Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing Policy

Who is this policy for?	All nursery and school staff, therapists, volunteers and other adults working with pupils
Policy date:	November 2026
Date of next review:	November 2028
Who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating this policy?	Headteacher, SENCO and Board of Trustees
Date signed off by Governing Body	November 2026

Introduction

This policy sets out Side by Side School's approach to promoting positive behaviour and emotional wellbeing across the nursery and school departments.

It provides a consistent framework for understanding and responding to pupils' individual needs, outlining the responsibilities of staff and the processes for providing appropriate support.

The policy applies to all staff, therapists, volunteers and other adults working with pupils, including during off-site activities.

Aims of this Policy

The aims of this policy are:

- To promote emotional wellbeing, positive behaviour and a safe, inclusive learning environment.
- To establish a consistent, whole-school approach to understanding and responding to pupils' behaviour.
- To provide a clear framework for universal, targeted and specialist support.
- To ensure that responses to behaviours of concern are safe, proportionate and appropriate to pupils' individual needs.
- To clarify the responsibilities of staff and promote effective collaboration with families and other professionals.

Related Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Side by Side School policies and procedures:

Physical Intervention/Restrictive Intervention Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Special Educational Needs Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Exclusions Policy, Equality and Diversity Policy, Health and Safety Policy,

In particular, the Physical Intervention / Restrictive Intervention Policy (September 2026) sets out the school's detailed procedures and requirements relating to the use of reasonable force, restraint and seclusion, including staff training, recording, parental notification and post-incident review.

UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR: ALL BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION

Side by Side is a place of belonging. We aim to promote the emotional wellbeing of pupils, staff and families, enabling every pupil to flourish, learn, develop relationships and experience safety, dignity and meaningful participation. This policy applies to all staff, therapists, volunteers and visitors working with pupils across nursery and school, including off-site activities.

Behaviour is understood in context: it can communicate distress, sensory or physical discomfort, a need for connection, difficulty understanding expectations or a lack of accessible alternatives. Staff must not assume that every behaviour is deliberate or that every behaviour has a single function. We maintain ambitious, individually appropriate expectations alongside reasonable adjustments and a trauma-informed, relational approach.

Our response prioritises prevention, quality of life, communication, co-regulation, safeguarding and teaching new skills. Restrictive practice is a last resort, never a disciplinary technique.

Every child communicates through behaviour as well as through speech, signs, symbols, gestures, movement and other forms of expression. At Side by Side, we approach behaviour with curiosity, compassion and respect. Behaviour that adults find challenging may be a child's most accessible way of expressing an unmet need, an overwhelming experience or a difficulty they cannot yet communicate in another way. We believe that every behaviour is a form of communication.

There is therefore no single explanation for behaviour. The same outward behaviour may have different meanings for different pupils, or for one pupil at different times. Staff must consider the whole child, the context and what happened before, during and after the behaviour, rather than assume that the pupil is deliberately choosing to be difficult.

A pupil may be communicating or responding to:

- Communication barriers: difficulty asking for help, making choices, refusing, expressing pain or understanding what others expect.
- Sensory needs: overload from noise, light, touch, crowds or movement, or a need to seek sensory input.

- Emotional distress: anxiety, fear, frustration, grief, uncertainty, shame or difficulty regulating strong feelings.
- Physical or health needs: pain, illness, constipation, fatigue, hunger, sleep difficulties, medication effects or other discomfort.
- Changes and demands: unexpected transitions, unfamiliar people, unclear instructions, waiting, excessive demands or loss of predictability.
- Developmental and learning differences: a mismatch between the demands of the situation and the pupil's current communication, social, cognitive or self-regulation skills.
- Relationships and belonging: a need for connection, reassurance, shared attention, safety or a trusted adult's support.
- Autonomy and agency: a need to communicate preferences, exercise choice, escape an overwhelming experience or gain a sense of control.
- Past experiences: trauma, loss, repeated misunderstandings or experiences that have affected the pupil's sense of safety.

These influences may overlap. Staff should actively seek the pupil's perspective through their preferred communication methods, involve parents and carers, and draw on class teams, therapists, the SENCO and educational psychologist where appropriate. Persistent changes in behaviour may require consideration of medical needs and safeguarding concerns.

Our first question is not simply "How do we stop this behaviour?" but "What might this pupil be communicating, and what can we change, teach or provide to help?"

Understanding the reason for behaviour does not mean ignoring risk or removing appropriate boundaries. It means protecting safety and dignity while addressing the underlying need, reducing preventable distress, teaching alternative communication and regulation skills, and avoiding punitive or compliance-driven responses.

CORE VALUES AND SHARED STAFF LANGUAGE

Side by Side's approach to emotional wellbeing and behaviour is underpinned by three core messages: Be Kind, Help Each Other and We Belong Together. These values promote positive relationships, mutual support and a sense of safety and belonging throughout the school community.

Our core values are reflected in the language and responses used by staff. A shared approach to communication helps pupils experience consistency, reassurance and predictable support, particularly during periods of emotional distress or dysregulation.

Staff are encouraged to use short, calm and positive phrases, adapted to each pupil's level of understanding and communication needs. These may include "I'm here to help", "You are safe", "Let's take a break" and "First this, then that".

The school's Shared Staff Language and Core Messages resources provide practical guidance to support consistent implementation across nursery and school.

GRADUATED RESPONSE: UNIVERSAL, TARGETED AND SPECIALIST

Side by Side's wellbeing framework provides three levels of support: universal, targeted and specialist. This graduated approach reflects the school's Emotionally Able framework, which focuses on engagement, relationships and feeling positive.

Universal

The class teacher ensures agreed universal strategies are implemented consistently. SENCOs and therapists advise and support classroom practice. A pupil does not have to wait for a full cycle of universal strategies where risk or distress requires immediate escalation.

Whole class universal strategies include:

- Build trusting relationships with all pupils, not only assigned key pupils; use intensive interaction, shared play and individual interests.
- Provide predictable routines and prepare transitions using visual/tactile timetables, objects of reference, supportive stories and appropriate AAC or Makaton.
- Consider sensory environment, pain, fatigue, hunger, sleep, medical needs, communication demands and changes at home or school.
- Model calm communication and regulation; give processing time, meaningful choices, movement and access to calming spaces without making access punitive.
- Notice and reinforce helpful skills in ways meaningful to the pupil. Rewards may be individualised but must not replace basic care, dignity or access to learning.
- Teach communication, self-advocacy, independence, problem solving and regulation skills through the curriculum and daily routines.
- Use clear, respectful language; do not label pupils naughty, manipulative or stubborn, shame them, threaten them or discuss incidents in front of others.

Supporting Emotional Regulation

The school uses visual and communication resources to help pupils recognise and express their emotions, request support and develop strategies for managing distress.

The "When I Feel Upset" resource introduces supportive choices such as asking for help, accessing a quiet space, requesting additional time, understanding what happens next and expressing feelings through accessible communication methods.

The school also draws on aspects of The Zones of Regulation framework to help pupils recognise and communicate their emotions, understand different levels of emotional arousal and develop appropriate regulation strategies. Using a colour-coded approach, staff support pupils to identify how they are feeling and explore strategies that help them manage their emotions and behaviour. The approach is adapted to pupils' individual developmental and communication needs, recognising that all emotional states are valid and that pupils may require adult support to regulate.

These resources are adapted to pupils' individual communication, sensory and developmental needs, with adults modelling and supporting their use. Pupils are encouraged to develop increasing awareness and independence in using strategies that help them feel safe, supported and regulated.

Supportive Stories

Side by Side uses Supportive Stories as a visual and narrative-based approach to help pupils understand situations, prepare for changes and transitions, develop emotional awareness and explore appropriate responses to challenging experiences.

Supportive Stories are adapted to each pupil's understanding and communication needs and may be used with individuals or groups. They aim to provide reassurance, predictability and opportunities to explore feelings and develop coping strategies in a supportive, non-judgemental way.

Where appropriate, Supportive Stories may form part of a pupil's Emotional Wellbeing Passport or Plan.

Targeted

Where distress, withdrawal, dysregulation or behaviour of concern persists, the class teacher contacts the class SENCO. Together, they review universal provision, consult the family and seek the pupil’s perspective using preferred communication methods. They gather relevant information, such as ABC and ABC-exception records, motivational assessment and sensory or health observations, and agree an Emotional Wellbeing Passport. The passport identifies strengths, communication needs, likely triggers, early warning signs, preventative strategies, helpful responses, responses to avoid, agreed teaching targets and named staff. The class SENCO prepares the passport in collaboration with the classroom team, circulates it to

relevant staff and ensures it is reviewed at least termly and whenever needs or presentation change.

Specialist

Where concerns are severe, persistent or complex, or external professional involvement is required, the class SENCO coordinates specialist input. This may include an Educational Psychologist-led or SENCO-led Emotional Wellbeing Meeting, bringing together the relevant team, family perspectives and pupil voice to explore the behaviour and its possible causes, agree measurable outcomes, allocate actions and set a review date. Urgent risk and safeguarding concerns must be addressed immediately; reporting must not be delayed by administrative processes.

Emotional Wellbeing Plans draw on the Emotionally Able model (Fox, Laverty and Chowdhury) and consider wellbeing through three connected lenses:

- Engagement: meaningful, accessible learning, choice, enjoyment, agency and opportunities to experience success.
- Relationships: trusting, consistent adults, unconditional positive regard, shared communication and peer connection.
- Feeling positive: safety, belonging, emotional security, confidence, autonomy and a predictable environment.

Class teams use the classroom wellbeing audit to identify strengths, barriers and next steps in each of these areas. Plans should be responsive to all pupils including those with profound and multiple learning disabilities, complex medical needs, autism, sensory differences, moderate learning difficulties and differing communication profiles.

Priority Behaviour Baskets

Side by Side uses Priority Behaviour Baskets as a practical classroom tool to help staff agree which behaviours need immediate attention during challenging situations. When a pupil is dysregulated, the aim is not to correct everything at once. Staff prioritise safety, regulation and de-escalation, and avoid escalating distress by addressing non-essential behaviours.

The class team considers three baskets for the individual pupil and situation:

- **Small basket (red / highest priority):** one or two behaviours or immediate risks that must be addressed now, usually because of safety or serious disruption.
- **Middle basket (amber / flexible):** behaviours or expectations for which staff can negotiate, offer choices or respond flexibly, often when the pupil is calmer.
- **Large basket (green / low priority):** behaviours that staff consciously choose not to address in the moment; these may be revisited later if necessary.

Staff ask: What must be addressed right now? What can wait until the pupil is calm? What can we choose not to respond to at this point? Basket decisions are individualised, agreed by the class team and reviewed with the class SENCO as appropriate. They do not override safeguarding duties, individual risk assessments, medical needs or the obligation to protect pupils and others from harm.

Priority baskets are a way of prioritising adult responses, not labelling pupils or withdrawing support. Where relevant, agreed priorities should be reflected in the pupil's Emotional Wellbeing Passport and shared with staff consistently.

INDIVIDUAL PLANNING AND BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

An Emotional Wellbeing Passport provides the shared everyday guide for pupils receiving targeted support; a more detailed Emotional Wellbeing Plan may be agreed where specialist input is required. Where there is a foreseeable risk of harm, an individual risk assessment must specify prevention, communication support, de-escalation, safer alternatives, emergency arrangements, staff competence, medical considerations, post-incident support, parent communication and review. Where restrictive interventions are foreseeable, planning must also comply with the school's Physical Intervention / Restrictive Intervention Policy (September 2026), including consideration of less restrictive alternatives and steps to reduce future use. Plans must be individualised, accessible to relevant staff and reviewed following significant incidents.

RESPONDING TO DISTRESS AND INCIDENTS

The adult's first task is to keep everyone safe, remain calm, reduce demands and stimulation where appropriate, offer familiar communication and regulation support, summon assistance when needed and protect the pupil's dignity. Avoid arguing, correcting behaviour, lecturing or insisting on an immediate apology during dysregulation. Attend to injured or distressed pupils and assess medical needs. Use agreed strategies to support regulation. Once the pupil is settled, offer an accessible restorative conversation, repair or learning opportunity only where developmentally and emotionally appropriate. This may be later in the day or the following day. The purpose is to understand what happened and adapt provision, not to attribute blame.

PHYSICAL CONTACT AND RESTRICTIVE INTERVENTIONS

Side by Side recognises that appropriate physical contact, guidance and co-regulation may form part of everyday support, particularly for pupils with complex needs. However, any intervention that restricts a pupil's movement must be carefully distinguished from ordinary

supportive contact. Restrictive intervention must only be used as a last resort, where lawful, necessary and proportionate, using the least restrictive approach for the shortest possible time, and never as punishment or simply to secure compliance. Staff must prioritise prevention, de-escalation, pupil safety and dignity, taking account of individual needs, risks and support plans. All restrictive interventions must be recorded, reported and reviewed in accordance with the school's Physical Intervention / Restrictive Intervention Policy (September 2026), which sets out the detailed requirements for permitted interventions, Safer Handling training, prohibited practices, safeguarding, parental notification and post-incident procedures. This policy must be read in conjunction with that separate policy.

SAFEGUARDING, EQUALITY AND PUPIL VOICE

Changes in behaviour may indicate abuse, neglect, bullying, pain, communication barriers or unmet needs. Staff must not attribute all distress to SEND. Report concerns promptly through the safeguarding procedure in line with the school Safeguarding Policy. Pupil voice may be expressed through AAC, symbols, objects, photographs, behaviour observations and trusted adults.

Ensure reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 and avoid discriminatory or disproportionate responses. Any use of suspension or exclusion must follow the school's separate policy and applicable law, with careful consideration of SEND and disability duties.

FAMILIES AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY PARTNERSHIP

Parents and carers are essential partners in identifying triggers, successful strategies, cultural context and changes affecting wellbeing. Communication with parents should take place promptly when new behaviours or changes in behaviour are identified. Plans should be shared and reviewed collaboratively. Teachers, Kodesh and secular staff, support staff, SENCOs, therapists and external professionals should use a consistent approach. Information is shared on a need-to-know basis with appropriate confidentiality.

Where appropriate and with parental consent, support and advice may be requested through the WAMHS practitioner or by direct referral to CAMHS.

STAFF WELLBEING, TRAINING AND LEADERSHIP

All staff receive induction and refresher training on the wellbeing framework, relational approaches, co-regulation, communication and safeguarding. Additional role-specific training covers risk assessment, incident reporting, de-escalation, physical intervention and safe manual handling. Following serious incidents, managers arrange prompt practical support and reflective debriefs without blame. Leaders analyse incident patterns, injury, restrictive

practice, pupil experience and disproportionate impact, and report themes to governors. Staff can raise concerns without fear of criticism.

MONITORING, ACCOUNTABILITY AND POLICY REVIEW

The Headteacher leads implementation of this policy; the SENCO team coordinates individual planning; the DSL oversees safeguarding concerns; and the Board of Trustees monitors safety, inclusion and the reduction of restrictive practice.

This policy should be read alongside the school's Physical Intervention / Restrictive Intervention Policy (September 2026), Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and relevant individual pupil plans.

The school will monitor the effectiveness of its approach through incident records, pupil wellbeing, staff feedback and reviews of individual support arrangements. This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the stated review cycle, or earlier where changes in legislation, statutory guidance or school practice require it.

APPENDIX 1 – PRACTICAL STAFF GUIDANCE: DO'S AND DON'TS

This guidance supports the consistent implementation of Side by Side's Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing Policy across nursery and school.

DO – Approaches we encourage

- Recognise behaviour as communication. Consider what a pupil may be expressing through their behaviour, including distress, unmet needs or difficulties communicating.
- Remain calm and reassuring. Support pupils to feel safe and regulate their emotions. During distress, prioritise co-regulation rather than attempting to teach through verbal instruction.
- Build positive relationships. Interact with all pupils, show interest in their activities and use approaches such as Floortime and Intensive Interaction.
- Maintain predictable routines. Use clear structures and accessible communication to help pupils understand what to expect.
- Prepare for transitions and changes. Use visual supports, Supportive Stories and other appropriate resources.
- Notice and reinforce positive behaviour. Recognise effort, progress and helpful behaviours through meaningful praise and individualised encouragement.

- Model the behaviour you wish to see. Demonstrate kindness, patience, respect and calm communication.
- Use accessible communication. Support understanding through visuals, AAC, Makaton and the school's Shared Staff Language resources, as appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for regulation. Offer access to calming spaces, sensory resources and appropriate regulation strategies.
- Promote independence and responsibility. Give pupils meaningful choices, responsibilities and opportunities to develop their skills.
- Follow pupils' interests. Use their preferences and motivations to support engagement, learning and positive relationships.
- Work consistently as a team. Follow agreed individual strategies, Emotional Wellbeing Passports and Plans.
- Listen to pupil voice. Recognise and respond to pupils' preferences, feelings and communication in all its forms.

DON'T – Approaches we avoid

- Do not threaten, shame, belittle or humiliate pupils.
- Do not use punitive responses or physical force as punishment. Any planned consequences must be appropriate to the pupil's individual needs and consistent with school policy.
- Do not make negative assumptions about behaviour. Avoid labelling pupils or interpreting behaviour as deliberate defiance without considering its underlying causes.
- Do not attempt to reason, lecture or demand apologies during periods of dysregulation. Allow time for regulation before addressing learning or reflection.
- Do not discuss a pupil's behaviour in front of other pupils or adults who do not need to know.
- Do not share information about a pupil's behaviour with staff or others who are not involved in their care or support.
- Do not openly criticise another staff member's response to behaviour. Raise concerns constructively with the class teacher, SENCO or appropriate senior leader. Any immediate safety or safeguarding concern must be addressed and reported without delay.
- Do not withdraw necessary care, sensory support or access to basic needs as a consequence of behaviour.

All staff are expected to apply these principles with appropriate consideration of each pupil's developmental level, communication needs, emotional wellbeing and individual support arrangements.

APPENDICES 2–4 — VISUAL RESOURCES





