

Educational Psychology Service



Argyll & Bute
Educational Psychology
Service



Developing a Relationships Policy

Guidance

Background:

This document has been produced to support the growing number of Argyll and Bute setting's wishing to implement a relationships policy. A working group was established in order to progress this work with the aim of designing an information pack that would support settings to develop and implement their own bespoke relationships policy. This work was completed in February 2024.

Wellbeing, positive relationships and an inclusive ethos and culture are the foundation for learning, and this guidance seeks to ensure that these elements are embedded within a setting's Relationships Policy.

Group members:

Caroline Armour (Head Teacher, Glenbarr and Dalintober Primary Schools)
Helen Campbell (Depute Head Teacher (Support), Dunoon Grammar School)
Elaine Sullivan (Depute Head Teacher (Support), Rothesay Joint Campus (Secondary)
Catherine Khan (Acting Principal Teacher of Nurture, Hermitage Academy)
Susan McEwan (Acting Depute Head, Dunoon Primary School)
Gillian Morris (Principal Teacher, Bowmore Primary School)
Louise Paterson (Head Teacher, Ardrishaig Primary School)
Kirsty Robertson (Principal Teacher, John Logie Baird Primary School)
Christine Walker (Nurture Teacher, Psychological Services)
John Stuart (Principal Teacher of Nurture, Psychological Services)

Creating a Relationships Policy: The Process

1. Whole setting needs analysis and review of current policy

Core group:

Identify a core group to lead on design, consultation and implementation. If possible, include the school link Education Psychologist at this stage. Smaller settings might choose to adopt a collaborative/collective approach with other settings.

Needs analysis:

The core group lead a whole-staff collegiate session to explore two key questions “*what do we currently do to support positive relationships?*” and “*what would we like to see happen to promote positive relationships?*” The session should explore these questions across each of the component areas of the Relationships Policy structure; 1. *purpose, vision, values & aims* / 2. *Expectations, consequences & boundaries* / 3. *Key relational approaches*.

Draft policy:

The core group will use the discussion generated from the whole-staff collegiate session/sessions to produce a draft policy using the suggested structure contained in this document.

2. Stakeholder consultation (children/parents/other stakeholders)

Focus groups/questionnaires

It is essential to consult with stakeholders to ensure the policy is not developed in isolation. The core group should consult with parents, children and young people and other agencies where appropriate. The focus groups/questionnaires should seek to explore the key features and elements of practice discussed during the collegiate session. The core group can triangulate this evidence in order to identify themes, address concerns or consider other aspects. This information should be used by the core-group to re-draft the policy.

Following the re-draft, the policy should be released to stakeholders for comment, and a final draft of the policy should be produced based on this feedback. This process will ensure that parental voice, pupil voice and other stakeholder voices are represented to ensure that the policy is personalised to the unique context of the setting.

3. Plan for implementation (whole staff training, PDSA on approaches)

Careful consideration should be given to develop a plan for the implementation of the policy. The success or failure of the policy will be determined by how it is implemented. The core group should give careful consideration to ensure that whole-staff training is delivered to support the effective implementation of the underpinning elements of practice e.g. restorative

conversations. Ensuring that staff have had relevant training will help to ensure that they are appropriately up-skilled in order to support the consistent application of the policy.

The core group should consider the approach to gathering baseline data for key measures that are relevant to the setting and the implementation of the policy e.g. Attendance data, exclusion data, bullying/equalities data, Glasgow Motivational & Wellbeing Tool, School Climate Survey, Planet Youth data.

The core group should also consider whether it is appropriate to carry out a small test of change using the use of the Model for Improvement, specifically the *Plan, Do, Study, Act Cycle* to demonstrate the efficacy of any new approaches to practice e.g. *the use of PACE as an approach to de-escalation*. **See appendix 1 for PDSA template.**

4. Plan for review – stakeholder consultation (pupils, parents, staff)

It is important to understand that the collective revisiting of the policy will be fundamental to its success. It is recommended that a setting's Relationships Policy should become a standing agenda item during an in-service day at the start of term one, like Child Protection currently is.

The policy should be reviewed April-June following implementation alongside staff and stakeholders.

Relationships Policy: Key Features

1. Purpose, Vision, Values & Aims

What?	Why?
This section should clearly explain the vision, values and aims which underpin the school's ethos across four domains: structure and context, academic and organisational, community and safety and support	<p>Research indicates that positive school cultures impact significantly on the mental health and wellbeing of those who interact with it.</p> <p>Jessiman, P., Kidger, J., Spencer, L. et al. School culture and student mental health: a qualitative study in UK secondary schools. BMC Public Health 22, 619 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13034-x</p> <p>Developing a positive whole-school ethos and culture – Relationships, Learning and Behaviour - Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture: relationships, learning and behaviour - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)</p>
It should explain clearly that positive relationships are crucial in supporting the school ethos by helping to foster a sense of belonging for all.	Research on fostering a sense of belonging indicates that students who feel connected to their setting are likely to perform better in school, show higher levels of motivation, more secure self-concept and self-efficacy and more positive behavioural outcomes.
It should clearly explain the importance of positive relationships in supporting the socio-emotional needs of all children and young people which is vital for academic learning to take place.	Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E. T., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & de Boer, H. (2020). The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: A meta-analytic review. <i>Research papers in education</i>, 35(6), 641-680.
This statement should clearly explain that there is a commitment to building positive relationships, restoring relationships and promoting self-regulation skills through co-regulation.	
The framing of language is crucial and the aim is for this language to be used by all stakeholders e.g. using ' <i>distressed behaviour</i> ' instead of ' <i>challenging behaviour</i> ' or ' <i>struggling with self-regulation</i> ' instead of ' <i>struggling with their behaviour</i> '.	<p>Research on language used in relation to behaviour indicates that dispositional language should be avoided (dispositional language in this case refers to language that locates the problem in the individual rather than taking account of other situational or individual factors).</p> <p>Joanna Stanbridge & Emma Mercer (2022) Mind your language: why the language used to describe children's SEMH needs matters, <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i>, 26:3, 263-283, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2019.1649477</p>
This statement should clearly outline the importance of relationships within the new Education Scotland Guidance on Inspections, and make links to the UNCRC, GIRFEC and the Equalities Act (2010), and the Wellbeing, Inclusion and Equalities Professional Learning Framework (Inclusion, Right & Equalities, Relationships, Wellbeing and Care)	<p>Education Scotland - Inspection and Review Guidance - Relationships and Behaviour</p> <p>Taking a children's human rights approach: guidance</p> <p>GIRFEC principles and values</p> <p>Equality Act (2010) Resources Education Scotland</p> <p>Inclusion, Wellbeing and Equalities Professional Learning Framework</p>

Relationships Policy: Exemplar Statement

1.1 Purpose, Vision & Values and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for parents, pupils, and teachers about our relationships-focussed approach to behaviour management. Relationships and behaviour will be a specific focus of school inspections by HMIE, and we recognise that the two are inextricably linked. Positive relationships are also central to GIRFEC (Getting It Right for Every Child) and the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child).

Positive relationships are central to a positive school ethos which supports the inclusion, equality, and wellbeing of everyone in the school community. Positive relationships play a key role in underpinning our vision and values which are [\[insert school vision, values and aims\]](#).

Our relationships-focused approach emphasises the importance of wellbeing as the first vital step in ensuring meaningful learning and teaching can take place. We understand the importance of fostering meaningful relationships and restoring these when things go wrong and understand the importance of co-regulation and de-escalation as vital tools to ensure a calm and caring environment.

We recognise that there may be some people in our learning community who might require further help and support with self-regulation, and we are committed to ensuring we work alongside those that experience these challenges to allow us to respond appropriately. We understand the importance of using language that is non-dispositional, so we use the term “distressed” when describing “challenging behaviour”. Our approach to relationships-focused practice will prioritise, as far as possible, a solution orientated approach.

The main purpose of this policy is to promote positive relationships within our learning community, with the common purpose of ensuring that everyone experiences a nurturing, empathetic and respectful environment.

Relationships Policy: Key Features

2. Expectations, Consequences and Boundaries

What?	Why?
This section should emphasise that school expectations and routines are applicable to everyone and not only children and young people.	<p>Research indicates that expectations and routines are helpful in ensuring that everyone knows what is expected of them and allows us to direct attention to these effectively by reducing the volume of information being processed and assessed and by supporting the creation of social norms.</p> <p>Argyropulo-Palmer, A. N. N. (2022). Exploring the evidence base: The role of routines in creating an effective learning environment. <i>Impact</i> (2514-6955), (15).</p> <p>Exploring the evidence base: The role of routines in creating an effective learning environment</p>
This section should hinge on the nurture principle “all behaviour is communication” and should emphasise that the focus of practitioners is to form an understanding of what drives behaviour in order to identify appropriate supports.	<p>Research indicates that approaches to language we use and how we communicate are fundamental to supporting dysregulated or distressed behaviour.</p> <p>Hibbin, R. (2019). A psycho-dynamic analysis of nurture and restorative practice: positive language and communication through relational approaches in school. <i>The International Journal of Nurture in Education</i>, 5(1), 54-65.</p> <p>IJNE Vol 5-A-psycho-dynamic-analysis-of-nurture-and-restorative-practice—Rebecca-Hibbin.pdf (nurtureuk.org)</p>
This section should outline the importance of consequences within a relational approach and that these are necessary to establish the appropriate boundaries for a nurturing, empathetic and respectful school ethos.	<p>Research indicates that punitive approaches are applied unfairly and inconsistently, can impact on academic development and emotional wellbeing and are limited in their long-term effectiveness in supporting behaviour change.</p> <p>Jones, R., Kreppner, J., Marsh, F., & Hartwell, B. (2023). Punitive behaviour management policies and practices in secondary schools: A systematic review of children and young people’s perceptions and experiences. <i>Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties</i>, 28(2-3), 182-197.</p>
This section should emphasise that consequences will be implemented from an attuned perspective and through a non-punitive lens.	
This section should emphasise that consequences will be proportionate, natural or collaborative in nature.	
This section should also outline that there is an adult expectation that individuals will push boundaries, and, when relationships significantly break down, the appropriate support will be sought.	

Relationships Policy Exemplar Statement

2.1. Expectations, Consequences and Boundaries

It is important to emphasise that a relationships-focused approach does not mean there is a lack of expectations or boundaries.

At *[insert setting name]* we have expectations in place that apply to everyone and are inclusive and achievable by all. *[Insert school expectations as they apply to all stakeholders and be explicit about why these are in place]*. We recognise the importance of the adults modelling these expectations to ensure that learners know what is expected of them.

At *[insert setting name]* we understand the importance of the physical school environment in supporting our expectations and fostering a sense of belonging. Linked to our physical environment everyone can expect *[list what children, staff, stakeholders can expect in line with the school environment]*. These expectations exist to help us to promote a calm, secure and supportive school ethos.

Our school expectations exist in order to establish the appropriate boundaries that will support effective learning and teaching. We understand that it is natural for individuals to push boundaries, but, when this happens, we are committed to reinforcing boundaries in an attuned manner. It is important to acknowledge that we will not prioritise a punitive approach when members of our school community fall short of achieving our expectations, instead, we will explore consequences that are proportionate, natural, and collaborative in nature. Our approach will always be solution-orientated and restorative in the first instance to ensure that those involved are able to learn and implement change for themselves.

Where an individual is struggling to meet our expectations, we will work collaboratively with everyone involved to ensure the appropriate support is in place.

Relationships Policy: Key Features

3. Key Relational Practice

<p>This section should outline the key relational approaches to supporting positive relationships at whole-school, classroom and the individual level</p>	<p>Research indicates the importance of the individual's perception of the social relationships in school and the school environment. Satisfaction with social relationships has been found to be a stronger predictor of sense of school belonging than satisfaction with the school environment.</p> <p>Cemalcilar, Z. (2010). Schools as socialisation contexts: Understanding the impact of school climate factors on students' sense of school belonging. <i>Applied psychology</i>, 59(2), 243-272.</p>
<p>This section should outline specific relational approaches, making explicit links to how they support overall inclusion, equality, and wellbeing for all. These approaches will be unique to your setting.</p>	<p>Informed Level Inclusion, Wellbeing and Equalities Professional Learning Framework Resources Education Scotland</p> <p>IJNE Vol 5-Beyond-nurture-groups-to-nurturing-approaches—Maura-Kearney Gail-Nowek.pdf (nurtureuk.org)</p>

Relationships Policy Exemplar Statement

3.1. Key Relational Practice

At [\[insert name\]](#) all of our staff understand the vital role that positive relationships play in fostering our school ethos. Our staff understand the impact of trauma on brain development and self-regulation skills and are attachment and trauma informed. Understanding these key concepts equips us with the ability to ensure that we see distressed behaviour in the wider context of the individual's circumstances.

Positive relationships are inextricably linked to positive educational outcomes, so the ways in which we actively promote positive relationships are outlined below.

At whole school level, we use [\[outline key whole-school relational strategies e.g. positive noticing; PACEful language with everyone; restorative conversations; PSHE curriculum; celebrating wider achievements; extra-curricular clubs; MVP, See Me, See Change. You should make explicit links to why these are used.\]](#)

At classroom level, we use [\[outline classroom relational strategies e.g. daily check-ins, soft starts, welcome at the door, co-regulation, the stepped approach, play-based learning. You should make explicit links to why these are used\]](#)

At the individual level, we use [\[outline individual relational strategies e.g. Nurture Group, Lego Therapy group.\]](#)

The aim of these approaches is to promote positive relationships and make them visible within our school community. These approaches help to foster an inclusive environment where people feel they belong and in which the wellbeing of everyone is prioritised in order to achieve our individual successes.

Training to Support Development and Implementation:

The links below will direct you towards appropriate information, resources, and professional learning to support the development and implementation of your setting's relationships policy.

Inspection Advice Guidance Information: Education Scotland

[Inspection Advice Note – January 2024 | Inspection and review guidance | HM Chief Inspector reports and guidance | Inspection and review | Education Scotland](#)

Wellbeing, Inclusion and Equalities Professional Learning Framework: Education Scotland

[Informed Level | Inclusion, Wellbeing and Equalities Professional Learning Framework | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

National Trauma Training Programme

[National trauma training programme | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

Included, Engage and Involved Part 1 & 2

[Included, engaged and involved part 1: promoting and managing school attendance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

[Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

Time for Inclusive Education

[Teachers - Time for Inclusive Education \(tie.scot\)](#)

Keeping the Promise Award Programme

[Keeping the Promise Award Programme | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative

[Method - CYPIC 2023](#)

Argyll and Bute Educational Psychology Service Website

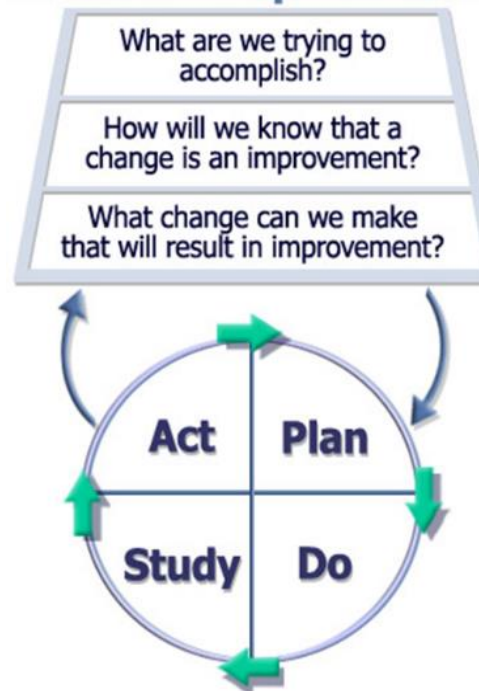
[Argyll and Bute Educational Psychology Service \(google.com\)](#)

Appendix 1 - PDSA Cycle Template

Model for Improvement: Three questions for improvement

1. What are we trying to accomplish (aim)?
2. How will we know that change is an improvement (measures)?
3. What change can we make that will result in an improvement (ideas, hunches, theories)?

Model for Improvement



Langley, G. J., Moen, R. D., Nolan, K. M., Nolan, T. W., Norman, C. L., & Provost, L. P. (2009). *The improvement guide* (2nd ed.). Jossey Bass Wiley.

<p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the objective of the test? • What do you predict will happen and why? • What change will you make? • Who will it involve (e.g. one unit, one floor, one department)? • How long will the change take to implement? • What resources will it need? • What data need to be collected? 	<p>List your action steps along with person(s) responsible and time line.</p>
<p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement change. Try out the test on a small scale. • Carry out the test. • Document problems and unexpected observations. • Begin analysis of the data. 	<p>Describe what actually happened when you ran the test.</p>
<p>Study</p> <p>Set aside time to analyze the data and study the results and determine if the change resulted in the expected outcome.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the analysis of the data. • Compare the data to your predictions. • Summarise and reflect on what was learned. Look for: unintended consequences, surprises, successes, failures. 	<p>Describe the measured results and how they compared to the predictions.</p>
<p>Act</p> <p>If the results were not what you wanted you try something else Refine the change, based on what was learned from the test.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt – modify the changes and repeat PDSA cycle • Adopt – consider expanding the changes in your organization to additional residents, staff, units • Abandon – change your approach and repeat PDSA cycle 	<p>Describe what modifications to the plan will be made for the next cycle from what you learned.</p>