***Introductory context of Co regulation Policy***

***Brains are built not born.***

The question of whether we are reacting or responding to children is of huge significance if we are to offer children emotional safety. Reactivity is immediate & comes without conscious thought, like a knee jerk reaction. A reaction would typically be because something has triggered an emotion in us. The thing about emotion is it’s very personal & none of what we experience with a child *is* personal. Even the most epic meltdowns, hitting, screaming, saying unkind things are not personal. None of it is about us. All of it is about the child;

\* Their need for connection/co-regulation

\*Their brain’s inability to cope any other way

\*Their need for us to recognise this & offer a reply to meet these needs in a way that is healthy. This is responsiveness.

Responsiveness implies thoughtful action that considers long and short-term outcomes in the context of the situation at hand. This means tailoring your response to suit the behaviour, what we know about the child as an individual & what they are trying to tell us.

***The Brain science stuff!***

Childhood serves a purpose; it isn’t something to ‘get through’ or ‘speed up’. Its purpose is to protect developing minds & nurture young souls. Birth to five supports educators to shift away from ‘how to’ manuals & ‘tick lists’ to both allow educators to be more present with the child & to align with the notion that childhood should not be linear, it should not be overly comparable & each child will interact & respond to their world differently. Equality in our Nurseries aims to provide fairness through treating everyone alike – it concentrates on sameness for all. Equity, on the other hand, provides fairness through treating people differently depending on their need.

This is a mammoth task for us & one of great importance. We know that there are different levels of need & that needs change over time – those needs can only be truly seen when we look at the child as sitting in the centre of their unique systems of family, community, culture, ethnicity, religion and more. Some needs change from moment to moment. As trusted caregivers & educators our response to the child’s needs should say “I am here, you are safe”.

When we talk about safety we often think about the environment, risk assessing & safeguarding in the sense of protecting children from harm – all of which are paramount. For the purpose of considering the philosophy behind our response to behaviour I am inviting you to view ‘safe’ as emotional safety. Emotional safety should unpin every interaction you ever have with a child.

***Why?***

Brain development during infancy is at its most vulnerable to environmental influence & the acquisition of new information. This means that during childhood the brain is under heavy construction work. How a child experiences the world & the way the world responds to them literally shapes the way their brain wires up, asking “What brain do I need to develop for the rest of my life?” One that can function in a chaotic, un-nurturing, unpredictable world or one that is stable & safe.

Wow - we can add brain architect to our already extensive list of duties … but joking aside this is one of the most important aspects for us to get right.

***Nourishing for flourishing***

We need to allow space to be unbusy & unhurried. Space to ‘be’, space to process, space to work out the world around. This space needs to be treasured & held with the same value as everything else we provide for children. When we view childhood as a practice or mere preparation for adulthood we stop valuing & noticing the beauty of everything childhood so rightly brings. The messy, unfiltered, impulsivity. The dysregulated, honest, unapologetic sense of themselves. The authentic, innocent, fascinations. The capacity to live in the present moment; these childhood attributes are to be embraced with warmth, patience & acceptance that *all* of this is what it takes to be a child. Children have children’s brains - this sounds obvious but often our response to children suggests they have mini adult’s brains. This is not the case. Children’s brains are structured totally differently & as such should be responded to in a way that supports healthy development. This requires us to act with respect, safety & a response that says unconditionally…I see you, I hear you & this is exactly where you are supposed to be.

Emotional safety allows a child to feel safe even at their worst. It allows a child to feel unconditionally nurtured when they behave in ways that are beyond their brain’s capacity to regulate. It is predicable. In times of ‘meltdown’ or times of ‘not getting it right’ children need to borrow our adult brains. This is called co-regulation.

Co – regulation feels like;

A gentle voice

A soft touch

Listening to a heart beat

Warmth

Calmness

Empathy

Having feelings validated

A safe space

Gentleness

Predictability

Compassion

It is unjudgmental in its delivery & helps a child to feel grounded again. Each time this happens connections are made to the part of a child’s brain that says you are safe; the world is stable & predictable. Over time this grows their capacity to become more reasonable, logical & emotionally intelligent.

Children should not feel shamed, humiliated, silly, judged, blamed or any feeling that is unsafe. When we view a child as these things & make a child feel this way we are unfairly & inappropriately placing our adult interpretation of a situation onto a child or reacting from an emotional space which then becomes all about us and our needs. Children need a hundred & one chances to get it wrong in an emotionally safe place in order to learn how to get it right. When children get it right this then comes from an authentic place of having made a considered choice rather than a place of compliance or having been told. There is a big difference here. One of the troubles with compliance is that children grow into adolescents who become adults who are compliant. By this point compliance looks like ‘I don’t have a voice to share my opinion’, ‘I won’t be heard’, ‘my thoughts aren’t valid’ ‘I can’t say no’, ‘their opinion is more important than mine’, ‘I am invisible’. None of which are conducive to making healthy relationships or setting boundaries for ourselves.

Holding an emotionally safe place for children enables us to set compassionate boundaries & to make authentic connections with children from which we can support, attune & guide children in their experiences of navigating the world.

The simplest, most effective approach to growing independence is to meet children’s attachment needs, to be emotionally safe adults in their lives. It is the trust that comes from this which frees children to grow, explore & develop rather than forced compliance, fear or broken attachments.

This is the blueprint of research & knowledge from which our *Supporting Behaviour – A responsive Approach Policy* is based.

***“People will forget what you said, People will forget what you did, But people will never forget how you made them feel” Maya Angelou***

***When people feel good they do good….***