

Phoenix Park School



Relationship and Wellbeing Policy

September 2025

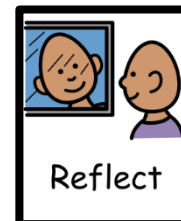
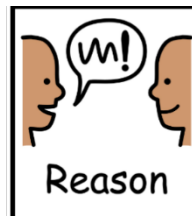
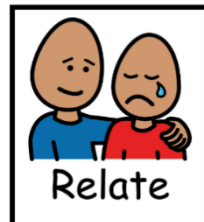
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Introduction

Phoenix Park Specialist School provides for children between the ages of 5 and 12 with a diagnosis of severe emotional and/or behavioural difficulties (Severe EBD) who have the potential to return to mainstream school. The school aims to provide a quality learning environment that maximizes educational opportunities for children. We aspire to develop high standards of behaviour in a caring nurturing and safe environment where all pupils are provided with experiences that make them feel valued and respected. This policy outlines the Phoenix Park Schools Relationship & Wellbeing Policy which is child-centred, connection-led, and trauma-responsive and is underpinned by the Neurosequential model of Dr Bruce Perry: Regulate, Relate, Reason. This policy is built on the belief that children should be regulated before we try to reason, discipline replaces punishment and wellbeing is at the centre of positive relationships. It has been produced and written with considerations given to:

- Phoenix Park School's Mission Statement
- Phoenix Park School's SPHE & RSE Policies
- The school's responsibility to make appropriate provision for learners with SEBD
- The strengths and needs of the learners who attend our school

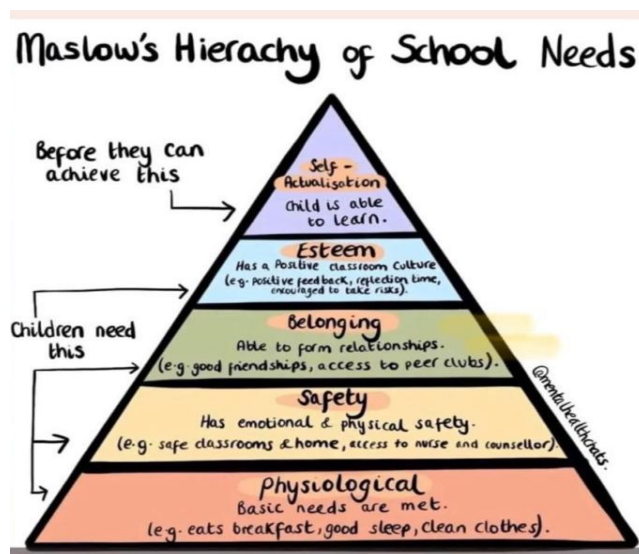


Policy Rationale

The children in the Phoenix Park Specialist school travel from Dublin and the greater Dublin area, alongside surrounding counties daily to attend school and avail of the school transport scheme to do so. Many of our children are moving us from schools who have DEIS status. This means many of our children are coming from areas of deprivation where anti-social behaviours and poverty are prevalent. Despite this, the Department of Education does not permit our school to avail of Deis status because our designation is that of a "Special School". Bearing this in mind, we must give consideration to the impact this has on our pupils when they are transitioning from such schools and areas of deprivation. These children have the same skill set and potential as children living in more affluent areas, however, due to their post code, they are **not** afforded the same **opportunities**. This lack of equity means children from low socio-economic areas have to work even harder to reach their full potential. **"Potential is equally distributed across social class. Opportunity is not"** K. O'Sullivan.

The Pobal HP Deprivation Index 2022 states that “The gap between Ireland’s most disadvantaged areas and the national average has increased”. The index, which is Ireland’s primary social gradient tool, found a nationwide improvement in measures such as employment and population growth. However, persistent disadvantage remains for many communities.

In understanding the communities from which our children come from and the prevalence of disadvantage, we must consider meeting the children where they are at each day, this means ensuring their basic needs are met. At Phoenix Park school we consider Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs and we look to ensure physiological, safety, belonging and esteem needs are met before we consider self-actualisation and the process of learning.



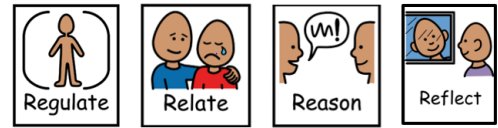
Aims

At the Phoenix Park School, our relationship policy reflects the culture of well-being we have embedded throughout the school. The short-term aims of this policy are to:

- Enrich the well-being of our school community leading to an improvement in relationships and behaviour. Ultimately, this will impact the learning and attainment of our children.
- Ensure a regulation first approach which aims for connection before correction.
- Allow for positive connections between students, adults and peers that foster positive social interaction and establish a nurturing environment.

We are committed to making long-term lasting changes to the lives of our children through the compassionate practice outlined in this policy.

Understanding Relationships and Behaviour using the Neurosequential Model Dr. Bruce Perry



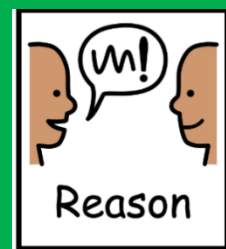
1. Our survival brain doesn't communicate through words, it communicates through our senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, & taste) Information from the environment and signals within our bodies, will soothe or trigger us. We can use our sensory system to help REGULATE our nervous system. Rhythmic movement, such as bouncing, walking, and running, can provide the body and brain with feelings of safety. This gives us a sense of physical safety and therefore regulation. The brain will then process information in the emotional brain. Babies and young children often have strong reactions, their survival brain is doing its job and keeping them safe. Babies and young children will naturally experience the world from a position of fear and stress which is why they are so dependent physically and emotionally on adults. Our survival brain continuously and subconsciously scans the environment for threats.



2. RELATE is all about positive relationships, meaningful connections, and emotional safety. Naming emotions and having those emotions validated can help to reduce the overwhelming effect emotions have on our behaviour. "Name it to tame it." Being understood and permitted to feel builds emotional safety. This prevents the internalisation of shame. When we feel emotionally safe, the learning brain functions better. Children need calm adults to accommodate and allow for strong emotional outburst to help them build emotional resilience. The emotional brain scans the environment for belonging and emotional safety.



3. Once we feel physically safe (REGULATE), and emotionally safe (RELATE) we can communicate effectively, think clearly, plan efficiently, organise, learn, self-regulate and predict outcomes. We have accessed the thinking and learning and can REASON. IQ improves with regulation, we are rational, less reactive and can think clearly. This part of the brain is not fully developed until 28–30 years old. Therefore, this part of the brain is under development in children.



REMEMBER! The nervous system does not respond to words (which is why telling someone to calm down doesn't work!) It responds to the sensory environment. Think about how you can calm and soothe your nervous system and your child/ren's nervous system using these strategies. This will make scripting more effective.

Our Response when considering 'All Behaviour is Communication'

At the Phoenix Park School, we are aware that All Behaviour is Communication. It is our responsibility to determine what the child is trying to communicate to us and how we can best support them with these needs. Examining this information can allow us to prevent escalation rather than respond to crisis. When we are working to support a child with regulation we make use of our toolkit depending on where the child is at. We must look to respond in order to regulate and ensure we do not react which can cause escalation. Below are some examples of how responding versus reacting can impact the child and their behaviours;

Responding → De-escalate	Reacting -> Escalate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging how the child is feeling. "I can see you're angry. This must be very difficult for you" • Supportive stance • Adopting non-threatening body language • Avoiding direct or sustained eye contact • Offer clear simple choices and regulation options • Use a calm tone of voice • Give options • Soft facial expressions, communicate empathy • Ensuring you are regulated first • Actively listen, paraphrase. "so, what you're saying is" • Ask the child "what do you want to see happen?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stern facial expression • Raising your voice • Loud or aggressive tone of voice • Physical contact • Moving towards a child with urgency • Using sarcasm • Using shame "do you know what this fella has done?" • Phrases such as "I am very disappointed in you" • Comparing the child to their compliant peers/siblings • Asking a child "what have you done/what did you do" • Using punitive responses such as red cards • Asking for an apology. • Physical contact; this could be perceived as threat.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the child, "what is going on for you today" • Ask "how can I help" • Move location • Reduce communication 	
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Let's try to reframe behaviour as a form of communication. This allows us to support the child's needs, rather than addressing their symptom of distress.

Regulation First

At Phoenix Park School, we make use of a Toolkit filled with strategies and approaches which aim to support children to regulate. Each of these toolkits lists strategies for use with the child and also identifies practices which the adult engages in prior to supporting the regulation of the child. This happens at four stages;



1. Green Toolkit - Keeping it all on track

Child	Adult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choices in work/activities • Visual timetables • Now/Next boards • Movement Breaks • Phoenix Park Tuck Shop • Incentives based on children's interests. • Target Cards • Praise/Reassurance • Sensory toys & fidgets • Break cards • Change of face • Consistent approaches • Controlled environments • Nurture Room • Opportunities for Movement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarisation with IEPP'S • Asking for advice/opinions of colleagues • Discussion of issues with leadership team • Notice negative thought patterns and challenge them • Solution based conversations • Wellbeing support workshops • Supervision sessions

2. Orange Toolkit - Keeping it together when things get rocky

Child	Adult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redirection with a story • Give the child a job to do • Offer then a way out, e.g. time in back press/a walk/preferred activity • Support from a preferred adult • Reminder of options • Removal of Audience • Use of a timer • Offer choices and reminders of desired outcomes and walk away, allowing take up time • Support child to identify emotion on the 5-point scale using sentences like; "I wonder if you are feeling ..." "It's ok to be... but it's not ok to..." • Paraphrasing "what you are saying is..." • Setting limits "when and then" "if and then" • Use of humour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avail of supervision provided by the school • Access wellbeing supports • Spectrum Life; free counselling service • Talk to a supportive friend/colleague • Stop and identify your own emotions on the 5-point scale. • Identify strategies to get yourself back to 1 • Swap out if feeling overwhelmed • Take a breath before acting

3. Red Toolkit - Keeping it safe

Child	Adult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of familiar staff • Clear Safety Instructions • Supportive stance • Consistent approach • Verbal Reassurance • Safety Interventions • Use of minimal language • Give in to reasonable demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for help • Look for assistance • Reflect on CPI safety interventions • Stop and consider if you are responding or reacting.

- Give the child space
- One voice only spoken low and slow

4. Blue Toolkit - Repairing Relationships

Child	Adult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer the child a drink or snack • Take the child for a walk • Offer a safer space e.g. Sensory Room, Hall, Quiet Room, Back press • Give designated one on one time • Offer a preferred activity • Have a hot chocolate or a tea together • Play cards • Give praise and recognition for things the child has done well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak with colleagues • Engage in restorative conversations • Reflect on incidents • Go for a walk, get some movement

Regulating & Nurturing Environments

Understanding that all sensory information is first processed through the survival brain is an important aspect of our behaviour ethos. The nervous system can either be soothed or triggered by the environment. Class teachers might consider the following to support a calm, regulating learning environment:



- Reduce lighting, and noise.
- Careful table planning & learning stations
- Adaptive learning & teaching styles
- Visual timetables and use of now and next boards to support predictability
- Classroom routines
- Simplified instructions
- Universal designed for learning to meet different learning approaches
- Regular movement breaks
- Requesting or using various sensory equipment that might encourage regulation
- Consideration of a child's hunger, tiredness or overwhelm (Maslow's Hierarchy of needs)
- Allow them to sleep if necessary; provide a safe space.

The Hall

This room is a modified space to accommodate and support children to feel physically safe. The room is separated into areas which are calming, organising and alerting and offers opportunities to rock, bounce, jump, balance, swing and move. It is a proprioceptive space. The room is suitable for children who might struggle with regulation, need some time out or seek reciprocal interactions with staff i.e. throwing and catching a ball together, pulling and pushing, gross motor activities and so on.



School Corridor

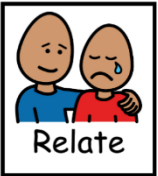
The corridor outside the hall can be used to engage children in structured physical activity. It has six stations which encourage physical movement and supports transitions from the hall or the Nurture room back to the learning environment.

The Sensory Room

This room provides calm and quiet away from a busy classroom. There are various resources to calm or soothe the senses such soft furnishings, various lighting, musical sound boxes, massage equipment, blackout blinds, soft pillows, and tactile objects. This room is suitable for any child who needs a sensory break, time out, alerting and/or calming activities. Children who access these rooms are referred and timetabled. Adults do not enter the sensory room with children but can sit outside with the door open.

Relating to a child through a Nurturing approach

Nurturing approaches are at the heart of the Phoenix Park School. Nurture is available for all, it is embedded within our culture. While adults remain curious and responsive towards ongoing symptoms of distressed behaviours, we can consider further support which could be put in place to care for our children. Nurture is by no means a reward, it is a way for them to gain feelings of belonging, self-worth and to build up further connections and positive relationships within the school. The Nurture room bridges the gap between home and school. Nurture time should not be used as a reward or punishment, it is essential for the long-term well-being and mental health of our children. Furthermore, regulated children will be more readily able to learn, focus, control impulses and participate actively in lessons. It is everyone’s responsibility to nurture the wellbeing of children. Nurture takes place in every corner of Phoenix Park Specialist School.

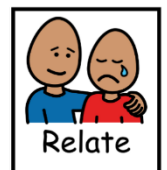


<p>Universal Support Support for All</p>	<p>Hot Breakfast/Café Positive Pupil Relations (Bí Cineálta) Rec Room Restorative Conversations Class Visual Timetable</p>
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	What survival looks like in school Resource CPI- Crisis Intervention training Wellbeing Ambassadors 2x10 Breathing techniques
Additional Support Support for Some	Family Breakfast Hamish & Milo Understanding Anxiety Workshop Sensory Room Nurture Room A quiet place to sleep Roots of Empathy
Intensive Support Support for Few	In school therapy support CAMHS In school therapy support; External Agencies 1:1 Support Meitheal meetings Rainbows Programme NEPS Family Liaison Worker; Deputy Principal Youth Diversion Project Referral ISPCC Referral Daughters of Charity Referral Incredible Years The Stephen Moylan Foundation

Co-Regulation & Containment

Children need safe spaces, safe faces, and safe places to thrive emotionally in school. Children should be co-regulated in the first instance, prior to de-escalation. We focus on connection before correction. Attune to their emotions and needs, “You look angry?”. **Label their emotions.** Externalising how they are feeling helps children to alleviate the feelings inside them. We can wonder out loud together **“I wonder if you feel frustrated because maths feels tricky?”** linking up the emotion with the trigger. Then, linking the emotion with the behaviour **“I wonder if that is why you threw the chair?”**.



Using the 5 Point Scale to give an intensity to emotions helps children to understand the transience of emotions. **“I can see you are a 5 right now, we need to get you to at least a 3 or a 2 before we think about learning.”**

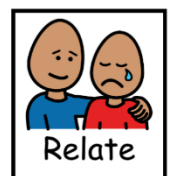
By simply being with children when they are dysregulated, we act as a container for their emotions. By holding space for them we are offering children the emotional safety they crave and need to thrive. To successfully contain emotions, we must ensure we remain deliberately grounded and calm – keeping our own emotions in check. Calm must be seen in facial expressions, through open and slow body language, and using a quiet and composed voice. We also understand that working with dysregulated children can cause compassion fatigue. You must lean on colleagues for support and engage in debriefs and reflective conversations.



A dysregulated adult will never regulate a dysregulated pupil. If you feel you are unable to co-regulate a child, calling upon a colleague to “take the baton” can be a positive step for both you and the child. The change of face will enter heightened situations from a place of curiosity and empathy. We aim to replace authoritarian and controlling approaches with compassion and understanding. Ask yourself; Can I respond or will I react?

Attachment

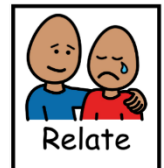
Responding and not reacting to behaviour is an important aspect of connections and relationships. Children do not choose to become dysregulated. Distressed behaviour does not stem from the part of the brain that is rational. Let’s look at this in terms of a child internal working model (IWM).



	Secure Attachment	Insecure Attachment
I am...	a good kid, loveable, listened to, worthy of belonging, safe physically and emotionally	a bad kid, unwanted, unheard, it's all my fault, shameful, unsafe physically and emotionally
People are...	kind, trustworthy, loving, worthwhile investing in emotionally	untrustworthy, unreliable, unkind, not worth bothering about, dangerous, contagious
The World is...	a safe place, fun, a place to explore, somewhere I belong	dangerous, a place to remain alert, somewhere I don't belong

Learning around Behaviour

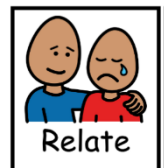
Rewards at Phoenix Park School should promote belonging and inclusion. They should be accessible to all and used in a meaningful way to foster self-esteem. Behaviour charts that label desirable and undesirable behaviours are discouraged, we do not use them to publicly shame children (for example rainy clouds, red cards/dojo points). We believe it is not ok to make a child behave better by making them feel bad about themselves. 5 Point Scale, Restorative Conversations, Spin the Wheel are examples of trauma-sensitive and child-centred resources to facilitate learning from and about behaviours.



A child's pre-frontal cortex (the learning, logical, rational, decision-making part of the brain) must be fully engaged to be able to effectively make decisions where they will fully be aware of the reward or consequence of their behaviour. When the amygdala is triggered (the brain's smoke detector for danger) it hijacks the pre-frontal cortex preventing rational decisions from being made. Therefore, a reward and consequence chart will be of limited success and is likely to be unsustainable for the child, and in some cases can do more harm than good. We encourage learning from experience to be done, this means using restorative approaches.

Pupil Leadership

Empowering children by giving them leadership roles allows them to have ownership over their school environment. Our children play an active role in promoting positive relationships that subsequently impact behaviour.



Student Council: Each term, a student from each class is chosen to represent their class in the student council, they take part in fortnightly meetings with the deputy principal where they discuss what is going well and what needs to be improved, the students are given an opportunity to use their voice to suggest what they would like to see happen in terms of things which can be changed.

Wellbeing Ambassadors: The Wellbeing Ambassadors meet weekly and plan termly. Pupils are provided with hoodies when they are selected as Wellbeing Ambassadors. Their role is to learn (and create) different breathing methods to support regulation. These methods are then shared with the wider school community. They plan a different well-being activity every week to share with their peers. Children in each class are then encouraged to practice this strategy throughout the week.

Buddy Friday

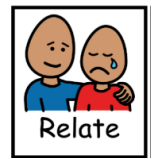
We are aware that building and maintaining positive relationships within the school is imperative to ensure positive outcomes for the children in the school. In response to this, we have allocated a one-hour slot each Friday for children and staff to identify a preferred activity they would like to engage in around the school

community. No matter what has gone on for a child throughout their week, they get a chance to work on their relationships, alongside their social skills out and about in the community.

Staff Wellbeing

'Quite simply, we cannot put children first if we put adults last.'

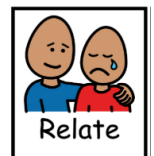
Colleagues are the greatest resource in a school, and their well-being shapes the emotional well-being of children. If we “put our oxygen mask on first before helping others” we avoid depleting our wellbeing. Looking after our mental wellness will ensure we are well-equipped for co-regulating our children. At Phoenix Park Specialist School the following Wellbeing initiatives are in place.



- Tea or Talk Tuesday
- Individual Supervision on request
- Termly Supervision
- Wellbeing Workshops
- Safety Intervention Training
- Spectrum Life-Free Counselling Service

Family Wellbeing

One of the greatest indicators of a child's well-being is the well-being of the parents or carers. Within a family context, well-being is inseparable. To support the emotional needs of our learners it is fundamental to have a united understanding about well-being with parents and carers. Moreover, it is crucial to support the well-being of the family – offering emotional containment for parents.

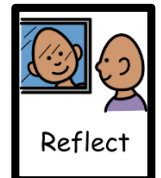
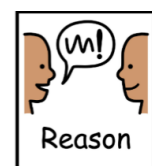


Building relationships with parents is central to building relationships with children. If we gain trust with parents and carers, we are simultaneously building trust with children (known as flocking).

Compassion and empathy towards parents, carers and their family circumstances are essential. They must feel emotionally safe at Phoenix Park School for us to work together productively. Understanding that children are an emotional extension of their parents can help explain the strong emotions parents often experience when faced with their child's distressed behaviour. When a child's well-being is under threat, it is only to be expected that parents become emotionally heightened. Listening to parents and understanding their perspectives will help to inform decisions that will promote positive relationships and reduce anxious behaviour in children.

Restorative Approaches

Restorative approaches (sometimes referred to as restorative practice) are a way of repairing relationships when those relationships have broken down. These can happen between peers and between children and staff. There are two main aims of restorative practice:



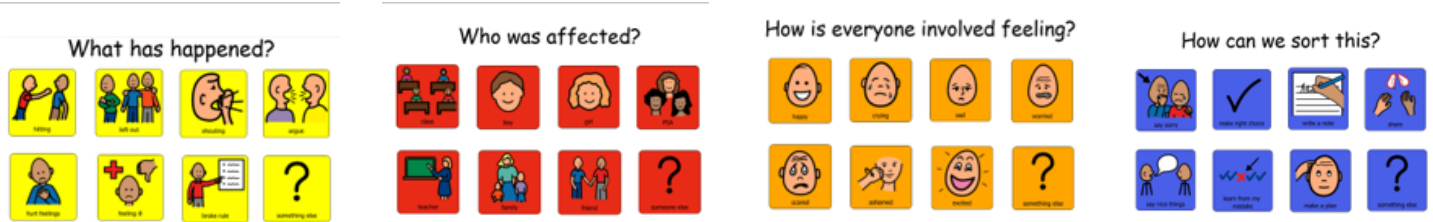
Phoenix Park School

- **Proactively** build healthy relationships and prevent challenging behaviour and conflicts
- **Reactively** address conflict or wrongdoing

Restorative approaches create a culture of high challenge and high support. They promote accountability and seek to repair any harm caused in a situation. Restorative approaches help schools create peaceful learning environments for children to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

A restorative approach may include having a ‘restorative conversation’. These conversations may happen during the school day and practitioners will use restorative language and questions to allow children and young people to understand the impact of their behaviours. We encourage children to repair their relationships with adults and/or peers to ensure everyone’s safety. If children are unavailable to engage in restorative conversations, it is our responsibility to find safe spaces for children to access, while we are waiting for the repair to take place. The six questions involved in a restorative conversation include;

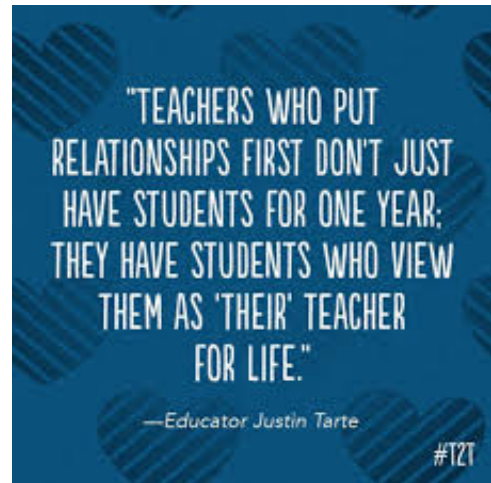
- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected and in what way?
- How could things have been done differently?
- What do you think needs to happen next?



Final Thoughts

This role is not for everyone. Sometimes our own life experiences shape whether this is the right environment for us to work in. If this policy doesn’t align with your values or core beliefs, it is ok to reflect on whether this is the right place for you.

“Better to admit, you walked through the wrong door, than spend your life in the wrong room”



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Date Ratified	October
Date for Review	October 2025

Chairperson's Signature: _____