

BETNS Behaviours of Concern Policy

The guidelines have been developed to address uncertainty for staff on how to respond when facing crisis situations, where there are concerns regarding physical safety. They focus on creating inclusive environments, which can respond to need and build on good practice including prevention and de-escalation.

Guidance is provided for schools on effective approaches to supporting students with behaviours of concern in crisis situations. The focus is on prevention, early intervention and de-escalation strategies for the management of crisis situations in which physical intervention may be employed only as the last part of a comprehensive, positive and planned behavioural approach by the school.

They are underpinned by the principles that such intervention is never used for the purposes of discipline; that it should be applied proportionately and should last only as long as is necessary to de-escalate the situation. The guidelines underline the importance of continued supervision of children during a crisis period including matters related to behaviour and the need for such incidents to be recorded. They also make clear that seclusion of children is inappropriate.

This Policy is directed by the Department of Education's Policy for schools, **Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations Guidelines for Schools in Supporting Students**. This document is underpinned by the following core values: Child Focus, Wellbeing, Respect, Collaboration, WholeSchool, Safe Environment and Legal.

This Policy also supports our Health and Safety Policy and also our Child Protection Policy, all which are in place to ensure the respect and safety of all pupils in our school and also to protect and support all staff working in our school.

This policy is a clear summary of the document above whereby staff, parents and pupils have clear steps regarding the management of pupils with behaviours of concern and the reporting of such in BETNS. Resources for reporting are included and also explanation of terms.

The guidelines advocate that schools' staff adopt a biopsychosocial approach: this approach recognises that humans are complex beings whose functioning is determined by interrelated and interdependent biological, psychological and sociocultural factors. This approach allows the application and integration of a range of theoretical frameworks in considering a student's current functioning and needs.

This Policy is underpinned also by the culture of inclusivity and our ET ethos in BETNS. We recognise the value of parental support when working with complex situations and therefore a culture of wholeschool support and ongoing engagement

with parents/guardians, are necessary when supporting a student in a crisis situation. Each stakeholder working together works best to meet the needs of pupils who may have challenges in differing areas.

Core Values in our school when working with pupils presenting with behaviours of concern.

Child Focus: The voice of the child. All decisions made in respect of a child should be underpinned by what is in the child's best interests, take account of their evolving capacity and be guided and underpinned by the need to uphold their right to dignity.

- **Respect:** Students have a right to be treated with respect, care and dignity at all times. However, this must apply to staff working within the school. Staff equally have a right to be safe and respected in their roles and should be treated fairly and respectfully by parents also. Staff in engaging with parents must apply the same respect and understand that parents only wish to have their children respected, safe and happy in school.

- **Collaboration:** Parents/guardians are valued as key members of the team supporting the student and are included regularly in IEP meetings or as needed

- **Wholeschool Leadership:** Wholeschool approaches to supporting students who demonstrate behaviours of concern offer the greatest likelihood of good outcomes for all. These include access to communication systems, appropriate and nurturing environments and development of positive relationships with peers, school staff and community.

These should build on an existing comprehensive approach to behaviour support that is designed to teach, nurture and encourage positive social behaviour and rewarding relationships. School leaders play a unique role in supporting this endeavour and along with the BOM should endeavour where possible to provide the supports, training and resources to support the pupils, the staff and parents/family if possible.

- **Safe Environment:** Minimising the risk of harm to students and staff should be a key priority and result in appropriate and enabling school environments where students feel cared for and staff and students feel effectively supported.

- **Legal:** Schools must be cognisant of their legal responsibilities to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Legal Context day to day-

Any misconception that physical contact between staff and a student is in some way unlawful should be dismissed.

Physical contact to support students **is an everyday occurrence in our school** – it should not be avoided, if in a supportive capacity and in some cases it is entirely

necessary. For example, for some students, close contact is important when tending to care needs, or for others, a gentle hand on shoulder can be comforting when upset. It is important that such contact with students is appropriate to the adult's professional role.

In BETNS, teacher–student relationships exist, which is a special duty of care. The duty of care arises from the fact that parents have entrusted their children to the care and control of the school – the “in loco parentis” principle .

As outlined in The Code of Conduct for Teachers (page 7), teachers should “take all reasonable steps in relation to the care of students under their supervision, so as to ensure their safety and welfare”.

Human rights principles set out in international treaties and conventions which have been ratified by Ireland, underpin all areas relevant to physical interventions and strongly influence both proactive strategies to prevent, minimise and eliminate behaviours of concern, as well as reactive strategies in response to those behaviours.

The centrality of the child's voice is reflected in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1992) which states that when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to have their opinions taken into account and their views respected.

An inappropriate use of seclusion or restraint could be considered a breach of the Teaching Council of Ireland (TCI) Codes of Practice (The Teaching Council Acts 2001/2015). However, in rare circumstances there may be a requirement for a teacher to intervene in a physical manner to protect a student in crisis or other students or staff.

. • The Board of Management (ETB), as employer, also has a duty of care to employees to ensure that their work environment is safe, where risks are identified and appropriate guidance and training are offered. Risks may include behaviours of concern which undermine the safety of the student and/or those around them (Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005)

Education

Student behaviour is best understood through the application of a cyclical process of problemsolving and review, using a biopsychosocial model of understanding (Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD): A Continuum of Support, 2010). •

Strong whole school preventative strategies form the basis of BETNS' approach to supporting student behaviour. These also have targeted measures for specific pupils through the Continuum of Support, Code of Behaviour and in collaboration with staff, the pupil and parents-agencies where applicable.

In BETNS, there is a primary focus on student wellbeing as happy and supported pupils thrive in a safe and happy learning environment, suitable to their needs, where possible.

In working with pupils with behaviours of concern, we adapt the following as a measure of our success criteria- Wellbeing Promotion Indicators of Success

(Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, 2018, page 23)

Key Areas Indicators of Success

Culture & Environment

- Children and staff, experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported.
- Systems are in place so that the voice of the child, teacher and parent are heard and lead to improvements in school culture and ethos.

Curriculum(Teaching & Learning)

- Children experience positive, highquality teaching, learning and assessment, which provides opportunities for success for all.
- Children access curricular activities to promote their physical, social and emotional competence to enhance their overall wellbeing.

Policy & Planning

- We selfevaluate Wellbeing Promotion Process to develop, implement and review wellbeing promotion.
- We incorporate wellbeing promotion into wholeschool policies and practices in daily life of our school

Relationships & Partnerships

- Children, their parents and other external partners are actively involved in wellbeing promotion within the school community.
- All adults in schools have an increased awareness of the importance of wellbeing promotion, including listening to children, and signposting them to internal or external pathways for support when needed.

Student Support Plans

Pupils with behaviours of concern have collaborative support plans in place, which are reviewed regularly and adapted to meet the needs of the pupil and where targets are not being met. Parents have regular input-formally once per term but on a regular basis informally through email and communication.

Universal Design for Learning

(UDL) provides a framework which maximises learning for all students by using a variety of teaching methods to enhance participation and to remove barriers to learning. UDL benefits every student, whatever their experience, background, ethnicity or ability, by creating a learning environment that engages students, giving them a greater voice and choice in their own learning.

In BETNS we adopt preventative approaches that prioritise building social and emotional competencies through nurturing relationships, valuing differences in communication, creating sensitive environments to meet physical and sensory needs and providing learning opportunities in safe and supportive classrooms.

Physical contact between staff and students related to wellbeing and education including communication, **can play a critical role in this process and for some students it will be proper and necessary, for example-**

Skill development • Guiding a student's hand to the correct position to write/play a musical instrument. • Teaching independent life skills. • Physically demonstrating a safe way to perform a task during physical education e.g., coaching instruction/adaptation.

Wellbeing • Providing First Aid. • A helping hand when a student has fallen over. • Redirecting a student's attention to a different activity or topic. • A high five, fist bump or handshake to acknowledge achievement. • Arm around the shoulder, pat on top of arm, back or shoulder to give reassurance. • Holding hands to accompany somewhere

Personal Care • To aid and assist in personal care

Safe Spaces

We have adapted to our ability self regulation spaces and activities available to students during the school day. These spaces and activities are designed specifically to support students to process their thoughts, feelings and behaviours and, as such, represent a proactive approach to reduce the likelihood of behaviours of concern occurring. Examples in our school are the newly adapted spaces on the ground floor, second floor outdoor area and corridor on the top floor where children can self regulate by engaging in a number of activities while on movement breaks. We are also currently developing a 'secret garden' where pupils can relax, be involved in gardening or simply sit with nature

Our yard including the Astro can be useful at times for pupils who wish to go off and run off energy or frustration in an open area,

Each classroom is developing a quiet space /reading area which will have inviting elements and where pupils can retreat to should they need to deregulate. Spaces and tents are also in place on our ground floor outside classrooms and support rooms are adapted to suit the needs of pupils who may need space to deregulate/have quiet time/ be involved in regulation stations daily.

Prevention to escalating behaviours steps for staff.

Taking action immediately before, or, as behaviour escalates can be highly effective in reducing the student's distress and minimising behaviours that may lead to a crisis situation.

Wherever possible, de-escalation techniques should be used **before** any other responses are considered.

De-escalation techniques should be

- **Cognisant of the student's individual early signs of escalation.**
- **Student specific.**
- **Developmentally sensitive.**
- **Based upon an understanding of what is being communicated by the behaviour.**

This provides staff with the opportunity to apply strategies that reduce the intensity of an emerging situation and in turn reduce the likelihood of using physical restraint.

There are certain approaches that may not have the desired effect and that may serve to increase the student's agitation instead. As deescalation techniques are tailored to individual needs. Appropriate responses to known sequences of behaviours of concern should be recorded in the Student Support Plan

Common de-escalation techniques include:

- Active listening.
- Acknowledging what the student is experiencing emotionally.
- Reducing the communication load on the student.
- Using a preferred mode of communication by the student
- Physical redirection to an alternative activity.
- Problem solving if appropriate (if the student is able).
- Offering clear simple choices, which would include self regulation options.
- Allowing adequate personal space.
- Adopting nonthreatening body language such as hands by your sides or in pockets.
- Avoiding direct or sustained eye contact in most cases.
- Going to an alternative space with the student that is less stimulating or which removes access to the triggers.

Actions which may heighten agitation in a student whose behaviour is escalating includes:

- Loud or aggressive tone of voice.

- Disagreeing with the student's statement.
- Moving closer into the student's personal space.
- Crouching in a threatening way.
- Embarrassing the student.
- Giving either/or scenarios with only one right option leads to confusion.
- Any form of physical contact when the student is already highly agitated.
- Correcting the behaviour in crisis situations.
- Asking for an apology.
- Removal of communication systems.

Response to Crisis situations are defined in *as times when behaviours of concern present serious risk of imminent physical harm to the student concerned and/or others within the school environment.*

It is acknowledged that there are **exceptional occasions when the use of physical restraint in a crisis situation may occur in any school setting.**

The term physical restraint describes a wide range of actions that involve the use of direct or indirect force, to limit another person's movement. The use of physical restraint **must be proportionate to the risk posed by the student's behaviour.**

Seclusion

Seclusion should not be used under any circumstances. Seclusion is placing a student involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and physically prevented from leaving.

What is NOT seclusion?

- Restrictions (that apply equally to all students) regarding some restrictions on movement. For example, in the interest of student safety, restrictions about leaving the school premises/classroom during break.
- Proactive strategies that involve redirecting a distressed, overstimulated or overwhelmed student into a low stimulus environment as long as they are free to leave this space and this is an agreed strategy in their support plan
- If a student independently takes themselves to a space or room. However vigilance is needed to ensure they do not isolate themselves for extended periods of time.

Physical restraint

Physical restraint is not permitted within any recognised school setting except in a crisis situation **where there is imminent risk to students' physical safety or the safety of others.** . Physical restraint is any procedure where one or more adults restrict a student's physical movement or normal access to his or her own body. It is

an intervention used in crisis situations when **not to do so could result in serious physical harm or injury to the student or others.**

- **Should Always Be-**

An act of care. For safety reasons. To manage behaviour in an emergency. Used with the least amount of force necessary for safety. For the shortest amount of time needed for the student to regain control.

- **Sometimes-**

Can lead to injury of the student or adults. Can lead to an increase in physical and emotional stress for student or adults. Can provoke a more intense physical reaction from the student or adults.

- **Should never be**

Punitive. Used unless the situation is an emergency and safety is compromised. Used as a teaching strategy

What is not considered physical restraint?

Where schools are following the guidance and recommendation of the relevant professional, for example, in using a standing frame with a harness restraint to support a student with physical needs, using a school bus seatbelt/harness for safety during transportation, or using a weighted vest for deep pressure or other sensory processing interventions, it should be noted that this does not constitute physical restraint as defined within this policy.

Any use of physical restraint must be:

- **Timely.** Physical restraint should NOT be the first option, nor done at the onset of a known escalation sequence.
- **Measured.** Use only enough physical contact and force to maintain or reestablish safety for the student, peers or adults, and remove physical contact in favour of shadowing as soon as the student can regain control of him/herself (Shadowing is moving one step back from physical contact and staying close enough to make physical contact if needed).
- **Appropriate.** Consider the least amount of touch and force needed to manage the emergency and safety of all concerned. Take into account any additional needs the student may have including selfmanagement, language difficulties, sensory needs, medical considerations (such as stability issues, unsteady footing or coordination difficulties) and social differences. Consider the vulnerability of the student in relation to their experience of trauma
- Carried out by the most appropriately trained persons, if at all possible.
- Reviewed subsequent to the event and a report prepared

Interim safety response

In the event of an unexpected crisis situation or when the cause of a student's behaviour is not yet established, prioritising the safety of both the distressed student and those around them is crucial. To address such situations the following process is recommended

Dynamic Risk assessment:

Conduct a brief, on the spot assessment to adaptively manage risks in the ever-changing context. Key components of a dynamic risk assessment in crisis situations are:

- **Step Back:** Evaluate whether immediate intervention is necessary.
- **Assess threat:** Consider the student (s), staff, objects, environment and situational factors
- **Find Help:** If required, seek assistance from colleagues or use the physical environment to reduce risks.
- **Evaluate options:** Is there another option available in the circumstances for preventing harm? **De-escalation** approaches, diverting, changing staff to allow for co regulation involving a staff member who the student feels connected to, or use of physical restraint.
- **Continual Monitoring:** Reevaluate the situation and monitor risk levels.
Safety
- **Considerations: Do not intervene alone in unplanned situations if-
If you are at risk of serious injury.
Unable to safely apply intervention techniques.**

Key messages:

- De-escalation strategies should be engaged in at an early point to avoid behaviours of concern posing a safety risk.
- Seclusion should not be used under any circumstances.
- Physical restraint is not permitted within any recognised school except in a crisis situation where there is an imminent physical risk to a student's safety and/or to the safety of others.
- Where physical restraint is used in a crisis situation, it must be timely, measured and carried out by appropriately trained persons.
- If physical restraint has been used in a crisis situation, it must be documented, reported and reviewed with a view to reducing and eliminating the need for physical restraint.
- Schools with a demonstrable need for specialised training in the use of physical restraint should access approved training for minimising the use of restrictive physical intervention.
- Management play a pivotal role in prevention of and response to crisis situations.

Review Process-

A structured review process aims to restore wellbeing and calm and prevent reoccurrences.

Review documents to be filled in by those adults present after the event and uploaded to the child's profile. This must be carried out on the day of the incident. Please see resources below under '**Recording Process**'

Supporting staff

Everyone's response to stress is different. Management need to ensure affected staff receive immediate support following an incident of physical restraint in a crisis situation.

Support could include debriefing, medical assistance, emotional support, and/or practical help. The physiological effects of such incidents make debriefing when staff are in a calmer state optimum. Should staff require additional confidential supports, staff should be directed to the Employee Assistance Programme.

Staff have a responsibility for their own safety and need to adhere to any guidelines relating to personal safety e.g., lone working procedures.

Recording Process

The Record of Incident Involving Physical Restraint form is to be returned by the Principal to the NCSE at: bocreports@ncse.ie.

Upon receipt of the form, the NCSE will consider the appropriate support and training for the schools in relation to students with SEN and provide to the Department a record of engagement and school response .

Ratified by the Board of Management: September 24th 2025

Signed: Clare Egan Chairperson.

Resource 1:

Record of Incident involving Physical Restraint

(In line with a rights based approach the language used in this record needs to be objective, factual and non-judgemental)

Student:

Location:

Date of incident:

Time and Duration of incident :

Name of other students and any staff directly involved and who observed the incident:

1. DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT

2. DESCRIBE WHAT WAS HAPPENING IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

(e.g., activities that the student was engaged in; behaviours of other students; changes to the environment or the usual routine, etc.).

3. DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE INCIDENT

(staff responses, reactions of students, any other consequences)

Please complete the following (tick all applicable boxes):

4. CATEGORIES OF BEHAVIOUR

(i) Imminent danger of:

Injury to self ☐

Injury to peer ☐

Injury to staff ☐

(ii) Injury to:

a) Self ☐

b) Peer ☐

c) Staff ☐

5. Staff Response -Interventions i

Signed (Principal)

Date:

5. Date of development/review of Student Support Plan

6. Date:

Signed (Staff(Member)

Date:

Resource 2:

Staff reflection form following an incident of physical restraint¹

For use by individual teachers for self-reflection to inform future actions and/or

For use by groups of teachers for staff reflection at a meeting to inform future actions

(The language used in this record needs to be objective, factual and non-judgemental)

Events leading to the incident Describe what was happening before the behaviour started to escalate. What was the student doing? What do you think might have triggered the behaviour? How were other students reacting to the student?

Behaviour of the student What did you notice about the student's behaviour that alerted you that they were struggling to cope? Think about the way they looked, for example, facial expressions, physical signs, language.

¹Adapted from Physical Restraint and Seclusion Guidelines for Registered Schools in New Zealand

What message do you believe the student was trying to communicate during this incident?

What did you try before the restraint? Describe the alternative techniques and interventions tried to prevent the emergency, including a description of the deescalation strategies you used. What was the response of the student?

The restraint method used Describe the nature of the physical restraint. Include the type of restraint, the duration and the number of people that participated.

Monitoring Describe how the student's physical and emotional distress was monitored while they were restrained.

After the restraint ended Describe the mood of the student following the restraint. What help and support were they offered or did they request.

How about you? How are you feeling and what support do you need? How about others?

Next Steps? Plan for maintaining/repairing relationships with the student: What could be done differently in the future to prevent the need for restraint? E.g. review of environment, communication skills, learning needs, health check, sensory needs, emotional wellbeing etc.

This process should inform a review of the student's support plan, in consultation with the student, parents/guardians, and a review of whole school policy and practice.

Resource 3

NCSE Record of Incident involving Physical Restraint Form

(In line with a rights-based approach the language used in this record needs to be objective, factual. and non-judgmental)

No personal details of person/s involved should be included in this report.

School details

School Name

School roll number

Student details

Age of student

Confirmed Special Educational Need, (if applicable)

Details of incident

Date Time

Location

Duration

Description of the incident

DESCRIBE WHAT WAS HAPPENING IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

(e.g., activities that the student was engaged in; behaviours of other students; changes to the environment or the usual routine, etc.).

DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE INCIDENT

(staff responses, reactions of students, any other consequences)

Any other details deemed relevant in relation to the incident

Report completed by

Date

Report should be forwarded to the following dedicated email account:
bocreports@ncse.ie

Resource 4:

Guidance on engaging with parents following an incident of physical restraint

If it has been necessary for school staff to use physical restraint with a student, it is essential to inform the parent/guardian as soon as possible (at a minimum before the student goes home) by phone.

This should be followed up with a written report and a meeting with the parents. Incidents where physical restraint has been used can be upsetting for parents, the student and staff alike. It is important, during all interactions after an incident that all parties treat each other with respect and focus on childcentred solutions.

When a followup meeting with parents is convened, the agenda should include:

- A discussion of the incident:
- What led to the incident?
- What happened during the incident?
- What happened after the incident, including any injuries to the student or staff member?
- A discussion of possible causes of the incident and future planning.
- Agreed minutes of the meeting.

The principal should open the meeting with a statement that acknowledges what has happened and the stress it may have caused all parties. The principal will set out that the best interest of the student is the focus of the meeting for everyone present.

It is important the parents are given adequate time to discuss the incident as they may have suggestions that can be incorporated into a support plan for the student to avoid future incidents.

If not already in place, thought should be given to enhancing homeschool communications, for example a homeschool diary. This will allow for communication on issues that may impact on behaviour such as a bad night's sleep, heightened sensory issues and medication changes.

If a parent is unhappy about how the school responded to the incident, they should be made aware of the school's formal complaints procedure-

https://www.educatetogether.ie/app/uploads/2023/12/Parental-Complaints-Procedure_V4-final-Nov23.pdf