



Think Like a Pony Behaviour Support Policy

Policy Statement

At *Think Like a Pony*, we foster a safe and emotionally supportive environment where children learn to manage and regulate their emotions through direct interaction with horses. The horses provide immediate feedback that reflects the child's emotional state, allowing them to develop emotional awareness, self-regulation, and positive behaviours. Our programme is focused on creating positive learning experiences to help children build emotional resilience and life skills.

Principles of Behaviour Support

At *Think Like a Pony*, we approach behaviour support by:

- **Emotional Awareness:** Helping children recognise their emotions.
- **Horse Reflection:** Using the horses to help children see the real-time impact of their emotional state.
- **Consistency:** Providing consistent and fair responses to behaviour, with an emphasis on positive reinforcement.
- **Respect for the Horse:** Teaching children respect for others by modelling respect for the horses.
- **Self-Regulation:** Empowering children with strategies to manage and regulate their emotions.

Positive Behaviour Expectations

At *Think Like a Pony*, we are committed to fostering a positive and respectful environment where children feel safe and supported in their emotional development. Positive behaviour expectations are set to encourage emotional growth, self-regulation, and respect for others. We expect learners to demonstrate:

- **Respect:** Showing consideration for others, including staff, peers, and animals, by listening actively, using polite language, and treating everyone with kindness and empathy.
- **Responsibility:** Taking ownership of their actions and emotions, being accountable for their behaviour, and working to improve through self-reflection and effort.
- **Honesty:** Being truthful in all interactions, especially when reflecting on feelings, actions, and behaviours in their interactions with horses and peers.
- **Self-regulation:** Managing emotions and behaviours appropriately, especially in challenging situations, by using coping strategies learned through the programme.
- **Collaboration:** Working together with peers, staff, and horses, demonstrating teamwork, patience, and a positive attitude towards collective learning and growth.

These expectations provide a clear framework for all children in our programme to understand the behavioural standards required for success. The focus is on reinforcing the positive choices that contribute to personal growth, emotional well-being, and a positive, safe environment for everyone involved.



At *Think Like a Pony*, we recognize that many of the children who join our programme may have experienced trauma that can impact their emotional and behavioural responses. We are committed to working in a **trauma-informed** way, understanding that trauma affects each individual differently and that it can influence their interactions with others, as well as their ability to regulate emotions. We approach every child with empathy, patience, and respect, ensuring that their emotional safety is prioritised in all interactions.

Our trauma-informed approach involves:

- **Creating a Safe Environment:** We establish a calm, predictable, and supportive atmosphere where children feel physically and emotionally safe, free from fear of judgment or harm.
- **Building Trust:** We take the time to build positive relationships with the children, offering consistent support, clear boundaries, and an understanding of their individual needs.
- **Empathy and Compassion:** We listen actively to children's feelings and experiences, validating their emotions and offering appropriate interventions that promote healing and emotional growth.
- **Empowering Choice and Control:** By allowing children to express themselves and make choices in their interactions with horses, we help restore a sense of control and agency that trauma may have taken away.
- **Fostering Emotional Regulation:** We teach and encourage emotional regulation strategies, helping children to recognise, understand, and manage their emotions in healthy ways.

By working in a trauma-informed way, we ensure that the programme not only meets the emotional needs of each child but also creates a space for growth, healing, and resilience. This approach strengthens the overall effectiveness of our work and ensures that all children can learn to thrive in a safe and supportive environment.

PACE Model of Practice

At *Think Like a Pony*, we recognise the importance of providing a safe and supportive environment for children, particularly those who may have experienced trauma. As part of our trauma-informed approach, we integrate the **PACE model** of practice into our interactions with learners, fostering an atmosphere of emotional safety, trust, and growth.

The **PACE model** is built on four core elements that guide how we engage with children:

1. **Playfulness:** We use light-hearted interactions to create an environment where children feel relaxed, supported, and open to learning. It helps to reduce anxiety, build trust, and promotes a sense of enjoyment in the learning process. Through activities with horses, children can develop emotional awareness and learn to manage difficult feelings in a healthy way.
2. **Acceptance:** At *Think Like a Pony*, we accept every child as they are, without judgment. We understand that children may have complex emotional needs, and we respect where they are in their emotional journey. Acceptance means creating a space where children feel valued and understood, regardless of their past experiences. We offer unconditional support and reassurance, helping children build self-esteem and confidence. Every child's feelings and experiences are acknowledged, fostering a sense of belonging and safety within the programme.

3. **Curiosity:** We approach each child's behaviour and emotional responses with curiosity, rather than making assumptions. We take the time to understand the underlying causes of their actions, exploring their emotional states and triggers. By being curious, we help children reflect on their feelings and actions, guiding them to a deeper understanding of themselves. This curiosity helps us create tailored interventions that support their emotional growth, encouraging them to become more self-aware and resilient in the face of challenges.
4. **Empathy:** Empathy is at the heart of everything we do. We listen to children's concerns and emotions with compassion and understanding, validating their feelings. Empathy helps build trust between children and staff, making them feel safe and supported. By reflecting empathy in our interactions, we help children feel heard and understood, which is essential in supporting their emotional healing and growth. Through empathy, we also model emotional regulation and appropriate ways to express and manage difficult emotions.

By integrating **PACE** into our practice, we aim to foster a safe, supportive, and emotionally nurturing environment where children feel empowered to develop positive behaviours, manage their emotions, and build resilience. The PACE model complements our trauma-informed approach, creating a foundation for children to thrive emotionally, socially, and behaviourally.

Use of Rewards

Positive reinforcement is central to our approach. The most significant reward for children at *Think Like a Pony* is the positive emotional experience and connection they form with the horses. Other forms of recognition include:

- **Emotional Growth:** Positive feelings generated through learning emotional regulation and positive behaviour.
- **Praise:** Verbal encouragement and acknowledgment of progress.
- **Emotional Reflection:** Children are encouraged to reflect on their emotional progress and how they feel during their interactions with horses.

Use of Sanctions

We believe that while positive reinforcement is the most effective way to encourage good behaviour, sanctions are sometimes necessary to address breaches of conduct. The following breaches of behaviour are considered:

- **Bullying:** Any intentional harm or intimidation towards others, whether verbal, physical, or social. This includes exclusion, spreading rumours, or hurtful comments.
 - **Harmful Sexual Behaviour:** Inappropriate or non-consensual sexual behaviours, including touching others inappropriately or making sexually explicit comments.
 - **Abuse:** Any physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse.
 - **Harm:** Any action that may cause harm to a child or another person, including endangering safety, damaging property, or disrupting the learning environment.
 - **Drugs and Contraband:** The possession or distribution of illegal drugs, alcohol, harmful items, or contraband (such as weapons or vape products).
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Guidance for the Discovery of Drugs and Contraband (aligned with DFE Searching, Screening, and Confiscation Guidance)

If drugs, alcohol, or any other contraband are discovered on-site, the following protocol must be followed, in line with the **Department for Education's Searching, Screening, and Confiscation Guidance**:

1. Immediate Action:

- If drugs or contraband are discovered, staff should immediately ensure the safety of all involved by removing the item(s) from the child's possession. **Staff should not attempt to handle or test any substances directly.**
- If the item is suspected to be dangerous or illegal, staff should call local authorities or emergency services immediately to ensure proper handling of the situation.

2. Searching and Screening:

- **Consent for Searching:** If a search is deemed necessary, staff should ensure that the search is conducted respectfully and in accordance with consent. Ideally, a member of staff should conduct the search in the presence of a second staff member as a witness. If possible, the child should be asked for consent to the search. If consent is refused, a discussion will be held to explain the need for the search in line with safety concerns.
- **Reasonable Grounds:** Searches should only be carried out when there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has prohibited substances or contraband in their possession. This may include behavioural signs or credible information regarding the presence of such items.

3. Reporting the Discovery:

- All discoveries of drugs or contraband must be immediately reported to the **Centre Manager** and the **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)**. A formal record must be made of the items found, the context in which they were discovered, and any actions taken.

4. Confiscation:

- Any discovered drugs or contraband must be safely confiscated and stored securely until authorities arrive. Items should never be disposed of by staff without consulting law enforcement or safeguarding professionals.
- For non-illegal contraband (such as vaping products), staff must still take appropriate action to confiscate the item and follow up with the child and parents/carers.

5. Parental Notification:

- Parents or carers should be informed of the incident as soon as possible. The communication should be respectful, yet clear on the seriousness of the situation.
- A meeting may be arranged with the child's parents to discuss the findings and ensure appropriate actions are taken. In case of illegal substances, authorities will be involved, and further discussions may be held in the presence of the authorities.

6. Next Steps:

- If a child is found with illegal substances (e.g., drugs or alcohol), the incident will be taken seriously. Possible actions include:
 - Immediate suspension from the programme.

- Reporting the discovery to external agencies, such as local law enforcement or social services, depending on the nature of the contraband.
 - Loss of placement or other disciplinary measures if appropriate.
 - For non-illegal contraband, a discussion will be held with the child and their parents/carers to understand why the item was brought onto the premises. Follow-up action, such as additional emotional support sessions, may be implemented to help the child understand the consequences of their actions.
7. **Safeguarding Considerations:**
- The safety and well-being of all children and staff are paramount. Any discovery of drugs, alcohol, or harmful items should be treated as a potential safeguarding concern. Appropriate referrals will be made to safeguarding authorities, such as social services or law enforcement, depending on the seriousness of the situation.
 - All staff must be trained to recognise the signs of substance abuse and other safeguarding issues, and should follow appropriate procedures to report concerns.

Debrief and Follow-Up Following an Incident

It is essential that any incident, whether related to a breach of behaviour policy or the discovery of contraband, is followed by a thorough debrief and appropriate follow-up to ensure that all parties involved receive the necessary support and that the matter is resolved constructively.

1. **Debriefing:**
 - **Staff Debrief:** Following an incident, the staff members involved should meet to discuss what happened, the actions taken, and any improvements or adjustments needed for future responses. This ensures that the incident is handled effectively and provides opportunities for staff development.
 - **Child Debrief:** After an incident involving a child, a debrief session should take place where the child is given the opportunity to discuss what happened, their feelings about the situation, and what could be done differently moving forward. This is essential for emotional growth and for learning from the experience.
 - **Parental Debrief:** Parents should also be informed of the incident and invited to participate in a debrief discussion. This can include explaining the actions taken, the reasons behind them, and ensuring the parents understand the situation fully. Parents should be asked for their input and support in addressing the situation moving forward.
2. **Follow-Up:**
 - **Action Plan:** A plan should be developed to support the child following the incident. This may include additional emotional support sessions, targeted interventions, or the development of a Behaviour Support Plan if necessary. The plan should be tailored to the individual child's needs and focus on helping them improve their emotional regulation and behaviour.
 - **Monitoring:** The child's behaviour should be monitored over a period following the incident to ensure that any patterns of inappropriate behaviour are addressed. This can be done through regular check-ins with the child and through keeping detailed records of their progress.



- **Further Support:** If required, additional support may be provided through external professionals, such as child counsellors or mental health services, to ensure that the child is given the best opportunity to improve their emotional well-being and behaviour.
3. **Review of Procedures:**
- The Centre Manager will conduct a review of the incident and the procedures followed to ensure that the organisation's response was appropriate and that any learning from the situation is incorporated into future practices. Any necessary updates to the Behaviour Support Policy or related procedures will be made following the review.

Parent/Carer Cooperation

We believe that collaboration with parents and carers is crucial to support children in their emotional and behavioural development. We encourage ongoing communication and will involve parents if behaviour concerns arise. Parents will be informed of any breaches of behaviour policy, and together, we will work on strategies to support the child's emotional growth and well-being.

Responsibility for Implementation and Review of Policy

The **Centre Manager** is responsible for ensuring that the policy is communicated to all staff and parents, and that it is consistently followed. The policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and relevance to the needs of the children and the program.

This policy is designed to support a safe, nurturing, and educational environment for all children at *Think Like a Pony*. Through collaboration, guidance, and emotional growth, we aim to empower children to better understand their emotions and behaviour, fostering a positive and supportive learning environment.

By following these procedures, including the **Debrief and Follow-Up** steps, we ensure that incidents are addressed in a constructive manner that promotes emotional growth, well-being, and behavioural improvement for all children involved.

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