



Behaviour Management Policy - Children and Young People

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Autism Bedfordshire as a charitable organisation is under obligation to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all individuals in their care at all times.

This policy covers the geographical areas where Autism Bedfordshire delivers services.

Policy Statement

This policy outlines our approach to behaviour management and support. Autism Bedfordshire is committed to creating safe, inclusive, respectful, and supportive community sessions for autistic children and young people.

We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication. We aim to understand the reasons behind behaviours and respond in ways that promote wellbeing, dignity, emotional regulation, safety, and positive relationships.

Our approach is based on:

- Respect for neurodiversity
- Trauma-informed practice
- Positive behaviour support
- Safeguarding principles
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Child-centred practice

We do not view autistic behaviours as “bad behaviour” simply because they differ from neurotypical expectations.

Preventative Measures

Autism Bedfordshire aims to provide individuals with safe, supportive environments where they can develop their potential. To ensure this happens, Autism Bedfordshire liaise with parents and schools when planning activities and consider staffing and environmental factors prior to children coming on site. In addition, staff and volunteers are given guidance and training on the Behaviour Management Strategies and we expect staff and volunteers to use these strategies at all times.

Staff will receive training on the appropriate course of action in dealing with distressed behaviours. This is the responsibility of the Senior Team Leader(s) and Children’s Services Coordinators and includes both proactive strategies (e.g. adapting environment, transport policies) and reactive strategies (e.g. distraction, time away, holding hands etc.).

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All staff
- Volunteers
- Session leaders
- Trustees
- Contractors working directly with children
- Students or placement workers

It applies during:

- Community sessions
- Group activities
- Workshops
- Trips and outings
- Online sessions
- Any activity organised by Autism Bedfordshire

Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Promote emotional safety and wellbeing
- Support autistic children in ways that respect their needs
- Reduce distress and anxiety
- Encourage positive relationships and communication
- Provide staff with consistent guidance
- Ensure safe responses to behaviours that may place someone at risk
- Prevent punitive or shaming approaches

Principles of Behaviour Support

We recognise that autistic children may:

- Communicate differently
- Experience sensory sensitivities
- Become overwhelmed by noise, transitions, uncertainty, or social demands
- Use stimming behaviours for self-regulation
- Experience anxiety, burnout, shutdowns, or meltdowns

Staff and volunteers will:

- Use calm, respectful communication
- Focus on prevention and understanding triggers
- Make reasonable adjustments
- Offer choices where possible
- Use clear and consistent expectations
- Support regulation rather than demand compliance
- Respect communication preferences
- Avoid power struggles

Positive Behaviour Strategies

Staff should use proactive strategies including:

Environment

- Providing quiet or low-sensory spaces
- Reducing unnecessary noise and visual overload
- Offering predictable routines
- Giving advance warning of changes

Communication

- Using clear, concise language
- Allowing processing time
- Using visual supports where appropriate
- Checking understanding without pressure

Emotional Regulation

- Supporting breaks when needed
- Encouraging safe self-regulation strategies
- Recognising signs of distress early
- Validating feelings

Relationships

- Building trust and consistency
- Praising effort and strengths
- Respecting boundaries
- Working collaboratively with families

Understanding Distressed Behaviour

Behaviours that challenge may indicate:

- Anxiety
- Sensory overload
- Communication difficulties
- Fatigue
- Pain or illness
- Fear or uncertainty
- Unmet needs

Staff should seek to understand:

- What happened before the behaviour
- Environmental triggers
- Communication attempts
- The child's individual needs and preferences

Responses should prioritise de-escalation and safety.

De-escalation Approaches

When a child becomes distressed, staff should:

- Remain calm and non-threatening
- Reduce demands where appropriate
- Lower sensory input if possible
- Give physical space
- Use minimal language
- Offer reassurance without pressure
- Allow time for recovery

Staff must avoid:

- Shouting
- Public humiliation
- Threats or intimidation
- Arguing
- Forced eye contact
- Punitive sanctions
- Physical intervention unless absolutely necessary for immediate safety

Physical Intervention

The charity operates a **minimal restrictive practice** approach.

Physical intervention must only be used:

- As a last resort
- To prevent immediate harm to the child or others
- For the shortest time necessary
- By trained staff only where possible

Physical intervention must never be used:

- As punishment
- To force compliance
- Because a child is stimming, refusing, or upset
- In a way that causes pain, fear, or humiliation

Any incident involving physical intervention must:

- Be recorded immediately
- Be reported to safeguarding leads
- Be shared with parents/carers
- Be reviewed to identify preventative strategies

Safeguarding

All behaviour incidents must be managed in line with the charity's safeguarding policy.

If behaviour raises concerns about:

- Abuse
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Mental health risk
- Unsafe home situations

Staff must follow safeguarding reporting procedures.

Supporting Staff and Volunteers

The charity will:

- Provide behaviour support training
- Offer autism-informed practice guidance
- Promote reflective practice
- Support staff wellbeing after serious incidents
- Ensure volunteers understand this policy before working with children

Partnership with Parents and Carers

We value collaboration with families and carers.

Where appropriate, we will:

- Seek information about communication and support needs
- Discuss successful regulation strategies
- Share concerns respectfully
- Work together to promote consistency and wellbeing

Recording and Reporting Incidents

Significant incidents should be recorded, including:

- Date, time, and location
- People involved
- What happened before, during, and after
- Actions taken
- Any injuries or safeguarding concerns
- Follow-up actions

Records will be stored securely in line with data protection requirements.

Equality and Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that behaviour management practices:

- Do not discriminate
- Respect neurodiversity
- Take account of disability and communication needs
- Promote dignity and inclusion for all children

Reasonable adjustments will be made wherever possible.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed:

- Annually
- Following serious incidents
- Following changes in legislation or guidance

Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Data Protection Policy

Relevant legislation and references

- **Equality Act 2010** – requires services to avoid discrimination, make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people, and promote inclusive practice.
- **Human Rights Act 1998** – supports dignity, respect, safety, family life, and protection from degrading treatment; relevant when considering any restrictive or physical intervention.
- **Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004** – set out duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including disabled children and children in need.
- **Children and Families Act 2014** and the **SEND Code of Practice** – support person-centred planning, participation of children and families, and appropriate support for special educational needs and disabilities.
- **Mental Capacity Act 2005** – relevant where young people aged 16 or over may lack capacity for a specific decision; decisions must follow the statutory principles and be in the person's best interests.
- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026** – statutory guidance for organisations and agencies, including voluntary and charity sector organisations, on working together to help, protect and promote the welfare of children.
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education** – statutory safeguarding guidance for schools and colleges; relevant where Autism Bedfordshire works in partnership with education settings or receives safeguarding information from them.
- **Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention** (Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education, 2019) – guidance on supporting children and young people with learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and mental health difficulties who may be at risk of restrictive intervention.
- **Use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions guidance** (Department for Education, April 2026) – guidance for schools in England on prevention, de-escalation, reasonable force, seclusion, recording and reporting; useful as a reference point when working with education settings.

- **UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018** – require behaviour, incident and safeguarding records to be processed lawfully, fairly, securely and only for as long as necessary; safeguarding information may be shared where lawful and necessary to protect a child.
- **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974** and associated health and safety duties – require the organisation to take reasonably practicable steps to protect staff, volunteers, children, young people and visitors from harm.
- **Autism Act 2009** and current national autism strategy guidance – relevant to autism-informed practice, reasonable adjustments, staff awareness and inclusive service provision.