



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

NCSE Relate

A Regulation-First Approach to Reframing Behaviour
and Supporting Student Engagement and Participation





**An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta**
National Council
for Special Education

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National Council for Special Education

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Triskelion: A symbol that represents balance, relationships, movement and progress

Ancient symbols have been important to Irish culture for many generations, symbolising different aspects of life and religion. These symbols are present in many art forms and hold great significance for people of Celtic heritage. Appearing on rock art as far back as the Neolithic period, spirals appear to have held important meaning with some of the earliest human civilisations. These early symbols are characterised by their swirling patterns and complex designs. The spiral is regarded as one of most primitive decorations on earth and is believed by some to represent the sun's radiation and energy. The renowned tri-spiral motif meticulously engraved on a stone within the Newgrange chamber stands out as one of the most iconic symbols in Irish Megalithic art. Also known as the triskele, the triskelion is comprised of three clockwise spirals connecting from a central hub.

The precise meaning of this symbol remains a subject of interpretation, but it offers a hint about the rich symbolism of the ancient people who created it. The triskelion is seen by some as a symbol of unity and progress. As it appears to be moving, the triskelion also represents the determination to move forward and overcome difficulty, and so is represented by the appearance of movement in the symbol. Movement, or motion, is believed to signify energies. Another possible meaning is that the flowing design represents the Celts' all-important number three along with endless lines with no visible point of start or finish.



The triskelion has three clockwise spirals connecting from the centre, and is a little like the Manx three-legged symbol. The Greek word *triskelés* means 'three-legged' and is also known as the triple spiral.

The triskelion in Newgrange is regarded as an appropriate symbol to represent NCSE Relate. Comprised of three interlocking spirals, it suggests cycles and motion and can represent the multi-faceted lived experience of students and school communities.

In the recess of the Newgrange chamber, the triskelion is carved into a large rock and the rock base itself serves as a strong foundation for this remarkable petroglyph. The pillar's strength and stability are essential to its endurance. Similarly, for children and young people to thrive on their educational journey, a solid foundation in the home, preschool and in the community is crucial. In the foundation phase of education, children learn and develop life skills that will help them as they grow, including social and emotional coping skills, problem-solving and collaboration. The wider social, economic, and physical environment, the quality of housing, and supports in the neighbourhood, will also influence how they develop.

Bronfenbrenner suggested that a child's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings to broad societal structures or systems. As we know, these structures are interrelated; the influence of one system on a child's development depends on its relationship with the others. The triskelion offers an apt depiction of these intricate, never static relationships. The visual impact of the swirling motion of the *triskelion* highlights the dynamic nature of teaching and learning, the interaction of internal and external influences in the daily lives of students and teachers, and the impossibility of progress as always being linear and straightforward.

The three spirals can also stand for the child or young person, the adult, and the environment. The pathways that link the three spirals can be understood to be joining the learners, the school personnel, and the context, including the environment and the homes. The swirling creativity and artistry of the triskelion makes it difficult to see all that is going on within the symbol (or indeed the student's experience) at one time, and it can be confusing when one attempts to trace a line from the edge to the centre or from one spiral to another. The narrowness of the spaces between the lines and their proximity to other features point to the challenges in finding the safest and best way, as well as acknowledging the risk to those on the journey of becoming lost, especially the more vulnerable or inexperienced travellers.

NCSE Relate draws from international practices as well as best practice in this country. Two important influences are the *Reggio Emilia* and the *Te Whāriki* approaches. The Reggio approach was developed from 1945 in Italy in the aftermath of World War II. Corresponding to the three spirals of the triskelion, the approach suggests that three "teachers" are involved in children's learning – parents, teachers, and the environment of the classroom. The symbol of the triskelion reflects the vision of the Reggio Emilia founders. The principles espoused in Reggio Emilia might be substituted for the triskelion's spirals. Thus, each one of the fundamental spirals of the approach should be considered as part of the larger system working to create environments where children, teachers and families find a sense of belonging. Each of the spirals is dependent on and influenced by the other. Each spiral makes its own unique contribution to the system as a whole.

Similarly, NCSE Relate shares the ambition of the visionaries who outlined the Reggio Emilia approach in regard to an 'image of the child'. Respecting the young broadens the relationship between teacher and child. Respect requires a give and take with neither participant always in the lead nor following behind. The deep understanding and connectedness children develop with peers, material and the environment happen through multiple encounters over an extended period of time. The triskelion reflects those hopes and expectations.

Since its inception, the challenge in Reggio Emilia is to educate in a different way. Similarly, NCSE Relate seeks to reframe students' behaviour and promote a 'regulation-first' approach, supporting student engagement and participation. The Reggio and Relate approaches both see the child as strong and full of potential. That view is based on the formation of relationships between and among children, teachers, others, and materials. Each component is embedded in and dependent on the others in a system that acts like a living organism. This living organism of a school is constantly in motion, spiralling out toward the world of families and community, and circles back to the child or young person as the central character. The process is never-ending, always moving towards the child as having rights and creating an inclusive culture in schools. There are no predetermined outcomes or linear patterns of organisation. Instead, they describe the organisation of teaching more like a spiral where the actions of teachers are not expected to take place in a designated order or a limited amount of time. In Reggio Emilia, the process of planning a curriculum was described by Loris Malaguzzi as a kind of journey that has many twists and turns with a single goal in mind to help children. (McNally and Slutsky, 2016)

The elements of the curriculum in the Irish education system have often been referred to as strands. The students encounter and engage with the strands that are woven and interwoven to experience the broad curriculum. The linking of education and weaving or interweaving is to be found also in other educational systems. Te Whāriki in New Zealand draws upon traditional Māori concepts, language and culture. Whāriki means a woven mat in English. A weaver weaves in new strands as the whāriki expands. When the curriculum document is opened, it can be seen that the whāriki is unfinished, with loose strands still to be woven. This acknowledges the child's potential and their ongoing educational journey.

McNally, S.A., and Slutsky, R. (2016) *Key elements of the Reggio Emilia approach and how they are interconnected to create the highly regarded system of early childhood education*

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National Council for Special Education

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) promotes a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive for all students. The NCSE provides support to schools; advises educators, parents and guardians; commissions and disseminates research on special education; and provides policy advice to the Minister for Education on the education of students with additional needs in our schools.

The NCSE delivers a wide range of Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) initiatives to enable schools to build their capacity to support the needs of all students. This includes the provision of a calendar of seminars and workshops, and facilitating in-school supports nationally that are designed to:

- Develop teachers' knowledge and skills to build capacity in their schools to support students with special educational needs
- Promote a continuum of support which is inclusive and responsive to all students
- Provide supports to assist schools to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for all students

More information is available at www.ncse.ie.

Statement on Language

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) acknowledges the variations in language used to describe educational needs and disability. For some individuals, person first language (PFL), for example, “person or individual with disability” is the preferred term. For others, their preference is identity first language (IFL), for example “autistic”. The term “neuro-divergent” is emerging as a preferred term to acknowledge individuals in all their diversity. To embed an inclusive approach to this framework document, the NCSE use all three terms interchangeably. “Special educational needs” is applied throughout this document as it is the established term in education and in the legislative context of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004). The NCSE recognises that the use of “special educational needs” as a term is controversial and is currently under consideration in the review of the EPSEN Act, ongoing at the time of publication of this document. This document also uses gender inclusive language.

Foreword



Supporting students, families and schools guides the work of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Earlier this year, the NCSE set out a vision for a world-class inclusive education system. Our policy advice paper no.7, 'An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society', illustrates our commitment to support schools in nurturing the potential of every child, fostering environments where we empower students to thrive.

NCSE Relate embodies this commitment. This contemporary behaviour resource is designed to put relationships and regulation first, recognising that true inclusivity is built upon understanding and connection. By prioritising meaningful relationships, we enable educators to build safe and supportive environments where students feel valued, respected and have the means to learn and grow. This approach is essential for developing the skills needed not only for learning and academic success but for life's broader challenges.

Developed using the most up-to-date research in inclusive practices, NCSE Relate provides teacher professional learning, practical strategies and a range of new tools and supports to help educators support students with understanding and connection. When students feel included, connected and a sense of belonging, they can truly engage and participate in a meaningful way.

Our vision of an inclusive society begins with inclusive education, where every student, regardless of their unique circumstances, experiences belonging and inclusion. NCSE Relate empowers educators to prioritise connection over compliance, paving the way for classrooms where variability is known as the rule and not the exception.

We are excited to share this valuable resource and look forward to seeing its transformative impact on schools and communities as we continue our journey towards an inclusive future for all.

John Kearney
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction



NCSE Relate is a resource to support school staff to understand and reframe behaviour. Relate puts relationships at the heart of teaching and learning, with an emphasis on understanding and connection. The resource takes a regulation-first approach meaning that relationships, the environment and the individual are central to support. Relate shifts the focus from what is happening to why it is happening and applies support and removes barriers there.

Pedagogy is the work of teachers and Relate supports behaviour from a pedagogical perspective, recognising the role relational pedagogy plays in teaching and learning throughout the school and the importance of a playful approach for all ages.

Playfulness leans into students' strengths and interests, and realises the joy in teaching and learning. In Relate, we explore how a playful and relational approach reduces stressors and de-escalates tense moments.

Universal design for learning swirls through the elements of support in Relate with an understanding that what may be essential for one student will often benefit many or all. We understand that the barrier is not in the student, the barrier is in the environment and we must work to uncover and reduce that barrier for the student. There may be unintentional barriers in the learning environment and it is our role to seek them out and remove them wherever possible. Supporting behaviour on an individual basis only is often short lived due to the nature of the school environment, employing support on a school-wide basis in a way that reflects the variability of the school community will be more consistent and enduring. School self-evaluation (SSE) can support the collaborative, reflective and inclusive process of school-wide review to bring about school-wide inclusive practices.

Contributors to NCSE Relate include teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and NCSE advisors specialising in behaviour, autism and curricular support, some of whom represent neuro-divergent perspectives. This resource was written by educators for educators and is intended to frame the skills and knowledge that teachers already have. The Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool has been designed specifically to support staff in recognising the good practice that is already happening and considering the next step to build on it.

NCSE Relate is a Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) resource and is supported by NCSE seminars and is used by NCSE staff to support schools. It is a live document and the online version will be periodically updated. We understand that schools are busy communities and there will be ongoing supports for schools to engage with Relate, with continuing introduction sessions and TPL opportunities to support schools as they require.

NCSE would like to extend sincere thanks to the many stakeholders who provided consultation on Relate, the principles, elements of support and specific resources within it. Students, school leaders, teachers and SNAs have made significant and valuable contributions and trialled principles, elements of support and tools to make them better for everyone else. Thank you all.

Sharon Healy

Specialist Lead for Behaviour for Learning and Wellbeing

A Vision for Inclusive and Relational Approaches

| Shifting from: | Moving towards: |
|--|--|
| Seeing behaviour as something to manage | Recognising behaviour as communication and working to address unmet needs |
| Hypothesising functions of behaviour | Recognising stressors and understanding the influence of the environment |
| Relying on reinforcement through rewards | Finding intrinsic motivation by reducing barriers |
| Changing behaviours | Changing the environment to increase wellbeing |
| Collecting data on 'what is happening' with factors such as intensity and duration | Collecting data on 'why it is happening', examining stressors and occurrences in the day |
| Finding the problem | Leading with strengths and remaining solution focused |
| Focusing on when behaviours happen | Focusing on when they don't happen and identifying what is successful at that time |
| Compliance | Connection |
| Doing things 'to' or 'for' students | Doing things 'with' students |
| Starting with individual interventions | Making change at a universal level that is consistent and manageable in the long term |

How to Use NCSE Relate

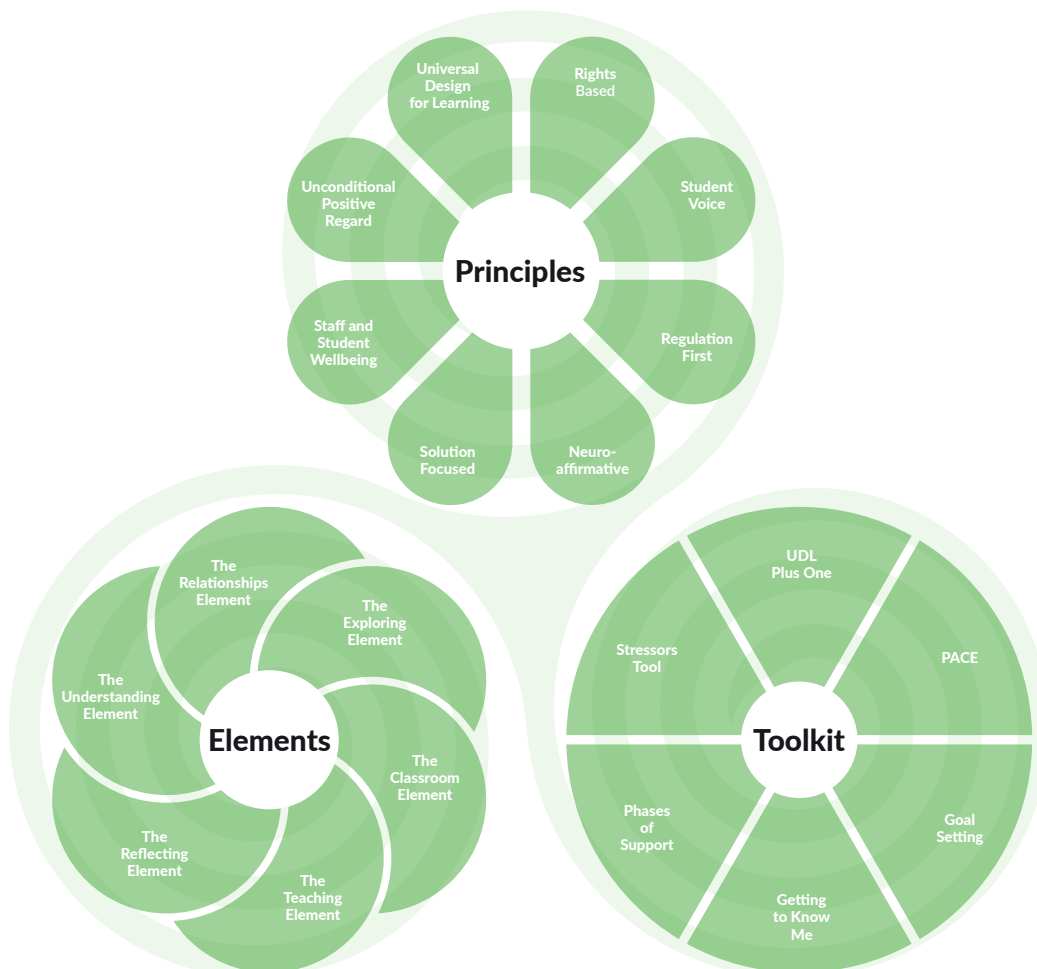
NCSE Relate is primarily an online resource. If you are using the printed version of the resource, please visit the online version for full functionality and access to links, videos and podcasts. Alternatively, scan the QR code for all cited resources on Padlet. At the second QR code, you will find a Spotify playlist with the podcast episodes cited throughout Relate.

Relate begins with eight grounding principles, and teachers are encouraged to consider these principles and reflect on their own practice using the resources, reading and videos that accompany them. The principles are separate to the six elements because they underpin each element.

After the principles, NCSE Relate is presented in six elements to guide practice as schools respond to the variability of students. Over time, the framework will guide your practice to be more proactive than responsive.

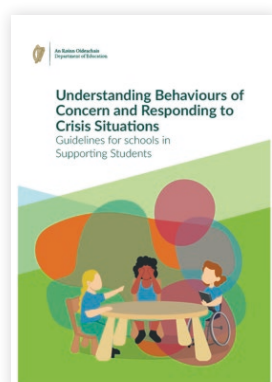
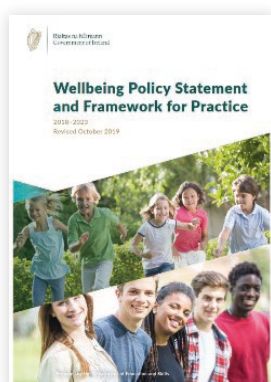
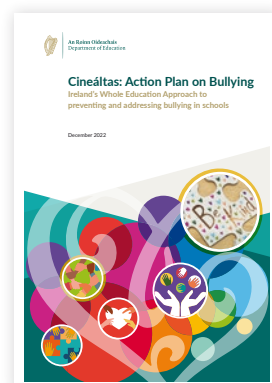
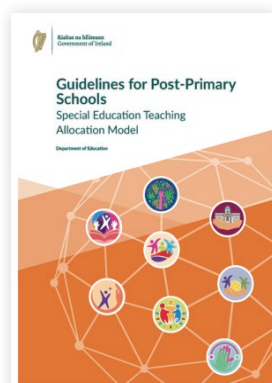
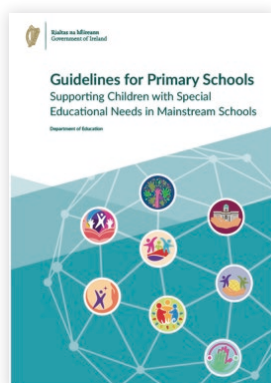
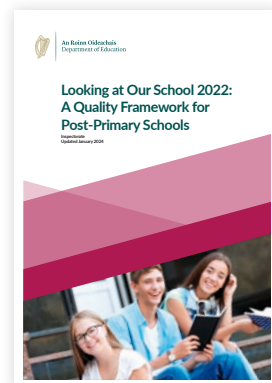
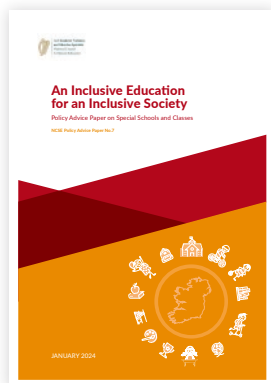
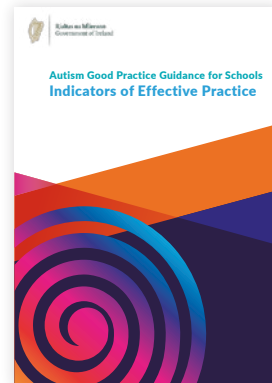
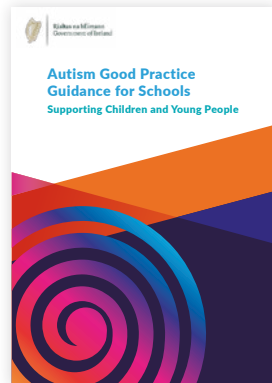
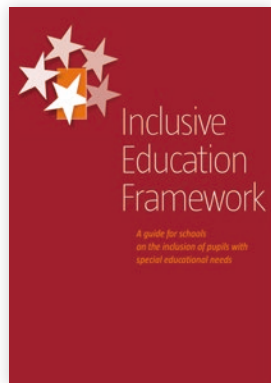
The appendices contain a number of useful resources. These can be printed or filled in digitally. They may form part of a student's school support file so that they will support collaborative practice and handovers to other involved teachers.

Reflective questions are posed throughout the resource and these can be responded to in any way that works for the user: diary, voice notes, notes app on phone, etc. There is also a printable reflective tool in the appendices. Use them for yourself, as discussion points with a colleague or at a staff meeting for whole staff reflection. Your reflections will be useful if you attend an NCSE Teacher Professional Learning seminar or if you seek the support of the NCSE Advisory Service.



Educational Context

NCSE Relate has been designed to be complementary to other NCSE and Department of Education publications, and to resources from the Irish education system. It is flexible by design and can be used at all stages of the Continuum of Support to implement universal approaches that benefit all or to support an individual student. Other publications may have tools or resources that will support students within the elements of the framework. Please see the below publications, which are all relevant to this framework.



How does NCSE Relate fit in with planning for an individual or group of students?

| |
|---|
| SUPPORT PLAN* |
| Classroom Support School Support (Support for SOME) School Support Plus (Support for A FEW) |

To be completed by the teacher(s).

For help, see *SEN: A Continuum of Support - Guidelines for Teachers*; *BESD: A Continuum of Support – Guidelines for Teachers* pp.71-74; *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools, Resource Pack for Teachers*, pp. 51, 53, 54, 57.

| | | | |
|--|--|------------|--|
| Student's name | | Age | |
| Lead teacher | | Class/year | |
| Start date of plan | | | |
| Review date of plan | | | |
| Student's strengths and interests | | | |
| Priority concerns | | | |
| Possible reasons for concerns | | | |
| Targets for the student | | | |
| Strategies to help the student achieve the targets | | | |
| Staff involved and resources needed | | | |
| Signature of parent(s)/ guardian(s) | | | |
| Signature of teacher | | | |

The Getting to Know Me Tool will inform you about the student's strengths and priority concerns. This will include hearing from the student, their parents /guardians and previous supporting staff.

Recognising and reducing stressors.

The Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool will help to decide on targets with the student.

Reducing stressors, strategies and approaches from across the six elements are included here.

*A consultation with a NEPS psychologist/ other professionals may contribute to this plan.

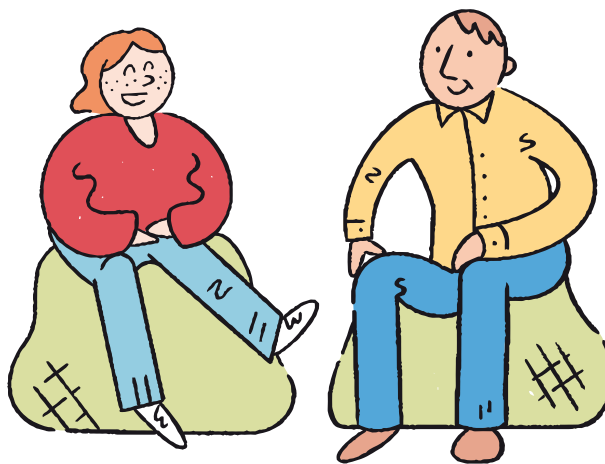
Pedagogy

The document 'Guidance on Preparation for Teaching and Learning' highlights knowledge of pedagogy as one of three key pillars of preparation for teaching and learning, alongside knowledge of the children and their prior learning and knowledge of the curriculum. It states that pedagogy “shapes teachers’ actions, words and judgments” (Government of Ireland, 2021, p.9) and reflects on the evolving nature of pedagogy, which is further supported in the reflective practice of teachers.

Pedagogy is all about the methods and practices of teachers. As a practical school resource, NCSE Relate is grounded in pedagogy. Support for positive behaviour does not need to be separate to the curriculum and everyday teaching and learning, In fact, it really needs to be part of it to be most effective. Teachers draw on many pedagogical influences, here we will focus on two that strongly support positive behaviour in schools.

Relational Pedagogy

Relational pedagogy places relationships at the heart of teaching and learning. Relationships and connections provide strong protective factors for all students. They are important enough to be part of the pedagogy of the school day. Within NCSE Relate, The Relationships Element, PACE resource and Unconditional Positive Regard principle will provide guidance and practical strategies towards a relational pedagogical approach in the classroom.



Playful Pedagogy

Playful pedagogy has been described as a teaching approach involving playful, child-directed elements along with some degree of adult guidance and scaffolded learning objectives (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff, 2013). A playful pedagogy infused throughout the school day can be regulating for students, promote positive relationships and engage learners. Students identify play on a play-work continuum through environmental cues such as the location of the activity and the presence of adults, as well as through emotional cues such as their level of choice and the voluntary nature of the activity. The cue of adult presence has shown particular importance in research, where children displayed enhanced performance and behaviour when an adult was nearby but not participating (McInnes, Howard, Miles and Crowley, 2010). Playful pedagogy is not reserved to primary settings and the way a lesson is presented, the elements of choice included and the opportunities for movement and activity will all contribute to a playful pedagogy. Within NCSE Relate, the Universal Design for Learning principle, PACE and The Power of Play resources will provide guidance and practical strategies towards a playful pedagogical approach in the classroom.

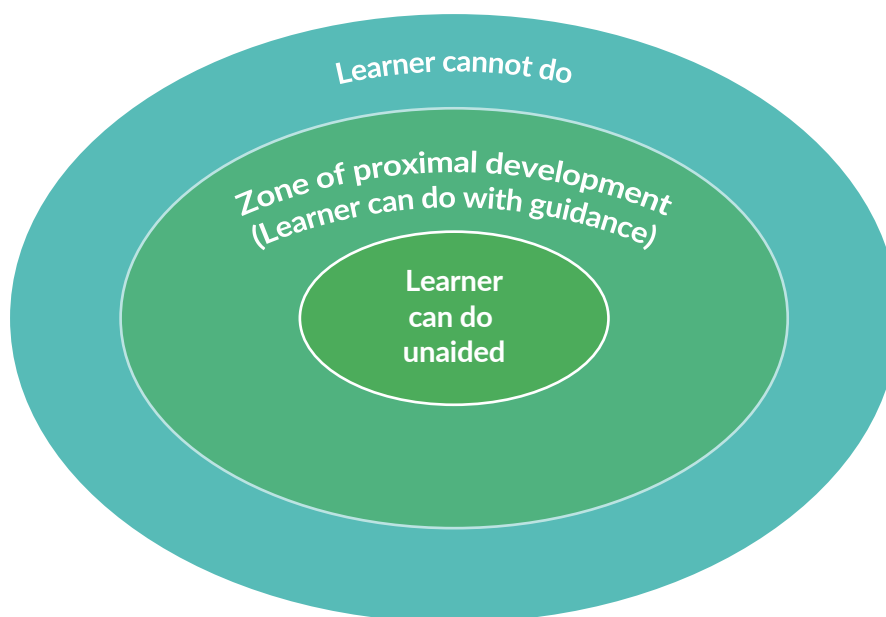


Teacher Agency and Knowledge of Pedagogy

Teacher agency is about choice and flexibility and empowers teachers to make key decisions about teaching and learning in their context and in the best interest of the student. Teachers use their knowledge of the student, the curriculum and pedagogy to make decisions about what their students learn and the sequence and pace at which they learn.

Many pedagogical approaches are underpinned by Vygotsky's theory, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the difference between a learner's actual developmental level and the learner's potential development when collaborating with a more knowledgeable other.

Teachers, as the more knowledgeable other, can guide and support learning through modelling, thinking aloud, questioning or guiding children and young people to try new ideas (Loizou & Loizou, 2022). When learning activities and tasks are sequenced to allow for gradual progression, students' participation and engagement is promoted. This sequencing also best scaffolds the student to translate new learning into their own understanding, so the student can use this learning independently, with autonomy and self-efficacy.



Principles

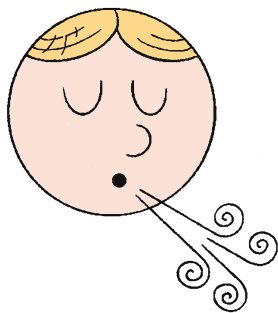
The following principles underpin every element of the framework. They should be considered in every action. The following section gives an overview of each principle with further readings and materials to explore.



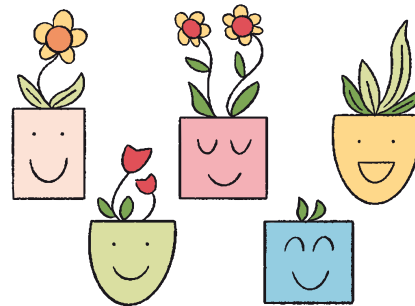
Rights Based



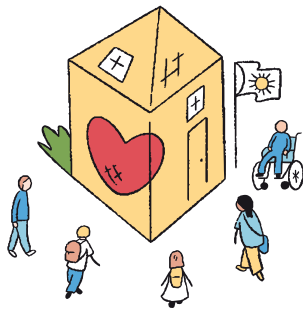
Student Voice



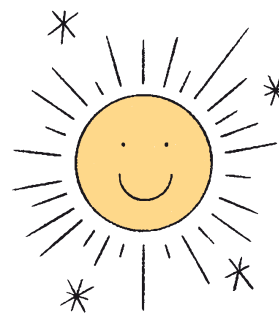
Regulation First



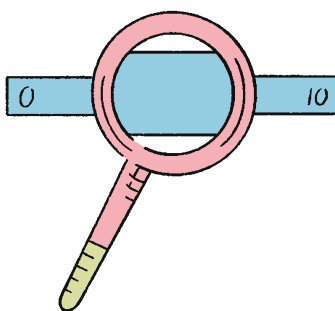
Neurodiversity Affirming



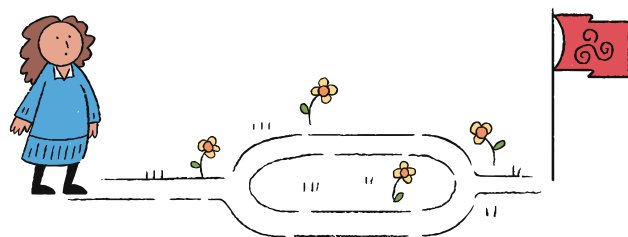
Staff and Student Wellbeing



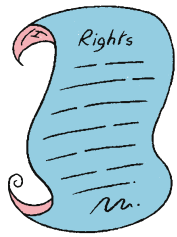
Unconditional Positive Regard



Solution Focused



Universal Design for Learning



Rights Based

This resource is informed by the rights of all students. The best interests of the child must be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 7 – Children with disabilities) underpin all principles, elements and approaches in this document.

Reading and further resources



Communication Bill of Rights



Further education materials for teachers



Child friendly version of UNCRC



Video explaining UNCRC for younger students



Social narrative on UNCRC



Video explaining UNCRC for students



Self Assessment Toolkit from Unicef



10 part series on children's rights

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a list of children's rights. These rights are for every child and young person up to 18 years. All children and young people should be able to experience these rights as they are growing up.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in Ireland works to encourage people, including the government, to respect children's rights, to make decisions based on what's best for children and to hear children's views. To find out more about what the OCO does, go to www.oco.ie.

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Ombudsman for Children



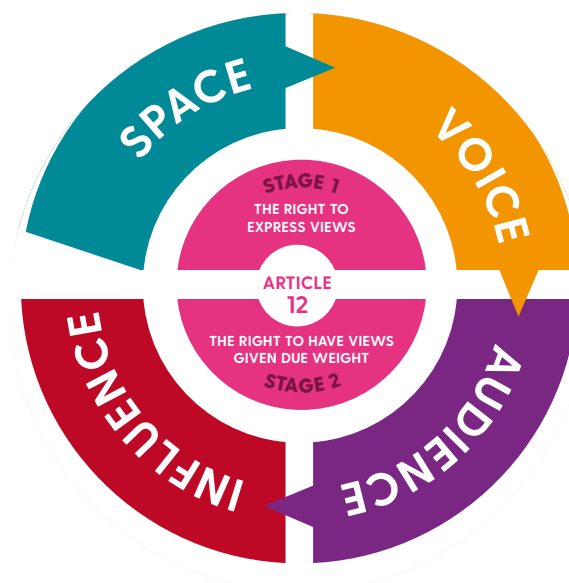
Student Voice

Students have a right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them. This right is therefore fundamental to all actions taken concerning students. It is the right of individual students *and* the right of groups of students.

The central premise of student voice is that students know what is and is not working in their classrooms and schools, and therefore, it is the responsibility of anyone who wants to improve students' educational experiences to attend to their perspectives, solicit their ideas, and take their feedback seriously.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations (UN), 1989) highlights that children have the right to have their opinions considered, their views respected in decision-making that affects them, and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Research clearly emphasises that prioritising children's participation impacts positively on their self-esteem and confidence, and promotes their overall development, autonomy, independence, social competence and resilience (Harmon 2021; NCCA 2020; Ring *et al.* 2018).

Professor Laura Lundy developed The Lundy Model to conceptualise the distinct elements involved when supporting student participation.



(HUB na nÓg)

Space: The initial step of the Lundy Model of Participation starts with creating a safe and inclusive space for all children to express their views. Such space is a pre-requisite for children to express their views, without fear of rebuke and reprisal (Lundy 2007). This space is not just a physical space but a space for voice to be heard and not solely in a tokenistic way.

Voice: Nobody expresses themselves in the same way and once a safe space has been established (Lundy 2007) adults can develop opportunities for young people to express themselves inclusive of the silent voice (Harmon, 2021).

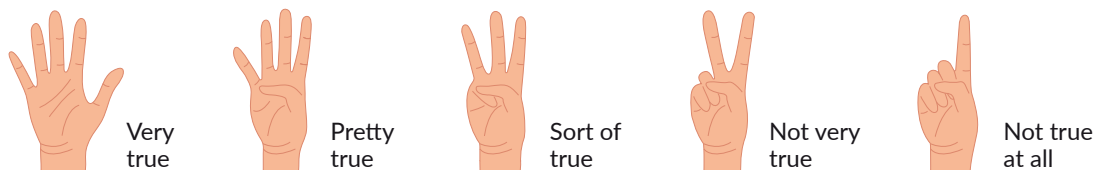
Audience: Children have a right to an audience and those hearing the child's voice should have some ability to effect change (Lundy, 2007).

Influence: Purposeful listening enables adults to be open to what is articulated and, where appropriate, to act for the benefit of the child. Lundy (2007) stresses the importance of children knowing and feeling that their voice has influence and is respected. This will promote a culture where voice is appreciated.

Practical strategies to engage student voice:

Ideas on how to gather student voice (apply the Lundy model when using any of these approaches to ensure it is a meaningful experience for students):

- Ross Greene's Five-Finger Strategy



- Likert scales



- Moving towards choices – eye gaze or walking, e.g. basketball one side of the room and football other side
- Suggestion boxes
- **Getting to Know Me Tool:** engaging with staff, parents and students to ensure student voice is heard
- Create a **decision-making profile**
- Writing things down – providing multiple means for the student to do this, including templates
- Drawing a picture
- Using video or photographs
- Gestures and facial expressions (when it is clear through the student's advocates how these should be interpreted)
- Using visuals (such as **The Blob Tree**)

Watch the video on Padlet to see how St Aidan's CS in Tallaght, Dublin use their 'Spotlite Project' (Student Perspective on Teaching and Learning in the Educational Space) to elicit and act upon student voices in their school.

Reading and further resources



[Hub na nÓg Student Voice Participation Resources](#)



[Unicef Guidelines for Setting Up a Student Council](#)



[Creating Child Friendly Versions of Policies](#)



[Learner Voice Research Project](#)



[A Practical Guide to Including Seldom Heard Children and Young People in Decision Making](#)

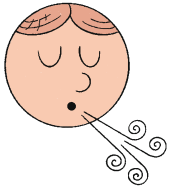


[Tusla Child and Youth Participation Toolkit](#)

NCSE TPL



The Spotlite Project



Regulation First

What is Self-regulation?

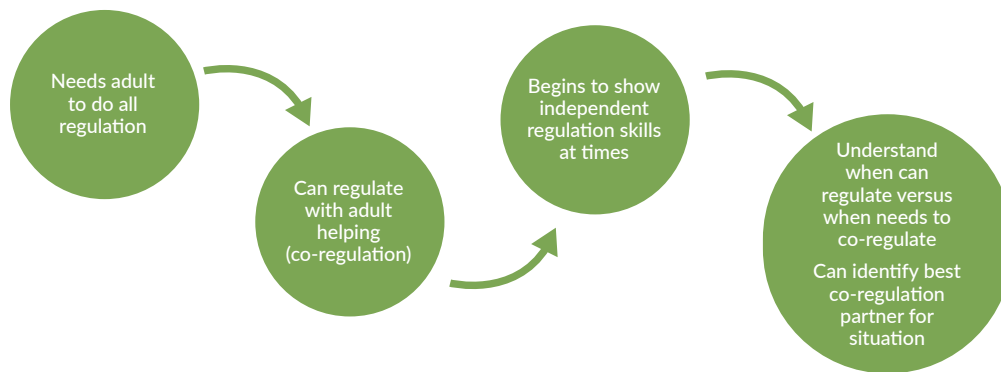
Self-regulation is a complex higher level executive functioning skill. It is defined as the ability to manage your energy levels, emotions, attention, and behaviour. Effective self-regulation supports you to engage in learning, establish and maintain good relationships and maintain wellbeing (Shanker, 2010).

When we are regulated we can:

- focus on the task at hand
- be at the appropriate energy level for the environment and the task
- manage emotions
- maintain a sense of calm
- wait for our turn

How we perceive and experience any given moment is dependent on our current state of regulation. It impacts our capacity to participate and engage with the world around us. Regulation can be influenced by the school and classroom environment, people in the room, the means of communication and the learning experiences.

Stages of Regulation



What is Co-regulation?

The ability to 'self' regulate is developmental, it is not a skill that we are born with. The part of the brain where self-regulation takes place doesn't fully develop until we are approximately 25 years old, hence students at all stages of their educational journey will continue to need some level of regulation support from the adults in their surroundings.

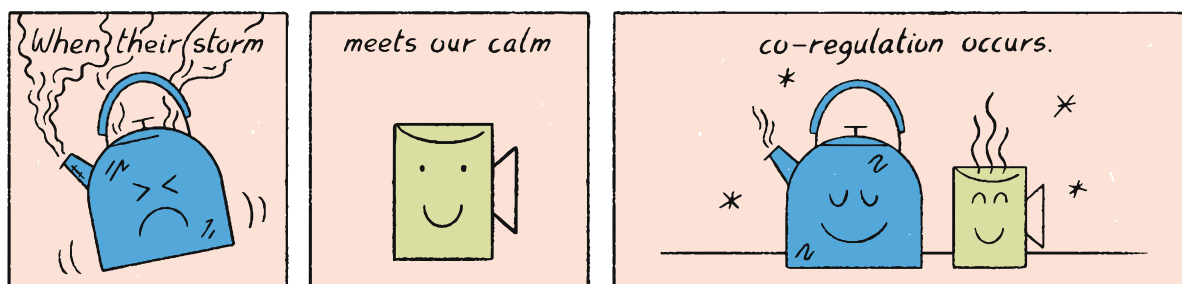
It is important that we have realistic expectations of our students when it comes to their regulation. We need to shift our focus away from 'teaching' students to become 'independent at self-regulation' towards the adults focusing on being intentional and active co-regulators.

Co-regulation is one of the first processes of learning how to self-regulate. Co-regulating requires teachers to pay close attention to the cues students send and respond consistently and sensitively so that students can understand, express and modulate their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Gillespie, 2015). This results in a widening of students' capacity to be present within our environment and their readiness to engage and learn.

The Adult as a Co-regulator

Co-regulation occurs when one person can transmit a sense of safety, trust and comfort to another (Murray *et al.* 2015, 14). This is done by being reliable and present. Co-regulation occurs mostly through how we use our non-verbal communication such as our facial expression, tone of voice, gestures and body language (Cameron-Whiting & Tekell, 2021). Our nervous systems scan for cues of safety and danger within our environment, without us even being aware of this happening. This is called neuroception (Dana, 2019).

Therefore, it is vital to recognise our role as co-regulators and the power positive relationships with our students has in making them feel safe and regulated. **The adults in the room are the most valuable regulatory and environmental tool.**



Like learning most skills, learning to regulate takes exposure, modelling, supervision and practice.

This can be done by the adults:

- being mindful of their own regulation
- creating a predictable learning environment
- establishing positive relationships with students
- modelling their own regulation strategies
- providing opportunity for choice and reflection of regulation strategies
- understanding students' regulation needs
- recognising when a student may need time and space



By investing time in this foundational practice, students are more likely to remain in a regulated state for longer. When in a regulated state, there are more opportunities to develop proactive and positive skills for times when self-regulation strategies may be needed.

To be effective co-regulators, we need to take care of our own wellbeing and regulation first.

We need our nervous system to be regulated before we can regulate another.

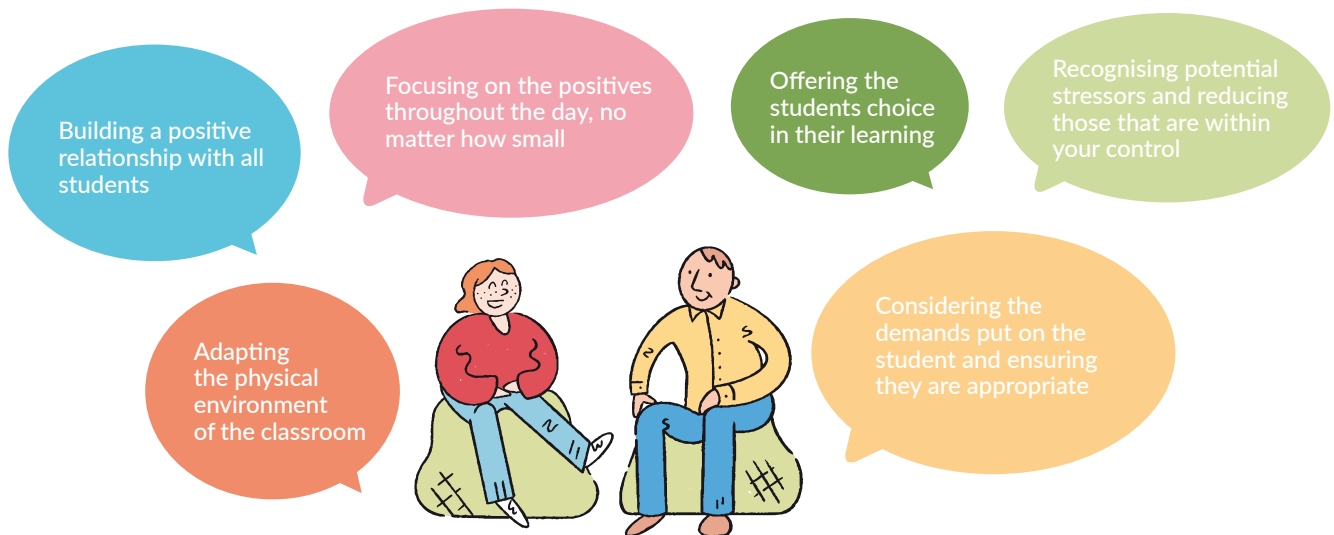
Reframing Behaviour as Dysregulation

Our ability to self-regulate can be impacted by the amount of stress in which we are tolerating. Stress can be thought of as extra loads. Stuart Shanker (2012) categorises these stressors into five domains (biological, emotional, cognitive, social and prosocial). Considering these stressors supports us to reframe behaviours as a stress response, rather than as a 'misbehaviour'. Behaviours are often a response to the level of stress an individual is tolerating. This may present as someone 'flipping their lid' (Dr Dan Siegel) or in other words, having a fight or flight stress response.

Dysregulation occurs when a student's stress level becomes too much to manage. Dysregulation limits a student's ability to maintain 'readiness' for participation in any aspect of the education setting, as well as reducing their ability to connect with others (Cameron-Whiting et. al., 2021).










Reframing students' behaviours as a stress-response or as a sign of dysregulation, can support you to shift your expectations of the student. Instead of focusing on stopping their behaviour and using reactive interventions, adopting this lens helps shift our focus to the learning environment and our role in supporting the student. You can then consider the proactive measures to put in place there instead.

This may involve:





* See The Classroom Element for tips and resources to create a classroom environment that is regulating for students, reducing barriers to enable them to be successful in their learning.

Further resources:

-  [NCSE Relate Video: Flipping the Lid](#)
-  [Co-regulation for Adolescents](#)
-  [Self-regulation for Pupils: A guide for school staff \(Post Primary\)](#)
-  [Mona Delahook - The Polyvagal Theory](#)
-  [Dr Bruce Perry: Regulating Yourself and Your Classroom](#)
-  [Every Moment Counts Breathing and Movement Strategies](#)
-  [The Kids Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control by Lauren Brukner](#)
-  [Stuart Shanker's podcast: The Self Reg Show](#)
-  See **NEPS training** on Introducing a Trauma Informed Approach: [The Stress Factor - Getting the Balance Right](#)

NCSE TPL

-  Understanding and Supporting Behaviour (Post-primary)
-  Understanding Behaviour
- The Relate Model of Support
- Reflections on Emotional Regulation and Wellbeing Supports

Reframing Behaviours by Recognising and Reducing Stressors

'Stressors' are the extra loads that we all tolerate day to day that may impact our regulation.

Some of these stressors may be internal, for instance a physical feeling (e.g. hunger) or an emotional feeling (e.g. frustrated) or there could be external stressors happening around a person or to a person (e.g. a noisy room). Everyone has different tolerance to different stressors and everyone's capacity to manage stressors differs depending on what stress-loads are already being managed.



If a person's 'bucket' becomes too full with mounting stressors, the stressors become less manageable and we lose tolerance of what may be a small stressor. If we reach a point where we cannot tolerate any more stressors, we may have a stress response reaction.

This usually falls into 3 categories:



When a person reaches one of these stress responses, their brain and body are showing us that they are in 'survival mode' and are therefore not in a position to follow instructions, make choices or learn.

It is important at this time, the adult is a co-regulator, supporting the students to feel safe and transition out of 'survival mode'.

This can be achieved by:

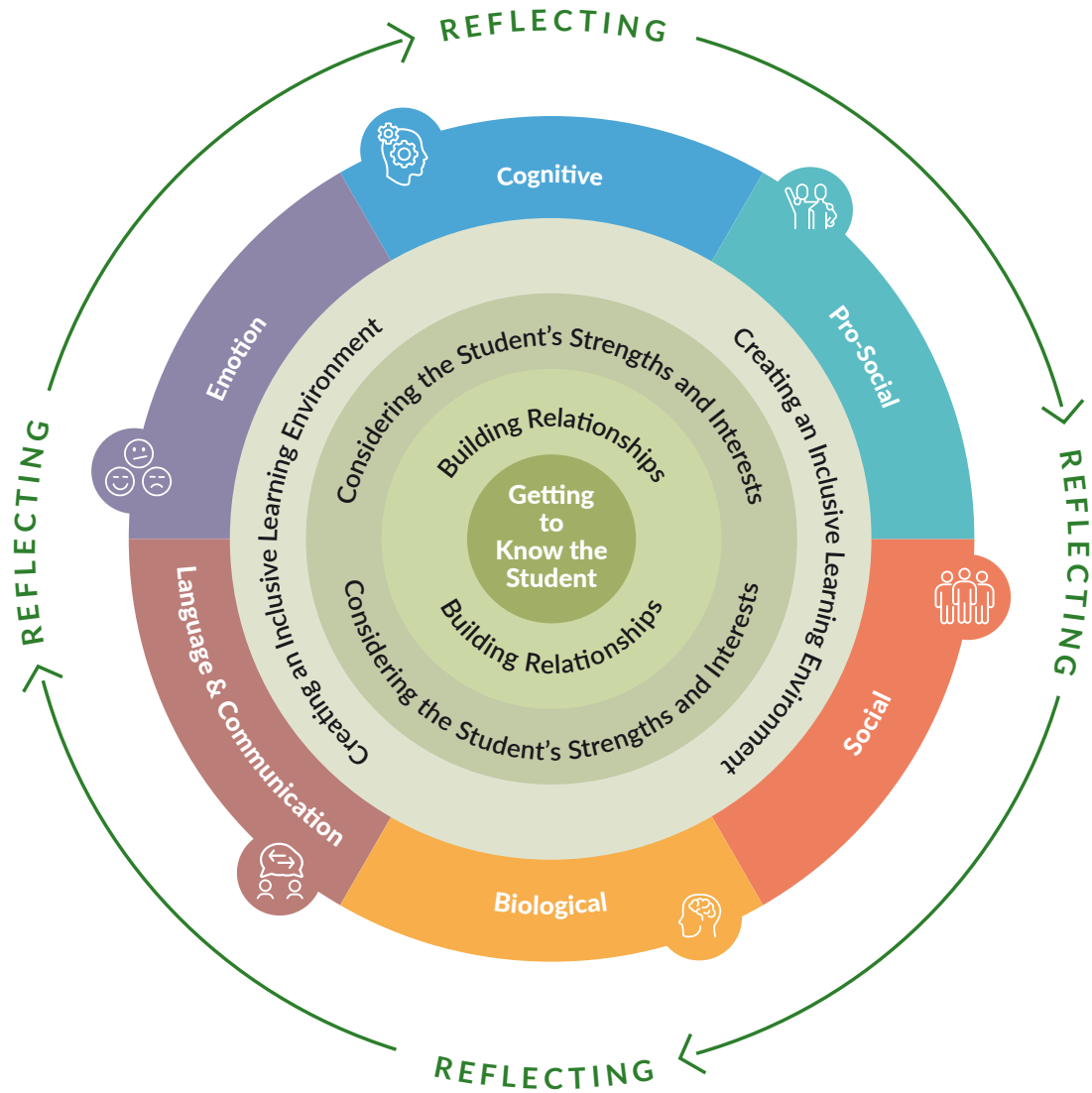
- significantly reducing language
- providing personal space
- giving the person time
- using a soft tone of voice
- transmitting a feeling of safety and understanding

We know that behaviour is a form of communication, but sometimes it can be challenging to figure out what is being communicated.

By being mindful of the stressor domains, it can help us to reframe behaviour and be proactive in reducing stressors. By adopting this proactive approach, it can expand the student's capacity to engage, participate and regulate.

There will be times where although we are able to reframe the behaviour and can recognise the stressor, reducing that specific stressor is out of our control. At these times, we focus on supporting students by removing other recognised stressors, expanding their capacity to manage and engage.

When working with a student who continuously demonstrates survival mode behaviour, Dr Stuart Shanker encourages us to ask 'Why this student and why now?' Gathering insight into the student's life and looking at the school and classroom environment through the lens of the below domains supports us to implement potential solutions.



Biological Domain



The biological domain recognises the role that the nervous system plays in regulating energy levels and the basic physiological needs we need to successfully function in life such as physical health, sleep, nutrition and exercise.

Examples of biological stressors:

- Hunger
- Thirst
- Being Sick
- Pain
- Poor Sleep
- Scents/Fragrance
- Temperature
- Extreme Weather
- Bright Lights
- Loud Music
- Uncomfortable Clothing

Cognitive Domain



The cognitive domain focuses on the processes of memory, attention, the acquisition and retention of information and problem solving.

Examples of cognitive stressors:

- Reading challenges
- Making decisions
- Slow processing in a speedy world
- Constant new learning
- Multitasking
- Too much inferring vs. clearly stating expectations
- Information overload
- New information that doesn't fit in to what you currently 'know'
- Learning something new
- Information presented too quickly or slowly
- Working memory

Emotion Domain



In the emotion domain, a regulated student can monitor, cope with and adapt their responses to any strong emotion, such as intense feelings of happiness, curiosity, excitement, frustration, fear or worry.

Examples of emotion stressors:

- An intense surprise, over-excitement
- Anticipation during the build-up to birthdays or holidays
- Feeling or being responsible for other people
- Not feeling safe, not feeling welcome or that they belong
- Feeling fearful, e.g. fear of trying something new, general fear, such as, heights, spiders
- A grief/loss of a significant person or relationship, e.g. parents, grandparents, sibling, peers, pets, neighbours, placement in foster care
- Feeling lonely or experiencing conflict, e.g. disagreements, falling out with peers, confrontation
- Experiencing disappointments or frustrations
- Comparing themselves with peers or others, feeling embarrassed, low self-esteem
- Anxieties due to changes in family circumstances, e.g. moving house, parental separation, new siblings, new relationships
- Intense feelings due to a parent or family member being sick, e.g. worry, anxiety, guilt

Social Domain



The social domain recognises stressors that impact the student in relation to social engagement.

Examples of social stressors:

- Being a quiet person in a loud world
- Being left out of a group/feeling rejected
- Putting on a social face when your 'social battery' feels low
- Working within a group when you are struggling to connect with those around you
- Participating in circle time or public speaking
- Being in a setting where you are expected to use 'small talk'
- Not being understood by friends or classmates
- Fitting in to different cultural social norms
- One-to-one interactions that feel intense (this could include the SET room)
- Not having anyone to play with/chat with at break times
- Peer pressure from friends or other classmates

Pro-Social Domain



The pro-social domain includes the energy and emotions we take on from others. This includes empathy, relating to others, social approval and 'fitting in'.

Examples of pro-social stressors:

- Peer rejection and bullying
- Conflict in the family
- Academic pressure
- Cultural or socioeconomic stressors
- Digital technology
- Transitions and changes
- World events
- Injustice
- Sharing
- Fatigue

(Shanker, 2010)

Language and Communication Domain



Students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) can have difficulties in understanding what others say to them (e.g. multiple meaning words, non-literal language, complex multi-part instructions, etc.) and may have expressive language difficulties (e.g. finding the right word, constructing sentences or using narrative).

Examples of language and communication stressors:


- Using increasingly complex language (oral and written) to access and engage with learning
- Need to learn thousands of new vocabulary terms
- Difficulties understanding curriculum reading and understanding a wide variety of texts
- Unable to name the emotion and express how they are feeling
- Difficulties explaining their actions clearly
- Learning English as an additional language
- Not having access to supportive communication partners who use a total communication approach
- Not having access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)
- Having the language skills to seek clarification appropriately if they have not understood
- Using language to problem solve and resolve conflict with peers in school

(Murphy and Franklin, 2013)

STRESSOR TOOL

Recognising and reducing stressors is an important part of reframing behaviour. Start with the student's strengths and interests. Then fill out the potential stressors that you recognise through your own observations or what you have learned from the student, their parent/caregiver or other supporting adults. When you have recognised the stressors, consider how you might reduce some of them with consideration to the student's strengths and interests. Some will be outside of your control.

| | | |
|---------------|--|-------|
| Student Name: | Student's Strengths and Interests | Date: |
| | | |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| RECOGNISING STRESSORS |   Biological | REDUCING STRESSORS |
| RECOGNISING STRESSORS |   Cognitive | REDUCING STRESSORS |

RECOGNISING STRESSORS



REDUCING STRESSORS

RECOGNISING STRESSORS



REDUCING STRESSORS

RECOGNISING STRESSORS



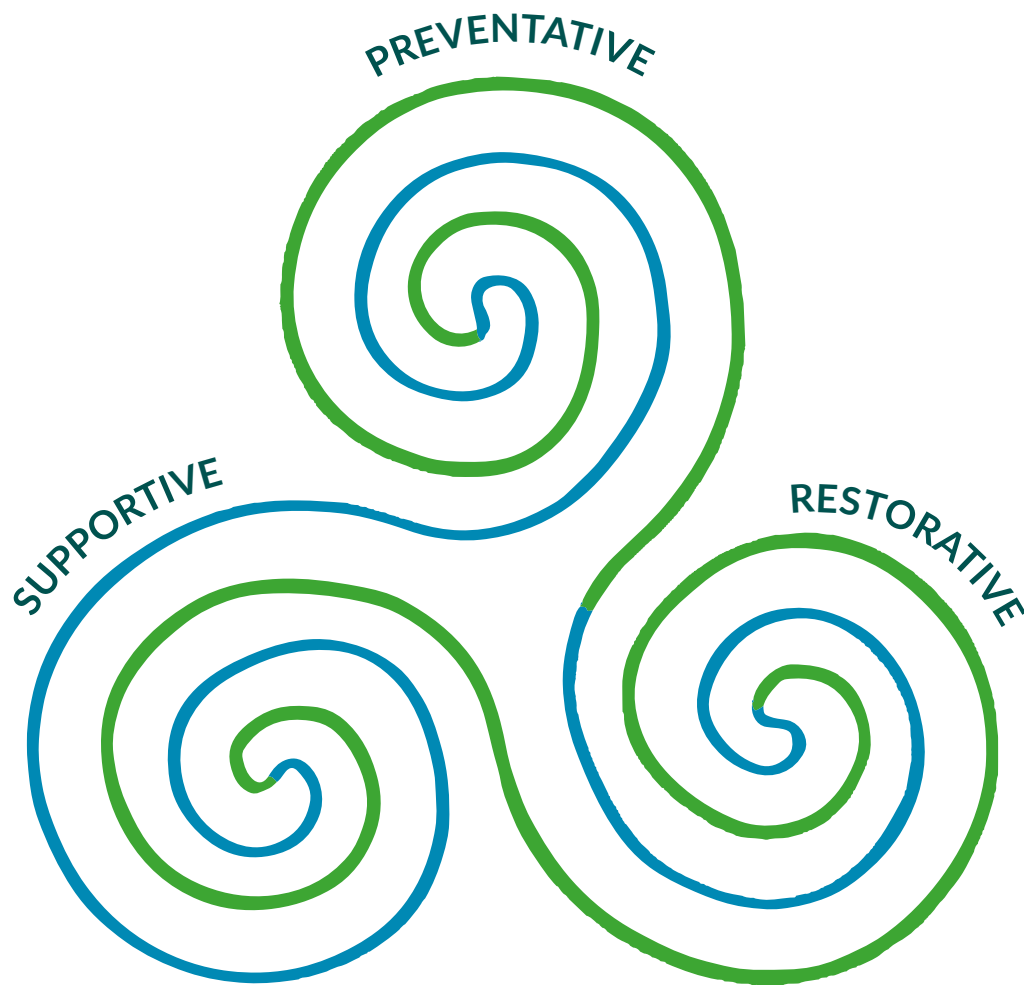
REDUCING STRESSORS

RECOGNISING STRESSORS



REDUCING STRESSORS

Phases of Support



What the student may be experiencing



What the adult is doing



Regulation and dysregulation looks different from student to student.

Building a relationship with your students will help develop a deeper understanding of them as individuals, as well as creating a relationship where students feel safe.

By building a strong foundation, proactive regulating measures will be more successful and during times of dysregulation you will be more confident to respond accordingly.

What the student may be experiencing:



Preventing

When a student is regulated, they may be experiencing:

- Perceived safety
- Comfort
- Connection
- Belonging
- Calm
- Engagement
- Relaxation
- Motivation
- Content



Supporting

When a student is dysregulated, they are experiencing a stress response. For some students, this may result in an activated survival response: fight, flight or freeze. This student may be experiencing:

- Overwhelmed
- Stress
- Heightened emotions
- A need to escape
- Lack of control
- Shut down
- The need to withdraw
- Changes to physiological body responses (arousal state, body temperature, heart rate etc.)
- Changes to cognitive functioning (difficulty accessing higher level thinking, processing language)



Restoring

As a student begins to return to a regulated state they may be experiencing:

- A sense of safety
- A more regulated physiological state
- A motivation to engage with objects, people, their environment
- A readiness to connect

What the adult can do:



Preventing

- Build trust by being consistent, predictable and setting clear expectations
- Make relationships the centre of everything
- Recognise and reduce stressors where possible
- Be available as a co-regulator (work on your own calm)
- Use PACE in your approach
- Use visuals and simple language
- Select a sensory experience that might help to regulate – consider a soothing or moving activity
- Practice UDL
- Include students in meaningful classroom decisions and act on them
- Provide opportunity for students to make meaningful choices
- Adopt student-centred approaches in learning to make learning motivating and engaging



Supporting

- Reframe the student's behaviour
- Understand that the behaviour is a form of communication
- Remind yourself of recognised stressors
- Be mindful of your own regulation
- Give space and time
- Adapt your stance to be soothing and non-threatening
- Keep your own spoken language to a minimum
- Avoid questions or choices
- Avoid talking about rewards or consequences
- Reduce sensory intrusions – bright lights, loud noises, etc
- Give the opportunity to move somewhere safe and quiet or else move the other students.



Restoring

- We are applying Dr Bruce Perry's '3 Rs' – Regulate, Relate, Reason. What the adult does in the supportive phase helps to regulate the child. Continue to work on this before moving into the following two steps:
 - Relate: use connection to calm their nervous system. Attune to their emotional state and acknowledge their feelings without labelling.
 - Reason: Listen to them. Have a non-judgemental chat. Help them to 'reframe' the behaviour to problem solve a different path next time/see if there are ways to further reduce stressors.

What next?

- Consider changes that can be made to remain in the preventative phase in future.
- Consider the communicative intent of the behaviour.
- What barriers are present in the environment, communication or learning that could be removed?
- What does the student need to identify emotions? Consider teaching, role play, modelling and access to visuals to communicate.
- Consult the student, their parents and other staff involved to create a plan that lists actions under the three phases of support using the template provided overleaf.

Further reading and resources



Dr Bruce Perry discusses the 3 Rs

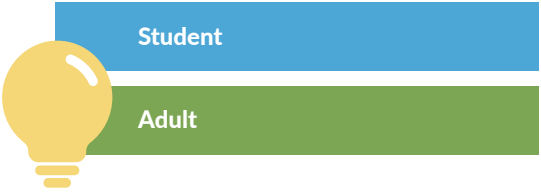
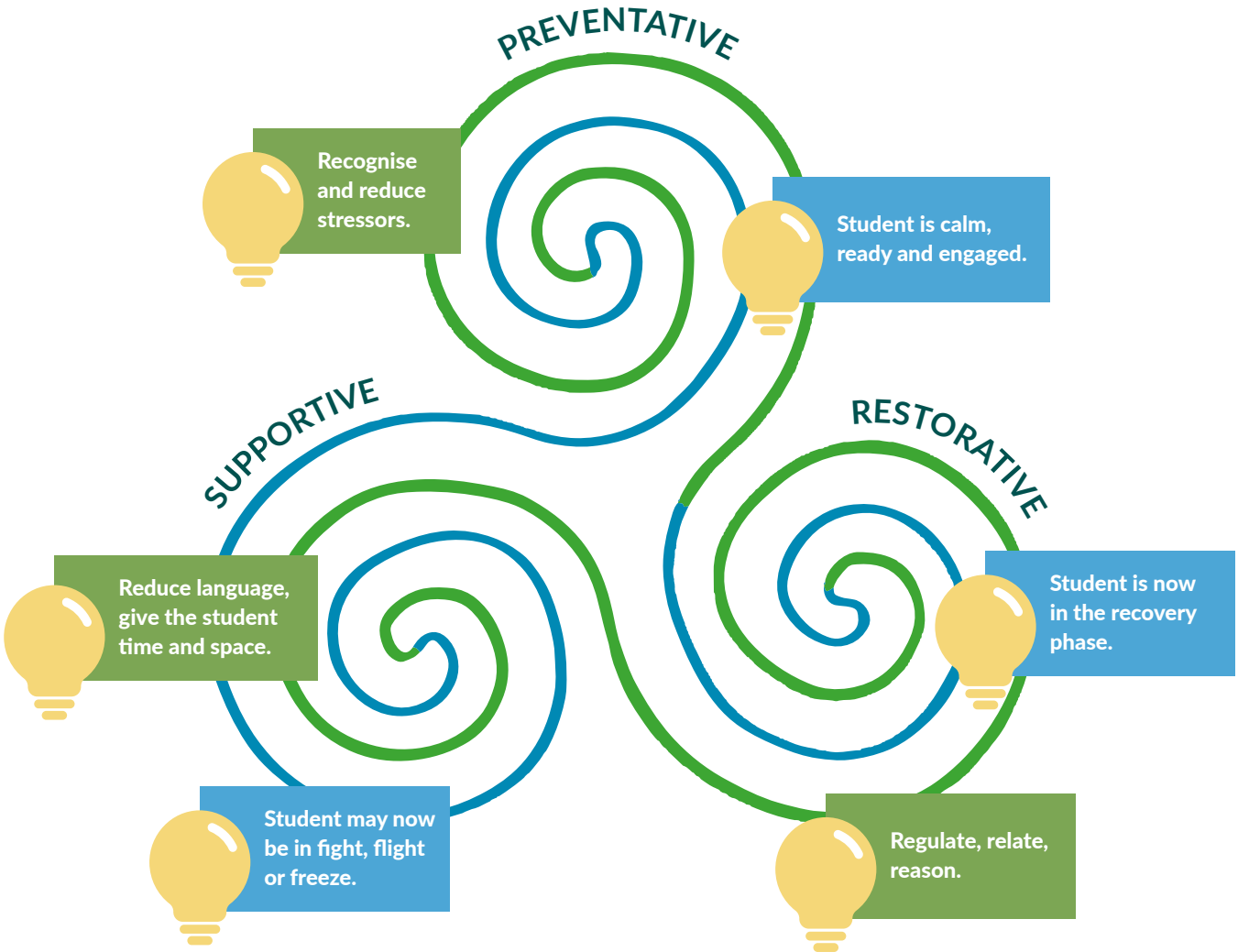


Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations






Unlocking Us: Brené with Oprah Winfrey and Dr Bruce Perry on Trauma, Resilience and Healing

Phases of Support



Phases of Support Template

| What the student may be experiencing: | | |
|--|--|--|
|  Preventing |  Supporting |  Restoring |
| | | |

| What the adult is doing: | | |
|--|--|--|
|  Preventing |  Supporting |  Restoring |
| | | |



Neurodiversity Affirming

Supporting behaviour is not about changing the person, conforming or being neuro-typical. We respect and celebrate difference and when behaviour is supported, it is always to support the student in their learning and for them to work towards achieving their best hopes. In knowing that behaviour is communication, we recognise the need to understand the student and their needs as part of a solution-focused process. Neuroaffirmation is seeing difference as an opportunity to listen, learn, adapt and evolve.

What does it mean to be neurodiversity affirming?

“Neurodiversity means that we are all different in how we think, feel, and learn, because our brains process information differently. Your whole class is diverse, not just in the way you look or what you enjoy doing, but also in the way your brains work and how you think, feel, and learn.” (LEANS)

The human race is neurodiverse. We all have different preferences and needs and process things in different ways.

Neurotypical is the phrase sometimes used to describe the majority of people as it is thought they process information in a similar way. Systems and approaches are generally set up with neurotypical people in mind.

Neurodivergent is the phrase sometimes used to describe people who process information in a different way to the majority. This may include, but is not limited to, autistic people, people with ADHD, dyslexic people or people with a developmental language disorder, however, it is not diagnosis dependent.

The needs of neurotypical people are generally met as many systems have been set up by people with similar needs, whereas neurodivergent people may have different needs that haven't been considered. For example, a school uniform might have been decided for everyone, however some people wearing it might feel uncomfortable and find it hard to concentrate.

Neurodiversity affirming means considering the needs of all in decision making, ensuring that everyone is represented and that people who are not represented by the majority are consulted and understood.

Ways to be neurodiversity affirming in school:

- Respect communication preferences and understand that no one communication style is the 'right' one
- Reframe 'behaviours' and understand the difference and diversity of different neurotypes
- Consult widely with students before making decisions that affect them
- Be open to doing things differently so that you can open success up to all students and staff
- Embrace the wonderful opportunities that difference and variability brings to the school community
- Ensure that support does not come in the form of compliance based interventions, that students and parents/caregivers are part of the SET planning process and that targets are not set in a way that seeks to change the student
- Ensure that every student has the opportunity for success in all activities

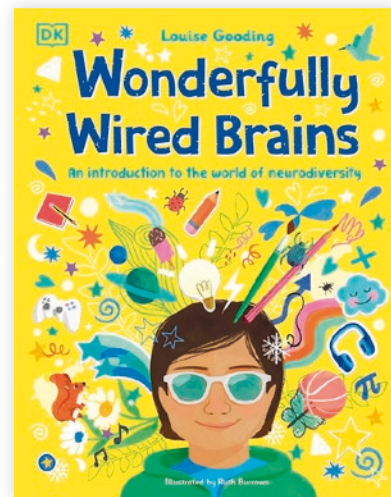
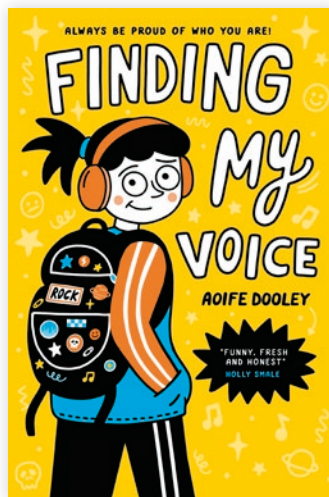
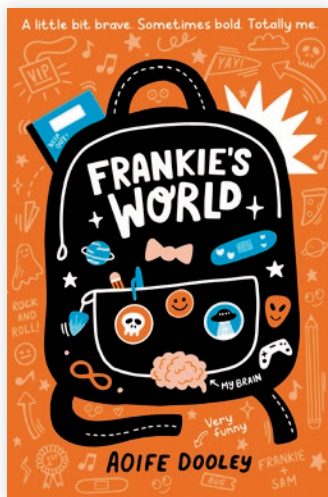
Resources and further reading



NEST (NEurodivergent peer Support Toolkit) is a free suite of materials to facilitate peer support for neurodivergent young people in mainstream post-primary schools.



LEANS: A free programme for mainstream primary schools to introduce students aged 8-11 to the concept of neurodiversity and how it impacts our experiences at school.



Frankie's World and Finding My Voice are two books about neurodiversity and the autistic experience by autistic author and illustrator, Aoife Dooley.

Wonderfully Wired Brains by Louise Gooding



Article from the British Psychological Society:
['Neurodiversity affirmative education: why and how?'](#)



[Middletown Centre for Autism with Sue Fletcher Watson](#)



[Neuro-affirmation in the Classroom with Sue Fletcher Watson](#)



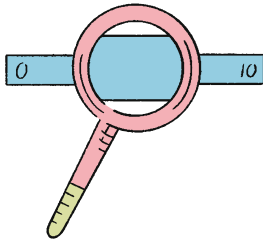
[An Irish School's Neuro-affirmative Approach to Uniform](#)

NCSE TPL



[An Introduction to Autism](#)

[Understanding Social Differences – A Neuroaffirmative Approach](#)



Solution Focused

Solution-Focused Practice (SFP) is a change-focused approach that helps people to find ways forward from difficult or challenging situations by focusing on what is wanted in the future and what is already working, and focusing on solutions rather than problems (Ajmal & Ratner, 2020).

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) originated in the 1970s in America with psychotherapists Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. SFBT and SFP have been applied in schools since the 1990s and there is increasing empirical evidence that validates the use of SFP within educational settings. SFP can be used at all tiers of the continuum of support and flexibly throughout the school community (e.g. individual students, targeted groups, whole classes, parent meetings and at a whole school level).

Solution-focused practice is about creating a context of assumed competence and moving in the direction of:

- Co-constructing meaningful goals which are framed in concrete and positive terms. To do this, we talk about what the student/teacher wants to be present, rather than a description of the absence of problems (e.g. 'stop shouting out' to 'listening more' or 'for students at our school to not feel left out' to 'students feel included and valued').
- Shifting focus from problems to solutions. To do this we need to change what we listen out for and how we listen.
- Exploring the preferred future in detail. To do this we need to explore what is really wanted that will make a difference.
- Looking for strengths and resources rather than deficits. To do this we need to be activating existing knowledge and skills and building on that.
- Exploring what is already contributing to that preferred future, think about exceptions to the behaviour, when it is not happening and explore those moments. In doing this, we are seeking and building co-operation by finding what is working and most meaningful for our students.
- Practicing unconditional positive regard.

Taking a holistic view of a situation to include the student's strengths, what is working well and what small step we can take towards achieving the 'best hopes' for the student leads to positive relationships and outcomes. Solution-focused practice not only recognises the strengths, interests and voice of the student, it also helps us in how we talk about the next steps in our planning.

Solution-focused language can be used in conversation to gather student voice, or used within structured goal-setting activities, such as planning meetings.

By eliciting best hopes, preferred future and signs of change, it provides the teacher and school staff with information that allows for co-construction of goals, and identifies specific actions that school staff can respond to in supporting the student(s).

Included in NCSE Relate is the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool, created by an SFBT advanced practitioner. This tool can be used to collaboratively set meaningful goals with a student or group of students; or for school staff to set goals for their own practice, or wider school practices. The tool also includes a review and reflection section so that the impact of any support, strategies or plans can be reviewed to ensure they are making a positive difference. Please see the video explainer before using the tool.

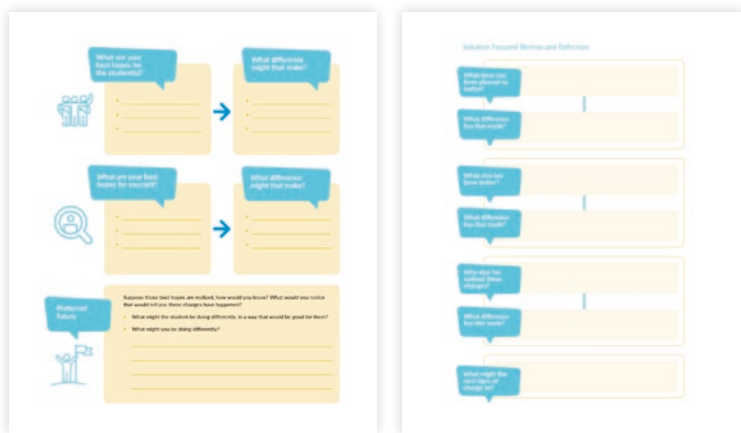
The principle of being solution focused is intertwined with many of the other principles, including student voice, unconditional positive regard and staff and student wellbeing. Alongside using the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool, a solution focused approach can be incorporated into schools in as little as five minutes, using the example questions below:

Creating Solution Focused Moments in the Classroom



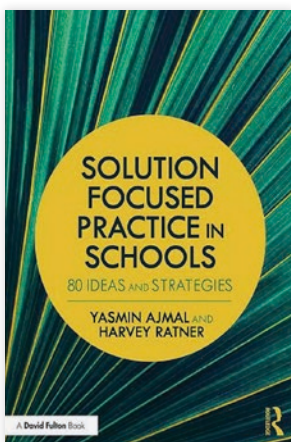
- What are your best hopes for learning about 'x' today, what will make this lesson/day most useful for you?
- If 10 is as confident as you could feel in learning about 'x' and 0 is the opposite of that, where are you now on that scale? How come you are already there and not lower? List three things.
- What three things might we notice today that will tell us this class is learning in the way that is best for each of you?
- Supposing this happened, what difference might this make?
- What are you pleased to notice about yourself today/during a lesson today?
- What three things have gone well today? What difference did that make?
- What are your best hopes for this classroom/school, what differences would you like to see that would support you to learn in the way that's best for you?

See Solution Focused Goal Setting Tool

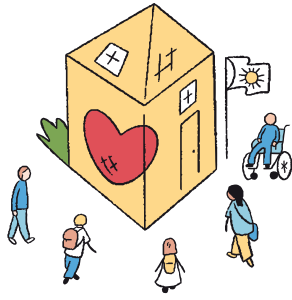


 [NCSE Solution Focused Goal Setting Tutorial](#)

 www.brief.org.uk



Solution Focused Practice in Schools
by Yasmin Ajmal and Harvey Ratner



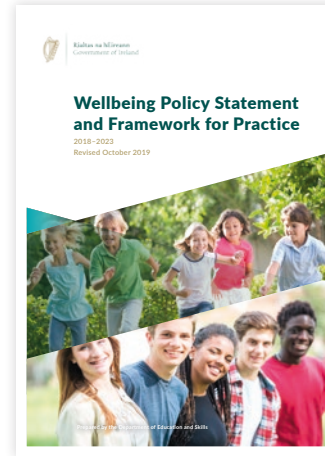
Staff and Student Wellbeing

Student and staff wellbeing is of the utmost importance. When engaging in regulation-first support, we know that the wellbeing of supportive adults is key to their practice as co-regulators.

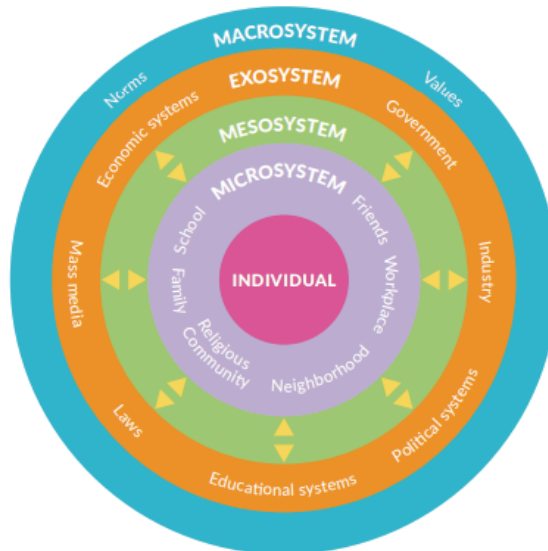
Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (DES, 2019) sets out the ambition and vision that the promotion of wellbeing is at the core of the ethos of every school.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development supports this view and offers a comprehensive systems-based understanding of wellbeing. It acknowledges the importance of the individual and his/her immediate relationships in their social context and in their wider community.



Bronfenbrenner’s model demonstrates that to be human is to be relational and that wellbeing is always realised in a community

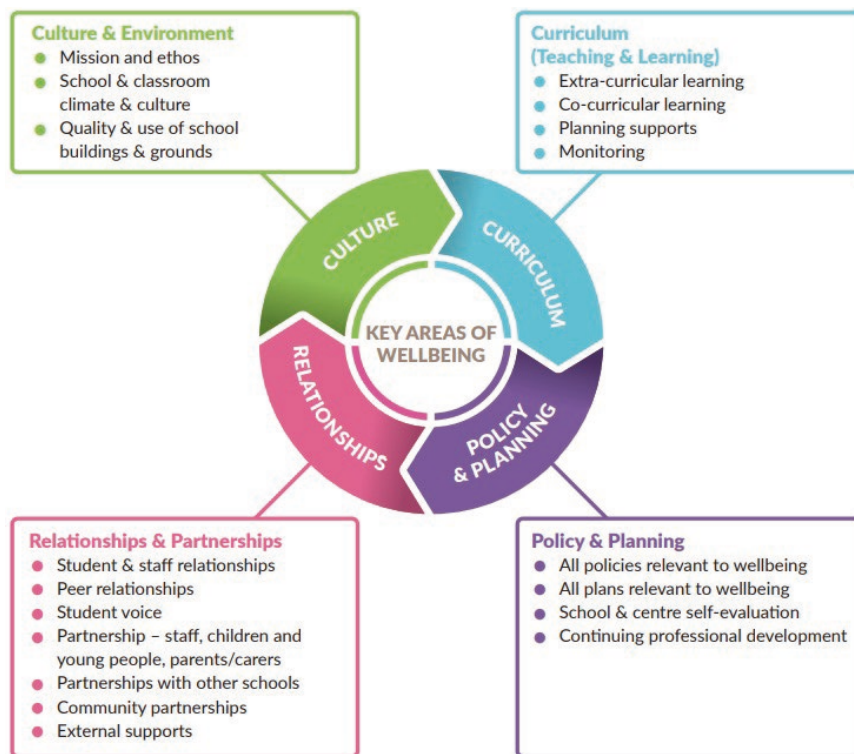


| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>INDIVIDUAL Age, sex, health, etc.</p> <p>MICROSYSTEM Immediate environments Direct interaction in activities, roles and relation with others and objects.</p> | <p>MESOSYSTEM Connections between systems and microsystems.</p> <p>EXOSYSTEM Indirect environments Systems that influence the individual indirectly through microsystems.</p> | <p>MACROSYSTEM Social ideologies and values of cultures and subcultures.</p> <p>TECHNO-SUBSYSTEM Media influences Computers Internet Portable devices Social media Television Telephones</p> |
|--|---|--|

(DES, 2019)

“The role of the teacher has also been found to be paramount to children and young people’s wellbeing (OECD, 2017), and reaches beyond teaching and learning. The relationship that teachers develop with the young person is a key influence on wellbeing development. Access to ‘one good adult’ who can guide and support a young person at a vulnerable time is an identified protective factor. Furthermore, support for the wellbeing of staff is also an essential element, and crucial to sustaining teacher/resource staff engagement, enthusiasm and ability to model resilience. It builds staff capacity to cope with challenges and adapt to change, and creates conditions to support and motivate staff to be effective.”

(Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, p.15)



Four Key Areas of Wellbeing (DES, 2019)

NCSE Relate can be used to support the Four Key Areas of Wellbeing. There are many practical strategies and resources throughout to support whole school practice for each of the key areas.

Belonging

A sense of belonging for all students is important for wellbeing and ,when every student feels that they belong, there is a positive impact for students with special educational needs, as well as all other students. Whilst location is where belonging tends to start, it is the experience of belonging for every student that we are aiming for and that links with the emphasis on relationships and understanding throughout NCSE Relate.



See the '[10 Dimensions of Belonging](#)' by Erik Carter to reflect on belonging in your school.

Growth Mindset

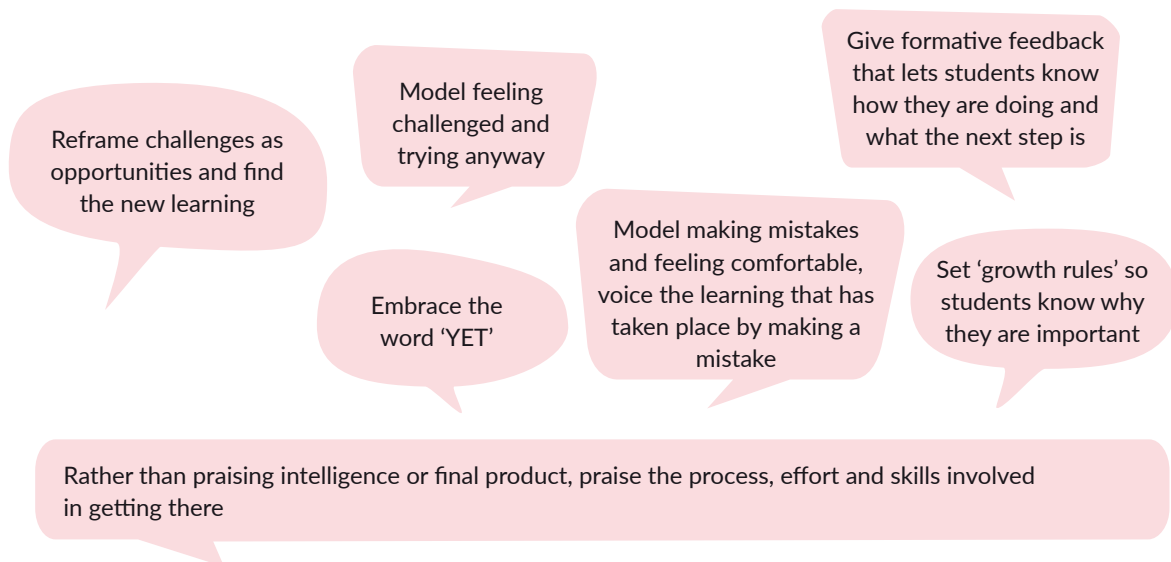
A person with a *growth mindset* views intelligence, abilities, and talents as learnable and capable of improvement through effort. A person with a *fixed mindset* views those same traits as inherently stable and unchangeable over time.

Carol S. Dweck has extensively researched growth mindset. According to Dweck, when people with a fixed mindset meet a challenge, it can leave them feeling that the challenge is insurmountable, whereas a person with a growth mindset will feel more confident in taking on the challenge and learning what is needed to overcome it.

Studies by Dweck have shown a difference in brain activity between students with fixed and growth mindset when viewing mistakes or corrections in their work; the students with fixed mindset showed no brain activity when reviewing their mistakes while students with growth mindset showed increased brain activity. The students with fixed mindset see that their mistakes are a pathway to change through reflection whereas the student with fixed mindset may not see a pathway beyond their mistakes.

Understanding the power of a growth mindset when supporting behaviour is important as it will be an important consideration in how you support students and in considering use of language.

How to Foster a Growth Mindset



Growth Rules

Rules and expectations are important in the school community; however, they can be counterproductive if they are worded without flexibility. They need to be fair for all and should be achievable for all students.

We know that rules should be phrased to tell the students what we want to see rather than what we don't want, but we can go one step further than this by creating 'Growth Rules'. These are rules that promote positive learning through motivation. Growth rules explain how they help the students thrive. For example, 'We are successful and more relaxed when we are ready and organised for class by going to lockers at least ten minutes before class starts.'



Article: [How to create the right environment for growth mindset](#)



Carol S Dweck's Ted Talk: ['The Power of Yet'](#)



Talks at Google: [Carol Dweck - The Growth Mindset](#)

Wellbeing Resources



Department of Education's [Wellbeing Site](#)



Department of Education's [Catalogue of Wellbeing Resources Primary](#)



Department of Education's [Catalogue of Wellbeing Resources Post Primary](#)



Managing Reluctant Attendance and School Avoidance Behaviour:
[A Good Practice Guide for Primary Schools](#)



Managing Reluctant Attendance and School Avoidance Behaviour:
[A Good Practice Guide for Post-Primary Schools](#)



Responding to Self Harm in School (Primary and Post Primary)



Panic Attacks: A Guide for School Staff

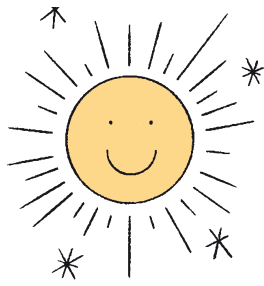
NCSE TPL



The Relate Model of Support

Understanding Behaviour

Supporting Autistic Learners in the Special School



Unconditional Positive Regard

The theory of Unconditional Positive Regard underpins NCSE Relate throughout. According to Carl Rogers (1957), a humanistic psychologist, unconditional positive regard is a caring attitude towards another, where the other person is authentically valued and totally accepted without judgement. While it does not mean that all of their actions are approved of, viewing the person with unconditional positive regard fosters the development of safe, trusting and honest relationships, crucial for change.

With such connection, the person's self-esteem and self-belief is nurtured, with empathy being the catalyst for personal growth. In contrast, if a person receives care and acceptance from a significant adult solely on condition they act or think in a desired way, their growth is inhibited.

"For a person to 'grow', they need an environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard) and empathy (being listened to and understood). Without these, relationships and healthy personalities will not develop as they should, much like a tree will not grow without sunlight and water".

Carl Rogers

Traditionally used within person-centred therapy and treatments, unconditional positive regard has been applied across many contexts. In schools and classrooms, unconditional positive regard is a way of thinking as a teacher. Thinking in this way does not mean that teachers can never feel frustrated with situations or behaviours. Instead, teachers make the distinction between feeling frustrated at what has happened, disliking the actions or the coping strategy used, as opposed to disliking or feeling frustrated with the student as a person. While it may take practice to think in this way, and at times it may feel difficult to do, particularly if teachers feel overwhelmed themselves, unconditional positive regard shapes a mindset of forgiveness and looking for the best in students and the situation. This is also good modelling and helps develop a culture of tolerance and respect.

Unconditional positive regard involves:



Barnardos "It's All About Relationships"



Benefits of Unconditional Positive Regard in the Classroom



The Sendcast: My Behaviour Journey with Catrina Lowri

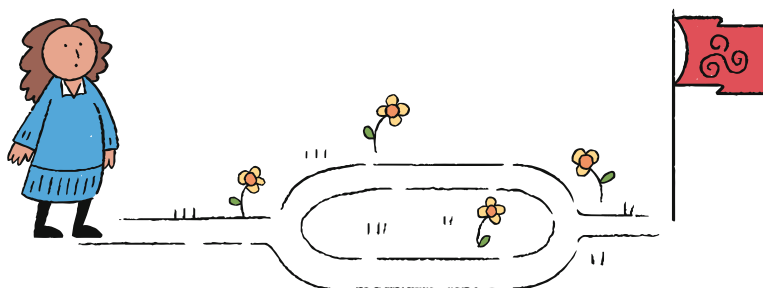
NCSE TPL



Understanding Behaviour

The Relate Model of Support

Universal Design for Learning



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) recognises, accommodates and celebrates the variability of students' strengths, needs and how they learn. Through UDL, we consider that **'What might be essential for some, may be beneficial for all'** and therefore aim to create an environment where all learners can access, engage with, and succeed in their learning.

The goal of UDL is learner agency that is purposeful and reflective, resourceful and authentic, strategic and action-orientated.

UDL is a framework that promotes participation, engagement and inclusion by providing multiple means of engagement (the WHY of learning), representation (the WHAT of learning) and action/expression (the HOW of learning).

This inclusive framework not only enhances academic outcomes, but also positively influences students' behaviour, fostering a supportive and proactive classroom. The focus on each individual's strengths and flexibility in how goals are achieved is naturally neurodiversity-affirming.

Through employing the Universal Design for Learning framework, in the context of relational and playful pedagogy, teachers can design learning environments and activities that best support learners to access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities. These activities should connect with the student's life experiences, prior knowledge, strengths and interests.

Variability

The variability of the students in our classrooms is not the exception, it's the rule.

With this in mind, in order to successfully include all of the different learners and their own strengths and needs, we need to plan in a way that allows our students to learn in different ways. This includes using different materials and providing choices or option in how our students learning through the day.

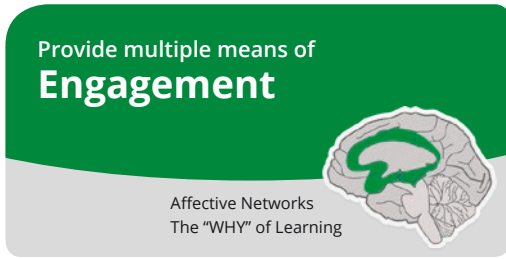
Barriers

The barrier is not in the student, the barrier is in the environment and we must work to uncover and reduce that barrier for the student. There may be unintentional barriers in the learning environment and it is our role to seek them out and remove them wherever possible. Removing barriers may be essential for one or some students but may benefit everyone.

Learner Agency

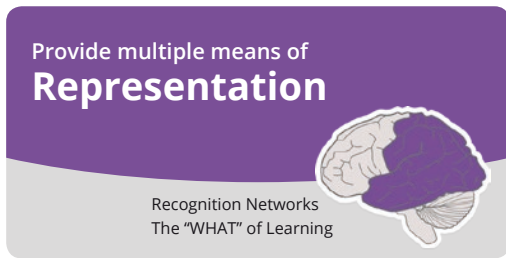
Learner agency is an important concept when supporting behaviour. Sometimes we see behaviours or dysregulation when the student does not have what they need to access the learning. This can create mounting frustration throughout the day. The answer is not always to 'reduce the demand' but to foster learner agency. The learner with agency has what they need to access the lessons, whether it is with different materials, technology, regulation time or another approach. They are resourceful, purposeful and action orientated; and we provide them with the ways and means to achieve this learner agency. By speaking to the student, you will usually find that they have a good idea of what they need to achieve this (for non-speaking or minimally speaking students, see the section on Student Voice for multiple ideas to support eliciting student voice). Learners with agency have multiple means of engagement, representation and action and expression. Barriers are removed for them.

Multiple Means of Engagement



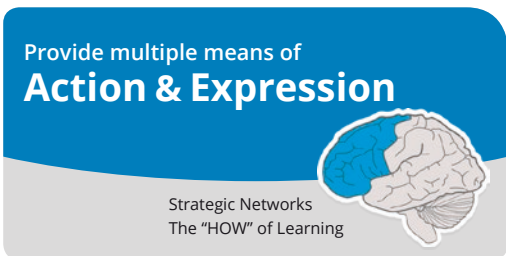
Students differ in how they are motivated to learn and there is no one way to engage all students. Some will enjoy spontaneity throughout the day, spurring them on in their learning, whilst other students could feel very anxious if the day and learning is not predictable. We need to provide multiple means of engagement to bring our students along with us and increase their engagement. Knowing our students and what interests them will be an important part of engaging them.

Multiple Means of Representation



Students differ in how they perceive and take in the information presented to them. Again, there is no one way to represent information that will suit all of the students in a classroom. We know that there will be variability. For example, students with visual impairment or who are deaf/hard of hearing will require different representation to a student who does not speak English, however they and others in the class may all appreciate the use of visuals in their learning. We need to provide multiple means of representation for our students to support them fully in their learning.

Multiple Means of Action and Expression



Students also differ in how they navigate the learning environment and showing what they know. Some students will be able to sit all day, while others will need opportunities to move, or work in different ways such as at standing stations or sitting on a rug while listening. Having these multiple means open to all students will be beneficial to all. Similarly, the way that students show best what they know will differ through writing, retelling, voice recorders, drawing, etc. The goal is to create an environment where every student can show you what they know. Students will be more regulated in their learning space if they are provided with multiple means of action and expression.



Katie Novak: What is Universal Design for Learning



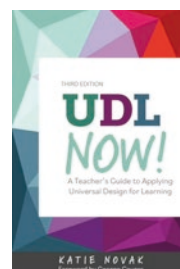
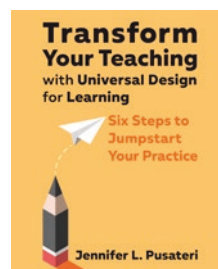
Think UDL!



Transform Your Teaching with Universal Design for Learning by Jennifer L Pusateri



UDL Now by Katie Novak



Provide multiple means of **Engagement**



Affective Networks
The "WHY" of Learning

- Provide options for **Recruiting Interest** ⁽⁷⁾
- Optimize individual choice and autonomy (7.1)
 - Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity (7.2)
 - Minimize threats and distractions (7.3)

Access

Provide multiple means of **Representation**



Recognition Networks
The "WHAT" of Learning

- Provide options for **Perception** ⁽¹⁾
- Offer ways of customizing the display of information (1.1)
 - Offer alternatives for auditory information (1.2)
 - Offer alternatives for visual information (1.3)

- Provide options for **Sustaining Effort & Persistence** ⁽⁸⁾
- Heighten salience of goals and objectives (8.1)
 - Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge (8.2)
 - Foster collaboration and community (8.3)
 - Increase mastery-oriented feedback (8.4)

Build

Provide multiple means of **Action & Expression**



Strategic Networks
The "HOW" of Learning

- Provide options for **Physical Action** ⁽⁴⁾
- Vary the methods for response and navigation (4.1)
 - Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies (4.2)

- Provide options for **Expression & Communication** ⁽⁵⁾
- Use multiple media for communication (5.1)
 - Use multiple tools for construction and composition (5.2)
 - Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance (5.3)

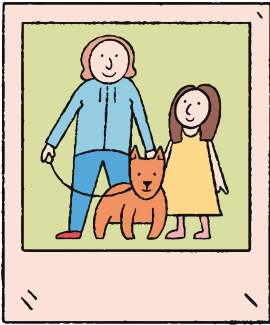
- Provide options for **Self Regulation** ⁽⁹⁾
- Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation (9.1)
 - Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies (9.2)
 - Develop self-assessment and reflection (9.3)

Internalize

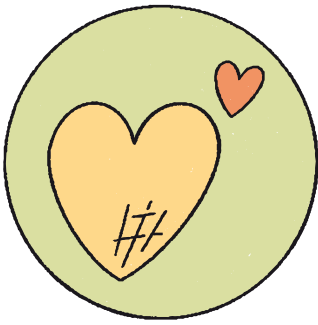
- Provide options for **Comprehension** ⁽³⁾
- Activate or supply background knowledge (3.1)
 - Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships (3.2)
 - Guide information processing and visualization (3.3)
 - Maximize transfer and generalization (3.4)

- Provide options for **Executive Functions** ⁽⁶⁾
- Guide appropriate goal-setting (6.1)
 - Support planning and strategy development (6.2)
 - Facilitate managing information and resources (6.3)
 - Enhance capacity for monitoring progress (6.4)

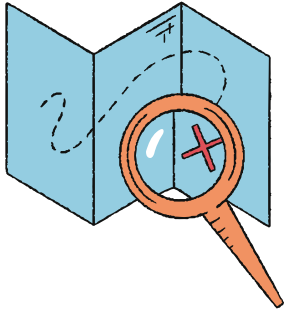
Six Elements to Support Student Participation and Engagement



The Understanding Element



The Relationships Element



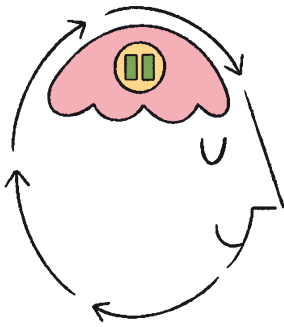
The Exploring Element



The Classroom Element

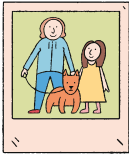


The Teaching Element



The Reflecting Element

The following six elements are a pathway for supporting students. They follow a particular order with the understanding that some happen side by side; however, there is learning from each element that will help you to make student centred and solution focused decisions along the way. For example, The Classroom Element is not the first element presented. You will undoubtedly be considering the classroom environment from the start of the academic year, however, as you learn more about the students in your class and with the UDL principle of ‘What is essential for some, may be beneficial to all’, you will be able to consider the classroom environment from a more informed and nuanced perspective.



The Understanding Element

To fully support students, we first need to know about them and understand where they are coming from. Do you know their strengths, what they are interested in and how they spend their time outside of school? Without some understanding of the student outside of the need we are supporting, we won't be able to select the right supports that will make the most impact.

This will also feed into The Relationships Element. In order to know where to start with building relationships and making a connection, we need to know about the student, their culture and values and what is important to them.

Toolkit



Getting to Know Me tool (primary/special school)



Getting to Know Me tool (post primary/special school)



The Belonging in School resource from Cambridge University



Create a **One Page Profile**

Practical Strategies

- Consider the student's communication style, how can it be included as part of a total communication approach in the classroom?
- Plan opportunities in the curriculum for specific 'Getting to Know You' activities
- Use a home/school communication tool
- Get to know students' strengths and interests and build them into lessons
- Find common ground – what do you have in common with your students?
- Take time to find out more about what you have learned from the 'Getting to Know Me' tool



Bruce Perry: Building a Connected Classroom



Be a Mr Jensen



Engaging Pupils with SEMH and Other Behaviour Needs with Adele Bates



Inside I'm Hurting by Louise Bomber



Know Me to Teach Me by Louise Bomber

NCSE TPL



Autism and Co-occurring Additional Needs



Supporting the Transition from Primary to Post Primary

Social Narratives

Understanding Social Differences – A Neuroaffirmative Approach

Students Say...

Try asking the following questions

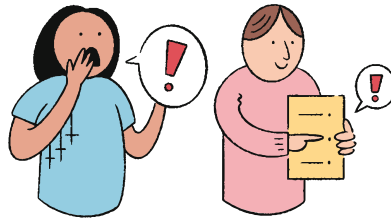
How do you find the classroom and learning?

Is there anything affecting/stressing you?

What makes it worse?

What might it look like if you are stressed?

Why did you choose this subject? What is your motivation?



What coping mechanisms help you to support your wellbeing?

Reflective Questions

- What systems are in place so that staff can collaborate, gather and share information that is already known about the student?
- Have I taken time to reflect on what I find out about the student and to extend my learning where necessary?
- Do I need more teacher professional learning to understand the student's strengths and needs? Is there somebody on staff who has knowledge or expertise who can support me?
- Is the student's identity and culture represented and valued in the school community?

Getting to Know Me



Getting To Know Me

What do I really love?

What do I like about school?

What activities do I enjoy at school?

What do I like about break time?

What activities do I enjoy at home?

What do I like about yard?

What makes learning easier for me?

Something you should know about me...

I like to show what I have learned by...

Getting To Know Me

Questions for Parents/Caregivers

What are your child's interests and hobbies?

Is your child worried about anything or scared of something that we should know about?

How can we support your child in school?

Is there any other information you would like us to know?

Have they had any life experiences or changes that you would like to share with us?

Getting To Know Me

Questions for Adults working with: _____

What does the student enjoy currently?

How can the student's strengths and interests be used to support their learning?

What's working well?

Are there any approaches or strategies that were previously implemented or are ready to be implemented?

What helped the student in their previous class or setting?

Getting To Know My Teacher

My teacher's name is:

What did you like about school?

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

Do you like to play any games or sports?

What's the coolest place you've ever been to?

My teacher's favourites:

Colour: _____

Animal: _____

Food: _____

What's the most fun thing you like to do on the weekend?

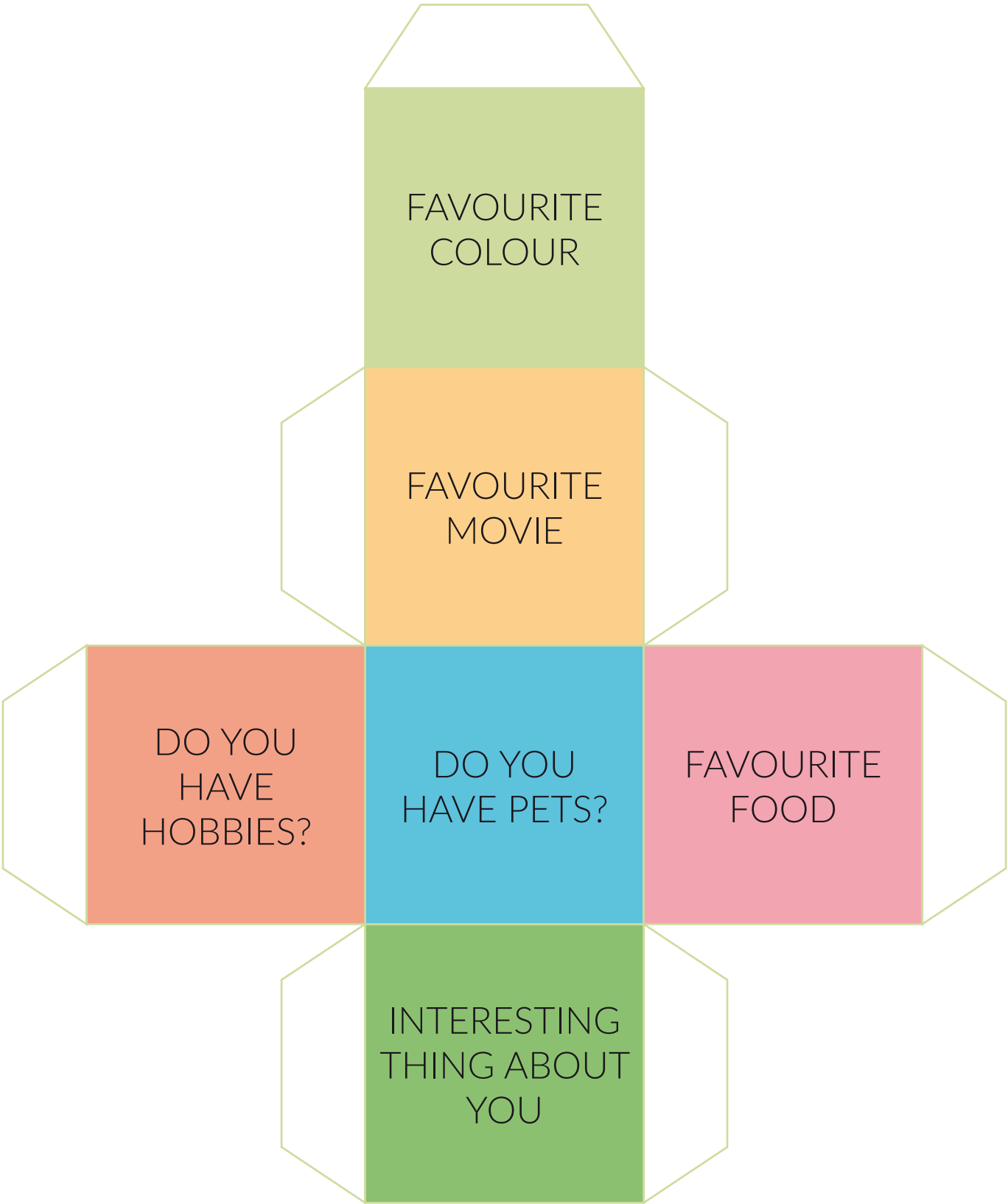
Do you have any pets?

Do you like TV or movies?

What is an interesting fact about you?

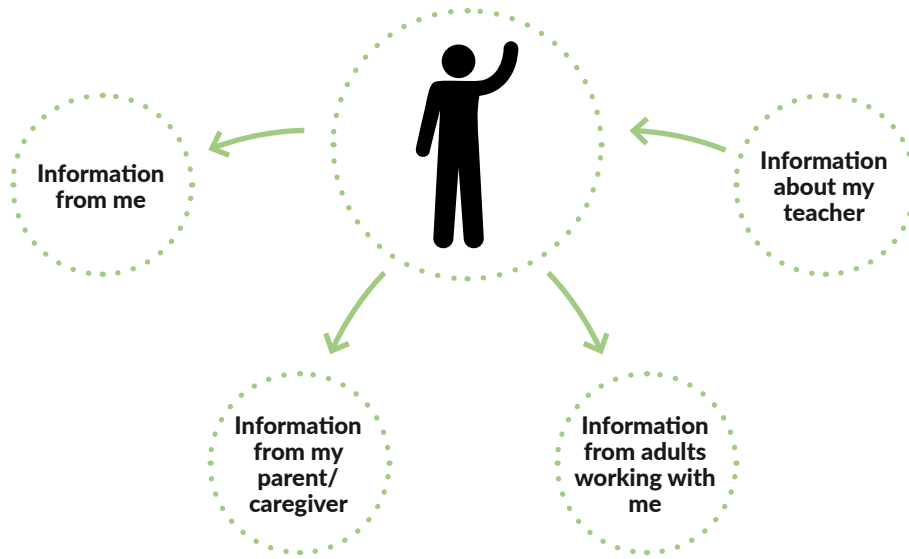
Getting To Know My Teacher

Dice Game



The Understanding Element

Getting to Know Me



Getting To Know Me

Things that I like (in school/outside school):

What are break times like for me?

My favourite part of the school day is:

What is class changeover like for me?

My favourite subjects are:

Who are the important people in my life?

What makes learning easier for me?

Something I would like you to know about me..

I prefer to show my learning by...

Getting To Know Me

Questions for Parents/Caregivers

What are your child's interests and hobbies?

Is your child anxious about anything that we should know about?

How can we support your child in school?

Have they had any life experiences or changes that you would like to share with us?

If your child experiences stress, is there anything that can make this worse that we should know about?

Is there any other information you would like us to know?

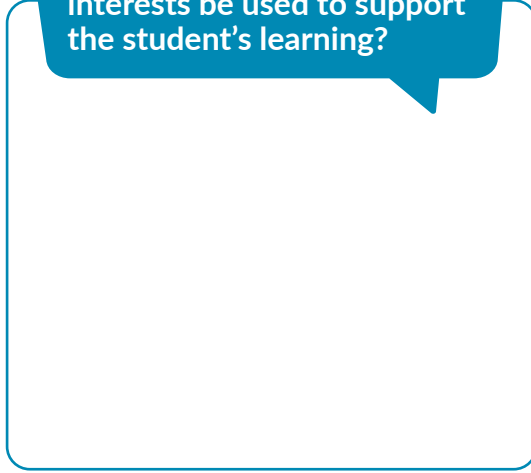
Getting To Know Me

Questions for Adults working with: _____

What are the student's strengths and interests?



How can these strengths and interests be used to support the student's learning?



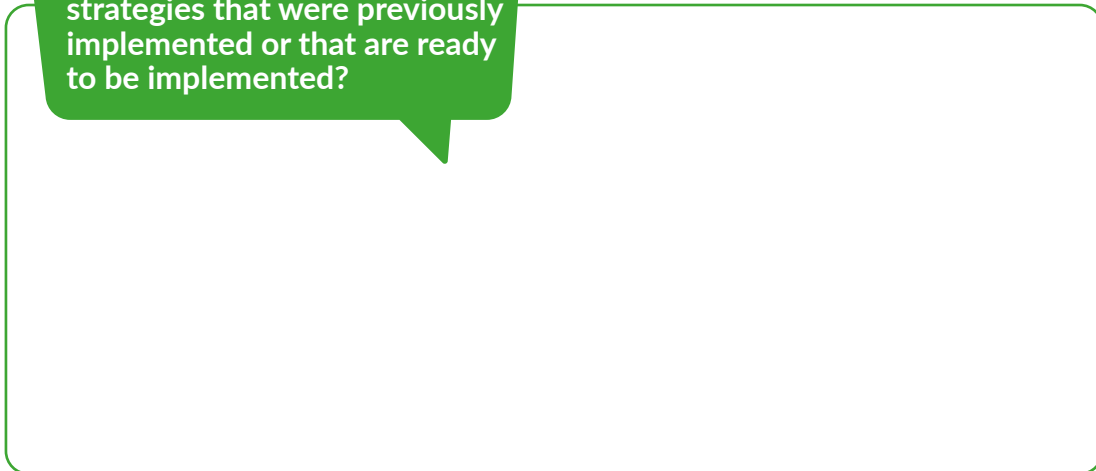
What has been working well for the student?



This student learns best by...



Are there any approaches or strategies that were previously implemented or that are ready to be implemented?



Getting To Know My Teacher

My teacher's name is:

What did you like about school?

What's a hobby you're really passionate about?

Is there a book or movie you think everyone should experience at least once?

If you could take a year off to travel, where would you go first?

My teacher's favourites:

Music: _____

TV Shows: _____

Take Out: _____

If you weren't teaching, what other job do you think you'd be doing?

What's the best meal you've ever had?

What's a hobby you're really passionate about?

Have you ever surprised yourself?



The Relationships Element


“No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship.”

Dr James Comer

People who have positive relationships are more likely to feel happier with their lives and feel that they belong. Every adult in the school setting has a responsibility to understand the importance of positive relationships and how they impact behaviour. As professionals, it is our role to establish positive relationships with students and their families. They are essential for future success when supporting behaviour. Healthy relationships help students feel secure and supported, whereas unhealthy relationships can have a long lasting negative impact.

Is the support you give balanced with the challenge you set?

Consider relationships through the social discipline window (adapted from McCold and Wachtel, 2003). Thinking about the students in your class, consider the level of support paired with the level of challenge for each individual and how the ‘with’ quadrant can be achieved. This is where relationships are emphasised, a sense of belonging is achieved and students work within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Showing a belief in students along with the principles of a growth mindset is an important part of building healthy relationships with students.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| C H A L L E N G E | TO <i>Punitive</i> Feels pointless No development Boredom sets in Patronising High Challenge and Low Support | WITH <i>Relational</i>  Feel understood and supported Taking a supported risk in learning Zone of Proximal Development Sense of belonging High Support and High Challenge |
| | NOT <i>Neglectful</i> Feel left out Boring No growth or learning Low Support and Low Challenge | FOR <i>Permissive</i> Feels unsafe High risk without the support needed Damages self esteem High Support and Low Challenge |
| S U P P O R T | | |

Toolkit



PACE Approach



Relationship Circles

Practical Strategies

- Employ **Unconditional Positive Regard**
- Use **Growth Mindset language**
- **Check in circles**
- 'Meet and Greet' each student at the door of the class, use their name
- Try the 2x10 approach
- Seek meaningful **student voice** in your classroom
- Be One Good Adult
- Support students to join in with group activities by finding the right role for them
- Use of Intensive Interaction (See NCSE TPL)

Students say...

Feeling safe and connected with school staff makes it easier to learn.

Offer options to make it easier to decide and when a student is having a good day, ask them how they would like to be asked, e.g. "Do you prefer yes/no questions, or 3 options, or to only use communication cards?"

Check in on why a student has missed school. It could be due to a stressful situation like a field trip or a task that feels impossible due to barriers. Checking in might give them the chance to tell you why.

If a student misses a class, please give them the notes/homework, don't tell them to find out from other students. This places extra social stressors on some students.



If you are offering support or checking in, try to avoid broad questions like "How can I help you?" This can be hard to answer if the student is already feeling stressed as it can be harder to articulate. Try saying: "Do you need a break?", "Do you feel uncomfortable?"

If you are giving advice, think about how this is delivered – is the student comfortable in the space and is it advice that they have asked for? Is the advice appropriate to their life and perspective?



Meet and Greet

A small change that makes a big difference

Making an effort to greet each of your students at the start of each day/lesson nurtures a sense of belonging. This simple strategy fosters a sense of individual importance for each student as well as contributing to a friendly and safe classroom culture. Research into positive greetings at the door have found that disruption was decreased while engagement in learning increased. The study found that up to one hour of learning time per day can be gained with this effective strategy.

2x10 Approach





The 2x10 approach is a relationship building strategy used to support hard to reach students. The idea is simple: a teacher or staff member spends two minutes per day, for ten consecutive days, engaging in casual, non-academic, problem-free talk. The goal is to foster trust and build a positive rapport between the student and adult, helping the student feel seen and valued. Research shows that those two minutes make a difference when the adult is consistent over ten consecutive schools days, so keep persevering and making that connection.

One Good Adult

The concept of one good adult is to ensure that students have an adult who they can turn to if they are in need.

The 'My World Survey 2' by UCD School of Psychology and Jigsaw (Dooley, O' Connor, Fitzgerald, O' Reilly, 2019) found that students who reported having one good adult tended to have increased self-esteem, better mental health, lower levels of depression and anxiety and higher resilience and optimism.

It is important to note that Third Year and Sixth Year students were more likely to report low perceived support from a special adult.

-  [NCSE 2x10 Approach in Post Primary](#)
-  [Making Sure Each Child is Known](#)
-  [Rita Pierson: Every Kid Needs a Champion](#)
-  [The Magic of Relationships with Dr Sonia Mastrangelo](#)

NCSE TPL



- Understanding Behaviour
- The Relate Model of Support
- Intensive Interaction
- The Power of Play
- Understanding and Supporting Behaviour (Post Primary)
- Check and Connect (Post Primary)

Reflective Questions

- What would students say about your relationship with them?
- How do you promote peer relationships?
- When you were growing up, did you have one good adult to talk to when you needed support? What qualities did that person possess?
- Consider the following relationships in your environment: student to student, teacher to student and colleague to colleague.

PACE

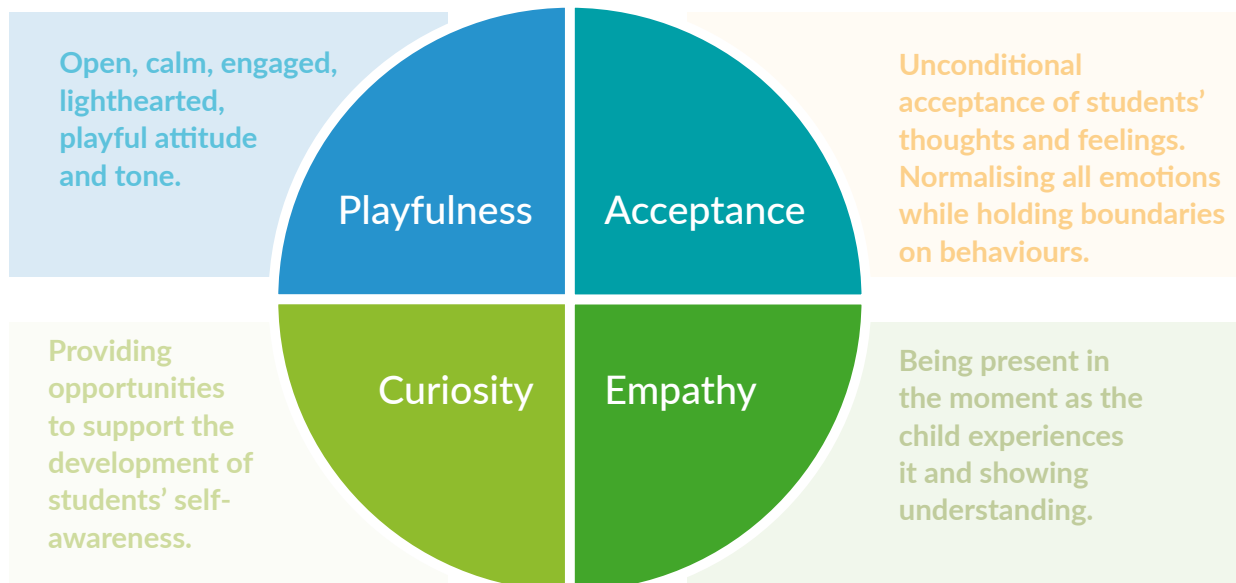
(Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy)

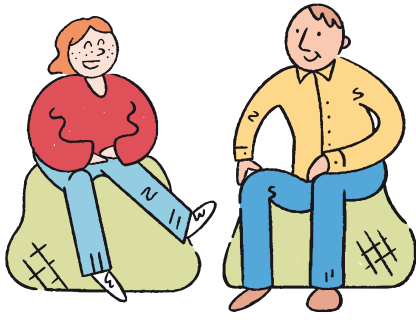
PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving developed by the psychologist Dr Dan Hughes that fosters trust, emotional connection and meaningful relationships. It is a way of relating, a 'way of being', that focuses on how we communicate with students and how we communicate a sense of safety and security in our interactions.

PACE can be used to connect with many students and is particularly effective in meeting the needs of students who have experienced trauma or attachment difficulties.

The PACE approach communicates to students that adults hold them in unconditional positive regard and are accepting of all of their thoughts and feelings. It can also help adults to gain a better understanding of what the student is experiencing in the moment. When adults embrace the PACE approach, a student's self-awareness and skills to respond to their own stress is supported through co-regulation as well as nurturing the student's positive sense of self.

The PACE approach has four elements, **P** stands for playfulness, **A** for acceptance, **C** for curiosity and **E** for empathy, which can be used individually, in different combinations or sequentially.





Playfulness

A playful approach is not about being funny all of the time or not taking situations or students' emotions seriously. Instead, playfulness involves having an engaged attitude, open and calm body language and using a light-hearted or gentle tone of voice. This helps students to be more open and trusting of connections and positive experiences with adults. Being playful may involve communicating an interest through sharing activities with the student, being humorous or playing alongside them. While playfulness may not be appropriate at times of distress, playfulness can be helpful in communicating short reminders of an expectation in a non-threatening way. Responding with playfulness can also diffuse a tense situation that is beginning to develop, as shame or frustration that a student might feel in that moment can be reduced, preventing defensive responses.

Light tone of voice rather than sharp, irritated or authoritative tones.

Showing interest through non-verbal communication, soft expression, nodding, smiling, lowering your body to the student's level.

Responding verbally and/or nonverbally in animated or jovial ways.

Being flexible.



Acceptance

Acceptance begins by separating the student from their behaviour and by connecting with the student's feelings, thoughts or perceptions without judgement and without disregarding, or reassuring them away. Unconditional acceptance of the feelings or thoughts felt at that moment fosters a student's sense of safety. However, acceptance does not mean we always accept or agree with the student's actions or the student's interpretation of a situation. It is also important not to challenge or contradict the student's expressions of thought or feeling, even if those expressions are upsetting to hear. Rather, acknowledge and accept them with curiosity and empathy. In responding in this way, the adult communicates understanding and an acceptance of the student's right to show their emotions, while also communicating and supporting the student to recognise boundaries for behaviours at school and in daily life.

"I can see how you feel this is unfair. You wanted to play longer but the time is up. It's great you get a chance again tomorrow."

"I can hear you saying that you _____ and you're feeling _____."

"You were letting me know that you were really _____ when you _____."



Curiosity

Being curious in a quiet, accepting tone, communicates to the student that you want to understand what they are experiencing and that you are willing to support them. This genuine curiosity and willingness, helps the student to build awareness of and reflect on how they have responded and how this response may have been influenced by their thoughts or feelings. Adults can convey curiosity through phrases such as “I wonder if...” rather than asking the student “Why?” which places expectation on the student to understand, explain and communicate the reasons for their response. In communicating with curiosity we initiate calmer and more open conversation.

“Can you tell me a bit more about that?”

“When I was listening to you I was starting to think that... Does that seem right?”

“I’m wondering if you thought that...?”



Empathy

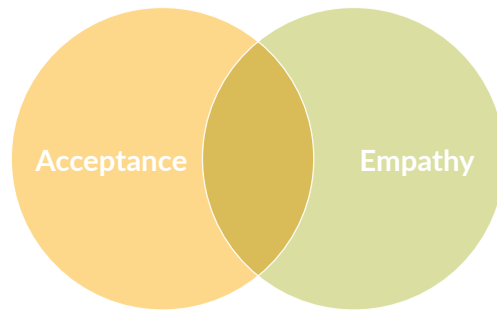
An adult communicating that they really understand a student and consider the student's feelings important, can make a big difference to how that student can learn to cope with stress. Being empathetic, putting yourself in someone else's shoes and allowing yourself to feel what they are feeling, being “with them” in the moment and carrying and containing their big emotions lays the foundation for connection. Being empathetic communicates to the student that we know how difficult an experience is for them and that they do not have to cope with this difficult experience or feeling alone.

“It sounds like it’s been really tough.”

“It seems to you like he hates you. That must be really hard.”

“I would find that frustrating too... when I feel frustrated I usually do _____ would you like to give that a try?”

Acceptance and Empathy



Used together, acceptance and empathy in how adults think, feel, interact and behave towards students is at the root of developing a sense of safety for students at school. Embracing just these two elements together, through non-verbal and verbal communication can be an effective and accessible way to begin using the PACE approach in your classroom.

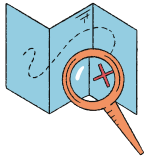
"You must have been so scared and so you ran away. I was really worried about you too; it is so nice to have you back."

"I can see this feels too difficult to start right now... I'm going to get everyone else started, and then I am going to come back to you."

Further Reading



[Dr Dan Hughes](#)

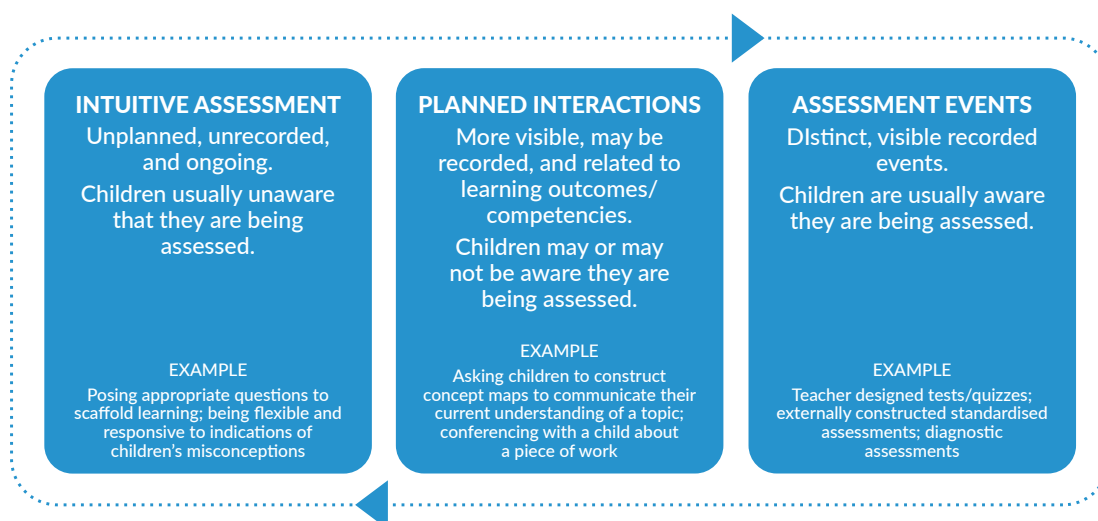


The Exploring Element

The Exploring Element builds on the what has been established in The Understanding Element and The Relationships Element to develop knowledge of the student and how they can be supported to achieve best hopes and become expert learners. Now that you know about the student, their life and interests, you can find out more about what engages them in learning and what they may need to reduce barriers in their learning. Explore what is working well and how the elements of successful moments can be used to further support the student.

Exploring – where to start?

- You will have gained great insight into the student from themselves and the people around them in The Understanding Element and The Relationships Element. Take time to reflect on how you will use this information to make positive changes.
- Knowing more about the student’s strengths, how can you build upon them to affirm the student and make learning accessible, supporting them in being a learner with agency?
- Has the student identified areas that they would like to work on? Incorporate these ideas into any planned support.
- Is there information from the student and their family, other staff or relevant professionals that will inform you on changes to the environment? Explore these changes regularly with the student to ensure they remain productive.
- Consider what and how you are assessing. Remember that we are getting to the bottom of ‘why’ a behaviour happens so good assessment is best placed in areas where the student needs support, e.g. literacy, language, sensory checklists, environment checks. Use the NCCA Continuum of Assessment to inform the best approach.
- Think holistically. Behaviours are never in silo, they have communicative intent; think widely about the supports the student may need rather than looking closely at the behaviour. To support the behaviour through rewards or consequences will not change the reason that it happens. Explore this as widely as possible.



(NCCA)

Students say...

Ask students



Toolkit



Stressor Tool



Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool



NCSE Solution Focused Goal Setting Tutorial

Further resources



Routes for Learning



CAST Tips for UDL Assessment



NCCA Assessment (Primary)



NCCA Assessment (Post Primary)

NCSE TPL



A Neuro-affirmative Approach to Assessment and Preparation (Primary)

Assessment and Planning (Post Primary)

Preparation for Teaching and Learning for Autistic Students (Primary)

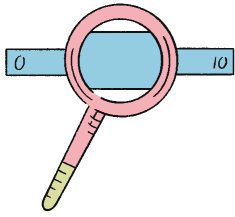
Planning for Autistic Students (Post Primary)

The SCERTS Model (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Supports)

Student Support Planning (Post Primary)

Reflective questions

- Are there multiple ways for students to show their learning?
- Do you use assessment flexibly or is there more value placed on one particular type?
- Are students and their families aware of assessment and do they have voice and choice in this?



Solution Focused

Solution-Focused Practice is a change-focused approach that helps people to find ways forward from difficult or challenging situations by focusing on what is wanted in the future and what is already working, and focusing on solutions rather than problems.

(Ajmal & Ratner, 2020)



Exploring best hopes. Finding out what is wanted and what are the best hopes in terms of differences or outcomes.



Exploring the 'preferred future'. Capturing the details of what we want to see happening.



Identifying instances of existing success and strengths and exceptions to the 'problem'. Finding moments where the preferred future may already be happening so that we can build on what is already working.



Identifying small signs of change as evidence of future progress.



Engaging in reflective practice.

Solution-Focused Goal Setting



What are your best hopes for the student(s)?

- _____
- _____
- _____



What difference might that make?

- _____
- _____
- _____



What are your best hopes for yourself?

- _____
- _____
- _____



What difference might that make?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Preferred future



Suppose those best hopes are realised, how would you know? What would you notice that would tell you these changes have happened?

- What might the student be doing differently, in a way that would be good for them?
- What might you be doing differently?

Exploring existing strengths and solutions



On the scale, where, at 10, the best hopes are achieved, and 0 is the opposite of that, where are you now? Mark a number on the scale below.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(best hopes)

How come you are already there and not lower? List 5 things.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Mark where might be the 'good enough' point on that scale?

Small signs of change



Moving up half a point on that scale from where you are now, what will be the next small signs of change that show things are moving in a helpful direction? What will you start looking out for?

Reflective practice



Continuous reviewing and reflecting on what is going well is encouraged. Start looking out for small signs of change, and what you are pleased to notice.

Solution-Focused Review and Reflection

What have you been pleased to notice?

What difference has that made?

What else has been better?

What difference has that made?

Who else has noticed these changes?

What difference has this made?

What might the next signs of change be?



The Classroom Element

The Classroom Element encompasses the environment and the people who create a classroom community.

The Reggio Emilia approach from Italy recognises the environment as the ‘third teacher’; the first being the parent and the second being the class teacher. Therefore, it’s worth spending time considering the best way to use the environment to promote meaningful participation and engagement.

Consider the **Universal Design for Learning principle**. By providing multiple means of engagement, representation, expression and action, we reduce barriers to learning and nurture the agency of learners who can flexibly use their environment.

Proactive measures in the classroom environment such as:

| | | | |
|---------|----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| ROUTINE | PREDICTABILITY | CONSISTENCY | CLEAR EXPECTATIONS |
|---------|----------------|-------------|--------------------|

can create a regulated classroom and support students to feel calm, safe and ready for learning.

If a student can anticipate a transition, perhaps through an embedded routine or schedule, this predictability supports their ability to begin to regulate based on the upcoming activity.

Students feel less anxious and apprehensive in a predictable and structured space. With embedded routines, students can build independence and confidence.

Practical Strategies

- ‘Meet and Greet’ every student by name in the morning
- Have students collaborate and contribute to decisions about their classroom and their learning
- Create a predictable, structured environment to support transitions between and during lessons
- Offer a soft start to the day and after breaks
- Have an area within the classroom that offers students a quiet space, e.g. a beanbag, calm corner or library space. See the [Relate Mindful Colouring Page](#) for a relaxing activity
- Use the top of a bookcase or cabinet as a standing station where students can opt to stand while they engage in writing tasks
- Be conscious of the visual clutter in the classroom space. Be reflective of whether it is necessary and relevant to the learning

Students say...

Listening looks different from person to person. Being allowed to listen in a different way can make all the difference, e.g using hands to fidget or even knit/crochet, sitting in a different way, standing up or stretching legs.

School staff modelling taking breaks would help make it the norm.

In exam years, some students push themselves not to take necessary breaks as they are stressed about missing something. Check in with them to make sure they are not ‘pushing’ themselves too much.

Where possible, stagger corridor times as these can be overwhelming for some students.

Not all breaks are for movement, some are for fatigue or quiet or to stop and take a moment to re-engage.

Flexible movement being usual practice makes it easier to get up and move about or stim without feeling self-conscious.



The Outdoor Classroom

Conducting teaching and learning outside in natural environments can positively impact student regulation, social-emotional development, motivation and engagement in learning (Becker, Lauterbach, Spengler and Dettweiler, 2017; Mann *et al.*, 2021). The outdoor classroom can be explored and provide benefits in all contexts.

Outdoor learning brings everyday subjects such as reading, maths or science alive by adopting a kinaesthetic, sensory and experiential approach to learning (Lieberman and Hoody, 1998).

The sensory rich environment of nature creates unique opportunities for students

- To connect with their surroundings
- To attend to the unique tactile, visual and scented experiences of the natural world
- To be curious and imaginative
- To create and build using natural materials

Finding opportunities to incorporate nature into teaching and learning activities is something that will benefit students of all ages.

For ideas for all age ranges check out [Outdoor Learning – Education Scotland](#) and [Learning Through Landscapes](#)

Visuals in the Classroom

- Use them to label
- Use them to direct
- Use them to schedule
- Use them to show when there's a change
- Use them to list instructions
- Use them to create zones in the environment
- Use them to show expectations
- Use them to show time
- Use them to offer choices

Toolkit



[NCSE The Physical Classroom Environment](#)



[NCSE Classroom Sensory Screening Tool](#)



[NCSE Visual Supports within an Inclusive Learning Environment](#)



[NCSE Movement Breaks in the Post Primary Classroom](#)



[NCSE Sensory Spaces](#)



[Clever Classrooms Report](#)



[NCSE Get Ready, Do, Done Template](#)



Calm, Alert and Learning by Stuart Shanker



Self-Reg Schools: A Handbook for Educators by Stuart Shanker and Susan Hopkins



The Kid's Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control by Lauren Brukner

NCSE TPL



Fundamentals of Structured TEACCHing

Visual Structured Teaching Methodologies

Understanding Behaviour (Primary)

The Relate Model of Support

Understanding and Supporting Behaviour (Post-primary)

Reflective Questions

- Are there opportunities for multi-sensory or movement-based learning activities that link in with what you are teaching?
- Is there flexibility in what position students are in throughout the day? Can they stand, sit or move around at different times?
- Can you zone the classroom space for different activities? For example, a rug for sitting as a group, a beanbag for relaxing, a standing station for standing up while writing.
- Observe the physical environment through the student's perspective.
 - Is the environment welcoming and warm?
 - Are the resources needed available and easy to access?
 - Is the furniture the correct size for everyone who will be there?
 - Is everything visible from all positions the students are in?



The Teaching Element

Learner Variability and Removing Barriers

We now know, that like fingerprints, no two brains are the same. There is no single way in which the brain reacts to a task or activity. Removing barriers in the learning environment can be done by:

- Anticipating variability of learners
- Providing flexible ways for students to reach learning goals
- Providing multiple means of engagement, representation and action/expression (please see [UDL Principle](#))

By doing this, we can expand a student's capacity to regulate and engage in their learning more successfully.

When reducing stressors to increase engagement and participation, it is important to remove barriers rather than solely reducing demands.

Removing barriers in the learning environment while beneficial for all, will be essential for some. This ensures that all learners have the agency required to be successful. The goal is to create a learning environment where our students are purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal-directed.

Practical Strategies

It is important to talk to students and take into account what they tell us. Remember, they know what is and is not working in their environment. Start with what they tell you.

The following is not an exhaustive list and is dependent on the individuals at the heart of planning, however, some relevant strategies to support all students include:

Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

- Be clear in expectations and rules, while remaining flexible to respond to student variability and regulation
- Collaborate with students to co-design tasks, activities and the learning environment
- Visually represent expectations and rules
- Model skills
- Use schedules, checklists, cues and signals
- Use social narratives to prepare students
- Create routines that foster predictability and consistency
- Vary the social demands involved in class tasks and activities

- Supporting transitions during the school day
 - using visual schedules and timers
 - provide verbal reminders
 - allow time to process or absorb information
- Set goals together using the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool, display them in different ways and discuss how to achieve them together
- Emphasise process and effort, think about Growth Mindset in the Wellbeing principle
- Give Growth Mindset feedback
- Allow flexibility for time to regulate throughout tasks, model the need to regulate to overcome distraction or fatigue during tasks
- Zone the classroom to signal different areas available to complete the task, e.g standing station, short break area, etc.
- Recognise the context – what is motivating or necessary in one context or at one time can change or may not apply in another context
- Ensure that the environment and activities are culturally representative and inviting to all

Provide Multiple Means of Representation

- Display images in a flexible format – consider font, size, format, visual or audio, there are many possibilities and they depend on the learners you are working with
- Use a total communication approach
- Provide alternatives to text, such as photos and objects of reference
- Pre-teach vocabulary and support with visuals
- Offer an alternative representation when teaching concepts, e.g text and comic strip, diagram and video
- Break tasks into small steps, see: [Get Ready, Do, Done](#) strategy
- Use digital translation tools where necessary
- Activate prior knowledge of topics through discussion, journals, mind-maps, KWL charts and other means
- Chunk instructions to manage tasks, see [Goblin Magic To-do Manager](#)
- Provide multiple ways to take notes and learn, e.g. post its, mind-maps, mini whiteboards or digital options
- Ensure diverse perspectives are represented and that they are complex and authentic portrayals
- Allow text to speech tools where possible

Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression

- Provide access to alternative technologies such as immersive reader on Microsoft 365, see [video](#)
- Provide multiple media to learn concepts, e.g. maths manipulatives, videos/slide presentations, diagrams, etc.
- Provide tools for creating, e.g. storyboards, text to speech, sentence starters, calculators, etc.
- Use co-teaching to provide more relational opportunities
- Use goal setting; set collaborative intentions for tasks and lessons and use the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool for broader goals
- Provide varying feedback, e.g a voice note, a written comment, rubrics
- Provide checklists to guide students through tasks, these can be adapted to the individual, e.g. physical objects or checkbox lists
- Use graphic organisers to organise information or as aids for students to manage tasks
- Teach note-taking skills and offer multiple means of doing so

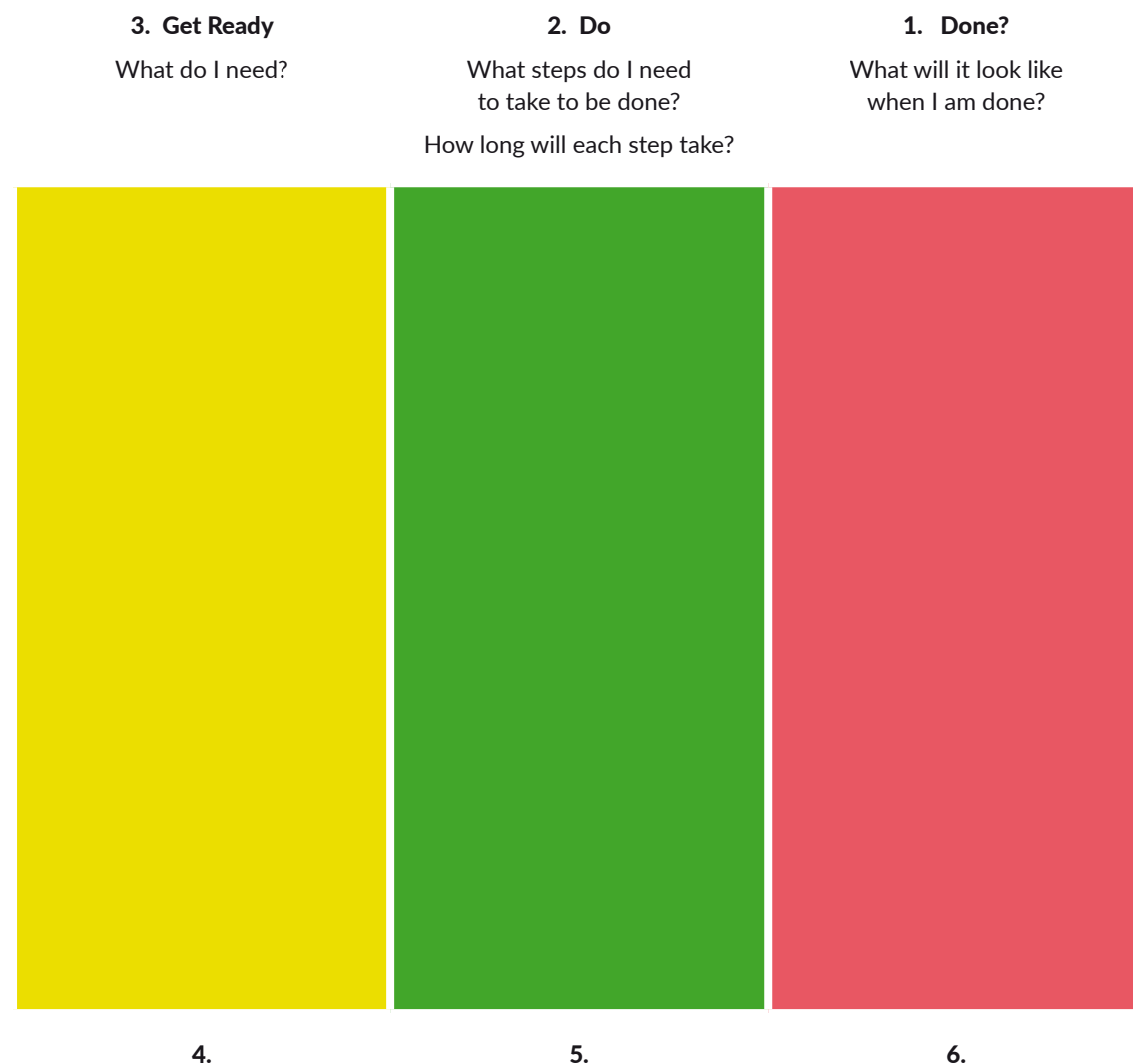
Get Ready, Do, Done

Get Ready, Do, Done is an executive function planning tool that supports students to develop an understanding of the components and process of completing a multi-step sequence activity. This framework supports future thinking, which is a large component of executive functioning including the ability to plan, organise and manage behaviours for task completion within an allotted time frame. It can be used with the whole class, a group or an individual student.

The process of using this tool starts with the end in mind, imagining what the task will look like when it is all done. Next, working through the sequential steps to “Do” and finally the organisation of resources to “Get Ready”.

The tool is colour coded with yellow for ‘Get Ready’, green for ‘Do’ and red for ‘Done’. It can be used with physical objects, post it notes, written out, drawn or made digitally but should always be colour coded correctly and follow the order as described below:

- Teachers show and demonstrate what **Done** looks like.
- Students problem solve with the teacher what steps are required to achieve their goals and collaboratively identify the steps and time allocation in the **Do** section.
- Students then work out what materials are needed to complete the task in the **Get Ready** column.
- Students are then instructed to go and gather those materials independently, now completing the task in the order: **Get Ready, Do, Done**.
- The last step includes comparing the final product with the plan, visually captured in **Done**.



Students say...

When giving instructions, it's great to always write it down as well. It means we have something to go back to if we are finding it hard to process everything at once or if we miss a step or just need to check back on what we need to do.

It's great to get the notes before class, this makes a really big difference!



Use the technology that is already there! If the school has email accounts for students, use them to send the homework, instructions or let students know about a change of plan in advance, e.g. a substitute teacher will be taking the class.

Toolkit



NCSE Plus One Planner



NCSE Get Ready, Do, Done template



CAST UDL Guidelines



Step by Step Planner: UDL Lesson Design: Support in planning lessons that are UDL centric with a planning template available



NCCA Additional Support Pathways



NCCA Assessment Guidelines



Executive Functioning: Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence: A resource from Harvard University with executive functioning activities for all development stages.



Dr Shelley Moore: Shifting to strengths based and inclusive IEPeas



Turning differentiation on its head with Catrina Lowri "Good differentiation should be for everyone"

NCSE TPL



Inclusive Music, Drama and Art for Autistic Learners

Inclusive Teaching and Learning (Post Primary)

Teaching and Learning Approaches for Students with Severe/Profound General Learning Difficulties

Teaching Students with Down Syndrome

Teaching Students with Acquired Brain Injury

Teaching Students with Literacy Difficulties including Dyslexia

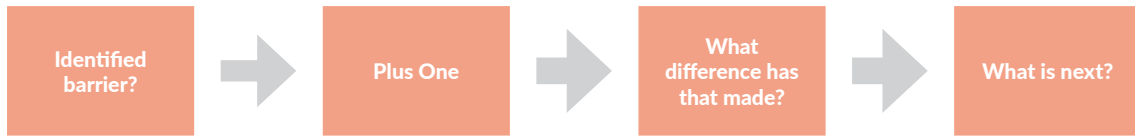
Vision Impairment: Supporting Teaching and Learning

Reflective Questions

- Are my expectations of students' engagement and participation in teaching and learning activities realistic in relation to students' Zone of Proximal Development?
- Do I need to observe my students, source checklists or formal assessments in my school that could help me to find out what my students can do unaided and what they can do with support across a range of different areas?
- When planning teaching and learning activities, am I providing flexible ways for my students to reach a shared goal?
- Do I embrace flexibility and choice in how students engage in their learning? Do I use varied ways to share the new information (verbally, visually, concretely) and do I provide varied options for students to show me what they have learned?
- Do I notice when my students are starting to become dysregulated during teaching and learning? Am I flexible enough to respond in a supportive way, in a way that the student would like?

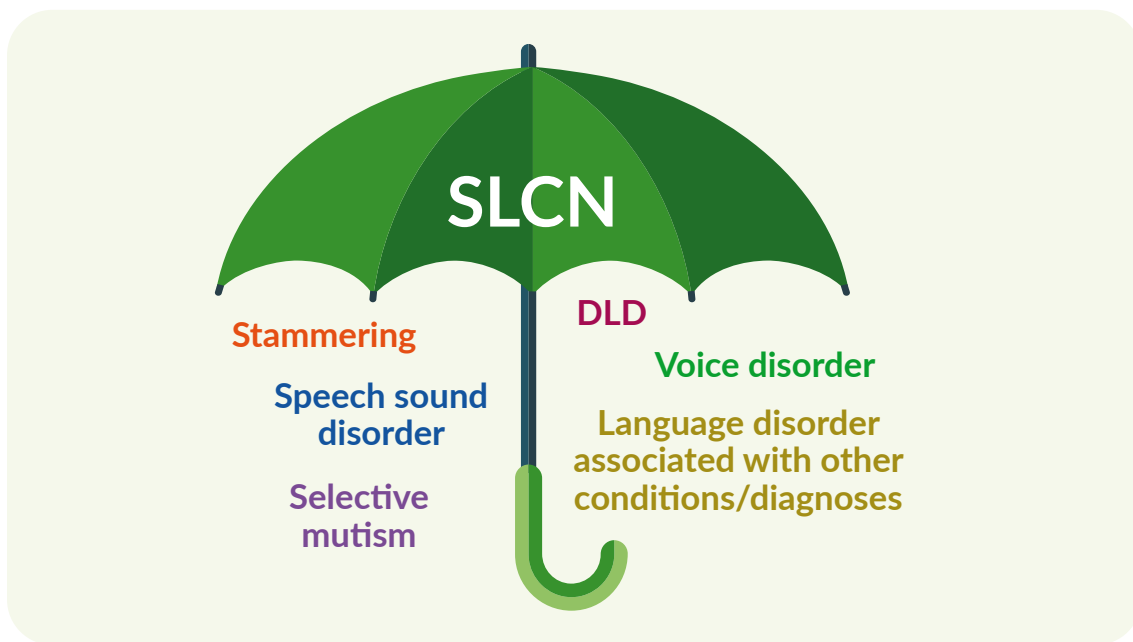
A Plus One Approach

Write any change you are going to make towards your vision. Use this tool to record your steps towards your vision, one action (weekly, monthly, termly or yearly) at a time.



| Goal | What I am currently doing | My Plus One (this week/ month/term/year) | Next week/month/ term/year |
|---|---|---|---|
| <i>e.g. including all students when reading texts</i> | <i>All students get their own copy of the novel and get notes ahead of time</i> | <i>All students get their own copy of the novel and get notes ahead of time This year: Provide graphic novel version of the text</i> | <i>All students get their own copy of the novel and get notes ahead of time Provide graphic novel version of the text Next year: Make audio versions of the text available for students</i> |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Language and Communication



SLCN

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), is an umbrella term that encompasses multiple different profiles of students; including students who are autistic, who stammer, who have a speech sound disorder, voice disorder, or language disorder associated with another condition. Students can have different diagnoses and these will fall under the umbrella of SLCN if there are identified speech, language and communication needs encompassed in and/or associated with this diagnosis.

Students with SLCN can have associated difficulties with:

- Accessing the curriculum
- Academic achievement
- Literacy and numeracy
- Career opportunities
- Social relationships with adults and peers
- Behaviour and emotional development

Prevalence of SLCN

Students with SLCN are often under-identified in schools. Students who experience difficulties or differences with their speech, language or communication skills can therefore be vulnerable to having their needs misinterpreted as “behaviour”, rather than identifying SLCN as a potential stressor contributing to dysregulation and impeding access to the curriculum. When we consider the prevalence of SLCN and the volume of language that students are exposed to, it is paramount that the correct supports are in place in schools to support students to thrive.

Internationally, it is accepted that around 10% of the population have SLCN. In areas of social disadvantage, this figure is significantly higher with up to 50-60% of students entering school with SLCN. Approximately 7% of all students have developmental language disorder (DLD).

At least 3% of all students have SLCN linked with other conditions, including those with autism or general learning difficulties or individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing. The majority of students with additional needs have some degree of SLCN. Of these students, an estimated 1% have the most severe and complex SLCN which prevent them from expressing their basic needs.

Evidence Base of Impact of SLCN

The following studies share the impact that SLCN can have on a student:

International research has identified that 50-80% of students with behaviour difficulties have SLCN (Bryan, Freer, & Furlong, 2007; Snow & Powell, 2008).

Research also points to significant links between SLCN, behaviour and academic difficulties (Beitchman *et al.*, 2001; Locke, Ginsborg *et al.*, 2002; Smart *et al.*, 2003).







A study in the UK found that 66% of excluded males at post-primary level had SLCN (Clegg *et al.*, 2009).

An Irish study found that 95% of post-primary students receiving level 3 support for behaviour had SLCN (Murphy, 2011).

A study in the UK found that 46-67% of youth offenders have SLCN (Bryan *et al.*, 2007).

Children with a poor vocabulary at five years of age, are four times more likely to struggle with reading in adulthood and three times more likely to have mental health issues (Law *et al.*, 2017).

For further information on SLCN

-  [NCSE video: Speech, Language and Communication – An Introduction](#)
-  [NCSE video: Supporting SLCN in the Primary Classroom – Simple Strategies](#)
-  [NCSE video: Developmental Language Disorder – What is it?](#)
-  [Speech, Language and Communication Needs](#)
-  [NCSE Communication Profiling Checklist \(Primary\)](#)
-  [NCSE Communication Profiling Checklist \(Post-primary\)](#)

Strategies to Support Students' Language and Communication





Visual Strategies to Support Students' Language and Communication

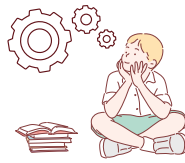
The implementation of visuals forms part of a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach. 'Visual strategies', 'visual supports' or 'visuals' include using objects, objects of reference, photos, signs, writing, physical demonstration, symbols or pictures in a way that supports understanding, expression and social inclusion and participation, along with creating an inclusive learning environment for students.

Language is transient; when something is said orally, the message can be lost if it is not processed immediately. Visuals support all students. Students without additional support needs report using visual timetables as often as those with additional needs (Rutherford *et al.*, 2020). This shows us that the visuals we put in place for students with additional needs may also benefit students in classrooms more generally and should be used as a universal, whole-class strategy.

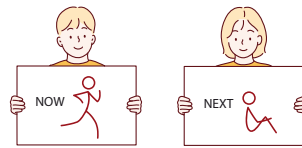
9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS



Visuals are permanent
(Spoken words disappear)



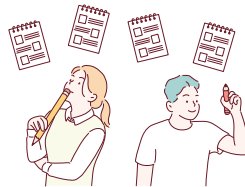
Visuals allow time for
language processing



Visuals prepare
students for transitions



Visuals help students
see what you mean



Visuals help all students



Visuals help build independence



Visuals are transferable between
environments and people



Visuals have no attitude,
no tone, no frustration,
no disapproval



Visuals help reduce
anxiety

Visuals can help **students' understanding** of:

- Teacher instructions
- Tasks and activities
- Routines (and changes in routines)
- Curriculum content
- Language concepts and vocabulary

Visuals can help **support students'**:

- Organisation and memory
- Self-management
- Understanding of social interactions

Top Tips for Implementation of Visual Supports



Standardise

Standardising visuals across the whole school, ensure students are not required to re-learn visual supports when they change class or teacher.



Repeat

Lots of exposure and repetition may be needed before the benefits and effects of the visual support are apparent.



Keep it Meaningful

Keep visuals meaningful and functional for the class group. Choose a visual support that is based on the class group's needs, interests and learning experiences.



Consider Placement

Consider the positioning of visuals – ensure they are clearly visible for all students by placing them in prominent places at eye level.



Be Consistent

Ensure all staff members, e.g. class teacher, SNA, SET use the visual support in the same way each time, especially when first introducing the visual support.



Make Visuals Interactive

Refer to the visual supports and interact with them throughout the day. Visual supports are created to be interacted with.



Make Visuals Accessible for All

Avoid too much visual clutter in the classroom. Ensure visuals are accessible to all students, consider enlarging visual supports, increasing font sizes or providing individual visuals to students with additional needs.



Include Student voice

Continuously check in with students on the current use and engagement of visual supports. Ask students questions like “Can you understand what the visual means?” or, “Can you see the visual clearly?”



Vocabulary Strategies to Support Students' Language and Communication

Vocabulary learning is one of the most significant problems experienced by students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), (Bishop, 1997; Gathercole, 1993; Sim, 1998).

Vocabulary is the building block of language. Without good foundational vocabulary skills there will likely be difficulties later on with other areas of language and learning, and often behaviour. It is important at this point to emphasise that vocabulary refers to both expressive language and receptive language. It is sometimes thought that vocabulary refers to only the words we say, but vocabulary also relates to our understanding and the processing of words that we hear.

The STAR Approach

Reliance on incidental word learning is not enough for many students. One effective way to teach vocabulary is by taking the **STAR (Select, Teach, Activate, Review)** approach, based on the work of Parsons and Branagan (2017) and used within the NCSE's TalkTime intervention, which is referenced in the Primary Language Curriculum.

STAR involves:

- Select the most useful vocabulary (i.e. Tier 2 words are considered to be really useful words as they build on conceptual understanding and are likely to be encountered in lots of contexts, including different lessons and in spoken and written language, e.g. explain, deliberate, categorise, fortunate, hilarious, separate, climate, etc.).
- Teach the selected vocabulary in a structured manner.
- Activate the meaning by using the words in context.
- Review the taught words to ensure they are retained.

The **STAR** approach can be used to support vocabulary development of students at a universal, targeted or individual level in the continuum of support, and across special school, primary and post-primary schools.

Vocabulary resources that can be used to provide materials and/or to support vocabulary development include:

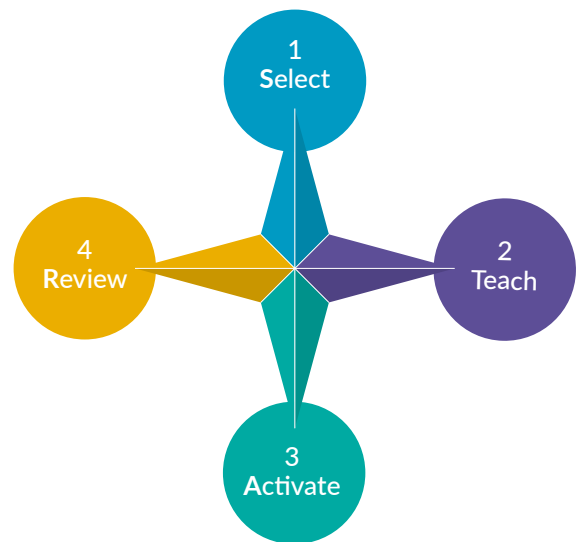
Primary

- **TalkTime:** NCSE and Curriculum Online
- **TalkBoost** (Key Stage 1 for children aged 4-7/ Key Stage 2 for children aged 7-10)
- **Word Aware:** Teaching Vocabulary Across the Day Across the Curriculum by Stephen Parsons and Anna Branagan/Word Aware 2: Teaching Vocabulary Across the Early Years by Stephen Parsons and Anna Branagan
- **Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction** by Beck, McKeown and Kucan

Post Primary

- The **Vocabulary Enrichment Intervention Programme** by Victoria Joffe (2011) is a structured intervention to develop vocabulary skills in post primary aged student
- STAR (Select, Teach, Activate, Review) approach. This is based on **Word Aware**, the work of Parsons and Branagan (2017)
- **Fruyer Model**

Vocabulary Development





General Tips to Support Language and Communication in the Classroom

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>Pause and Pace</p> <p>Pause for up to 10 seconds after giving instructions/information to give students time to process language. It's helpful to use a slower rate of speech too. An appropriate rate of speech for teaching is slower than the rate of speech used in conversation with colleagues/friends.</p> |
| | <p>Repeat</p> <p>Repeat the phrase or key words to allow the student time to process and comprehend what has been said. Create a culture in your class that encourages students to check and clarify (e.g. ask for repetition) when they have not understood something.</p> |
| | <p>Explain</p> <p>Take the time to explain new words, non-literal or figurative language, such as idioms and multiple meanings words.</p> |
| | <p>Positive Statements</p> <p>Positive statements reduce the language demand on students by telling a student what they should do rather than what not to do. These statements limit the amount of language the student has to process.</p> <p>For example, instead of saying "Don't walk on the grass", try "Walk on the path".</p> |
| | <p>Reduce and Rephrase</p> <p>Reduce the language load of an instruction by decreasing the length and complexity of your sentence. You can replace key words with easier words. You can also consider chunking longer instructions.</p> <p>When giving an instruction or information, breaking it down in to manageable chunks makes it easier for students with comprehension difficulties to follow, process and understand. Example of chunking:</p> <p>"When you come in, sit down, get out your books and turn to page 51 paragraph 3 section 5 but before that pick up the document on your desk, consider the information and fill it out"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We are going to do 3 things" (hold up three fingers) • "First read the page on your desk" (show page) • "Then fill it out" • "Lastly, get out your books" (show book) "and turn to:" (Written on board) "page 51, paragraph 3, section 5 and begin reading" |

NCSE TPL

- Lámh (Module 1)
- Language and Communication for Autistic Students in the Mainstream Classroom
- The SCERTS Model (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Supports)



The Power of Playful Pedagogy

“Throughout childhood, play is of value in and of itself, and children have both a right and a desire to play.”

(NCCA, 2023)

Children need stable and nurturing relationships with adults in order to thrive, and play provides the opportunity to develop these relationships in a powerful manner. The power of play lies in the fact that it is an opportunity for adults to observe and understand non-verbal behaviour and to share in the joy that children express in their interests through play. In times of toxic stress during childhood, play becomes even more important. The shared joy and interaction that children and adults can experience through playful experiences can regulate the body’s stress response (Yogman *et al.*, 2018).

By infusing playfulness through all classroom interactions and learning experiences, teachers can promote engagement and interest, and also prevent anxiety. Playfulness can refer to feelings of light-heartedness, pleasure and joy, it can also refer to behaviours that are characterised by expressiveness, creativity and good humour (Sproule *et al.*, 2019).

There is strong evidence that playful pedagogies that support children’s play skills will also develop self-regulation skills. During play children use and improve self-regulation skills, by paying attention, following instructions, and taking on roles in the play (Neslihan Bay, 2023; Savina, 2020).

A playful approach in tone, body language and interaction can be de-escalating in times of tension. See section on **PACE**.

Play has been introduced into CAST’s UDL Guidelines 3.0 – **Guideline 7.3 ‘Nurture Joy and Play’** under multiple means of engagement. Play is cited as an approach that “supports the learning and development of learners of all ages – from young children to adults”.

What Does It Look Like in Post Primary?

Giving students opportunities to engage in play fulfils a crucial stage in teenage development: increased independence and ownership of their own learning. Dependent on the developmental stage of individuals/ groups, playful learning in a post-primary setting generally focuses more on social elements. While there are no prescriptive activities that denote playfulness – these activities may include: hands-on and exploratory learning, creative expression and activities deemed by students as non-didactic. It is important to note the role of the teacher. A curious, enthusiastic approach to scaffolding the activity removes the barrier of teacher as all-knowing and challenges adolescent students to come to their own conclusions. The teacher’s tone of voice, body language and stance sets the tone for the activity. In this sense, it is the approach and not necessarily the activity that prompts playfulness.

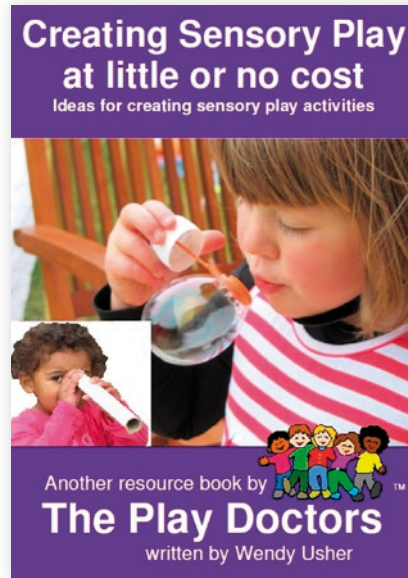
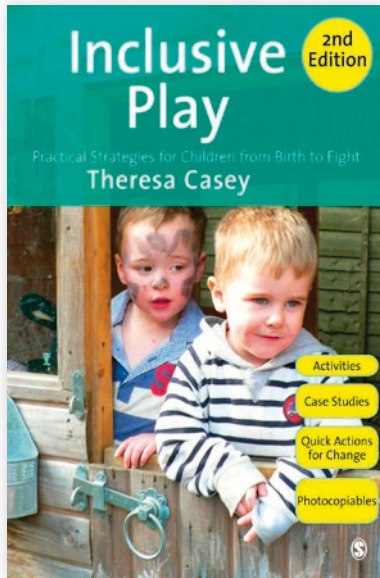
Examples of playful approaches in post primary:

- Any activities that involve movement. For example, walking debates. This extends learning as well as allowing for students to regulate.
- Having class outside-time away from books, technology and exam key words will benefit student wellbeing and promote curiosity and creativity.
- Recognising yourself as an important resource – your energy, stance and tone of voice all affect how adolescents engage in playful learning activities. (See **PACE approach in Relationships Element**)

Subject specific examples:

- In History, presenting your Industrial Revolution invention to Dragon's Den judges.
- An engineering class where each student or group becomes an engine component and forming a human engine.
- Speed dating as Gaeilge/en Espa ola.
- Acting out the emotions of a poem/stages of a river.

Resources



[Playful Structure: Six Pillars of Developmentally Appropriate Practice](#)



[Curriculum Online: Infusing Playfulness](#)



[Key Skills of Junior Cycle: Being Creative](#)



[Seeking Play by How Might We](#)



[PEDAL: Play in Education, Development & Learning](#)

NCSE TPL

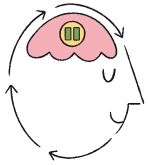


[The Power of Play](#)

[Intensive Interaction](#)

[Attention Autism](#)

[DIR Floortime](#)



The Reflecting Element

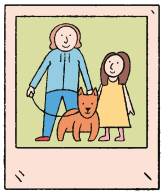
Reflection is an important part of the process. This is where you can take time to reflect on all of the elements and the reflective questions throughout.

Use the review section of the Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool to consider the following questions:

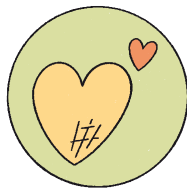
- What have you been pleased to notice?
- What has been better?
- Who else has noticed these changes?
- What difference has this made?

Using the School Self Evaluation (SSE) Process to Implement NCSE Relate

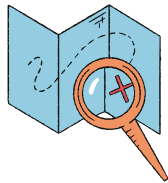
Reflection as a whole school community is also critical for change and the School Self Evaluation (SSE) process will support school-wide review of relational approaches. Making a change in a classroom is a start but sustained change happens at a school-wide level and leadership teams may use this document to implement school-wide change using the SSE process as guidance.



The Understanding Element



The Relationships Element



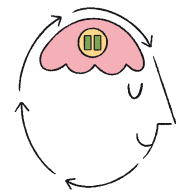
The Exploring Element



The Classroom Element



The Teaching Element



The Reflecting Element

Use your reflections to inform the next steps in support for the student and to consider what you now know if you go back to The Understanding Element.

As emphasised throughout NCSE Relate, teacher wellbeing really matters. You can't pour from an empty vessel. Reflect on how you will manage your own regulation so that you can be an effective co-regulator to your students.



At times it can be challenging when you are supporting an individual and some elements of the support required are outside of your control. It's important to focus on the scope of your practice as an educator and continue to work on the things you have the power to change. Use the prompt below to help you to 'Pause and Process Your Power'.

Pause and Process Your Power

Things I am Powerless to Change

-
-
-

Things I Have the Power to Change

-
-
-

Toolkit



Solution-Focused Goal Setting Tool – review and reflection page



Every Moment Counts: Nurture Yourself Tool



Reflective Practice through Mindful Moments: Integrative Movement with Dr Dan Siegel

Students say...

Consistency across school is so important, it would be great for school staff to agree on some things that are done the same way by everyone, e.g. how homework is given, using visuals, etc.



It would be great for school staff to have a simple communication system so that we don't have to advocate or explain our needs to each staff member, this can feel exhausting.

Practical Strategies

- Keep a reflective journal for your notes, observations and ideas
- Reflect as a classroom community, ask the students what they need to become expert learners
- Join a community of practice through your local education centre or through an NCSE seminar to reflect with peers
- Reflect with a colleague if you have travelled through the 3 Phases of Support with a student.

NCSE TPL



Understanding Behaviour

The Relate Model of Support

Solution-Focused Review and Reflection

What have you been pleased to notice?

What difference has that made?

What else has been better?

What difference has that made?

Who else has noticed these changes?

What difference has this made?

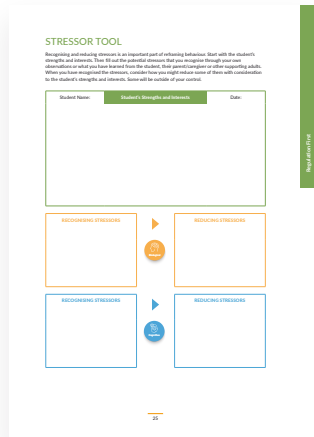
What might the next signs of change be?

The Reflecting Element

Notes and Reflections



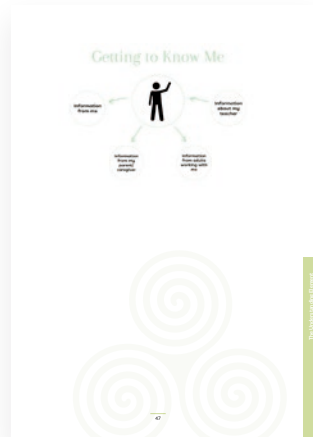
Appendices



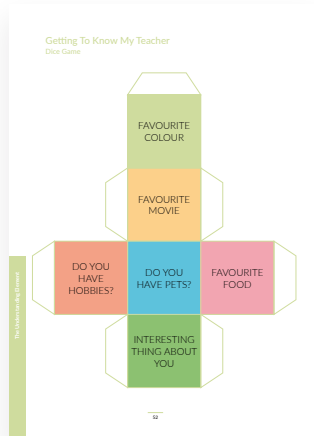
pg 25 Stressors Tool



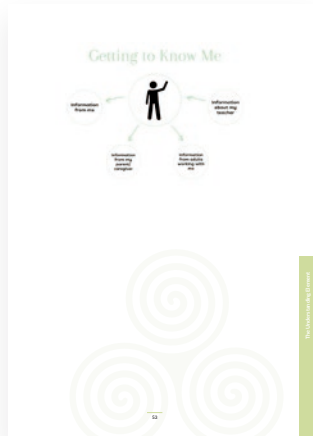
pg 31 Phases of Support Template



pg 47 Getting to Know Me Tool 1



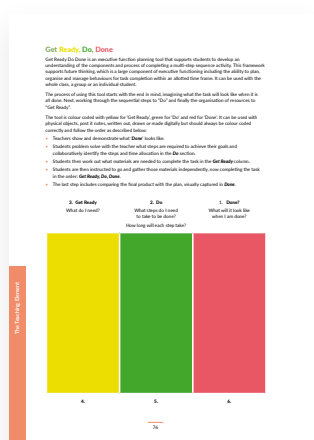
pg 52 Getting to Know Me Dice Game



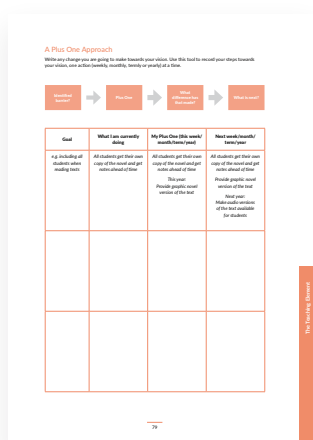
pg 53 Getting to Know Me Tool 2



pg 67 Solution Focused Goal Setting Tool



pg 76 Get Ready, Do, Done Template



pg 79 Plus One Template

One Page Profile

My picture goes here!

Things I like to do:

Things that comfort me:

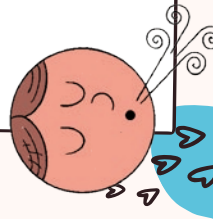
Things I don't like:

How I like to communicate:

My name is

I am years old

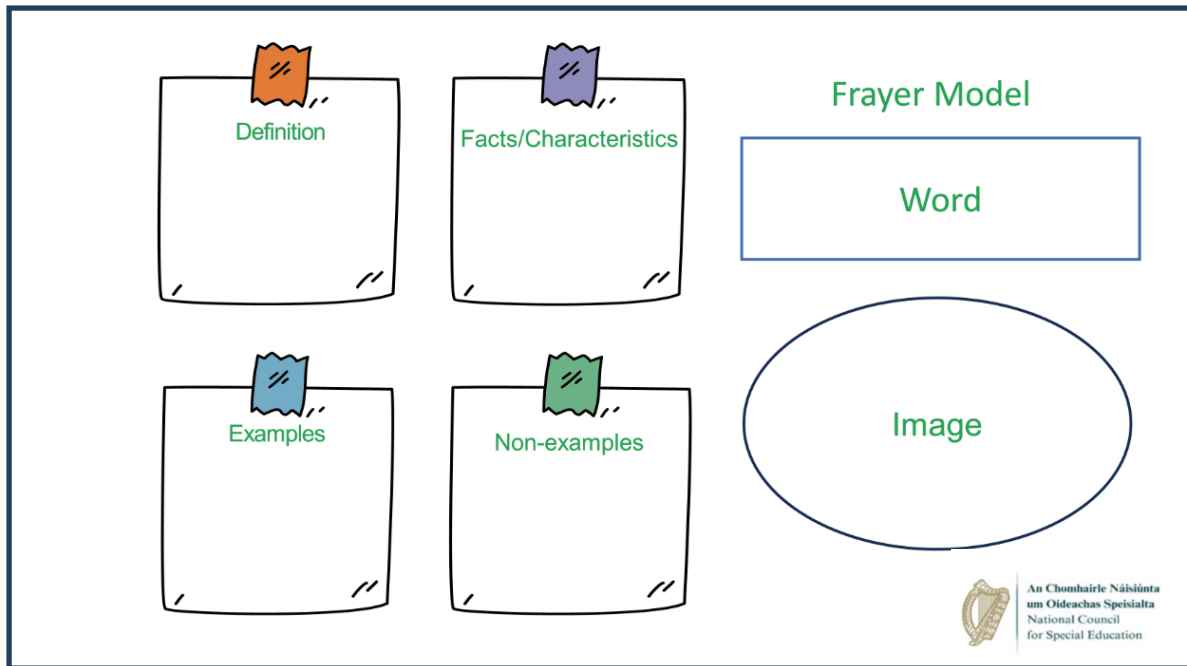
How to support me best:



Mindful Colouring

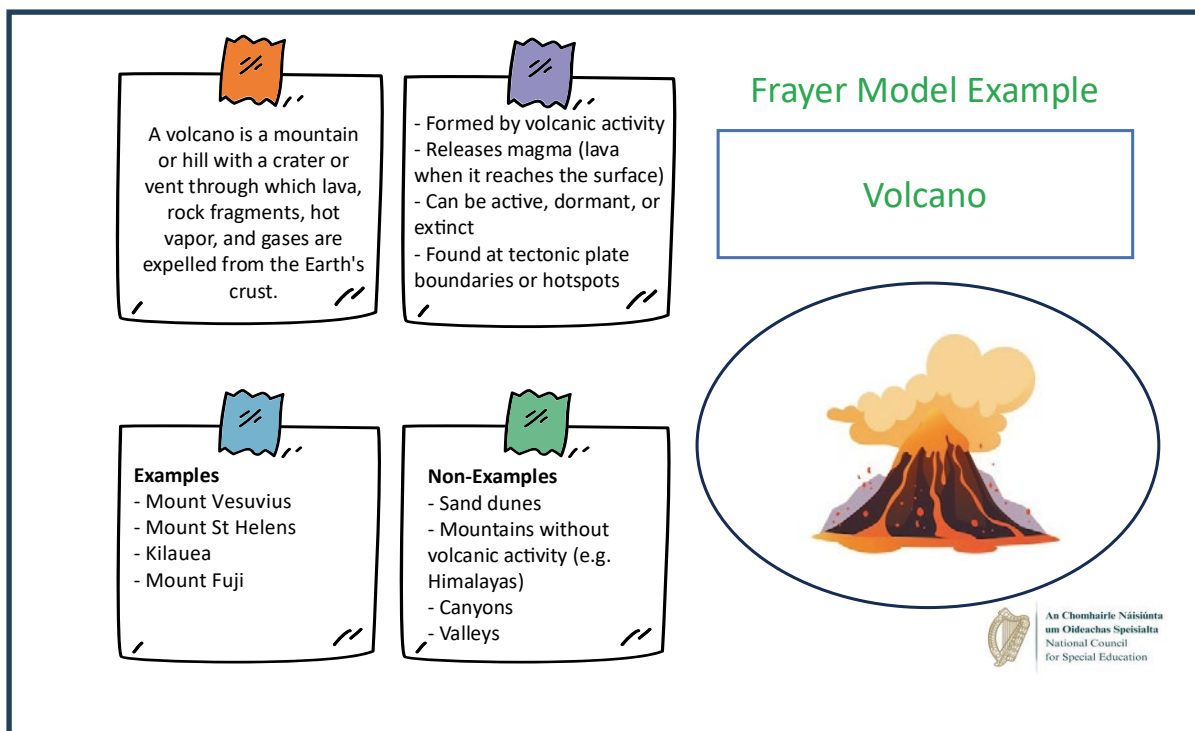


Frayer Model



How to Use the Frayer Model:

1. **Choose a Concept or Word:** Select a vocabulary term, concept, or topic to explore.
2. **Define the Term:** In the **Definition** quadrant, provide a clear and concise explanation.
3. **Identify Key Characteristics:** List essential features, traits, or attributes in the **Characteristics** quadrant.
4. **Provide Examples:** Include specific instances or items that match the concept in the **Examples** quadrant.
5. **List Non-Examples:** Identify items or concepts that are unrelated or opposite to the term in the **Non-Examples** quadrant.
6. **Add an image:** students add their own **Image** to link to the word.
7. **Discuss and Reflect:** Encourage group discussion to refine understanding and address misconceptions.





Primary Communication Profiling Checklist: Speech, Language and Communication

Student Name: _____ School Year/Class: _____

Checklist Completed By: _____ Position in School: _____

Think about the student’s abilities, as compared to their peers, then score this profile using the following:

0 = Rarely (average skills or not applicable)

1 = Sometimes (once a week but not every day)

2 = Often (daily)

This profile can be used to gather information on a student’s strengths, difficulties or differences in speech, language and communication. Identifying a difficulty or a difference does not necessarily indicate a need for support in this area. This is not a diagnostic tool and there is diversity across every person’s speech, language and communication skills.

Expressive Language (Speaking)

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> find it difficult to think of certain words (e.g. may talk around the word or give up) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> leave out word endings like plurals or past tense? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> jumble up the word order of sentences? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> have difficulty creating longer sentences using conjunctions (e.g. if, so, or)? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> leave out information when explaining themselves or telling a story? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mix up the order of an explanation or story? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Receptive Language (Understanding Spoken Language)

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> have difficulty following longer instructions or only follow them in part? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> have difficulty remembering things people say/require repetition of instructions? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> look to other students’ actions to follow instructions? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> have difficulty understanding jokes, idioms & can take things literally? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> have difficulty answering questions or take a long time to respond to a question? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> have difficulty understanding stories as a whole, i.e. drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes and understanding implied meaning? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Speech

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> find it hard to say multisyllabic words, e.g. psgetti for spaghetti | | | |



| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| ○ have difficulty co-ordinating mouth movements, e.g. struggles with tongue twisters or alliteration | | | |
| ○ show persistent articulation errors, e.g. wed/red | | | |
| ○ repeat words/sounds or get stuck on words/sounds when they are speaking (stammering) or avoid saying specific words they get stuck on | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Vocabulary

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| ○ have a limited range of vocabulary? | | | |
| ○ frequently use non-specific words such as 'stuff' and 'thing'? | | | |
| ○ have difficulty understanding and remembering word meanings? | | | |
| ○ misuse words? (e.g. uses them in the wrong context) | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Written Language (Reading Comprehension & Expression)

| Does the student have difficulty: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| ○ understanding what they are reading (as distinct from ability to decode)? | | | |
| ○ answering questions and summarising information on a written text? | | | |
| ○ structuring and organising thoughts in written pieces? | | | |
| ○ constructing sentences and using correct grammar in written pieces? | | | |
| ○ using correct content (e.g. vocabulary) to convey meaning in written pieces? | | | |
| ○ with spelling? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Social Communication

| Does the student have a difference (compared to most of the class) in the way they: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|
| ○ start a conversation? | | | |
| ○ keep the conversation going (taking turns)? | | | |
| ○ maintain topics of conversation? | | | |
| ○ use eye contact? | | | |
| ○ with non-verbal communication? (e.g. personal space, facial expressions) | | | |
| ○ recognise/say when they don't understand? | | | |
| ○ interact or participate with others in group activities? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Is English the child's first language?

yes no

Comments:

Signature:

Date Completed:



Scoring guidelines for the NCSE Primary Speech, Language and Communication Profiling Checklist

Interpretation

If a student scores;

| | | |
|------------|--|---|
| 0 | | No further action is required in this area. |
| 1-2 | | This area of communication should be monitored and reviewed. |
| 3 or above | | This student may benefit from additional support which may include a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist. |

Please place total cumulative scores from each section in the scoring box below, and then consider the student's existing strengths and skills per area.

| Area | Total | Interpretation of score as above | Despite any scores, what is an existing strength or skill of the student in this area? |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Expressive Language</i> | | | |
| <i>Receptive Language</i> | | | |
| <i>Speech</i> | | | |
| <i>Vocabulary</i> | | | |
| <i>Written Language</i> | | | |
| <i>Social Communication</i> | | | |



HOW TO USE THE COMMUNICATION PROFILING CHECKLIST

This checklist was designed as a teacher-led tool to allow for the profiling of a student's speech, language and communication strengths, difficulties and differences.

Why use the checklist?

This checklist allows a teacher to:

- profile students' strengths, difficulties and differences
- design and plan for support
- identify need for further assessment or onward referral to SLT services
- recognise the diversity in students' speech, language and communication
- review and monitor students' progress

How to administer the checklist?

The checklist should be completed by a teacher or a number of teachers who know the student well. The checklist contains statements describing students' communication skills. For each statement, the teacher is requested to provide information about how often the student demonstrates a behaviour/skill/ability, etc.

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | Rarely (average skills or not applicable) |
| 1 | Sometimes (once a week but not everyday) |
| 2 | Often (daily) |

The teacher should choose the response that, in their judgement, best describes the student. Each item should be read carefully and it is advised not to leave any items blank.

Administration tips

1. If you feel that you are unable to make a judgement, please score it as 0 and add a comment.
2. The comments box could be used to record any additional information such as classroom observations, additional languages, existing diagnoses, recent assessments, etc.
3. Liaise with other teachers in your school who are trained and using the tool.
4. Liaise with other people who know the student well to support you completing the tool; parents, other people who teach/support the student.
5. Practice rationalising your decision making; asking questions such as why did I tick 'often'?
6. Consider other data that has been gathered on the student, e.g. school assessments, past reports, classroom observations and curricular work.



How to score the checklist?

Step 1: Please write the cumulative score in the **Total** box in each section.

Example:

Vocabulary

| Does the student: | rarely | sometimes | often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> have a limited range of vocabulary? | | | 2 |
| <input type="radio"/> frequently use non-specific words such as 'stuff' and 'thing'? | | 1 | |
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty understanding and remembering word meanings? | | 1 | |
| <input type="radio"/> misuse words (e.g. uses them in the wrong context) | | | 2 |
| Total: | 6 | | |

Step 2: Please transfer the total cumulative score from each section into the **scoring box** on page 3.

Example:

| | Total |
|----------------------|-------|
| Expressive Language | 4 |
| Receptive Language | 3 |
| Speech | 0 |
| Vocabulary | 6 |
| Written language | 3 |
| Social Communication | 1 |

Step 3:

A) Interpretation of results: Each area of language is scored individually. There is no overall score. If a student scores the following **in any one area of language**:

| | | |
|------------|---|---|
| 0 | ➔ | No further action is required in this area. |
| 1-2 | ➔ | This area of communication should be monitored and reviewed. |
| 3 or above | ➔ | This student may benefit from additional support which may include a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist. |

B) Existing strengths and skills: Despite any scores, please consider what the student's **existing strengths and skills** are for **each area of language**.

| Area | Total | Interpretation of score as above | Despite any scores, what is an existing strength or skill of the student in this area? |
|----------------------|-------|----------------------------------|--|
| Expressive Language | | | |
| Receptive Language | | | |
| Speech | | | |
| Vocabulary | | | |
| Written language | | | |
| Social Communication | | | |



Post Primary Communication Profiling Checklist: Speech, Language and Communication

Student Name: _____

School Year/Class: _____

Checklist Completed By: _____

Position in School: _____

Think about the student's abilities **as compared to their peers**, then rate them using the following:

0 = Rarely (adequate skills or not applicable)

1 = Sometimes (once a week but not every day)

2 = Often (daily)

This profile can be used to gather information on a student's strengths, difficulties or differences in speech, language and communication. Identifying a difficulty or a difference does not necessarily indicate a need for support in this area. This is not a diagnostic tool and there is diversity across every person's speech, language and communication skills.

Expressive Language (Speaking)

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> find it difficult to think of certain words? (e.g. may talk around the word or give up) | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> leave out word endings like plurals or past tense? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> jumble up the word order of sentences? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty creating longer sentences using conjunctions? (e.g. if, so, or) | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> leave out information when explaining themselves or telling a story? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> mix up the order of an explanation or story? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Receptive Language (Understanding Spoken Language)

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty following longer instructions or only follow them in part? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty remembering things people say/require repetition of instructions? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> look to other students' actions to follow instructions? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> take things literally? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty understanding jokes and puns? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty understanding inferred meaning? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> take a long time to respond to a question? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> show reluctance to answer questions in class? | | | |
| Total: | | | |



Vocabulary

| Does the student: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> have a limited range of vocabulary? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> frequently use non-specific words such as 'stuff' and 'thing'? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> have difficulty understanding and remembering word meanings? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> misuse words? (e.g. uses them in the wrong context) | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Understanding Written Language (Reading Comprehension & Expression)

| Does the student have difficulty: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> understanding what they are reading (as distinct from ability to decode)? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> answering questions and summarising information on a written text? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> structuring and organising thoughts in written pieces? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> constructing sentences and using correct grammar in written pieces? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> using correct content (e.g. vocabulary) to convey meaning in written pieces? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> with spelling? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Social Communication (Pragmatic Language)

| Does the student have a difference (compared to most of the class) in the way they: | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|
| <input type="radio"/> start a conversation? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> take turns in a conversation? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> maintain topics of conversation? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> switch topics of conversation? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> use eye contact? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> are aware of personal space? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> use appropriate facial expressions? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> interpret facial expressions in others? (e.g. when others don't understand them) | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> recognise/say when they don't understand? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> interact or participate with others in group activities? | | | |
| Total: | | | |

Is English the student's first language?

yes no

Comments:

Signature:

Date Completed:



Scoring guidelines for the NCSE Post Primary Speech, Language and Communication Profiling Checklist

Interpretation

If a student scores;

| | | |
|------------|--|---|
| 0 | | No further action is required in this area. |
| 1-2 | | This area of communication should be monitored and reviewed. |
| 3 or above | | This student would benefit from additional support. This student may also benefit from referral to a Speech and Language Therapist. |

Please place total cumulative scores from each section in the scoring box below, and then consider the student's existing strengths and skills per area.

| Area | Total | Interpretation of score as above | Despite any scores, what is an existing strength or skill of the student in this area? |
|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Expressive Language</i> | | | |
| <i>Receptive Language</i> | | | |
| <i>Vocabulary</i> | | | |
| <i>Written Language</i> | | | |
| <i>Social Communication</i> | | | |



HOW TO USE THE COMMUNICATION PROFILING CHECKLIST?

This checklist was designed as a teacher-led tool to allow for the profiling of a student's speech, language and communication strengths, difficulties and differences.

Why use the checklist?

This checklist allows a teacher to:

- profile students' strengths, difficulties and differences
- design and plan for support
- identify need for further assessment or onward referral to SLT services
- recognise the diversity in students' speech, language and communication
- review and monitor students' progress

How to administer the checklist?

The checklist should be completed by a teacher or a number of teachers who know the student well. The checklist contains statements describing students' communication skills. For each statement, the teacher is requested to provide information about how often the student demonstrates a behaviour/skill/ability, etc.

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | Rarely (average skills or not applicable) |
| 1 | Sometimes (once a week but not everyday) |
| 2 | Often (daily) |

The teacher should choose the response that, in their judgement, best describes the student. Each item should be read carefully and it is advised not to leave any items blank.

Administration tips

1. If you feel that you are unable to make a judgement, please score it as 0 and add a comment.
2. The comments box could be used to record any additional information such as classroom observations, additional languages, existing diagnoses, recent assessments, etc.
3. Liaise with other teachers in your school who are trained and using the tool.
4. Liaise with other people who know the student well to support you completing the tool; parents, other people who teach/support the student.
5. Practice rationalising your decision making; asking questions such as why did I tick 'often'?
6. Consider other data that has been gathered on the student, e.g. school assessments, past reports, classroom observations, and curricular work.



How to score the checklist?

Step 1: Please write the cumulative score in the **Total** box in each section.

Example:

| | | Vocabulary | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------|-----------|-------|
| Does the student: | | rarely | sometimes | Often |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | have a limited range of vocabulary? | | | 2 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | frequently uses non-specific words such as 'stuff' and 'thing'? | | 1 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | have difficulty understanding and remembering word meanings? | | 1 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | misuse words e.g uses them in the wrong context | | | 2 |
| Total: | | 6 | | |

Step 2: Please transfer the total cumulative score from each section into the **scoring box** on page 3.

Example:

| | Total | Interpretation |
|----------------------|-------|----------------|
| Expressive Language | 5 | |
| Receptive Language | 4 | |
| Speech | 1 | |
| Vocabulary | 6 | |
| Written language | 3 | |
| Social Communication | 1 | |

Step 3:

A) Interpretation of results: Each area of language is scored individually. There is no overall score. If a student scores the following **in any one area of language**:

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| 0 | | No further action is required in this area. |
| 1-2 | | This area of communication should be monitored and reviewed. |
| 3 or above | | This student may benefit from additional support which may include a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist. |

B) Existing strengths and skills: Despite any scores, please consider what the student's **existing strengths and skills** are for **each area of language**.

| Area | Total | Interpretation of score as above | Despite any scores, what is an existing strength or skill of the student in this area? |
|----------------------|-------|----------------------------------|--|
| Expressive Language | | | |
| Receptive Language | | | |
| Vocabulary | | | |
| Written language | | | |
| Social Communication | | | |

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Thank You!

The National Council for Special Education wishes to acknowledge and thank the following:

Members of the National Council for Special Education

Members of the NCSE Consultative Forum

Department of Education, Special Education Section

Department of Education Inspectorate

National Education Psychology Service

As I Am

Members of the As I Am Youth Leadership Team

Inclusion Ireland

Staff of St Brigid's Infant National School

Staff of Gaelscoil Bhaile Munna

Staff of Naíscoil Íde

Staff of St Francis SNS

Staff of Scoil Íosagáin

Staff of Limerick Community Special School

Staff of Grace Park Educate Together NS

Staff and Students of Le Chéile NS

Staff and Students of Calasanctius College

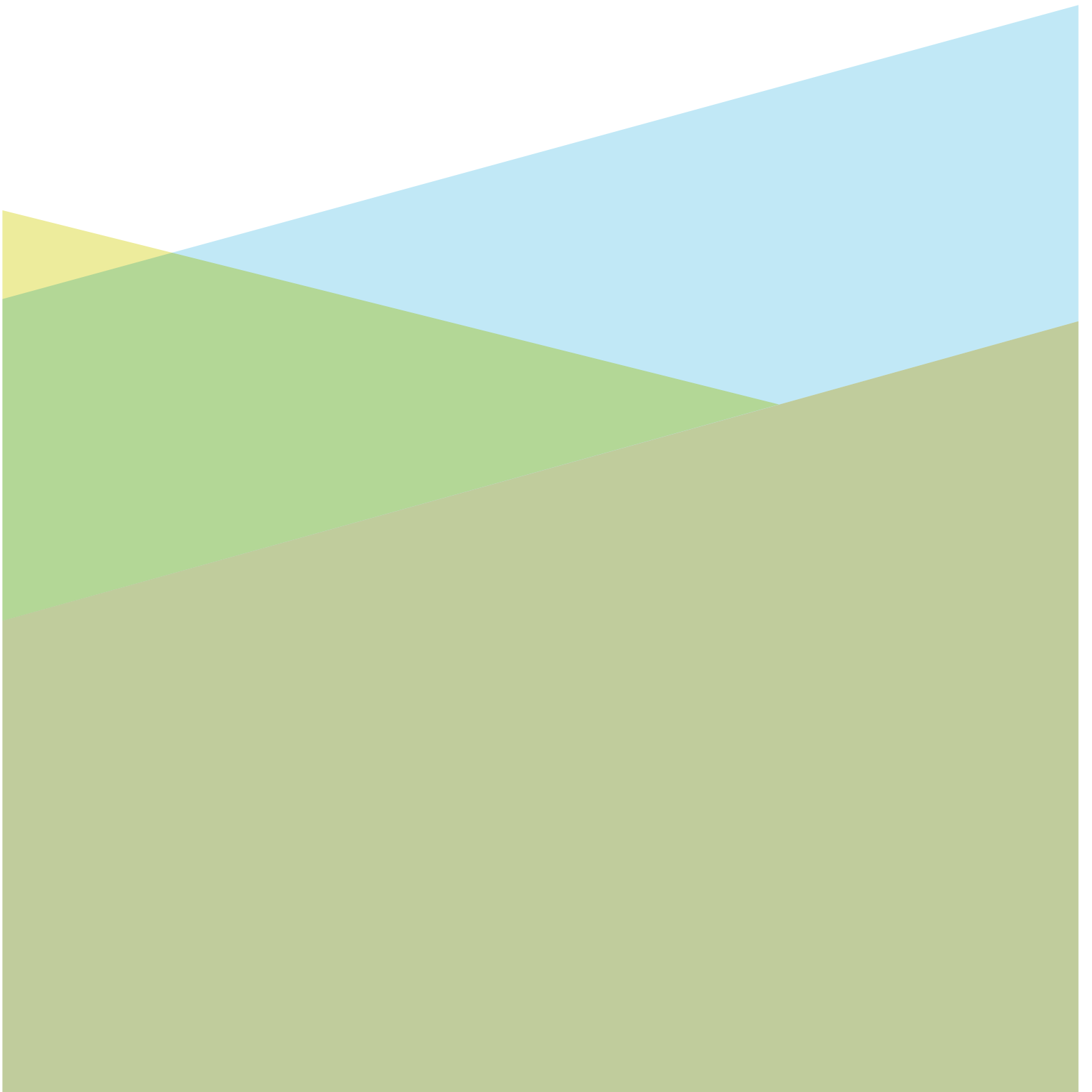
Staff and Students of Knocknacarra Educate Together NS

Staff and Students of Sacred Heart Secondary School

Staff and Students of St Aidan's Community School

Notes and Reflections

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