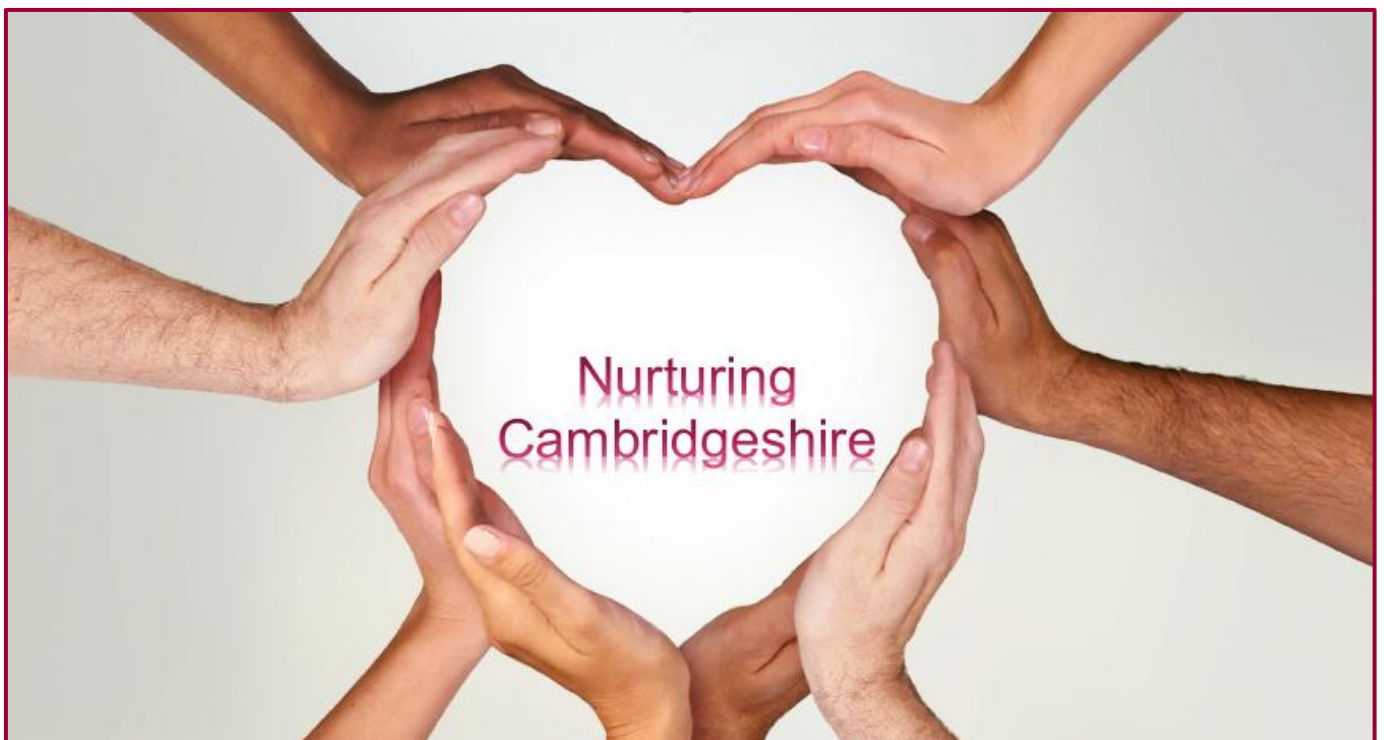


Nurturing Cambridgeshire

An enabler for 'Inclusion for All'



Principle 1: A Safe Base

A safe, predictable and nurturing environment builds trust and *felt safety*, required for thriving and learning.



Nurture for wellbeing

Emotional safety and **wellbeing** are essential foundations for learning and must be actively prioritised.



All behaviour is communication

Behaviour reflects the **underlying needs**; adults **respond with support** rather than judgement.



Importance of transitions

Children are carefully supported through **all transitions** to maintain **safety, stability** and **wellbeing**.



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Foreword

Sarah Callaghan: Service Director Education



Across Cambridgeshire, we are united by a shared commitment: that every child is seen, heard, valued and supported to achieve and thrive. This guide emerges from that commitment, and from a deepening understanding of children's lived experience, particularly those shaped by adversity.

We know that many of our children come to school having experienced disruption, loss, trauma or uncertainty. Adverse childhood experiences can affect how children feel, relate, regulate and learn. What we see in classrooms is often only the surface; beneath this, children may be carrying

complex emotions and unmet needs. As this guide reminds us, our role is to respond with curiosity, empathy and understanding.

This practice guide is our collective response. It translates what we know from research, evidence and practice into something practical and meaningful for schools. It recognises that emotionally safe, relational environments are not an 'add-on', they are the foundation for engagement, attendance, learning and long-term outcomes for all children.

Crucially, this guide aligns with our wider ambitions set out through national education reform and Cambridgeshire's *Inclusion for All* framework. At their heart is a shared vision: a system that removes barriers to learning, strengthens belonging, and enables every child, regardless of background or starting point, to flourish within their school community. A nurturing, relational approach is central to delivering this vision.

However, there is no single blueprint for this work. There is no 'one size fits all' model of inclusion. Each school community is unique, shaped by its children, families, staff and context. This guide is therefore not intended as a checklist, but as an enabler, supporting schools to reflect, to build on strengths already in place, and to take their next steps. For some, these steps will be small and focused; for others, more transformational. All are valid, and all contribute to a wider culture shift.

As you engage with this guide, we encourage you to recognise and celebrate the practice that is already happening within your setting. Across Cambridgeshire, there is a wealth of compassionate, thoughtful and effective work taking place every day. We would warmly welcome the sharing of this practice through photographs, case studies and reflections so that they can be added to the guide and we can continue to learn from one another and strengthen our collective approach.

This is not a finished document. It is intended to grow and evolve alongside practice. Over time, it will reflect the increasing depth, confidence and impact of nurturing approaches across our county. Together, we are building a rich evidence base that demonstrates how our schools nurture not only children, but also each other and the wider community.

By working relationally, reflectively and collaboratively, we create the conditions in which every child can feel safe, belong, and succeed.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Callaghan'.

Introduction

At the heart of the Nurturing Cambridgeshire approach is the principle that the environment is a safe space. This is not simply about physical safety but about creating learning environments where children and adults feel emotionally secure, valued, and understood. When schools intentionally shape spaces that reduce anxiety, build trust, and promote connection, they lay the foundations for engagement, learning, and long-term success.

A safe environment is one in which children can take risks in their learning, express themselves without fear of judgement, and experience consistent, predictable support from adults. It is characterised by warm relationships, clear routines, attentive listening, and an ethos of respect and belonging. In such environments, behaviour is understood as communicating a reduced sense of felt safety and responses are rooted in curiosity, empathy, and support rather than punishment.

By prioritising emotionally safe environments, schools are actively contributing to the wider ambitions set out in *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*. This includes a shared commitment to:

- ensuring all children feel seen, heard and valued
- supporting strong relationships and connectedness
- creating conditions where children can engage, attend, and achieve
- reducing barriers to learning through inclusive, responsive practice

Embedding the principle that the environment is a safe base is therefore not an additional initiative, but a core strategy for improving outcomes. It aligns directly with system wide priorities to enable every child to thrive, recognising that children learn best in environments where they feel safe enough to be themselves.

This guide is designed to support schools in translating this principle into practice through leadership, classroom environments, interactions, and whole-school culture. By doing so, schools strengthen their capacity to nurture all learners and ensure that every child can achieve and thrive.

Background

Why Nurturing Cambridgeshire Matters

Many children experience adversity both within their families and within their wider communities. Nationally, around one in five children experience challenges with their mental health and wellbeing, around a quarter live in low-income households, in some areas, this is 1 in 3 children, and many are affected by experiences such as domestic abuse, parental mental illness or social disadvantage.

Nurturing Cambridgeshire recognises that behaviour is often a response to unmet needs and adversity. It seeks to build resilience through nurture: by building strong relationships, emotional safety and collaborative partnerships with families, so that schools become an important protective factor which can promote inclusion, resilience, wellbeing and engagement in learning.

Importantly, many children are affected not only by individual ACEs but also by community adversities, sometimes referred to as 'community ACEs'. These include poverty, housing insecurity, neighbourhood violence, discrimination, social isolation and limited access to services.

Although Cambridgeshire is often viewed as an affluent county, Cambridge is one of the UK's most unequal cities; across the county there are significant, hidden pockets of deprivation with some of the highest housing costs in the UK. High housing and rental costs can place considerable pressure on our families, affecting parental wellbeing, family relationships and children's sense of stability.

Rural poverty can be less visible than urban deprivation but can be equally significant. In parts of rural Cambridgeshire, families may experience a combination of low income, high housing costs, limited public transport and reduced access to local services, creating additional barriers to employment, education and support.

Nurturing Cambridgeshire is aware of the diverse experiences in our community and that our children come to school with different starting points. While schools cannot prevent all adversity, through a nurturing approach they can act as a significant protective factor by creating environments where children and families experience safety, belonging, connection and access to wider support services.

Nurturing Cambridgeshire draws on the evidence base from Glasgow but has been adapted for Cambridgeshire's context. Here are links to key resources and background reading:

[Nurturing-Schools-Pack-FINAL.pdf](#)

[Item No. 4 - Appendix 1 Nurturing Approaches Guidelines Dec 20.pdf](#)

[Applying-Nurturing-Approaches.pdf](#)

[Nurturing-Approaches-Guidelines-Final-Mar-2021.pdf](#)

[Nine-Steps-to-Nurture-Quality-Indicators-and-Features-of-Effective-Practice-for-Primary-and-Secondary-Establishments.pdf](#)

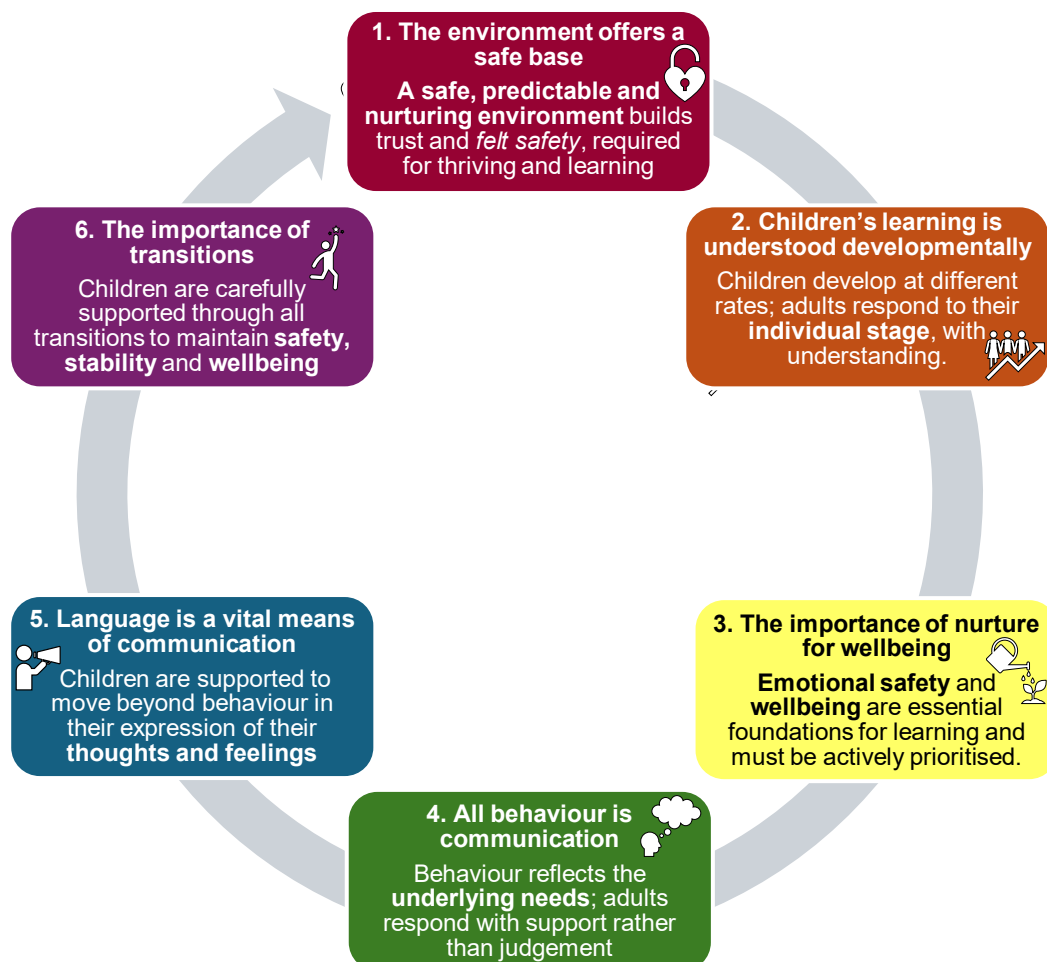
[\(PDF\) A psychological service contribution to nurture: Glasgow's nurturing city](#)

[International-Journal-of-Nurture-in-Education-2023_article-2.pdf](#)

Overview

While the six nurture principles are designed to be embedded simultaneously as part of a **holistic, whole-school ethos**, implementing them in two parts can be a more manageable approach.

A logical, developmental, and practical starting point is **‘the environment offers a safe base,’** as this underpins all other aspects of nurturing practice. Within this, nurture for wellbeing, all behaviour is communication and transitions can be interwoven.



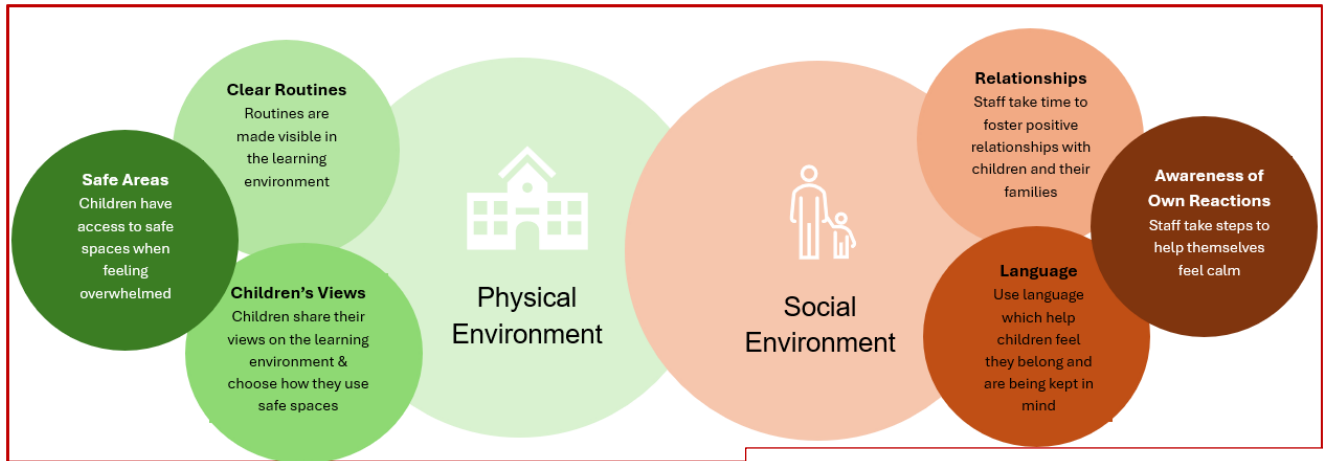
Key Implementation Advice

- ✓ **Context matters:** Each school context is unique; implementation should be reflective of the wider school priorities and what is possible (with training and support) within the given context. It is about taking the next step, whether this is small or more transformational.
- ✓ **Begin with Staff & Environment:** The most crucial initial step is creating a nurturing environment (safe base) and [training staff](#) to understand attachment theory and to model nurturing behaviour.
- ✓ **Nothing is Hurried:** A key tenet is that, particularly for children with missing early nurturing experiences, development cannot be rushed.
- ✓ **Interlinked:** Although the nurture principles are numbered 1-6 in most literature, in practice they are interlinked, each principle having strong cross-overs to others.

The Environment Offers a Safe-Base



The environment offers a safe base principle can be applied by thinking - people and place. Children's sense of safety essentially flows from the adults in school. The adults are the safe base ensuring both relationships and the environment around children are nurturing and safe.



Adapted from Nurturing Glasgow graphic

The Environment Offers a Safe Base: People

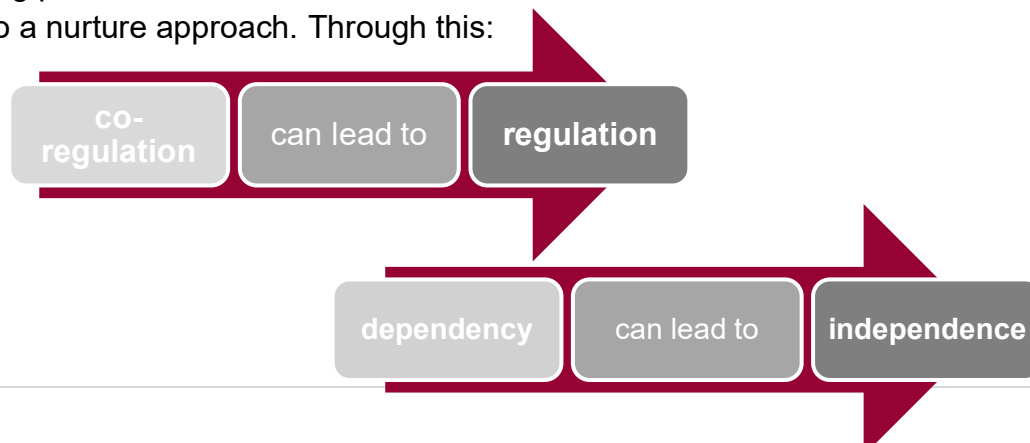


A relational approach is fundamental to the successful creation of a nurturing environment, one in which children are more able to self-regulate successfully. It is the golden thread that runs through a whole school nurture approach.

For nurturing schools to have the best outcomes it is essential for them to include all staff, such as lunch, grounds and office staff, as these are the staff that many children encounter at the times when they are most vulnerable e.g. if they arrive late, feel unwell or break and lunchtime. All staff in a nurturing school should have an awareness of [trauma and attachment](#) and its potential impact on their practice. All children need warm, sensitive attachment figures, but this is especially so for children who have experienced [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#). This awareness and understanding of children can enhance all relationships within an establishment.

Staff prioritise relationships at all levels (self, other staff, children and their families). The wellbeing of children is seen as all staff's business.

Staff are available and present in children's lives, they understand that children come to school at different starting points, have different needs, and that connected, consistent relationships are foundational to a nurture approach. Through this:



A Safe Base for Adults



Building safety and trust among all staff is key to a whole school nurturing environment. A stressed overwhelmed adult cannot effectively support overwhelmed children. Considerations for creating a culture where staff feel safe to care for their own wellbeing and that of colleagues include:



- ✓ Clear guidance for staff on how to share concerns and seek support for their wellbeing.
- ✓ Opportunities and structures for staff to support their own health and wellbeing.
- ✓ Self-care is encouraged and promoted within the establishment. Staff are aware of a range of wellbeing materials available.
- ✓ Planned and informal opportunities to stop, reflect, share and empathise.
- ✓ Acknowledgement and openness from senior leaders that this work can be tough and we can do our best when we support each other.
- ✓ Moments of acknowledgement and celebration for the micro successes.

[Supporting Staff Wellbeing in Schools | Anna Freud](#)

Relationship Building



Taking time to build strong relationships with children and families is essential. Children need to feel regulated, secure, and that they belong, in order to thrive and in turn learn. Strong links with families further supports this, helping to remove barriers and strengthen belonging.

Evidence shows that at least one consistent, connected adult is key to building resilience and buffering adversity. In school, trust and safety are developed through frequent, everyday interactions and small, meaningful moments:

- ✓ Use high levels of positive prompts and specific praise (directly and / or indirectly)
- ✓ Provide special jobs and responsibilities
- ✓ Use board games to develop turn-taking, independence, and coping with disappointment
- ✓ Reassure children you will return to them, to reinforce that they are 'held in mind'; for some children, a transitional object can be supportive
- ✓ Be attuned to behaviour and respond to underlying needs at the child's developmental stage
- ✓ Develop social skills first with a trusted adult, then with peers, moving towards independence (dependence, interdependence, independence)
- ✓ Prioritise playfulness, joy, and appropriate humour
- ✓ A school pet can help build a gentler, less threatening connection between a child and adult
- ✓ Capture and celebrate shared successes through photos, videos, or a 'celebration book'



Trusted Adult, Touch-Base and Team-Me Approach



Just a few minutes a day



can create positive change



For children who have experienced disrupted attachment or early trauma, having at least one consistent, trusted adult in school can significantly support their emotional security and development. These relationships take time to build and are especially important because staff see children regularly and can provide stability and connection.

A role of the key adult is to build this relationship through regular check-ins, spending consistent one-to-one time, understanding the child's needs and motivations, and supporting communication with other staff. They help the child feel safe, prepared, and valued by celebrating successes, discussing worries, and supporting transitions, recognising that these relational interactions are an essential part of learning and wellbeing.

Trusted Adult is a proactive universal approach upskilling all adults in school to be that one Trusted Adult. The benefit of having this universal approach is it increases relational practice and support across your school community.

- ✓ It offers benefit to all children whose needs are known and emerging, or not at a level that would require a more intensive approach.
- ✓ The approach offers every child connection, empowerment and guidance to respect boundaries in your school [draft-one-good-adult-implementation-guidance.pdf](#)

Through **Touch-Base**, a child is supported by a Key Adult who meets them 1-1 on a regular basis offering relational connection (a once weekly touch-base minimum). This approach is flexible, but should match the needs of the child, otherwise it won't work. It can be offered daily, more than once a day, twice or more than twice a week, and weekly. [Relational Attendance Pilot Anglian Learning and Cambridgeshire Virtual School](#)

Team Me is a whole-school, attachment-aware approach that brings a team of adults together around a pupil who has experienced adversity. It aims to increase the child's sense of safety, stability, connection and belonging by providing coordinated, consistent support. It works alongside trauma-informed practice, can be adapted to different levels of need, and is suitable across all school types. It is especially helpful for children affected by trauma, loss, or dysregulation, and offers an additional, proactive way to support engagement a ([for more details click here](#))

Peer Relationships



Healthy peer relationships are seen as a primary route to belonging. They are not incidental, they are core to development, engagement and attainment. In a nurturing school, peer relationships are actively taught, modelled and supported through structured opportunities, adult guidance, and restorative approaches, ensuring all children develop the skills (appropriate to their developmental stage), confidence and sense of belonging needed to form and maintain positive relationships. There will be a wealth of examples of this in your school within your universal, targeted and targeted plus offer.

PSHE / RSHE curriculum

Healthy relationships: a toolkit to support primary-aged pupils | Anna Freud

Social skills groups

e.g. Time To Talk, Friendship formula, comic strip conversations

Lego based therapy

SEND training

Reading buddies:
how about using
Paired Reading

Nurture Groups

Wellbeing ambassadors

ELSA

Peer mentors or buddies
Peer Support Programmes for Mental Wellbeing in Schools & Colleges | Anna Freud

Difficulties with peers (conflict, bullying, exclusion) are understood as risks to wellbeing. The key practice is:

- Repairing harm
- Rebuilding trust
- Maintaining connection

Look beyond the behaviour
Support understanding
Repair relationships
...restorative approaches

Relationships with Families: Building Home-School Partnerships



Underpinning Principles

A nurturing approach embraces its whole school community. It understands the special role and influence parents and carers have in their children's lives; as well as the child's first and most enduring educators.

School staff are also important to children; they bring their professional expertise whilst families bring deep knowledge of their child. This means positive outcomes are more likely to flow when

these significant adults are combined in a relationship characterised by trust, respect and shared responsibility that is focused on the child.

The aim is not simply to communicate with parents and carers, but to create a sense of belonging in which families feel valued, heard and included as members of the school community.

The overall purpose is not simply to increase parents' involvement in school activities, but to strengthen parents' sense of belonging, partnership and engagement in their child's learning and wellbeing, as this is what will make a difference to their child's outcomes.

The approach is underpinned by three relational principles.

- ✓ **'With', not 'To'**
 - This means working alongside families as partners rather than 'working on' or 'doing to' families. Importantly, schools should also recognise that parents' responses or levels of engagement may reflect stress, trauma, their own school experience or unmet needs.
 - By cultivating a position of seeing everyone (including yourself) as doing the best they can with the resources they've got, will go a long way towards building relationship.
- ✓ **Curiosity Before Conclusion**
 - Seek understanding and build a shared understanding before rushing to explanations or solutions.
- ✓ **Relationships** are key and positive outcomes are more likely when relationships are established and characterised by trust and respect. Such relationships are built overtime, through everyday interactions where a school is actively promoting inclusion for all members of its community.

Relational Reminders

- ✓ Families can't build relationships with adults they don't know.
- ✓ Predictability creates psychological safety.
- ✓ Visual staff maps remove the embarrassment of "I don't know who to ask."
- ✓ Feeling connected to key adults improves attendance and reduces escalation.
- ✓ For some families, knowing *just one approachable adult* can make the difference.

Anglian Learning: Attendance Toolkit

Relationships with Families: The Home-School Partnership Cycle



This cycle comprises four connected stages:

1. Connect: Establish Relationships and Belonging

Strong partnerships begin before any concerns arise. Schools create a sense of belonging when families experience a welcoming environment, consistency, warmth and genuine interest in their child as an individual.

Staff can promote connection by:

- ✓ Demonstrating that all families are valued and welcome
- ✓ Making positive contact with families early and regularly
- ✓ Taking time to understand families' circumstances and perspectives
- ✓ Understanding barriers, like poverty, and responding sensitively
- ✓ Offering flexible ways for families to engage (e.g. informal meetings, drop-ins, community spaces in schools, soft starts and finishes involving activities with families)
- ✓ Learning about children's strengths, interests and aspirations
- ✓ Using accessible, jargon-free communication
- ✓ Creating opportunities for parents and carers to contribute their views and ideas

The key question at this stage is:



How do our parents and carers know that they belong here?

When families experience a sense of belonging, trust begins to develop.

2. Collaborate: Maintain Ongoing Partnership

Relationships require active maintenance.

Rather than communicating only when something is wrong, schools should actively create and establish opportunities for parent partnership and participation at a whole school and classroom level as well as ongoing dialogue about children's efforts, progress and wellbeing.

Collaboration involves:

- ✓ Sharing positives as well as concerns
- ✓ Keeping communication predictable and transparent
- ✓ Clarifying roles and points of contact with a named adult
- ✓ Seeking parent and carer perspectives routinely
- ✓ Developing shared goals for children
- ✓ Recognising and valuing family expertise



Afternoon Miss Anjum,
just a quick call to let you
know how kind Jacob was
today. We had the year 6's in
for a transition visit.
Jacob was brilliant at
showing them round.

Staff can support by adopting a stance of **working with families, not 'doing to' families**.

The key question at this stage is:



How are we demonstrating that parents and carers are partners in their child's education

Strong collaboration creates the foundation when challenges emerge.

3. Understand: Respond to Emerging Concerns

When difficulties arise, the priority is understanding rather than immediate problem-solving.

It is helpful if concerns are raised early, before they become entrenched or escalate:

We wanted to talk early so we can work together

Effective conversations begin with non-judgemental curiosity:

- ✓ What are we noticing?
- ✓ What might be contributing to this?
- ✓ How is the child experiencing the situation?
- ✓ What are parents and carers noticing?
- ✓ What knowledge and insights do the parents/carers have, that we don't?
- ✓ What might help and what strengths can we build upon?

Staff can try to present observations rather than judgements.

Instead of:



'J is becoming disruptive in class.'

Try:



'We have noticed that J is finding it difficult to settle to work and is leaving their seat several times during lessons.'

During these conversations it may be helpful for staff to:

- ✓ Begin with strengths
- ✓ Describe the concern (factually)
- ✓ Invite parent /carers perspective and ideas and listen actively
- ✓ Validate feelings and concerns
- ✓ Remain curious rather than defensive
- ✓ Seek a shared understanding of the situation

The key question becomes:



What can we understand together that neither of us could understand alone?

4. Plan: Agree and Review Shared Actions

Once a shared understanding has been established, solutions can be developed collaboratively.

Effective plans often are:

- ✓ Realistic (manageable next steps)
- ✓ Specific
- ✓ Strengths-based
- ✓ Shared between home and school.

Effective plans typically identify:

- ✓ What school will do
- ✓ What parents or carers may wish to try
- ✓ How progress will be monitored
- ✓ Who will coordinate communication
- ✓ When and where a review will take place

Effective implementation often includes a focus on maintaining contact. When progress occurs, however small, quickly acknowledging and sharing the successes can be supportive for the child, families and colleagues.

If strategies are not effective, it can be helpful to respond with adaptations rather than blame.

The key question is:



What shall we try next, together?

The cycle then returns to collaboration and relationship-building.

When Relationships Become Challenging

Even strong partnerships can encounter disagreement, frustration or conflict.

In these situations, staff can support through:

- ✓ Staying focused on the child's needs
- ✓ Acknowledging emotions without becoming defensive
- ✓ Separating concerns from judgements about individuals
- ✓ Continuing to listen and seek understanding
- ✓ Returning to shared goals and common interests
- ✓ Maintaining communication and follow-up
- ✓ Using staff support systems to support empathy and curiosity.
- ✓ Considering a more intensive approach such as [Team Me](#) or working with other services in a team around family and child approach.

The objective is not to avoid difficult conversations, but to conduct them within a relationship that remains respectful and collaborative.

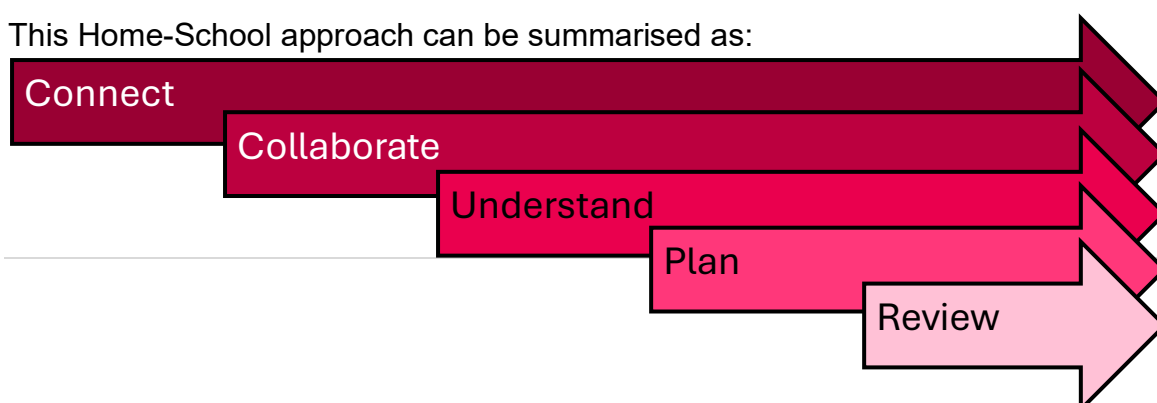
Pitfalls to Avoid

Strong partnerships can be undermined when communication is infrequent, unclear or perceived as judgemental. Schools can minimise difficulties by maintaining regular contact, using respectful and accessible language, seeking parent perspectives before reaching conclusions, and ensuring decisions are made collaboratively rather than presented as fixed outcomes. Here's a short list of pitfalls to avoid.

- ⊗ Only contacting parents when something is wrong
- ⊗ Using overly technical or jargon-heavy language
- ⊗ Making implicit judgements about parenting and/or the child
- ⊗ Presenting decisions as already made
- ⊗ Rigidity and escalating straight to action without dialogue
- ⊗ Inconsistent messages from different staff
- ⊗ Confusing systems which parents struggle to understand and use.

Summary

This Home-School approach can be summarised as:



The same principles underpin both relationship-building and problem-solving:

- ✓ Parents and carers belong in your school community.
- ✓ Parents and carers are partners in decision-making about their children and have special insights and knowledge.
- ✓ Understanding should precede intervention.
- ✓ Effective plans are co-produced.
- ✓ Clear, accessible communication is key.
- ✓ Relationships require ongoing investment.

When schools consistently work in this way, difficult conversations become easier because they take place within an established culture of trust, respect and partnership.

Resources

Anna Freud

[Parent/carer engagement : Mentally Healthy Schools](#)

[ffy_anna-freud-s-participation-strategy-pdf.pdf](#)

Education Endowment Foundation

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/supporting-parents>

The Environment Offers a Safe Base: Place



Developing a nurturing environment means that the environment feels safe and secure, this creates the right conditions for emotional, social and cognitive development.

The Classroom



A nurturing classroom has a planned routine to provide a predictable, reliable structure in which the children feel safe and cared for, so that they begin to trust the adults, to explore and to learn. A nurturing classroom structure include a caring approach with the opportunities for children to participate in the group by taking turns, waiting, making choices, completing tasks and tidying up. The children then begin to 'make sense of their experiences, to be able to ask questions, to discuss, to feel some control over their environment and to internalise some control over their behaviour' (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000).

Does the classroom promote a sense of belonging?

In what ways does the environment feel homely?

Are adults and children's names, photographs and children's work visible?

Consider soft furnishings, natural materials, soft lighting, plants, use of music...

Does the environment promote routine and predictability?

Are classroom responsibilities and jobs used to promote a sense of purpose, routine and security?

Are visuals (such as timetables) used to support understanding and show changes?

Children with attachment difficulties can sometimes find that a repetitive activity such as cleaning, or sharpening pencils can help them relax, feel valued and that they have a safe level of control. Caring for peers, younger children, plants, or the school environment builds trust, self-esteem, independence, and social skills.

Nooks and Comfy Spaces



At relatively little cost, a whole school nurturing approach can be achieved by creating an environment across your school that feels more homely, with safe spaces for everyone to use.

Nooks provide an area for children to retreat to, containing comfy seating, beanbags, pictures, soft toys, weighted blankets/ lap weights and cushions. Use of translucent fabric can be helpful to create divide but still allow the child to feel connected to the classroom, peers and adults. It allows for safe observation of peers, adults and the social rules of the classroom in a non-threatening manner. Use of a cosy nook, may be helpful for different reasons e.g. upset, overwhelmed or angry.

This can be an ideal area to promote emotional literacy, through posters, books and feelings boxes.

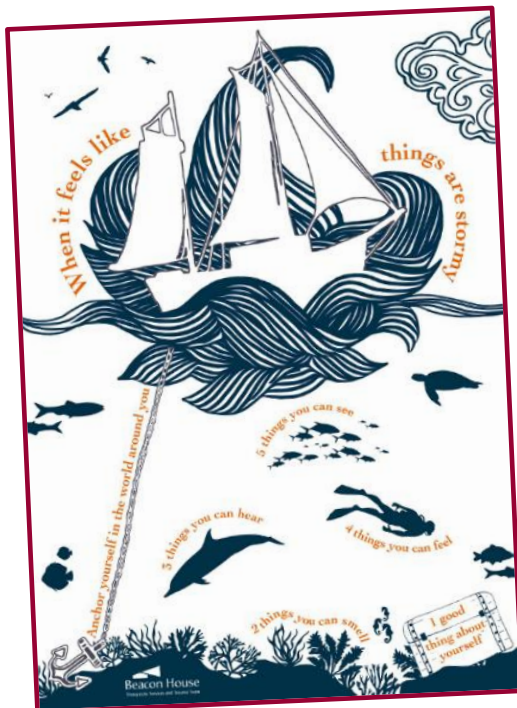


Sensory Sensitivities



Children who have experienced early trauma may be overwhelmed at times by sensory memories that recreate that trauma. Effective practice often includes listening to the child's voice and noticing non-verbal cues to understand their experience. It can be helpful to use sensory checklists to understand how to create a safe environment.

Providing a tailored sensory diet using rhythmic or physical activities can support regulation, this can support both up-regulating and down-regulating.



IN EACH PART OF THE SCHOOL I CAN HAVE DIFFERENT TOOLS.
I CAN MAKE A PLAN OF WHAT HELPS ME.

ALL THE SENSES CAN BE USED TO HELP ME FEEL CALM OR ALERT	WHAT THINGS CAN I DO ON MY OWN?	WHAT THINGS CAN I DO WITH OTHER PEOPLE?
CLASSROOMS	OFFICES	HALLS
LIBRARY	CORRIDORS	SPECIALIST AREAS
OUTSIDE SPACES		

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Resource Pack

BRAINSTEM REGULATING ACTIVITIES NEED TO BE:

- Relational (offered within a safe relationship)
- Relevant (developmentally-matched to the child rather than matched to their actual age)
- Repetitive (patterned)
- Rewarding (pleasurable)
- Rhythmic (resonant with neural patterns)
- Respectful (of the child and family)



Creating a therapeutic web of safe relationships around the child together with regular brainstem soothing activities can, over time, help a child's brain and body to learn that they are safe.

Beacon House Therapeutic Services & Trauma Team | 2024 | www.beaconhouse.org.uk

Brainstem-Soothers (1).pdf

Calm Boxes



Calm boxes can provide children with accessible tools to help them regulate their emotions and manage moments of distress or overwhelm. By offering familiar, sensory items, they support children in developing self-soothing strategies and increasing their sense of safety and control. It can be helpful to personalise the box, creating it with the child and in collaboration with the family. Transitional objects can be beneficial in helping the child to feel connected.

‘A transitional object is something that is a concrete, visual reminder of a continuing relationship’

Bomber 2011

When creating a calm box it is worth thinking about all senses. For example:

Sight: Consider calming visuals such as photos, soft colours, or a small picture book to help focus attention and reduce overwhelm



Hearing: Offer items like calming music, noise-cancelling headphones, or a simple sound toy to provide soothing or controllable audio input.



Smell: Use gentle, familiar scents (e.g. lavender sachets or scented playdough) to promote relaxation and comfort



Taste: Offer safe, preferred snacks or mints that can soothe and ground the child through familiar flavours.



Touch: Consider a range of textures such as stress balls, fidget toys, or soft fabrics to support self-regulation through tactile input.



Movement (proprioception/vestibular): Consider simple items or prompts that encourage gentle movement, such as a stretch band, putty, or activity cards (e.g. push against the wall or take deep breaths with arm movements) to help release tension and support regulation.



The Importance of Nurture for Wellbeing



You will see the symbol for nurture for wellbeing throughout this document. It is intrinsic to a safe base and as such runs through this guide. Nurture is key to building resilience. Resilience is a dynamic process involving 'bouncing back' from adverse experiences, to succeed despite adversity. It is a process rather than a character trait, built through supportive and protective relationships.

Resilience



A nurturing approach can help children build resilience. Resilience increases when children have strengths across multiple domains, supported by consistent adults.

Children's lives cross different systems: home, school, community and children's services. If we want to build a child's resilience it's important to think and work holistically, building strong partnership working with all parts of their lives, especially home.

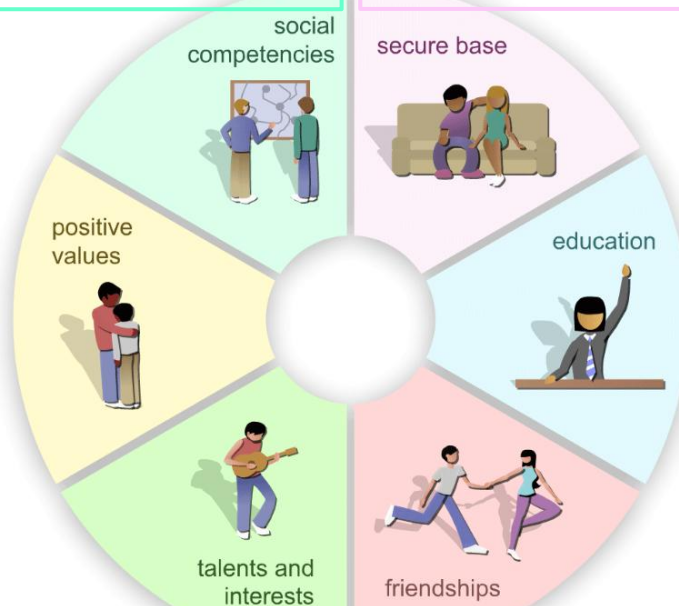
With the right support at the right time, every child can reach their full potential.



- **Individual:** To what extent do this child's personal characteristics contribute to his or her level of social competence?
- **Family:** To what extent do carers encourage social competencies?
- **Community:** What opportunities does this child have to develop competence in a wider social environment?

- **Individual:** Does the child appear to feel secure?
- **Family:** Do the child's carers provide the child with a secure base?
- **Community:** What are the wider resources that contribute to the child's attachment network?

- **Individual:** What level of moral reasoning does this child show, what understanding of his or her own feelings and what ability to empathise with those of others?
- **Family:** What level of helping behaviour does this child show?
- **Community:** What level of comforting or sharing or more general pro-social behaviour does this child show?



- **Individual:** What talents does this child have, and does she have any particular interests?
- **Family:** Do carers encourage the development and expression of talents and interests?
- **Community:** What opportunities are there in the wider community for the nurturing of this child's talents and interests?

- **Individual:** What characteristics does the child have that help with making and keeping friends?
- **Family:** To what extent do the child's carers support the development of friendships?
- **Community:** What are the child's friendships like at the moment?

Assessing Resilience: Daniel and Wassell 2002

For each domain you may wish to consider...



Domain	School Actions
Secure base	Key adult, nurturing relationships
Education	Scaffolded learning, closing gaps, celebrating effort
Friendships	Building strong peer network, playful times, repairing ruptures
Talents	Interests, clubs, ensuring strengths-based opportunities
Values	Inclusion, belonging, pupil voice, pro social values
Social competence	Teaching pro social skills, group working, restorative approaches

[Strengthening understanding of anxiety \(assessment\) overview – Falkirk Educational Psychology Service Practitioners Pages](#)

Food for Nurture



In nurturing approaches, meeting basic needs like hunger is a foundation for emotional support. Providing food is a sign of care and safety. Shared meals can build trusting relationships, and positive food experiences can support attachment and belonging.

Breakfast & 'Start the Day Right'

Snacks and regulation spaces

- Teach children to notice hunger and thirst cues.
- Make drinks and snacks available in regulation spaces. Sucking thick drinks through straws, warm drinks and crunchy food promote sensory regulation.

- Universal and targeted breakfast clubs: Offers a healthy & calm start to the day and builds relational connection. [Case Study](#)

Shared meals for relationships

- Family style lunches where a small group eat with a trusted adult.
- Use of mealtimes / snacks for gentle check ins.

Growing food, nature and cooking as a therapeutic activity

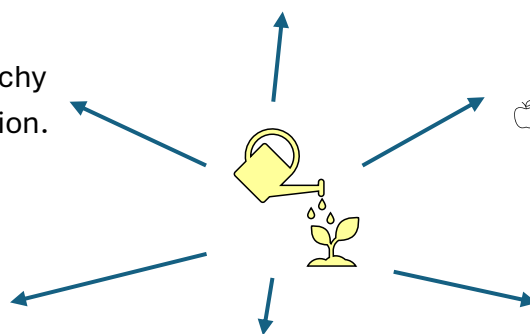
- Small group or 1:1 planning, cooking and eating together (linked to PSHE).
- School gardens, herb boxes, forest schools.

Staff and children check-ins

- Hot chocolate or 'tea chats' are supportive of wellbeing for children and adults.

Food for community

- Use community links to promote shared cultural food.
- Discreet provision of food — parcels or vouchers or families in need.



All Behaviour is Communication

Understanding behaviour, as a way of expressing an underlying need, feeling, or experience, rather than simply something to be corrected enables a shift in mindset from 'what's wrong with this child?' to 'what has this child experienced? What are they trying to communicate?'

Responses guided by this principle build trust and safety, reduce escalation over time and help children to move from acting out feelings to talking about feelings.

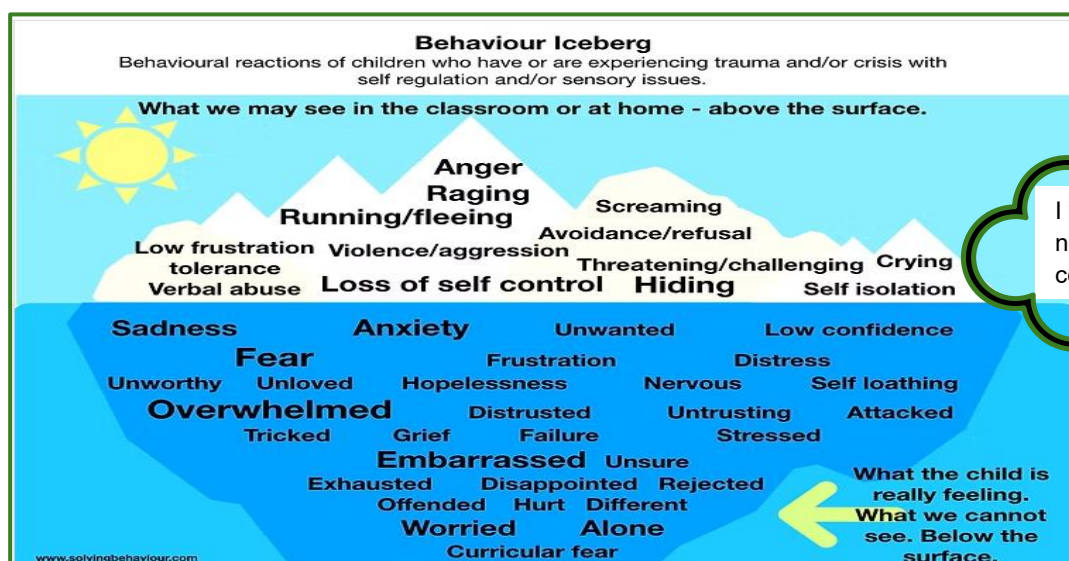
But what about discipline?

There is a perception that schools who practice a nurturing approach or a relational approach can be 'soft' on discipline; unlike a traditional behavioural approach the perception is it's a light touch on consequences, pupils are seen to 'get away with it' and avoid responsibility for their actions.

The reality is far from this perception. Discipline is understood in its original sense from the Latin word *disciplina* which means instruction or learning. As relationships are inherently messy, navigating conflict is a natural, inevitable part of all human interaction, whatever our age. Behaviour incidents are vital learning opportunities; to teach children how their actions impact others (and self), with the explicit intention of equipping our children with essential knowledge and skills.

A nurturing approach understands many children struggle with behaviour, at some point in their school life. By regarding all behaviour as communication, that struggle is seen as a communication of need, that's not been met yet, which a child will need to keep 'communicating', until their need is met.

By being curious about the need behind the behaviour, the focus shifts from simply correcting the behaviour to a problem-solving approach. The factors driving the behaviour are key e.g. hunger, distress, adversity, learning barriers, social threat, peer difficulties, factors outside school and online. Incidents are opportunities to understand, connect, teach, and meet needs. Children who have, for example, experienced chaotic family environments, where adults are frightening, who then come to school frightened or frightening to others, need access to trusted adults, predictable structures and strong home-school partnerships in order to feel safe and to learn



I wonder what you have experienced

I wonder what need you are communicating

Recognising behaviour as communication requires a trauma-informed, curious approach grounded in an understanding of ACEs, additional needs, diversity, and in situations where children's development may have been shaped by factors such as prenatal alcohol exposure ([FASD training can be booked here](#)). Nurturing adults seek to understand what sits beneath behaviour by asking what a child's experiences may be. This insight enables us to meet children where they are, support resilience and reduce barriers to their learning, wellbeing, and development.

This section is nested within the broader nurturing approach, appreciating the good practice and policies already within our schools. The purpose is not to replace what's already working in schools, but work alongside, strengthen and share the good practice and policies already within our schools.

The rationale for a nurturing approach to behaviour is grounded in established theories and the evidence of child development, adversity and trauma, attachment, learning, and neuroscience. This body of evidence highlights the importance of a safe base for learning, secure relationships, nurturing, and consistent experiences in supporting children's development and behaviour. These core principles are linked to improved engagement, attainment and holistic, positive child outcomes.

Building cultures that nurture and care



An anxious overwhelmed adult will find it harder to regulate an overwhelmed child. This is why Nurturing Cambridgeshire means nurturing everyone, the adults at home and school, as well our children.

[It's vital that all staff are supported to take care of themselves and one another](#), as working with high levels of need and trauma can be demanding. By modelling this as standard practice, we are teaching our children how to do this when they are adults, as well as encouraging our parents and carers to do likewise, and build a culture of nurture.



Organisational care through shared values, reflective practice spaces, exploring setbacks without blame, working with clear structures and supportive leadership helps staff remain regulated, consistent, and relational, which in turn enables them to provide the safe, nurturing responses that children need to learn and thrive. This is why caring for the adults who care is not an extra, it's an essential.

Language: Verbal and non-verbal



A key aspect of a nurturing school is enabling children to contribute to, and feel ownership of, their community. Within this, children are supported to take responsibility for their social and emotional wellbeing by identifying and naming their emotions, seeking support, and finding safe spaces when needed. This helps build resilience and develop individual coping strategies.

The child's voice is essential in shaping a nurturing school. Schools can gather this through councils, discussions, drawings, and questionnaires. Although this takes time, it empowers children, strengthens engagement, and reinforces their role in shaping their school community.

Notice the way children talk about themselves and where it diminishes the child's sense of self, gently reframe.



The way we talk (and write) about children is as important as what we say to them. Supporting each other to notice when spoken or written language needs reframing, helps us all to understand the behaviour as communication.

[The Misunderstood: Living FASD - Me & My FASD](#)



Effective practice often includes use of language which helps children, their families and staff feel they are welcome and belong. Greet children by their name, talking and noticing your children during less structured times. Remembering details, they have previously shared shows them they are visible and valued. Use positive, constructive language that recognises effort and supports self-esteem. Those micro-moments drip feed 'you are cared for, you are valued, you are worthy'.

Hi Freddie, Mrs Hope told me you wrote a fantastic paragraph today. Great stuff!

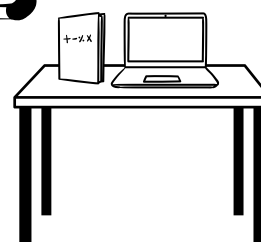
How's your puppy Raj? He must be getting big now.

Morning Gemma, I thought of you last night when Cambridge United won. It was a great result!

I wonder if you're feeling frustrated because you didn't get to finish. Shall we think of a way forward together?



I belong
I am welcome
I am valued



I noticed you kept trying even when it was tricky, that really matters.

Provide relaxed opportunities for discussion and self-expression, with explicit teaching and modelling of emotional and problem-solving vocabulary.

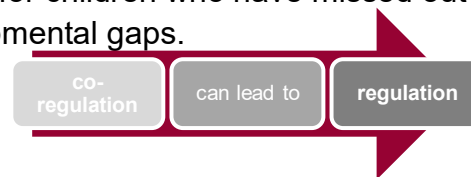
Teaching Emotional Regulation



Emotional literacy and regulation are fundamental to children's wellbeing and learning. All feelings are valid, and by helping children to notice, name and understand their emotions, within safe relationships, we enable them to make sense of their experiences and communicate their needs more effectively.

Through proactive teaching and supportive environments, (alongside responsive co-regulation in the moment) adults model and guide children in managing their feelings, so that every child feels safe, accepted and understood.

Grounding activities help to calm the nervous system, enabling the child to stay connected to the thinking part of their brain. It can be helpful to incorporate them as part of the daily plan. Activities can be used with the whole class and tailored to support individuals [Brainstem Calmer Activities](#). Reflecting with children by noticing and naming feelings and bodily sensations following grounding activities helps children understand what is happening in their bodies and the importance of these activities for regulation. This is particularly critical for children who have missed out on nurturing experiences in their early years and have developmental gaps.

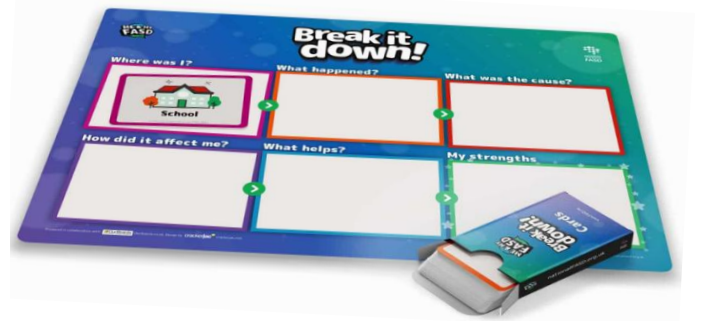


[The Hand Brain](#) model offers a simple, visual way to explain the three key parts of the brain: the brain stem (survival responses), the limbic system (feelings and emotions), and the cortical brain (thinking, reasoning, and self-control). Using this model, teachers can help children understand that when emotions in the limbic system become overwhelming, they can override the cortical brain, making it harder to think clearly. This supports children to recognise these moments and learn strategies to regain regulation and re-engage their thinking brain. With secondary aged children you may wish to explore how the brain changes during this critical period. [Unlocking the Adolescent Mind: Insights from Dr. Siegel](#)

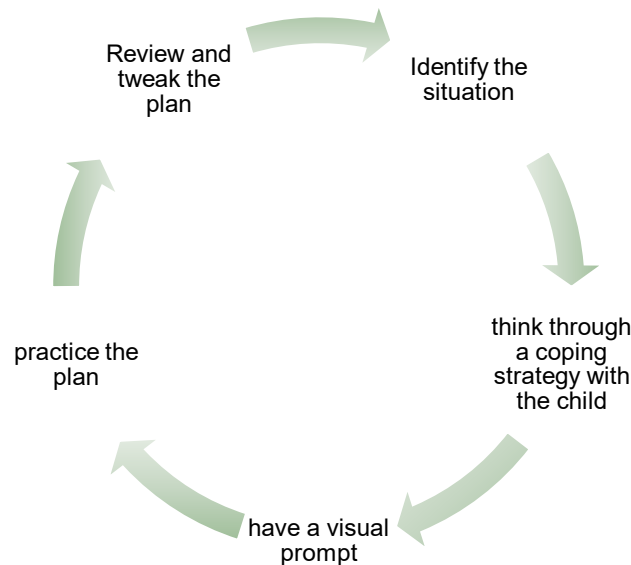
The [Zones of Regulation](#) is one structured approach which supports teaching emotional regulation by helping children recognise, label and understand their internal states (e.g. feelings, energy levels) in a clear, structured way. By categorising emotions into simple zones, it gives a shared language for discussing behaviour without judgement.

[ELSA](#) (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) provides targeted, relational support to help children develop emotional understanding and regulation skills in a safe, nurturing space. Through planned sessions and the use of personalised strategies, ELSA practitioners help children explore their feelings, build resilience, and learn practical ways to manage challenges. The approach supports children to feel heard, supported and better equipped to engage in learning and relationships.

The [break it down board](#) is a helpful visual and relational resource to support children to reflect on what went wrong, or why something was successful! It comes with visual cards; however, the board can also be used with a whiteboard pen. It is best used with a trusted adult when the child is fully regulated.



Planning for escalation and practising the plan when fully regulated is important, [this is why](#).



Boundaries and Expectations



Boundaries, expectations and consequences are key: they make an effective framework where teachers can teach children to reflect and learn from their behaviour. Teaching boundaries through clear expectations alongside fair, consistent consequences helps children learn and develop appropriate boundaries and behaviour. This is especially important for children who struggle to process information and/or have experienced, unpredictable, chaotic or unsafe environments.



Boundaries are important as they create a sense of safety, trust, and mutual respect. Boundaries define the acceptable behaviour and interactions within a school community. Whilst boundaries are linked to school expectations, boundaries are typically unwritten, defining the complex rules within any social context. Being unwritten 'rules' means navigating them requires constant adaptation, as they vary according to context, and cultural norms. Actions that signal respect in one culture can accidentally cross a line and feel rude in another.

For example, a child not giving an elder eye contact might be seen as respectful in some cultures; in the UK looking down might be read as disrespectful, and confusingly too much direct eye contact might be considered challenging and disrespectful.

Boundaries are learned implicitly from infancy and can be complex for children with learning difficulties or limited positive role models, so they may struggle to interpret social cues, understand implicit expectations, which other children pick up more easily. Children who have been exposed to neglect and abuse are particularly vulnerable to inappropriate boundaries (e.g. sexual abuse) as well as inconsistent experiences of limits being modelled and reinforced. It takes time for all children to learn how to navigate this social terrain; where children with learning difficulties, and/or childhood adversity will require more time. Showing sensitivity to the fact that each child comes to school with different experiences, and has different starting points, means different responses are required.

A whole school nurturing approach goes a long way to helping children learn appropriate boundaries. This is achieved by adults in school modelling safe, appropriate boundaries to other adults and to children; as well as showing an understanding of these unwritten 'rules' - helping children navigate them.

Expectations in a school are the shared understandings about how children and adults are expected to behave, learn, and interact with one another. Clear, predictable expectations are essential for everyone in a school community because they create a safe environment where everyone understands how to act respectfully toward each other and their wider environment. Adults help by making expectations explicit, responding predictably, and naming the connection ('When you did X, this happened'), which helps children notice patterns over time. Children learn more effectively when they feel safe, have adults who model and explain outcomes, and are given opportunities to reflect on their actions. This helps develop children's cause-effect thinking.

Cause-effect thinking is learned over time, involves recognising patterns such as 'if I do this, then this will happen,' which supports self-regulation and decision-making. This ability is what we need to help regulate our behaviour, but if environments and people aren't predictable and feel unsafe, there is no pattern and it's hard to learn.

When expectations are applied fairly and consistently by all staff, pupils feel secure, are more likely to trust adults, which in turn supports positive relationships and engagement in learning. Sustaining consistency is effortful, and needs to come from all staff, (including support staff and supply teachers). The benefits for staff are they feel supported by sharing responsibility and the hard work of creating consistency.

Within a nurturing approach the focus of expectations is a shift from compliance to community-wide shared responsibility to support inclusion and respectful relationships. Whole school expectations outline how students, staff, and families work together to build inclusive schools, creating a safe-base for everyone to thrive.

Traditional school rules

No talking while the teacher is speaking

Reframed as school community expectations

We practice active listening and respect diverse voices

What this looks like for everyone

Children: give their full attention when a peer or teacher shares ideas

Families: Engage in open, two-way communication during meetings

Staff: Listen intentionally to children & families feedback & ideas

The three elements to creating these expectations are:

- ✓ **Positively stated:** Focus on the desired action rather than the prohibited behaviour. Replace words like 'no,' 'don't,' and 'stop' with active verbs like 'create,' 'respect,' and 'engage'.
- ✓ **Universal application:** the expectations apply equally to all adults (staff, parents/carers and visitors) and children.
- ✓ **Restorative rather than penalty:** Frame accountability around repairing rather than delivering a penalty. The response could ask: *'who was affected, and how can we restore relationships?'*

Responses and Consequences



Children have a strong sense of fairness, and dislike unfairness. A nurturing approach promotes predictable responses (consequences) which are fair.

The emphasis is on noticing and appreciating children's efforts. Offering warm, positive and supportive responses when children show effort, including the tiniest of steps. These are connection building moments, giving responses such as smiling, praising, offering words and signs of encouragement, recognition, celebrating and sharing their efforts, including with parents and carers. These responses are powerful in helping children engage, as well as building their confidence, feelings of self-worth and sense of belonging.

We all need limits; limits are a part of everyday life. Teaching children limits involves clearly and calmly showing them what is acceptable and what is not, through consistent expectations, modelling, and predictable responses. It requires adults to set firm, but respectful boundaries, explained in ways children can understand, reinforcing them over time. This helps children feel safe, develop self-control, and learn how to manage their behaviour within different situations.

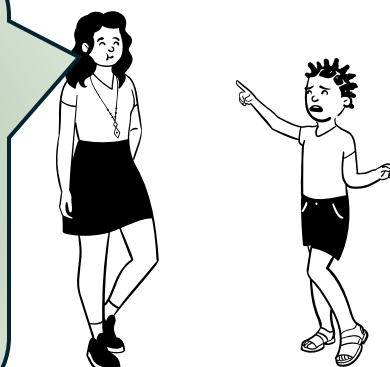
There is a spectrum of responses teachers use to communicate what's expected from non-verbal, such as presence moving-in and around, a glance and a pause, to verbal responses. Connection before Correction is a useful approach teachers use to scaffold a verbal response. Offering a small additional step of connection before correction helps children process what you need to teach.

Connect



Correct

I've asked you to do this and it seems like something's getting in the way. What's up?"
→ **acknowledge feelings**
Okay, I hear you. We still need to get it done. How can I help you start?



- ✓ Acknowledge feelings
- ✓ Stay calm and regulated yourself
- ✓ Show curiosity rather than judgement
- ✓ Pause before giving instructions or consequences
- ✓ Then move into guidance, limits, or teaching

Challenging behaviours

In cases of extreme behaviour, responses need to prioritise safety of all. Responses should be calm, recognising that such behaviour often reflects distress or unmet need rather than pure defiance. Staff can support through responding with an agreed de-escalation approach with follow-up regulation support, to help the child feel safe again, reflect and learn alternative ways to cope and communicate. More information can be found in the [De-escalation section](#).

A more personalised approach will be needed for children who are struggling to regulate and keep safe which will require more focus and strong home-school partnership working (see [Relationships with Families](#)). However, creating positive outcomes will still depend on the strength of a whole school nurturing approach.



Types of consequences

Consequences can be grouped into three types:

1. **Behavioural consequences** are punishments often unrelated to the behaviour, and involve an adult withdrawing a privilege or issuing a sanction aiming to control the child's behaviour.
2. **Natural consequences** occur naturally, without adult intervention, in response to the situation. It can provide a learning opportunity.
3. **Logical Consequences** are directly tied to the behaviour and aim to teach a new skill e.g. how to regulate, seek help or make reparation. They are arranged by adults, sensitive to the child's developmental age and stage, are directly related, respectful, reasonable, reflective and restorative. The emphasis is on children 'showing' sorry rather than 'saying' sorry.

Children who have experienced abuse, neglect and / or violence, with little experience of nurture and empathy, can become inured to punishment. Behavioural consequences also increase mistrust and distancing of adults, and so behavioural consequences are less effective. Children who have experienced low nurture and empathy may also struggle to feel and say an authentic, heartfelt sorry; 'showing sorry' might be a more useful approach than 'saying sorry'. Being supported to take a restorative approach helps children experience repair, regulating shame. When this is repeated, over time the message becomes...



Child's behaviour	Behavioural Consequence Punitive, disconnected from the behaviour	Natural Consequence Happens organically without adult support	Logical Consequence Designed by adult; related and respectful
Refusing to share or cooperate in a game.	Sent to sit on a bench for the rest of break.	Peers stop playing with the child, and the game naturally ends for them.	The child is supported to share and co-operate
Running and spilling paints over others work.	Issued a lunchtime detention or a generic behaviour demerit.	The student misses out on free time because they are left behind to clean the mess.	The pupil is asked to reflect, tidy, and draw a sorry picture for classmate.
Repeated calling out to classmate, insults.	Misses break, gets a demerit, if repeated, sent to office and given a written warning.	The classmate feels hurt and peers actively avoids interacting with them.	The pupil is supported to understand impact, take action to repair relationships.

Restorative approaches

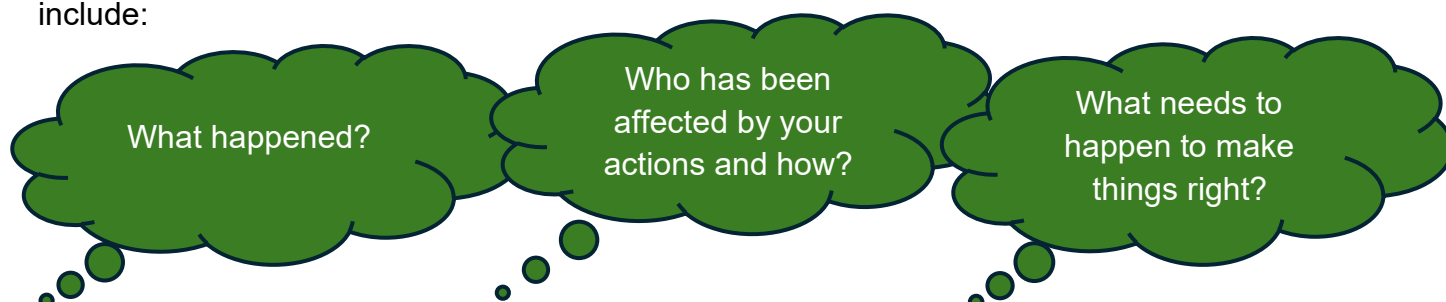


Rather than viewing misbehaviour as an infraction requiring a behavioural consequence a nurturing approach regards behaviour as communication and a learning opportunity, met through restorative approaches and teaching of pro-social values and behaviours. A restorative approach is a whole school framework that prioritises repairing harm, building community, and maintaining strong relationships.

Instead of focusing on which rule was broken and what the punishment should be the conversation shifts to what happened, how can we make things better, and how can actively rebuild trust and the relationships together. It encourages accountability, self-reflection, and prosocial skills by involving children in restorative conversations, community-building circles, and collaborative problem-solving.

When relationships fracture, schools use systematic tools to teach children how to navigate disagreements independently, fostering long-term 'conflict literacy.'

Restorative approaches shift from compliance to connection and repair. Restorative questions ask what sort of conversation is needed (short or full conference) and then facilitate a structured dialogue to encourage reflection, perspective-taking, and emotional awareness. Key questions include:



It normalises mistakes: classroom cultures treat social errors like academic ones. We don't punish someone if they don't know what a right-angle is, we don't punish someone who has made a social mistake, we guide them through a learning process.

Pro-social behaviour



The development of pro-social behaviour requires intentional teaching alongside structured restorative / conflict resolution tools.

Children and adults who are prosocial tend to build stronger, more meaningful relationships and face less social isolation. When prosocial skills are poorly developed, the trajectory shifts toward vulnerability, with increased risk of suspension / exclusion, specialist provision, poor educational and social outcomes, with impacts into adulthood.

Developmental Domain	Risk of vulnerability in childhood / adolescence	Long-term risk of vulnerability adulthood
Interpersonal	Chronic peer rejection, bullying involvement, peer and relationship difficulties, social isolation.	Inability to maintain healthy romantic relationships, higher divorce rates, and employment difficulties
Psychological	High rates of externalising behaviours: heightened emotional responses and behaviours that adults find difficult to manage and internalising distress: increased incidents of withdrawal or overwhelm.	Increased risk of mental health aggression, chronic depression, and substance abuse.
Academic & Career	Classroom disruption, frequent suspensions, lower attendance and academic engagement. Children's Services involvement.	Persistent unemployment, lower earning potential, housing instability and difficulty working in team environments, involvement with criminal justice service. Transgenerational pattern of poor outcomes, adult and children's service involvement.

A nurturing school plays a pivotal role in shaping prosocial behaviour by identifying and addressing the need behind the behaviour. Teaching prosocial behaviours and values (kindness, co-operation, sharing, helping, working together and resolving conflict) are important life skills.

Playtimes, breaktimes, and times outside lessons are of high importance to our children, it can make or break their school experience. Healthy peer friendships and positive social experiences create that vital sense of safety, fun and belonging that contributes to a pupil's motivation to come to school. The development of pro-social skills is thus intrinsic to attendance, engagement and positive educational outcomes.

By supporting pro-social skills schools can transform daily friction, incidents and conflict into practical lessons in sustaining friendships, taking responsibility, and social cooperation. Schools can do this by thinking about Bruce Perry's [The Three R's](#):

1. Regulation

- ✓ Use professional curiosity to explore what's behind the behaviour: sensory seeking or avoiding, learning, peer, or other factors outside school?

- ✓ Notice and name emotions in the moment or soon after: Help pupils notice and name their feelings (e.g. 'I see you are feeling frustrated') to build the emotional vocabulary required to understand self and others (see [Teaching Emotional Regulation](#)).
- ✓ Teach safe coping methods to regulate emotions – feelings are neither right nor wrong they just are, and there are ways to help us feel calmer.
- ✓ Praise the character, not just the action, saying 'You are a very helpful person' builds a prosocial identity more effectively than simply saying 'That was helpful'.

2. Relationships

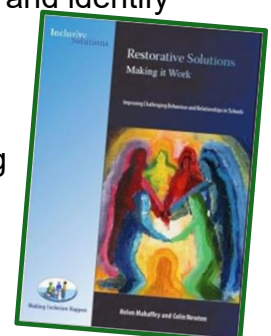
- ✓ Demonstrate everyday kindness. Children observe and reflect adult actions. Consistently display sharing, active listening, kind actions and care in your daily routine.
- ✓ Ensure a trusted adult approach, where children have consistent meaningful connection with an adult (see [Trusted Adult, Touch-Base and Team Me Approach](#)).
- ✓ Similarly, build relationships with families and strong home-school partnership working (see [Relationships with Families](#)).
- ✓ Value care, and state clear expectations of the school community's care to each other and the school's physical / natural environment.
- ✓ Provide structured opportunities for children to help others and take responsibility. They can't learn responsibility if they aren't guided and given responsibility. Assign age-appropriate caring responsibility that directly benefit the group, such as tidying, cleaning and making the classroom homely and comfortable, setting-up tables, watering plants, looking after displays, outside areas or feeding a school pet.
- ✓ Share media and culture that promotes pro-social values and action. Read stories or watch media together that feature characters overcoming selfishness, and ask reflective questions which explore intention, empathy and consequences like, '*How do you think that character felt?*' '*How come the Selfish Giant's garden turned to winter?*'

3. Reflection and Repair

- ✓ When children feel safe, calm and connected, have been given sufficient time to de-escalate from high arousal, they can be supported to reflect on what happened, and what needs to be done next in respect of repair. This needs to be supported, scaffolded, and concrete. Rather than expecting reflection to emerge independently, adults help the child make sense of what happened, name the impact in simple terms, and guide them through repair in a practical, relational way (see links to resources below). The [Break it Down Board](#) is a visual coping tool designed to help individuals, particularly children who have been exposed to alcohol in utero, to process events, regulate their emotions, and identify personal strengths, but is a useful resource for other children too.

Useful resources:

Restorative Solutions: Outlines step-by-step methods and scripts for dealing with conflict, managing challenging behaviour, and transforming relationships without relying on traditional punishment. [Shop — Inclusive Solutions](#)



RJC Schools Section

Education Talks: Restorative practices in schools

Restorative Justice 4 Schools Resource Area

Restorative Solutions 5 R's Principle Guide

University of Cambridge Restorative Approaches Report

De-escalation



It is key that our children experience their adults in school (and at home) as their unassailable safe base. When children put themselves or others at risk - hurt themselves, others and /or are damaging property - our children are letting us know they can't manage, and they don't feel safe.

Some children come to school with a limited experience of adults as a safe base and will try to find out where our limits are; what are our 'button pushers'. Adults who set limits may experience more resistance and challenge: attending to the well-being of staff involved in helping aroused children settle is an essential to a safe base approach, because an overwhelmed adult cannot regulate an overwhelmed child.



Repeated unmanaged escalations run the risk of teaching our children that they are not safe in school, and we can't keep them safe. This will have a ripple effect on other children, who rely on adults to create safety and calm in their school.

Helping our children learn how to manage big feelings safely (without harming) is essential learning for life and gaps in this learning should be closed, just like any other essential learning.

- ✓ Responding proactively by creating a safe base will help reduce challenging behaviours, however escalations will inevitably occur. At this point there should be a clear co-ordinated plan to de-escalate aggression in your school, alongside knowing your child.
- ✓ Strengths-based partnership working with parents and carers is essential, the 'message' we are trying to communicate to our children is:

You are safe here. We are bigger, stronger, wiser, kind adults working to keep you and everyone safe in school



I am safe, I can trust the adults

- ✓ Understanding the triggers and patterns will help create an effective more personalised de-escalation and regulation plan. Effective practice often includes this being developed with your child, and relevant staff.
- ✓ Consider sensory issues, and how best to reduce or manage potential sensory overloading.
- ✓ Ensure there are trusted adults in school to support regulation and relationship building, including a more intensive approach such as [Team Me](#).
- ✓ Notice behavioural changes that signal your child is not OK and act proactively, steer towards something that is regulating, validate 'I can see you are pretty annoyed at your team losing'

- ✓ When regulated and calm, if possible, talk to your child about what they notice when they start to struggle, what was happening around them and inside their body.
- ✓ Teach your child names for emotional and physical states and talk to them about what might help them when big feelings arise. Teach empathic acceptance of feelings: that feelings are neither right, nor wrong, they just are, sometimes big feelings are hard to manage, but you are there to help them with that.
- ✓ Teach a distinction between harmful behaviour that needs re-direction and the person, the person is loved, it is the behaviour that needs re-directing.
- ✓ Create a plan with your child to help them manage 'big feelings' in a safe and effective way.
- ✓ It may be useful to create an agreed 'flight path' so your child can escape to a safe place, rather than flight turning to fight.
- ✓ Ensure there is a safe agreed space, if possible, invite your child to personalise the space or resources to help them regulate in class, and outside of class, as needed.
- ✓ Help your child stay in their [Window Of Tolerance](#) by increasing opportunity for connection, sensory and physical regulation breaks over the school day, and ensuring basic needs are met, when they are feeling tired, hungry or unwell.
- ✓ 'Channelling' your child's threat response behaviour to a safe space, that your child knows and can use to regulate.
- ✓ When a child becomes aggressive either harming self, others or property there must be an agreed, rehearsed co-ordinated response plan.
- ✓ Ensure relevant teaching staff have received appropriate training to give them the confidence and skills to manage challenging behaviour, including episodes of escalation e.g. [Cambridgeshire Therapeutic Thinking](#), or your MAT approved approach.
- ✓ Know who will be the key adult in an escalation, and who will support, if required.
- ✓ Prioritise safety of everyone, remove other children and any potential hazards.
- ✓ Keep communication soft, low and reassuring; try not to engage the child in reciprocal conversation as they may struggle to engage when their threat response system is activated.
- ✓ A key phrase might be to remind the child that they are safe in school: 'It's Ok you are safe here' using a 'low and slow' approach.
- ✓ After an incident, when your child is ready offer something to eat or drink, to help regulate stress and shame, use what works best - a personal 'calm-kit' to support regulation.
- ✓ Use a peaceful approach to empathise with how your child was feeling, provide comfort and safety as appropriate. You may need to prioritise A and E.



Playful

You are loved no matter what. Your feelings are not right or wrong they just are

Acceptance

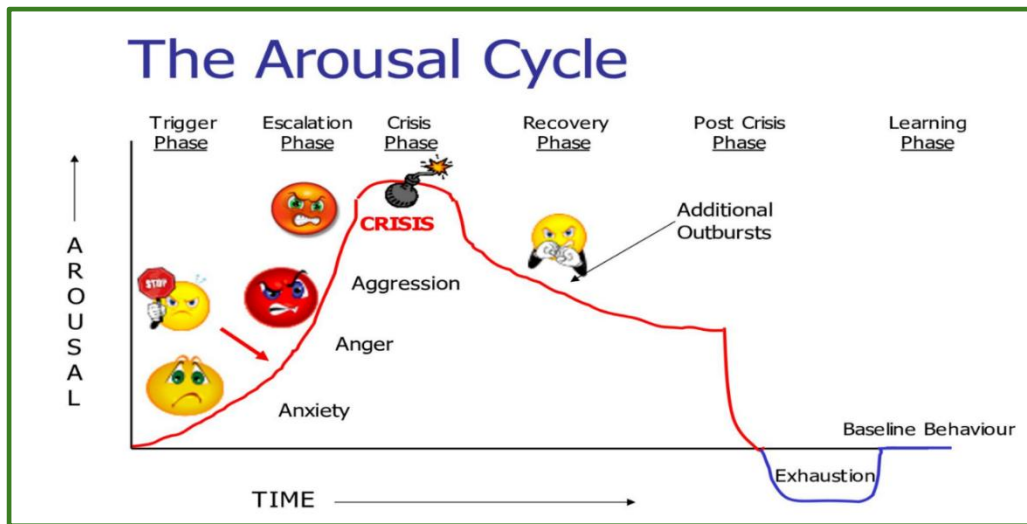
Empathy

I wonder...

Curiosity

That must be so hard

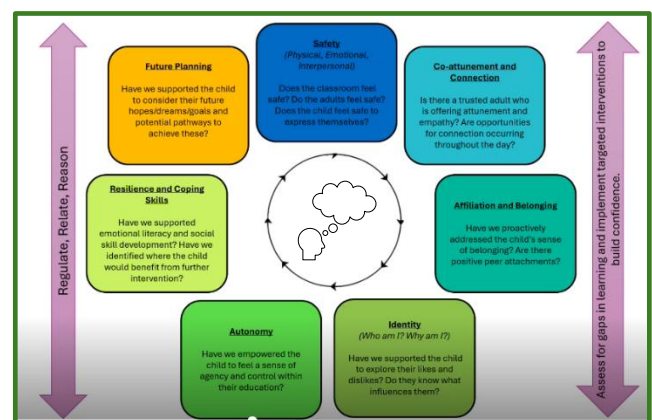
- ✓ Think about the arousal curve to ensure there is sufficient time for your child to recover.
- ✓ Remember repair and reflection can only happen when your child is fully regulated.



- ✓ Record incidents in line with your school policy.
- ✓ Communicate with carers and parents in line with your school policy, holding the hope that positive change is possible with partnership working and patience.
- ✓ Ensure there is nurture and care for the staff involved, working with children who struggle to trust and accept adult influence is tiring work, they will need an opportunity to recover from escalations, as their own arousal system will be activated. The environment as a safe base is for adults and children in school.
- ✓ Reflect on the incident with professional curiosity consider what else is needed for individualised risk assessment, de-escalation and a proactive provision plan.

The Virtual School offers support through a Relational Observation Resource. This is a collaborative approach which promotes professional curiosity supporting the team around the child to consider what the child may be communicating through their behaviour, taking into consideration their developmental stage. For more information talk to your link Virtual School Education Advisor

virtualschool@cambridgeshire.gov.uk



The Importance of Transitions



Transitions are a central part of children's lives and are understood, within the nurturing approach, as both everyday experiences and significant life events. They involve any change from one place, state or activity to another, ranging from small daily shifts (e.g. moving between lessons or starting a new task) to major transitions such as starting school or moving to secondary or post 16 education.

Change can be both exciting and scary for all children (and adults), but where children have additional needs or early experiences have been characterised by loss and trauma, navigating transitions is not surprisingly more complex. Children in care may be navigating multiple large

transitions simultaneously (e.g. leaving their family, moving into a new home and a new school). [Here](#) is a guide to support when a child is moving in with their pre-adoptive family.

Changes in routine, people and environments can increase anxiety, uncertainty, and difficulty with regulation, particularly when children struggle to predict what will happen next, process information, or manage change. Transitions are not only challenges, but they are also developmental opportunities, to enable growth in independence, resilience, and social understanding; supporting a shift in the narrative, when previous change has been characterised as negative.

Things are a bit different today, you might feel nervous. Let's look at your visual planner together and think through your day.

That is the tight feeling in my tummy. I can trust you. You will be there if this feels too much.



Nurturing schools aim to ensure that every transition is experienced as a safe, supported process that promotes resilience and inclusion. A nurturing approach emphasises that effective transitions are supported through:

- ✓ **Strong relationships and a safe base**, where children feel secure, valued and understood
- ✓ **Planning and preparation**, making the unfamiliar familiar and reducing anxiety
- ✓ **Consistent routines and environments**, providing predictability
- ✓ **Clear communication and attunement**, helping children understand and manage change
- ✓ **A team around the child**, ensuring joined-up support across home, school and wider services

New Relationships and Enduring Relationships through Transitions



When a child has built trust over time with an adult who has become their secure base, any disruption to that relationship can feel like a significant loss of safety and stability, reactivating feelings of uncertainty or past relational trauma; it is therefore essential that transitions are carefully planned to preserve connection, provide continuity, and mitigate this loss through supportive, attuned relationships.

- ✓ **Prioritise connection before change**
Where possible, ensure the child feels connected to a trusted adult before, during and after the transition. A brief, consistent check-in can help the child feel held in mind and emotionally supported.
- ✓ **Acknowledge that endings matter**
Endings can trigger feelings of loss, even when the next step is positive. Name this openly and sensitively: *'It can feel hard to say goodbye, even when we're moving on to something new.'*

✓ **Hold both relationships alongside each other**

Where possible, create overlap between current and new adults (handover meetings, joint check-ins, shared visits) so the child experiences continuity rather than abrupt change. Create a one-page profile for the child, new adults and the school pet to promote new connections!



✓ **Use a trusted adult as a bridge**

A familiar adult may accompany the child into a new space, introduce new staff, or help interpret expectations, supporting a sense of safety in the unknown. Some children might need a more intensive approach e.g. [Touch base or Team Me](#).

✓ **Create tangible reminders of relationships**

Provide transitional objects such as photos, memory books, or notes from key adults to reinforce that relationships continue, even when contexts change.

✓ **Build in planned opportunities for goodbye**

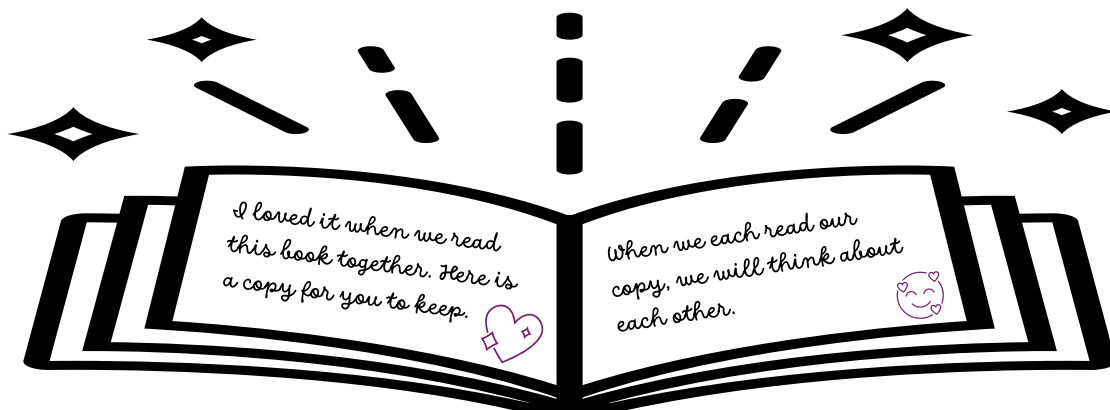
Allow time and structure for endings. This might include shared activities, writing goodbye messages, or reflecting on positive memories to support emotional processing.

✓ **Keep routines and relational rituals consistent**

Maintain familiar greetings, check-ins, or end-of-day routines where possible to provide a sense of predictability and connection.

Use language that reinforces permanence of care

Help children understand that relationships are not 'lost': *'Even though you won't see me every day, I will still be thinking about you.'*



✓ **Prepare the child relationally, not just practically**

Alongside timetables and logistics, talk about *who* will be there, *how* they will help, and *who the child can go to* if they feel unsure.

✓ **Recognise individual responses to endings**

Some children may appear unaffected, avoidant, or dysregulated, these are different ways of managing feelings. Stay curious and attuned rather than assuming impact.

✓ **Maintain connection where appropriate**

Where it is safe and possible, consider light-touch follow-up (e.g. a card, message, or agreed check-in) to reinforce that the relationship can endure beyond a transition.

✓ **Support staff reflection and emotional holding**

Endings can also affect adults. Creating space for staff to reflect helps them remain emotionally available and attuned to children during transitions.

Changes in Routine and the Environment



Changes in routines and the environment are important to consider because even small shifts in what a child expects or experiences can increase uncertainty, disrupt their sense of safety, and impact their ability to regulate, engage and learn. Repetition, rehearsal and attention to the small, often hidden elements of change further strengthen a child's sense of security.

✓ **Break transitions down into manageable steps**

Gradual exposure (e.g. short visits increasing over time) helps children build confidence and reduces overwhelm. It can be helpful to use [visual stories](#) to prepare.

✓ **Use visual supports to increase predictability**

Visual timetables, now-and-next boards, countdowns or transition objects help children understand and anticipate change.



✓ **Plan for the child's individual needs**

Consider developmental stage, sensory needs, past experiences and triggers. Consider whether things that have worked in the previous environment can be recreated e.g. safe space, welcome routine. Think about opportunities to adapt the plan to the child, not the child to the plan.

✓ **Build in regulation opportunities**

Ensure there are planned moments for movement, sensory support, or connection before, during and after transitions.

✓ **Have a flexible plan**

Recognise that plans may need to be adapted in response to how the child presents. Responsiveness is key to maintaining safety and trust.

✓ **Work in partnership with families and professionals**

Share information, insights and strategies to create a consistent, joined-up approach across home and school.

Planning for the unknown

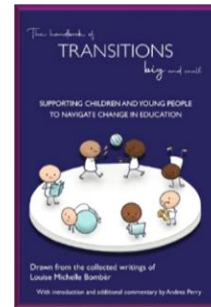


Planning for transitions needs to include the possibility of unexpected changes, such as a trusted adult being absent. By anticipating these moments in advance, schools can reduce anxiety and help the child feel safer, maintaining as much predictability and continuity as possible. Careful use of familiar routines, visuals and pre-prepared supports can make an otherwise unsettling change feel more manageable.

- ✓ **Plan ahead for the unexpected:** recognise that any adult may be absent and prepare for this in advance.

- ✓ **Use connection-focused resources:** e.g. a pre-written card or message from the adult that can be shared with the child on the day.
- ✓ **Acknowledge feelings:** 'It is rubbish that we can't go on the field today. I know you were really looking forward to playing football with the year 10s'
- ✓ **Incorporate visuals:** include symbols such as "change," or "?" within visual timetables.
- ✓ **Prioritise what stays the same:** maintain familiar routines, spaces and expectations wherever possible.
- ✓ **Support emotional safety:** ensure the child knows who is available and how they will be supported.

If this is an area of focus you may wish to read this [book](#).



Implementation Model

There are many ways to develop a nurturing approach in schools, think about what's working well in your setting, what do you want to develop next, and how does this link with your SEF and development plan?

Here is a resource to help you think about how to create change and to support you on your improvement journey.



The links within this section are short videos about the use of this implementation model [Quality Improvement journey](#) | [Turas](#) | [Learn](#)

Creating the conditions

Early collaboration helps create ownership and engagement, plus a sense of shared purpose and values. Involve as many key groups in your school as possible (e.g. SLT, governors, staff, parents, and children).

[Creating conditions](#) | [Turas](#) | [Learn](#)

Understand your system



It's important to understand your school system before starting any change, to avoid pitfalls.

1. Reflect on your school, with all its interacting 'moving parts' as well as the wider system partners.
2. Use existing information and collect feedback from key people / groups, other systems, and any relevant research - staff/ parent/ pupil surveys, Self Evaluation Framework (SEF), School Improvement Plan (SIP), new Ofsted requirements, school Ofsted, and Advisory Services.

Q. What change is practical and possible within your resources?

[Understanding systems | Turas | Learn](#)

Developing aims



1. Explain exactly what you want to improve. Create an aim statement what, how, who and when. Ensure this links to your SEF and / or school development plan.
2. Once a clear improvement aim has been identified, practitioners can develop meaningful theories and ideas for change, which can then be tested.
3. Formalise, commitment through your school improvement plan.
4. Share the aim with relevant partners in and outside your school.

[Developing aims | Turas | Learn](#)

Testing changes



1. Have a clear aim and a change idea that can be tested.
2. Identify how this will be measured so you can see if your change idea leads to improvement that meets your aim.
3. Run a test cycle to find out what change is effective – what leads to the desired improvement, and what is less effective.
4. Consider PDSA testing cycle –plan, do, study results, act (adopt, adapt, or abandon).

[Testing changes | Turas | Learn](#)

Implement



1. Implementation is about making the improvement become normal, 'standard' practice.
2. Implementation starts after running PDSA test cycles - when you're confident the change will work.
3. Implementation can be:
 - a) Just Do It (for simple changes)
 - b) Parallel (running alongside current practice)
 - c) Sequential (step by step, a bit at a time).
4. Consider the key areas to embed the change so it becomes standard practice.

[Implement | Turas | Learn](#)

Spread



1. Once effective change is embedded, you can 'spread' good practice so other settings can improve.
2. Decide what you want to spread, what are the key ingredients leading to improvement?
3. How to adapt to fit different contexts.
4. How broad is your 'spread': other key stages, departments, schools, across a MAT, LA or National?
5. What's your compelling improvement story showing the sustained change and benefits?

[Spread](#) | [Turas](#) | [Learn](#)

Top Tips

Leadership is key to success



Leadership
and Teams

- ✓ Build engagement and collaboration
- ✓ Set and communicate a clear vision so your team has clarity of purpose and can prioritise
- ✓ Encourage trust, supportive teamwork, where it is safe to say what is working and what is not.
- ✓ People create change, psychological safety is at the heart of effective working relationships

[Leadership and teams](#) | [Turas](#) | [Learn](#)

If we don't know where we are, how do know if we're going in the right direction?



Measurement

We need measurement to:

- ✓ Tell us where we started, where we're going, if change leads to improvement and what we need to do next...
- ✓ Data is collected overtime, little and often to give regular feedback on what's happening, how far we've come, how far to go and what to do next....
- ✓ For balance data needs to be numbers (quantitative), and verbal feedback (qualitative).

[Measurement](#) | [Turas](#) | [Learn](#)

Project Management & Communication



Project Management
and Communication

- ✓ **Start up:** Understand your whole system (people, processes, parts). Communicate the vision with a clear project plan, what will change, how it leads to improvement, who's involved.
- ✓ **Planning:** Agree with the team, who will do what and by when.
- ✓ **Managing and reporting:** Sharing information and co-ordinating the team and key stake-holders.

[Project Management and Communications](#) | [Turas](#) | [Learn](#)

You are not alone. Nurturing Cambridgeshire is an enabler for Inclusion for All. Talk to your LA links about how they can support you with your next steps.

Service Director Education



Sarah Callaghan

Assistant Director Inclusion



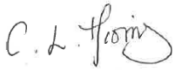
Michael Bateman

Assistant Director Education



Alison Cramer

Virtual School Head Teacher



Claire Hiorns

**Join our Connected Communities group to link with your peers:
connect, share and support each other's journey.**

