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Oaks Rise: Community Guidelines

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1. Introduction and aims

These Community Guidelines set out how Oaks Rise staff, parents and learners will work together to create a learning environment in which everyone feels safe, listened to and able to have their needs understood and met. For those seeking to understand our policy on behaviour - this policy should be considered our 'Behaviour Policy'.

Oaks Rise aims to create a healthy provision community that values relationships and belonging and is strong on both accountability and care, whilst remaining equitable and low demand, with an emphasis on feeling safe.

Oaks Rise adopts a critical position towards discourses of behaviour & behaviourism, including the concepts of 'good behaviour' and 'misbehaviour' which can function to pathologise young people and risk obscuring the ways in which provision systems, structures, and cultures themselves can be at the root of behaviours that cause harm in provision communities. Instead we promote community accountability - wherein every member of the provision community holds themselves accountable for behaviours that cause harm. At Oaks Rise, we do not use rewards or punishments to control behaviour. Instead, we support young people to practise and strengthen their internal regulation of their behaviour through improving their self-referential abilities (for example, self-confidence, self-esteem, self knowledge, self-efficacy and self worth), learning about the impact their behaviour has on others, and developing the skills to hold themselves and others accountable. We support young people to understand how their behaviour has harmed people instead of punishment when they cause harm.

In using an approach of community accountability, our aim is to encourage collective responsibility, uncover the wider issues surrounding harmful behaviour, and support young people to work through their emotional responses, and understand how to set their own, and respect others', boundaries.

When young people act in a way that causes harm or transgresses agreed boundaries, we hold them accountable in a way that pulls them in, rather than excludes them.

Our community accountability responses to behaviour is organised over three tiers:

- First Level: A culture of community accountability
- Second Level: Supporting young people to mend harm and understand boundaries
- Third Level: Supporting more complex difficulties

As a small community, we endeavour to build positive relationships with parents and carers at Oaks Rise, in order to best support young people in our provision. There are many interactions that will take place every day between members of the provision community. Staff will use their professional judgement to determine when parents/carers

need to be updated, and endeavour to do this as often as possible, given the high level of contact. In cases of severe difficulties, staff will inform and work with parents and carers in a timely and appropriate manner.

2. Trauma-Informed Practice

Trauma informed practice is a model that is grounded in an understanding of how trauma exposure and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) might affect a young person's development, interactions and self esteem.

Most of the learners who attend Oaks rise will have been identified as Neurodivergent and some may have had traumatising experiences of their educational environment due to their academic, social and emotional needs not being met, alongside other ACEs.

These factors can impact on how our learners communicate and express themselves, receive and process information, experience their environment, manage relationships, trust others, and regulate emotions. All staff recognise that these factors mean that our learners have huge amounts of challenges to navigate and that sometimes this leads to dysregulated behaviour. When behaviour becomes dysregulated, it is a sign of distress and overwhelm, not a reflection on who the learner is. Supporting the learner to regulate involves both environmental adaptations and learner strategies and the balance between these two must be right for the individual learner.

We are aware that the mental health of our learners will have been impacted adversely. Therefore it is our aim at Oaks Rise to understand the whole learner, so that we avoid re-traumatising them. To achieve this we work in a holistic way to support and develop each learner's academic, emotional, social and behavioural wellbeing so that we achieve the best outcomes for each individual. Our goal is to create happy, confident, fulfilled young people who understand themselves, recognise their own unique strengths and challenges, and are ready for the world of further education (if desired) and work.

Oaks Rise aims to create a healthy community that values relationships and belonging and is strong on both accountability and care, whilst remaining equitable and low demand, with an emphasis on feeling safe. Staff at Oaks Rise understand that the way learners behave is often a reflection of how they feel, as well as the context in which they find themselves, and we seek to acknowledge and validate the emotions behind any behaviour that appears challenging to others. By connecting to the emotion first, staff then work with learners to understand the root cause of the behaviour, and the learner's perspective.

3. Feeling Safe

Children learn best when they feel safe and valued, we are aware that children at Oaks Rise are likely to have had educational experiences which have made them feel unsafe and thus wary of educational settings, peers and teachers. Therefore ensuring that learners at Oaks Rise feel safe, supported and happy is our priority above all else.

Our community accountability response has been developed to ensure the wraparound safety of our learners. This has been organised over three levels:

First Level. Culture:

A culture of community accountability is embedded in our provision culture through the use of staff training, PSHE, Collaborative activities, setting, group discussions, social activities and relationship building.

Second Level. Transformative Justice & Restorative Practice:

Supporting young people to mend harm caused and to understand their own and others' boundaries through the use of: individual check-ins, transformative justice, and parent/carer-transformative restorative justice.

Third Level. Supporting Complex Difficulties:

We support more complex difficulties through the use of: risk assessments, Formal Community Meetings, and in rare cases where the provision cannot support the child with the resources we have, exclusion.

4. Culture

The culture at Oaks Rise represents the building blocks upon which the values of our community rest. The Culture at Oaks Rise holds staff and young people accountable for the community we are building together.

Modelling by Staff

All members of staff lead by example and model being reflective around their own emotions, perspective on a situation, and the challenges of understanding the perspectives of others, as well as the positive benefits of doing so. Staff actively promote tolerant and thoughtful relationships between all staff and learners but acknowledge that differences of perspective can be challenging for all to handle and offer strategies to deal with such challenges.

Oaks Rise staff value the views of learners and parents and will seek to work collaboratively at all times. Our staff are equal community members with our young people and, beyond that, they are in a teaching role and therefore hold certain kinds of power and influence. Therefore the way that they behave models our values. They do this both by demonstrating clear and respectful communication and leadership, but also by holding themselves accountable when things go wrong. No staff member will have infinite patience, unlimited time, or be able to perfectly articulate what they mean at every moment; however, every staff member aims to hold themselves accountable for doing their best, and setting clear boundaries that model ways of speaking respectfully at all times.

Rights & Responsibilities

Oaks Rise is a proudly low demand educational setting, those in the provision community have the right to express themselves and choose what they do or don't do, so long as this doesn't harm or disrupt others. To that end we will help young people to understand their rights and responsibilities as well as how they may impact others, without enforcing unnecessary guilt or shame when others rights have been impacted.

For example:

- A right is choosing to use art material; leaving a mess all over the table though may stop someone else from using the materials, which is disrupting others' rights. The responsibility here is to leave the space in a state that allows others to learn within it, and we encourage reflection on this when we are unable to do so.
- A right is expressing an opinion or point of view; using language or a tone of voice that is disrespectful towards another is harmful, so it is our responsibility to communicate respectfully, and to reflect on this when we are unable to do so.

PSHE

PSHE is a daily occurrence at Oaks Rise. PSHE lessons support the development of respectful communication skills and transformative approaches to conflict and harm. Our daily PSHE programme explicitly supports the teaching of relational skills including active listening, communication, problem-solving, perspective taking, cooperation, negotiation and celebrating difference.

These lessons are also a space in which we bring in topics that pertain to the lived experience of the young people at Oaks Rise, so that they can begin to make sense of their identities and experiences in a supportive, secure, and boundaried way.

Proactive and Preventative Approach, used in conjunction with the My Ace Space programme

Staff will work with learners and parents to understand the unique experience of each individual. This includes validating their perspective around what may support a learner to feel alert, calm and ready to engage (ACE) with learning or socialising.

Staff will prioritise building positive relationships with learners, valuing what matters to them and sharing in activities that both parties find enjoyable, as a way to build trust. Learners will work with staff to develop their own My Ace Space emotional/sensory regulation profile (MAS profile). These will outline what helps them to stay in "the green", as well as identifying triggers that may make them dip down into the blue or move into dysregulation (yellow-orange) or crisis (fight, flight, freeze-red).

Staff recognise that the aim is not to be "green" all the time, but to help learners recognise and communicate how they are feeling, acknowledging that it is also sometimes necessary

and understandable to be in a different colour. For example, if they have slept badly, they may be more in blue that day; or if they are very excited, they may present as orange. Equally, some learners may feel safer in yellow, needing to retain some hyper vigilance.

Staff will adapt the environment so that any identified triggers are reduced or removed wherever possible. They will ensure that the strategies and resources that enable a learner to remain regulated, or to support re-regulation, are understood by all, and available to the learner across their session at Oaks Rise.

As part of a learner's individual MAS profile, information will also be gathered on how a learner might display signs of dysregulation, even when the trigger is unclear.

Staff will work with parents to ensure that they have a full understanding of the above. This is particularly important for those learners who mask and may not outwardly show what triggers them or feel able to communicate this to staff.

Staff will ensure that the way in which an MAS profile is put in place will need tailoring to the needs of each learner, for example, recognising that some learners will benefit from a very clear, direct approach, and that others (particularly those with a demand avoidant profile) may need a more covert approach to be best supported.

Learners and staff will engage in frequent discussions around regulation, though the MAS programme, both individually and within group time as needed. This will include:

- Support to develop self-awareness of emotions, in particular how to "tune into" your body's interoceptive signals (internal cues) to help understand what you are feeling
- Ways to communicate this to others- which may be verbal, visual or other means
- Practice around actively using regulation strategies- sharing what works and learning from others. There will be emphasis on regulation in these four key areas:
 - Breathing techniques
 - Physical calmers, such as deep pressure exercises
 - Thought calmers, such as using an "anxiety see-saw"
 - Who to share your feelings with and how

Staff will also model all of the above as a way to support learners to recognise that no one can stay fully regulated all the time and that periods of dysregulation are normal (and sometimes necessary).

Non-Punitive Care

At Oaks Rise, we refrain from using coercion such as charts, stickers, etc. or other forms of rewards and punishments, even if it is positive reinforcement. In both areas we would rather focus on the development of a healthy and responsible internal accountability

system.

We aim to build young people's sense of intrinsic motivation. For us, the goal of accountability is not obedience and compliance, it is strengthened community and self-knowledge. Young people have a need to develop both agency and a sense of belonging so that they are fully capable of acting in their own individual self-interest whilst always considering the interests of others and the group as a whole.

Calling In, not Calling Out

We strive to cultivate a provision culture in which community members feel able to hold one another accountable. All members must expect to be held accountable, and feel supported to work through a process of accountability when they have been called to.

We strive to create a culture in which all members proactively check in with one another, and acknowledge harm that we experience, witness, and occasionally enact ourselves – we don't require harm (emotional or physical) to be visible before addressing it. We acknowledge that accountability is a skill, and when young people make mistakes, we call them in, rather than excluding them, as we would with other parts of their learning.

5. Transformative Justice and Restorative Practice

Beyond creating a culture that supports community accountability, we will also support young people to mend harm and understand boundaries when instances of conflict or harm take place.

We aim to equip learners at Oaks Rise with the skills and tools to hold themselves and others accountable for harm. We recognise that this is a learning journey, and therefore our response should be nuanced, depending on the understanding and skillset of the young people involved. For example, we want young people to be able to resolve interpersonal conflicts with their peers without always needing adult input, and so staff avoid imposing solutions upon young people. We focus on supporting young people to understand natural consequences (rather than imposing arbitrary consequences); for example, supporting young people to understand how their behaviour has harmed people (rather than giving them a punishment when they cause harm).

Where conflict is unable to be resolved by the young people, or in other instances of harm and the breaking of agreed-upon rules and boundaries, staff will support the young person/people involved

Staff will support learners to think about how things could be done differently in the future- both in terms of the learner's actions, and the ways in which those around them respond. This includes environmental adaptations to reduce or remove any triggers the learner has identified, as well as support to help them regulate at the first signs of experiencing distress.

Where appropriate, staff will support learners to repair relationships in a way that is meaningful to all parties. Oaks Rise staff will also ensure that any learners who have been adversely impacted by the behaviour of other(s) are supported to share their feelings around what happened, their perspective on the incident, and what will support them in feeling safe and secure moving forward.

Staff recognise the paramount importance of using supportive language when dealing with an incident of behaviour that has become challenging, as well as in any discussions after the event. They also understand that the specifics of language will need to be tailored to the communication needs of each learner.

Individual Check In

Individual check-ins often take place as a first step after instances of conflict, harm, or the breaking of boundaries. In this one-to-one conversation, the adult will empathise with the young person and seek a greater understanding of the situation at hand. The adult will then explore three questions:

- What skill or knowledge does the young person need in order to move past this conflict or harmful behaviour?
- What unmet need(s) might there be underlying this conflict or harmful behaviour?
- In what way does the community and/or the environment need to be transformed in order to support this learning, meet these needs, or address root causes of harm?

Group Discussion

Group Discussions are a valuable tool for addressing concerns that affect a group, class, or the whole community without singling out an individual.

Such discussions are arranged in an ad hoc manner, usually by the learning facilitators, in response to situations such as: community agreements not being followed, interpersonal conflicts which contain opportunities for learning, and difficulties with transitions.

These discussions are valuable opportunities for learning and are a key part of our community accountability process. Young people are introduced to the subject of the community discussion, and are invited to share their responses. The purpose of the circle may simply be to offer a space for sharing and listening, while at other times, further discussion, new ideas or agreements may be raised as a result of the discussion.

Key to whole community circles is listening, which is a skill that takes time to develop and which adults both model and actively teach.

Transformative Justice

After restorative practices have restored the conditions in place before harm took place and resolved relational tension, Oaks Rise Staff and in some cases learners will dig deeper

to uncover the root causes of injustice that led to the incident and see how we can enact systemic change.

Example: Student A takes student B's pen.

Restorative Justice: Student B returns the pen to Student A.

Transformative Justice: We find out why Student B took the pen, was it because they don't have a pen, or they wanted connection with Student A, were they feeling dysregulated? We will find a solution or transformation that address the cause of Student B taking the pen.

Discriminatory language/incidents

Any incident or behaviour which includes elements of racism, homophobia, sexism, or those related to disability, gender presentation or religion is unacceptable. We will work with parents and learners to understand what led to this behaviour, and whether it is underpinned by belief, OR difficulties with impulse control/understanding social impact, and then agree a way forward in response to the underlying cause, using the above format.

The learner or staff member who has experienced discriminatory language will also be given an opportunity to discuss and/or write down how the incident has impacted on them. Thought will be given in terms of how to ensure that this learner feels:

- Reassured that the incident is seen as serious
- Reassured that steps will be taken to prevent it happening again
- Extra measures may be put in place to ensure that they feel safe and secure at Oaks Rise
- They have an identified key adult they can speak to as and when needed, if they continue to feel anxious or distressed.

6. Supporting more complex cases

When Oaks Rise learners need more support, we will use tools from our third level to support them. This may include support for more complex behaviours, or support for young people who are experiencing many different kinds of challenges at the same time.

Anti-Bullying

We will never ignore bullying behaviour. All instances of bullying will be investigated and addressed. Staff will work with the learner and parents will be informed so we can work collaboratively to help support all the learners involved.

We take bullying very seriously at Oaks Rise and are aware that it can take many forms. All cases of suspected bullying must be reported to the Senior Learning Facilitator or Education and Strategy Lead, instances will be recorded and analysed for patterns or trends. We will then follow the process in our Anti-Bullying Policy.

Risk Assessment for safety in provision

Where behaviour presents a risk to the emotional or physical safety of the community or individual young person, an appropriate member of staff will complete a Risk Assessment, which is then signed off by the Designated Safeguarding Lead. In some extreme cases, parents/carers may be asked to keep their children at home until a risk assessment can be completed and actioned appropriately. However, our priority is ensuring that young people are able to access provision as quickly as possible.

Young Person in Crisis Support

When young people are having a particularly challenging time in provision, staff come together to provide intensive support for the young person. They form a team and meet to coordinate care effectively.

Parent Support Meeting

When young people are struggling with a range of complex issues across provision, a Parent Support Meeting is likely to be supportive. The young person, their parents/carer, the Education and Strategy Lead and Senior Learning Facilitator (and or other relevant stakeholders) will meet to discuss the issues involved.

The purpose of the conference is to develop a common understanding of what has been happening, who has been affected and how, and what needs the young person has that are not currently being met. The role of the adults is to actively listen and to use careful questions to support the young person to identify their needs. Clear solutions are agreed upon and any agreements reached are noted.

Solutions may include:

- New information that was previously not known by Oaks Rise staff, that means additional support can be put in place. This should be communicated to all staff.
- A referral to external support services i.e. therapeutic counselling, or a discussion with relevant external bodies. It is important to highlight that accessing this kind of support can take a long time and is not a "quick fix."
- A reduced timetable whilst support is put in place. A date for review will be set depending on the solution agreed upon.

Formal Community Conference

Serious incidents of harm might be supported by a full community conference. Community conferences involve all stakeholders, including the parents/carers (or other supporters) of the young people involved, and staff. The purpose of the conference is to develop a common understanding of what has been happening, who has been affected and how, and what needs to happen in order to collectively address the harm, including at the community level.

The Education and Strategy Lead (or an external supporter who has specialist training in group conferencing) aims to reintegrate young people into the provision community. Their role

is to create a safe space that enables those who caused harm to take accountability for the harm, acknowledge how others were affected, and to lay the foundations to repair the harm done, thereby reducing the risk of harm reoccurring. The strength of this process lies in the careful structure of the conference process and the values of responsibility, respect and resilience inherent in the process.

Any agreements reached will be noted and the Senior Learning facilitator will follow up with the young people involved.

Best practice for conferences:

- No surprises - facilitators should hold preparatory meetings with everyone attending the community conference and work through the restorative questions in depth so that nothing said in the meeting is unexpected.
- The person who caused the harm goes first in describing what happened, in order to avoid them denying responsibility and causing more harm.
- For community conferences, all members of the community affected should attend. This includes relevant staff - these staff should be involved as participants and not facilitators.
- The role of facilitators is not to 'prove' or 'investigate', but to believe and trust the accounts of those involved. Whilst facilitators are also community members, they should be mindful of the use of 'we' statements that might function to distance the person they're working with from the community - 'we' should be inclusive of both the person harmed and the person who caused the harm. Facilitators should be prepared to own their role within the process with 'I' statements. Crucially, the organisation of this conference would need an inclusive lens in order to ensure we are meeting the needs of the young people involved. It may need an external facilitator, though this may not be possible to organise.

Placement Review

When colleagues feel that as a provision we have reached a limit on our ability to support a young person with the resources we have available; when the young person's behaviour is having a serious detrimental impact on the young person themselves and/or the community; and when colleagues are concerned that Oaks Rise is unlikely to be able to meet the young person's needs, a Review may be called. Any member of staff is able to request this review.

As part of the review, the Education and Strategy Lead and Senior Learning Facilitator will document the voice of all relevant stakeholders, which could include staff, young people, and parents/carers. They will seek to understand if Oaks Rise is an appropriate setting for the young person. The Education and Strategy Lead will publish the review to key stakeholders in a timely fashion.

If the Review concludes that Oaks Rise is unable to meet the needs of the young person they will be asked to leave the provision. This would not be documented on the young person's record as a Permanent Exclusion, unless the parents/carers refuse the decision.

The review might also find that Oaks Rise is able to support the young person going

forward. The Education and Strategy Lead & Senior Learning Facilitator will make a plan for how this support would look and what the expectations are of the young person, staff, and parents/carers. Appropriate goals and meetings would be set and scheduled to monitor effectiveness.

7. Physical Intervention and Restraint

Oaks Rise staff will only use safety interventions (restraint) when there is a high level of risk to the young person, member of staff or the public. In this instance we would use proportionate force to ensure safety (physical holds). Physically restraining a young person can have serious risks associated with it such as bruising, respiratory damage, cardiovascular damage, bone or articular damage, psychosocial effects, re-traumatization for the young person. The risk to the young person, staff or public must be higher than the risk of the above for the young people.

If the risk is high enough to use safety interventions, then only CPI trained staff will do this for the minimum time needed. Staff will never hurt or injure a student in any way to gain control of a situation. The hold will be stopped at the earliest opportunity.

If a young person has been held, staff must ensure they inform an Oaks Rise Director as soon as practicably possible to complete a safety intervention form. This will be shared with parents/carers, the Local Authority and any school a child /young person is on roll at.

Parent/carers must be informed of this at the earliest possible opportunity including the length of time the young person was held, how the young person was held and the reasoning behind the need for a safety intervention to be used.

After an incident where a learner has needed to be physically restrained, the learner will be unable to come back on site until a meeting has been held with parents and the learner in order to repair relationships, address next steps, develop a safety plan, and avoid this event in the future.

8. Supporting learners at Risk of Exclusion

[Studies have found](#) that young people with pre-existing mental health problems are more likely to be excluded from provisions, and even short-term exclusions of just a few days can exacerbate issues including loss of confidence, low self- esteem, and social isolation.

Therefore before any exclusion, whether fixed term or permanent take place, we will try to:

- Explore underlying issues leading to behaviour
- Offer blended learning (where possible, this may not be possible during start-up phase)

9. Exclusion

Please be aware that Oaks Rise would never take an exclusion lightly, we are well aware of the evidence on exclusion being strongly linked to mental health issues and poor life outcomes. There are times however, where it may be the best thing for a young person who has caused harm to have time away from the provision community. This may be the case, for example, when another young person's safety is at risk; when the young person needs a 'cooling down' period; or where the needs of the young person cannot be met in the interim before, for example, a community conference can be organised.

However, this will only be enforced in extreme circumstances. Every effort will be made to engage in meaningful dialogue with that young person and their parent or legal guardian about the process. In the unlikely event that this is impossible, and the young person continues to behave in a way that is unsafe, the provision will enforce a fixed term suspension or exclusion.

The situations where a student may be excluded include:

- Extended refusal to take part in a process of accountability
- Situations where continued harm may be caused by the student's presence. Such as:
 - Sexually explicit behaviour
 - Possession of a weapon
 - Discrimination
 - Unresolved threat
 - Unresolved bullying
- Situations where we can no longer meet need and a student's behaviour poses too big a risk to their safety or the safety of others.

Before exclusion we will try to:

- Explore underlying issues leading to behaviour
- Offer blended learning (where possible, this may not be possible during start-up phase)

10. Learner Participation in Community Guideline Reviews

We want our learners to feel empowered to make healthy decisions about their learning environment and to feel as though they have a voice in relation to the community guidelines in place at Oaks Rise. As such, learners will be involved in the review process of this policy.

This policy will be reviewed initially on a 6 month basis, thereafter on a yearly basis. It will also be reviewed with immediate effect if any new considerations become apparent or if learners wish this to happen.