

**Trauma Informed Practice**

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**Introduction and Policy Statement**

In our vision for children and young people, Phoenix Abbey are committed to making our residential homes a place where all young people can thrive: living and learning in a safe and healthy environment. Phoenix Abbey are committed to improving outcomes for Children and young people and this policy is intended to be a framework that will:

* Ensure that children and young people are understood and their needs are met through the prism of trauma
* Provide safeguards for staff members in this rewarding, though sometimes difficult, responsibility
* Ensure that the safety of both children and staff is treated with the utmost importance
* Ensuring that children and young people and staff are aware of the inalienable rights of the child

The policy covers all Phoenix Abbey residential services to a wide age range of children and young people and where appropriate includes advice about siblings and parents. Much of this policy and its knowledge of trauma is underpinned by ‘Trauma Informed Practice, a toolkit for Scotland’ published by the Scottish Government in partnership with the NHS Scotland.

This policy and practice guidance sets out a framework for looking after and providing services to children and young people who display behaviours enacted through trauma by:

* Understanding trauma and its effect on the young person
* Promoting regulation and support strategies to promote positive behaviour
* Ensure it is consistent with both the law and the expectations of regulatory bodies

Research suggests that understanding the key principles of trauma will help support staff members cognition of the reasons around behavioural presentations.

**Trauma**

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set or circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being.

**Enabling relationships through understanding trauma**

It is important that staff members recognise that challenging behaviour is often a metastasis of previous trauma experienced. This trauma can affect our children and young people throughout their lives. The principles underpinning support for our children and young people are built on the core principles of relationships. Where secure attachment can be built, this builds trust and will begin to create positive relationships.

**Trauma-informed Practice**

Trauma informed practice is defined as ‘a model that is grounded in and directed by complete understanding of how trauma exposure affects service user’s (Children and young people’s) neurological, biological, psychological and social development.’

At Phoenix Abbey, we aim to be a Trauma informed practice organisation. Children and young people may have had traumatic experiences, and as a result may find it difficult to feel safe within new environments and to develop trusting relationships. Consequently, our services are structured, organised and delivered in ways that promote safety and trust and aim to prevent re-traumatisation.

**Why is it important to be trauma-informed?**

A review of the literature provides evidence that trauma-informed practice is effective and can benefit both trauma survivors and staff. For trauma survivors, trauma-informed services can bring hope, empowerment and support that is not re-traumatising. Moreover, such services can help close the gap between the people who use services and the people who provide them (Filson & Mead, 2016).

Staff are equipped with the reasoning behind behaviour and the presentation of children and young people which can seem dysregulated. It contextualises behaviour and allows a base to begin creating a new bond and relationship. This empathetic view of care delivery supports a young person to feel nurture and attachment and gives staff a toolkit to build relationships.

**Children’s Rights**

Children and young people joining Phoenix Abbey services when being welcomed will be offered information which promotes their rights.

The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child references 54 articles which outline the rights of the child broken down to individually outline the detail of their inalienable rights. Children and young people will have access to independent advocacy throughout their time in our services.

Staff, children and young people and appropriate Parents, Carers, Professionals should base all of their practice around protecting a child’s rights. This helps guide professionals to support children and young people’s rights and ultimately builds trust, transparency and relationships.

**Developing relationships between Children and Staff Members**

Children learn how the world works and their role in it mostly from the adults who care for them. They do this on the basis of trusting and caring relationships, usually with their parents. Unfortunately many children in residential care have had poor experiences of relationships with adults and may have suffered trauma through abuse, neglect and rejection in the past. They may also have experienced disruptions in earlier placements. These experiences may have left them anxious and mistrustful about adults and they may have limited ability or inclination to accept another relationship with another adult. As a consequence, it is not unusual for children to initially reject staff and staff members through exhibiting challenging behaviour.

Children and Young people may do this for a number of reasons:

* To test out a staff members resolve before forming secure attachment.
* To feel safe and to keep staff members at an emotional distance.
* To retain a feeling of security by deflecting potential scenarios of further rejection.

How staff members respond to this is vital to helping the child form secure attachments and solid relationships. It is important that staff members recognise the behaviour for what it is and understand that even though it can seem without precedent or vexatious, it is often not personal. Rather, it is the product of the child’s past experience and a means of testing out a potentially risky investment in a new relationship with staff members.

Staff members will always seek to maintain relationships with children which are positive and based on mutual respect. When staff members intervene with children because of their behaviour, they will do so in a way that clearly differentiates disapproval of the behaviour from disapproval of the child him/herself.

It is important that staff members appreciate the need to take the initiative to sustain relationships with children who, at first, may not want to have such a relationship. Staff members can do this by:

* Displaying a genuine commitment to sustain relationships with children who can display challenging behaviour.
* Being clear to children and young people how they can support a young person through trauma
* Demonstrating an understanding of the child’s needs and rights
* Being clear about issues of confidentiality.
* Not making promises they cannot keep.
* Showing integrity – always be truthful, consistent and reliable.
* Modelling appropriate behaviour.
* Display empathy and nurture.
* Give the young person time and space and afford them the opportunity to discuss their feelings at an appropriate time (recorded through key time where appropriate).
* Always making sure the child’s needs are being met.
* Encouraging them to do new things and praising their efforts.
* Supporting them when necessary, without colluding or defending inappropriate behaviour or actions.
* Never succumbing to negativity. Ensure that all interactions are positive and promote the child’s self-esteem.

**Positive Reinforcement**

Many children who we work with have suffered trauma. As a consequence, they will have repeatedly received negative messages about themselves, which will have impacted on their self-esteem and self-confidence.

The expectation of Phoenix Abbey is that staff members in any setting will develop positive and supportive relationships with children and that they will generally be managed through positive reinforcement.

**Key principles of trauma-informed practice**

Safety

Efforts are made by staff to ensure the physical and emotional safety of children and young people. This includes reasonable freedom from threat or harm, and attempts to prevent further retraumatisation.

Trustworthiness

Staff should present trustworthiness throughout interactions and recording of events surrounding children and young people.

Choice

Children and young people have meaningful choice and a voice in the decision-making process of their own experience of care and in the organisation’s strategic vision for the care it delivers.

Collaboration

Phoenix Abbey recognises the value of staff and children and young people’s collaboration around their care needs and wishes. Collaboration should take into accounts Children’s rights.

Empowerment

Efforts are made by Phoenix Abbey to communicate around key decision making and for children and young people to have a strong voice in decision-making, at both individual and organisational levels.

**Positive Preventative Strategies**

The best way of dealing with a difficult situation is to prevent it happening in the first place. A clear method of mitigating challenging behaviour is to thoroughly assess the behaviour and needs of any child for whom a service or care is being provided; this may take the form of a risk assessment prior to or early in the provision of a service by Phoenix Abbey. All residential care workers will make this a high priority. Where it is known a child can exhibit difficult or challenging behaviour, this should always be carried out prior to services being arranged.

**Individual Crisis Management Plans (ICMP’s)**

It is important that, where necessary, a risk assessment leads on to a creation of a clear and agreed Individual Crisis Management Plan for each child. Wherever possible any behaviour plan should be drawn up and agreed with the child, staff members, parents/carers and include others who know them well. Hopefully involving the child themselves will help them to discuss all their strengths and interests and develop a knowledge of Crisis Management Interventions which makes the young person feel in control and empowered whilst upholding their rights and ensuring their safety.

**Physical Environment**

Consideration should always be given to the physical surroundings where children and young people reside/are educated. Low arousal environments support relaxation, an ability to unwind and to feel safe and secure. Our properties will always be designed in a trauma informed way to consider privacy, low arousal spaces, relaxation and safety. By creating suitable conditions to build relationships and secure attachment, the organisation and teams must consider creating the physical environment to aid a young person’s sensory comfort. Dependent on the specific diagnosed needs of the young person, further adaptations may be required to make the environment suitable.

**Supervision around Trauma**

Staff who work with children and young people who experience a presentation of past or current trauma require support in their own right to manage feelings which may be difficult to hear or handle. Supervision is also a key outlet in allowing staff the ability to discuss progress and challenges and receive support with regards the appropriate way to handle complex situations. Supervision will be planned on a 6 weekly rotational basis for all staff to allow them space to discuss how they handle trauma presentations (amongst other issues) for the children and young people they support. All staff will also have access to 6 sessions of crisis counselling if they feel this is required to support them as they support our children and young people. (More can be resourced in an ad hoc basis).

**Physical Interventions (Holding Safely)**

Physical Intervention refers to the use of appropriate physical means whereby a staff member needs to maintain a child’s immediate safety through the use of a safe hold. A safe hold should only ever be used as a situation of last resort where all other tools have been employed to deescalate a situation of crisis.

Please reference Phoenix Abbey’s ‘Holding Safely’ guidance for further details.