POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

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Version 2 Sep 24	Policy structure and formatting overhaul. Expanded ethos and strengthened commitment to neuro-affirming practice
Version 3 Sep 25	New Sections: Legal And Guidance Framework and Roles and Responsibilities. Improved Neurodiversity explanation. Use of MyConcern for recording behavioural and safeguarding concerns now clearly stated with the retirement of paper forms. Addition of APPENDIX 2. DEALING WITH PROHIBITIVE ITEMS & APPENDIX 3 - EXCLUSION POLICY
Version 4 Sep 26	Updated to reflect current legislation and modernise language. Addition of the PACE approach. Changed Appendix 3 to TEMPORARY REMOVAL FROM SESSIONS, DISENGAGEMENT AND ENDING PLACEMENTS

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1.1. INTRODUCTION

Overworld AMP Limited ("the Provision") is an independent alternative provision supporting young people with SEND, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, and other barriers to education. Many of the young people we support have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The Provision champions neurodiversity and is committed to nurturing each young person's strengths through mutual respect, trust and shared interests.

Many of the young people the Provision supports have experienced barriers to education, including trauma associated with previous educational experiences. The Provision's approach is therefore grounded in understanding, flexibility, emotional safety and reasonable adjustments, enabling every young person to participate safely and meaningfully.

We recognise that many neurodivergent young people experience differences in communication, sensory processing and emotional regulation. Our learning environments are designed to promote regulation, wellbeing and successful participation.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, contractors and visitors working with young people on behalf of the Provision at Tilford House, Redlands Lodge, online and during educational visits or community activities.

It sets out the Provision's approach to promoting positive interactions, supporting emotional regulation, responding to distressed behaviour and ensuring that behaviour is managed in a way that is trauma-informed, neuro-affirming, proportionate and consistent with safeguarding responsibilities.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

The Provision seeks to understand the reasons behind behaviour rather than simply responding to its presentation. Staff are encouraged to explore their underlying beliefs and question how those influence their practice. This allows the Provision to provide a neuro-affirming, trauma-informed environment that promotes emotional safety, trust, autonomy and positive relationships.

Young people are not expected to conform to neuro-normative standards of communication, interaction or emotional expression. Instead, staff work collaboratively with young people to support co-regulation, develop self-regulation over time and enable meaningful participation in learning and daily life.

The Provision does not use compliance-based behaviour management approaches, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). Rewards, praise and consequences are used thoughtfully and only where they are meaningful, respectful and appropriate to the individual, recognising that intrinsic motivation and positive relationships provide the strongest foundation for lasting development.

Staff adopt evidence-informed relational approaches, including the PACE model (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and the PANDA approach developed by the PDA Society, to reduce anxiety, strengthen relationships and support emotional regulation through collaboration, flexibility and reasonable adjustments.

All behaviour-related incidents, emotional regulation needs and safeguarding concerns are recorded on MyConcern, the Provision's secure recording system, and are reviewed to inform person-centred-plans (PCPs), safeguarding and continuous improvement.

4. LEGAL AND GUIDANCE FRAMEWORK

The policy is underpinned by the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Equality Act 2010
- Care Act 2014
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015)
- The Human Rights Act 1998

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE, 2026)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)

This policy is designed to work in conjunction with all the Provision's policies in particular *Safeguarding* and *Young Person Protection*, *Online Safety*, *Equality, Diversion and Inclusion* and *Tackling Bullying*.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

At The Provision, all staff, volunteers, and partners share responsibility for modelling and supporting positive interactions in line with our neuro-affirming, trauma-informed values.

5.1 The CEO:

- Has overall responsibility for the welfare, safety and wellbeing of young people attending the Provision.

5.2 Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

- Ensures this policy is implemented, monitored and reviewed.
- Provides training and reflective supervision to ensure consistent, ethical practice.
- Reviews incident data and uses insights to shape practice and reduce restrictive or reactive responses.
- Works with their team and external professionals, where necessary to monitor and adjust support plans.

5.3 Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Deputy DSLs

- Monitors all behaviour-related concerns and safeguarding indicators logged via MyConcern.
- Leads reviews of patterns, risks and regulation needs, contributing to planning for individual and Provisional safety.
- Ensures behaviour incidents with a safeguarding aspect are managed in line with the Provision's policies and procedures.

5.4 All Staff and Volunteers

- Foster positive, collaborative relationships with young people.
- Avoid compliance-based strategies and focus on empathy, co-regulation, and autonomy.
- Respond to emotional distress in ways that are proportionate, reasonable and necessary, following guidance in this policy and all related training.
- Record all behaviour-related incidents on MyConcern promptly, factually and professionally.
- Engage in ongoing reflective practice and adjust approaches in line with a young person's needs, sensory profile, and regulation capacity.

5.5 Parents, Carers and Placing Authorities

- Work collaboratively with the Provision to share information relevant to a young person's emotional wellbeing, triggers and regulation needs.
- Participate in co-produced support planning and post-incident reflection where appropriate.
- Support the implementation of consistent approaches across contexts where possible.

6. NEURODIVERSITY

The Provision, recognises and celebrates **neurodiversity** — the natural variation in the ways individuals think, process, communicate, and relate to the world. Every person has a unique cognitive profile with their own strengths and areas of challenge. There is no single 'normal' way to be human.

While many people are described as **neurotypical** (meaning their neurological development and behavioural traits align with social expectations), an increasing number of individuals identify as **neurodivergent** — either through formal diagnosis or self-identification.

Neurodivergent individuals may experience and interact with the world differently due to one or more of the following profiles:

- **Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC):** A lifelong neurodevelopmental difference affecting how individuals communicate, relate to others, and experience the sensory environment. (autism.org.uk)
- **Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA):** A profile within the autism spectrum where individuals experience an anxiety-driven need to avoid everyday demands, even those they may enjoy. (pdasociety.org.uk)

- **Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADHD/ADD):** A condition affecting attention regulation, executive functioning, impulse control, and sleep. (adhdfoundation.org.uk)
- **Dyslexia:** A specific learning difference affecting the processing of written and verbal language. (bdadyslexia.org.uk)
- **Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder):** A condition affecting motor coordination, Provision, and sometimes speech and language. (dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)
- **Dyscalculia:** A specific learning difficulty relating to numeracy and mathematical reasoning. (dyscalculiaassociation.uk)
- **Tic Disorders, including Tourette Syndrome:** Conditions involving involuntary movements or vocalisations. (tourettes-action.org.uk)

These profiles exist within spectrums and may vary significantly from person to person. It is common for individuals to experience more than one form of neurodivergence (known as co-occurrence). Some neurodivergent people also experience associated physical, emotional, or sensory needs - for example, hypermobility or anxiety - often shaped by navigating environments not designed for their neurotype.

7. ANXIETY

The most important starting point is to understand and accept that most young people's 'difficult' behaviours are underpinned by anxiety and for some young people this is extreme and involves an extreme need to feel in control. Anxiety can be expressed in many ways including avoidance, anger, shouting, crying, laughing, not talking, restlessness, boredom, fidgeting, rocking, tics, repetitive actions, obsessing, skin picking, swearing, hiding, running off, protective withdrawing, masking, throwing things and lashing out at others.

In addition, any or all the following may be present

- **Difficulties in processing language** –may have good expressive language but may not be able to process verbal communication quickly enough to keep up during a conversation and may be confused by non-specific questions or instructions and take things literally. They may use language as a defence mechanism, to shock and disgust. They may easily lose their train of thought so it's best not to interrupt!
- **Rigid thinking –** they might get stuck in a way of thinking and find it difficult to accept when the idea or plan cannot take place. If they want a take-away, they need a takeaway and may die without it!
- **Sensory needs** – it's very likely they will have a heightened sensory perception, which can contribute to anxiety, avoidance and eventually overload. They might have poor introception so do not often feel hunger, thirst, extremes of temperature or need for the toilet until its urgent; which can trigger an anxiety response
- **Boundaries** – due to sensory processing differences they might like to be physical with people and pets regardless of whether there is mutual consent. They may can get rough or hurt people by accident and have limited understanding of keeping their body private
- **Difficulties with social interaction** – may not always understand the 'unwritten rules' of social interaction or non-verbal communication including body language, eye contact and tone of voice. They might like to shock because they receive positive stimulation from the reaction. Sharing or loosing might be an excruciating experience
- **Confusion about emotions** – may not be able to understand or accurately 'label' emotions in themselves or other people or may feel overwhelmed by their own and others' emotions. Despite what may be thought, they are likely to be hyperempathetic so feel much more acutely that neurotypical people
- **Intolerance of uncertainty** – may struggle with all the 'what ifs' of life, not knowing how things might 'play out,' what might be expected of them, where a situation might lead, when a situation might end and whether they will be able to cope with whatever may come along. Waiting may be incredibly difficult
- **No concept of hierarchies** - young people may not see the difference between themselves and any adult nor differences with positions of authority

- **Poor Executive function** – most if not all neurodivergent people find it very hard to plan, monitor and successfully execute activities they find mundane or demanding, even if other's find the task easy e.g. doing up buttons

8. ADJUSTING YOUR MINDSET

Our own mindset and mood are key factors in developing a toolkit of helpful approaches. Some key pointers are:

- **Meltdowns are not tantrums** – they are panic attacks
- **Look beyond surface behaviours** – outward behaviours are just the tip of the iceberg with many contributory factors lying below the surface as explained above
- **Re-balance your relationship** – a more equal relationship between the young person and adult, based on collaboration and respect, builds trust. Try to aim for win: win solutions
- **Keep calm and carry on** – try not to take things personally; model desired behaviours; pick your battles; treat every day as a fresh start
- **Focus on the long-term** objective of building a young person's ability to cope rather than short term compliance.
- **Be flexible** – helpful approaches require creativity and adaptability
- **See the positives** – whilst supporting our young people's challenges, try not to lose sight of their many positive qualities

9. THE PACE APPROACH

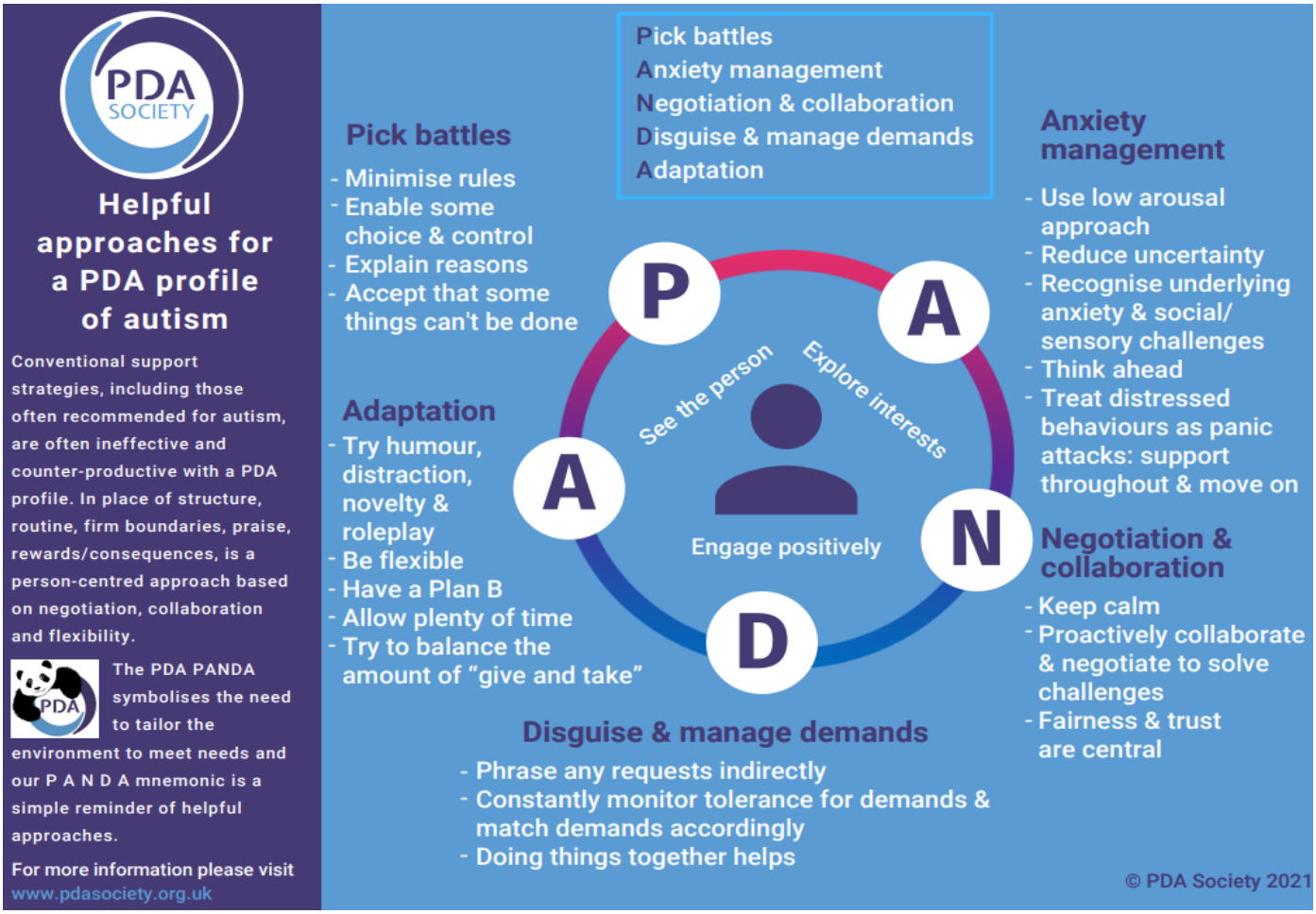
Staff use the PACE approach (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy), to build safe, trusting relationships and support emotional regulation. PACE is based on four key principles:

- **Playfulness** – using warmth, humour and shared enjoyment to reduce anxiety and build connection.
- **Acceptance** – accepting the young person's thoughts, feelings and experiences without judgement, while maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- **Curiosity** – seeking to understand the reasons behind behaviour rather than making assumptions.
- **Empathy** – responding with compassion and understanding to help young people feel safe, valued and understood.

By adopting PACE, staff promote co-regulation, strengthen relationships and support young people to develop confidence, resilience and self-regulation over time.

10. THE PANDA APPROACH

Please see below for the infographic from the PDA Society which we follow to promote positive interactions with all young people.



An approach based on negotiation, collaboration and flexibility tends to work better for our young people.

- **Balancing tolerance and demands** – a young person's ability to cope with demands will vary from day to day and from hour to hour, so try to control the 'input' of demands accordingly. Demands can include Laws, expectations, questions, menus, relationships, self-care needs, star charts. Demands can be direct e.g. instructions, indirect e.g. needing to eat, self-imposed e.g. wanting to complete a Lego set or implied e.g. to wear a coat because someone else has put one on. Each one can cause a serious level of anxiety to our young people and plenty of 'downtime' needs to be built in to give space for anxiety to lessen and tolerance levels to replenish.
- **Agreeing non-negotiable boundaries** – for some, the barest minimum of non-negotiable boundaries may be needed when anxiety is extremely high, but they may be increased over time. Rules need to be as few as possible but then maintained using techniques such as passing over responsibility (e.g. 'I'm sorry but it's a health and safety requirement'), de-personalising (through the use of imaginary characters, visual clarification etc) and giving choices that allow the individual a feeling of autonomy
- **Allowing plenty of time** – time is an additional demand, so it is helpful to build in plenty of time. Always try to plan, anticipate potential challenges, and allow some flexibility to accommodate fluctuating anxiety levels.
- **Having an exit strategy** – knowing how to extract yourself from a situation can help with reducing anxiety (for instance, you might agree a quiet zone where a young person can retreat to or provide reassurance that if something cannot be done today it can be tried again tomorrow)

11. MAKING DEMANDS LESS DEMANDY

- **Always speak in a friendly manner**; it's important that the young person knows you like them and that you genuinely want to get to know them – remember they are perceptive to the general vibe of a person/room

- **Speak politely as you would to someone of authority**. Never underestimate the use of PLEASE before and again after a request and never speak down to a young person. “because I said so” or “because I’m in charge” is a sure fire way of breaking relationships
- **Saying SORRY also cannot be underestimated.** If a young person has not understood or seems confused by what you are proposing, apologise for not making it clear. Even if you have not made a mistake by accepting some responsibility for a miscommunication, you will find the young person will be more able to meet you in the middle. You have formed a collaboration based on trust
- **Using declarative language** (statements, comments, or observations), or rephrasing things to talk about an object rather than a person e.g. “by unplugging it from here, the system wont do a full shut down so it’ll take longer to re-boot” rather than “you must never pull this out without shutting down properly, as you’ll break it”
- If the young person has not had a drink all day you might just place the drink alongside them and say, “Here’s a drink.” Similarly, phrases such as “I wonder whether …” and “Let’s see if …” and including words that suggest an element of choice, such as “maybe we could …” or “a possible idea could be ….” or “I’m not sure if …” all reduce the perception of demands.
- **Where possible, avoid trigger words like “no”, “don’t” or “can’t”** – put on your best Customer Service hat e.g. “I’m afraid it’s not possible right now”, try to also explain the reason and offer alternatives e.g. “I’m afraid it’s not possible to go to use the VR right now because it has run out of charge. I will see if the other one is available and plug this in but shall we play Fortnite instead?”
- Indirect communication includes
    - **Use physical prompts** like placing their shoes near them to signify the transition back home;
    - **Use visual prompts** like step by step pictures, checklists to independently tick off, post-it notes or communicating via instant messenger apps
    - **Use eavesdropping** e.g. allowing the young person to hear you say something demandy “Please remember the rules about not eating in here” when you know that they know the rules already
    - **Leaving posters/leaflets ‘lying around’** for our young people to pick up out of natural curiosity
- **Communicating positive attributes and life skills** using the content of the video game e.g. multiplayer games give opportunity to build strong collaboration skills, all give opportunities to discuss creativity, time-management, tolerance, problem-solving and emotional regulation skills
- **De-personalising**: explain that the requirement is made by some other, higher authority than you – for instance that “it’s the law for me to take regular breaks from the PC, especially to have a lunch break”
- **Distracting/turning things into a game**: the idea here is to focus on something else other than the demand, “I bet you can’t have completed that task, by the time I get back from the loo?”
- **Using humour/novelty:** humour is a great way to make everyone feel more relaxed and to help reduce the perception of demands. The young people in our care are often very funny with a great sense of humour. Sometimes however, they may use outlandish ways to avoid demands and it’s important to recognise the difference. Many of the young people in our care get bored easily, novelty, therefore (provided the change in direction feels like a bonus/benefit for the young person) can also work well. There are masses of opportunity for fun and novelty within the world of gaming.
- **Asking for help:** saying that you do not know or cannot remember how to do something can be a great way of making a demand more indirect e.g. “agh I’ve forgotten how to……?” or “How have you found is the best way to defeat this….?”
- **Offering choices:** the idea here is to give a young person some control without losing all control as the adult, by offering limited choices “shall I carry your shoes to the sofa for you to put them on or are you comfortable to do it here?”. “I’ll make a start on editing the first sequence, do you want to design this or this” but accepting they will choose another element to work on that still keeps them on task
- **Casually model behaviours or apply demands to yourself** without expectation e.g. you might say “I’m feeling a bit stressed from this game now so I’m going to take a break and get a drink.” It’s suggested you don’t follow it up with, “are you coming?” just accept they may or may not join you

12. BEING CAUTIOUS WITH REWARDS/PRAISE/SANCTIONS

12.1 Rewards

Many of the young people we support experience rewards as an additional demand rather than a source of motivation. External rewards can unintentionally create pressure to perform, meet expectations or repeat a behaviour, which may increase anxiety rather than reduce it.

For example, saying *"You can have 15 minutes on the VR if you finish this worksheet"* may make the learning task feel even more demanding. The young person may focus entirely on accessing the reward, feel frustrated if it is delayed, or perceive the offer as controlling.

Instead, staff should encourage participation through trust, collaboration and genuine interest. Young people are supported to choose activities that are meaningful to them, whether that is gaming, cooking lunch, caring for the animals at Redlands Lodge, taking part in outdoor learning, attending the gym or completing an accredited learning programme. Certificates and recognised achievements are available for young people who choose to work towards them, but these should celebrate success rather than act as an incentive to participate.

12.2. Praise

Praise can also be experienced as a demand. Statements such as *"Well done!"* or *"Keep that up!"* may unintentionally create pressure to repeat or improve on previous performance.

Staff should aim to share genuine enjoyment in a young person's achievements rather than evaluating them. This helps build confidence without creating additional expectations.

Examples include:

- *"You've worked really hard on that Minecraft build."*
- *"You looked really confident when you climbed that section at Redlands Lodge."*
- *"I noticed you asked for help when you needed it today."*
- *"That lunch smells amazing—what did you put in it?"*
- *"You seemed to enjoy feeding the animals today."*
- *"You stayed with the group for longer than last week. How did that feel?"*

Encouragement is most effective when accompanied by choice and flexibility, for example:

"It would be great if you'd like to come to the gym today, but if it feels too much at any point we can take a break or head back."

This approach helps young people feel supported rather than pressured.

12.3. Imposed sanctions or consequences

Many behaviours arise because a young person is unable to meet a demand in that moment rather than choosing not to. Imposed sanctions or unrelated consequences often feel unfair, increase anxiety and damage relationships.

For example, removing VR time because a chair was kicked over is unlikely to help the young person understand what happened and may lead to further escalation.

Where possible, staff should allow **natural consequences** to occur safely and support young people to reflect once everyone is calm.

Examples include:

- A keyboard that has been thrown may no longer work.
- Friends may choose not to continue playing together if someone repeatedly shouts or swears at them.
- If equipment is not looked after, it may need repairing or replacing before it can be used again.

- If waterproof clothing is declined during outdoor learning, the young person may become cold or wet and choose differently next time.
- If ingredients are not measured carefully during cooking, the finished meal may not turn out as expected.

When appropriate, staff should use these situations as opportunities for collaborative problem-solving by asking questions such as:

- *"What do you think happened there?"*
- *"What could we try differently next time?"*
- *"Is there anything we could do to make that easier?"*

The focus should always remain on learning, repairing relationships and reducing future anxiety, rather than punishment.

13. SUPPORTING SENSORY NEEDS

Our children may be **hyper**-sensitive (seeking to avoid the sense) or **hypo**-sensitive (seeking out more of the sense) to any of the senses listed below:

- Auditory
- Visual
- Oral (gustatory)
- Smell (olfactory)
- Tactile
- Vestibular (the sense of movement and balance)
- Proprioceptive (the sense of 'position' of your body in space and the input from muscles and joints to the brain)
- Interoception (Internal senses from your body, such as hunger, thirst, pain and needing to use the toilet)

It is possible to be both hyper and hypo sensitive to the same sense (for instance, someone may enjoy their own noise (e.g., their voice or choice of music) but find others or background noises intolerable) and it is important to remember that sensory perception and sensitivity can also vary depending on levels of anxiety, illness, the type of surroundings and so on.

Many of the young people in our care will have had an assessment by an Occupational Therapist who will have created a 'sensory diet' for their EHCP. It may be necessary for us to host Occupational Therapy (OT) sessions or be trained in the delivery of some portions of the EHCP outcomes.

Young people must never be discouraged from using any auxiliary aids they may need to support their sensory needs, as these have the same impact as glasses, hearing aids and wheelchairs. Some young people may need:

- **Chewy toys** for those who seek oral sensory input – we have ice lollies in the freezer too
- **Headphones, in ear sound reducers or hoodies** for those who become easily overstimulated by noise and crowded places
- **To carrying an object with a favoured scent** (e.g., candle, soap, pillow or spraying a sleeve or handkerchief) for those who become distressed by unfamiliar or unpleasant smells
- **Hugs or never to be touched** as some young people are sensitive to touch and equally some young people may like the comfort of deep pressure and may feel well-regulated using **weighted blankets** or similar
- **Wearing tinted or sunglasses** for those who are oversensitive to light
- **To eat specific foods** due to avoidance of certain foods/textures
- **Access to a fidget toy** for those who seek tactile input
- **Plenty of opportunity for movement** to feel where their body is in space; they may need to jump for strong feedback or bounce on a gym ball

14. SUPPORTING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Many of the young people in our care will have had an assessment by a speech and language therapist (SaLT) to can assess their communication and interaction skills and make detailed recommendations. These may have been written in their EHCP. As with OT, it may be necessary for us to host SaLT sessions or be trained in the delivery of some portions of the EHCP outcomes. In any case, these tips should be followed:

14.1. Communication

- **Allow extra processing time** so that your young person can make sense of what you have said and have time to think about how to respond – it can be helpful to count to 5 in your head following a statement or request.
- **Chunk questions or requests** (space them out one at a time) rather than saying or asking many things in one go. Allow time for your young person to answer your first question or respond to your first request before adding any follow-ups.
- **Be clear and precise whilst being indirect** – for example "I wonder if you could help me open this trapdoor. I need you to move that block from near the lava and put on the table whilst I jump on this lever"

14.2. Social Interaction

- **Role playing via gaming** can help our young people understand other people's perspectives, how someone's actions can make another person feel and how this can affect relationships
- **TV/books/gaming** can be an effective way to learn about emotions, relationships, and social dynamics, and enable our young people to develop understanding and skills, in a more indirect way.

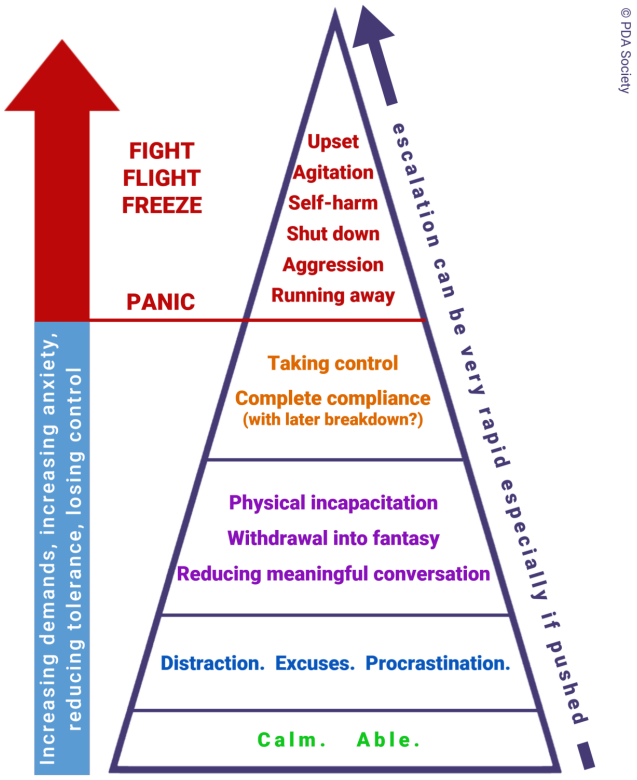
15. SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Many of our young people have poor self-esteem from their experience of life so far. It is important to remember to try and support our young people's emotional well-being by

- **focusing on their many positive qualities** and supporting them with the self-narrative. It's important to recognise, some young people may brag and seem overly confident as a way of overcompensating for their negative inner-monologue
- regularly reminding them that they are **valued for who they are** and that it is ok to be different
- regularly **reminding them that they are well respected** through whichever medium works best for them
- **supporting them with the things that they are interested in** rather than trying to impose on them what you feel they should be doing; they have often had enough of this at school!
- **speaking about them in positive terms to other people** e.g. "M has an amazing imagination; her Roblox obbies are incredible", "I'd want L on my team during the end of the world as their ability to slay Zombies is outstanding" or "J really makes me laugh, he's such good fun to be with."

15.1. When the Adrenaline Rises

"People do well if they can" (Dr Ross Green) – our young people often do not have the skills yet to manage their emotions and articulate their experiences before they become overwhelming. The adults around them will need to be attune to their needs and vigilant in spotting the signs that anxiety is escalating, see the infographic from the PDA Society below for the common signs to look out for:



Staff may use de- escalation techniques effectively throughout the day. **Offering a break away from the task** usually allows time to reset and hopefully reengage once they are in a more positive frame of mind. Such strategies can reduce areas of conflict, this is a negotiation not a demand or point of argument, the emphasis being on the individual to recognise their feelings and emotions while remaining in control.

15.2. Transition Times Can Be Particularly Tricky - it's likely they will be engrossed in their game or creative task and resent being asked to finish. These strategies may support:

- **Consistency and Predictability** – follow the same routine, patterns, driving routes, etc. The consistency and predictability will lessen the stress during the transitions.
- **Do not rush the young person** – it's suggested to give them a 15min and 5min transition warning that they will be collected/transitioned using calm, friendly verbal prompts and then lots of time to process and come to the transition when they are ready. We find the young people are likely to have a clear idea of the final activity they need to complete to feel able to tradition calmly and we will encourage this communication.
- **Offer a Break** – build in short breaks throughout the session to support their regulatory needs and addressing their sensory and emotional needs will lessen stress during transitions.
- **Use Redirection** – use the young person's affinity to engage them just before a transition. This offers redirection away from the anxiety and stress of the transition focusing instead on something enjoyable.
- **Provide a Transition Object** – many of our young people use a device whilst being transported to lessen the stress and boredom of the journey. You may need to ensure this is charged and ready but as the young person develops, you can encourage them to take responsibility

16. PHYSICAL INTERVENTION AND THE LAW

- The use of a physical intervention may become necessary when, a young person is at risk of harm to themselves and others or when behaviour is unsafe.
- A physical intervention must be a **last resort practice**; only used if they request it or if there is imminent danger

- Any circumstances that require staff to place their hands on young person can compromise everyone involved unless these situations are managed professionally and there is effective training and planning in place
- **The Best Interest Principle** where young people are concerned states "the welfare of the child should be the paramount consideration" (Children Act 1989). Paramount in this context means it should be the first consideration and should take precedence over all other issues. For that reason, staff who act in good faith in the best interest of the young person will always have the best defence if their actions are questioned. A focus on the best interest of the individual also encourages more productive discussions and debriefs between staff and the young person, as staff explain that their actions are motivated by a genuine concern.
- Any use of physical intervention will be based upon the principles of being Proportionate, Reasonable and Necessary.

17. WORKING WITH OUR CLIENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

- Our relationship with our clients e.g. parents/ carers, placing schools or Local Authorities is central to our success and we will always work closely to ensure a consistent approach.
- We provide opportunity to discuss how best meet a young person's needs as frequently as possible
- We make regular reports to share the positive aspects of young person's time with us as well as any areas we've noted as challenging.
- We will discuss honestly how a placement is working out and any issues we have encountered.
- We also appreciate any information that helps us to develop our practices from educational psychologists, occupational therapists, and any attached social workers.
- As an independent alternative provision, we will always work toward being as inclusive as possible. However, certain criminalised behaviour will never be accepted and could, if felt necessary, result in a young person not having access to the Provision. This would only be done after serious review of our ability to meet need and/or in context of the safety of staff and other centre users.

18. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Senior Leadership Team are responsible for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if there are changes to legislation, statutory guidance, recognised best practice, or following a significant incident or learning identified through safeguarding or quality assurance processes.

APPENDIX 1. PROCEDURE FOR MANAGING DISTRESSED BEHAVIOURS

Using information from the PDA Society, Spectrum Gaming, Studio 3 and Dr Ross Greene

A1.1. What are distressed behaviours?

"Distressed behaviours arise when our life experiences; sensory, emotional, social, demands etc exceed our capacity to cope and we feel overwhelmed and lose control" (PDA Society)

Distressed behaviours in neurodivergent individuals may include:

- **meltdowns** – an 'out of control' state which may include shouting, crying, throwing, or breaking things
- **physical or verbal aggression** directed towards others
- **self-injurious behaviours**
- **shutdowns** – individuals may hide or curl up in a ball, withdraw to a space that feels safe or stop communicating/moving. Shutdowns can sometimes be for a prolonged period (please see info on autistic burnout and catatonia-like breakdown for more information)
- **taking flight** – running from the source of distress

Distressed behaviours are not under the individual's control or something that they choose to do, this is a survival response – One individual described meltdowns as "I feel like I'm floating in the void, I cannot control my actions and every object around me feels like it needs to be destroyed. I feel like I could **die."**

Usually, once things have reached this point of distress it is impossible for others to intervene, so the priority is then to keep everyone as safe as possible.

A1.2. Supporting steps

1. Distressed behaviours are **not a 'battle' to be lost or won, but a crisis to be managed**. As the adult, you need to back down.
2. **This is not a 'learning opportunity'** - the threat of sanctions or offer of rewards will be ineffective at this time; you cannot 'teach a drowning person to swim'
3. **How you manage distress makes a difference -** separate your relationship with the person from the behaviours; and try to remember that anything that gets broken or damaged during distressed episodes can be replaced and words cannot hurt you however, insulting they may be
    a. **Always keep calm and level**. Shouting or getting angry will not help either of you, keep your facial expressions and body language as neutral and non-confrontational as possible to allow the young person an opportunity to mirror your behaviour and override their survival mechanism
    b. Offer active listening and acknowledge what you think they are trying to communicate.
    c. Don't make jokes or laugh, as this could make it look like you don't care about their distress. You are their emotional stability
    d. Swearing, defamatory or shocking words will not normally be socially acceptable or indeed tolerated (if racist, homophobic etc) but commenting or focusing on what the person is saying whilst they do not feel in control may is likely to escalate the situation
4. **Call for back up**
    a. Request the support of a DDSL
    b. Telephone for assistance if lone working; follow *Lone Working Policy* within the *Health and Safety Policy*.
5. **Protect yourself and others** in as calm a way as possible:
    a. Try to stay at least 2m away, forward facing/sideways on, unless that person requests/shows they need physical touch/ comfort from you;
    b. Slow down and be as predictable as possible to show a sense of calmness, as fast movements can appear threatening;

c. If you feel approaching a young person is really important e.g. due to self-injurious behaviour, let the person know in advance and approach them in a calm and slow manner;

d. Clear the area of any objects that could be thrown and cause harm (ideally in advance) whilst having other soft objects available;

e. It is usually better to remove others rather than try to move a person in distress but it may be necessary to place yourself between the individual and others to protect them

6. **Reduce stimuli** that may add to the sense of overwhelm – for instance, turn down PC volume, ask others to keep quiet, not intervene and leave the area if possible
7. **Keep communication to a minimum: i**nstructions should be short and simple; speak in terms of what you would like to happen rather than what you would like to stop, e.g., "you may feel calmer if you stand still" rather than "stop running around;" try offering simple reassurance, e.g. "it's OK."
8. **Give emotional and physical space**. Take a step backward from the situation, rather than forward into conflict.
9. **Encourage access to a safer place, if possible**. Some people may prefer to hide away in a den or under a table or cover themselves with a duvet or coat. Waiting outside/ close and calmly reminding them that you are there could help them feel safer
10. **Physical intervention should be a last resort** and only to keep the person or others safe.
11. **Be aware of environmental risks**, for instance scissors, knives or objects that may be used as a weapon. Other hazards may include glass doors, moving vehicles or proximity to a road.
12. If someone takes flight whilst distressed, provided there are no immediate safety concerns, **following at a distance is more effective than chasing** after them (because pursuit increases the 'flight' response).

A1.3. Support following episodes of distress

A young person described the way they felt after a distressing episode as "*I feel guilty, upset and shameful*."

- **Recovery time** will be required, ideally in a safe space
- A **snack or a drink** may help – offer an ice lolly from the freezer
- Provide **reassurance** - let the individual know that you understand they did not feel in control at this time and that you are there for them
- Some individuals may be upset and may express remorse or be angry with themselves; others may not. **Try to move on and start afresh**.
- Some people find it helpful to talk and this can provide insight into triggers and causes however, this kind of **debriefing** can be too stressful for many and may precipitate further distress or there may need to be some considerable time and space between the distressed episode and any discussion.

A1.4. Incident Reporting and Recording

- All incidents involving behaviour, regulation, emotional distress, or unsafe actions must be recorded promptly, accurately, and professionally.
- The Provision uses MyConcern, a secure, GDPR-compliant safeguarding and wellbeing platform, to log all concerns, including behaviour-related incidents.
- MyConcern entries must be factual, objective, and submitted as soon as practicable following the incident.
- In cases where there is immediate risk, staff must also report the concern verbally to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL.
- Patterns of behaviour, regulation support needs, and potential safeguarding indicators will be reviewed regularly by the DSL, relevant key staff, and clinical consultants as part of reflective and multi-agency practice.

APPENDIX 2. DEALING WITH PROHIBITIVE ITEMS

Following the Department of Education Advice for Schools: "*Searching, Screening and Confiscation"*. The guidance acknowledges that under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights students are entitled to a reasonable level of personal privacy. However, this right is not absolute and can be interfered with by the Provision if the interference is:

- **Justified:** The Provision must have a clear and legitimate reason for the search, such as maintaining safety.
- **Proportionate:** The search must balance the student's right to privacy with the need to protect their safety and that of the others at the Provision whilst ensuring the measures are not excessive.

The Education Act 1996 provides specific powers to search students for prohibited items, and these powers are considered compatible with Article 8, provided they are:

- **Exercised lawfully:** Following legal guidelines and the Provision's policies.
- **Conducted reasonably:** Minimising any intrusion into the student's privacy while ensuring safety.

- Only **the DSL or DDSLs** are authorised to question or search students and only if they have **reasonable grounds to suspect** they possess any article that one or more of them reasonably suspects has been, or is likely to be used:
  - to commit an offence, or
  - to cause personal injury to, or damage to property of; any person (including the student).
- **Prohibited items** include knives and weapons, drugs, alcohol, stolen items, harmful materials such as acid, fireworks or pornographic images.
- Call 999 Police - if an offense is being committed, including threat to use a knife/weapon/acid.
- Call 101 - if the individual refuses to give up the item(s), but staff have reasonable grounds to suspect they have an item to cause harm e.g. knife/weapon/acid, or it may have been hidden off-site or somewhere in the Provision.
- Searches should respect students' dignity and consider their neurotype/sensory sensitivities, therefore, the member of staff conducting the search will only request the student remove what might be considered outerwear - worn bags, coat, shoes, hat or gloves. **They will not remove any items for the student.**
  - Where possible the search must be done by someone of the same gender as the student (with another adult present), unless it is urgent.
- Any found items will be confiscated for the safety of all and handed to the Police and/or Student's parent/carer as appropriate.
- The Safeguarding Team will work together to record each incident where there has been a suspicion a student is in possession of a prohibited item, whether or not it led to a search, on MyConcern.
- This will be followed to conclusion, used as evidence, if necessary, filed and stored in accordance with our *Data Protection and GDPR* policy.

APPENDIX 3 – TEMPORARY REMOVAL FROM SESSIONS, DISENGAGEMENT AND ENDING PLACEMENTS

The provision recognises that many of the young people who attend have experienced exclusion, rejection or trauma associated with previous educational settings. Our aim is to provide a safe, low-demand environment where young people can rebuild trust, develop emotional safety and participate in education in ways that respect their individual needs.

The Provision is committed to avoiding the removal or ending of placements wherever possible. We recognise that repeated exclusion can adversely affect wellbeing, relationships and future engagement with education. Decisions to temporarily remove a young person from a session or end a placement will only be taken where all reasonable adjustments and supportive interventions have been explored, and where this is necessary to protect the safety and wellbeing of the young person, other young people or staff.

Our rules for students are simple:

1. **We work together to keep everyone safe from harm**
2. No one will be made, forced or coerced to do something
3. We follow the laws of the land

Everything else is approached collaboratively and, wherever possible, through negotiation, flexibility and reasonable adjustments.

All our policies, particularly Positive Interactions provides the framework for understanding the root of 'behaviour that challenges', re-framing our belief mechanisms, giving staff, young people and their family and/or key professionals tools with which to use neuro-affirmative, trauma informed support.

A3.1 Risk Mitigation

Before considering removal from sessions or ending a placement, the Provision will wherever reasonably practicable:

- review behaviour and safeguarding records;
- consider whether additional reasonable adjustments can be made;
- consult with parents/carers and the placing authority;
- seek advice from relevant professionals where appropriate;
- review staffing, session structure, transport or environmental factors;
- consider alternative timetables, online provision or phased attendance where appropriate.

A3.2. Temporary Removal from Sessions

Sometimes a young person may need to leave a session early, or a short break from attending may be necessary where:

- there is an immediate risk of serious harm;
- regulation cannot safely be achieved;
- the environment is no longer safe.

This is not intended as a punishment. It is a protective measure to allow everyone to regain safety and enable appropriate planning before attendance resumes.

A3.3. Placement Disengagement

The Provision recognises that some young people may become unable to engage with their placement despite reasonable adjustments, flexible approaches and collaborative work with families, commissioners and professionals.

Where attendance or engagement has significantly reduced over a sustained period, consider whether the placement remains appropriate.

If it is agreed that meaningful engagement cannot be re-established, or the commissioner determines that an alternative provision would better meet the young person's needs, the placement may be ended in a planned and collaborative manner.

A3.4. Responding to Temporary Removal or Ending a Placement

Where a young person needs to be removed from a session or a placement continuation is being considered, the Provision will:

- prioritise the immediate safety and wellbeing of everyone involved;
- ensure the decision is proportionate, reasonable and necessary;
- inform parents/carers and the commissioner as soon as practicable;
- record the incident and decision-making process on MyConcern (not applicable for disengagement);
- consider whether further reasonable adjustments or multi-agency support could enable the placement to continue safely;
- where appropriate, develop a reintegration or transition plan in collaboration with the young person, parents/carers and relevant professionals.

A3.5. Ending a Placement

The Provision will end a placement where it has become clear that we are no longer able to meet the young person's needs safely despite reasonable adjustments, collaborative planning and multi-agency working.

A placement may end where, for example:

- the Provision is no longer able to safely meet the young person's needs;
- Where the placement effectively ends because the young person is no longer engaging;
- there is a persistent risk of serious harm to the young person, other young people or staff;
- serious criminal behaviour places others at significant risk;
- the placing authority agrees that another provision would better meet the young person's needs.