

CRESSEY

COLLEGE

NURTURE POLICY

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Amendment Record

This Nurture policy is reviewed to ensure its continuing relevance to the direction and processes that it describes. A record of additions, admissions and amendments is given below:

Version	Amendments	Date
1	Annual update to Policy. Minor amendments to formatting and wording. Inclusion of Nurture guidelines. Approved at Management meeting dated 16 Mar 16. Authorised by TC, approved by Headteacher - AB.	16 Mar 16
2	Annual Review Approved at Management meeting dated 31 Aug 16. Approved by Headteacher - AB	01 Sep 16
3	Annual Review Approved at Management meeting dated 30 Aug 17. Approved by Head Teacher – AC.	31 Aug 17

Inclusion

1. Where possible our aim is to successfully re-integrate our children into mainstream education. Informed through continual assessment, any decision to begin a re-integration programme would be decided at Annual Review of Statement or EHCP.

2. This policy attempts to outline some of the principles underlying the 'nurture' philosophy. It is a vehicle for discussion and reflection with all staff.

The Students

3. The children referred to our school exhibit a wide spectrum of challenging behaviour. Each child arrives with a unique set of circumstances and an individual profile. Generalised descriptions of behaviour are unhelpful but it is useful to identify some common features in the children's early experiences that have contributed to their difficulties.

4. In some cases the children's early nurturing experiences have been interrupted, fragmented and in some cases abusive and traumatic. Their emotional and social development has been impinged upon in the early years. The children lack the solid foundation that a sustaining, untroubled nurturing approach provides. Instead they struggle to make sense of the world from a disadvantaged viewpoint and their responses become inevitably more out of line with their peers as they enter school. Their impulsive and inappropriate behaviour bears witness to the missing nurturing years.

5. The children are emotionally immature and will often appear and behave as much younger children. They seem to be "stuck" at an earlier developmental level. At times they are reminiscent of an omnipotent toddler demanding their own way at all costs. Equally they can present as a dependent baby relying on the constant closeness of the adult to feel safe.

6. For some children early attachments have been damaged and they find it hard to bond and attach to even familiar adults. The children lack trusts in the intentions of the grown-ups and can resist any attempts to form relationships. They test the adults as much as they can before they will take the risk to rely upon them or accept guidance from them. In this way the children can appear self-determined and overly self-reliant.

7. The children exhibit extreme behaviour at times, which may include destructive and violent outbursts. Some of these episodes can be regarded as "tantrums" familiar in a toddler. They are often provoked by an adult thwarting the child's wishes or simply insisting on a "no". Alternatively, some children express out of control behaviour which is best described as "panic" or "rage" and places the child in danger to him/herself and others and requires careful supervision and long term help from the carers.

8. It is not always easy to recognise the triggers that tip a child into destructive episodes. Sometimes a sound or touch will remind them of a past suffering and instigate a panic attack or rage, which appears to overwhelm them.

9. As we begin to have a deeper understanding of each child it becomes easier to predict the onset of panic. It also becomes possible to recognise when a child's initial belligerent stance is a desperate need to control events. Some children have been at the mercy of chaotic conditions and have learned how to take charge for themselves. Any attempt to undermine their dominance will instigate a battle. Being in control can represent a fragile security for the child and having lived with massive uncertainty

it is not something to relinquish lightly. A child may escalate into full-blown rage and subsequently into panic, rather than surrender the need to control the situation.

10. A child may have little self-preservation. They place themselves in danger and have no understanding of the consequences of their actions. Often they are unable to think before they react. They are impulse driven and forethought is not yet a process they employ. At the beginning we do their thinking for them and they learn from us.

11. Many of the children have had some very tough and painful experiences to deal with. They do not as yet have the skills to understand and overcome their worries. Some have survived by kicking and screaming out their distress. Other have developed patterns of behaviour which hinder their healthy growth.

12. Peer group relationships are fraught for most children. Learning to make friends is a slow and arduous process. For our children it is doubly hard. They are fundamentally egocentric and therefore find all sharing, giving and taking unpalatable. They cannot perceive another's point of view and are often slow to feel empathy for another child. Remorse and reparation for any injury they may inflict are qualities which take time to learn and internalise. They are quickly envious and view any nice experience happening to another child as a direct injury to themselves. They perceive any negative remark as persecution and become very aggrieved with the perpetrator.

13. The children have no boundaries and will not at first recognise any attempt to moderate their behaviour. They will try anything to re-establish themselves as in a position of power. In many cases they have had to be "in charge" of themselves and have become compulsively self-reliant. They are not about to readily take on the rules and restrictions imposed on them by an unknown adult.

14. The children find any change problematic. It is a measure of their insecurity that they cannot tolerate any uncertainty no matter how small. For instance, any change in routine can tip them into chaos. Life may never have felt safe and predictable and so any minor alteration can remind them of an imminent crisis.

The Nurturing Approach

15. Our purpose is to provide the early learning experiences that will nurture the children emotionally, behaviourally and intellectually. Our aim is to educate and heal.

16. Faced with so many facets of behaviour, which are complex and difficult to change, we could easily become overwhelmed and pessimistic. We might also begin to concentrate on the child's problems and find ourselves on a negative cycle. Although we certainly need to be insightful and work with the child to overcome their difficulties, this does not constitute the focus for our intervention.

17. Our school is a nurturing school and our main purpose is to find the healthy growing point of each child and to provide them with the experiences which encourage them into healthy emotional maturity.

18. We concentrate on what is going right and build on the positive abilities of the child. We reach them at the growing point and build a scaffold around them to support their tentative climb to maturity.

19. The thrust of our work is to look forward with hope and not backwards with despair.

The Nurture Environment

20. Within the classroom setting staff will create an environment that is safe, secure and nurturing.
21. Furniture and fittings need to be maintained at a high standard and take into account the predisposition of the children to explore and seek danger. Just as parents of wilful toddlers alter their living space to adapt to the changing needs of the children, then so must we. At first it may be necessary to cover all plug sockets until a child is mature enough to recognise and deal with the concept of electricity and its dangers.
22. Children should understand the particular functions of rooms and be able to learn the rules surrounding certain areas. The environment should be orderly and clean but allow for the normal disarray in a family home. The children are encouraged to respect their surroundings and to take shared responsibility for keeping their classes acceptably organised.
23. Our children are vulnerable to any dangers within the environment and extra caution is needed with regard to health and safety issues. The children do not readily understand the dangers implicit in everyday situations and need to be guarded against them.
24. A warm and pleasing environment is vital in demonstrating to the children how much they are valued. An ambience is generated which acts as an intangible container for “holding” and “anchoring” the children. The care and attention to detail implicit in home making is an essential ingredient in preparing a nurture environment.

The Nurture Structure

25. It is necessary to bring order and predictability into the sometimes chaotic lives of the children. This is not to imply oppressive control, but rather to underline the necessity for the children to experience a safe and predictable world. As an infant learns to expect the arrival of warmth and sustenance, so our children begin to feel safe in the predictability of events.
26. We introduce patterns into the daily activities. Familiar routines punctuate the day and serve to slow the pace of the children.
27. Transitions are often flash points for unmanageable outbursts. The children have to be prepared for any change however small. The changeover from school time to break time has to be handled carefully and almost seamlessly for the children to retain their composure.
28. Movement from one activity to another can also precipitate distress and children have to be rehearsed and gently prepared for the introduction of change.

Good beginnings and endings are crucial

29. The children need to know the satisfaction of completing an experience. If they are engrossed in an enjoyable activity and this is brought to an abrupt end, an angry outburst may be instigated. Where possible we make it possible for the children to wind down an activity, giving them plenty of guidance and reassurance as they do so. Remember, they are emotionally very fragile and quickly become frustrated and helpless if their best efforts are inadvertently spurned and cut short.

30. How a child begins the day can effect the whole day. Mornings may hold anxiety for the child. If they have had a nightmare or wet the bed, or have feelings of hunger they misinterpret, all these factors can affect their mood. Particular routines need to be established for individuals where possible and the child should be included in devising them. Small details put in place make all the difference. It is in the detail that we make the child feel safe and settled.

The Nurturing Content

31. The focus of our work is to provide a sustaining nurturing experience for the children.

32. It is also fundamental for professionals working with challenging children to recognise that in order to provide the essentials which lead to healthy growth we will have to provide added extras:

- a. An understanding of early child development and the implications of deprivation or unsettled or interrupted early development.
- b. A strong belief in the ability of the children to change.
- c. An understanding of our own emotions, reactions and responses when dealing with the children.
- d. To help each other to work creatively through a shared commitment to enhancing the lives of the children.
- e. To share responsibility for the children and to hold in high esteem the importance of our work.

Relationships – Secure beginnings

33. A baby experiences unconditional love. He grows confident in the actions of his carers and is secure in a world where his needs are unquestioningly catered for. He learns the feelings of security and well being and can sleep peacefully in the expectation that he will be safe. Parents shield their baby from any outside influence that may distress or bewilder them. Although a child may become upset or in pain, the adults do everything in their power to minimise the chances of any long-term damage to the child. The parents love the child unconditionally and their thoughts are preoccupied with the needs of this new life.

34. We recognise that our essential task is to build close and bonding relationships with the children. This is the cornerstone of our work. We offer unconditional acceptance of the child and although we will often disapprove of the behaviour, this never extends to the child. As a good “parent” we will “stick” with the child through their difficult times and work with them towards a solution.

35. Our patience will be tested to the limit and it is necessary to remain adult at all times. The children have mastered ways to push the most sensitive hidden buttons and we need to be aware of how we can be made to feel. We are all vulnerable and subject to our own insecurities. It is important we know ourselves in order to be able to withstand the testing delivered by the children. We have high expectations of our own professionalism and we need to remind each other and ourselves regularly, that how we are behaving towards the children is the essence of our task. Our checklist might include:

a. **Consistence – insistence – persistence**

served with

b. **care and concern**

mixed with

c. **understanding and intelligence**

topped with

d. **endless humour and bags of stamina**

36. With some children, forging a relationship will be a one-way ticket for quite some time. We may need to begin at the beginning and establish that important mother – baby eye contact. Often the children will avoid this and activities may need to be devised in order to gain it. Through our consistent interactions the child will gradually learn to trust the adult and bond with them.

37. The relationships between adults and children are positive and trusting and founded on mutual respect. We practise how to really listen to the child and we teach them how to really listen to others. They learn how to adopt the strategies we offer them to help understand themselves. They trust that in speaking about their difficulties, a solution can be found. They realise that circumstances can change and that they have the power to make changes. These positive relationships give the child an enhanced self-esteem and they feel important and valued. They develop real thinking skills and engage in the learning process.

38. In time it will be necessary to allow the child to become more self-determined. They will begin to make more decisions regarding their futures. It is important that we know when to “let go” and to empower the child to walk alone. This is part of a process that is undertaken with them from the onset of their time at Cressey College. From the first day the children are working towards a successful leaving. The process involves regular risk assessment on the part of the staff and close monitoring of the flexibility of provision. The closeness of the relationships ensures a thorough knowledge of the children which is our best guide in gauging how much independence they can manage.

39. Our ultimate aim is that the children can learn to manage their own behaviour and we can separate from them. As any “parent” we carefully measure the amount of support that is needed as the child matures. We are always ready to bring them back if they have wandered beyond their depth. At all times we stay alongside the children as the relationship follows a natural course.

Play

40. Many of our children need to learn how to play. We may have to begin at the baby stage where the adult encourages the baby to smile and the baby enjoys the playful behaviour inherent in these early communications.

41. Gradually we help the child to play with objects and toys and to know the joy of being absorbed in a world driven by their own imagination and curiosity. The child becomes absorbed in the wonders of these pastimes and learns how to engage in activities, to concentrate and to learn. The child

experiences control in the play situation and can direct the course of events and exercise power in a safe and non-threatening situation.

42. Eventually, we will be able to help the children learn how to play with other children. At first the adult will take the major role and the child will need maximum guidance and direction to maintain the play as a positive experience. Like children at playgroup, it is the adults who do the work. The children left to their own devices soon lose the plot and mayhem ensues. They are able to participate in parallel play alongside another child but any attempts to manoeuvre them into comradeship will take patience and time. Soon they will begin to share and with supervision will be ready to join in with other children. That is when the adult can feel that all the rehearsal time was worthwhile. Once the children can play together they can begin to make relationships with each other and a peer group develops.

43. At this point the children are ready to attempt cooperative play and although the fallings out and the necessity for reparations are frequent, the children have passed through several play stages. They are much better equipped for dealing with disappointments and squabbles and are on the road to making friendships.

44. Learning to make and keep friends is a life skill and play is the child's training course.

45. Play and play resources are vital to our purpose and it is necessary to read the Play Policy in order to feel confident in understanding the level of play needed for individual children. It is also necessary to be familiar with the resources needed to meet children's needs.

46. Play:

- a. Rekindles their curiosity.
- b. It absorbs them in meaningful activity.
- c. It teaches them how to concentrate and how to think.

47. Play is the child's real work.

Learning in School

48. The children referred to our school have experienced repeated failure in the mainstream school setting. In the majority of cases they demonstrated unmanageable behaviour at the onset of their infant education and despite receiving extra support they were unable to adjust.

49. School presents enormous obstacles for children who have not yet mastered the early social skills required in a large group situation. There is an expectation that children will be generally biddable and willing to participate in the enjoyment of school life. Our children are largely defiant, egocentric and unwilling to compromise. They find being a member of the group foreign and unpalatable as they are reluctant to share, take turns, give and take or accept anything other than instant gratification. No wonder they stir up trouble. They do not accept the grown ups with trust and do not recognise the rules and boundaries set down. Like toddlers at a six year olds party they follow their own course and are unaware of conforming to any group ethos.

50. Their behaviour is uninhibited and difficult to moderate. Their formal learning is hindered by their emotional immaturity, they risk falling behind in all aspects of school life and their fragile esteem is further crushed by repeated failure.

The Nurturing School

51. Our priority is to provide an educative setting where our children can become positively involved with learning.

52. The aim is to recognise the potential of each child and ensure that they access a broad and balanced curriculum.

53. Our response is to establish the philosophy and practice of Nurture Education.

54. The school environment is carefully structured. It allows for a whole spectrum of work and play activities to co-exist. It incorporates a setting that allows for early, pre-school experiences to take place.

55. A 'home' area for regularly gathering the children together to attend to their teacher is important.

56. Space is carefully structured and provides enclosed areas where children feel anchored and secure, alongside more open areas that allow for group interaction/play and free movement.

57. The children embark on a nurturing process that provides the early learning experiences necessary for the child to engage in the learning process. The child gains a solid foundation education on which to build all future learning.

58. The curriculum is delivered within the framework of this nurturing philosophy and individual and group social needs form part of the school day. The emotional needs of the children are catered for and the learning matches the maturity of the child and the pace at which they can absorb and engage in the set tasks.

59. Expectations are high and the children are encouraged through a culture of praise and positive reinforcement. They are supported and encouraged to attempt the challenges set for them and any achievement is celebrated. The work is initially presented in bite-size pieces in order for the children to taste success. Gradually, as befits the nurturing process, the child begins to tackle more demanding tasks and develops the capacity to think for him/herself.

60. The learning tasks are differentiated to account for a range of abilities and individual learning styles.

61. The staff work to ensure a high standard of primary childcare. The children are very testing of the physical environment and a great deal of effort is invested in maintaining a pleasant and inviting school. Children are encouraged to be a part of this process and they learn to take pride in their classroom.

62. All adults in the community are inducted into the ethos and expectations of the school. They are fully committed to the nurturing ethos and the aims of therapeutic education. Senior members of staff continually lead by example and junior members are able to observe more experienced practitioners during their induction period. This training is invaluable and equips apprentices with a shared

language, a wealth of strategies to use in challenging situations and an insight to the stamina required to cement relationships with the children. In order for the children to attach and form positive bonds an emotional commitment is necessary. This is equally true of the adults.

Liaison

63. Our children often arrive with a network of professionals working with them and their families. Close co-operation and shared decisions are initiated at the beginning of the child's placement and these links are maintained throughout the child's stay.

64. Informal contact is established, with parents/carers and social workers becoming friends and colleagues. Educational and Looked After Children (LAC) reviews, include all relevant agencies and the child is encouraged to attend.

Annex A – Nurture Policy Guidelines

Introduction

1. Cressey College recognises that many of our young people have had experiences that will have affected their social and emotional development. Traumas such as violence, abuse or neglect, as well as insecure attachments to caregivers can significantly impact on brain development. Children develop patterns of behaviour that are designed to protect themselves in unsafe situations, help get some of their needs met and/or keep painful feelings about traumatic experiences away from consciousness. These patterns of behaviour are largely habitual and unconscious and determined by areas of the brain developing in response to the child's experiences. Some of the behaviours we will see include:

- a. Inability to understand or manage emotions.
- b. Over-use of the fight / flight / freeze response– helps us respond to danger but over-used in children who've experienced trauma – children unable to think when in this state, primitive part of the brain in control – behaviours may be triggered by a stimulus associated with the trauma but not apparent to us (so there may not seem to be a reason).
- c. Fear of rejection or being hurt, leading to sabotage of relationships (“I’ll destroy the relationship before you reject and hurt me”), attempting to control relationships, avoiding closeness. Inability to trust others.
- d. Unconscious “projection” of feelings that child can’t cope with, into adults – making us feel anger, fear, grief etc through their behaviours.
- e. Fear of not getting their needs met leading to intense jealousy of other children getting our attention or praise, difficulties waiting, sharing etc.
- f. Low self-esteem – fear of doing work (and failing), difficulties accepting praise or conversely accepting challenge, disengagement / disaffection.
- g. Hypervigilance – exaggerated anxiety about potential threats, oversensitivity to perceived criticism.

Nurturing approach

2. These behaviours cannot be undone overnight. Children's brains essentially need to be “rewired” and this takes time. This rewiring takes place within the context of healing, nurturing relationships and we aim to provide our children with such relationships in order to help them progress with their difficulties. Most of these behaviours cannot be changed by simply telling the child how to behave, or by using behavioural strategies of rewards and sanctions, although such strategies are still valuable.

3. Rather, the child's brain will develop in a more healthy way if the child consistently experiences relationships with adults that are stable, attuned to the child's needs, empathic and which convey unconditional positive regard to the child. This is secure attachment and research has shown that this quality of relationship is vital for children's healthy psychological development. It is not "wrapping children in cotton wool" though. Good attachments change over time and knowing when to let go, when not to intervene is an essential element of attachment-based work.

4. This nurturing, attachment-based approach needs to be present in everything we do with the children, both in the structures that we provide and also the way we interact with them on a micro-level. Key elements of the approach are:

- a. Being consistently available for the children in a dependable, stable way.
- b. Providing familiar routines and structures to help "ground" the children but helping children increasingly cope without the need for so much of this as they progress.
- c. Scaffolding support and intervention so that children are given opportunities to manage themselves as much as possible and prepare for life after school. Structuring their school lives to the extent that they will fail without that structuring is not nurturing and leads to institutionalised young people who can't cope with life.
- d. Using extra care and planning around transitions – both small daily transitions (e.g. change of activity or lesson) and large significant transitions (e.g. change of academic year, change of staff) – children will need extra help with transitions. Detailed advice is available on this from the therapy team.
- e. Providing a warm and comfortable environment that shows the children we value them. Include examples of children's work, photos of good experiences etc – the environment should demonstrate our care and pride in the children.
- f. "Catching the children being good" – noticing and celebrating with praise small achievements that may be significant for them.
- g. Modelling good social and emotional skills in front of the children in how we interact with each other. Treating each other respectfully.
- h. Earning children's respect rather than demanding it. Ensuring we treat children respectfully and that our work empowers them and provides a space for their voice to be heard.
- i. Ensuring that our teaching practice is inclusive and that we do not repeat previous experiences of educational exclusion - making use of children's energy, creativity, humour in the way we teach. Catering to additional needs such as ADHD and ASD in the way we teach. Additional advice is available from the therapy team.

- j. Supporting each other in front of the children - not colluding with their tendency to split us unhealthily and unrealistically into "good" and "bad".
- k. Using a positive-focused approach that relies much more on rewarding good behaviour than sanctioning bad behaviour.
- l. Demonstrating to the child through what we say and (more importantly) our body language that we expect them to succeed and that we like them. For example, keeping a check on our own anxieties that a child might behave badly. Children with SEMH are hyper-sensitive to body language so be aware of facial expression, gesture, voice tone etc.
- m. Attuning closely to the child's emotional state – noticing when they're distressed, empathising with their feelings (even if you disagree with the behaviour or if you don't understand the feelings), wondering aloud what the feelings behind the behaviour might be – this models to the child that feelings can be thought about rather than just acted out impulsively.
- n. Finding solutions *with* the child (encouraging them to find their own if possible).
- o. Separating the child from the behaviour – challenge the behaviour but never the child as a human being. Remember they cannot help their behaviours a lot of the time because of how their brains have developed.
- p. Firm confident instructions are useful in challenging situations but shouting is never helpful and can re-traumatise children who have experienced abuse or domestic violence leading to an escalation of behaviours.
- q. “Meeting the child where they are at” – recognising that they may be stuck at a developmental age that is younger than their actual age and adapting ourselves to fit their need. Then, over time, gradually helping them to move forward at a pace that is realistic for them. Being sensitive around behaviours that may seem babyish (never tell a child to “act their age” or to “grow up”).
- r. Balancing humour, sensitivity, playfulness with the importance of clearly having an adult role. Not accepting inappropriate language, not showing amusement at children's inappropriate behaviour etc.
- s. Noticing our own emotions – children need to feel emotionally “contained” by us. We need to stay in control and maintain an understanding, thoughtful connection with the children, even in challenging situations. If we feel ourselves “losing it”, noticing this and making a conscious effort to alter our behaviour in the moment or alternatively ask for someone to take over temporarily.
- t. Constantly being proactive in repairing relationships with our young people when things go wrong. Helping them make amends using restorative approaches. Making it clear we still care for them when they have upset us. Acknowledging a child's apology

following an incident where they may have hurt us (never reject an apology because we are not ready to accept it or we feel it is not meant). Owning our mistakes and apologising for them (this is good modelling and helps children feel valued).

Nurturing families

5. It is important that we complement children's attachments to their families, not compete with them or undermine them. This means:

- a. Talking respectfully about parents / carers with children.
- b. Avoiding scapegoating or blaming parents / carers for their child's difficulties – recognising the wider social context of factors such as social deprivation, inequality, neighbourhood crime and how these impact on families. Also, parent and carers' own difficulties they may be struggling with, for example their own experience of trauma and insecure attachments to their parents.
- c. Building supportive relationships with parents – listening empathically to their concerns and working to address them.
- d. Ensuring that positives about children are regularly communicated to parents not just concerns – if parents only hear negatives this can cause real difficulties in their relationship with their child.
- e. Maintaining regular contact with parents and ensuring that the child is aware of this contact and what is communicated to reduce children's tendency to split home and school in an unhealthy way. Agreeing a level of contact with parents that is helpful to the child and manageable for the parent.