

Relational Policy

June 2026



Winlaton West Lane

A note from our Director of Education, Schools and Inclusion:

Across Education, Schools and Inclusion, we are committed to working alongside school colleagues to engage in a shared progress journey, grounded in relational practice for our children and young people.

This thinking is integral to our inclusion statement of Equity, Belonging and Collaboration.



Aims of this policy:

1.1. At Winlaton West Lane, our vision is to ensure every child is happy, feels loved and is inspired to become a lifelong learner. Rooted in independence, resilience, inclusion, confidence and respect, we nurture curious, confident pupils who belong to a supportive community of staff, parents and carers, ready to achieve their aspirations and contribute positively to the wider world.

We want to create a safe and nurturing environment in which to do this.

1.2. This policy aims to:

- To enable staff to understand the whole school relational stance.
- To be able to effectively anticipate needs and meet the needs of learners.
- To be able to adopt a reflective approach, becoming self-aware and enabling the “best fit” intervention for the child.
- To understand what behaviour is communicating in terms of unmet needs.

- To work alongside our school Behaviour Policy where we promote the message of 'Ready Respectful and Safe' in line with the fundamentals of the Paul Dix methods.

2. Underlying research and principles:

- 2.2 Research in neuroscience in particular the Triune Brain model.
- 2.3 Child development theory
- 2.4 Attachment theory
- 2.5 Thrive Approach Practices

3. Rationale:

Children who understand their behaviour and can actively change that behaviour will have improved outcomes and greater success throughout their lifetime. At West Lane, we believe in creating a safe and nurturing environment which supports learners to achieve their full potential and build secure and healthy relationships. Some of our children may display distressed behaviours as a result of significant or prolonged trauma. There may also be emerging additional needs and developmental gaps in their emotional and social learning. Children at different stages of childhood development will manage their emotions differently and as adults we know we need to look at what is going on for the whole child.

This policy aims to support all learners to recognise their triggers, experience and survive overwhelming emotions and support children to make informed choices around their own behaviour, leading to becoming well regulated, steady and safe adults. It also aims to support our staff who are alongside our children and young people as co-regulators, helping and supporting our children by meeting their needs and understanding their story.

Our relational model:

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

Tier 1: Whole school relational approach.

1. Maintaining a PACE stance – remaining PLAYFUL, ACCEPTING, CURIOUS, and EMPATHIC.
2. Teach, promote & model positive social interactions.
3. Design enabling, proactive & predictable environments.

Tier 2: Focused support (1:1) or small group support: Where children present a moderate developmental need, these children will need focused support. This may look like:

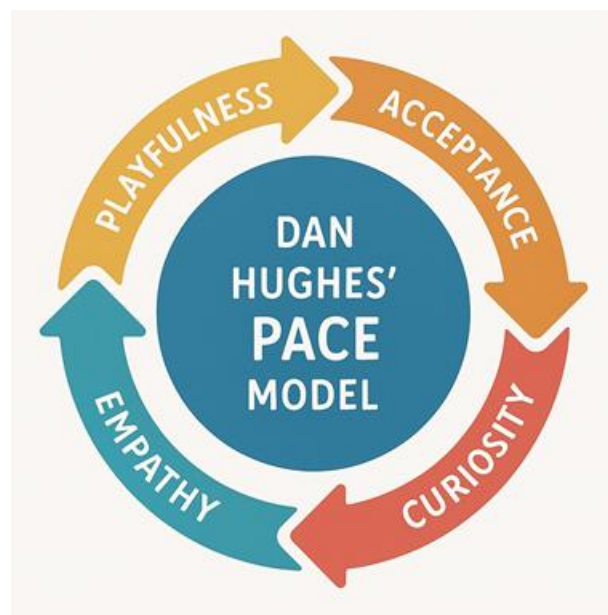
- An adapted curriculum to help support need.
- 1:1 baseline reparative Thrive sessions and profiling.
- Thrive behaviour profiling.
- Sessions with the family support worker available within school.
- Environmental changes – classroom space, sensory space.
- Possible support with the family.

Some of this support we will be able to provide through our existing resources at school and some of this support will be sourced via our Local Authority and the referral to the Vulnerable Pupil Panel.

Our Local Authority stance:

PACE is our way of being alongside children in relationship and support our everyday interactions with our children and young people.

In Gateshead, we advocate the PACE stance. PACE is the acronym used by psychologist Dan Hughes to describe the optimal adult stance when working with people to reduce stress, enhance connection, promote safety and engender the learning of new social and emotional skills.



Playfulness: sensitive and appropriate playfulness helps the child feel safe and promotes positivity. This is embodied through connection and shared joy/interests.

Acceptance: unconditionally accepting the child makes them feel safe, secure and loved. Accepting a perspective without judgement helps us to validate and create emotional safety.

Curiosity: genuine and non-judgemental interest in the child helps them become aware of their inner life. This also opens the door to 'wondering aloud' to understand the why behind the presentation without confrontation or conflict.

Empathy: demonstrating deep compassion for the child and their feelings supports the child's sense of self-worth and helps the child feel connected, loved and safe.

Helpful scripts to structure interactions:

WIN - Wonder, Imagine, Notice

At West Lane when we engage with children engage in a relationship, we aim to reshape some of our language. A non-confrontational approach will yield much more regulated results and use of the WIN acronym is a strong way to engage with children without them feeling confronted. The following are some examples of this:

- "I **w**onder if Mrs Smith is aware that you are struggling with this task..."
- "I **i**mage that must be a really strong feeling for you right now, that must be really tough..."
- "I'm **n**oticing you seem really tired..."

Helpful scripts for positive noticing and appreciating

- "I noticed that you really focused today in class, thank you"
- "I love having you in my class"
- "I really enjoyed seeing you share so well with others".
- "It's such a joy to see you play so well with your friends..."

At West Lane we will model how to build strong, steady and secure relationships at all times. We will work as a team to be emotionally available helping all in our school community.

The Relate Rupture Repair Cycle:



While we always do our best to minimise breaks in connections, when they do happen, they can be repaired, and learning can come from this experience. Research scientist Suzanne Zeedyk shares with us that “making up is more important than messing up.” Dr Zeedyk refers to the everyday scenarios where relationships between two people go through a rhythm of relating (in relationship), a rupture happening in the relationship and then making a necessary repair to the rupture in order to return to relationship.

The repair not only rewires patterns of behaviour; it also establishes trust. This is known as the relate–rupture–repair cycle.

Some questions we might choose to use in these moments are:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- Who else has been affected by this?
- What do you need, and what needs to happen now, so that we can ‘Repair and Restore’

During these conversations we aim to consider any learning needed. Staff will model humility and where appropriate, share what they feel they might do differently next time as part of the process.

How do we build emotional and environmental safety?

Maintaining an empathic and connected stance with our children and young people will help us to build emotional safety within our school. This will create a sense of belonging and real

grounding for the children. There are also things that we can think about to help our children feel environmentally safe, particularly with children who are experiencing trauma or anxiety:

- Who has the strongest relationships with the child? Can opportunities for connection be built into the school day?
- Think about the physical environment, do they need to have their seating plan reconsidered, their movement breaks around the building?
- Where do the children enter school? Can they manage coming in through the main entrance or do they need adjustments?
- Would the child benefit from a supported meet and greet?
- Would the child benefit from check-ins throughout the day to help them regulate and stay on track?
- Does the child need a different playtime arrangement if possible?
- Would the child benefit from a chat with our family support worker?

Creating emotional and environmental safety when repairing ruptures:

When repairing conflict we will also consider:

- The location of the communication; meetings in offices, particularly with professionals in authority may have considerable associations with previous traumatic interactions and could cause fear and anxiety.
- Consideration of the adult letting the child choose where they would like to meet, or meeting somewhere neutral can be helpful. Often a 'walk and talk' or meeting off site can feel less intimidating.
- There can be a preconception that the 'Repair and Restore' conversation has to be with certain people; perhaps with the adult who was most involved in the incident or the most senior member of staff. In fact, it might be appropriate to allow the adult who has the best relationship with the child to lead on the process.
- It can be helpful to work through others. For example, communicating with parents / carers and allowing them to scaffold the conversation at home can be helpful if the child does not yet have a strong enough relationship to feel able to engage with staff in school.
- Preparation and pre-warning can help. If a child knows ahead of time what will be discussed, what the potential outcomes might be, where it will be held, how long they need to be there and who will support them, they will feel empowered to engage more readily.
- Changing the format can help. A conversation is a complex interaction and may be too difficult. An exchange of notes or letters, or reflections through visuals or creative activities can be very supportive and brings the formal temperature down making this a more reflective moment rather than a combative one.

Links to our values:

Here at West Lane our values are lived and our relational approach is woven throughout our daily interactions.

Our School Culture:

In our school, we recognise that regulation can occur in many different forms depending on the situation. When a child is in distress, physiological regulation may be the best method for restoring calm and steadiness. This might look like:

- The use of safe contingent touch such as a side on hug, a hand on the shoulder to reassure, hand holding to quell anxiety.
- Taking a pause and stepping away to engage in an energy release activity and then waiting for the right moment to make the repair.
- Having a drink or something to eat to restore balance and support recovery.

We recognise these strategies as critical to regaining regulation and will ensure our students, staff and wider community understand this is not about 'not holding a boundary' – a repair will happen. But we think that repair happening at the right time, and in the right way is paramount to maintaining relationships. We don't see this as 'rewarding poor behaviour' but as 'wrapping care and compassion around the child' and will always make sure we follow up with the students to help them understand the rationale for this and why different things might be needed for different people at different times.

Sanctions and consequences:

We believe that relationships are at the heart of what we do and this enables us to have a positive, caring and compassionate school community. For the most part, our relational stance will help us understand need, anticipate and plan appropriate responses and repair any ruptures. However, we do recognise, there may be certain circumstances where significant incidents occur and further guidance may need to be sought from our formal behaviour policy. We hope that through our relentless drive and focus on relationality, we see transformative growth and can avoid punitive based sanctions but our approach is to be alongside the child to help them understand through restorative conversations why a consequence may be explored and how we can support them with this. Understanding the boundary and knowing the impact of stepping beyond that is an important part of life, and a lesson which strong relational practice can help consolidate with our children for their life now and in the future.

Appendices:

- [Gateshead Threshold Documentation](#)
- [Gateshead Family Hubs](#)

