



# Empowerment Approach Handbook



**CHANTRY  
COMMUNITY  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**



**CHANGING CHANCES**  
— BUILDING BRAINS FOR BETTER FUTURES —

# Empowerment Approach Handbook

## Introduction

This handbook has been created through collaboration between Chantry Community Primary School and Changing Chances to support The Empowerment Approach implemented at Chantry Community Primary School. This works in conjunction with Therapeutic Thinking. More information about this can be found in our Behaviour Policy, available on our school website or from the school office.

Successfully implementing the Empowerment Approach across school requires a cultural shift – it is not just about changing approaches and methods. As with any school improvement strategy, it takes time to bring about long-term change, years rather than months. This handbook is likely to evolve and develop as the school community become proficient with the approach. It will be updated to reflect this.

## OUR AMBITION

Our ambition at Chantry is to create an inclusive school where children are supported to become confident, prosocial and have both the skills and the intrinsic motivation to do the right thing, whether or not someone is watching. We believe our responsibility lies not only with the present but also ensuring children develop the skills to become great future citizens who contribute positively to the communities in which they live.

As with all learning, children enter our school gates at very different stages. Some children will already have developed a good level of pro-social and pro-learning skills due to the support and experiences they have enjoyed. It will be easy for them to learn and play successfully. Other children will not have been so lucky and may have greater needs and difficulties than their peers. This means it will be much harder for them to follow routines, work with others and meet the daily demands of school. They will need greater support. We are working to achieve an inclusive school where **every** member feels safe, content and able to learn. Our approach therefore ensures that, whilst we meet the needs of the most vulnerable, those of the group also holds paramount importance.

At Chantry we know that a person never rises to low expectations and so we will always insist children work hard to become the best they can possibly be, in every way. We also know that some children will find meeting expectations much harder; as such we will always combine this with equally high support. Every child deserves a champion - we will do not give up on children.

The process of learning means children will not always get things right. This is as true of the skills associated with behaviour as it is with reading, writing, swimming or maths. We are educators, not controllers. When children do not meet expectations, we work **with** them so they do better next time. At Chantry we work hard not to just 'manage' children, sitting an adult by their side to 'keep them on task', but work with a child and their parents/carers to build skills and ensure they make ongoing progress until they succeed independently. At the same time, we make sure things are in place to ensure all those around them are safe, content and able to learn.

## **OUR GOALS**

### **For all children to:**

- Build the learning skills needed to achieve in the classroom and beyond.
- Develop strong pro-social skills so they talk and act in ways that are good for those around them and the groups and communities in which they belong.
- Become positive self-advocates so they secure their individual needs successfully and in ways that work for others.

## **AIMS OF THE HANDBOOK in conjunction with the POLICY**

- To secure a calm, supportive and enjoyable environment for children and adults alike.
- To support all children in meeting physical, emotional and learning needs fully and with increasing independence so they feel great and can learn and play at their best.
- To support all young people in developing skills needed to learn and play successfully with increasing independence.
- To have a consistent approach to behaviour throughout the school community and beyond so that all adults supporting our children use shared language and strategies.
- To establish clear procedures and expectations with children, supporting them to prepare and plan ahead of tasks and events to enable them to be at their best.
- To respond and follow up when they do not manage to do so.
- To ensure that all members of our school community are aware of these procedures and follow them consistently.
- To teach children about pro-social and pro-learning behaviours through our Wellbeing curriculum (which includes but is not limited to PSHE, RSE, Online Safety, the Empowerment Approach, Neuroninja and Chantry Values and British values).
- To recognise and celebrate progress in all areas of learning, including pro-social and pro-learning behaviour.

## **OUR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING BEHAVIOUR: USING EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE**

At Chantry we have adopted The Empowerment Approach to behaviour because it has been developed by a team of educationalists, psychologists and coaches. It uniquely brings together a range of disciplines, including neuroscience, neurobiology, psychology, coaching and education, ensuring the strategies we use with children to support their behaviour are firmly evidence-based. Please see the Appendix for further information.

## **OUR STRUCTURED & SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO IMPROVING BEHAVIOUR**

At Chantry we have a systematic way to prepare young people to be at their best and a clear structure for responding when children do not meet agreed expectations. We use straightforward strategies to respond in the moment and a consistent method of follow-up to ensure children make sustained progress.

### **Key elements of our approach**

- Teaching children about their brains

- Agreeing high expectations
- Supporting children to prepare and plan to be at their best for learning and play
- Responding by connecting when things go wrong
- Following up incidents and solving problems together
- Coaching young people to resolve unhelpful behaviour patterns

### **Cultural shift**

Our approach is not simply a strategy for managing behaviour but a cultural shift in how difficulties are perceived and children are supported in securing long-term essential life skills, mental well-being and future success. It utilises neurobiology and neuroscience to support young people, their teachers and families in understanding the factors underlying unhelpful behaviours.

It provides a clear and structured approach based on scientific evidence for responding to difficulties, problem solving and working towards future progress. The structured nature of the approach, along with its clear principles, mantras, tools and visual supports is carefully planned for through a spiral curriculum to ensure children build on these skills year on year, whilst becoming more practised in those they have learnt previously.

### **Beyond the Classroom through a Shared Language**

At Chantry we believe that real impact requires all adults around our children to adopt a shared language and consistent techniques. Our approach to behaviour is therefore not limited to the classroom. We ensure that training, information and support extends to all members of our community, and there is an emphasis on developing a shared language accessible to all, from the youngest reception child to those supporting the child at home.

### **Putting the child at the centre**

At the core of the approach is ensuring the young person's voice remains central. It is crucial that children are supported to understand their behaviour and develop strong metacognitive skills. Knowledge is power. By understanding their own responses to situations and the responses of others, we give children an authentic opportunity to voice their thoughts, concerns and develop solutions that last.

## **WHAT WE BELIEVE**

### **Key principles:**

- **Be Curious Not Furious:** maintain a calm, investigative and solution-focused mindset towards unhelpful behaviour; training and supporting all adults in the school to respond by acknowledging and addressing unmet needs and missing skills that underlie behaviour, rather than focusing on the behaviour itself.
- **Positive, kind, unconditionally positive relationships:** prioritising strong, kind, trusting relationships between staff, children and parents/carers. Adults position themselves **for** rather than **against** the child, with the core belief that when people **feel** better, they **do** better.
- **High expectations, high support:** expect all children to achieve their very best and make ongoing progress; provide high quality, systematic and carefully planned support **with** the child for pupils not yet able to meet expectations. High expectations always teamed with a spirit of kindness and unconditional support.

- **Teaching about the brain:** place a high priority on developing understanding of themselves and their brains; recognising knowledge of oneself is empowering and is the first step towards progress – one cannot change what one doesn't know or understand.
- **Understand needs:** when emotional, physical, sensory and learning needs aren't well met, challenging behaviour may be the outcome. By understanding need, we are in a better position to prepare to meet them well.
- **Follow-up is essential** – 'without follow-up, there will always be mopping up'. Like all areas of learning, systematic and rigorous approach to improvement is essential, and follow-up when a child does not meet expectations is embedded to ensure good progress.
- **Children's voice at the centre** – supporting children to understand their behaviour, setting goals and how to achieve them is at the heart of the approach; by doing so, we secure intrinsic motivation and self-advocacy.
- **Teach Executive Function Skills:** attention control, impulse control, processing speed, working memory; cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation are key skills for life. They need to be taught and practised.

## **OUR BELIEFS IN PRACTICE**

### **A. Building the Foundations: how adults prepare for children to be at their best:**

There are four main elements to Chantry's support of young people to achieve the best they can:

#### **I. Teach about the brain:**

- All classes follow the spiral curriculum which ensures children learn about their brains, needs and skills needed to learn and play successfully on their own and with others.

#### **II. Agree expectations with children so they have a sense of control over what happens to them and the boundaries in place in school.**

#### **III. Help children plan and prepare to be at their best:**

- Adults follow a routine in which expectations are agreed ahead of a task or event; children are given opportunities to consider what they need in order to work at their best.

#### **IV. Unconditional support**

- work with children and put relationship first.
- All adults work hard to establish secure, positive relationships with children. If the relationship is not positive, the adult takes responsibility to put this right.

## **Practice at Chantry:**

### **I. Teach children about their brain**

All classes follow a spiral curriculum for The Empowerment Approach as part of our Wellbeing Curriculum. The focus is on helping children to better understand their physical, emotional and learning needs and the needs of those around them so that they can learn and play at their best. The plans support all children to build strong pro-social and pro-learning skills.

### **II. Agree Expectations: Our School Charter**

At Chantry we believe the key to teaching children pro-social and pro-learning skills is to provide as much practise as possible in thinking through how people need to talk and act for everyone to feel safe, content and able to learn and play at their best – for it to be, ‘Good for Me, Good for You, Good for Everyone!’.

Pro-social and pro-learning expectations vary widely for different situations. What is considered acceptable in a mosque, temple or church is very different to how people are expected to talk and act in a playground. Social etiquette is different in a cinema than a vibrant café. Having static ‘rules’ which are given to children rather than being discussed strips children of opportunities to develop skills in thinking through needs of all parties in varying situations.

An essential element of the approach therefore includes agreeing expectations **prior** to any activity or event and helping children think through and agree what will help everyone to feel safe, content and able to learn or play at their best, what they might find difficult in keeping to that agreement and what will help them manage it well. We call this strategy ‘Prep4Best’ (further details in the following section).

However, there are some expectations common to all situations: talking and acting in ways which mean the people around us feel safe and respected; looking after our physical world so it is in a good condition for others for example.

It is equally important for children to have a role in thinking through wider expectations and we do this through our ‘School Charter’. The process of establishing our Chantry School Charter each year enables children to feel greater ownership and therefore investment in keeping to these. It also means children understand the purpose of the expectations; knowing the ‘why’ results in individuals feeling less controlled and better motivated to keep to the boundaries agreed. Please see Appendix for further information.

### **Should expectations be the same for everyone?**

Yes. It is important for everyone to feel safe, happy and to be able to learn at their best. This only happens if every person in the class keeps to the charter.

However, we also know there are genuine reasons why some children find it much harder to keep to expectations. These children need adjustments, support and scaffolds to ensure they can succeed.

Further information on the reasons why some children have greater difficulty in keeping to expectations and how we support their progress can be found in the Appendix.



### III. Help all children to plan and prepare to be at their best (Prep4Best):

Whilst some children have individual higher levels of needs and poorer EF skills 'Prep4Best' strategies are a routine element of **practice** in every class for **all** children.

Prior to any activity or event, adults routinely use 'Prep4Best', during which the class think through needs, what might go wrong and what will help them prevent this so they can be at their best. This will not need to be repeated for regular activities once it is established how children are at their best but should be repeated regularly and **always** take place prior to new or unfamiliar tasks.

Prep4Best is crucial as it ensures staff set consistently high expectations and ensures a proactive rather than reactive approach to behaviour. It is a good habit for children to develop and prevents individuals from launching into a task without preparation. It is a habit that which will be of great help into future studies and work.

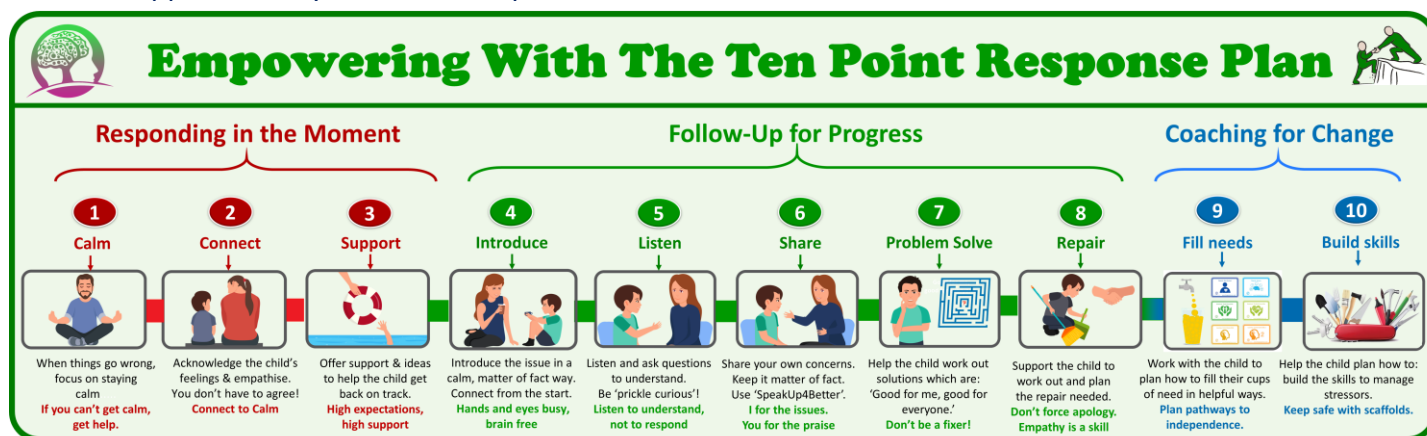
### IV: Show unconditional support

Every child needs a champion; research has shown that just one supportive adult in a child's life makes all the difference. We are educators, and as such, we ensure every Chantry child feels unconditionally supported and cared for, whatever the challenges. We recognise that children sometimes present with behaviours that are challenging and upsetting for those around them. Whilst securing the safety and well-being of all within our school community, this is teamed with a spirit of unconditional support and kindness for the individual child. Support is not at the expense of high expectations – we can be kind without agreeing or condoning unhelpful behaviours.

### B. How adults respond when children do not keep to expectations:

If a child does not manage to keep to expectations, all staff and adults supporting follow the '10 Point Response Plan to Challenging Behaviour'.

All staff receive training in the approach and it is a core aspect of our Induction Programme. Staff struggling with any of the elements of the 10 Point Response Plan should speak with their Line Manager and request time for support so they can secure improvement.



The 10 Point Response Plan has been carefully designed using evidence from neuroscience, psychology and coaching in the most effective strategies for supporting young people.

The 10 Point Response Plan is divided into three clear stages:

- I. **Respond in the Moment** – how adults respond at the time when a child presents with unhelpful behaviours.
- II. **Follow-up for Progress** – the way we follow-up after an incident to ensure the child does better next time.
- III. **Coaching for Change** – how we support children who present with significant difficulties to ensure improvement.





These stages need to be followed consistently and systematically. The approach is not effective and the child is prevented from making the progress they deserve if this is not the case; progress which is so essential for their own success and the well-being and achievement of those around them.

Procedures for the different elements of the Ten Point Response Plan and when to use them are contained Appendix of this policy.

**Stage I Support: Responding in the Moment (PARAMEDIC):**

If a child is not meeting expectations, the adult responds with Calm, Connect, Support:

- **Calm:** adult finds their own calm.  
Adults model self-regulation, helping the child to regulate theirs. If this isn't possible, ask for help.
- **Connect:** acknowledge and empathise with feelings, you don't have to agree.  
When things go wrong, adults say things which help the child to feel supported and understood.
- **Support:** help them to get back on track for the moment. Working out steps for next time comes later.  
Adults offer ways to help the child get back on track: a different space to learn or other support.

		
<p><b>1</b> Calm</p> 	<p><b>2</b> Connect</p> 	<p><b>3</b> Support</p> 
<p><b>Get calm</b> Focus on staying in positive, empowered positions. If you cannot be calm, get some help. Model skills you want to see.</p>	<p><b>Connect to Calm</b> Show you understand how it is for them. Help them feel heard and felt. Show you care. You don't have to agree!</p>	<p><b>Help them get back on track.</b> Offer suggestions if they cannot think. Help the child to feel you are on their side and supported. Think team!</p>



## **Why should adults use this approach for unhelpful behaviours?**

We know from neuroscience that when children dysregulate, the areas of the brain responsible for rational thinking, reasoning and problem solving are inhibited. The first priority therefore is to regulate the child. When support and empathy are given, oxytocin is released into the body which speeds up the regulatory system. Adults therefore always respond with support and empathy, even when a child has done things we don't agree with. Showing support and empathy does not mean we agree with or condone the action.

Responsive, positive relationships are crucial to long term well-being and success. When adults respond in cross or disappointed ways, the child feels adults are not on their side. Relational safety is crucial for children, and when damaged it becomes a significant unmet need which exacerbates the stressors contributing to unhelpful behaviours.

Negative responses from adults lead children to self-identify as 'bad' or 'naughty' (and for peers to label them as 'naughty'). A child feeling like this feel worse about themselves and responses spiral downwards; in many schools, children become trapped in the 'punishment cycle'. It is therefore crucial that adults **always** respond calmly and supportively so self-concept is protected. When people feel better, they do better!

**Embracing a spirit of support and empathy does not mean lowering expectations or not holding children to account.** Maintaining high expectations is crucial; it is vital that there is consistent focus on pro-social and pro-learning skills and **always** follow-up when a child does not meet expectations. Every member of the school community knows that children who aren't managing are given lots of extra help, just like someone finding reading difficult. They have to work harder and give extra time until they can manage successfully.

### **Stage II and III Support: Follow-up for Progress - (SURGEON):**

Follow-up involves two elements: a) Coaching Conversation and b) Repair Time.

*Repair Time is carried out separately if words or actions had a negative impact.*

Repair Time is separate to a Coaching Conversation and they have very different purposes.

The purpose of Coaching Conversations is to problem-solve concerns and needs of all parties and find a solution to enable the child to do better next time. Repair Time is about reflecting on amends that should be made and building skills of social cognition and empathy.

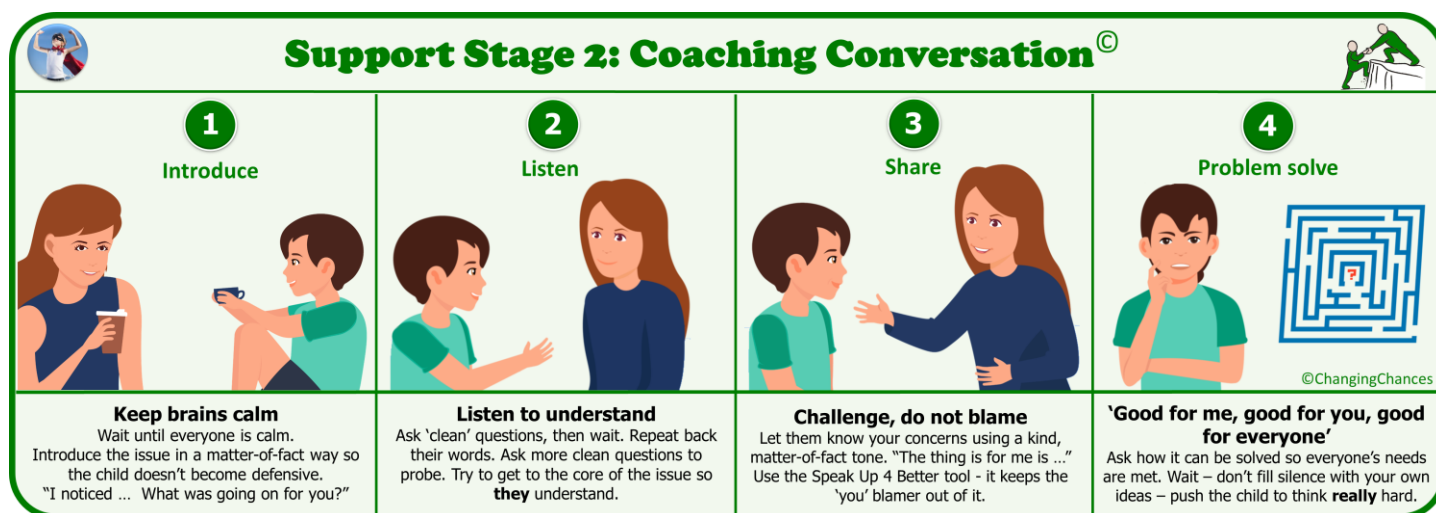
### **Coaching Conversations: How adults follow-up incidents:**

When children do not meet agreed expectations, it is followed-up, when everyone is calm, using a 'Coaching Conversation'. These are a problem-solving technique focusing on understanding need, building skills and planning how to do better.

We use this method because we know that punitive consequences make children feel bad but don't help children:

- a) work out how to meet their needs better next time
- b) build EF skills
- c) develop Emotional Intelligence.

During a Coaching Conversation, the concerns of the child **and** the adult are explored and ways to solve both are discussed.



## Stage II Support: The Coaching Conversation

- **Introduce the concern** in a way that keeps the child regulated and feeling supported
- **Listen to the child** – listen to understand, not to respond.  
Ask questions until both you and the child really understand needs and missing skills behind the issue, in a way the child feels heard and understood.
- **Share** your concerns and point of view using the 'Speak Up for Better' technique (start with evidence and how you are interpreting it, use 'I' rather than 'you').
- **Problem-solve** together – ask for the child's ideas first; expect the child to work hard to find solutions 'Good for Me, Good for You, Good for Everyone'. If they cannot think of solutions, despite trying hard, the adult makes suggestions and encourages the child to decide which would be best from limited options provided. The principle is that the child feels ownership of the solution as this makes it more likely they follow through.

## Sustaining ongoing progress

- **Real, long-term change takes time** – our job is to help children and young people create new neural pathways, and recognise they can't do this overnight. The first Coaching Conversation is unlikely to lead to change – 'Change needs more than a chat'.
- **Scaffolding pathways to independence:** Children and adults need to be clear about end goals. Small steps should be planned with the child, and successes recognised and celebrated.

It may be necessary to put scaffolds in place for a while, but it is essential that over time these are reduced and removed as the child develops the skills to function independently. When supports and scaffolds remain static, children become dependent.

## Repair Time: restorative justice (used at all stages):

Repair Time is used if a child's words or actions have had a negative impact.

Repair Time is separate to the Coaching Conversation and, as noted above, has a separate purpose.

Repair Time is scheduled to take place as soon after the incident as possible, once the child is calm. The adult first involved in the incident leads Repair Time, wherever possible.

During this stage, the child is supported to consider the perspectives of others; they are helped to think through whether the needs of other people were compromised and the natural impact that their words or actions had. By exploring this in a matter-of-fact way and in a spirit of support, the 'repair stage' supports improved skills within the areas of social cognition and empathy.



Children saying they do not care about impact on others and not wanting to make things better should not be forced. The adult shows them the Control Centre Skills card for Emotional Intelligence (gold needs card) and explains that this means they haven't learned the skills to feel what others feel or want others to feel better. The adult also emphasise that:

- These are important skills for everyone to have to make sure it is a pleasant place for all to live
- As their educator, we have a duty to help them improve these skills so extra help will be put in place.
- This may mean extra learning before or after school, or during unstructured times but it is not a punishment – it is because you care about them and those around them deeply – we want them to achieve well and for others to feel safe.
- Reassure that extra sessions will be within a spirit of support and as enjoyable as possible.

## Stage 3: Coaching Time

Coaching Time takes place in the event that Coaching Conversations have been used several times but not led to noticeable improvement.

It is vital that the child does not see Coaching Time as punishment but as a commitment to wanting them to do better so they can achieve well. This message is emphasised to the child and the experience should be a positive one for the child, whilst also firmly holding them to account for making progress.

Coaching Time is carried out in the spirit of support. Coaching Time can take place in groups, if necessary.

Coaching Time incorporates the following different elements:



If a set of Coaching Times take place and these do not lead to change, an individual plan and a coaching programme is put in place.

### Support Stage 4: Coaching for Change

If Coaching Time has taken place and sufficient progress has not been achieved, the child is placed on a Coaching Programme. The Coaching Programme is an intensive level of support for children with higher levels of need; it involves a series of sessions to support change, and may take place outside of the school day.



At Support Stages 3 & 4 children have an individual plan which identifies and plans for unmet need and building lacking Executive Function Skills. At Chantry, our SENCO and Nurture Lead Teacher lead and support class teachers with this. The Educational Mental Health Practitioner, coaches and therapists, along with outside agencies (ESBAS, CLASS etc) are here to support children with building missing skills and finding helpful ways to get need met.

### C. Consequences:

Consequences are focused on **natural impact** i.e. If we are kind in how we respond to others, they will feel safe. If we respond unkindly, others feel unsafe and feel scared. They may then not wish to spend time with us. At Chantry we use Protective and Educational consequences to support change (see Behaviour Policy for more information), and base this on what makes sense.

**Focus on natural impact supports the development of:**

- Emotional intelligence and empathy
- A strong moral compass and intrinsic motivation to do the right thing

### **If consequences are focused on reward and punishment children:**

- Think about what's in it for them rather than developing social and emotional intelligence
- Do things to "be seen" or not "get caught" rather than developing a strong moral compass
- Become dependent on authority rather than develop independence to do the right thing to do for the well-being of themselves and others
- Rely on extrinsic motivation rather than make moral decisions.

Internal motivation, independence and a clear moral compass are crucial for children's futures. Building these early means they are better equipped to avoid common pressures experienced in teenage years and beyond which lead to substance abuse, risky behaviours and crime.

At Chantry we use Protective and Educational consequences (ConEDsequences). These are focused on helping the child to **do better** rather than **feel worse**. They may have extra support and stay for coaching outside of school hours or at unstructured times. This will be carried out with a spirit of support and kindness – like all learning, we want the child to learn the skills to do better **and** enjoy the experience along the way. At Chantry the Reflection Room, lunch club or alternative provision provides a safe and enjoyable experience for those who find it hard to manage well, whilst still ensuring others' safety and wellbeing. (See Behaviour Policy for more information.)

### **What if a child continues to struggle?**

Every child at Chantry deserves to feel safe, happy and able to learn. It is vital that, if a pupil in the class is putting this at risk, the right support is put in place so that others feel safe.

If the use of Calm Connect Respond, Coaching, skill building/scaffolds and adjustments to help whilst these are developing isn't sufficient, the child may need different provision whilst they develop the necessary skills.

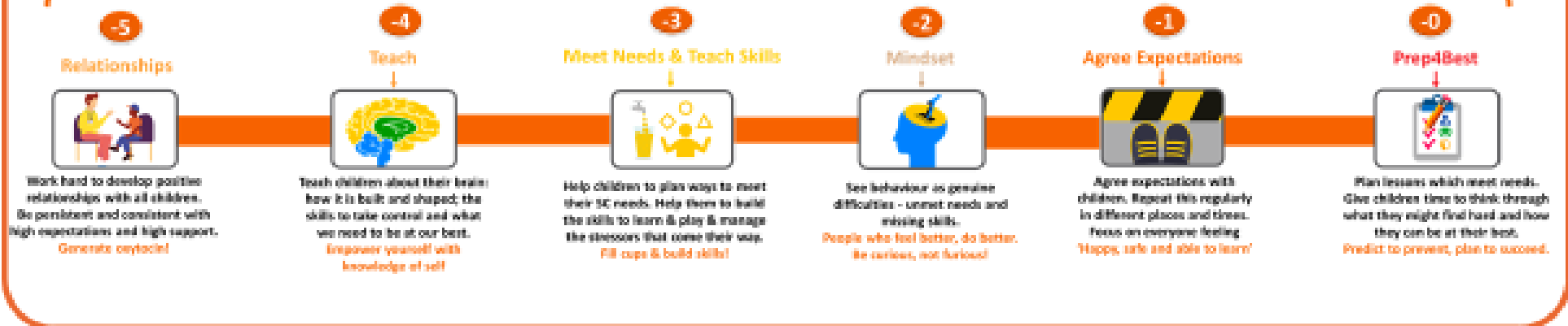
This might be an alternative timetable, Nurture Groups, or 1:1 nurture to practise key Executive Function skills. It might also include working within other areas within the school (at specific times they find challenging) or placements where the child can build confidence and skills (see Behaviour Policy for more information).

# Appendices

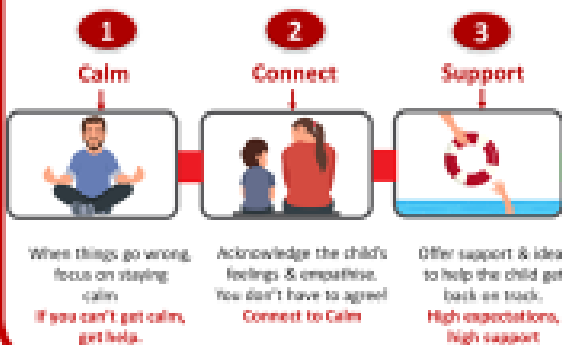


# The Four Key Elements of the Approach

## Building the Foundations (before things go wrong)



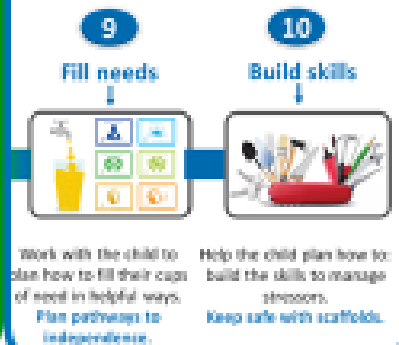
## Responding in the Moment



## Follow-Up for Progress



## Coaching for Change



### Will everyone find it easy to meet expectations?

No. We know from neuroscience that some children will find this genuinely difficult. Some children have higher levels of stress chemicals in their body which make them more sensitive and reactive to stressors. Some children have neurodiversity or disabilities which make this more challenging. Some children have not yet developed strong neural circuitry in the part of the brain responsible for **'Executive Function Skills'** which include:

- Working Memory
- Attention control
- Impulse Control
- Self-regulation - managing energy and emotions.
- Cognitive Flexibility – being able to think of different solutions
- Processing Speed

There are a number of reasons why some children have poorer Executive Function Skills:

1. **Limited experiences** mean neural pathways in the area of the brain responsible for Executive Function skills have not developed.
2. **Poor early attachments** impede development of brain circuitry and affect the stress response system.
3. **Trauma or stress** leads to 'toxic stress' (during which regions of the brain, including those in charge of executive function, become less active).
4. **A neurodiverse cognitive profile** (e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia), or **disability** in which some areas of Executive Function do not develop in the same way.

### What difference do Executive Function Skills make?

If developed well, these skills help children to meet expectations. If not, it is much harder for children to manage the demands of the classroom: following instructions, processing information, focusing on tasks and working with others. These children need additional scaffolds, adjustments and support from adults and other children to manage well, as outlined above.

### What should we do when children haven't yet developed good Executive Function (EF) skills?

There are three ways in which children with poorer Executive Function Skills can be supported:

#### **a. Coach**

Children with significant difficulty in areas of Executive Function will (just as with reading, writing or mathematics) receive support to narrow the gap between them and their peers. Adults at home and outside of school make a significant difference to the development of EF skills and therefore any programme of support includes liaison with parents/carers.

The key principle is for **the child** to be the driver – deciding on goals, thinking through how they can reach them, tracking progress and thinking through strategies which may help along the way.

#### **b. Pre-Mortem**

When planning lessons, experiences and the environment, staff reflect on the needs and skills of individual pupils, reflecting on how stressors can be reduced and how missing skills are supported for children with greater difficulties in areas of Executive Function. They will think through what could go wrong for some children and plan ways specific individuals can learn at their best and manage difficulties successfully.

#### **c. Prep4Best**

Staff support children to '**Prep4Best**' (plan and prepare to do well) ahead of tasks and experiences. This may include helping them to work out any learning and environmental scaffolds that help, such as writing frames, sound buttons, sensory cushions, ear buds for example.

## **Appendix 4: Evidence Base for The Approach**

The approach incorporates ideas and theories from a range of seminal authors, such as Albert Bandura (self-efficacy), Alfred Adler (unmet emotional needs), Rudolf Dreikurs (emotional drivers), John Bowlby (attachment) and Eric Berne (transactional analysis). It combines these with the work of current experts such as Jack Shonkoff at the Harvard Center on the Developing Child (neuroscience & brain development), Bruce Perry (the neurobiology of threat and safety), Stuart Ablon (Collaborative Problem Solving); Peter Fonagy (mentalisation), Lisa Feldman-Barrett (emotional literacy); Stuart Shanker (self-regulation) and improving Executive Function Skills (Ellen Braaten, Peggy Dawson & Richard Guare) to name just a few.

### **A continuum of approaches to changing behaviour**

Approaches to managing and changing behaviour can be placed along a continuum, with behaviourist approaches at one end and attachment-aware, therapeutic approaches at the other. Our approach sits firmly at the therapeutic end of that continuum, based on a wide, growing body of evidence that these are most effective at building skills for success in school and adult life.

### **Behaviourist approaches**

A growing body of evidence shows that while behaviourist approaches may be effective in the short-term, they do nothing to help young people to build self-knowledge and skills to help them in the future.

1. One major criticism of behaviourism is it does not recognise **the uniqueness of the individual** (Vialle et al., 2005). Educationally, Weare (2004) suggests that behaviourist approaches do not work equally with all learners and are particularly ineffective with those who may find it difficult to meet behavioural demands of the learning setting due to cultural differences, learning difficulties or emotional state. It is therefore argued that behaviour management should take a more holistic approach and consider the child's unique personal situation; their developmental level; cultural and social background; personality and characteristics instead of focusing on rigid norms of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' behaviour (Kay, 2006).
2. The behaviourist approach is further criticised for its **simplistic approach** to behaviour, largely derived from experiments on animals. Learners are considered to be passive recipients, simply reacting to stimuli (Wragg, 2001). By focusing on observable behaviours, this fails to account for the complex nature of human learning and thinking processes.
3. Garner criticises a behaviourist approach, arguing that by focusing only on **observable behaviours** it fails to consider the mental processes of the individual and will therefore not impact on the learner's cognition. As such, is unlikely to be effective in the long-term (Garner, 2009). This is due to a behaviourist approach focusing simply on suppressing unwanted behaviours rather than teaching new responses and affecting change of unhelpful behaviour patterns (Kearney, 2007). As such, it is suggested that behaviourist approaches have little long-term effect and do not teach learners the skills to respond to situations in more appropriate ways.
4. Finally, behaviourist approaches to challenging behaviour have been criticised for their **focus on rewards**. It has been argued that this reduces learner's intrinsic motivation to complete tasks (Vialle et al., 2005) and fails to support young people to develop a secure moral compass, internal self-regulation skills or empathy and emotional intelligence. A behaviourist approach leads young people to become reliant on extrinsic reward in order to meet the needs of other people or complete tasks. As

such, they are not supported to become self-motivated and independent, but reliant on others' approval and direction.

### **Therapeutic approaches**

The Empowerment Approach adopts the principles of a therapeutic, attachment and neurodiverse informed approach to working with children. It is underpinned by the belief that when a child presents with challenging behaviour, the first step should be to work **with** the child to identify stressors and missing skills. Once stressors are identified, adults work with the child to reduce these and build skills needed to respond better next time.

New skills need to be taught and practised. Change will not necessarily be quick as new neural pathways take time to build; the child may therefore require additional supports whilst they build skills and strategies.