



NORTHUMBERLAND SCHOOLS C.A.R.E. GUIDE



Northumberland
County Council



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust





Be you



This guide has been developed in collaboration with...

- Be You- Northumberland's Mental Health Support Team
- Northumberland HINT and Psychological Services
- Northumberland Virtual School



Northumberland
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NHS Foundation Trust



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Foreword by Audrey Kingham, Executive Director of Children, Young People & Education

In Northumberland, collectively we have recognised much earlier the difference we can make to the lives of our children and young people when we identify, recognise and understand the impact of trauma, behavioural change and the challenges they have had to overcome on too many occasions.

Our collective team of professionals and practitioners have worked very hard to communicate more effectively; developed and honed their knowledge over time and applied skills and learning at the right time to support our system of partners working together to support our children and young people.

The next stage in our development is to build upon the work to date through our relationships focus. The relational practice is strong and is well understood, most importantly the difference this approach has taken is well understood and making a difference to our children and young people. Our next stage is 'belonging' taking the matters and still matters approach to another level and considering the significant difference we can make to the way a child feels, interacts, learns, communicates and achieves within our partnership approach.

Our practice has adapted and I am certain will continue to evolve to meet changing needs and transitions for our children and young people. This is a key feature of our collaborative approach and I look forward to working with you all in the next step of the journey in Northumberland.



Foreword by Jane Walker, Northumberland Virtual School Headteacher

It has been less than 2 years since our relational journey started with the launch of *Northumberland Schools CARE* and your response to that as professionals working with children has been impressive. Joint working between the Virtual School, Be You, Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour Support Service, Educational Psychology, schools and social workers is helping to achieve the cultural change that is needed to embed relational practice that is attachment aware and trauma informed throughout Northumberland.

At the Relationships Matter conference I asked you to stand in our children's shoes to get a better understanding of what life might be like if you experience, or might experience, disadvantage. This guide is the outcome of what you learned from doing that, bringing together what we know works, practical advice and evidence-based research to support you as your relational journey progresses.

The guide encourages you to be enquiring about behaviour and to consider the underlying reasons that might create challenges in education for individual children. We want all of our children to feel safe, secure and that they belong so that they can engage, learn and do their best at school. Please think also about those children who need help at school and help at home, who have or have had a social worker. We know that they under-achieve in comparison to all other children at every stage in their education, and face challenges in the relationships and environment around them that are mostly out of their control. This guide is inspired by them and can make a difference to them.

I recently heard a care experienced adult summarise his experiences at school, saying *no adults thought I had potential before I started showing potential*. Relational practice will help you to see the potential in all children and that's why relationships will always matter.



Introduction

Context

There is great complexity across the national landscape. In Northumberland our partnerships of schools, families and communities come with incredible strengths as well as varying challenges.

As of September 2024:

- 41% of our pupils are finding attending school difficult,
- 3943 young people in Northumberland have had contact with a social worker over the past 6 years,
- "persistent disruptions" in lessons are leading to exclusion,
- there is a rising number of young people accessing our mental health services and greater identification of SEND.

Our children and young people and the adults supporting them are facing increasing complexity.

Research highlights that a sense of belonging is a key factor in young peoples' engagement in school. Embedding a relational approach can enhance a sense of belonging and ensure all partners feel seen, valued and acknowledged.



Our Vision

Northumberland is a land of great opportunities where we want everybody to thrive and achieve their best. We want to see relational practice embedded in the heart of all our schools ensuring we live our values: people first, respect, excellence and resilience.



Who Are C.A.R.E Approaches For?

In Northumberland we recognise that many children, young people and adults will have life events and experiences that put them at risk of disadvantage in the short term or the longer term. As part of this we acknowledge some people are impacted through adverse childhood experiences. The term 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACEs) can be used to describe a wide range of stressful or traumatic events that happen during childhood.

Relational approaches are good for everyone: adults, children and young people. However, there are some groups for whom they are even more essential. It is important to highlight the unique challenges of our most vulnerable groups.

As you are reading this guidance, please keep in mind our Cared for Children, Previously Cared for Children, Children with a Social Worker and Children living in Kinship Care. We know that these groups of children need and benefit from relational approaches even more than others. They are often starting life from a point of disadvantage and so steps need to be taken at the whole school and individual level to ensure that they experience success and thrive.

We know that if we get this right, for all happy, healthy and fulfilling lives are achievable.



Overview of Guidance

The structure for this guide is based on the Education Endowment Foundation's "School's Guide to Implementation."

The guidance uses a familiar implementation process that they have named...

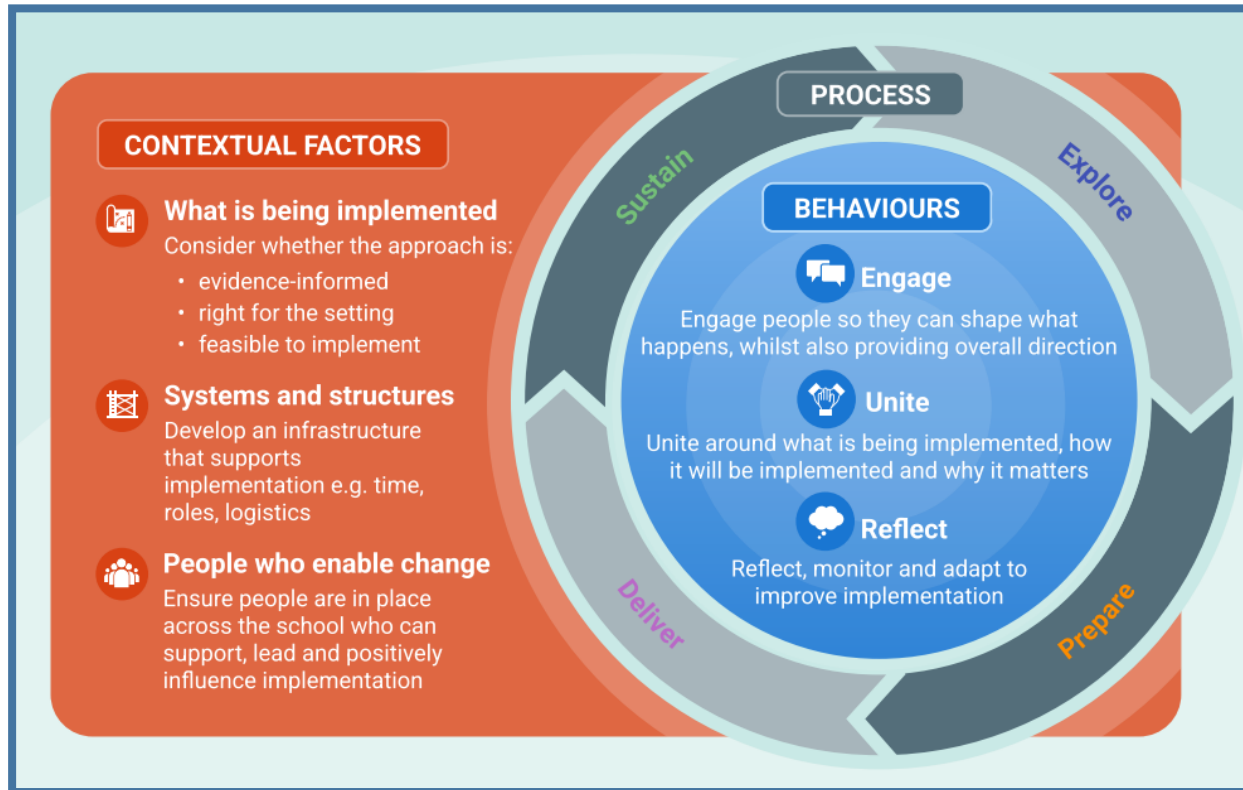
- Explore
- Prepare
- Deliver
- Sustain

You can read the full guidance report

[HERE](#)



Overview of Guidance



This guide is split into four areas:



In each section you will find tips, information and resources to support you in developing the relational approach in your setting.

What is the Relational Approach?

A Relational Approach Should:

- Be explicitly linked to your schools' vision, culture and ethos.
- Be modelled, taught and supported by all staff.
- Involve listening with intent.
- Be purposeful in creating safe environments for everyone.
- Be rooted in consistency with clear boundaries and expectations.
- Be rights respecting.
- Promote inclusion by being proactive in supporting need.
- Recognise behaviour as communication.

~”
“Nurture isn't a room, restorative isn't just a set of questions, kindness isn't weakness, and exclusion isn't a behaviour strategy”

Paul Dix

”~



What is the Relational Approach?



The table to the right demonstrates some key differences between traditional behaviour management and the relational approach.

A common misconception of the relational approach is that there are no rules or consequences. As you can see from the table, this isn't the case.

When we are relational we are supporting everyone to meet expectations.



Behavioural Approach	Relational Approach
Rules should be enforced without exception	Rules should try and meet everyone's needs
Behaviour is something to control	Behaviour is something to listen to and be curious about
Consequences are sanctions and punishments	Natural consequences and problem solving
Inappropriate behaviour is seen as wrong-doing, deliberate, learned	Inappropriate behaviour is a sign of either an unmet need, difficulty coping, or lack of knowledge. We can view these as teaching moments.
Policy effectiveness is measured by compliance	Policy effectiveness is measured by well-being



Explore – Things to Consider



Whether your school is well along the way on its relational journey or whether you are making your first steps, start here.

This section is the first building block.

- Have you collated contextual data about your school and locality that illustrates and supports your views on pupil need?
- Using your data do you have a clear rationale and vision that supports the need to apply this approach in your school?
- What theory or research have you identified that supports the implementation of this approach?
- What is needed for you to implement and embed this approach?
- What barriers might prevent the successful implementation of this approach and how might you overcome them?



Explore- Theory & Research



“Awareness of sanctions and consequences isn't strongly linked to improved attendance. Understanding the importance of school and relationships with peers and teachers were more strongly associated with attendance”
(ImpactED Evaluation Attendance Record Report, 2024)

“Pupils who feel they belong at school are more likely to have successful school experiences and increased levels of motivation.” (ImpactED Evaluation Attendance Record Report, 2024)

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that relational practice has a positive impact on education settings, including:

- Improved academic progress, reduced staff absenteeism and reduced pupil restraints (Rose et al., 2015)
- Increased pupil wellbeing, increased support from staff, fewer sanctions for vulnerable pupils, improved impact on learning and attainment, and improved staff wellbeing (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2019)
- Reported improvements in staff confidence and improved engagement, attendance, learning and attainment of vulnerable children (Timpson, 2022a).
- A calmer environment and stronger relationships for children in addition to more supportive colleague relationships (Timpson, 2022b)

For further reading visit our padlet [Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E \(padlet.com\)](https://www.padlet.com/northumberland-schools-care)



Explore-checklists, audits and self-evaluation



A good place to start before you make any changes is with a robust system of self-evaluation. Most schools will already have lots of relational practice in place, possibly without even realising or labelling as such. This isn't about throwing the baby out with the bath water. It's about building on the strengths you already have as a school.

Below you will find links to some useful self-evaluation tools with a brief explanation so you can choose the most relevant tool to support your individual school's development.

You can find all of the self evaluation tools on our [Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E. padlet](#)



Explore-checklists, audits and self-evaluation



Mental Health Settings Audit- Use this audit to look at mental health and wellbeing provision across your school. This audit will help you identify areas for development across the eight principles of a whole-school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing. All of our schools participating in our Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E. project are asked to complete this.

Attuned Interactions Profile- A really supportive framework to use with staff. This is a strengths-based approach whereby positive elements of attuned interactions are identified and shared with staff to build upon positive interactions. This could be used as part of a lesson observation or be used more as a framework for coaching conversations.

Classroom Observation Profile- A framework to support thinking around nurture at a class level. This could be used as an observation tool to support lesson observations, a self-reflective tool for individual practitioners to consider their own practice or it could be used by identifying certain principles to focus on during a learning walk.

Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach- A document to support action planning around the six principles of nurture. These are understanding that children's learning is developmental, that environments can offer a safe base, nurture is important for wellbeing and self-esteem, language is a vital means of communication and transitions are important in children's lives.

Relational Approach Environmental Learning Walk Framework- Developed by our Assistant Educational Psychologists, this framework can be used to support environmental change within your school.

School Environment Checklist- Linked with the six principles of nurture, a framework to review your school environment.

Parent & Carer Questionnaire- A set of questions to capture parent and carer views.

Focus Group Questions (for use with staff, pupils, parents)- A set of questions to use in focus groups. Delivered by our Northumberland Schools CARE project.

Staff Questionnaire, Understanding and Applying Nurture Principles- A set of questions to capture staff views.



Prepare- Things to Consider



In this next section you will explore how to bring everyone along with you on your relational journey.

- Have you conducted implementation planning collaboratively, using all the information you have collected to support decisions for change?
- How might you support all staff to understand why the change is taking place and empower them to join you on your relational journey?
- How have you selected which strategies you will develop to support this approach?
- How will you communicate what it entails and how it will be implemented? Have you got mechanisms in place to ensure key messages are shared with all stakeholders?
- Have you identified and empowered a range of people across school who can support the changes?
- Have you considered how you might provide additional support for any staff who may need support in adopting this approach?
- What systems and structures are already in place to support this approach? Is there anything you might need to adapt or introduce?



Prepare- Culture



Culture Eats Strategy For Breakfast

First things first. No matter how good your strategic plan is, if you haven't first established a safe and supportive culture whereby change is nurtured by the very people executing it, you will find it incredibly difficult to embed and maintain new developments effectively in your school.

This following section is going to illustrate ways in which you can bring pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors along with you on your relational journey. All the while creating and establishing a culture and a strategy that work hand in hand.



Prepare- The Stages of Change



Remember: When you are planning change- You need to be the tortoise and not the hare. Plan for small steps of change, wait until each is embedded before moving to the next.



The very fact that you are reading this guide suggests that you have already decided that change needs to happen in your school.

However, not everyone in your school community might be at the same point as you. Before you start making any changes it might be useful to consider at what point your staff are at and how you can take them along on this relational journey with you.

The key here is:

Collaboration over confrontation



Prepare- The Stages of Change



Remember: When you are planning change- You need to be the tortoise and not the hare. Plan for small steps of change, wait until each is embedded before moving to the next.



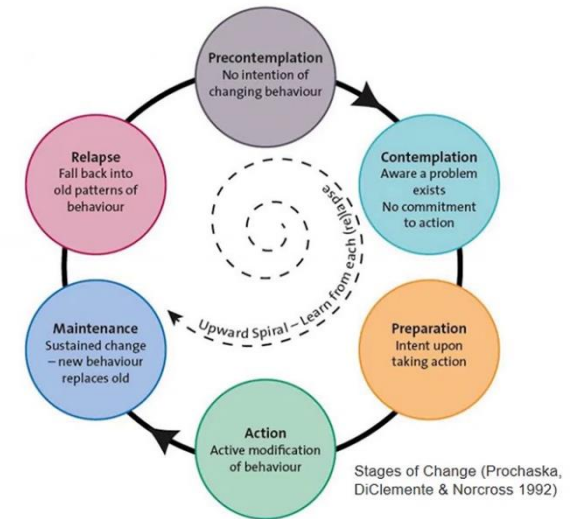
The stages of change diagram is useful to refer to when developing your strategy. You may wish to consider individuals, groups and the whole school in relation to this.

Which staff will readily spring into action to support with innovation?
Who might need more time and support to come onboard?

To support staff through the stages think about...

- How might you raise awareness of the relational approach?
- How will you make explicit the benefits of this approach on staff as well as pupils?
- Are there any particularly safe and supportive relationships between staff that could support the desired change?
- How might the desired changes or behaviours be recognised and rewarded?

Stages of Change



Prepare- Communicating Change



Remember: When you are planning change- You need to be the tortoise and not the hare. Plan for small steps of change, wait until each is embedded before moving to the next.



Change can feel uncomfortable, even scary sometimes. Safety can often be found in familiarity. As school leaders, when we are leading change, communication is key! With clarity and transparency around the change we want to bring about we can include everyone in the journey.

Why? By this point you will already have a wealth of evidence to illustrate the drivers for change in your school. By communicating the “why” clearly with all involved you are not only providing some concrete evidence to support your decisions for change but bringing everyone together at the very beginning. Ensuring that everyone sees the need for change.

What? This needs to be linked explicitly with the “why.” What is it exactly that is going to change? Everyone needs to know and understand what to expect as well as what is expected of them. All children and young people, staff, parents and carers and governors need to be clear about the expectations, their roles and responsibilities.

How? This is how we are going to do it. This needs to be clearly communicated and consistently modelled by all senior leaders in school. The how needs to be broken down into small, attainable and measurable steps. Remember to be the tortoise and not the hare! Don’t move onto the next change or step until you are sure the first is properly embedded in practice.

When? Timelines and check-in points can be really helpful in ensuring that key elements, practices and procedures become embedded in your school. It further clarifies expectations and includes transparency around the “what next.”



Prepare- Change Management

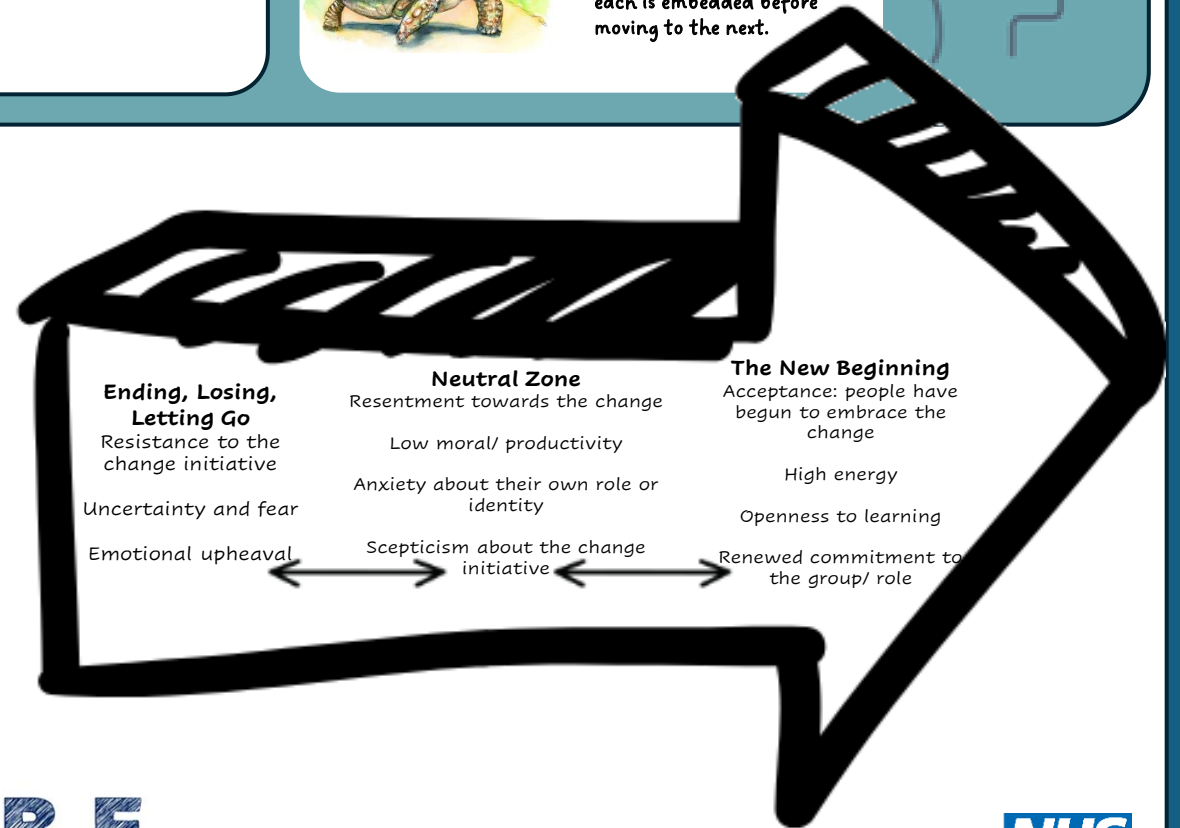


Remember: When you are planning change- You need to be the tortoise and not the hare. Plan for small steps of change, wait until each is embedded before moving to the next.



Bridges Transitions Model

Moving from a behavioural to relational approach – things to consider in making a change to policy and practice.
In bringing about any change it is important to understand the impact for those involved. A change is not just about embracing a new approach / way of working / system but letting go of what was there previously – and the familiarity and security with that.
There is a subtle difference between “change” and “transition.” We might think of change as something happening to us. Transition is internalised. It’s what’s happening in our minds as we experience change.
The bridges model suggests that people will go through each of the stages at different rates, with people who feel more comfortable with the change, moving ahead more quickly.



Prepare- Change Management



Remember: When you are planning change- You need to be the tortoise and not the hare. Plan for small steps of change, wait until each is embedded before moving to the next.



Innovation - Rogers (2003) Characteristics of Innovation Introducing Relational Approaches



Relative Advantage: The degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes.	What advantages will staff see to using the relational approach? How will it impact on colleague, pupil and family relationships?
Compatibility: The degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters.	How well do relational approaches fit with your school values/ mission statement?
Complexity: The degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use.	Is it possible to implement and review in a trial?
Trialability: The degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis.	How easily is the relational approach understood by staff and students?
Observability: The degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others.	How observable is relational practice? What will look, hear, feel different that others will notice?



Prepare- Coproduction



Co-production is working together, being involved with or directly influencing the production of a project, policy, procedure or materials.

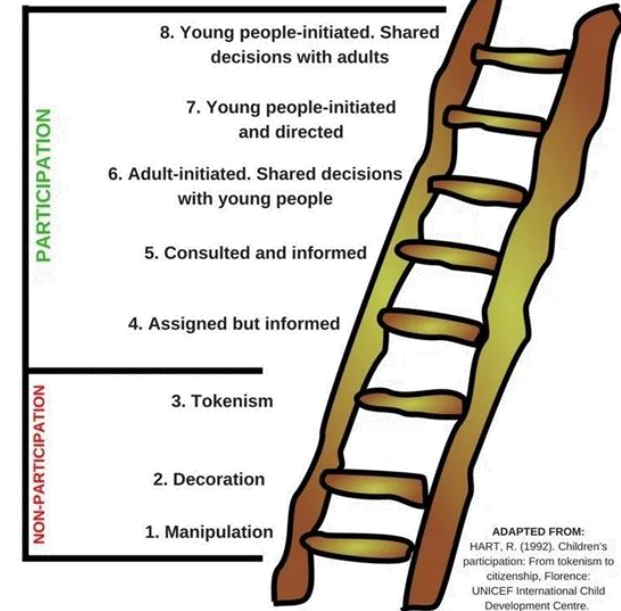
The ladder of coproduction illustrates differing levels of agency as you move up the rungs. When planning for implementation it is useful to think about which elements could be coproduced, by who and how. Are there elements where different stakeholders might be given more decision-making power? How might this impact on buy-in or perception?

~”

“Meaningful co-production can increase the application, worth, usability and impact of clinical research and practice, to develop and improve services and outcomes for young people and families.” (British Psychological Society, October 2023)

”~

[Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation \(mefirst.org.uk\)](https://mefirst.org.uk)



ADAPTED FROM:
HART, R. (1992). Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.



Prepare- Coproduction



Coproduction with young people- a quick reference guide- gives top tips and considerations for planning and facilitating coproduction with children, young people and families.



Deliver- Things to Consider

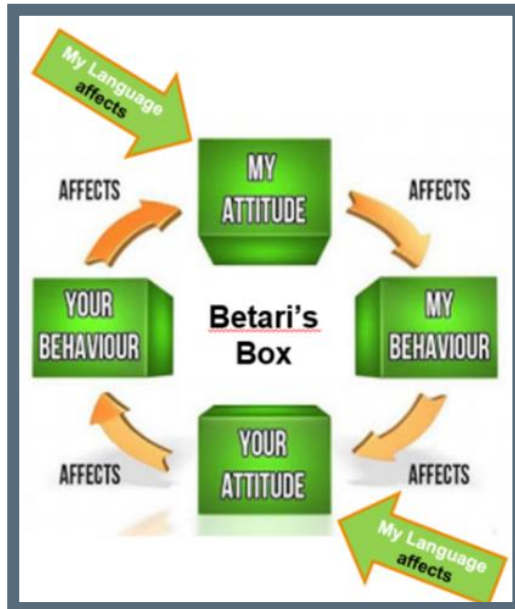


This next section is all about putting your relational plan into action! It's a process of small steps and continual evaluation.

- Is the delivery approach treated as a process of ongoing learning and improvement?
- How do you ensure consistency in approach from all staff?
- What systems are in place to monitor implementation, identify barriers and enablers, and make adaptations?
- Is need considered through a supportive lens? How is behaviour "taught not caught?"
- How are emerging needs and issues addressed through teaching and learning?
- How do you check that all staff feel included and supported in this process?
- Are professional development opportunities reinforced by follow up support such as feedback, prompts, reminders, coaching etc?
- How are you ensuring that our most vulnerable groups of children are having their needs met through the approach?



Deliver- Language & Communication



The way that we think and talk about behaviour can influence the way we respond to it.

If we can reframe how we view behaviour, then instead of responding from a place of judgement, we respond with curiosity and empathy.

By using words and actions that foster connections, sooth emotions, build trust and support growth, the relationship remains intact.

The model to the left illustrates how this is all interrelated.



Deliver- Language & Communication



Welcome

"I'm so happy to see you again."
"I've really missed you."
"I can't wait to get to know you."
"Here's a job you can help me with."

Reassure

"School is a safe place."
"Some things may look different, but let me tell you what has stayed the same."
"I'm ready to help when you need me."

Hold in Mind

"I remember how you really like."
"When I saw that on tv it made me think of you."
"I'll be back to check in with you after..."

Model

"I like how you are looking carefully and taking your time."
"you're staying calm and having another go."
"you asked for help just like we practiced."

Encourage

"You're getting better and better at..."
"Now that we can do this, I wonder if we could try..."

Repair

"I still like you. that hasn't changed."
"I'm sorry, I didn't realise what happened."
"Things went wrong but we got through it together."

wonder

"I've noticed how you..."
"I think you're telling me that."
"I want to check that I know what's going."

Our Choice of Words Matter

Whether we are making the first steps in developing relationships, supporting someone through a difficult moment or reconnecting, our choice of words and the way we relay them is really important.

The image to the left illustrates 8 aspects of language we may wish to consider. What might this young person need in this moment?



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Deliver – Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Groups

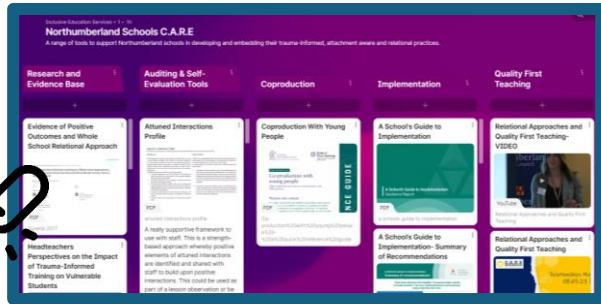


Whilst whole school relational approaches will benefit all children, our most vulnerable groups will need something more bespoke. They will need:

- Regular check-ins with a trusted adult.
 - Staff to consistently use approaches such as PACE and Emotion Coaching.
 - Safe spaces to go to when feeling overwhelmed.
 - Access to social and emotional interventions.
 - Individual support plans to pull everything together.
- They may need to be placed on the SEN register for SEMH needs.



Deliver- Resources to support

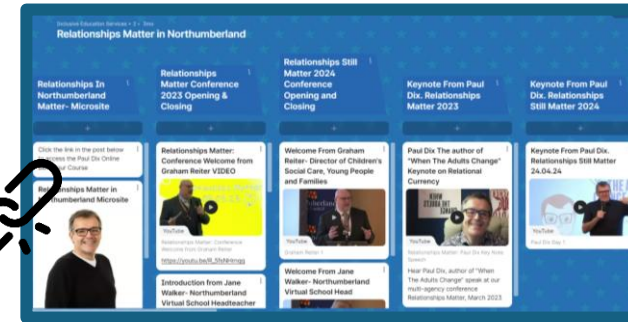


Northumberland Schools CARE

A padlet of resources to support the implementation of the relational approach in your school.

This padlet includes...

- Research
- Auditing and self-evaluation tools
- Guidance to write your relational policy.



Relationships Matter in Northumberland Conference Padlet

All of the presentations from both Relationships Matter and Relationships Still Matter conferences.




Content includes...

- 2 keynotes from Paul Dix, author of "When the Adults Change."
 - Relational Practice
 - Trauma-informed practice
- The impact of trauma on functioning



Deliver- Policy & Practice



Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E. Relational Policy Guidance

This guidance has been written to support you in developing a Trauma Informed, Attachment Aware, Relational Policy.

Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E. Guide & associated resources are a good starting point to help you in answering the following questions and developing your policy.

Links to above resources:

1. Rationale

- What & Why?
 - What is the purpose of this policy?
 - How has it been developed? e.g. consultation with pupils, parents/carers, staff, all stakeholders.
 - Who is it for? E.g. this policy is for all staff, pupils...
 - Any underpinning research / self-evaluation processes should be referenced in this section.

2. School Vision/ Values/ Ethos / Aims.

- What are your core values?
 - encompass this in a short paragraph
 - Think about... Culture, Ethos & Environment, Curriculum & Teaching, Community Engagement.
- How are these values embedded and promoted? E.g. curriculum, relationships, community links etc.
- Explain how the effective implementation of your policy creates a positive behaviour culture in which pupils are encouraged to reflect the values of the school.

3. Legislation and Statutory Guidance

- Links to other school policies
 - Safeguarding
 - Anti Bullying / Cyberbullying etc
 - Mental Health
 - SEND
 - Physical Intervention Policy (if separate)
 - Induction Policy / Code of conduct – staff / pupil
 - Suspension, Exclusion Policy
 - Complaints Policy
- Links to Legislation & Statutory Guidance
 - DfE KSCE
 - DfE Mental Health & Beh in schools
 - DfE searching, screening and confiscation – advice for schools
 - DfE Behaviour in schools – advice for headteachers and school staff

This guidance has been developed to support you in reviewing and adapting your behaviour or relational policy.



Sustain- Things to Consider



In this section you will reflect back on everything you have achieved and plan to keep momentum moving.

- As new priorities emerge, is sufficient resource and support in place to protect and maintain the implementation effort?
- Do leaders continue to acknowledge and support good relational practice?
- Are a range of staff involved so that we aren't over-relying on individuals?
- Are there systems in place that support continuous evaluation, remembering to include the voice of all stakeholders?
- How are plans secured for continuous development?
- What role do your governing body play? How might they add rigour to your self-evaluation?
- How are staff supported with the emotional element of this work?



Sustain- Keeping Momentum



— ”

SCHOOLS REGULARLY FEEL UNDER PRESSURE TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE AND DELIVER RESULTS QUICKLY. WHILE RAPID CHANGE IS SOMETIMES NECESSARY (FOR EXAMPLE, RESPONDING TO A PANDEMIC), A CULTURE OF SHORT-TERMISM CAN RESULT IN PROJECTS WITHERING OR BECOMING FAR REMOVED FROM THEIR ORIGINAL INTENTION.

THERE CAN SOMETIMES BE AN INITIAL DIP IN OUTCOMES DURING IMPLEMENTATION AS EXISTING PRACTICES ARE STOPPED AND NEW PRACTICES TAKE TIME TO EMBED. IMPLEMENTATION DIPS CAN ALSO OCCUR LATER AS MOMENTUM FADES AND COMPETING PRIORITIES EMERGE. IN BOTH CASES, THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT SCHOOLS NEED TO MAINTAIN THE IMPLEMENTATION EFFORT AND KEEP SUPPORTING AND MONITORING THE CHANGES.

” —



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Sustain- The Stages of Change



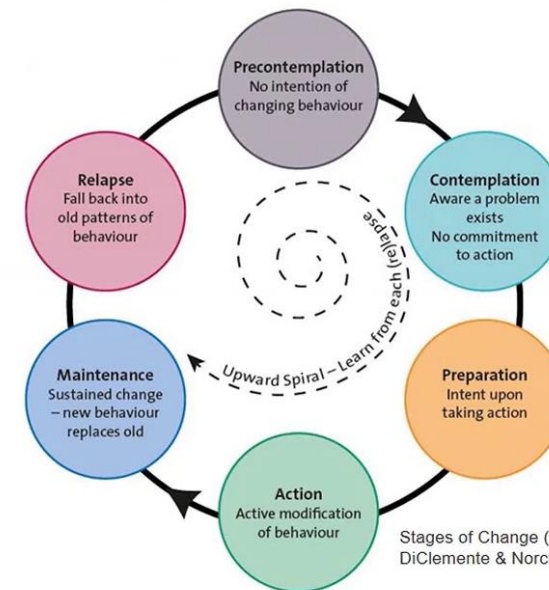
You may find it useful to revisit and reflect on the stages of change at this point.

Where are staff now?

Have any changed position?

How might you sustain their position and begin to move forward?

Stages of Change



Stages of Change (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross 1992)



Sustain- Revisit and Review



Reflect back on your journey so far.

Reviewing your initial audits and self-evaluation will keep that momentum going!

Look how far you've come!

What might need to be revisited? Tweaked?
Scrapped even?
Don't be afraid to adapt!

Explore-Checklists, audits and self-evaluation



Mental Health Settings Audit- Use this audit to look at mental health and wellbeing provision across your school. This audit will help you identify areas for development across the eight principles of a whole-school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing. All of our schools participating in our Northumberland Schools C.A.R.E. project are asked to complete this.

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School Environment Checklist- linked with the six principles of nurture, a framework to review your school environment.

Parent & Caree Questionnaire- A set of questions to capture parent and caree views.

Staff Questionnaire, Understanding and Applying Nurture Principles- A set of questions to capture staff views.

Focus Group Questions (for use with staff, pupils, parents)- A set of questions to use in focus groups. Delivered by our Northumberland Schools CARE project.



Sustain-Staff Development



How will you continue to support staff development?

How might staff voice support this process?



How will you ensure that new staff are supported to adopt this approach through your induction procedures?

Sustain-Working With Families



How will you continue to build links between school and families?

How will you encourage parents and carers to share and support your vision?

How might you build parent and carer efficacy so that they feel like partners in this?

What mechanisms do you have to support effective communication with parents & carers?

How might strategies be shared?



