

Crisis Management Policy

Introduction

This document provides guidelines for using physical interventions and restrictive practices in Saplings Special School, Goresbridge. It was developed through a process of consultation with the teaching staff and behaviour analyst and has also been produced in line with other organisational policies in Saplings Goresbridge, such as child protection, anti-bullying, code of behaviour, health and safety, data protection, toileting and intimate care and grievance procedures. This policy is based on guidance from the following:

- ✓ Education and Welfare Act 2000
- ✓ Health and Safety at Work Acts 2007, 2005
- ✓ Children First Guidelines 2011
- ✓ Guidelines for schools on supporting students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties – an information guide for primary schools
- ✓ Best practice guidelines on the use of physical restraints: special residential board DES, HSE, SSI, SRSB, 2006

It was shared with all stakeholders for consultation and review and the draft policy was subsequently submitted to the Board of Management for their consideration and ratification. It was initially ratified in June 2015 and has been reviewed annually since that date.

Aims and Objectives

The paramount concerns of the Board of Management Saplings Special School, Goresbridge are for the safety and welfare of the pupils in the school as well as the safety and welfare of the adults who look after them. Therefore, we will aim to implement our duty of care to all affected by our work at all times. The aim of this policy is to provide guidance in circumstances where the behaviour of a student presents a serious risk of harm. This policy needs to:

- ✓ Provide clear guidelines to all stakeholders regarding the use of restrictive practices/physical interventions in schools.
- ✓ To continue to build a culture of positive behavioural intervention, emphasising the prevention and reduction of the use of physical interventions/restrictive practices.
- ✓ To provide a frame work for the management of serious incidents as they occur, and the clear and transparent documentation of same.
- ✓ To reduce the risks associated with serious incidents such as self-injurious behaviours, challenging behaviour towards others or serious damage to property.

Relationship to school ethos

This policy reflects the ethos of the school and is written in consultation with all stakeholders, staff, parents, children (where relevant) and Board of Management. It is noted that the pupils attending Saplings Goresbridge have a diagnosis of autism, and also present

with other diagnoses such as varying degrees of learning difficulty, ADHD, epilepsy and other complex medical needs.

Our school in the first instance applies the code of behaviour, which provides guidelines to staff on the use of general positive behavioural management strategies, and strategies more specific to the individual as outlined in the behaviour support plan (BSP). These are designed to support all pupils in the modification and management of their own behaviour in the long-term. Our assessment process ensures that the response to challenging behaviour is matched to its function, and each behaviour support plan will outline a series of proactive/reactive strategies that should be used to de-escalate any incidents of challenging behaviour. Where these strategies are not consistently working or where there is a possibility that a student may engage in high-risk behaviours requiring a physical intervention or restrictive practice this policy applies. A debriefing occurs after every crisis and the staff collaborate to reflect and alter strategies to support the pupil to be successful.

Physical Contact

There are many occasions where physical contact is used in Saplings Goresbridge, such as high fives, patting a child for reassurance, administering first aid and intimate care needs etc. However, as part of our duty of care to those on the premises, it may on occasion be necessary to use physical contact to transport a child who is putting either themselves or another person at risk of injury. This policy governs the use of such practices. The following table outlines the circumstances where the use of physical contact may be employed during the course of the school day. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

Category 1 Curriculum	Category 2 Reassurance/ Comfort	Category 3 Intimate Care/First Aid/Safety	Category 4 Non- contact restrictions	Category 5 Use of physical intervention
PE/Games	Pat on arm for praise/reassuran ce	Cleaning cuts	High handles/locks	Disengaging from a hair pull/grab
Music/ Drama	High fives, clapping rhythms	Toileting/personal care	Coded access on doors	Transporting a pupil to a safer location
Sensory	Deep pressure/Tac Pac	Dressing/personal hygiene	Fences/walls around playgrounds	Breaking up a fight/blocking a pupil's path
Physio	Sitting on laps (up to senior infant age)	Assisting a child down from a piece of equipment	Seat belts on transport	Vertical and Horizontal immobilization
Physical prompting to support learning	Holding hand of upset child	Taking a dangerous item away from a child	Exclusion from activities which may pose a particular risk	Withdrawal/ Implementation of PCM procedures

The first four categories form part of the day to day running of the school and are not considered to be restrictive. Category 5 however, is considered to be restrictive and requires careful consideration by staff before being implemented. Any use of such restrictions must be discussed with the Principal and agreed with parents and shared with the multi-disciplinary team.

Definition

PCM® defines crisis as one or more of the following behaviours: *continuous aggression and/or continuous self-injury and/or continuous high magnitude disruption*. Individually, these can also be referred to as crisis behaviours.

Crisis Prevention

The school seeks in the first instance to be proactive at all times. Proactive strategies are scheduled or introduced if necessary to prevent and minimise the need to use physical interventions and restrictive practices by employing de-escalation strategies and environmental alterations as follows:

De-escalation strategies

- ✓ Sensory breaks
- ✓ Calm stance and facial expression
- ✓ Careful use of tone of voice
- ✓ Careful choice of words
- ✓ Change of staff
- ✓ Distraction and re-direction
- ✓ Use of humour
- ✓ Use of negotiation/choices
- ✓ Use of rewards
- ✓ Positive reminders
- ✓ Planned ignoring
- ✓ Reassurance
- ✓ Reduced expectations in terms of demands placed
- ✓ Time given to process/calm down
- ✓ Verbal supports/praise
- ✓ Visual schedule

Environmental alterations

- ✓ Comfort /low arousal areas
- ✓ Sensory break rooms
- ✓ 1:1 teaching areas
- ✓ Access to preferred activities
- ✓ Access to preferred personnel where possible
- ✓ Timetable re-organised to reduce risks
- ✓ Reduced pupil/staff ratios
- ✓ Increased access to specialist staff
- ✓ Opportunities provided for deep pressure or other regulating activities
- ✓ Reduced access to some doors
- ✓ High locks on some doors
- ✓ Wall in rear playground

Training and Implementation

All crisis intervention techniques used in Saplings Special School Goresbridge form part of PCM® (Professional Crisis Management) training. Only those who have received PCM training will be allowed to use physical intervention, and then only under the guidance of a teacher or the behaviour analyst. Staff undergo 22 hours of training when initially certified,

will attend regular refresher sessions which will be monitored by the school behaviour analyst who is certified as a PCM instructor, and will retrain once every 12 months under her supervision. Only staff members who are in receipt of current certification will be allowed to use physical intervention.

Crisis Intervention techniques may only be used:

- ✓ In unforeseen or emergency situations - e.g., a child tries to run into the road, climb a fence, attempt to hurt another unexpectedly, is in immediate physical danger -**All staff** must use their judgement and take appropriate action to safeguard pupils or staff while calling for assistance from trained staff. NB Additionally, in school there is a walkie talkie system. Staff members who are working with children who have behaviours that physically challenge will be in possession of a walkie talkie and will call for assistance at the first sign of a precursor.
- ✓ Pupils with Plans for crisis intervention – The school will make every effort to ensure that staff with up to date training and knowledge of the pupils positive handling plan/BSP are available to these pupils at all times. However, for reasons of break cover, scheduling and risk assessments, this may not always be possible. In the event of an escalation, where known precursors are not observed any staff member should take appropriate action to safeguard the situation whilst calling for assistance from trained staff.

Deciding whether or not to use a physical intervention Both Saplings Goresbridge and the Professional Crisis Management Association actively encourage staff to carefully consider the necessity of a physical intervention on every occasion.

Act	Balance	Choose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adopt a calm and non-threatening stance ✓ Use a slow and controlled voice ✓ Give clear verbal directions ✓ Pause and allow time for compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The likely outcomes if intervention is used against the likely outcomes if it is not ✓ Short-term versus long-term risks ✓ Best interest of the child against the best interest of the other children and staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Persons who are most likely to succeed ✓ Best place available ✓ Best time available ✓ Implement the least restrictive intervention ✓ Fade to the least restrictive intervention as soon as the behaviour allows

If crisis intervention is used, where possible, being sanctioned by a member of the in-school management team, (teachers, principal, behaviour analyst), staff must ask themselves the following questions

- ✓ Have I implemented the least restrictive intervention possible?

- ✓ Am I implementing the intervention correctly?
- ✓ Has the intensity of the behaviour lessened to the extent to allow me to fade ?
- ✓ How best can I communicate with the child and other staff?
- ✓ Should I ask someone else to take over/do I need to take a break?

Last resort/ Early intervention

Physical intervention should be used as a last resort and only during a crisis. This does not mean that all other possible strategies must be tried and tested beforehand, but means that trained staff must make a considered judgement balancing the risks involved, thus allowing informed decisions to be made. Some children may have stereotypical patterns of behaviour which have been identified previously as being consistent precursors to challenging behaviour, and which alert staff to a developing crisis. This will be clearly outlined in any behaviour support/positive handling plan and signed off by parents. Early action may prevent a risk of injury to the child, other children, or staff, thus justifying the use of physical intervention.

Use of time out/withdrawal

Sometimes a child cannot manage in a classroom setting for a variety of reasons and needs to be withdrawn to allow teaching and learning to continue for the rest of the class. This can happen in a number of ways.

- ✓ Children are supported to recognise signs of dysregulation and request a break, this skill is taught when in stable functioning . NB. Sensory breaks are scheduled into the daily routine and are also available for the child if requested.
- ✓ Non-punitive time out – this may be used informally for pupils who need time or space to regulate themselves. A child may be encouraged or prompted to move to another table, chair or other designated area for a short period of time. The purpose of this is to redirect the attention of the pupil.
- ✓ Withdrawal/Comfort – This may be used in times of crisis, when the child is manifesting behaviours that present a risk to themselves or others, to move a child to another place outside the classroom for reasons of health and safety. The child will be continually supported by staff either inside or outside the area the child is in. This may involve physically intervening to transition the child back into the area until staff consider that it is safe for them to return to class. This may take some time if the pupil is demonstrating that they need a break from activities that they are finding over-stimulating. Doors will not be secured in this instance unless by prior arrangement with parents or for reasons of health and safety where limbs may be at risk. *A plan for crisis management agreed with parents is needed for this intervention if physical interventions are required to move the pupil from the classroom.* The purpose of this is to safeguard pupil and staff in situations that have the potential to be high risk to themselves or others.

NB: Use of either physical interventions or withdrawal for reasons of sanction/punishment or staff convenience is NOT permitted. This is unlawful and will be dealt with appropriately by the Board of Management in line with Child Protection Services and/or the Gardaí

Post-incident support

Research suggests that when staff experience serious incidents of challenging behaviour, the reaction of their colleagues and the employing agency is the most distressing aspect of the experience. Saplings Goresbridge will endeavour to ensure that staff involved in these incidents are effectively supported. Effective post-incident debriefing can play a fundamental role in ensuring that services monitor, audit and update their safety systems, thus reducing the likelihood of further incidents. Any staff member involved in such, will be given the opportunity to take a break.

The priority will always be to look after the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff who were involved in any incident before reports are filled out and reviews held. Debriefing will usually take place on the day following the incident, and will involve the employee(s) involved in the incident, the principal/deputy principal and the school behaviour analyst. An incident report form will be filled out where any injuries occur, and parents will be informed as per the agreed crisis plan. The review documentation will then be checked by members of the in-school management team, who will decide if any follow up action is required to provide any further care or reassurance to pupils or staff, to review interventions used, and to inform any future practice.

Opportunities will also be given for the staff member to express how they feel about the incident.

- ✓ Did they feel prepared to deal with the incident?
- ✓ What can the school do to support the staff member in the future?
- ✓ Explore any errors made and detail action points for review.

The practice of the school is to provide copies of incident report forms on request, as long as there is no breach of data protection re other pupils or staff. Some parents wish to be informed after every incident, whereas others may prefer to be informed at review meetings and this will be discussed when writing a crisis plan. It should be noted that the Principal is the only member of staff authorised to release an incident report to a parent. The Principal may defer to the Chairperson of the Board if necessary. All reports will be retained in line with the school policy on data protection.

Checklist for Principal/Deputy Principal

Check	Record	Report to	Review (if necessary)
Has anyone been hurt?	Debriefing form/incident report form	Parents (as previously agreed)	Positive handling plan/Risk assessment
Is medical attention required?	Check information and decide if any further action is required	BOM if necessary	Policy guidance
Does anyone need a drink of water /sweet tea/to rest?	If injuries sustained, fill out accident report form for insurance purposes	Insurers if medical attention was necessary	Staff training

Reporting

Where a physical restraint has been used in a school, the incident must be reported to the school principal and, subsequently, to the Board of Management. This will be included on the agenda at every Board Meeting. From September 2025, schools are also required to report instances of physical restraint to the NCSE.

Grievance procedure

Saplings Goresbridge seeks to engage positively with parents regarding all aspects of their child's educational provision and their life in the wider community. Parents of pupils who engage in high risk challenging behaviours are prioritised for meetings/phone calls etc with the Principal, class teacher and behaviour analyst. Multi-disciplinary meetings will be facilitated where possible.

Parents or staff wishing to make a complaint should contact the Principal, who will furnish them with a copy of the school parental complaints or grievance procedures.

Ratification, Communication and Review

This **Crisis Management Policy** was reviewed and re-ratified by the Board of Management of Saplings Special School at its meeting held on **28th April 2025**. It will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the schools behaviour policy. The review of this document will be communicated to parents and staff via agreed minutes, and a copy will be included in staff folder. This policy will also be included in parent packs for all new student intake, and will form part of the school plan, available to view in reception.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Principal

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Chairperson, Board of Management

Blank Page