



# Relationships Policy

Reviewed: 28.04.2026 | Next date for review: 01.04.2027

Running Deer Intervention Services knows that young people can reach their full potential given time, the right opportunity and the support they need.

Our values are based on respect.

- Respect for self.
- Respect for others.
- Respect for the environment.

We strive to:

- Be ethical in everything we do.
- Be user led and transparent at all times.
- Promote inclusiveness.
- Make a positive difference to peoples' lives.

## Rationale

At Running Deer, we recognise that people from all backgrounds access the Intervention Service, both as staff members and as people receiving support, and we believe that at our Intervention Service there are 'No Outsiders' because we are all different and we are all equal. We draw strength from our diversity as a group and use this to ensure the best possible outcomes for all, recognising that people will have different strengths and different needs.

This policy sets out how we will nurture the interactions and relationships between us all. We are committed to a Trauma and Mental Health Informed ethos that maximises the protective factors of the Intervention Service, by creating an environment of safety that has strong, positive and supportive relationships between everyone at its heart. This requires staff and adults, who support the young people at Running Deer, to understand the impact of emotionally regulated and available adults, who can provide calmness and containment of young people, their parents/carers, or each other.

All staff are responsible for adhering to positive practise that promotes a child's ability to engage in, and access, their learning. This is based on the understanding that children best achieve, develop, and reach, their true potential when staff are fair, flexible, trustworthy, respectful, and model positive relationships. It is the expectation at Running Deer that all staff, regardless of role, act in this way.

## Application and Practice

*"The ability to form meaningful relationships is fundamental to mental health and happiness. It's the quality of contact we have with other people that is arguably the most important determining factor in our quality of life. We can only truly develop ourselves through relationships with others"*  
(TISUK, 2019)

*“Just one emotionally available adult in the Intervention Service, community or home can make all the difference” (TISUK, 2019)*

Therefore, our Intervention Service is invested in supporting the very best relational health between:

- Parent(s)/carer and child
- Child and child
- Child and Intervention Service staff
- Parent/carers and Intervention Service staff
- Intervention Service staff
- Intervention Service staff and senior leaders
- Children, parent(s)/carer and other agencies
- Intervention Service staff and external agencies

Our community adopts relational and educational practices which protect, relate, regulate and reflect as follows:

**Protect:**

- Our Intervention Service aims to increase ‘safety cues’ in all aspects of the Intervention Service day, for our children and each other, for example through designed and timetabled interventions that create opportunities for the emotionally available adults to be alongside our children across the Intervention Service day. These include, but are not limited to, sandplay and art therapy.
- An ‘open door’ policy for informal discussions with parents/ carers.
- We aim to increase our staff’s understanding in nurturing attachments and the PACE approach (Hughes, 2015). This means that our children are met with a warm empathic, playful and curious staff team that will enable them to move out of flight/fight or freeze and into relationship and trust. We are committed to regular staff training and development.
- As an Intervention Service we ensure that interactions with children, their families/carers, other agencies, and each other, are socially engaging and not socially defensive.
- Punitive approaches are not being used under any circumstances in response to children’s behaviour, challenging or otherwise, such as the use of harsh voices, shouting, isolating, secluding, denying curriculum access, withholding food, and shame-evoking behaviours (which are proven to be damaging psychologically and neurologically).
- All members of our Intervention Service aim to interactively reflect and repair occasions when they themselves move into defensiveness.
- Our Intervention Service staff adopt ways of developing relationships and understanding of our children, their families/carers, and each other. Holding at the heart of our approach is relationship as the key to personal, social and emotional development (as well as academic achievement) for our children.
- Our Intervention Service staff adjust their expectations for our children, their families and carers, in accordance with their developmental capabilities and experience of traumatic stress. This sometimes involves removing vulnerable and traumatised children in a kind and non-judgemental way from situations they are not managing well. As a staffing team we are also able to do this for each other.
- The use of a robust debrief system. De-briefing opportunities are available in several ways for staff and children to assist them in managing situations that have caused or may cause distress, we look to develop this through inter/multiagency links:

- This may be done as a restorative conversation, involving visual prompts, for example to enable children to understand what has happened and why, who this has affected and how, and to help them to reflect then to begin to repair.
- This may be a meeting between the child, parents/carers, and pastoral staff, to debrief about the incident, considering what happened and why, who was affected and how, and to consider ways to move forward, with supported plans in place.
- This may be an after-Intervention Service discussion, for example as a team of staff, to consider what happened, why, and look at ways forward
- This may be a formal de-brief meeting with involved staff to look at protocols and procedures in more detail
- An incident debriefing meeting assists people, particularly staff and children, to overcome the effects of an incident by:
  - Talking about what happened
  - Expressing how they feel as a result of the incident
  - Identifying any individual stress reactions (i.e. physical, emotional, thinking, behavioural)
  - Identifying some ways of dealing with stress reactions,
  - If appropriate, independent referrals can then be made to outside agencies and professionals (such as Education Support Partnership, which offers individual support, information and counselling to staff 7 days a week/ 24 hours a day).

#### **Relate:**

- A whole Intervention Service approach and commitment to enable our children, families/ carers and staff to see themselves, their relationships and the world positively, rather than through the lens of threat, danger or self-blame.
  - This will be through:
    - developing trusting relationships between all parties,
    - open communication,
    - positive feedback,
    - training for staff to act as emotionally available adults for our child,
    - supporting families to access support and outside agencies,
    - implementing therapeutic interventions for children,
    - the clinical supervision provided for staff,
    - line manager 'check-ins' with staff,
    - a transparent staff appraisal process.
- Our Intervention Service provides everyone with repeated relational experiences (alongside emotionally available adults) to support everyone to move from 'blocked trust' (not feeling psychologically safe with anyone) to trust, and from self-help to 'help-seeking'.

#### **Regulate:**

- As an Intervention Service we use evidence-based interventions that aim to repair psychological damage and brain damage caused by traumatic experiences, through emotionally regulating, playful and enriched interactions.
- In our Intervention Service the emotional well-being, and emotional regulation, of staff is treated as highly important to prevent burn-out, stress-related absence, or leaving the profession through stress-related illness, secondary trauma and/or feeling blamed or undervalued.

- We recognise that, if possible, sometimes staff may need 'time out', for example to go for a short walk, or to have a 'change of face' for the child for the staff member's own wellbeing, giving time to take the space they need to reflect and rejuvenate which supports the release of natural anti-stress and pro-social neurochemicals (opioids and oxytocin).
- Relational interventions specifically designed to bring down stress hormone levels (e.g. from toxic to tolerable) in vulnerable children, enabling them to feel calm, soothed and safe. These may be through sandplay or art therapy, through talking with a named emotionally available adult, through physical activity, through work with our therapy animals, or another sensory or wellbeing intervention.

### Reflect:

- The adults in our Intervention Service feel confident to develop relationships with children, their families, and each other, and to have the courageous conversations about their experiences so far.
- Our Intervention Service promotes the exploration of conversations with our children that helps to make sense of their life, to develop a language for their emotions and a narrative that makes sense of their experiences and how they feel. We support our children to understand their thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and reactions, and in doing so enable them to identify and explore new options and strategies for ways forward with their challenges.
- We are committed to staff development and training to help children move from 'behaving' their trauma/painful life experiences, to reflecting on those experiences.
- We have a positive behaviour management policy based not on punishment and sanctions, but on resolution and interactive repair (e.g. restorative conversations).
- Within the context of an established and trusted relationship with a member of staff, children are given the means and opportunity to symbolise painful life experiences through images as well as words, as a key part of 'working through' these experiences. Means include the provision of different modes of expression, e.g. art/play/ music/sand/emotion worksheets/ emotion cards.
- We are committed to staff training and development in the art of good listening, dialogue, empathy and understanding (instead of asking a series of questions/ giving lectures).

### References

TISUK (2019) *Trauma and Mental Health Informed Intervention Services and Communities Delegate Programme Handbook*

Hughes, D. (2015) *Creating Loving Attachments: Parenting with PACE to Nurture Confidence and Security in the Troubled Child*

### Contact Running Deer Intervention Service

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## Appendix

### The PACE Approach (Dan Hughes)

PACE stands for PLAYFULNESS, ACCEPTANCE, CURIOSITY, EMPATHY.

**Playfulness** – an open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude.

*'When children laugh and giggle, they become less defensive and more reflective. Playfulness can help keep it all in perspective... It can also diffuse a difficult or tense situation when the parent has a touch of playfulness in his or her discipline.'*

**Acceptance** – unconditionally accepting a child makes them feel secure, safe and loved

*'Actively communicating to the child that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, her inner life. The child's inner life simply is; it is not right or wrong. The parent may be very firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motives for the behaviour.'*

**Curiosity** – without judgement children become aware of their inner life

*'Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child: "What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about?"'*

**Empathy** – a sense of compassion for the child and her feelings

*'The adult will stay with the child emotionally, providing comfort and support... The adult is also communicating strength, love and commitment, with confidence that sharing the child's distress will not be too much. Together they will get through it.'*

More information can be found at <https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace>