



Nurture and Relationships (Behaviour) Policy

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For the purpose of this policy Guildford Nursery School will be referred to as GNS. When we say “parent” we mean “parents and carers”.

This policy and guidance have been written with due consideration to [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) statutory guidance for schools and colleges.

Introduction

Children’s behaviour includes everything they do - their approach to work and play; the ways they relate to other people; their responses to all the experiences they encounter at nursery, at home and in the wider community.

Young children have to learn about appropriate behaviour in the same way as they learn about other things in their lives and as adult carers and educators it is important that we are clear about the kinds of behaviour we want our children to learn. In behaviour, as in all other areas of learning, the children’s own parents are the key source of information and insight about their children, and the key to their children’s development in this area.

We must promote the emotional well-being, development and learning of all children and build on the children’s capacity for self-regulation and managing their emotions themselves. All behaviour is a form of communication.

Principles

- Children flourish best when they feel happy and safe, which includes knowing how they are expected to behave.
- The development of self-discipline and the ability to cooperate are essential life skills.
- Positive behaviour is linked to a child’s motivation to learn. A stimulating, developmentally appropriate learning environment makes a fundamental contribution to positive behaviour.
- All staff have responsibility for proactively developing positive behaviour within GNS.

Aims

- To encourage children to form positive relationships with each other and with staff as part of a group beyond their immediate family experience.
- To encourage children to do the “right” thing, not for reward or through fear of punishment but because they know it is right.

- To act as role models of good behaviour ourselves, demonstrating a calm demeanour, well-managed emotions, open body language and positive tone of voice and language.
- To ensure that behaviour boundaries and expectations are clear and consistent to children, parents and staff.
- To work as a team, supporting and valuing each other and using a solution-focused approach when challenges arise.

Rights and responsibilities

All staff have:

- The right to access training and support in relation to positive behaviour management.
- Responsibility for understanding and implementing this policy to fulfil their duty of care.

All children have:

- The right to learn in a safe, secure, exciting and happy environment.
- Responsibility for contributing towards this experience for others.

All parents have:

- The right to be fully involved in issues relating to their child's behaviour.
- Responsibility for working with staff to support the development of positive behaviour in their child.

Working with families

A trusting, non-judgemental relationship with parents is key to supporting the development of positive behaviour in our children. Parents are encouraged and supported to manage their children's behaviour positively. Parents are involved in celebrating their child's successes, both informally, such as sharing a child's achievements at the end of the day, through their child's learning journey and formally, such as parent meetings. When a child's behaviour is challenging or persistently difficult the parent's perspective will be asked for. Information about the child's behaviour at home and nursery will be shared and possible strategies discussed to ensure consistency for the child. At no time will responsibility for difficult behaviour at nursery be given to the parents. As practitioners, the effectiveness of how our provision meets behavioural needs is our responsibility. Parenting support is available both individually and in group sessions.

Controversial and challenging play

All sorts of play can pose a dilemma in terms of whether it is children's natural exploratory play or something more concerning. Staff often have to make judgements about the nature of the play and whether they should be supporting and scaffolding it, whether to intervene or whether to observe and report concerns.

It is understood that however we respond, we will always ensure that every child feels safe and protected. Children are not allowed to use forms of play to intimidate other children in any way.

Keeping children safe

It is a core responsibility of GNS to ensure that children are safe and secure. Challenging behaviour and difficulties with social situations are an ordinary part of child development – our job is to help children work through some of these problems in a supportive atmosphere, where there are clear boundaries, so that they develop positive attitudes to each other and to learning.

The majority of our work is around helping children's social development and supporting their emotional wellbeing. We want children to be strong, connected to other children and to adults, and to be self-motivated and self-regulating.

At times, children may express their emotions and needs in ways that can be unsafe for themselves or others. It is essential for adults to respond consistently with understanding, support, and collaboration, when appropriate, with the SENCO and relevant services to ensure each child receives the appropriate guidance and care. Prioritising the well-being of all children, we take steps to create a safe and supportive environment for everyone. This includes documenting incidents as needed to track patterns and inform support strategies. As an inclusive school, we are committed to working positively with every

child and family. When needed, a Nurture Plan may be developed to provide a consistent and personalised approach (see Appendix 1). All staff need to be mindful of their safeguarding responsibilities when supporting children's behaviours and report any unusual patterns of behaviour.

Monitoring and evaluation

Children's behaviour and emotional regulation will be observed and supported through both formal and informal processes, with respect for the child as a whole and unique individual. These observations will inform reflective discussions where effective practice is celebrated, and areas for growth are nurtured through ongoing professional learning and relational support.

Teachers have responsibility for fostering secure, respectful relationships and guiding behaviour in ways that honour the child's emotional, social, and developmental needs. They are encouraged to respond with empathy and curiosity, seeking to understand the child's perspective and the possible underlying causes of behaviour, including unmet needs or disrupted connections.

The headteacher and assistant headteacher will ensure that monitoring is collaborative and continuous, supporting a culture of care and mutual respect.

Governors and external partners may periodically review the setting's relational approach to behaviour, ensuring it aligns with the values of holistic development, unity, and the nurturing of each child's potential within a connected community.

Complaints procedure

Every effort will be made to work fairly and transparently with children, parents and staff regarding behavioural issues. However, if there is dissatisfaction with the way a situation has been handled, a discussion with the headteacher will be offered. If a complaint cannot be resolved through this, the Governing Body or the Local Authority can be contacted.

This policy links with the following policies and guidance:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

Promoting positive behaviour - guidance for staff

The positive approach

Key people will:

- Work closely with each key child, starting with the home visit and settling-in procedure, to help each child feel safe, secure, valued and feel that someone knows about them as a unique child.
- Be aware of and seek out children who don't approach them.
- Relate positively to each child every day.
- Make time to listen to and take an interest in each child every day.

All staff will:

Use emotion coaching strategies to support children's emotional regulation (see Appendix 2).

- Strive to be "emotionally attuned" to children, valuing and accepting their emotions e.g. "I can see you're sad about that, shall I help you for a moment" rather than "don't cry, you're a big girl now".
- Praise good behaviour.
- Praise good efforts.
- Show disapproval of the behaviour, not the child e.g. "That was a rude thing to do" not "You rude child".
- Ensure developmentally appropriate language is used to support the child's understanding.
- Adopt a proactive approach to managing behaviour within the nursery environment, understanding that it is everybody's responsibility.
- Model how to deal with and sort out difficult situations.
- Model nursery expectations e.g. encouraging tidying up, how to care and be respectful of nursery toys and resources and ensure these are shared and discussed with children.
- Show empathy towards children and each other e.g. "I understand you feel... but ..." and "Are you feeling...?"
- Ensure strategies are shared and modelled to the parents, explaining the reasons why these strategies are being used.

Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation is a vital part of a child's development, referring to their ability to recognise, express, and manage emotions in ways that are healthy and appropriate. It involves understanding feelings, responding thoughtfully, and using strategies to navigate challenging emotions such as frustration, anger, or sadness.

In the early years, emotional regulation is nurtured through warm, responsive relationships, meaningful interactions, and rich social experiences. Adults play a key role by modelling calm and attuned responses, creating environments of trust and safety where children feel seen and understood.

Developing emotional regulation through co-regulation

Adults should ensure that expectations are consistent, appropriate and realistic according to each child's age and stage of development. They need to be alongside children getting '*stuck into*' learning, with the adults being involved, motivated, inquisitive and thoughtful.

There should be an **equal partnership** of involvement and engagement, nurturing reciprocal relationships that are warm and consistent. Adults should be fully present *in the moment* with children, being in tune and responsive to their needs and signals.

Strategies to support and promote emotional regulation

- Emotion coaching (see Appendix 2)
- Build emotional awareness
- Create a calm, nurturing environment
- Model and provide regulation strategies
- Provide co-regulation
- Use visuals to support communication

Children like to spend time with adults and some behaviours show that they need connection with a trusted adult. It is important for adults to be positive and nurturing with the children.

- Name the child.
- "Describe" specifically what it is we are pleased about to the child.
- Share it with someone else or with the group.
- Tell parents about "good" things - kind, polite and helpful things children have done.
- Notice and recognise when a child is playing well, persevering, concentrating, co-operating and being helpful.

At GNS we limit the use of external rewards such as stickers as we believe that developing intrinsic motivation and natural consequences will support children in developing their emotional literacy.

Limit negative attention

Lots of children prefer negative attention to nothing, and this will reinforce the behaviour which triggers it and reward children for behaving in undesirable ways.

Experiencing and managing conflict is an important part of growing up and early education. Our aim is to help children to learn the skills they need to manage conflicts, through guidance and modelling.

- Encourage children to be assertive and to say/sign "no" clearly or say "I don't like that", etc. Where a child appropriately asserts "no" and the other child responds, it is not usually necessary for an adult to get involved.
- Think developmentally: if a child is at an early stage of development, then sharing resources will be very challenging. Ways to support include:
 - making sure that we have enough resources for everyone
 - setting up experiences for 2 or 3 children, to avoid large groups crowding around
 - model language/approaches like "me next"; "can I have a turn"; "you can have it next, when I've finished".
- Understanding that when a child has special educational needs, that a different approach to supporting behaviour may be needed. In this instance guidance from the SENCO may be necessary.
- Model sharing and learning. Show children that we actively listen to the ideas, needs and wants of others. Show simple approaches to sharing like "I'll do one, you do the next." Support and promote open-ended experiences that promote collaboration, e.g. block play.
- Anticipate potential problem situations and eliminate or reduce practical difficulties before they arise. By observing what triggers difficult behaviour, we can avoid it happening in the first place.

Dealing with conflict

Describe to the child very clearly and simply the undesirable behaviour we do not like and will not accept, and simultaneously:

- Describe clearly and simply what we **do** want to see and hear, e.g. "Remember to use gentle hands."
- Make changes in behaviour in small steps, praising and encouraging even the slightest progress in the right direction all the time.

The children who need love the most will often ask for it in the most unloving ways.

Conflict resolution

- Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.
- Acknowledge children's feelings ("I can see that you are feeling angry").
- Gather information from children's perspective ("I wonder what happened"). Accounts may not be the same but this is acceptable.
- Restate the problem (children need to hear this verbalised in order to internalise the information).
- Ask for and support ideas for solutions from the children and choose one.
- Be prepared to follow up and restate the solution (again this helps children to internalise the solutions used).

- Decide if further support is needed, e.g. social story in book form for instance ‘My Mouth’ (linked to biting), ‘Kind Hands’ and, where needed, provide a copy for use at home.

Conflicts	
Escalate when you:	De-escalate when you:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the person. Focus on the position. Use ‘you’ statements. Use intense body language. Make accusations or blame. Focus on the past. Make assumptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the problem. Focus on children’s needs. Use ‘I’ statements “I am worried because the stick might hurt someone”. Use gentle body language, get to the children’s level. Are specific without blame “The water has split on the floor. Uh oh. What shall we do?” Listen carefully to both sides.

We have an agreed ‘**nursery code**’ which is devised and agreed by the children. This is displayed with photos as visual reminders, around the nursery in relevant areas, e.g.

We use gentle hands and feet.



If a child does not want to participate in a particular play scenario:

- Model language that provides an escape, e.g. “I don’t want to play your game” or “Stop... I don’t want to play”, and explain to the children engaging in the game that the child does not want to play.
- Share with all children the principle that children choose whether to join in a play scenario and when to leave or stop playing.

Some play may cause adults concern such as rough and tumble play, climbing trees or weapon play. As with all play staff need to ask themselves questions:

- Is this pretend play or real aggression?
- How do I manage any risk for and with the children?

If the play is pretend, allow it to develop with the children.

If the play involves real aggression, manage the situation using strategies as outlined above in the conflict resolution section.

If the play poses a risk, consider how to ensure the risk is appropriate and managed.

Appropriate risk

When children are given a chance to engage freely but with adult guidance in adventurous play they quickly learn to assess their own skills and match them to the demands of the environment. Such children ask themselves (consciously or unconsciously) “how high can I climb”, or “is this log strong enough to support me?” They become savvy about themselves and their environment. Children who are confident about taking chances rebound well when things don't work out at first. They are resilient and will try again and again until they master a situation that challenges them - or wisely avoid it, if that seems best.

Weapon and super-hero play

At GNS we allow weapon and super-hero play to take place. This play is only instigated by the children.

Why do we allow gun and superhero related play at GNS?

- To provide opportunities for problem solving and creativity.
- To ensure that all of our children feel included and valued.
- To provide children with conflict resolution and assertiveness strategies.
- To lessen the likelihood of direct physical aggression being used in this type of play.

We accept weapons:

- That have been represented with found materials (for example a wooden block, a coloured cape, a drape or a waistcoat);
- That have been constructed using resources within the nursery.

These promote creativity, both in their use and in their construction – they can be used in a variety of ways, they can be modified and adapted by the children.

We do not accept:

- Commercially produced weapons and dressing up clothes.

Biting

At GNS, we understand that behaviour is a form of communication. Biting is common with young children who are dysregulated. When a child bites they are expressing an unmet need or emotion they cannot yet verbalise. We approach these behaviours with curiosity and compassion, seeking to understand the child's experience rather than simply stop the behaviour. Our responses are rooted in secure relationships, emotional safety, and developmentally appropriate support.

We use **emotion coaching** to help children recognise, name, and manage their feelings. Adults model calm, consistent responses and guide children through moments of emotional dysregulation with empathy and attunement. Through co-regulation, children learn to understand their emotions and develop strategies for responding to them.

When a biting incident occurs, we speak with the parents or carers of both the child who bit and the child who was bitten. These conversations are handled with sensitivity and respect. For the family of the child who bit, we share observations, explore possible triggers, and discuss how emotion coaching and relational strategies are being used to support their child. For the family of the child who was bitten, we reassure them about the steps taken to support both children and prevent further incidents. We emphasise that biting is a common developmental behaviour and that our approach is focused on understanding and supporting all children involved. Follow-up conversations may be arranged to share progress and maintain a collaborative approach.

Restraining children

With a very young age-group of children, physical holding and guidance are often needed, e.g. when a small child is very angry and about to hit out at other children, or runs to the gate during an unsettled episode whilst settling-in. We judge that an incident is “physical restraint” if the child has to be fully restrained from movement for more than a few seconds because the child wants to hurt another or to hurt themselves. Restraint is then needed in order to keep the child or other children safe.

If a child's behaviour results in a need for restraint, as defined above, then there will be a specific plan to manage behaviour and set clear boundaries. This plan will be drawn up by the SENCO working with wider services, and with the involvement of the child's parents. This plan will outline when restraint is needed and how it is to be implemented. All instances of restraint will be recorded by the SENCO and the information will be shared with the parents.

Conclusion

Our aspiration for every child is to be able to self-regulate for it is this that will ensure that they succeed throughout their school life and beyond.

It is easy to discipline a child, much harder to teach self-regulation.

All staff must adhere to these guidelines to ensure that a cohesive and committed approach is practised across GNS.

Appendix 1

Nurture Plan



Child's Name	
Key Person	
Date	
Typical triggers for dysregulation	
Support Needs – consistency from all adults	
Further information	
Nurture Plan completed by	
Parental consent to plan	

Plan to be reviewed regularly as required to ensure support needs are still relevant.



Emotion Coaching

C

Connect

Tune into child's feelings, and your own.

A

Attune

Validate and label child's emotions.

L

Limits

Remind child of acceptable behaviours.

M

Make a Plan

Reflect and problem solve together.

