

Relationships Policy

Helping children to manage their responses to challenging situations



Introduction

Vanessa nursery school works with a diverse group of children. Often the nursery is the first experience they have of being in a large space and around large numbers of children and needing to communicate, negotiate and share with others. Many children need the help of respectful, caring and sometimes firm adults to learn how to behave appropriately in a group and manage challenging and unfamiliar situations.

We protect the unique nature of each child; the child's individual spirit and drive to learn and develop must be cherished.

In the nursery the children have considerable scope to make choices and move around from area to area, from inside to outside. There are not many times the nursery needs to say "no" to a child, but we must be sure that when we say "no" we understand why and we really mean it.

Staff

Positive strategies; things we need to think about

1. Emotional security: Are there adults in the nursery who provide consistent care and attention to the child, who the child seeks out on arrival and goes to when upset? Are the adults in the nursery supported well so they are able to 'hold' children and help them to regulate their emotions? (Hold- as in keep them in mind, hold their emotions not hold a child physically)
2. The Curriculum. Are there first-hand play experiences that interest the child? Is the level of challenge correct? Do the adults join in with the play rather than 'hijack' children's plans and ideas?
3. A calm atmosphere. Are transitions managed for the child – from the session, into tidying up time; from group time to lunchtime? Does the child need extra help at these times? Have we reviewed our 'timetable' of events to make sure they are appropriate for the child and not just for the adults to manage the day?
4. The child's age and stage of development. Is the child able to share equipment, or does the child need protected time to play without the pressure and competition of other children? Do they need to 'share', if they are using the only red car do they really need to give it up while they are deeply involved in their play? Are there enough resources to enable collaborative play?
5. Additional Needs/SEND. Does the child have any additional needs that might impact on their ability to build relationships with others? Does the child's individual needs make it difficult for them to empathise with others?
6. Communication & Language Are there a variety of ways for children to communicate their needs and wants, photographs, symbols, objects of reference? Are all children taught augmentative communication methods so they can understand each other?

Some children need help with shy and withdrawn behaviour. Please remember to raise issues like this in the Child of Concern meetings. (If you are not in nursery during Child of Concern meetings, please record your concern or speak to the child's key person so they can share with the rest of the team, that way children will be supported by all staff).

Useful strategies to use when you are finding a child's behaviour challenging

- Get down to the child's level where possible. Show concern for the child. Make eye contact where possible. If eye contact not possible, then ensure you are speaking so that the child can hear you.
- Keep what you say focussed and to-the-point; use short sentences with Makaton signs if appropriate, speak calmly and don't raise your voice.
- Does the child know what the expectations of the setting are? State positively what you want or need. E.g. "I need you to move around safely indoors." – "I need you to come down from there it's dangerous." Try to say what you positively need, wherever possible, rather than what you do not want them to do.
- Be firm and clear but avoid a direct power-struggle. For example: "I can wait one minute for you to give that to me" will give the child some time and space to adjust to what you are saying. If the child does not respond saying: "I need to hold your hand and bring you away." Has a positive feel and lets the child know you want to be with them.
- Do not keep talking or repeating. For example: "I need you to come away now. I can wait one minute. But then I will have to hold your hand and bring you away." Said at the same time this is too much language for a child to understand and is not effective in explaining what you want them to do.

Behaviour which is dangerous or causing harm

It is important that we clearly signal the unacceptability of dangerous behaviour and behaviour that harms others.

If a child is in immediate danger, you may need to raise your voice to be heard. This should be very exceptional and it is important to be clear, not aggressive when you do this. You may need to call to another adult for help, this is ok.

Some strategies for dealing with dangerous and harmful behaviour

Example 1: If a child is climbing somewhere that is dangerous

You could say; "I need you to come down now, you could hurt yourself."

If there is no response, you could follow through with:

"If you don't come down now your play will be finished for 1 minute." (Only to be used if the behaviour is dangerous)

It is important that this is followed through and you call for help if necessary. To follow through this strategy, you might sit quietly with the child, or hold the child's hand and keep the child with you.

Example 2: If a child is behaving in a way that might or has hurt another child

You could call to the child by name and point out gently that their actions might hurt someone, you could then help the child to move to a safer space and join their play to model a safer way to do things

Example 3: If another child has been hurt

You should quickly and calmly join both children and offer comfort to anyone who is upset, you then need to talk calmly to both children about the action, you could say “ I don’t like it when children are hurt can you tell me what happened?” as the children are aged 5 and under it is unlikely they will be able to explain why they have hurt or been hurt but may be able to describe the action. You can then follow up with a short discussion about the action, for example

“The ball hit her on the head and hurt her, can you help me to see if she is ok?” helping one child to care for another will encourage empathy rather than trying to force a discussion about why an event happened.

You can then follow up with “Can you think of a different place to throw the ball? Do you think it needs to be where there is a bit more space so the ball doesn’t hit anyone else?”

If one child has hit, bitten or kicked another child you will need to say with a firm voice “Stop it I don’t like it when (child’s name) is being hurt” you should join the children to help them calm- children this age are often unable to self regulate when angry or upset. A calm adult sitting or standing closely can help children to feel calmer more quickly. You may need to call for help if one of the children needs first aid as you will need to remain with the child who has hurt the other. You should support this child to help the other by perhaps getting an ice pack or bringing them a drink of water.

Most children under 5 are not able to articulate their emotions or why they may have hurt someone else, it is helpful for them if you can model the language they need for example: “I can see you are upset/angry/sad about something, can I help to make it better?” You will need to reiterate to the child that it is not OK to hurt another.

Before the child returns to play, ensure that the boundaries are clear. For example: reminding them of the ‘class’ rules or saying “Are you ready to play now? Remember: in nursery we need to listen to the grownups.” Settle the child into an activity before leaving her or him.

It is good to remember that sometimes both children have contributed to the problem. You may want to try an approach such as: “Is there a problem here?” “What’s the matter?” You may be able to model good ways to manage a conflict, e.g. “You look very sad about that, but it’s not your turn. You need to say, “Can I have a turn next?”

“Time out” is not used unless in exceptional circumstances and with a pre-written agreement with parents.

Please remember that in rare cases where restraint is used, it must be recorded and the parent must be informed.

Repeated patterns of behaviour

If a child is consistently repeating the same difficult behaviour or targeting a particular child, then you must bring the issue to the “Child of Concern meetings” as soon as possible so the whole team can work together to support all children:

Sharing with other staff will

1. Raise awareness/vigilance.
2. Provide an opportunity to look at “triggers” (e.g. is it always at tidying up time?) and then plan to prevent the difficult behaviour occurring (e.g. giving child positive attention at that time.)
3. Enables time to evaluate the curriculum/expectations on the child and make adjustments.
4. Think about meeting with the parents, in order to gain an understanding of the child’s behaviour and develop agreed joint strategies to manage the difficulties

Involving parents

Parents should be involved as partners, not people to be blamed. They should not receive unprepared feedback on their child’s behaviour in nursery. Where a child’s behaviour is difficult, the joint-work of the parent/s and nursery is critical.

- Think first – exactly what will you say? Talk it over first before meeting the parent, if possible.
- Meet the parent in a confidential space.
- Explain the difficulty in nursery and ask if the parent has any particular understanding. Parents are experts on their own children.
- Take a problem-solving approach: we need to work together to help your child with this... Ask for the parent’s support – can the parent take time to talk to the child about the difficulty? Can we all use the same? Strategies?
- Arrange to review progress a week later.
- Feed back information to the staff team

When a child’s behaviour continues to cause concern, you will need to discuss next steps with the SENCO or Head Teacher.

It is important that all staff Model the behaviour, which we aim to promote

- Treat each other and the children with respect and kindness.
- Use sensitive methods of control to achieve order.
- Focus on the positive, remembering that a child may only have been told what not to do.
- Acknowledge children’s feelings – “I can see you are very angry about that” ... “You look really sad.” Do not negate children’s feelings by saying – “don’t be sad” ... “it will be alright” ... “don’t cry”, children have a right to their feelings.
- Support each other!
Practically e.g. enabling a colleague to have a few minutes time away if she or he is becoming stressed by a difficult behaviour
Emotionally e.g. recognising that a colleague may be upset or angry after an incident has occurred and enabling a colleague to recognise this and talk about it rather than “take those feelings out” later on a child, family or member of staff
Professionally e.g. sharing approaches or strategies which you have found effective, reminding each other when necessary about our policy, challenging each other when it seems that our ethos or policy is being breached

Relationship plans

Challenging behaviour in children is usually the result of difficulties with relationships, both with their peers and with adults. It is important to remember that children are not "NAUGHTY." Children sometimes need our help to enable them to make friends, manage new and difficult situations and develop strategies to interact with others positively.

Children with persistent difficulty managing their behaviour with others should have a relationship plan – this plan will tell us (the adults) how we can help the child interact with others and what consequences there are to specified actions. For a plan to work effectively we must all be involved – the plan will be written by the SENCO, Key person, and parents. Children often respond better to consistency. If a child has a relationship plan, make sure you read it and follow the strategies.

Example relationships plan

Plan for Susan

Things Susan enjoys:

Susan likes to immerse herself in sensory experiences such as corn flour, paint mixing, sand and water and 'gloop'; she is very creative and also enjoys roleplay, particularly with the dolls and buggies. Susan responds to adult interaction, she manages the day better when greeted by her key person on arrival, spending some time with her before settling into an activity of her choice. Some mornings Susan needs help to decide what to do.

Things she finds difficult:

Susan finds it difficult to share resources at an activity; she cannot always use her words to express what she wants and can hit out at someone taking something from near by Susan finds it difficult to verbalise her feelings, particularly if she is upset or angry.

How we can help Susan:

Her key person will greet her in the mornings; if she is unavailable her co-key person will do this. Mum will bring her to her key person after putting up her name. Susan will be settled into an activity of her choosing – if she is struggling to choose, she will be shown some symbol cards of favourite things.

When Susan is shouting or getting upset:

The adult should offer Susan some help to negotiate with her peer – please try not to do it for her. Use sentences like; "Is there a problem, can I help you Susan?" "Susan, we don't shout in nursery, do you need some help to sort this out?" Then offer her the strategies or words to help her.

If Susan hits another child:

The adult needs to say "Stop, I don't like it" Firmly but without shouting "We don't hit other children" Susan only hits when she is really upset, so it is sensible to tell her that she needs to come with you until she calms down, then sit with her for a few minutes until she is ready to talk. (ask another adult to look after the hurt child or do that first)
Encourage Susan to talk about what happened and to return to the child she has hurt. To see if they are ok. Let her help them to feel better, this helps her to understand

Please make sure you record incidents in Susan's book – if possible try to record what happened before and how she responded after the incident this will help us to get a more detailed picture.