

## Behaviour for learning – Parent and carers workshop transcript

Hello, welcome to our parent and carer workshop, Behaviour for Learning.

My name is Victoria Gamble and I am the SENCO at the Firs.

This morning we're going to be talking about how we are approaching behaviour and how these approaches impacts children's learning.

As we know, children don't come with instructions. If only they did, it would certainly make our lives as parents and as educators a much easier role, a much easier job to be able to do.

But what we do know is that we are all social individuals. It's often how we're treated in the past that informs our actions and that can also be about what people say in the present. At the Firs we are very mindful of the fact that every individual comes with very different experiences and because every child doesn't come with even their own set of instructions, it's our job to think very carefully and mindfully about how we build an environment where children feel safe, respected, included and are able to come and learn.

So we talk at the Firs about the Firs way.

The Firs way is all about how we do things here. What's important for us is that we're really clear about our expectations but also about our approach as to how we treat each other as individuals in a respectful and safe way.

So there's a couple of questions we're going to have a think about as we start today:

1. What is important about how we all develop relationships and engage in positive ways?
2. Whose responsibility is it to develop relationships and behave in what we call pro-social ways?

Pro-social ways that are safe, acceptable ways of being and behaving so that we're all able to get on as a community.

We have just over 300 children at the Firs and including our adults that is a large community. We extend that community to families, carers, our governors and the wider community as well. We want our environment, our community around the Firs to be one that's positive.

So whose responsibility is that to develop those positive relationships and behave in certain ways? That's something we're going to be looking at this morning and certainly something we talk about with all the children and adults who belong to the Firs community.

So one of the things that we understand and know and something I'm sure you've come across before is that it does '*take a village to raise a child*'. We're very mindful of the fact that the Firs is part of that village and we're here to support and work together collaboratively in order to make sure that your child is able to flourish, develop and learn.

The Firs provides a really positive foundation in order for children to be able to develop into positive humans, who can make a positive contribution to our society. But we also know that when thinking about behaviour, the challenge is trying to understand someone else's behaviour is very, very difficult. And every individual is unique in their own way and unique in not only their personality but also in how they experience the world.

So one of the things that underpins what we do at the Firs is trying to understand that everybody responds differently to different situations based on their background, their experiences, how they're feeling in those moments, their developmental stage and also the skills that they have in order to be able to react in certain ways within social situations.

Therefore, we need to make sure that we're very mindful, as the adults in the school, that we react in certain ways and help to build that understanding with our children.

### **Child development and a child centred approach**

One of the key underlying principles for us is that we're thinking about an ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner was a developmental psychologist in the 1970s and what Bronfenbrenner talked about is actually child development is influenced by so many different systems that are around them. (*Refer to diagram of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory of child development*)

At the Firs, we are very proud of the fact that we hold every individual child at the very centre of every interaction, every moment, every planning opportunity that we have. The child is very much at the centre of what we do and that relationship is incredibly important.

But as you can see from this ecological system diagram, the child is at the centre, but they are also influenced by so many other systems that are at play, that interact with and affect the life of that young person. So we see ourselves as that wider family. We are the group that are around, that builds that community, that supports alongside you as family, their peers, other cultural influences that might be there, your religion as a family. But also in the wider sense, those areas that also have an indirect but very powerful influence.

So we're mindful of the fact that local amenities can also have an impact on that child's development as well. We also are very mindful of the impact of media and certainly the wider access that children now have to information, whether that's online or in social media as well. And also actually how the even wider, the macro system also affects how children and individuals develop and also how we parent as well and our perceptions of child development.

Bearing all of this in mind, we come back to the underpinning systems and principles that we believe affects our thinking about child development and behaviour and how we teach behaviour. It starts with the individual but recognises all of the other systems that are in play.

So we do what we do based on what we know at the time. All of us will have a different experience from our own backgrounds, our own childhoods as well, but also our own experiences of being parents, of being carers, of being teachers, educators, family members, friends, and also with our peer group.

So the question really we want to think about is if we know that, what can we do differently? What responsibility do we have? And the question I posed in the very beginning of this was about whose responsibility is it?

We recognise that actually the responsibility for behaviour does lie with the individual, but also we, as the adults around those individuals, have a very important role to play.

Something that Pam Leo talked about really resonates with how we've built and developed our behaviour curriculum, our behaviour policy, and how we approach our children and our culture and the first way. And it's this:

*'You can't teach children to behave better by making them feel worse. When children feel better, they behave better.'*

That might resonate with you. That might be in conflict in some way with perhaps how you were brought up. The perceptions around how children learn to behave better, we believe, is built on thinking about children's emotional regulation, thinking about how children feel and how we can enable them to make positive choices and be responsible and accountable for their behaviours and their pro-social behaviours, those positive behaviours that we want to see: the kindness, the respect, the being safe, the being thoughtful, having that empathy and understanding and wanting to be able to support one another within that community.

What we don't want is our children to feel like they are only behaving better because there's a sanction or a punishment that is linked to that, because actually then that's driven by a sense of fear or negativity or only choosing to do something in that way because there's a consequence that's linked to it.

So we're looking very much from a person-centred therapeutic approach where the individual is able to take responsibility for that in a positive way and be able to look for solutions in how and learning the tools that they need in order to be able to engage with one another and build in those relationships and those situations.

So that being said, we also know that actually as the adults around the child we're the ones who make the difference. Once our mindset alters, it also alters our approach. So how we approach situations can very much determine how that situation will pan out, how that experience will then build upon future experiences.

### **The Firs way**

So one of the things we're going to talk about this morning is thinking about how do we do that in school? At the Firs we refer to this as the Firs way. The Firs way has been something that we have become very passionate about. It's about our culture. It's about how we do things here. When you enter our school, our Firs way display proudly celebrates and recognises those children who've made those positive choices.

And in order to be part of our school community, these are the things that we hold dear. The Firs way was something that's been developed with staff, with other members of the community, with the children, and enabling everyone to have a voice. It's all about building those relationships, having a voice and feeling that you are listened to and valued. It's also about being supported in our relationships.

We recognise that it's with that collective support, relationships develop and those behaviours that we start to see are much more positive. One of the things the Firs way holds very dear is that we all have agency. What that means is that everybody is enabled to be accountable and responsible for their actions and their choices.

The choices that they make may need to be supported and there may need to be some discussion and co-regulation and teaching around that. But also we understand that behaviour is communication. We can respond to any behaviour with kindness and support.

That being said, one of the things that we try to do on a daily basis, with as many interactions as we possibly can, is that we catch children in, we don't catch them out. The Firs way is a lovely way of being able to do that, that makes us mindful of the fact that when we're recognising more of the positives, all of those children that every single day come in with a positive mindset. They try hard, they work hard, they're kind and they show empathy towards one another. They're resilient, they build up that sense of teamwork.

Some of your children may have already come home this year with a Firs way certificate where somebody has nominated them. Some of those nominations are known, some of

them are anonymous. It's a lovely way of being able to celebrate those children who are following the Firs way. Any member of the community can be able to nominate and also to be nominated, which is lovely.

But it's also been able to see that these are the things that we value. These are the behaviours, these are the ways of being that we feel are values driven, that underpin every single approach and interaction that we feel is important at the Firs. It's what the Firs way is about.

### **Behaviour as communication**

So thinking about behaviour as communication, you may have come across similar images that represent behaviour in an iceberg. So what we're looking at here is most behaviours that we see or unexpected behaviours that we see are merely the tip of the iceberg. As I said earlier, behaviours are linked to our experiences of the world, how we're feeling and our perception of what's happening in that moment.

But actually, what we need to be thinking about, and one of the ways that we approach this at the Firs, is that all behaviour is communicating something. And if we only focus on the unexpected behaviour and that's all we concentrate on, actually, that's not going to end up really holding the child at the centre because we may misunderstand what is going on for the child.

Misbehaviour (or anti-social behaviours) can be actually due to an underlining reason. And what I invite people to do, and that's members of staff and our children, is to rather than sit on the boat on the top and just be looking at that unexpected behaviour at the top of the iceberg, is actually to dive underneath and take a little trip in the submarine and start to look at reframing children's behaviour and see and try to identify what actually is going on for that child.

So it could be something biological that's happening within them, a different hormone response to a situation. It might be something emotional that's going on at that moment in time. We might find that actually there's a social issue that's happening that actually is really impacting on their self-regulation. Or it could be something cognitive going on. It could be something about understanding a situation or misunderstanding situations or not having those tools or that point of development in order to be able to handle and cope within that situation. So the behaviour is telling you something and we need to become really clear on identifying what the underlying reasons are for a child with unexpected behaviours, ones that are what we call dangerous or difficult behaviours that are being presented to us. And then we can then use what we would consider to be a child-centred course of action in order to be able to support and help and co-regulate as well.

Our pledge at the Firs to support the social, emotional, mental health for all members of the school community. It is encompassed really by these three points:

1. What we are aiming to do is to create a safe and inclusive space that fosters connection and well-being in all members of the community.
2. We also recognize that we need to provide teachable moments. Those teachable moments can happen at any point, any time, and can be very, very small moments, but also can be quite significant for a child's development and a child's understanding. And those teachable moments enrich connection, co-regulation, and develop a more reflective sense of self.

3. Our final pledge is to support every member of the school community in their social, emotional, mental health, and that's without bias or prejudice.

We are looking at the individual, holding that individual at the very centre, and making sure that all of our actions, our words, our behaviours, our reactions hold that child. And what's really important with that is actually building that really meaningful relationship in order to make sure that every member of the community feels supported.

### **Relational and restorative practices.**

So how do we go about doing that? Building social and emotional development comes in a couple of different ways, and we're going to focus on two of them today. One of them is that we build an emotional and relational piggy bank. So every interaction, every moment, every connection fosters positive feelings. Because we know that some of our children who have very positive experiences already come to school some days with a reasonably full piggy bank. And they're able to be able to regulate. Their emotional regulation skills are quite embedded. They feel quite secure.

But we're also very mindful of the fact that some children and adults in the school might actually be quite depleted in their emotional reserves. And what we don't want to end up happening is those individuals end up with an empty piggy bank. So we know that that would be a place where that individual would be really struggling and therefore then be able to not cope with perhaps even smaller issues that might cause a problem for them and certainly won't enable them to be the best learners.

So what we do is we think about that emotional bank and those emotional reserves being built every day. The importance of the relationships that we're able to develop is so crucial there. Because with every connection, we build more of a relationship, more positive experiences. One of the things we do in school is we talk a lot about restorative practices. Restorative practice is a way of being able to approach situations that build that sense of community. We build those relationships and that community and that connection in every single moment.

The other aspect of restorative practice and relational practices is that we are always seeking to understand. We never assume that we know exactly what's happening in each individual at any moment. Even if there is a situation that has been difficult or tricky, dangerous or difficult, we never assume that we know exactly what's happened in that moment for that individual, how they are actually feeling, maybe what's happened five minutes before, 10 minutes before, a week before, maybe the morning, and that's actually affected that child's emotional state and their mental health. So we always try and seek to understand. We never assume, because if we assume, in a way we're implying judgment, that we know what's happened when actually we don't. So we seek to understand in every moment. And one of the ways that we are able to do that is we frame that around our three golden rules so that we all have a responsibility to be ready, respectful and safe. And all of our behaviour policy, our class rules, our approaches, our culture is built around these three areas. So when we're talking to children, we very much keep in mind that seeking to understand.

In addition, we use questioning and language mindfully. We call this the restorative five, the questions that we use in order to seek to understand, be non-judgmental and be able to facilitate a way to support children, and adults as well, to find a way and navigate their way through perhaps tricky situations. It might be arguments, it might be an incident that's happened, it might be something that somebody's struggling with.

The restorative five questions are around these themes:

1. So what happened?
2. How did that make you feel?
3. Who was affected and how?
4. So what are you going to do to make things right?
5. What can you do differently in the future?

This process builds that sense of accountability and the impact that somebody has had on somebody else. And also what can you do differently in the future?

These restorative five questions are really important whether the person has caused harm or has had harm caused to them, that they've given the time, the space and the voice to be able to explore that with somebody without judgment.

You might notice there that the one question that isn't there is why? And one of the principles of restorative and relational practice is we don't ask why. The reason we don't ask why is because that in itself implies judgment. We're passing a judgment on a situation that actually hasn't involved us. Using what and how is a much more open question. It opens out for individuals to be able to explain their version, their experience, how they've been impacted rather than the 'why' shutting down any conversation, any openness or any willingness to share, which leaves open that seeking to understand a situation from a non-judgmental perspective.

### **A curriculum for behaviour**

The other approach we're starting to develop at the Firs is actually having a curriculum for behaviour. Our learning is not just learning about English and maths and spelling, reading and science, geography and history and so on. But actually we recognize that teaching about behaviours, teaching about regulation, teaching about emotional control is really vital. We all come with our own experiences. We all come with our own ways of being. And what's important is just like any other curriculum area, behaviour and self-regulation and emotional control is something that can be taught. It's something that can be explored at each point of development

We've introduced at the Firs The Zones of Regulation. This is built from a curriculum which really supports individuals to be able to build their self-regulation and in turn builds their emotional control. So we can start to enable individuals to have the tools to be able to regulate, to then be able to engage in positive ways and learn in any situation.

### **Self-regulation**

So just to look very briefly about what self-regulation is. It's all about the capacity to manage your thoughts, feelings and actions and be able to adapt in flexible ways. And it encompasses these following points:

- Self-control
- Resilience
- Self-management
- Anger management

- Impulse control
- Sensory regulation

This is something that we talk about with the children in a very open way. It is so vital and important for their learning. But one point to note here is that there is an emotional regulation hierarchy. So this is what it looks like (refer to hierarchy model). Because what's important and the way we approach this at the Firs is very much in the frame of mind that Janelle Fenwick talks about here in her quote. She says, *'We don't expect a child to run before they walk. So we can't expect a child to self-regulate if they can't regulate with assistance.'*

That's where we come in as educators, as parents, as family members, as carers, in that our job is incredibly important to enable children to be able to co-regulate, to be able to have that ability to be able to explain how they're feeling, build that emotional language and also then think about the co-regulation in that we can help them to make those choices and to be able to seek the help that they might need. And only then when that's able to happen, self-regulation can happen independently.

As I'm sure you have experienced yourselves, I know I certainly still do need some co-regulation sometimes. And not every situation that we come across, we should be coping with on our own. But it's about building up that toolkit to help us with the strategies that we can use and learn about them so that we are able to regulate and be prepared and be able to be in situations that might cause us a difference in how we might approach them. So self-regulation is so important.

You might have come across this illustration by Charlie Mackesy, which is one of my favourites in that it's how we react to things because in our lives can be defined as 10% is what happens to us and 90% is how we react to it. And we know that even from a research perspective is that it enables us to be able to maintain healthy and meaningful relationships, to be able to achieve academically and be able to navigate a community and have an overall sense of well-being. The research is also telling us that this is so important in building social and emotional competencies, which has a huge impact on our young people moving forward as future citizens.

So when a person is able to self-regulate, there's certain areas that this is really important for. Executive functioning is all about helping us to be able to be calm and organized. So if we can self-regulate, these are the aspects that we'll be able to do more effectively, including:

- Time management.
- Our working memory is affected by our regulation, which is significant for our learning.
- Whether we can be flexible.
- Our attention to be able to persevere with tasks, which we know is so important when we're learning anything at all.

Self-regulation is also about our own emotional regulation. So can we cheer ourselves up? Are we able to alter our way of feeling, especially after a disappointment?

Being able to self-regulate is also really important for sensory processing. So if we experience sensory overload, we can adjust to that. We have the tools to be able to, if we're in certain situations, maybe it's too bright, the lights are too bright, it's too noisy, there's too many people, that sensory overstimulation becomes too much. Self-regulation helps us in

having the tools to be able to manage in those situations of modern day life and everyday life experiences for our young people and for us as adults as well.

Self-regulation also helps with is our social cognition. So how we react in social situations, how we are able to engage and connect with social situations and know what's the right thing to do in the right situation and for us to be able to be our best version of ourselves.

You may have come across regulation but as different words and you might have known it to be self-control or self-management or anger management or impulse control. They all come under the same banner of regulation. But it's all about that ability to adjust your state of alertness. It's about your energy levels and it's how you can then meet the demands of the situation around you.

Whereas if you're dysregulated, it's the complete opposite. It's when you are physiologically feeling a bit off. You may be experiencing sensory overload. And what happens is our nervous system is flooded by stress hormones, and those stress hormones affect our brain and our body.

In lots of situations, that's when children can't always articulate how they are feeling, why they are doing. They might not know. That comes back to why we don't use the question why when we are talking to children about their feelings and what's happened, maybe if they have been dysregulated and something's happened. Because they might not know because it's a hormonal response within their body to those being flooded with those stress hormones.

So what we're looking at here is trying to be able to engage with the body and with the brain in thinking about when there's a sense of dysregulation, what can actually happen? What can we do about that?

### **The Zones of Regulation**

The Zones of Regulation is all about organizing feelings and being able to recognize and identify the states of alertness. And these are categorized into: Identify the states of alertness, and these are categorized into four different zones, which are called the zones of regulation.

I'm going to play you this very short video, and you can access this again on youtube as well. (play video)

What are the zones of regulation? Have you ever noticed how complicated our feelings and emotions can be? We can group our feelings into four coloured categories or zones to help us.

We call these the Zones of Regulation. We can think about how much energy or strength our feelings have to sort them into each coloured zone. Let's explore the four zones of regulation.

In the blue zone, we have low levels of energy and down feelings, such as when we feel sad, tired, sick, or bored.

In the green zone, we have a sense of calm energy and control. We might be feeling okay, happy, calm, or focused.

In the yellow zone, our energy starts to get higher and our feelings get a little stronger. We might be feeling frustrated, worried, silly, or excited.

In the red zone, we have extremely high energy and our biggest, strongest feelings. We might feel angry, terrified, or out of control. We can also feel strong, positive feelings, such as overjoyed or elated in this zone.

It's important to know that all the zones and all our feelings are okay. There are no right or wrong ways to feel. Having a wide range of feelings and moving through the zones is a natural part of life. Grouping our feelings into the four zones of regulation can help us to think about, talk about, and regulate them more easily. Hopefully that gave you a little insight into the zones of regulation. *(end of video)*

What does that look like in school? So you will notice in different classrooms there are starting to appear visuals such as this, with our zones of regulation in the different four coloured zones. Obviously it will depend on the age of the child and their developmental level as to how the teachers are introducing that. But the curriculum across the whole school is very similar. And it is about really engaging and thinking about those feelings and recognizing, as it said in the video, that all the zones are okay. Every feeling is valid. And enabling children to be able to recognize what that feeling is and be able to start to put some words to it.

What's really important at this point is that we're not talking to the children about what colour you are feeling. It's about what feeling and emotion you are feeling. The colours help to be able to organize into the four different energy zones. But what we're trying to do through our behaviour curriculum and through the Zones of Regulation curriculum is to build that emotional literacy. Really start to think about what words might be used to describe the feelings that we're feeling.

So you can see here one teacher is using the fabulous movie 'Inside Out' that lots of children and parents and families and carers will be aware of, which is a great way of being able to see those feelings in action. So you might see visuals like this across the classrooms. But you'll also see visuals that look like this (children's faces). So we're using lots of different ways for children to be able to see and understand what those feelings look like. Also the words that we can then use with them, building that really rich vocabulary. So rather than just saying I feel happy or I feel sad, we're starting to really think about how we can develop that emotional vocabulary to help children to understand what point of energy level within their regulation zones are they feeling at that time.

Then it's about building that shared understanding. Because if we start to name the emotions and name the feelings, we can then start to take some element of ownership and understanding and be able to share that understanding with somebody else. When I talked earlier about seeking to understand, developing this vocabulary is so vital. And building that shared language around emotions helps us to be able to co-regulate. So if I can understand how a child is feeling and they can explain that to me in the best way that they can, then we can co-regulate together and help to understand that feeling and what that feeling feels like from the body and taking that to the brain. Because if we're able to think about it, we can talk about it, and then we can help to co-regulate.

### **Check-ins**

In school we are exposing children to lots of different experiences for connection, and we use check-ins, zones check-ins as a first line of support.

This is something that will be introduced to children through the Zones lessons and has been part of our approach to building class communities with children for a while. Checking in helps to focus thinking about what is the feeling that we have rather than focussing on

correcting the behaviour or redirect it. So if we're taking a feelings first approach, it has a positive impact on our relationships, and it can affect everything.

In every class we have a well-being scale, and we've linked this to the zones of regulation. Every morning, and sometimes in the afternoon, children are invited to take part in a check-in circle. That check-in circle is about building that sense of community, building that sense of belonging. As you can see here there's some photographs of one of my classes from a previous school, where our morning check-in was a vital part of our school day. It's the time when we are building that connection and relationships, not just with the teacher, but with your classmates as well. And when you have that sense of shared collective belonging and that support within that class community, people are less likely to cause harm. But also, they are more likely to support one another and feel supported and valued. In addition when everybody has a voice within their circle, we can support one another as well.

The well-being scale used in check in time is focussing thinking about where our levels of energy are at. What's really important as a class teacher in this time is that it gives us a really good indicator of how children are feeling coming into school, which will obviously impact and affect their learning. If somebody is feeling very low in energy and have very down feelings, they're less likely to be receptive to learning. And equally so, if they have extremely high energy, the strongest feelings, and actually being expected to sit in a chair and listen or be able to attend an assembly and sit for a whole 20 minutes, when actually the energy they are experiencing is meaning that they are not able to necessarily cope with that situation.

So what is helpful for us to be able to understand where children's emotional energy levels are at. In these check-in circles it can be a really quick process. It doesn't necessarily even need to be a drawn-out explanation as to why. So you might actually find that your children will be coming back and sharing some of the themes of the check-in circle. It might have been to do with the well-being scale. It could be, for example, I felt a 'two' on the scale today. So I had quite high energy and quite strong feelings, but I was able to really use my tools in my regulation toolkit to be able to access my learning as well. But actually, that could have been a really positive number two. So it could have been very excited about something that we're going to be learning something new. It could also be a check-in circle where we're finding things out about one another. It could be a circle theme of favourite foods. It could be your favourite thing to do at the weekend. It could be an experience that children have had that they want to share. Or it could be something that's quite abstract, for example If you had a superpower, what would that superpower be? Or would you choose to be able to climb trees or swim to the bottom of the ocean?

It's all about building that connection, building that understanding of each other, so that when things maybe aren't going as well, you have that connection, that relationship that you can come back to and support one another in the class. So if somebody's feeling particularly low in their feelings or needs to be able to get rid of a lot of that energy, we're able to support each other in a really positive, proactive way.

## **Regulation tools**

The tools for regulation i've talked about a little bit, and the tools can come in two different ways. One's a bottom-up approach, which is from the body to brain. Those are the sorts of activities that are very much a sensory-motor activity, something that's highly active or sensory based. It could be just going for a walk. It could be about thinking about engaging different muscles. Or it could be that sensory, so when you kind of smell something that helps you to be able to regulate.

Other tools are focussed on being from brain to body. So depending on the level of dysregulation and the levels of energy, there might be tools that help us to be able to organize our thoughts, really start to be able to calm down perhaps what we're thinking, maybe make a list, maybe start to identify pros and cons. It might be able to have some calming breathing exercises. We'll talk about some of those tools and teach the children how to use them effectively.

But what's important is we're creating our own toolbox, because what works for me will be very different from what works for you. The different tools focus in four different ways:

- Sensory motor tools.
- Mind and body tools.
- Thinking and planning tools.
- Connecting tools, where we're building that further connection with one another.

Each tool helps in different zones. So for example, if we're feeling in the blue zone, so that's very low levels of energy, our tools are designed to be able to help to energize us, but they can also help us to be able to rest and gain comfort. And that comfort might be from somebody else. It might be from our own strategies that we have by listening to music, for example.

In the green zone, this is when our energy feels regulated, but the tools that we can also use here can help those beneficial positive feelings and emotions. So they help us to maintain a sense of wellness, being healthy and focused.

The tools in the yellow zone are designed to help us calm our energy and gain back a sense of control. So that could be to do with breathing strategies and techniques, or being mindful in our approaches, using our imagination to help us gain that sense of control back again.

And then when we're in the red zone, the tools within this zone respond to very high energy, the highest levels of energy, it's about pausing, gaining control of those big feelings, or releasing some energy in order to be able to feel calmer.

### **All zones are okay – developing a toolkit for regulation**

What's really important is that we remember that all zones are okay. It's how we regulate and manage and develop the tools within those zones to be able to help us to be able to self-regulate.

So part of the behaviour curriculum, part of the zones of regulation curriculum, is we practice the tool of the week. And through teaching, through the lessons that your children will be experiencing from foundation all the way through to year four, they'll be taught these steps to help them. There'll be a different tool that some children will get along well with, some won't. Some will be like, no, that's not for me, I don't think so.

So what we do is we start with paying attention to our body signals. What's our body telling us? How are we feeling? What's our heart doing? What's our breathing doing? What do we notice about our skin, maybe our eyes? Maybe we might be holding tension in our hands or our shoulders. And then we practice that tool.

And once we've practiced that tool, so for example, it could be the feel and fidget, so having something sensory available to be able to be connecting with to give our body something

different to do. Or it could be about using our brain and thinking about what we can see, feel, hear, smell, taste. Really paying attention and being mindful to what's around us.

Then what's important in this learning is that we're reflecting. How does that zone help you? How has it helped you? How does it make you feel now after you've used that tool? Is it something that you pop in your toolbox and you use again in the future when you feel that same feeling? Or is it something else, you need something else along those lines?

What I have created is a booklet that explains all the different tools to be able to help you at home. This booklet will be accessible on our website.

There are other ways that this is being practiced in our classrooms is you might notice some of these different areas within the classroom zones. All of our classrooms have a regulation station. So that's an area where children are able to regulate. You can see here there's lots of different resources, books and stories and an amazing resource there to help children to understand what those feelings and emotions look like. What do feelings look like in somebody else? But also you can see here teachers have put together resources and activities that children can then use in order to be able to start to self-regulate. Or if they need co-regulation, it's there for an adult to be able to help and support them with that as well.

### **Further Personal, social and emotional curriculum and individualised support**

Alongside the regulation stations and the zones of regulation curriculum, we also have different aspects of our curriculum provision and support provision that helps children with their emotional wellbeing and regulation is part of that. Our PHSE curriculum, our personal health, social, emotional curriculum is taught through the Jigsaw program, which is a developmental program that goes through from foundation through to year four. That's part of our learning that children will experience every week. We also have a pastoral program called Hamish and Milo, which is set of wellbeing resources. Some children might be identified as needing a little bit more support, a little bit of intervention. We have a pastoral teaching assistant who is able and very skilled, who is able to focus and help children with specific areas of need that they have. I've also referenced the NHS Mental Health Resources for Parents and Carers. We also use external services to be able to help and support. Following this padlet (reference to QR code) there are different apps, podcasts, booklets, and so on to be able to help with lots of areas as families and carers and parents, you'll be able to access through our NHS and Central Bedfordshire as well.

### **How can you use Zones of Regulation at home?**

One of the biggest things is about talking about feelings, checking in with their feelings and also talking about how you are feeling as well. Really opening out language around our emotions and our feelings helps to build that shared understanding, that shared connection as well. Some families I know have the Zones of Regulation visuals on their fridge. They might have versions of the toolbox that they've been able to develop as well, and creating your own toolkit as well. And there will be some blank resources of this available on our website.

In addition, checking in with your feelings. How are you feeling? Also being mindful not to assume that you know the feeling your child is experiencing. My son would get very upset with me if I told him that I thought he was feeling tired or hungry, because then you get a response of, well, 'I'm not tired or I'm not hungry'. Whereas as their parent, that's maybe the inkling you get, but it's really helping them to check in with how they're feeling. And that

really helps with the individual's interoception, the connecting with the body to understand these feelings and what that feels like for them.

Then what you can also do is start to think about talking about the zones. So which zone do you think you're in? And a good way of being able to do that is then linking ideas and verbalising this, if we're feeling in the blue zone and we need a little bit more energy, we need to re-energize or we need some comfort, this is what we can do about it. And then that would be leading on to looking at the strategies in the toolkit. Equally so, if somebody is feeling in the red zone, they are particularly dysregulated, they're feeling really out of control, they're mad, they're angry, actually exploring what tools can be used then. So it's giving that time, that space to really co-regulate and help that individual to manage where they're at and sit in that space for a while.

It's really important to recognize that it's not about the goal of getting to green, that every feeling is valid. And actually our natural resting state might not actually be in the green zone. You might recognize yourself as your resting state could be in the yellow zone. You might describe yourself as a naturally anxious person. So it's really being mindful of that for your children as well and really talking through those strategies and what works for you.

You can see two different toolboxes there as examples, one for younger children with the visuals, one for older children there as well, or even adults.

### **Tools to use at home**

The sorts of things that you might want to try at home that I'm sure you've tried already, are connecting with the sensory and movement tools. These are the sorts of tools that really engage with all the senses. Here are some of the ideas there that you might want to have and sort of think about. (refer to visual list of strategies on the slide)

Incidentally, the key advice from a lot of occupational therapists specifically is that any point of dysregulation can be calmed and soothed by physical activity. So even if you're not sure and your child is not sure at what point or can describe how dysregulated they're feeling, some way of physical exercise will help to stabilize and regulate. And then actually there'll be specifics that will work for your child as well. The blanket roll at the bottom is about providing sensory pressure, so that light and deep pressure that also helps with sensory regulation at a whole body level.

Sensory tools are something that a lot of people talk about. You might have some sensory tools at home as well. Something to be mindful here is that they are tools and not toys, it's about using those tools for regulation. You can see there's a range of different things, including a weighted cushion as well, which is also a nice sensory tool as well, something to be able to look at. The blue bobbly thing in the middle there is a sensory cushion, like what we call a wobble cushion. That provides sensory feedback by the child not having to sit in a still stationary position. They're getting sensory feedback by being able to move. Around, which helps to self-regulate. It helps to really stabilize them as well. And obviously we've got lavender there that includes the sense of smell as well as touch and sight as well.

The mindful and calming strategies, really helpful ones, something that we refer to a lot. Lots of breathing strategies and breathing shapes, breathing in and out. Using your hand as well, hand breathing is a really positive one because it's always there. So when you're breathing in and then you breathe out as you go down your next finger, breathing in and breathe out. Really helps to regulate, calm, control, really think about our breathing and regulate. When we are dysregulated, our breathing tends to get a lot faster, a lot more shallow. We want to try and help to regulate by thinking about the tool called six sides of breathing.

Ocean breaths are also similar, breathing in and out. One of the members of our team calls them wolf breaths because they've been doing about the three little pigs. So thinking about that breathing in like the big bad wolf and breathing out again as well. In addition, anything that connects you with nature or have some comfort that's linked to it as well is a mindful and calming strategy.

I'm sure you've done some of these things yourself and also with your children. Anything side by side is going to have a really positive co-regulation effect. It doesn't even have to be talking about what's happened, what's gone wrong, how they're feeling, just side by side chatter and being or even just being quiet next to each other has its own comfort as well.

The thinking and planning strategies are when the brain starts first. So it's brain to body as a tool. Really thinking about being your own inner coach. Children find that one really difficult, to really encourage that positive self-talk. And that takes time. Also practicing persistence takes time. None of these are going to be easy fixes at all.

And then other ideas that you might actually have or things that you might find useful. I certainly have along the way:

- Different games, anything that can be a game, anything that can actually start to engage and interact with anything about feelings.
- I'm a huge fan of books and stories to be able to share together and using those characters from the stories. I have a story called Angry Arthur and we talk about Arthur. And by the end of the story, he doesn't even remember why he was angry in the first place. You can use that character in your conversations, saying, OK, so how did Arthur feel? What happened there? And use the character rather than the individual. And that takes that pressure away from the child.
- There's loads of different songs about emotions and helping children to identify. Moose Clumps is a favourite of ours. You can find that on YouTube. And they do have one about the zones of regulation as well. Helping children to see what feelings look like. But I'm sure you'll have your favourites as well.

### **Summing up the Zones of regulation**

So these are the key points specifically about the zones of regulation:

- Zones are based on feeling, not behaviour.
- All zones are OK. Every feeling is validated.
- Our experiences of the zones are going to be unique to us.
- From a perspective of the adult, the zones of regulation is not a compliance based model. It's not about you're in red, you shouldn't be in red, you need to be in green. That's not what we're looking at.
- It's identifying that child centred, having the child at the centre. They're feeling this way for a reason. Take the behaviour as communication model and dive down under and see what's actually going on.
- Green isn't our goal. We're going to try and use the tools for us to care and manage and regulate within our zone. So there's no pressure to be on green.

### **Summing up our approach to behaviour for learning at the Firs**

- If we are modelling really positive use of language, modelling within our own relationships, modelling our own regulation, that is all going to help.
- Thinking about and talking about feelings, do you know what, I'm feeling really sleepy at the moment. Do you know what, I think I'm going to use one of my tools when I'm feeling this way. I'm going to have a drink. A cold drink really helps me when I'm feeling this way. So children start to look at and think about and realise that as adults we also feel this way.
- It's also important to open that dialogue as well if you're not regulated yourself because a dysregulated adult cannot co-regulate with a dysregulated child. So check in with your own regulation and it's okay to say, at the moment I'm not quite in the place to deal with this. Tap out with somebody else if you have the opportunity to be able to do that and you have another adult. Or if your child is safe, you're able to say, I'm going to be coming back in a minute. I just need to go and take a breath and I'm going to come back to you. So this is what I'd like you to have a little think about at the moment or this is what I'd like you to do. I will come back but I'm not quite managing this at the minute. This is what I'm going to do but I will return. So that children start to see that actually we are actually regulating ourselves at the same time. But it's so important to make sure that you're going back and that you're obviously doing that in a safe and careful and respectful way.
- Regulation tools are for well-being, they're not about compliance. And what we're doing is we're empowering children to explore and determine which tools work for them and developing that emotional literacy.
- Tools are a choice. We choose to use the tools and that's building that sense of self-confidence and the individual to have their sense of agency.
- Tools are tools, they are not toys. Something that we talk about in school is that these are tools to help you self-regulate and different people need different things to be able to self-regulate. The example I would give in a class is if somebody needs a hearing aid because they have a hearing impairment, I will give that child a hearing aid. That doesn't mean that every single child in the class needs a hearing aid. That child needs one. It's the same with our regulation tools. If that child needs that sensory regulation tool, that's what they will have. It doesn't mean to say that everybody else needs that in the same room. And that's the difference between equity and equality. We talk a lot with the children about what is the need and how is that need support. It's really important there for you to think about as well, that these are tools, not toys.
- As adults, we need to acknowledge when children attempt or try a tool, even if they've not been as successful as maybe you might anticipate or they might not feel as though it's been as successful, they've tried. It takes time to build up an effective toolkit.

### **Our role as adults in co-regulation**

So our role is in supporting emotional regulation. It's about thinking about those tools to help with our relational restorative practices as well. This question here really is one that I come back to time and time again, even in my own personal experience.

- Wouldn't you rather be an anchor that steadies your child rather than a catapult that launches them into dysregulation?

That's where really thinking about ourselves is really important.

We all have those moments where we're not having a great time either, or there's a response that we've given that maybe we've kind of regretted a little bit. But it's about modelling that collective approach, modelling in a way that we really want to be able to anchoring and to help to co-regulate.

So something for us as adults to think about is our own regulation awareness and our daily strategies. You might not be necessarily aware of what you do. It might be so intrinsic to you as a person, but really thinking and exploring that. It's also about the importance of relationships, building that positive, collaborative relationship with your child, with any other child that you have in your family or friends and peer groups, but also with one another as the adults. Are you coming from this in the same way? Being able to have that collective approach between adults within the home, with adults in school, and together as well, working in partnership to be able to really build a really strong and secure experience for our children. Those relationships should be at the heart of that.

Finally, our role in co-regulation. How do you attune with others? Do you pick up on when other people maybe are a little bit out of sorts or not as they would normally be? And one of the ways we try and do this at the first is we use 'connect before content'. This means that rather than seeing somebody and explaining exactly what we want straight away or what we're expecting or information that we need, it's making that connection. How are you? Is everything okay? It's nice to see you.

'Connect before content' is so important for us, as you'll have noticed at the Firs with our adults who are on the gates every morning and every afternoon, adults who are on the doors, building that connection before anything else happens. So children feel welcome and safe and part of our learning community before they even reach their actual academic learning. So 'connecting before content'.

And that's the same with a dysregulated child or an issue that's happened: connect with that child first and then once regulated, calm and connected, then start to talk about perhaps what the issue might have been rather than launch straight into the issue. It's making that connection, making that individual feel safe and listened to and respected.

### **Our pledge – The Firs way....**

So to finish, this was our pledge that we talked about at the very beginning about the importance of creating a safe and inclusive space and providing those teachable moments in every positive interaction.

I hope that this has helped to give you a little bit of information about how we do that at the Firs and how important that is for our Firs way and our values here.

Thank you so much for taking the time to listen. If anybody has any questions at all, you can email me at school or the school office or any member of staff will be happy to answer your questions. Thank you.