It focuses on building safe, trusting relationships and creating environments where children feel understood, valued, and emotionally secure. At the PRU, we encourage this as a way of being with ALL, not just those children we know have experienced trauma.

In practice, staff:

- Build strong, trusting relationships with children.
- Respond to behaviour with curiosity rather than punishment.
- Help children identify and make sense of their emotions.
- Co-regulate with children when they are distressed, supporting them to become more able to regulate their own emotions over time.
- Create predictable, nurturing environments that promote safety and belonging.

Through repeated experiences of being accepted, understood, and supported, children develop greater emotional regulation, resilience, confidence, and trust in others. This enables them to form healthier relationships, engage more successfully in learning, and reach their full potential.

DDP works by using safe, nurturing relationships to help children recover from the impact of trauma, develop emotional wellbeing, and become more able to learn, connect, and thrive.

The principles of Team pupil

Some of our children need additional support; they need to know there is a group of adults who are on their side, care about them, and who want to help them. A group of adults who are available for them, listen and understand them. We call this group- **Team pupil**. If a child requires this support, they will be given a picture at the start of placement. This team may include staff from the PRU and their mainstream school. They act as advocates for the child, communicating between settings and with home. The team will help to understand the child's journey so far, help the child feel settled and build positive, trusting relationships so that the child feels a sense of belonging and to help them feel safe in school. The team meets regularly to create a sense of predictability, in a world full of change. The team will focus on identifying stressors and calmers.

Differentiated support for relational trauma recovery

Effective recovery from relational trauma requires a differentiated approach because a "one size fits all" model does not work for children. Each child brings a unique history of experiences, relationships, strengths, and vulnerabilities, and therefore may respond differently to support strategies. While all children need adults who provide consistent boundaries, safety, and high expectations, the level and type of support should be adapted to their individual needs. For some children, this may mean increased structure, predictability, and adult supervision to help them feel safe and regulated. When behaviour concerns arise, consequences should be delivered in a firm, supportive, and relational manner, focusing on learning, reflection, and repairing relationships rather than punishment. By understanding the meaning behind behaviour and tailoring responses accordingly, adults can help children develop trust, emotional regulation, and resilience while maintaining clear and consistent boundaries.

When children don't reciprocate our connection with them

When children, particularly those attending a PRU, do not immediately reciprocate our attempts to connect with them, it is important to remember that many have experienced repeated experiences of rejection, exclusion, disrupted relationships, or school failure. They are now presenting with **'blocked trust.'** Their reluctance to engage is often a reflection of unmet needs and fractured trust rather than a lack of desire for connection. As adults, our role is to be trust builders, consistently demonstrating that we are safe, reliable, and committed to them regardless of how they respond. Using the principles of **PACE**, we seek to understand rather than judge. We might wonder aloud, saying things such as, "I wonder if it's hard to trust adults when school hasn't felt successful before?" or "I wonder if something about this feels unsafe or uncomfortable today?" Curiosity helps children feel understood rather than blamed, while empathy communicates that their feelings make sense in light of their experiences.

By remaining warm, calm, predictable, and consistent, even when children push us away, we show them that relationships can be different from those they have known before. Over time, these repeated experiences of acceptance, consistency, and emotional safety help children develop trust, strengthen relationships, and become more open to learning and growth.

When there are minor infractions

We understand that there will be daily minor infractions with our children. We need to ensure our environment attends to regulation and connection before demands. Demands placed on each child will be considered on an individual basis, considering their state, age and development. For many children attending the PRU, the experiences we need to provide are those that they most fear. As a result, it is important that we ensure the children feel understood and emotionally connected. We will provide the level of structure and supervision that each child needs depending on their stage of emotional development and deal with all minor infractions using **PACE.**

When there are serious incidents

When dealing with serious incidents we have to remember that experiences link to feelings which link to behaviour. When we understand the function of the behaviour, the unmet need or reasons for the behaviour, we are better positioned to know what response and adaptations are needed to our approach. Serious incidents will be dealt with using care and empathy; educational consequences will be discussed with the child in a manner that reduces stresses and shame. Consequences will be designed to help reflect, repair or rehearse behaviours together.

Staff self-regulation

As adults we need to bring our own regulation to the classroom. Staff self-regulation is fundamental to creating a safe, supportive, and relational environment. Children who have experienced adversity, trauma, or disrupted relationships may struggle to manage strong emotions and can communicate their distress through their behaviour. In these moments, it is essential that adults remain calm, reflective, and emotionally available, providing the co-regulation that children need before they can regulate themselves. This requires staff to recognise their own triggers, understand how stress can affect their responses, and take time to reflect on their practice. Through supervision, peer support, professional reflection, and self-care, staff can develop greater self-awareness and maintain a consistent, compassionate approach. By responding rather than reacting, adults model healthy emotional regulation, reduce the likelihood of escalation, and strengthen relationships built on trust, safety, and respect.

Attunement

Attunement is the process of consciously "tuning in" to a child's emotional state, needs, and experiences so that we can respond in a way that helps them feel understood, safe, and supported. Rather than focusing solely on a child's behaviour, attuned adults pay attention to the feelings, experiences, and unmet needs that may lie beneath it. This requires us to observe carefully, listen actively, and seek to understand what a child may be communicating through their words, actions, body language, and emotional responses. Being attuned means responding with curiosity, empathy, and sensitivity, recognising that behaviour is often a form of communication.

By consistently tuning into children in this way, we strengthen relationships, build trust, and create the emotional safety that enables children to regulate their emotions, engage in learning, and develop positive connections with others.

Self-reflection

Helping children to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours is important because it develops self-awareness, enabling them to better understand themselves, make positive choices, and build healthy relationships.

How we support children to reflect will depend on their age and emotional development. Before any reflection, it is vital that the child is regulated and connected with staff.

When helping our children to reflect, we wonder aloud, e.g. *'I wonder what could have happened to make you so upset….I wonder if you felt overwhelmed because you were worried about getting it wrong or didn't know where to start? Sometimes when things feel tricky, our brains can make us want to stop, walk away, or get cross. I wonder if that's what's happening for you right now?'* We use **PACE** and start with the child's experience before adding in viewpoints of others.

Regaining Balance

Self-reflection enables us to regain balance in our relationship with our children. The process cannot be rushed, children need to feel listened to and understood. The process needs to be authentic, and the child **must not** feel that it is rushed and moves on to talking of the consequence. When this occurs, it increases our children's shame and could result in further dysregulation. By investing the time in this process, it builds connections and reinforces trust. Consequences to repair or restore can now be discussed and agreed upon, rather than imposed by the adult.

Members of the PRU team will also reflect on the incident and discuss the unmet needs and how approaches can be adapted. This may include more supervision or structure at a particular time of the day or a specific intervention.

Relational repair

Relational repair is a vital part of a relational approach because all relationships experience moments of disconnection, misunderstanding, or conflict. For many children, particularly those who have experienced trauma, attachment difficulties, or repeated experiences of rejection, these ruptures can reinforce beliefs that relationships are unsafe, unpredictable, or conditional. Purposeful relational repair helps children learn that mistakes, strong emotions, and challenges do not have to result in damaged relationships. Through repair conversations, adults demonstrate empathy, accountability, and continued care, helping children feel valued and secure. As Louise Bomber highlights in Know Me to Teach Me, effective repair is grounded in key principles: wondering about the meaning behind behaviour rather than judging it; providing emotional and physical safety; building trustworthy relationships; regulating before educating; maintaining connection alongside boundaries; and understanding that behaviour is communication. By revisiting difficult moments with curiosity, empathy, and a focus on learning, adults help children develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, resilience, and trust in relationships.

Relational repair strengthens a child's sense of belonging and demonstrates that even when things go wrong, relationships can be restored and remain intact.

Section 4: When the Going Gets Tough: Some Key Considerations

- If our pupils could manage their emotions, behaviour, and relationships more successfully, they would.
- Big behaviours often signal big feelings, unmet needs, or overwhelming stress.
- Behaviour is communication: what is the child trying to tell us through their actions?
- Children experiencing dysregulation need adults who can lend them calm, not mirror their distress.
- When faced with challenge, move from "How do I stop this behaviour?" to "What does this child need right now?"
- Let’s not ask our pupils questions about their behaviour we already know the answer to, for example, ‘Did you take that pen?’ When we know they did!
- Seek to understand the function of the behaviour before deciding on the response.
- Remember that consequences alone do not teach regulation; relationships do.
- The adult's response can either escalate or de-escalate a situation.
- During moments of crisis, prioritise safety, dignity, and regulation over compliance.
- Ask: "What happened? What need is being expressed? How can we help this child succeed next time?"

When the going gets tough: CONNECTION before CORRECTION

It is important for us to slow down and respond with curiosity rather than urgency. When children present with big emotions, challenging behaviour, or disengagement from learning, our role is to hold regulation, maintain the relationship, and seek to understand what may be driving the behaviour. Whether the difficulty presents itself through behaviour or learning, adults should follow the sequence of **Regulate, Relate, Reason, and Repair**. Children cannot access reflection, problem-solving, or learning until they feel safe and regulated. Our responses should therefore be calm, consistent, and predictable, focusing on current stressors, triggers, and what helps the child to feel calmer and more secure. Through reflective practice, we consider not only the child's experiences and needs but also the impact of our own responses. We maintain the highest regard for every child, preserving dignity and connection even when addressing difficult situations. By prioritising relationships, co-regulation, and restoration, we create the conditions in which children can learn from mistakes, develop self-regulation, and experience a strong sense of belonging within our school community.

The tricky conversation: ENGAGE not ENRAGE

There will be times when we need to have difficult conversations with children about their behaviour, choices, relationships, or engagement with learning. For some pupils, particularly those who have experienced adversity, trauma, or multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), these conversations can trigger feelings of stress, shame, threat, or rejection. Our role is therefore to engage, not enrage, approaching every conversation in a way that protects the relationship and preserves the child's dignity. We begin from a position of care, connection, and belief in the child, recognising that they are more likely to reflect, repair, and problem-solve when they feel safe rather than judged.

Adults should remain calm, curious, and compassionate, avoiding language that escalates shame or defensiveness. Instead, we communicate that the child is valued, the relationship remains secure, and that we will work through the difficulty together. By maintaining emotional safety and focusing on understanding as well as accountability, we create the conditions for meaningful reflection, growth, and restoration.

Helpful starter phrases:

"We need to have a tricky conversation."

"Remember, I care about you and I'm not going anywhere."

"We will find a way to work this out together."

"You're not in trouble. I just want to understand what happened."

"Let's think together about what was going on for you."

"This doesn't change how I feel about you."

"We can sort this out, and I'll help you."

"What do you need from me right now so we can talk about this?"

"Let's work out what will help next time."

"We all make mistakes. What matters is how we move forward."

The golden nugget: NAME it to TAME it

One of the most powerful things we can do as educators is help children make sense of their experiences by joining up the dots between the past and the present. When a child experiences difficulty with behaviour, relationships, or learning, there is often more beneath the surface than we can immediately see. By being curious about possible triggers, current stressors, and previous experiences, we help children understand the "why" behind their reactions. It is important that pupils know we recognise their struggles and understand that their response may be linked to feelings of fear, disappointment, shame, frustration, worry, or sadness rather than simply poor choices. Many children lack the language to identify what they are feeling, so our role is to reduce the number of words, embrace the emotion, and help them name it. By saying things such as, "I wonder if that felt unfair," or "You seem really disappointed," we validate the feeling without excusing the behaviour. When children can name what they are feeling, they are better able to understand, regulate, and manage those emotions. Through compassion, connection, and curiosity, we help children move from reacting to reflecting, building their emotional awareness and resilience over time.

Reparation: Building Bridges

Reparation is about rebuilding connection, restoring trust, and strengthening relationships after a difficulty has occurred. In a relational approach, adults begin by reflecting on their own contribution to the situation and, where appropriate, taking responsibility for anything they may have done, or not done, that may have contributed to the child's distress. This might include saying, "I'm sorry that I didn't put enough supervision in place for you at a time when you needed it most," or "I'm sorry that I didn't notice how overwhelmed you were feeling."

When adults model humility, accountability, and repair, they teach children that mistakes are part of being human and that relationships can be repaired. Reparation is communicated not only through words but also through body language and tone. Using open, non-threatening posture, surrender arms, a gentle tone, and even taking a small step back can help reduce feelings of threat and demonstrate that we are working with, rather than against, the child. Phrases such as, "Whoa, I'm unsure where you've gone right now, but I'm here for you, not against you," can help maintain connection during moments of difficulty. Where reparation is needed, children should not be expected to navigate this process alone. We support them through it, helping them understand the impact of their actions and finding ways to make things right together. Whenever possible, we prioritise random acts of kindness, acts of service, and opportunities to contribute positively to the community as our first response to reparation, recognising that genuine repair is built through meaningful action, restored relationships, and a renewed sense of belonging.

DDP (Dyadic Developmental Practice) Examples

Stealing

Whilst stealing is not acceptable, the behaviour itself is often only the visible part of a much bigger story. Traditional consequences may sometimes stop the behaviour in the short term, but if we do not understand the underlying need, feeling, or motivation, the child may simply find another way to communicate their distress. Our first responsibility is therefore to remain curious and seek to understand what the stealing might be telling us about the child's emotional world.

Stealing may occur for a number of reasons, including:

- Impulsivity and difficulties with self-regulation.
- Fear of scarcity or previous experiences of deprivation.
- Wanting to fit in with peers or gain social acceptance.
- Jealousy or feelings of unfairness.
- Low self-esteem or a desire to possess what others have.
- Seeking attention or connection from adults or peers.
- Expressing anger, hurt, or resentment indirectly.
- Creating distance in a relationship through testing or pushing adults away.
- Difficulties understanding ownership and boundaries.
- Attempting to gain a sense of control during times of stress or uncertainty.

When responding to stealing, adults should focus on understanding before judging. Questions such as "I wonder what was happening for you when you took that?", "What did taking it do for you?" or "What might you have needed at that moment?" invite reflection rather than shame. Through the DDP principles of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy), we communicate that while the behaviour cannot be accepted, the child remains accepted and valued. Reparation remains important, but it should be undertaken alongside the child and viewed as an opportunity to strengthen relationships, develop insight, and build better ways of meeting needs in the future. The goal is not simply to stop the stealing; the goal is to understand the message behind it and support the child to find safer, more appropriate ways to communicate that need.

Collecting

Collecting, storing, or carrying large numbers of items should be approached with curiosity rather than judgement. Children who have experienced trauma, loss, neglect, disrupted attachments, or periods of uncertainty may develop collecting behaviours as a way of creating safety, predictability, comfort, or control. Research and practice described by Phillips et al. (2020) highlight the importance of understanding behaviour through the lens of a child's experiences and attachment history, recognising that behaviours often make sense when viewed in the context of what a child has lived through.

Children may collect items because:

- They have experienced scarcity or fear of not having enough.
- Possessions help them feel safe and secure.
- They are seeking comfort during times of stress or uncertainty.
- Objects remind them of important people, places, or memories.
- Collecting gives them a sense of control when life feels unpredictable.
- They struggle with loss and find it difficult to let things go.
- They are trying to create a sense of identity or belonging.
- The items help regulate overwhelming emotions.
- They worry that something important may be taken away from them.

Rather than insisting that a child immediately parts with possessions, adults should communicate acceptance, empathy, and understanding. Our role is to wonder about the meaning behind the behaviour and support the child to feel safe enough to explore it. Using PACE, we might say: "I wonder if these things help you feel safe?", "I wonder if it feels difficult when you're not sure where your things are?", or "I wonder if keeping these items close helps you remember something important?" Such comments help the child feel understood rather than judged and encourage reflection without shame.

The aim is not simply to stop collecting. The aim is to understand the need that the behaviour is meeting and work alongside the child to develop a greater sense of security, trust, and belonging. When children feel emotionally safe and understood, they are more able to explore alternative ways of meeting those needs and become less reliant on coping strategies that may have developed in response to earlier adversity.

Swearing

Swearing can be particularly difficult for adults because it is often experienced as disrespectful, insulting, or personally directed. However, from a DDP and trauma-informed perspective, it is important to look beyond the language and understand what the child may be communicating. Swearing is frequently a symptom of dysregulation, anger, fear, frustration, shame, or distress rather than a deliberate attempt to offend. For some children, swearing is a normal part of their home or community environment and may simply be the language they have heard and learned. For others, it can be a way of testing relationships, pushing adults away before they themselves feel rejected, or diverting attention from a mistake they have made. Often, children want adults to focus on the language rather than the underlying issue because addressing the behaviour may feel safer than facing feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or vulnerability.

When faced with swearing, adults should prioritise remaining calm, regulated, and relational. Responding emotionally or becoming drawn into a battle about language can escalate the situation and reinforce the child's expectation that relationships become unsafe during moments of conflict. Instead, the adult's role is to hold the child's distress, maintain connection, and support regulation. Once the child is calm and able to reflect, the focus can shift to understanding, repairing relationships, and considering the impact their words may have had on others. As with all behaviour, the goal is not simply to stop the swearing but to help the child develop safer and more effective ways of expressing strong emotions.

We may use language such as, '*You seemed really cross with us earlier.' 'I could see that you were feeling very angry in that moment.' 'Do you have any ideas about what made you feel so cross?' 'I wonder if something happened before that made those feelings even bigger?' 'It looked as though things felt really difficult for you.' 'I was thinking you might have been feeling hurt or frustrated.' 'I'm worried your friends may not want to spend time with you this afternoon because they might remember some of the unkind things that were said.' 'Would you like some help thinking about how we can fix this together?'*

This approach allows the adult to hold clear boundaries around respectful language whilst maintaining empathy, curiosity, and connection. In doing so, children learn that strong feelings are acceptable, relationships can survive mistakes, and repair is always possible.

Aggression

For children who have experienced trauma, loss, disrupted attachments, or significant adversity, aggression is often rooted in fear rather than defiance. When children do not experience a strong sense of felt safety, their brains and bodies can move rapidly into survival mode, leading to fight, flight, freeze, or flop responses. Aggression may emerge when a child feels threatened, overwhelmed, rejected, embarrassed, powerless, or scared. From a relational and DDP perspective, our role is to "chase the fear" rather than simply react to the behaviour. We recognise that if children could manage their emotions and responses differently, they would. The aggression is often a sign that the child's regulatory system has become overwhelmed and they need an adult to help them feel safe enough to regain control.

Our first responsibility is always safety. Adults should carry out a dynamic risk assessment, ensuring that other children and staff are safe and moving others away if necessary. At the same time, we seek to reduce threat by remaining calm, regulated, and non-confrontational. When we know children well, we become attuned to early signs of distress and intervene before escalation where possible, using proximity, connection, co-regulation, sensory strategies, movement breaks, humour, reassurance, or calming activities. Through PACE, we communicate that we are not frightened by their feelings and that we will stay alongside them until they are able to regain control.

Once the child is regulated, they will often experience feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, or confusion about what has happened. This is the time for connection, not blame. We offer unconditional acceptance of the child whilst maintaining clear boundaries around the behaviour. We want the child to know that the relationship remains secure, that we care about them, and that we will help them understand what happened. Through curiosity and empathy, we wonder aloud about the possible fears, worries, or triggers that may have contributed to the aggression and support the child to reflect and repair.

Example script:

"I'm really pleased to see you feeling a bit calmer now. That looked really hard for you. I wondered if something felt scary, upsetting, or too much in that moment? I noticed things changed very quickly. I wonder if something happened that made you feel unsafe or uncomfortable? Sometimes when people feel worried, angry, embarrassed, or frightened, their bodies react before they've had time to think. I don't think you wanted things to end up the way they did. I'm here for you and we're going to work through this together. I wonder what was happening for you just before you became so upset? What do you think your body was trying to tell you? Let's think together about what might help if those feelings start building again. The behaviour wasn't okay because people got hurt and frightened, but that doesn't change how much we care about you. How can we help repair things with the people who were affected?"

By approaching aggression through the lens of fear, safety, and connection, we help children develop insight into their emotions, strengthen their regulation skills, and learn that relationships can remain secure even when things go wrong. The goal is not simply to stop aggressive behaviour; it is to help children feel safe enough to choose a different response in the future.

Bragging, exaggerating and lying

Some children who have experienced developmental trauma, disrupted attachments, rejection, or repeated experiences of failure can struggle with the reciprocity and authenticity required for healthy relationships. Beneath bragging, exaggerating, or lying there is often a deep sense of insecurity, low self-worth, and, for some children, a belief that they are not good enough, interesting enough, or likeable enough as they are. As a result, they may create stories, embellish experiences, or exaggerate achievements in an attempt to gain approval, connection, status, or acceptance from others. Whilst the information they share may not be accurate, the emotional need underneath it is very real.

From a DDP perspective, correcting, confronting, or "catching out" a child rarely addresses the deeper feelings driving the behaviour. If a child secretly believes they are unworthy or unlovable, proving that their story is untrue will not change those beliefs. Instead, we seek to understand what the behaviour might be telling us. Through PACE, we respond with empathy and curiosity, helping the child feel accepted whilst gently acknowledging the underlying need. We recognise that many children who exaggerate are actually communicating feelings of insecurity, loneliness, a need for belonging, or a wish to be seen positively by others.

At the PRU, we place a high value on honesty and regularly teach, model, and celebrate truthful communication. However, we also recognise that lying is often an adaptive strategy rather than a deliberate attempt to deceive. Many children use lying to avoid trouble, disappointment, rejection, or feelings of shame. For some, the underlying driver is toxic shame: a deep belief that "I am bad" rather than "I made a mistake." Lying can temporarily protect children from these painful feelings and help them avoid the fear of being judged, blamed, or rejected.

For this reason, we avoid setting children up to fail by asking questions when we already know the answer. Doing so can invite further dishonesty and increase feelings of shame.

Instead, we are clear about what we know, while remaining curious about the reasons behind the behaviour.

For example, rather than saying:

"Did you throw the pencil?"

when we have seen it happen, we might say:

"I saw the pencil leave your hand and hit the wall. I'm wondering what was going on for you at that moment."

Running away

Occasionally, children may run away from adults, peers, classrooms, or situations when they become overwhelmed. This behaviour is often connected to the child's sympathetic arousal system signalling that they need distance from something that feels threatening, overwhelming, embarrassing, or emotionally unsafe. Whilst running away can be highly distressing for staff, particularly in a PRU where we have a significant duty of care to protect children and keep them safe, it is important that adults understand the behaviour through the lens of fear, stress, and regulation rather than simply non-compliance.

The security of our sites is an important protective factor, allowing staff to locate children quickly and reduce the risk of harm. Our response is always proportionate to the level of risk presented. If there are concerns about a child's immediate safety, adults must close the distance quickly and intervene to ensure safety, even if this temporarily escalates the child's distress. Safety will always take precedence.

Once a child has been found and is no longer at immediate risk, our focus shifts to co-regulation rather than correction. Adults should remain calm, sit quietly within proximity, and avoid excessive questioning or demands. We wait for visible signs that the child's arousal levels are beginning to reduce and offer support through individual calming strategies, including their personalised sensory safe bags, access to regulating activities, movement, hydration, or simply the reassuring presence of a trusted adult. We recognise that children cannot reflect on their behaviour when their survival system is activated.

When the child begins to regulate, we can start to wonder aloud about what may have happened. Through PACE, we communicate curiosity and empathy rather than judgement.

PACEful language might include:

"I wonder if something felt too much just then?"

"I noticed you needed to get away very quickly."

"I wonder if your body was telling you that you needed some space?"

"Something must have felt really difficult for you."

"I wonder what was happening just before you decided to leave?"

"I don't think running away felt like a good choice after the event, but I wonder if it felt like the only choice at the time."

At other times, children may run away to avoid difficult tasks, uncomfortable emotions, conflict, disappointment, or feelings of failure. In these situations, adults remain curious about what the child may be escaping from rather than focusing solely on the act of running itself. A playful, relationship-based response can often reduce shame and lower defences.

For example:

"Your feet seemed to make a decision before the rest of you caught up!"

"I think your trainers were working much harder than your thinking brain."

"I wonder what your feet were trying to get away from?"

"If your feet could talk, what would they tell us they were worried about?"

Only when the child is calm, connected, and able to think clearly do we move into reasoning, reflection, and repair. Together, we explore what triggered the need to run, identify early warning signs, and agree strategies that adults can use to help next time. Throughout the process, we communicate a clear message: "You are safe, you belong here, and we will help you through difficult moments rather than face them alone." This helps children develop trust in adults, greater awareness of their emotions, and confidence that relationships remain secure even when things go wrong.

Need for control

Some children have a strong need to control their environment, interactions, routines, or emotions. This need for control is often rooted in fear rather than opposition. Many of our children have experienced situations in which adults were unable to keep them safe, meet their needs consistently, or make decisions in their best interests. As a result, they may come to believe that remaining in control is the only way to feel secure. If they are in charge, life feels more predictable and less frightening. Allowing an adult to take the lead can feel risky, uncertain, and even threatening.

We seek to promote dependence before independence. Before children can trust themselves to manage the world, they often need repeated experiences of trusting caring adults. We create opportunities for children to experience the warmth, comfort, and safety that comes when someone else does something for them. These small moments communicate an important message: "You do not have to manage everything on your own."

Examples might include:

"I've noticed it's quite difficult pulling off your wellies. Let me take care of that for you."

"You've been working really hard today. I'll carry that for you."

"It must be tiring always feeling like you need to be in charge."

"People who care about us like doing things for us sometimes."

"I care about you and I enjoy helping."

"You don't have to do everything on your own here."

These moments also provide opportunities to gently reflect on past experiences and challenge long-held beliefs. We recognise that controlling behaviours may once have helped the child survive difficult circumstances. They may have been adaptive strategies that protected them from disappointment, uncertainty, or harm. Whilst these strategies may have been necessary in the past, they are no longer needed in the same way within a safe, supportive environment. Helping children understand this takes time, patience, and many repeated experiences of adults being reliable, attuned, and trustworthy.

Children often find this work challenging and may push back when adults take the lead. They may attempt to regain control through negotiation, distraction, refusal, argument, or by drawing adults into power struggles. It is important that staff remain mindful of their own responses and avoid becoming controlling in return. When we feel ourselves being pulled into a struggle for power, we use PACE to maintain the relationship and lower the emotional temperature.

A playful response might sound like:

"Oh, you nearly tricked me there!"

"You got me doing what you wanted rather than what we needed."

"You are very clever. I'll have to work harder not to be tricked next time!"

"I can see your control brain is working really hard today."

"Come on, let's get back to what we need to do together."

Using playfulness in this way allows us to acknowledge the behaviour without creating shame or conflict. Over time, children learn that adults can safely hold appropriate control, make helpful decisions, and remain connected even when boundaries are in place. The message we seek to communicate is: "You do not have to carry everything on your own. We can help keep you safe until you are ready to do more for yourself."

Receiving feedback

For many children who have experienced trauma, disrupted attachments, or repeated experiences of failure, receiving feedback can feel threatening. Corrective feedback may quickly trigger feelings of shame, embarrassment, or inadequacy. Many of our pupils have a fragile sense of self and can interpret a simple correction as evidence that they are "bad", "stupid", or "always getting things wrong". Equally, receiving praise can feel uncomfortable. Some children do not trust adults, struggle to believe positive things about themselves, or fear that praise creates expectations they may not be able to meet again. As a result, they may dismiss compliments, argue against praise, or appear indifferent when recognised for their achievements.

Adults, at the PRU, play the long game. Rather than repeatedly highlighting mistakes, we focus on protecting the relationship and regulating shame. We understand that children are more likely to accept feedback when they feel safe, connected, and valued. Wherever possible, corrections are delivered lightly, playfully, and without humiliation. The aim is not to draw attention to the mistake itself but to support the child to learn from it whilst maintaining their dignity.

Playful responses to mistakes might include:

"Oops, I think that answer took a little detour before it reached the page!"

"I wonder if your pencil got a bit confused there."

"That doesn't quite look like what we were aiming for. Let's be detectives and see what happened."

"Goodness me, your brain was moving so quickly it skipped a step!"

By responding in this way, adults communicate that mistakes are a normal and expected part of learning rather than something to fear.

Praise often requires the same sensitivity. Instead of overwhelming children with excessive praise, we gently notice, wonder, and comment on what we see. We aim to make positive feedback feel safe rather than exposing.

PACEful praise might sound like:

"I think your writing has quietly improved and I don't think you've noticed!"

"Your determination was working very hard during that task."

"You probably won't believe me, but that was a really kind thing you just did."

"I wonder if you realise how much progress you've made."

"That looked tricky and you kept going anyway. That's impressive."

For some children, words alone are not enough. Tangible and visual reminders of success can help build trust in positive feedback over time. Post-it notes, certificates, smiley faces, achievement cards, photographs, postcards home, or brief handwritten messages provide concrete evidence that can be revisited when the child is feeling uncertain about themselves. These small reminders help children hold onto positive experiences, challenge negative self-beliefs, and gradually become more comfortable receiving encouragement from others.

Over time, our goal is to help children understand that making mistakes does not make them a failure and that being praised does not mean they have to be perfect. Through playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy, we create an environment where feedback becomes an opportunity for growth rather than a trigger for shame. The message we seek to communicate is: "You are valued exactly as you are, and mistakes are simply part of learning and growing."

Safety matters

Children need to feel safe before they can learn, build relationships, regulate their emotions, or engage positively in school life. This is particularly important within a PRU, where many pupils arrive with educational experiences that have been disrupted by exclusion, adversity, trauma, loss, or repeated experiences of failure. It is important to remember that an adult's perception of safety is not always the same as a child's perception of safety. What feels ordinary, predictable, or reassuring to us may feel uncertain, threatening, or overwhelming to a child whose life experiences have taught them that the world is not always safe.

At the beginning of a placement, we therefore prioritise the development of felt safety. We achieve this by remaining physically and emotionally available, staying close, becoming attuned to a child's emotional state, and responding quickly when signs of distress begin to emerge.

During the early stages, staff may offer a greater level of proximity, reassurance, structure, and support than might be expected with other pupils. As trust develops and a child's sense of safety grows, this support gradually reduces, encouraging independence whilst maintaining the security of the relationship.

The journey towards self-safety begins from the very first day. Our induction process is designed to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability. We explain who staff members are, how adults can help, what visitors may be seen on site, and why unfamiliar adults occasionally come into the school. We also explain routines, expectations, emergency procedures, and drills in an age-appropriate way, helping children understand not only what happens but why these systems are in place. By making the environment predictable and transparent, we reduce anxiety and help children develop confidence in the adults responsible for their care.

Through PACE, we remain curious about what helps each child feel safe. Some children need regular reassurance, some need clear routines, some need sensory supports, and others need trusted adults nearby when they are feeling overwhelmed. We continually wonder aloud about what might help:

"I wonder what helps you feel safe when things feel difficult?"

"Is there anything we can do that would make today feel easier?"

"I'm noticing you seem more settled when you know what's happening next."

"I wonder whether having me nearby feels helpful right now?"

Our aim is that every child comes to experience school as a place where adults are reliable, predictable, and emotionally available. Over time, children begin to internalise this sense of safety, moving from relying on adults to help them feel safe towards developing their own strategies for managing uncertainty, relationships, and challenges independently. The message we seek to communicate is: "You are safe here. We will notice when things feel difficult, and you do not have to manage those feelings alone."

Sabotaging

Children who have experienced disrupted attachments, rejection, loss, or inconsistency in relationships can sometimes find feelings of safety, trust, and connection surprisingly uncomfortable. Whilst they may desperately want positive relationships, the experience of being cared for can also feel overwhelming and frightening. As trust develops, children may begin to worry about what will happen if that relationship changes, ends, or lets them down. Within a PRU, this can become particularly evident as placements progress, transitions approach, or children become aware that support may not remain exactly the same forever.

For some children, it can feel safer to reject others before they themselves are rejected. As a result, they may begin to sabotage relationships by becoming distant, argumentative, oppositional, dismissive, or disengaged. From a DDP perspective, we understand this behaviour as protective rather than wilfully challenging. The child is often attempting to manage fears of loss, separation, disappointment, or vulnerability.

When we notice signs of sabotage, it is important not to take the behaviour personally or become withdrawn ourselves. Instead, we remain emotionally available and use PACE to wonder about what the child may be feeling underneath their actions. We avoid focusing on the change that may be coming and instead remind children about what remains constant.

PACEful responses might include:

"I wonder if things feeling good can sometimes feel a bit worrying too?"

"I wonder whether part of you is expecting something to go wrong?"

"Sometimes when people have been let down before, it can feel difficult to trust that relationships will stay okay."

"I'm noticing you've been keeping a bit more distance from me lately. I wonder what that's been like for you?"

"I wonder if you're trying to work out whether we'll still care about you when things are difficult?"

When transitions or endings are approaching, adults should focus on continuity and permanence wherever possible.

Helpful language includes:

"Some things may be changing, but lots of things will stay the same."

"The relationships you've built here don't disappear because circumstances change."

"We will make sure the adults around you know what helps and what is important to you."

"The progress you've made belongs to you and comes with you wherever you go."

"Even when people are not physically close by, the care they had for you doesn't stop."

"I wonder if part of you is worried about what happens next?"

Where appropriate, adults can gently name what they are observing:

"I've noticed things seem a little bumpier between us at the moment. I wonder if that might be because some changes are coming and those feelings are difficult to hold?"

The goal is not to challenge the child's behaviour directly but to understand and validate the fears that may sit underneath it. Through repeated experiences of adults remaining calm, consistent, and connected, children learn that relationships can survive distance, change, mistakes, and strong emotions. The message we seek to communicate is: 'You do not need to push us away to protect yourself. We are here, we care about you, and we will help you navigate change safely.'

Loyalty issues

Many children who have experienced disruption, neglect, trauma, separation, or multiple caregiving arrangements can experience powerful loyalty conflicts. As children begin to trust adults within the PRU, they may find themselves questioning why previous adults were unable to keep them safe, meet their needs consistently, or make different choices.

These thoughts can feel confusing, frightening, and emotionally painful. Children often feel caught between caring about the adults from their past whilst also carrying hurt, disappointment, anger, or sadness about what they experienced.

For children who are not living with their birth parents, these feelings can be even more complex. They may worry that talking positively about their current carers, foster carers, residential staff, or trusted adults is somehow disloyal to their birth family. Equally, they may feel guilty or ashamed when expressing frustration or sadness about the adults they continue to love. Many children internalise these experiences and develop feelings of toxic shame, believing that if relationships have broken down, there must be something wrong with them. Rather than thinking, "The adults were unable to meet my needs," they may conclude, "I wasn't worth caring for."

Our role is not to judge or criticise significant adults from a child's past. Instead, we create a safe space where children can explore these confusing emotions and make sense of their experiences. Through empathy, curiosity and acceptance, we help organise their thinking and co-create a more balanced narrative. We support children to understand that it is possible to love someone and feel hurt by them at the same time. We help them move away from self-blame and towards a more compassionate understanding of their story.

The aim is not to rewrite a child's story but to help them understand it with greater compassion and accuracy. Through consistent relationships and PACEful conversations, children begin to see themselves not as the cause of what happened, but as individuals who have survived difficult experiences and deserve care, connection, and belonging. The message we seek to communicate is: "You can care about important people in your life whilst also acknowledging the hurt you experienced, and none of that changes your worth."

Separating environments

Many children who have experienced disruption, trauma, neglect, or multiple caregiving environments have learned that different settings require very different ways of surviving. Behaviours that may have been adaptive, necessary, or protective in one environment can be misunderstood or unhelpful in another. As children move between home, school, community settings, family networks, and care arrangements, they can struggle to understand which behaviours are expected where. Their nervous system may respond automatically to perceived threat before they have had the opportunity to think, reflect, and choose how they want to respond.

We help children make sense of these differences without criticising the environments or adults in their lives. We recognise that many behaviours developed for a reason and may have helped the child cope at an earlier point in their life. Rather than viewing these strategies as "bad", we help children understand when they are helpful and when they may no longer be needed. Our goal is to support children to develop flexibility and make conscious choices about how they respond in different situations, reducing the likelihood that they become hijacked by their nervous system.

Through curiosity and empathy, we help children explore the expectations and social rules of different environments:

"I wonder if that behaviour helped you in other places?"

"It sounds like you learned that strategy for a good reason."

"What works in one place doesn't always work in another."

"Different places sometimes need different versions of us."

"I wonder what your brain was expecting to happen?"

"What helps you stay safe at home might not be needed here."

We help children understand that adapting their behaviour is not about changing who they are. Instead, it is about developing a wider range of responses and choosing the strategy that best fits the situation.

Over time, we support children to develop an internal understanding of the differences between environments and relationships. They begin to recognise that school adults are safe, predictable, and available to help; that mistakes can be repaired; and that they do not need to rely on survival strategies which may have been necessary in the past. The message we seek to communicate is: "Your behaviour makes sense in the context of your experiences. Together, we can help you develop new strategies so that you can feel safe, successful, and connected in different environments."

Food matters

Many of the children and young people attending the PRU may have experienced disruption, uncertainty, or unhealthy relationships with food. For some, food may have been restricted, denied, used as a punishment, or inconsistently available, which can impact their ability to adapt to school routines around eating. Within our setting, we recognise the importance of food in supporting both regulation and relationships. Pupils come together each morning to share breakfast, providing a calm and nurturing start to the day that promotes connection, belonging, and emotional regulation. We also eat together at break and lunchtime, using these opportunities to strengthen relationships and develop social skills in a relaxed environment. Children have access to healthy, crunchy snacks throughout the day when needed, as these can support sensory regulation and concentration. We regularly engage pupils in cooking activities and discussions about nutrition, helping them to develop positive experiences of food, build life skills, and establish healthy relationships with eating. Through these approaches, we aim to create a safe, predictable, and nurturing environment where food is associated with care, connection, and wellbeing.

Travel matters

For many of the children and young people attending the PRU, the journey to and from school can be a significant source of stress. Children may arrive in a heightened state of arousal due to previous experiences, anxiety about transitions, sensory overload, or difficulties encountered during their journey. The adults accompanying them may not always be able to recognise signs of increasing dysregulation or provide the co-regulation needed to support them. As a result, some pupils arrive with nervous systems already overloaded and may not be ready to access learning immediately.

At our PRU, we recognise the importance of making the transition into school as safe, predictable, and nurturing as possible.

The day begins with opportunities for regulation and connection, including a calm breakfast shared with trusted adults and peers before any learning takes place. We understand that each child is different, and the time needed to regulate will vary depending on their individual needs and emotional state on arrival. We also work closely with taxi drivers and transport providers to promote consistency, predictability, and positive relationships during journeys. Through these approaches, we seek to reduce stress, increase feelings of safety, and support children to be emotionally available for learning and relationships.

Family matters

Many of the children and young people attending the PRU have experienced disruption, loss, separation, or inconsistency in their relationships with parents and carers. As a result, they may carry feelings of sadness, confusion, rejection, or grief, while simultaneously longing for secure and positive relationships. Children often make sense of difficult experiences by blaming themselves, believing that they did something wrong, are not good enough, or are somehow responsible for what has happened to them. These beliefs can contribute to feelings of shame and have a significant impact on their self-esteem, relationships, and emotional wellbeing.

Within our PRU, we recognise the importance of helping children understand their experiences in a safe and sensitive way. We believe that when significant aspects of a child's life are not spoken about, children can assume that adults do not want to discuss them or that the topic is too shameful to mention. This can inadvertently reinforce feelings of shame and isolation. Through a DDP-informed approach, we create opportunities for children to talk about their lives, feelings, and experiences when they are ready, while remaining highly sensitive to issues of privacy, confidentiality, and individual circumstances.

We are also mindful of how school events, celebrations, and curriculum activities may affect children whose family experiences differ from those of their peers. While we celebrate important occasions, we do so thoughtfully and inclusively, recognising that some children may find these times difficult. Through our Personal Development curriculum, children are supported to explore emotions, relationships, identity, belonging, and family diversity. By approaching these conversations with acceptance, curiosity, empathy, and attunement, we help children develop a more compassionate understanding of themselves and their experiences, reducing shame and strengthening their sense of self-worth and belonging.

Section 5: Vulnerability vs Shame

Many of the children and young people attending our PRU have experienced disrupted, traumatic, or inconsistent early relationships. As a result, they may have a fragmented and disorganised sense of self. Early caregiving relationships may have lacked the safety, unconditional acceptance, attuned responses, and intersubjective conversations needed to help a child develop a coherent understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Instead, their experiences, both verbal and non-verbal, may have been characterised by fear, uncertainty, rejection, or emotional overwhelm.

Shame is one of the most damaging consequences of these experiences. Unlike guilt, which relates to something a person has done, shame relates to who a person believes they are. A child experiencing shame feels that they are wrong, bad, unlovable, or not good enough. When shame is intense, experiences can become emotionally frozen in the child's mind, and they may go to great lengths to avoid situations, feelings, or relationships that remind them of those painful experiences.

Where close relationships with adults have been associated with shame, criticism, rejection, or inconsistency, children may learn that vulnerability is unsafe. Rather than seeking support from adults when distressed, they may withdraw, reject help, become defensive, or display behaviours that appear challenging. These responses are often attempts to protect themselves from further feelings of shame and emotional pain.

Within our PRU, we recognise that it is our role to notice, understand, and respond to shame with care, empathy, and curiosity. Through a DDP-informed approach, we seek to expose shame rather than allow it to remain hidden, helping children to express difficult thoughts and feelings in a safe and supported way. By responding with acceptance rather than judgement, we help children develop new meanings for their experiences and begin to see themselves through the eyes of caring and trustworthy adults.

We remain conscious that the challenges and adversities our children have faced will always form part of their life story. Many continue to struggle with doubts about whether they are worthy of love, belonging, and acceptance. It is therefore essential that adults consistently respond using the principles of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy), ensuring that every interaction communicates safety, connection, and respect.

As children experience positive and trusting relationships within school, they begin to discover that vulnerability can be safe. Through warm, attuned relationships combined with clear structure, consistency, and boundaries, children learn that making mistakes, expressing emotions, seeking help, and forming close relationships do not have to lead to rejection or shame. Over time, these experiences support the development of resilience, self-worth, and a stronger sense of identity, enabling children to engage more fully in learning, relationships, and the wider world.

Defence possible

Children who have experienced secure early relationships learn that adults can be trusted to keep them safe, meet their needs, and help them manage difficult emotions. Through these experiences, they develop confidence in seeking support and are able to approach relationships with a sense of safety and security.

For children who have experienced developmental trauma, relationships often look very different. Their early experiences may have taught them that adults are unpredictable, unavailable, frightening, or even a source of harm. As a result, they can become highly attuned to signs of danger and rejection, even when none is intended. They may quickly perceive situations, interactions, or adult responses as threatening, causing their nervous system to move rapidly into survival states of fight, flight, freeze, or flop.

Over time, the child's brain and nervous system can become hard-wired to anticipate danger. This means they often expect adults to let them down, punish them, reject them, or hurt them emotionally. These expectations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. When children assume that adults cannot be trusted, they may reject support, avoid connection, become controlling, withdraw, or respond defensively. In turn, adults may find these behaviours challenging, which can reinforce the child's belief that relationships are unsafe.

This pattern is known as blocked trust. Children with blocked trust often rely on their own survival strategies rather than turning to adults for help, even when they are distressed or overwhelmed. While these strategies may have helped them cope in the past, they can create barriers to learning, emotional regulation, and relationship building.

Within our PRU, we recognise that blocked trust is not a choice but an adaptation to earlier experiences. We understand that trust develops slowly and that it can be exceptionally difficult for children to change deeply held beliefs about adults and relationships. Rather than viewing defensive behaviours as deliberate defiance, we seek to understand the unmet need, fear, or protective function beneath them.

Developmental vulnerabilities and sensitivities

Children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma are often functioning at a developmental age that is younger than their chronological age. Due to missed experiences during their earliest years, they may continue to have unmet developmental needs that influence how they relate to others, regulate their emotions, and engage with the world around them. Although they may not be consciously aware of these needs, children are often seeking opportunities to experience the safety, nurture, joy, and connection that they may have missed.

As trusting relationships develop within the PRU, children may begin to reveal their developmental vulnerabilities. This can be seen when they show an interest in games, activities, and interactions that are typically associated with younger children, such as peek-a-boo, hide-and-seek, repetitive play, shared laughter, and playful interactions with trusted adults. These behaviours should not be viewed as immature or inappropriate. Instead, they can be understood as the child's attempt to revisit and experience developmental stages that may have been disrupted or missed. It is important that adults respond with acceptance, warmth, and enjoyment, allowing children to safely explore these vulnerabilities and experience the joy of connection within a secure relationship.

Alongside developmental vulnerabilities, many children who have experienced trauma present with heightened sensitivities. Their nervous systems may be particularly reactive to sensory experiences such as noises, sounds, smells, textures, touch, lighting, movement, or busy environments. What appears to be a minor sensory experience for one child may trigger strong emotional or physiological responses in another.

These reactions may evoke feelings of fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, or shame and can significantly affect the child's ability to regulate and engage in learning.

Within our PRU, adults seek to understand these responses through observation, attunement, and curiosity. Rather than viewing a child's reaction as challenging behaviour, we consider what the sensory experience may mean for that child and what memories, feelings, or unmet needs it may be activating. By remaining curious and responsive, we can make appropriate adaptations, provide co-regulation, and help children develop a greater sense of safety and emotional wellbeing. Through sensitive and attuned relationships, we support children to explore both their vulnerabilities and sensitivities in ways that promote trust, resilience, and positive development.

Parts language and pictures

At the PRU, we recognise that children are complex individuals who experience a wide range of thoughts, feelings and behaviours. We understand that children often learn about themselves through their relationships with others and through the way trusted adults help them make sense of their experiences.

For some children, we use parts language and visual supports (pictures, drawings, characters or diagrams) to help them understand their emotions, behaviours and needs. Parts language is based on the idea that we all have different "parts" of ourselves that can become stronger at different times. For example, there may be a part that feels worried, a part that wants to keep us safe, a part that feels angry when something seems unfair, or a part that enjoys learning and connecting with others.

Using parts language helps children understand that:

- They are more than any single behaviour or emotion.
- A difficult behaviour is only one part of them and does not define who they are.
- All feelings and parts have a purpose, even when their actions are unhelpful.
- They can develop awareness and control over how different parts respond.
- Adults are interested in understanding them, rather than judging or blaming them.

Visual representations can support children to identify, name and discuss different parts of themselves. Pictures may include characters, drawings, emotion maps or child-created images that help make abstract ideas more concrete and accessible.

This approach is particularly helpful when discussing incidents, repairing relationships, reflecting on behaviour, and supporting emotional regulation. It allows adults to remain curious, compassionate and non-judgemental while helping children take responsibility for their actions.

Example Script for a Tricky Conversation

Adult: "I've noticed that something was difficult for you today when you shouted at your friend. I wonder if we can think about which part of you was showing up at that moment?"

Child: "I don't know."

Adult: "That's okay. I wonder if there might have been a frustrated part, a worried part, or maybe a part that felt things weren't fair?"

Child: "Maybe the angry part."

Adult: "That makes sense. It sounds like the angry part got really big in that moment. Does that part sometimes try to protect you when you're upset?"

Child: "Yes."

Adult: "Thank you for telling me. Having an angry part doesn't make you an angry person. It is just one part of you. I also know there is a kind part of you and a part that cares about your friends."

Adult: "Let's think together about what the angry part needed, and what your caring part might like to do now to repair things."

This approach helps children separate their identity from their behaviour, promotes self-understanding, and supports accountability within a safe and respectful relational framework.

Key Adult Messages

"That behaviour is something you did; it is not who you are."

"All parts of you are welcome, even when some behaviours are not."

"Let's get curious about what that part was trying to achieve."

"What might another part of you want to do now?"

"We can work together to help all of your parts feel safe and successful."

Section 6: Celebrating Relationships: Examples from the PRU Team

Working with children at the PRU I am aware that relationships are paramount. The children often have 'blocked trust' and are wary of adults and their intentions. At the start of placement, they often expect the experience to be the same as in other schools. We need to intentionally take time to know the child. With genuine care and curiosity, we can start to build positive relationships and shock their brains.

(Teacher)

Since introducing the sequence of engagement to lessons at the PRU, it has enabled staff to better understand and respond to pupils' individual needs. She highlighted how the "regulate" phase provides valuable insight into pupils' preferences and has allowed her to see first-hand what the children need.

(SLSA)

Since introducing regulation and relational activities at the start of lessons it has had a positive impact on pupil engagement, progress, and independence. Following the trauma informed approach and clear routines have contributed to improved engagement and a reduction in low-level disruption.

(Teacher)

Section 7: Case Study Example 1: Child B

Child B joined the PRU at the end of the Autumn term of Year 6 following a permanent exclusion. The child had attended six previous schools. B experienced significant disruption in early childhood, including neglect, witnessing domestic violence and several moves.

When B first joined the PRU, staff prioritised building relationships and becoming attuned to B's needs. B had significant difficulties building any positive relationship with staff or peers. B would often display distressed behaviour with both verbal and physical aggression. At this time, B required intensive support. B followed a bespoke timetable, with regular breaks in the day when they would lead and staff would follow. B helped to organise and prepare breakfast each day for a member of staff and a peer. This allowed B to show their caring part and staff were able to support positive social interactions. B created an SOS sensory bag, which was stored on the back of B's chair so they could access it when needed. This also gave a sense of ownership and control. B also had a flexible seating plan and dependent on B's state, they had choice of where they sat for particular lessons.

As time passed B was able to verbalise when they needed support and could explain when they were starting to feel 'big feelings.' Staff used PACE scripts to help B when distressed, this helped B see that problems could be overcome and relationships could be repaired.

B was able to complete SAT assessments at the PRU and remain in class, sitting with peers. When B moved on, B explained that they felt listened to and understood not just judged. They were able to make mistakes and adults would support them to reflect and repair.

B's parent also commented that they were more positive about school and adults. B would talk about things that helped them and how staff supported them.

Section 8: Statutory Framework and Procedures

This section sets out the legal duties and procedures that sit underneath our relational approach. Nothing in it replaces connection before correction. It makes sure that when we respond to behaviour, we do so lawfully, safely and consistently, and that pupils, parents/carers and staff know what will happen and why. It should be read alongside the Management Committee's Statement of Behaviour Principles.

8.1 Legal framework and guidance

This policy has been written in line with:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006 (sections 88–94: behaviour policy, discipline, detention and reasonable force)
- Education Act 1996 (sections 550ZA–550ZC: searching and confiscation)
- The Education (Pupil Referral Units) (Application of Enactments) (England) Regulations 2007, which apply these duties to PRUs and their Management Committees
- Equality Act 2010, Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years
- DfE: Behaviour in Schools – advice for headteachers and school staff (February 2024)
- DfE: Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England (statutory guidance, version effective from 26 July 2026)
- DfE: Searching, Screening and Confiscation (July 2022)
- DfE: Restrictive Interventions, including Use of Reasonable Force, in Schools (April 2026)
- DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- DfE: Working Together to Improve School Attendance (statutory guidance), Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools, and Mobile Phones in Schools

8.2 Roles and responsibilities

Who	Responsibilities
Management Committee	Agrees and reviews the Statement of Behaviour Principles; holds the Headteacher to account for how this policy is applied; reviews behaviour, restrictive intervention, suspension and exclusion data each term, including by pupil group; considers reinstatement of permanently excluded pupils where required.
Headteacher	Writes, publishes and reviews this policy with regard to the Statement of Behaviour Principles; makes sure all staff are trained and supported to apply it; authorises staff to search; is the only person who may suspend or permanently exclude; reports to the Management Committee.
All staff	Apply the policy consistently and relationally; model the PRU values; record incidents accurately and on time; raise safeguarding concerns with the DSL; take part in training, supervision and debriefs.

Who	Responsibilities
Parents/carers	Work in partnership with the PRU through the Home/PRU agreement; share information that helps us understand their child; take part in review, Team Pupil and reintegration meetings.
Home schools and the Local Authority	For dual-registered pupils, the home school keeps its own responsibilities and works with us on a shared plan. The Local Authority commissions placements and must arrange education from the sixth day of a permanent exclusion.

8.3 Our expectations of pupils

Our expectations are few, simple and linked to our values. They are taught, modelled and practised every day, with visual supports, rather than simply displayed:

- **Perseverance –** I keep trying, and I let an adult help me when things feel hard.
- **Respect –** I keep myself and others safe, and I look after our space.
- **Understanding –** I listen to others, and I help put things right when they go wrong.

Routines for arrival, breakfast, transitions, break times, lunch and home time are taught explicitly at the start of each placement and revisited whenever a pupil needs them. All classes create class charters which outline positive behaviours that everyone should demonstrate. Pupils are explicitly taught what support is available to them when they are finding things difficult, both within and outside of the classroom. The support systems are reviewed following an incident using a reflect, repair and restore approach.

8.4 Consequences

We use consequences, but they are educational, relational and proportionate, and are decided once the child is regulated. They take account of the child's age, stage of development, SEND and circumstances, so two children may experience different consequences for similar behaviour. Consequences may include:

- a restorative conversation using PACE, with the adults and/or children affected
- a repair task agreed with the child (for example, helping to tidy or fix something, or an act of kindness)
- catching up on missed learning with adult support
- a natural consequence linked to safety, such as a supervised or adapted break time
- increased structure, proximity or supervision for a period of time
- contact with parents/carers to agree a shared response
- a Team Pupil meeting, or a review of the child's support plan or risk reduction plan
- in exceptional circumstances, and only as a last resort, suspension or permanent exclusion (see 8.10).

Regulation rooms and safe spaces are a support, not a sanction. A child in a regulation room is always supervised, and is never locked in or prevented from leaving.

Where a child is kept back at break or lunchtime, this counts as a detention under the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will be short and supervised, the child will have time to eat, drink and use the toilet, and parents/carers will be told the same day.

8.5 Bullying and child-on-child abuse

We do not accept bullying of any kind, including prejudice-based and online bullying. Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another person physically or emotionally. We respond by keeping everyone safe, supporting the child who has been harmed, and working with the child who has caused harm to understand and repair it.

- All concerns about child-on-child abuse, including sexualised behaviour, sexual harassment and physical abuse, are passed to the DSL and managed under our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- Harmful sexual behaviour is assessed using the Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool, taking account of each child's age and development.
- We do not dismiss abusive behaviour as "banter", "just having a laugh" or "part of growing up".
- Prejudice-related incidents are recorded and analysed so that we can spot patterns and respond through our Personal Development curriculum.
- Our Anti-Bullying Policy sets out prevention in more detail.

8.6 Safeguarding

A change in behaviour can be a sign that a child is being harmed, neglected or exploited. Staff consider this whenever behaviour changes or escalates, and report concerns to the DSL straight away. If a child leaves the site or cannot be found, we will contact parents/carers and, where there is risk, the police.

8.7 SEND and reasonable adjustments

We make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and plan ahead to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, as required by the Equality Act 2010. We also use our best endeavours to meet special educational needs, as required by the Children and Families Act 2014. Each child's support plan sets out the adjustments that apply to them. Where a pupil has an EHC plan and their behaviour is causing concern, we will contact the Local Authority and consider an early annual review. Where a pupil's behaviour continues to cause concern despite support, we will consider whether a multi-agency assessment or an EHC needs assessment is needed.

8.8 Reasonable force and restrictive intervention

All staff have a legal power to use reasonable force to prevent a pupil from hurting themselves or others, damaging property, committing an offence, or causing serious disorder (section 93, Education and Inspections Act 2006). At the PRU:

- de-escalation, co-regulation and less restrictive options are always tried first unless the risk is immediate;
- force is never used as a punishment, and pupils are never secluded in a locked room;
- all staff are trained in physical intervention using Norfolk STEPS, and this training is refreshed annually;
- pupils who may need physical intervention have a personal intervention plan, shared with parents/carers;
- every use of force or restrictive intervention is recorded on CPOMS the same day, and parents/carers are told the same day and receive a written account;

- the child and the staff involved are offered a debrief once everyone is regulated;
- restrictive intervention data is reviewed by senior leaders each half term and reported to the Management Committee each term.

Full details are in our Use of Reasonable Force Policy.

8.9 Searching, screening and confiscation

Searching is rare in our setting. When it is needed, it is carried out calmly and with the child's dignity in mind, in line with Searching, Screening and Confiscation (DfE, 2022). The Headteacher and staff they authorise may search a pupil, or their possessions, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that they have a prohibited item. Prohibited items are:

- knives and weapons; alcohol; illegal drugs; stolen items; tobacco and cigarette papers; fireworks; pornographic images;
- any article that has been, or is likely to be, used to commit an offence, cause personal injury or damage property.

When searching:

- staff explain why the search is needed and ask for the child's co-operation;
- the member of staff searching must be the same sex as the pupil, with another member of staff present as a witness, unless there is a risk of serious harm if the search is not done immediately;
- staff may only ask a pupil to remove outer clothing (such as a coat or jumper). Strip searches may only be carried out by the police, and the DSL must be involved;
- the search is recorded, parents/carers are informed, and the DSL is told if it raises any safeguarding concern;
- confiscated items are returned, handed to the police or disposed of, as the guidance sets out.
- Where there is a foreseeable risk, or following a search, an individual risk assessment will be created to reduce the risk of prohibited items being brought into the PRU. The risk assessment will be agreed with parents/carers and shared with the pupil, if appropriate.

8.10 Suspension, permanent exclusion and off-site direction

We work hard to avoid suspension and exclusion, but we do not operate a "no exclusion" policy, because that could leave children and staff at risk. The Headteacher may suspend or permanently exclude a pupil only in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of this policy, and where allowing the pupil to stay would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others. The Headteacher must have regard to the DfE's statutory guidance.

- Parents/carers are told without delay, and then in writing, of the reasons, the length of the suspension and their rights.
- The Local Authority, and the home school for dual-registered pupils, are informed.
- Work is set for the first five days of a suspension. From the sixth day of a suspension, the Local Authority arranges suitable full-time education.
- A reintegration meeting is held after every suspension to review what support needs to change.

- For a dual-registered pupil, a suspension or exclusion issued by the PRU applies to the PRU placement only.
- From 26 July 2026, the Management Committee may direct a pupil off-site to improve their behaviour, following the statutory procedures.

Sending a child home to "calm down" without a formal suspension is an unlawful exclusion, and we do not do it. A reduced or part-time timetable is used only with parental agreement, for a limited time, as part of a plan to return to full-time education, and is reviewed regularly, in line with Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

8.11 Behaviour outside the PRU and online

Under section 89(5) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, we may respond to behaviour that happens off site. This includes behaviour when a pupil is taking part in a PRU activity, travelling to or from the PRU (including in taxis and on commissioned transport), or otherwise identifiable as a PRU pupil. It also includes behaviour at any time, including online, that could affect the safety or wellbeing of others or the running of the PRU. Our response follows the same relational approach. Where the behaviour may be a crime or a safeguarding concern, the DSL will decide whether to involve the police or other agencies.

8.12 Mobile phones and devices

In line with current DfE guidance, pupils do not use mobile phones during the day. Pupils who need a phone for travel hand it to a member of staff and it is locked away during the school day, in the main office. (See Mobile Phone Policy for further guidance.)

8.13 Allegations against staff

Any allegation against a member of staff is dealt with promptly and fairly under Part 4 of Keeping Children Safe in Education, involving the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where required. Suspension of the member of staff is not an automatic response, and they are offered a named contact for support. Where an allegation is found to be malicious, the Headteacher will consider an appropriate, educational response for the pupil, and whether any referral is needed, for example because the allegation may itself be a sign of unmet need or harm.

8.14 Recording, monitoring and reporting

All significant incidents, uses of restrictive intervention, searches, bullying and prejudice-related incidents, suspensions and exclusions are recorded on CPOMS on the same day. Senior leaders analyse this data each half term, alongside the measures in Section 2c, including by sex, ethnicity, SEND, disadvantage and looked-after status, to check that the policy is applied fairly. A summary is reported to the Management Committee each term.

8.15 Working with parents/carers and home schools

Parents/carers are contacted on the same day about any significant incident, and are always involved in decisions about their child's support plan. For dual-registered pupils, we share information with the home school daily, as well as at half-termly reviews, and agree a joint plan for behaviour, support and reintegration through Team Pupil.

8.16 Staff training and support

All new staff are inducted in this policy, PACE, de-escalation, safeguarding and the Statement of Behaviour Principles. Training is refreshed annually. Staff are offered a debrief after significant incidents, and have access to supervision and wellbeing support, because regulated adults are central to our approach.

8.17 Monitoring, review and linked policies

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher, with regard to the Statement of Behaviour Principles, and is approved by the Management Committee. It is published on the PRU website, and a paper copy is available on request. It should be read alongside the Statement of Behaviour Principles and the following policies: Use of Reasonable Force; Suspension and Permanent Exclusion; Child Protection and Safeguarding; Anti-Bullying; SEND; Online Safety; Attendance; Mobile Phones; Staff Code of Conduct; Complaints.

Appendix 1: Sequence of Engagement

🧠 **DR BRUCE PERRY'S SEQUENCE OF ENGAGEMENT**

Connection and Safety Before Correction and Learning

🫁 **REGULATE**

Help the child feel calm and safe

Breathing • Movement • Sensory supports • Predictable routines

🤝 **RELATE**

Connect before you correct

Empathy • Listening • Trust • Reassurance

💭 **REASON**

The brain is ready to think

Problem-solving • Choices • Teaching • Learning

🔍 **REFLECT**

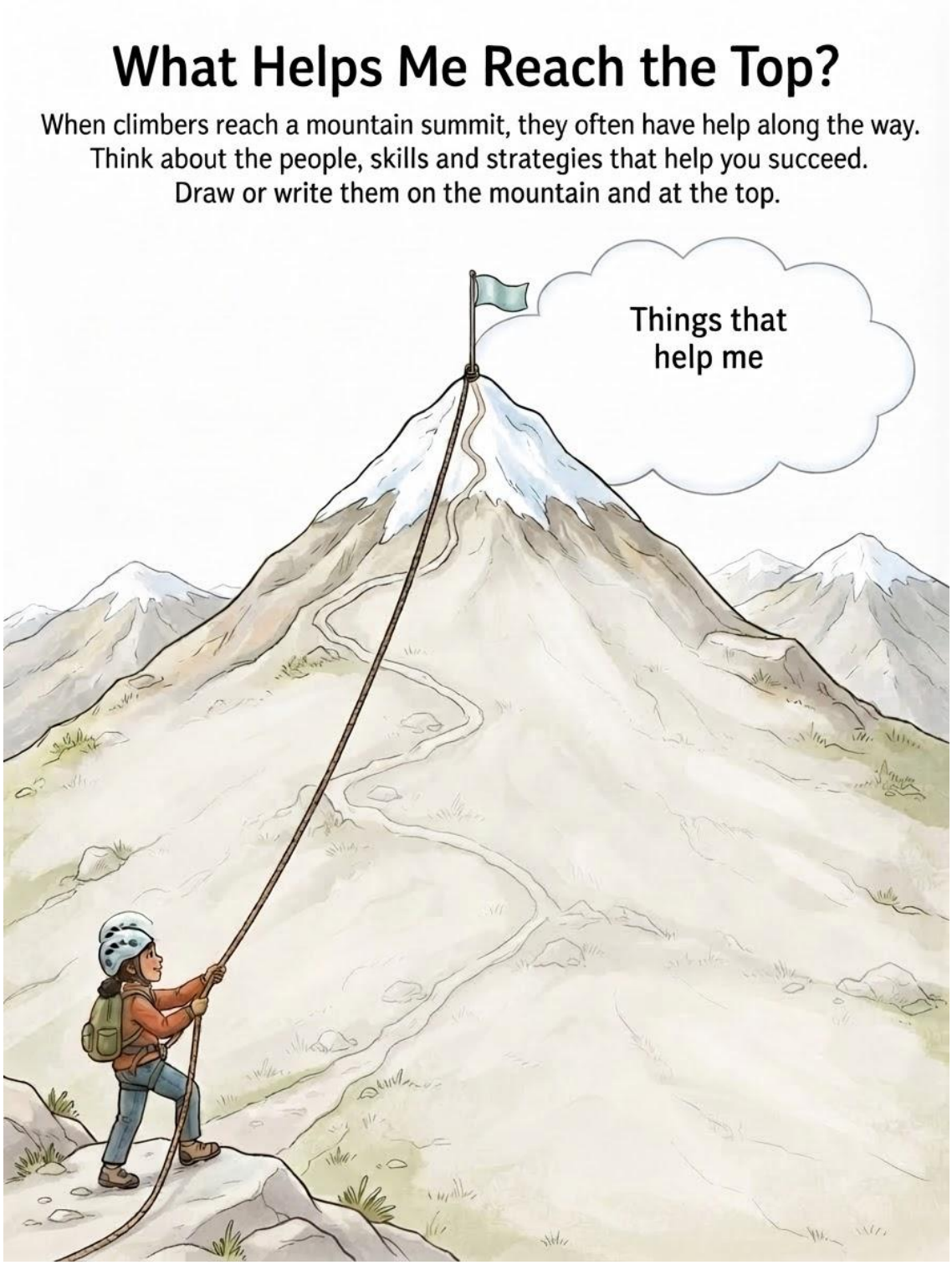
Learn from the experience

What happened? • What helped? • Next time?

🟢 → 🟡 → 🔵 → 🟣

REGULATE → RELATE → REASON → REFLECT

Appendix 2: Mountain Climb Picture



Appendix 3: My Team Circle of Safety

Circle of safety

