

LDST Relationships Policy



Highfield St Matthew's CE Primary

Date: September 2026

Our Trust Prayer

Heavenly Father,
Let peace, friendship and love grow in our schools.
Send the Holy Spirit to give
excellence to our learning,
love to our actions and
joy to our worship.
Guide us to help others,
so that we may all
Learn, Love and Achieve, Together with Jesus.

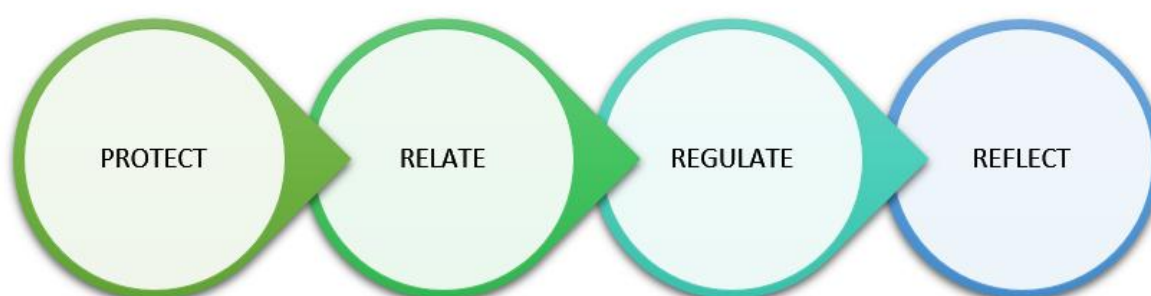
Amen

A LDST Relational Approach

Our Trust is invested in supporting the very best possible relational health between:

Parent and child
Child and child
Child and school staff
Parent and school staff
School staff
School staff and Senior Leads
School staff and external agencies

To this end our school is committed to educational practices, which **Protect, Relate, Regulate** and **Reflect**.



PROTECT: In PROTECT our focus is not only on the physical environment, but the relational environment and the very culture and ethos of the setting.

- Increased 'safety cues' in all aspects of the school day, e.g. meet and greet at the school entrance.
- School staff trained in 'PACE' modes of interaction (Hughes 2015) (see Appendix 1): being warm, empathic, playful and curious (proven to shift children out of flight/flight/ freeze positions).
- School staff to ensure that interactions with children are socially engaging not socially defensive, in order to decrease chances of children relating defensively (fight/flight/freeze).
- A whole school commitment to cease using harsh voices, shouting, put-downs, criticisms, shaming (proven to be damaging psychologically and neurologically). School staff will 'interactively repair' the occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness.
- The implementation of pedagogic interventions that help staff to get to know children better on an individual basis e.g. "I wish my teacher knew" (what matters to them, who matters to them, their dreams, hopes). This is key to

enabling children to feel safe enough to want to talk, if they so wish, about painful life experiences, which are interfering with their ability to learn and quality of life.

School has a responsibility to ensure there is a system in place for vulnerable children to have access to emotionally available adults when incidents arise.

School staff will adjust expectations around vulnerable children to correspond with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This will include removing vulnerable and traumatised children in a kind, non-judgmental way from situations they are not managing well. At Highfield St Matthew's CE Primary, we understand that some children may experience moments of crisis or heightened emotional distress, which can result in challenging behaviours. These behaviours can stem from a variety of factors, such as sensory overload, communication difficulties, anxiety, or other emotional needs. It is important to us that we provide a safe and supportive environment to help children manage these moments in a way that fosters their well-being and development.

To support children during these times, we have designated calm spaces around the school, where they can take a break, regulate their emotions, and regain composure. These spaces offer a quiet, peaceful environment for children to step away from busy areas and regain a sense of calm.

Another space is **The Sensory Room**, which offers a supportive and nurturing environment where children can receive individualised attention, engage in calming activities, and receive emotional support from staff. These spaces are all designed to ensure that children have the support they need to feel secure and supported when they are feeling overwhelmed. Through these calm spaces and support systems, our goal is to reduce the occurrence of crisis behaviours, help children manage their emotions, and enable them to return to their learning environment when they feel ready. These provisions allow children to feel understood and supported, enabling them to continue their education with confidence and well-being.

Our **Learning Mentor** is available to provide pastoral support to any child who may be experiencing emotional or social difficulties. We offer a safe and supportive space where children can talk about their concerns, receive guidance, and develop coping strategies to manage challenges. The Learning Mentor works closely with both staff and families to ensure that each child's emotional well-being is supported, helping them to feel confident, secure, and ready to engage with their learning.

There will be a clear, confidential and non-shaming system of self-referral for help/talk time. This system empowers students to take initiative in seeking support, ensuring they feel heard and valued. Each classroom is equipped with quiet spaces and calming areas, thoughtfully designed with resources to promote self-regulation and emotional resilience. These spaces provide students with the tools they need to manage their emotions and foster a sense of security within their learning environment.

To deepen our understanding of each student's needs and preferences, we implement the "What I Want My Teacher to Know" exercise at various points throughout the

academic year. This practice encourages open communication between students and teachers, fostering stronger relationships and a more personalised learning experience. Within every classroom, we conduct regular emotional check-ins, creating a space for students to express their feelings and for teachers to monitor and support their emotional health. These check-ins are integral to building a classroom culture where emotional well-being is prioritised alongside academic achievement.

Our Pupil Leadership Team play a role in supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing inclusivity and representing the voices of all students. They actively contribute to creating a school culture that celebrates diversity and ensures every student feels valued. Additionally, staff members are encouraged to refer students to our Learning Mentor for individualised pastoral sessions. These sessions provide tailored support to address specific emotional or social challenges, ensuring that each student receives the attention and resources they need to thrive. By integrating these practices, we strive to create a nurturing environment where every student feels supported, understood, and empowered to reach their full potential.

School staff will be nurturing so that all children feel truly valued and emotionally regulated enough to be able to interact throughout the school day with social engagement rather than defensiveness.

RELATE: The ability to form meaningful relationships. It's the quality of contact we have with other people that is arguably the most important determining factor in our quality of life.

We are committed to fostering a nurturing and supportive environment that addresses the diverse emotional and educational needs of our students. Our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo) is a trained trauma-informed practitioner, ensuring that our approach to supporting students is sensitive to the impacts of trauma. Our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has completed Trauma-Informed Schools UK (TIS UK) training, equipping them with strategies to lead and support trauma-sensitive practices within the school. Additionally, all teaching staff have received foundational trauma-informed training, ensuring a consistent and empathetic approach across the school.

Key staff members are trained in emotional coaching and are adept at addressing the four essential relational needs for secure attachment: affect atonement, empathy, soothing, and containment. These skills are integral to building strong, supportive relationships with our students, promoting emotional well-being, and enhancing learning outcomes. Role modelling these behaviours is a fundamental aspect of our school culture, demonstrating to students the importance of empathy and emotional intelligence in everyday interactions.

To ensure that all staff are equipped to meet the emotional and educational needs of our students, trauma-informed practices form a part of our induction process for new staff members. We also offer ongoing professional development opportunities focused on trauma-informed approaches, including advanced TIS UK Practitioner training and

specialised courses in emotional coaching. This comprehensive training framework ensures that our entire school community is aligned in providing a supportive and understanding environment for all students.

We prioritise building strong, supportive relationships with our students as a foundation for their emotional and educational development. Central to our approach is the **PACE model**—Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy—which guides our interactions and helps create a nurturing environment. This model fosters a sense of safety and trust, enabling students to engage more fully with their learning and with each other.

We recognise that **transitions** can be challenging for children, especially when moving between home and school or progressing through different educational stages. Understanding and supporting these transitions are crucial for maintaining stability and promoting positive emotional well-being. To facilitate this, we invest time in **getting to know each child** individually, learning about their backgrounds, interests, and needs. This personalised approach allows us to tailor our support and ensure that each child feels valued and understood, easing their transition and fostering a sense of belonging within our school community.

This whole school commitment to enabling children to see themselves, their relationships and the world more positively, rather than through a lens of threat, danger or self-blame. Relational opportunities for vulnerable children with emotionally available adults at school to enable them to make the shift from 'blocked trust' (not feeling psychologically safe with anyone) to trust, and from self-help to 'help seeking'.

Regulate: Having an emotionally available adult. High ACE scores (adverse childhood experiences) without the buffering of an emotionally available adult is likely to damage children's minds, brains and bodies because of toxic stress.

The implementation of interventions designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable) in vulnerable children, enabling them to feel calm, soothed and safe. This is to support learning, quality of life and protect against stress-induced physical and mental illness, now and in later life. At Highfield St Matthew's CE Primary we are dedicated to implementing interventions aimed at reducing stress hormone levels in vulnerable children, transitioning them from toxic to tolerable levels. This approach is designed to help students feel calm, soothed, and safe, thereby enhancing their learning experiences, improving their quality of life, and safeguarding against stress-induced physical and mental health issues both now and in the future.

Sensory Circuits

Sensory Circuits are available, offering structured activities that promote sensory processing and emotional regulation for all students. Additional tailored sensory circuits can be designed to support children with specific sensory processing needs by incorporating activities that help them self-regulate, such as deep pressure, proprioceptive input, or calming tactile experiences, which can improve focus and emotional well-being throughout the school day.

Pastoral Intervention Programs

Our **Learning Mentor** leads personalized pastoral intervention programs. These programs are tailored to address individual student needs, providing targeted support to help them navigate emotional challenges and develop coping strategies.

PSHE Curriculum

Strategies to manage stress and build resilience are embedded within our **Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) Curriculum**. This curriculum includes lessons on emotional well-being, coping mechanisms, and healthy relationships.

Sensory Room

At Highfield St Matthew's CE Primary our **Sensory Room** offers a controlled environment equipped with tools and resources to help students decompress, focus, and regulate their emotions effectively.

Individual Behaviour Plans

Recognising that each child's needs are unique, we develop **Individual Behaviour Plans** in collaboration with teachers, parents, and specialists. These plans outline specific strategies and goals tailored to support each student's behavioural and emotional development, ensuring a personalised approach to their well-being. By integrating these interventions, we aim to create a supportive environment that not only addresses the immediate emotional needs of our students but also equips them with the skills to manage stress and build resilience for the future.

Evidence-based nurturing and regulatory interventions that aim to repair psychological damage and brain damage caused by traumatic life experiences, through emotionally regulating and playful, enriched adult-child interactions.

The emotional well-being and regulating of staff is treated as high priority to prevent burn-out, stress-related absence or leaving the profession, through stress-related illness, secondary trauma and/or feeling undervalued, blamed or shamed.

Designated staff-only spaces, which support the release of natural anti-stress, pro-social neurochemicals (opioids and oxytocin). At Highfield St Matthew's CE Primary, we provide:

Designated Staff-Only Spaces

To support our staff, we have established dedicated staff-only areas, such as a comfortable staffroom, where educators can unwind and recharge. These spaces promote the release of natural anti-stress neurochemicals, fostering a sense of well-being and camaraderie among staff members.

Protective Time and Flexible Working Arrangements

We understand the importance of work-life balance and have implemented measures such as allocating time for staff to work from home during their Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA) periods. This flexibility allows staff to manage their workload more effectively and spend quality time with family. Additionally, we have introduced

twilight INSET (In-Service Training) days, enabling staff to enjoy extended holiday periods without compromising professional development.

Staff Incentives and Recognition

Recognising and celebrating the hard work and dedication of our staff is a core value. To this end, we participate in the LDST (Learning and Development Support Team) awards, providing opportunities to acknowledge outstanding contributions and achievements within our school community.

Reflect: Reflecting is about having conversations with a child/adult that support their emotional and mental health.

All staff are educated in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding (instead of asking lots of questions/giving lectures). Rather than relying on frequent questioning or didactic instruction, our approach prioritises emotionally available adults who build trusting, respectful relationships with children. To embed this culture, all schools engage in CPD through Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK), ensuring a shared understanding of the neuroscience and practical strategies behind positive relational practice. Each school has a nominated TISUK-trained lead who is responsible for delivering ongoing CPD, modelling effective approaches, and supporting the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of relational practice on pupil wellbeing, engagement, and readiness to learn. This consistent, reflective approach supports the development of emotionally secure, confident learners who thrive in nurturing and respectful learning environments.

There is planned training to develop skills and implement resources to support parents and staff have meaningful empathic conversations with vulnerable children who want to talk about their lives to empower children to better manage their home situations and life in general. Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff ('working alliance'), children are to be provided with the means to symbolise painful life experiences through images rather than solely everyday words, should they wish to do so, as a key part of 'working through' and memory re-consolidation. To this end, there is the provision of different modes of expression for children e.g. art/ play/drama/music/sand-play/emotion worksheets).

The PSHE (personal, social, and health education) curriculum is well-informed by current research (psychology and neuroscience) on mental health, mental ill-health (full range of specific conditions) relationship health: family, parenting, intimate relationships and tools for how to do life well. The curriculum content to enable children to make informed choices about how they relate to others and how they choose to treat their brains, bodies and minds now and in the future. Our PSHE curriculum reflects our commitment to equipping children with the knowledge, tools, and emotional literacy they need to understand mental health and ill-health—including a range of specific conditions—as well as how to build and maintain healthy relationships across family, friendships, and future intimate connections. We deliver our PSHE through Jigsaw, a comprehensive and research-informed programme that aligns with our values and whole-school approach to wellbeing. Our curriculum is built not only to inform but to empower children to make thoughtful, informed choices about

how they treat their brains, bodies, and minds—both now and in the future. We prioritise long-term life skills that support resilience, empathy, emotional regulation, and positive mental health.

All staff are trained to help children move from 'behaving' their trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences through empathic conversation to address negative self- referencing and help them to develop coherent narratives about their lives

All of this is underpinned by a behaviour policy that is based on positive framing and resolution (e.g. restorative conversations, WINE sentence stems).

Appendix 1

PACE: Strategies to support children who have experienced trauma

The aim of PACE is to support adults with building safe, trusting and meaningful relationships with children and young people who have experienced trauma. The approach focuses on building trusting relationships, emotional connections, containment of emotions and a sense of security. PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe. It is done by communicating the four elements of PACE together flexibly, not as a step by step process. Using PACE helps adults to slow down their reactions, stay calm and tune into what the child is experiencing in the moment. It supports us to gain a better understanding of what the child is feeling. In tricky moments it allows us to stay emotionally regulated and guide the child through their heightened emotions, thoughts and behaviours. In turn, PACE helps children and young people to feel more connected to and understood by important adults in their life and ultimately, to slow down their own responses.



PLAY

P

A playful, warm and spontaneous way of interacting with the child to support them to feel safe with you and to promote trust. When children are connected with in this way, they are freer to open up, reflect, laugh, play and share their true feelings with you. Use a warm light tone of voice is key (storytelling voice).



ACCEPTANCE

A

Acceptance communicates that that the child's inner life is safe with you; that you are interested in it and will not judge or evaluate it. Acceptance is at the core of the child's sense of safety. Accepting the child's intentions does not imply accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. Through acceptance, it's hoped that the child learns that while the behaviour may be criticised and limited, this is not the same as criticising the child's self. The child then becomes more confident that conflict and discipline focuses on the behaviour, not the relationship with adults nor their self-worth.



CURIOSITY

C

Curiosity is about seeking to understand why a child may feel the way they do and what is driving them to feel that way. The focus is on getting to the core of who the child is, including how they think, what they might be thinking, and what feelings might be going on for them beneath the behaviours that we see. Taking a curious and caring approach can be a valuable way to assist a child in navigating their experiences and emotions. By exploring their feelings together, you can help them make sense of their inner world. By asking questions and taking in the responses, you will develop a deeper understanding of the child.



EMPATHY

E

Being empathic means the adult actively showing the child that their inner life is important to the adult and that they want to support the child during their hard times. The adult is demonstrating that they know how difficult that experience is for the child. The adult is telling the child that they will not have to deal with the distress alone. The adult is also communicating strength, love and commitment, with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much for them. Together they will get through it.

Protect, Relate, Regulate, Reflect Model

We follow a trauma-informed approach to how we work with our children and young people. Our staff implement strategies guided by our Trauma and Mental Health Informed Practitioners. Regular CPD and training helps our staff to help our children and young people begin to make sense of their past experiences, triggers, and emotional challenges.

Our staff use trauma informed language throughout the school day and deliver the Trauma-Informed approach through the Protect/Relate/Regulate/Reflect model and PACE approach.

PROTECT

- Increasing the safety cues
- Optimising social engagement
- Reducing expectations to match developmental capacity
- Removing the child from the situation they're not managing
- Reducing stress from the traumatised child

RELATE

- PACE
- Easy access to emotionally available adults at school
- Addressing development deficit
- Affect Attunement
- Empathy and naming the pain
- Help to grieve and find empowered anger
- Containment

SEEKING

Relationship heals

ATTACHMENT



PLAY

REGULATE

- Just listening
- Finding words for feelings
- Mental state talk
- Feeling understood
- Mindfulness
- Engaging with nature
- Sensory Zones
- Attachment play

- Brains
- Mind
- Ability to learn

REFLECT

- Psychologically based PSHE
- Modelling psychological thinking
- Rich vocabulary for the words to say it
- Coherent narratives/Affect labelling
- Memory re-consolidation
- Emotion worksheets
- Problem solving: what went wrong/ planning what to do next time
- Arts/imagery as the third thing in the room