

Relationship Policy

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History of policy changes and review

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Date	Change	Details
12.03.2021	Reviewed – no changes	
12.06.2022	Reviewed – no changes	
10.07.2024	Reviewed – no changes	
22.07.2025	Reviewed and updated	Added: Positive recognition; addressing bullying and prejudice-based incidents; Glossary – Emotionally available adult and PACE Updated: References

Next review date: July 2026

Section 1

Introduction

The Briarwood relationship policy embodies our culture and ethos developed through a Trauma Informed approach where relationship is at the heart of every interaction and supports the whole school community to include our staff, our pupils, parent(s)/carers and all other agencies working with Briarwood.

Purpose

In Briarwood School we believe in providing every child with the opportunity to experience an outstanding education academically, emotionally and socially. We strongly believe that by identifying the barriers to learning, we can provide an inspiring and relevant curriculum that considers the whole child and provides the necessary support for pupils to achieve, develop and reach their true potential.

We are committed to ensuring that our school develops a Trauma and Mental Health Informed Approach to ensure that all our pupils develop positive mental health and resilience, enabling them to fully engage in life and learning. There is a growing body of research and understanding of the impact of Childhood Adversity Experiences (ACE) on long term mental and physical health and the protective factors that mitigate the potential impact. It is our aim to maximise the protective factors of school by creating an environment of safety that has strong, positive and supportive relationships at its heart.

Our priority as a school is to ensure psychological and environmental safety first; it is the foundation on which everything else depends. The ability to learn without fear in order to relate to others and engage in learning. Through a trauma informed approach our focus is not only the physical environment, but the relational environment and the very culture and ethos of our school. This requires emotionally regulated and available adults who can provide essential calming and containing of our pupils, their parents/carers or each other when they are overwhelmed by an event, a situation or their feelings. In some circumstances, this may mean that literal physical containment of each other to keep all safe.

In practical terms it means that we try to not place the pupils in situations that they are unable to manage. It is vital that our response to their distress and often behaviours that challenge is supportive and focuses on how best to support the brain's frontal lobe functioning to be able to relate to the world and each other in a healthier way, rather than employing punitive sanctions that are detrimental and inappropriate to a child's development. If we are truly to protect our pupils and each other, our school approach needs to reflect a differentiated and developmentally appropriate response to behaviour by recognising that behaviour represents an unmet need, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and/or particular neurocognitive or neurochemical profile.

Whole school approach

As a school we have embraced a wider definition of trauma to encompass any event that is experienced as frightening, painful or out of control, characterised by there being no one available to support or mitigate the impact of traumatic toxic stress. As such, even the day-to-day exposure to events such as divorce, loss of a loved one, illness within the family, moving house can be experienced as traumatic. Children and adults can be affected by toxic stress. Providing an environment that has safety, connection and compassion at its heart ensures that our school environments never unwittingly re-traumatise any of our school members and act to maximise protective factors through the conscious use of our relationships.

All adults in our school are aware of how to create an ethos and environment of both physical and psychological safety and have the skills to respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic

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stress. We fully understand and support the impact that connection with a trusted, emotionally available adult has on a child and seek to maximise this for those who are identified as requiring additional support.

Our behaviour and pastoral and relationship policies reflect a trauma informed approach, and our behaviour strategies are both developmentally and trauma - informed. We do not operate a 'zero tolerance' or 'one size fits all' approach to distressed behaviour, however, we have high expectations of behaviour for all and support is offered to those having difficulty meeting those expectations.

We aim to increase staff understanding in nurturing attachments and the PACE approach (Hughes, 2015), enabling staff to act as emotionally available adults — trusted, attuned adults who co-regulate, support and remain connected during moments of distress

We have specially trained Trauma and Mental Health Informed Practitioners to support children who are identified as requiring additional support. This support may be offered in 1:1 sessions, in class or in small groups. Our aim is to support children to make sense of their experience, find ways to manage their emotions and feelings and ensure that they maintain the capacity to learn, despite difficult events that may happen for them.

Children are identified for additional support by a number of methods. We universally screen the emotional and social development of some of our children using Motional three times every year or every six weeks to monitor the impact of any targeted interventions. This assesses key executive functions and skills, emotional literacy and self-regulation. Children do not always present through their behaviour when life is becoming difficult for them, our screening program ensures that no child is missed. Children may be referred by their class teacher or highlighted through a significant change in their behaviour in schools or through a parental concern when behaviour changes at home or a significant life event impacts the family.

All staff are responsible for adhering to positive practise that promotes a pupil's ability to engage in, and access their learning. This is based on the understanding that pupil's best achieve, develop and reach their true potential when staff are: fair, flexible, trustworthy, respectful, and model positive relationships. It is the expectation at Briarwood that all staff, regardless of role act in this way.

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

"The ability to form meaningful relationships is fundamental to mental health and happiness. It's the quality of contact we have with other people that is arguably the most important determining factor in our quality of life. We can only truly develop ourselves through relationships with others" (TISUK 2019)

"Just one emotionally available adult in the school, community or home can make all the difference" (TISUK 2019)

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

- Parent(s)/carer and child
- Pupil and pupil
- Pupil and school staff
- Parent/carers and school staff

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- School staff
- School staff and senior leaders
- Pupils, parent(s)/carer and other agencies
- School staff and external agencies

Positive recognition

At Briarwood, recognition of pupil achievement and relational effort is developmentally appropriate and non-tokenistic. Staff are encouraged to ‘notice and name’ positive interactions, acts of kindness, regulation attempts and pupil voice, celebrating these through class displays, key adult feedback, and in some cases pupil celebration folders.

Addressing Bullying and Prejudice-Based Incidents

At Briarwood, we recognise that bullying and prejudice-based behaviour are relational ruptures that require a trauma-informed, restorative response. While we do not operate standalone punitive anti-bullying procedures, all incidents of bullying — including those related to disability, race, gender identity, sexual orientation or religion — are taken seriously and addressed under our safeguarding, behaviour and relationship policy framework.

Our approach prioritises safety, regulation, repair and education over punishment. Pupils are supported to understand the impact of their actions, and where appropriate, relational or restorative processes are used to repair harm. These incidents are recorded and monitored to identify patterns and inform preventative strategies, in line with our safeguarding policy and the Equality Act 2010.

Any serious or persistent incidents are escalated to the Senior Leadership Team and may trigger a formal safeguarding response or referral, in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) and our own safeguarding procedures.

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

Protect

- Our school aims to increase ‘safety cues’ in all aspects of the school day for our pupils and each other, for example designed and timetabled interventions that create opportunities for the emotionally available adults to be alongside our pupils across the school day.
- Open-door policy for informal discussions with parents/ carers.
- We aim to increase our staff’s understanding in nurturing attachments and the PACE approach (Hughes, 2015). This means that our pupils are met with a warm emphatic, playful and curious staff team that will enable them to move out of flight/fight or freeze and into relationship and trust.
- As a school we ensure that interactions with pupils, their families/carers, other agencies and each other are socially engaging not socially defensive.
- Punitive approaches are not being used under any circumstances in response to pupils’ behaviour, challenging or otherwise such as the use of harsh voices, shouting, isolating,

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secluding, denying curriculum access, withholding food and shame evoking behaviours (which are proven to be damaging psychologically and neurologically).

- All members of our school aim to interactively reflect and repair occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness.
- Our school staff adopt ways of developing relationships and understanding of our pupils, their families/carers and each other. Holding at the heart of our approach relationship as the key to personal, social and emotional development, (as well as academic achievement for our pupils).
- Our school staff adjust their expectations for our pupils, their families and carers in accordance with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This sometimes involves removing vulnerable and traumatised pupils in a kind and non-judgemental way from situations they are not managing well. As a staffing team we are also able to do this for each other.
- The use of a robust debrief system. De-briefing opportunities are available in several ways for staff and pupils to assist them in managing situations that have caused or may cause distress. An incident debriefing meeting assists people, particularly staff and pupils, to overcome the effects of an incident by:
 - Talking about what happened
 - Expressing how they feel as a result of the incident
 - Identifying any individual stress reactions (i.e. physical, emotional, thinking, behavioural)
 - Identifying some ways of dealing with stress reactions
 - If appropriate, independent referrals can then be made to outside agencies and professionals such as Education Support Partnership, which offers individual support, information and counselling to our staff 7 days a week/ 24 hours a day.

Relate

- A whole school approach and commitment to enable our pupils, families/carers and staff to see themselves, their relationships and the world positively, rather than through the lens of threat, danger or self-blame.
- Our school provides everyone with repeated relational experiences (alongside emotionally available adults) to support everyone to move from 'blocked trust' (not feeling psychologically safe with anyone) to trust, and from self-help to 'help-seeking'.

Regulate

- As a school we use evidence-based interventions that aim to repair psychological damage and brain damage caused by traumatic experiences, through emotionally regulating, playful and enriched interactions.
- In our school the emotional well-being of and emotional regulation of staff is treated as highly important to prevent burn-out, stress –related absence, or leaving the profession through stress-related illness, secondary trauma and/or feeling blamed or under-valued.
- Our school provides staff wellbeing spaces which are there to enable staff to take the space they need to reflect and rejuvenate which supports the release of natural anti-stress and pro-social neurochemicals (opioids and oxytocin).
- Relational interventions specifically designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable) in vulnerable children, enabling them to feel calm, soothed and safe.

Reflect

- The adults in our school feel confident to develop relationships with pupils, their families and each other and to have the courageous conversations about their experiences so far.
- Our school promotes the exploration of conversations with our pupils that helps to make sense of their life, to develop a language for their emotions and a narrative that makes sense of their experiences and how they feel. Supporting our pupils to understand their thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and reactions and in doing so enables them to identify and explore new options and strategies for ways forward with their challenges.
- Staff development and training to help children move from 'behaving' their trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences.
- A positive behaviour management policy based not on punishment, sanctions, resolution and interactive repair (e.g. restorative conversations).
- Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff pupils are given the means and opportunity to symbolise painful life experiences through images as well as words, as a key part of 'working through' these experiences. Means include the provision of different modes of expression, e.g. art/play/ music/sand/emotion worksheets/emotion cards.
- Staff training and development in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding (instead of asking a series of questions/ giving lectures).
- Where a relationship rupture or incident has occurred, staff are encouraged to use restorative dialogue with the pupil or peers involved, guided by emotionally available adults. This may include structured debriefs, emotion coaching, and reflective conversation cards or social stories. The focus is not on blame but on relational repair, reflection and growth.

References, appendices and links

Links with other policies

- Behaviour & Pastoral Policy
- Self-Harm Policy
- Sensory Processing Policy

References

- Trauma Informed Schools UK (2019). Delegate Programme Handbook. TISUK.
- Department for Education (2022). Behaviour in Schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff. DfE.
- Department for Education (2018). Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools. DfE.
- Department for Education (2024). Keeping Children Safe in Education. DfE.
- Department for Education & Department of Health (2015). SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years. DfE.
- Creating Loving Attachments: Parenting with PACE to Nurture Confidence and Security in the Troubled Child (Daniel Hughes, 2015)

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Definitions - Glossary

Appendix 1

Definitions – Glossary

Relational environment	This kind of environment that can provide a safe place for young people to be transparent and vulnerable. As trust between adult and young person grows deeper, this kind of environment encourages accountability and spiritual growth. The aim is to develop close, nurturing individual relationships with the children and facilitate an emotionally safe and secure milieu that fosters an effective and challenging learning environment.
Behaviours that Challenge	Any behaviours that interfere with learning. These behaviours may include non-compliance, passivity, task avoidance, aggression or stereotyped behaviours.
Toxic stress	Toxic stress response can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity—such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship—without adequate adult support.
Tolerable stress	Tolerable stress activates the body’s alert system to a greater degree and generally occurs within a time-limited period. If it is buffered by supportive caregivers/relationships that assist the person to adapt, this gives the brain an opportunity to recover from potentially damaging effects.
Traumatic stress	Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, motor vehicle accident, plane crash, violent crime, or terrorist attack.
Motional	Motional is Trauma-Informed Schools’ tool of choice for measuring its intervention as well as providing universal guidance and support for the wider school setting. It is based on a combination of Professor Jaak Panksepp’s research on emotional systems in the brain and Dr Margot Sunderland’s extensive research, studies and expertise in executive functional skills. It records Aversive Childhood Experiences (ACE) and Protective Factor scores, and gives staff a whole-brain picture of the students' mental health and wellbeing.
Emotional Literacy	Emotional Literacy is the term used to describe the ability to understand and express feelings. Emotional Literacy involves having self-awareness and recognition of one's own feelings and knowing how to manage them, such as the ability to stay calm when angered or to reassure oneself when in doubt.
Emotionally Available Adult (EAA)	An emotionally available adult is a consistent, trusted adult who is able to remain calm, present, and attuned to a child’s emotional needs. EAAs use co-regulation, active listening, empathy, and non-

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	judgemental support to help children feel safe and understood. They build strong, predictable relationships, model self-regulation, and respond rather than react to behaviours. An EAA does not withdraw connection or relationship when a child is in distress or displaying challenging behaviour.
Self - Regulation	Self-regulation involves controlling one's behaviour, emotions, and thoughts in the pursuit of long-term goals. More specifically, emotional self-regulation refers to the ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses.
Learning disability	A reduced intellectual ability which affects someone for their whole life. People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complicated information and interact with other people.
Executive functions and skills	Executive function is responsible for a number of skills, including: Paying attention. Organizing, planning, and prioritizing. Starting tasks and staying focused on them to completion. Understanding different points of view. Regulating emotions. Self-monitoring (keeping track of what you're doing).
Makaton	Makaton is a language programme using signs & symbols to help people to communicate. It is designed to support spoken language and the signs & symbols are used with speech, in spoken word order.
Interventions	Interventions provide students with the support needed to acquire the skills being taught by the educational system and address functional skills, academic, cognitive, behavioural, and social skills that directly affect the child's ability to access an education.
Relational Interventions	Intervention that is designed for children who have experienced relationship-based trauma.
De – brief	Debriefing (reviewing an experience) through a structured process aids staff through reflection, by sharing experiences, gathering information, and developing ideas moving forward. Whether things went well or not all involved have likely learned from the experience. By debriefing we can capture lessons learned to ensure better outcomes.
Secondary Trauma	Secondary trauma can be incurred when an individual is exposed to people who have been traumatized themselves, disturbing descriptions of traumatic events by a survivor, or others inflicting cruelty on one another.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)	There are three direct and six indirect experiences that have an impact on childhood development. The more adversity a child experiences the more likely it is to impact upon their mental and physical health.
PACE	PACE is a therapeutic approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes to support children with attachment difficulties and trauma. It stands for

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	<p>Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy, which are core attitudes adults use to help children feel safe, understood, and connected. PACE supports relational repair, co-regulation and emotional safety, particularly in response to distressed or challenging behaviour.</p>
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