

SUPPORTING CHILDRENS WELL-BEING, SELF REGULATION & BEHAVIOUR

Reviewed by Rachel Traczyk
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Aim

The aim of this policy is to

- Support children's emotional well-being and self-regulation skills
- promote positive behaviour
- support and acknowledge children's feelings and big emotions
- help children organise and understand their feelings
- build resilience and self-regulation skills
- encourage self-discipline, empathy and consideration for others

Provide clear guidance to staff in:

- how to co-regulate children's feelings & behaviour
- how to give support effectively
- how the environment can impact behaviour
- how to role model and give meaningful praise
- understanding the link between self-regulation and the impact on narrowing the gap
- knowing the process of managing behaviour and ABC.

Purpose

Research has shown that children today are more likely to suffer from mental health problems, from depression, anxiety and behaviour problems.

Children who feel included in the setting and who feel a sense of belonging are less likely to develop mental ill-health. Displays and resources that reflect the lives and identities of children will facilitate a sense of inclusion.

Little Sparrows believes that children flourish best when their personal, social and emotional needs are met and where there are clear and developmentally appropriate expectations for their behaviour.

We aim to support children's mental health, encourage self-discipline, empathy and consideration for others, our surroundings and property. We aim to ensure that all children are provided with care, security, adequate rest and sleep, the freedom to explore, a positive image, suitable adult role models, consistency in their treatment, boundaries to behaviour, opportunities for self-expression and learning.

Children will never be subjected to humiliation or labelled as 'naughty'.

Named Behaviour Management Person:

The named person for managing behaviour is Cheryl Traczyk, who has overall responsibility for the programme in supporting personal, social and emotional development, including issues concerning behaviour.

The named person:

- Keeps herself up-to-date with legislation, research and thinking on promoting positive behaviour and on handling children's behaviour where it may require additional support'
- Accesses relevant sources of expertise on promoting positive behaviour within our programme for supporting personal, social and emotional development;
- Checks that all staff have relevant in-house training on promoting positive behaviour;
- Advises other staff on behaviour issues and keep the team up to date.

Attachment and the Key Person

A strong attachment between a child and their key person is critical in developing positive, safe and secure relationships. These relationships build children's confidence and give them a secure base to explore from and be curious and a 'safe haven' to return to.

Narrowing the gap & the characteristics of learning

There are **3 key characteristic traits** which have a huge impact on children's ability to access education and learning. Research has shown it plays a massive part for disadvantaged & vulnerable children and is crucial in narrowing the gap.

These three traits underpin all the characteristics of learning which makes them critical to children's development:

1. Self-Regulation
2. Perseverance
3. Resilience

"Herts Research indicates that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to enter the foundation stage with poorer self-regulation skills than their friends. It has also shown us that improving self-regulation skills is highly likely to have a positive impact on their later learning at school and outcomes such as behaviour and persistence and resilience."

BUILDING CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE

Children who are resilient can 'bounce back' when things get tough. When children bounce back, they acknowledge it, recover from it and then learn from it. Resilience is also affected by a child's self-worth and confidence. Children who lack confidence may take longer to recover.

Practitioners' role in building resilience

- Role modelling positive thoughts "perhaps you can have a turn next time"
- Empower children to help others
- Encourage children to problem solve and resolve conflict themselves
- Encourage children to have a go when things don't work out
- Highlight when things are going well
- Give praise and motivate

Building resilience and Regulation through Risk Taking

When children take risks they learn how to manage feelings such as fear, hesitation, anxiety, mastery and excitement. This helps to develop their self-regulation skills and builds confidence in completing a challenging task.

Using phrases such as 'be careful' does not help children to manage risk. **Pointing out the risk** helps children to learn how to manage it.

- "You might fall here, so hold on"
- "There is a drop here where you could fall"
- "The ground is hard below"
- "This bit is slippery"
- "How high do you feel you can climb today?"

Giving praise

- Always try and avoid a general 'well done' and always aim to use meaningful, specific praise.
- Praising children and acknowledging their positive actions and attitudes, sends the message we value and respect them.

Examples of meaningful praise:

- I really like that long red line you've drawn
- I liked the way you....
- Wow, tell me about this..
- What do you like best about your work?
- That's an interesting idea

Examples of praising the process:

- You're working really hard
- It looks like you have been practicing!
- I've never seen one like that before
- You've figured that out for yourself!
- I like how you worked that out
- Good thinking that does make sense
- You really paid attention
- You worked so carefully

DEFINITIONS

What's Co-regulation?

Co-regulation comes before self-regulation. Children need support in being able to self-regulate:

- Role model to children how to regulate in stressful situations
- Give support or comfort when children are dysregulated
- Lend children your calm
-

What's self-regulation?

Self-regulation can be described as:

- Self awareness and reorganisation of our thoughts feelings and behaviour
- Managing our behaviour and being able to curb impulsive behaviours
- Self soothing and bouncing back from upset i.e. resilience
- Thinking before we act
- Maintaining attention
- Behaving in ways that are pro social i.e. empathising, co-regulating our peers
- Planning and working towards a goal
- Not giving up when things are difficult i.e. perseverance

What does behaviour mean?

"Behaviour is the way someone conducts themselves" It can be defined as pro-social or anti-social behaviour. Behaviour is something that needs to be taught.

WHAT IS OUR ROLE AS CO-REGULATORS?

All staff and students are responsible for supporting children's mental health. Responding effectively to children's emotions builds trust, secure relationships and role models how to overcome situations:

At Little Sparrows our practitioners view themselves as co-regulators in helping children to develop their self-regulation skills, resilience and self-confidence.

When a child is having a big feeling the rational side of their brain stops working in the fight or flight mode – that's when you see the screaming, hitting etc. Children are not able to control themselves in that moment. Once they are calm then they are in a place to reason and listen about their behaviour.

CO-REGULATING CHILDREN THROUGH THEIR EMOTIONS

To co-regulate children through their emotions and big feelings, we need to

- Pause before we respond so we are not reacting but responding and supporting.
- To calm children down before teaching their behaviour. Or give children space to calm down as they may not want you in their face when they are dysregulated. Some children may prefer being spoken to from the side so they don't feel trapped.
- Not inflict our frustration and stressors on children who are dysregulated.

In practice we:

- Ask children how they are feeling
- Ask children what has happened? (in a neutral tone) – instead of 'why did you do that!'
- Listen to the children and understanding how they are feeling
- Acknowledge children's emotions i.e. "I see you are upset because.."
- Give and role modelling empathy "I know waiting for turn can be hard"
- Name children's emotions – envious, frustrated, sad, curious, loved, disgusted,
- Talk about what could make them feel better
- Be near and available, during a big feelings.

Mine Conkbayir explains :

Communication – be mindful of our communication, what are we saying to the child, what does our body language say when trying to soothe a child. Make sure you are at the child’s level and that you are speaking calmly and slowly.

Observe – look out for triggers in the environment or during interactions so you can help prevent the behaviour.

Reason – we cannot reason with a child who is dysregulated, first we need to calm then reason. We need to first seek to soothe that nervous system to make them feel and know they are safe. Only then they can reconnect upstairs and downstairs brain and think rationally and calmly.

Empathise – we need to empathise, if a child is sad, we need to honour that, acknowledge it - that’s half way to defuse their intensity. By listening, showing understanding and validating their feelings. You can do this by reflecting back what they tell you: “I understand that you’re feeling angry”.

Guide – help children learn in the moment techniques to calm them down, like grounding – do you feel the floor on your feet can you smell the dinner cooking, can you feel your heart beating with your hand or role modelling breathing techniques.

Supporting big emotions

Lots of children experience big feelings like ‘tantrums’ or losing control of their self regulation. It is our role as practitioners to ensure we support children through these big feelings.

Sitting near a child who is having a ‘big feeling’ lets them know you have not abandoned them, that their feelings are acknowledged and you are there to help when they need you.

“You’re okay”

Staff should try and actively avoid saying phrases like “You’re okay” to a child who is not feeling okay or who may be upset. By saying “You’re okay” dismisses the child’s feelings and tells them that their feelings aren’t important or acknowledged.

Positive language

Role model positive language and teach them what to do rather than what not to do. We are their guides, to teach them how to do things.

“Keep your feet on the ground” or “The water stays in the cup. Put the cup on the table” or “walking please, running has finished”.

Changing the words we use, changes how we feel and respond

We help children learn how to manage stress, not judge them by labelling them. Words like tantrum or clingy are negative and do not enable us to look past the behaviour or understand what’s causing it. We **respond to needs rather than react** to behaviour – this is what equips children for life.

Negative judgments	Co-regulating statements
Clingy / needy	They need more comfort today
Attention seeking	Connection Seeking / Moments or Attention Needing
Tantrum	Emotionally dysregulated / overwhelmed with big emotions
Clumsy	Un co-ordinated
Over sensitive	Delicate
You’re okay	You will be okay
Other words to avoid: Greedy, lazy, stroppy, stubborn, terrible two’s	

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE CO-REGULATOR IN SUPPORTING EMOTIONS

Practitioners co-regulate children through their emotions and big feelings.

From a child's perspective:

Stay calm and neutral

Stay calm when you talk to me and maintain a neutral tone, even during stressful situations. Remember I haven't learn how to regulate, I need you to teach me behaviour.

Listen & Understand

Listen to me and investigate to understand my point of view, especially during times of conflict and emotional upset.

"What has happened?" "How are you feeling?"

"You are upset because... and they are upset because..."

"Let me check I understand this right..."

"How can we make this better?"

Acknowledge

Acknowledge and sympathise with my feelings

"I can see you are upset" "I know waiting is hard.." "I see your mad..." "I can stay with you while we wait for a turn?"

Organise my feelings

Help me organise my feelings by labelling my emotions

"I think what you might be feeling is sad, anxious, envious"

Not shy away

Don't shy away when I am experiencing emotions. This is when you need to step in and help organise my feelings.

Practitioner: "When I see a child upset, I think that's my cue! I need to jump in and help organise their feelings"

Not to distract or rush children to feel better

When you rush me to feel better or distract me with another toy, this sends the message that my feelings aren't important and that being happy is that only emotion that is ok to feel. Distraction also doesn't give me the experience to work through my emotions.

To be present during tantrums

Being present or nearby during my big emotions such as 'tantrums', is when I need you the most. Being nearby lets me know that you care and will be there when I am ready to accept you.

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES IN CO-REGULATING EMOTIONS

Relationships

Staff

- Build positive, safe, secure and happy relationships with all children - some relationships need extra work and effort.
- Continuously maintain relationships with all children and their families.
- To seek out information from home life and help guide families into teaching positive behaviour. Consistency is important.

Role modelling & Support

Staff

- Respond appropriately to children's individual needs by adjusting your tone of voice, practice and giving support according to need and developmental stage.
- Role model to the children what to say in different situations "Can I have a turn please" "You've hurt me, please be careful" "I didn't like it when you punched me" "Can you pass me the milk?"
- Role model appropriate behaviour to other staff members i.e. staff saying thank you, being polite, saying good morning to your colleagues.

- Help babies, toddlers and children become positive, responsible and increasingly independent members of the group.
- Give opportunities for children to contribute to decisions about accepted behaviour where age/stage appropriate
- To notice and reward good behaviour, believing that this will develop an ethos of kindness and co-operation.
- Promote non-violence and encourage children to deal with conflict peacefully.
- To encourage children to resolve and negotiate conflicts independently.
- To recognise the individuality of all our children and that some behaviours are normal in young children e.g. biting
- Accepting and understanding their responsibility for implementing the goals in this policy and to be consistent in practice.

Environment

Staff

- Provide activities and stories to help children learn about accepted behaviours
- Ensure the environment is stimulating and challenging which effectively minimises negative behaviour, for example is there enough space in the room for play? Are there enough activities and resources for children to share? Are the children engaged, do they need additional stimuli or a change in activities? Do they need a break or space outside to run?

British Values

Staff actively promote the British Values by:

- making decisions together
- asking children their opinions
- respecting children's wishes turn taking
- having clear rules and boundaries
- having respect and talking about other cultures and traditions.

CO-REGULATING & TEACHING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES IN CO-REGULATING BEHAVIOUR

All staff are responsible for teaching children positive behaviour:

We view ourselves as co-regulators. We pause before we respond so we are not reacting but responding and supporting. We do not inflict our frustration and stressors on children who are dysregulated. It's okay to ask someone to step in to finish dealing with an incident.

We help to calm children down (or give children space to calm down) before teaching the behaviour. When a child is having a big feeling the rational side of their brain stops working in the fight or flight mode – that's when you see the screaming, biting hitting etc. Children are not able to control themselves in that moment. Once they are calm then they are in a place to reason and listen about their behaviour.

OUR PRACTITIONER GUIDE

Noticing a change in behaviour

Things to consider when a child's behaviour has changed:

- What's happening at home, has there been any changes?
- Is the child getting enough sleep, drink or food?
- Is anything at home or nursery triggering the behaviour i.e. the environment, children, toys, cultural capital?

Strategies

In our nursery, a child is never disciplined by smacking, slapping or shaking or labelled as 'naughty'.

We:

- Teach children to breath when stressed
- Give extra individual interaction called Time in
- Problem solve with the children "We have a problem here... let's find a solution"
- One to one where possible or shadowing
- Not sitting for as long as the activities requires – depending on developmental ability
- Recognising when children need to run and give them space for this.

Repair, reflect & respond

After an incident work with the child to repair, reflect and respond. If a child isn't at the developmental level, we move to forgiveness.

Childcare staff always aim to:

- Act in regards to the child's level of understanding through appropriate verbal direction and discussion – telling the child what they would like to do.
Babies: Simple clear language i.e. "keep the sand in the tray"
Toddlers & Pre schoolers "Please keep the sand in the tray, the floor will become slippery and dangerous."
- Use language to label the behaviour rather than the child i.e. "That was being unkind..." instead of "you are being unkind"
- Listen and try to understand why the child behaved that way "You thought it was okay to..."
"What happened" is better than "Why did you do that!?"
- Explain why the behaviour is undesirable and highlight any risks "When you throw the bricks, you might hurt somebodies head"
"That can be dangerous.."
- Explain what behaviour is expected i.e. "Keep your bowl on the table" "Books in the book case"
- Give the child an opportunity to express their feelings. "You can feel mad, but please don't kick me"
- Organise feelings. Staff must talk about these feelings with the child by naming their emotions and that of the other children involved.
- Encourage children to understand the other child's point of view and how they may be feeling.

- Actively encouraging the children to think about the consequences of their actions and to communicate their needs and feelings verbally, rather than by physical means. This includes role modelling what the child could have said verbally.
- If another child has been hurt, the child should be encouraged to check the other child is ok and think about how they can help the other child feel better. Where children are not at that ability or age, practitioners should role model how to comfort another child to help develop the skills of empathy and compassion.

Time In and Time out

Time in often comes before time out. If a child is having a difficult time regulating their behaviour, they need attention from an adult to positively engage and play with them.

Depending on how dangerous the behaviour was and child's development stage, children may need to have space away, time out. Having space away from the other children or activity can be helpful in breaking a cycle of behaviour, when a child is struggling to control their impulses or when a child needs some quiet time to calm down and reflect on their behaviour.

If time out is needed, staff still ensure the responsibilities towards teaching behaviour and big feelings. i.e. co-regulating, listening to the child, labelling emotions, explaining expected behaviour.

Saying sorry

Children should not be forced to say sorry. It is important that they develop empathy and compassion for others and not a meaningless reflex of 'I'm sorry'. This can be achieved by:

- Staff role modelling with the child gentle hands, being kind, giving a cuddle
- Role model "oh I'm sorry I hurt you"
- Helping children recognise what they have done wrong i.e. "You've hurt..."
- Helping children understand what to do when they have hurt someone or have been unkind "What could we do to help them feel better?" "I think we should check if they are okay?" "Let's help them up"
- When children do say sorry, it is important they say (and understand) what they are sorry for and what they will do next time i.e. "I'm sorry I knocked you over, I will be more careful"

Consent

Asking consent is an important part of having respect for children. Consent should always be sought i.e. "Can I cuddle you?" "Can I hold your hand" or letting children know what you are doing i.e. "I am going to wipe your nose". Sometimes when a child is feeling out of control they may need you to tell them what to do and what is happening (this can help children feel secure) i.e. "You are not going to hit" and move in-between the child or "I am taking your hand and moving you away to keep the children safe"

Safe Touch

- Consensual cuddling
- Holding hands, not holding a child's wrist and pulling them

BEHAVIOUR CONCERNS, TRAUMA & ACES

Everyone has mental health – babies, children, students and adults.

DEFINITIONS

A.C.E. Aware – Adverse childhood experiences

Traumatic event such as abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, poverty, grievance etc

Dangerous behaviour – behaviour that has the potential to cause significant harm.

Unacceptable behaviour

. Unacceptable behaviour from the children, i.e. physical aggression toward other children, misuse of toys or materials, is modified by a consistent means of discipline.

Vulnerable Characteristics & factors

Practitioners have a crucial role in supporting every child's mental health in the early years. There are some characteristics which make children more vulnerable to ill mental health:

- **Genetics** – not all children learn the same way. Each child has their own temperament, traits, needs and preferences. Practitioners must adapt their approach and use different methods for individual, unique children.
- **Learning disabilities** – children with learning disabilities have a higher risk of developing mental ill health.
- **Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder** – birth defects caused by alcohol exposure during pregnancy.
- **Family and community factors** - family breakdown, abuse & neglect, death, poverty, children who are fostered / in care

Behavioural Concerns, ABC and Nurture Plans

If a child needs specific support in their behaviour, we will:

- Observe the specific behaviour
- Seek out any background information from the family which could explain the behaviour for example; routine changes, communication delay, events at home.
- We will investigate what happens before the behaviour is displayed, find out about the behaviour and the consequence of what happens after the behaviour.
(**ABC** – Antecedent, Behaviour and Consequence)
- Discuss with the team strategies to help the child and to manage their behaviour, often through positive time in with adults, lots of positive praise and positive interaction.
- Work with the child's family to put support in place, discuss about the behaviour and factors which could be contributing, different strategies to support the child and provide support and guidance.
- A Nurture Plan or Individual Learning Plan will be used to collate the information and record strategies and targets as well as record any meetings.

Associated Documents

- Co-regulation Parent Guide
- Settling and transitions policy
- Nurture plans
- ABC forms