

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS



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Welcome to the Mulberry Bush School

The Mulberry Bush is a residential therapeutic school that works with vulnerable and severely traumatised primary aged children and their families from across the UK. The school is located in Standlake, a village 15 miles west of Oxford city centre, part of rural Oxfordshire. This location provides a safe environment in which the children staying at the school can explore a wide range of learning and leisure opportunities.

At The Mulberry Bush we believe that to effectively understand, educate and treat children who display challenging and disturbing behaviours, we need to be reflective practitioners who are highly attuned to the communication and needs of our young people. Through our understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication staff can adapt their work and the environment to better meet the children's needs.

We hope that your child will feel safe and settled at our school. We know that if we create the right environment for the children who are staying with us, one where they feel safe and understood, they will be able to develop socially, emotionally and academically. However, we also know that due to the nature of the trauma these young people have experienced the work can at times be very challenging for all the adults concerned. Despite this, our experience tells us that the best work happens when all of the adults work together as a team to support the child.

The aim of this booklet is therefore to provide all the important information that is needed by you, as a carer or a parent, to help your child settle at the school. It also aims to help you understand how the school functions; as well as enabling everyone to work together so that we can ensure that the children, placed at The Mulberry Bush School, are able to develop and progress over the time they are here.

It is also worth pointing out that this booklet is not exhaustive and if it is missing something or does not contain any information you want or need to know, please feel free to call us on 01865 300202 or email lwright@mulberrybush.org.uk or aburnett@mulberrybush.org.uk

We look forward to working closely with you in the year ahead.

Lee Wright
Director



New Admissions

When children start at the Mulberry Bush the focus is on bringing children into the school in as nurturing and safe way as possible, supporting them through a period of adjustment to Mulberry Bush routines, expectations and ways of working. For a minimum of twelve school weeks, our experiences of living and working alongside new children are gathered along with some formal assessments being carried out. At the end of this period an Assessment Placement Report is completed and shared with families and professional networks. A number of Placement Objectives are set at this point and are included in the report - these identify the areas of work we believe are the most significant for us to focus on throughout a child's placement at the Mulberry Bush.

During the first two weeks, new children are gradually introduced to more of the adults who will be working with them, and to children from other houses. This includes a staggered introduction into class, with a reduced timetable and with house adults alongside them. By the end of two weeks, it is hoped that new children will be able to manage the full school day alongside their peers, although support is available for those who need a bit longer.



Dates for Academic Year 2022 - 2023

AUTUMN TERM 2022

Children return to school: Monday 5th September 2022

Weekend home Friday 30th September 2022 – Monday 3rd October 2022

Half Term Children return home: Friday 21st October 2022

21st October 2022 - Education Open Day

Children return to school: Monday 31st October 2022

Weekend home Friday 25th November 2022 – Monday 28th November 2022

Christmas Holidays Children return home: Tuesday 20th December 2022

SPRING TERM 2023

Children return to school: Thursday 5th January 2023

Weekend home Friday 27th January 2023 - Monday 30th January 2023

Half Term Children return home: Friday 10th February 2023

Children return to school: Monday 20th February 2023

Weekend home Friday 10th March 2023 – Monday 13th March 2023

Easter Holidays Children return home: Friday 31st March 2023

SUMMER TERM 2023

Children return to school: Tuesday 18th April 2023

Weekend home Friday 5th May 2023 – Monday 8th May 2023

Half Term Children return home: Friday 26th May 2023

Children return to school: Monday 5th June 2023

Weekend home Friday 30th June 2023 – Tuesday 4th July 2023

30th June 2023 - Group Living Family Open Day

Summer Break Children return home: Friday 28th July 2023

Children should be picked up between 9.30am and 11.00am on days going home.
Children should be returned to the school between 2.30pm and 5.00pm.

Keeping in touch with your child and the school

Maintaining regular contact with the school is an important element of ensuring that the child's network is functioning appropriately. It is therefore really important to not only keep in touch with your child but also with the staff at the school.

PHONING THE SCHOOL

As mentioned already, ensuring that everyone is working together is a really important way of supporting your child's development whilst they are at school. At times the challenging nature of your child's behaviour will place a strain on the relationship between all the adults in the network. There may be times when you hear messages from your child or school staff that do not seem right or make sense. At these times it is really important to check these messages with the staff at the school. The best people to contact at these times are those within the network team. Each child and their family are allocated a Family Network Practitioner and this is the person to contact when discussing any issues or concerns about your child that you want clarifying. The contact details are as follows:

John Agudelo	-	07584 734809
Stuart Harragan	-	07786 965496
Diana Nixon	-	07584 620854

PHONING YOUR CHILD

We also encourage phone contact with your child. To try and ensure regular conversations we set certain phoning nights and times for each child. You are welcome to call at other times but please remember the school phones can be busy during the early evening period. If you have consistent difficulties contacting the households during the evenings please do let us know during office hours so that we can resolve the problem. The main school phone number during office hours is 01865 300202. Children are contactable out of office hours on their house's direct line phone number:

Pegasus: 01865 303082

Jigsaw: 01865 303032

Sunset: 01865 303016

Children also make regular telephone calls from their households. These are an important way for them to stay in touch with people at home. If for any reason the calls don't happen, it is important that parents and carers let the Family Network Practitioner know as soon as possible.

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY

Outside office hours the school runs an On Call system. In an emergency, two senior members of staff are contactable on the following numbers: 07788 254086 or 07788 254420.

CONTACT

We encourage parents and carers to visit their children at the school. We prefer visits to take place during the week if possible and to be planned in advance so that we have enough staff to welcome you. There is a visitor's flat to enable these visits to be private. On the other hand, if parents or carers wish to take their child out at the weekend, this is also welcomed, when planned well in advance.

E-MAIL

School staff e-mail address is: firstinitialsurname@mulberrybush.org.uk. (i.e. asmith@mulberrybush.org.uk). All children have an email address of their own using firstnamesurnameinitial@mulberrybush.org.uk (i.e. Jane Bloggs would be janeb@mulberrybush.org.uk)

OPEN DAYS

We run three Open Days each year. The Education Open Day provides an opportunity for you (parents and carers) to talk to your child's teacher, and look at their class work. We do ask on this open day that other family members do not come so that the sole focus can be on your child's work.

The Family Open Day is an opportunity for the whole family to come to the school to enjoy a fete-like atmosphere and have some fun together. It is a great opportunity to get to know all of the staff and see some of the things that the children at the school enjoy doing. The dates of these open days are set at the beginning of each school year and are available on the calendar on the school website.

The ex-pupils open day is typically run in August or September. Children receive an invite to this event once they have been away from the school for at least one year. We really hope that ex-pupils and their families will stay in touch with us once they have left and come back to visit on this day.



What to do if you have a complaint about the school

John Turberville and Lee Wright are the Complaints Officers. We would like to encourage anyone with a complaint about the school to let Lee know or if it is about the wider charity organisation then please inform John. They will need to know the detail of the complaint, and the outcome you would like from the complaint. For further details please read our Complaints Policy on our Website; www.mulberrybush.org.uk.

If we know what others are not happy with, we can try to improve our practice in these areas. A 'Comments Box' can be found in the School Reception and we welcome your comments and feedback. The children have their own comments / complaints form to fill in (or have filled in on their behalf) so please ask for one of these if your child has a complaint.

The children also have a phone line in their school house to our independent advocacy service at VOICE. If you wish you can also contact Ofsted on 0300 123 1231.

What to do if my child is unwell? (Medical)

From time to time it is possible that your child may not be very well when they are at school. In most cases this will be managed by trained school staff through the administration of homely remedies (non-prescription medicine that is available over the counter in community pharmacies) such as paracetamol based medication. If there are any more complicated health matters then your child would be taken to the Bampton Medical Practice to see a doctor or in some cases the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. In the event of this happening you would be contacted by school staff to inform you and keep you up to date with any developments.

DOCTORS

All children at the school are registered with the school's doctors surgery in Bampton. We have a very good working relationship with the practice and the children can either be taken to the surgery or, if necessary, doctors will come to the school. If a child needs to see a doctor whilst at home, **the child should not be registered with the home practice but taken as a temporary patient.** This stops the child's notes being posted back and forth.

DENTIST

The children at the school can be registered with the school dentist in Witney. Some parents and carers choose for their child to continue to see their family dentist at home instead.

HEALTH

Every child's keyworker is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are made for routine health checks. Regular dental checks can be arranged at six monthly intervals. The children will have an annual appointment with the optician. However, you do have the opportunity to take care of dental and optical care if you wish. Please let us know if you would like to arrange to take your child to these check-ups near to your home.

Education

ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Jessica Hooper, Head Teacher, has responsibility for ensuring that children's additional educational needs, such as Speech and Language support, or Dyslexia are provided for. All children have a Speech and Language assessment and Educational Psychology assessment in their first term. Those who would benefit can be referred to an Occupational Therapist. We use the findings of these assessments to identify how to address particular difficulties children may be having with their learning.

CURRICULUM

The Education team has developed its own curriculum, which was launched in September 2020. The curriculum starts with **curiosity**, where children's learning is predominantly sensory and exploratory; the skills covered in the curiosity level are the foundations of learning in all subjects. The next step is **confidence**, with a focus on taught skills essential for children's successful futures. The final step is **independence**, where children are encouraged to identify and develop their own areas of interest, and to pursue these to the best of their abilities. The children at the Mulberry Bush tend to learn best when they feel that what they are learning is relevant to them, and is presented in practical, interesting ways. If you would like to know how to best support your child's learning, please ask one of the Education team.

SATS TESTS

At the school we do not run national end of primary school Standard Assessments Tests (SATs). In exceptional circumstances, we can enter children in discussion with their network.

HOMEWORK

During the week we do set homework for the children to complete in their house at the end of the day or occasionally at weekends. This homework will generally be a topic-based activity such as researching information or completing artwork. However we would strongly recommend that whilst at home for the holidays some regular time is set aside for sharing stories together and any other particular area that your child shows an interest or strength in.

MUSIC LESSONS

At the school children regularly take part in music lessons with their class. We also provide opportunities for children to play a range of instruments including: drums, keyboard, recorder, violin and guitar.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education is taught as part of the school curriculum. We celebrate festivals from all of the world's major religions. Parents have the right to ask for their child not to take part in any collective worship at the school. If you wish to exercise this right, please contact Jessica Hooper, Head Teacher, at jhooper@mulberrybush.org.uk

PERSONAL, SOCIAL & HEALTH EDUCATION (PSHE)

We run a Growing Up Course annually for all children. The course is delivered termly in small groups. We inform parents, carers and local authorities that we run this course but make it clear that children can be withdrawn. The school Sex Education Policy, and the video used in the Growing Up Course, are available for parents and carers to see. A discrete drugs and alcohol awareness course is also run throughout the year. The curriculum also covers e-safety lessons and these are delivered across the academic year.

SCHOOL COUNCIL

Children are elected to our School Council, which meets once a week, to discuss any topics they wish. The School Council is also regularly consulted about planned developments so that they can contribute to these.

SPORT

All children take part in weekly PE lessons, and have the choice to join in with clubs and activities that are run after the learning day. Houses also organise regular sporting activities for the evenings and weekends. We have an annual Sports Day, which all of the children are encouraged to participate in. We also have links with local sports teams, which children can join when they are able to.

PAWS and FOREST SCHOOLS

All children at The Mulberry Bush School have an opportunity to take part in outdoor learning. Initially this will happen at the school; however, as your child progresses through the school these will become lessons off site during Forest School sessions. These visits usually last an hour and involve the children gaining confidence in an outdoor environment whilst learning through activities such as treasure trails or building simple tarpaulin shelters. PAWS (Play Adventure Wilderness Skills) is the natural progression from Forest Schools and is aimed at the children who have made significant social and emotional progress whilst at the Mulberry Bush. Learning is connected to the outdoors through walks and activities; also subjects such as geography, science and maths can be taught whilst on these sessions.



Trips and clubs

OUTWARD BOUND ACTIVITIES

We take our children out on camping and other outside activity trips on at least two occasions a year. These trips are intended to be positive social experiences that combine appropriate challenge alongside shared fun experiences. Each year the School runs an outward-bound trip. The children will take part in activities such as canoeing, rock climbing, and mountain walking. All of these pursuits are led by qualified instructors. These activities can be quite demanding for the children but it is highly rewarding for them when they are able to overcome these challenges - it is fantastic to observe the delight and pride when they experience this success. During this time children are not contactable, except in the case of emergency.

CLUBS

The School offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. These take place across the week, during evenings and weekends. A wide range of activities are also available to our children during choosing time on a Wednesday afternoon. Examples of the different types of clubs and activities that are on offer include; cycling, cooking club, leavers club, football club and swimming. We also make sure that when the children are ready that they are able to make use of clubs and societies in the wider community. Over the years children have attended clubs such as the Cubs, the Brownies, football teams, horse riding centres, gymnastics centres and disco swim.

TRIPS AND VISITS

The School organises regular opportunities for the children to go on trips and visits. These range from walks from the school, visits to local shops or swimming pool, to educational visits to the Roman Baths in Bath or the Black Country Museum in Dudley.



Clothing

CLOTHING

There is a clothing list below that is a guide of what your child may need at the school. If you can name your child's clothing we would be really grateful, however, if you are not able to, please keep these items separately and let us know so that they can be named before going through the laundry, this way they can be easily identified. On travel days we do put any unidentified laundry out in the dining room for families to reclaim. Clothing can be an area of the service that causes stress for families, particularly if expensive or important items of clothing go missing. Please do let us know if there are any issues about clothing that are causing you concern.

HAIR

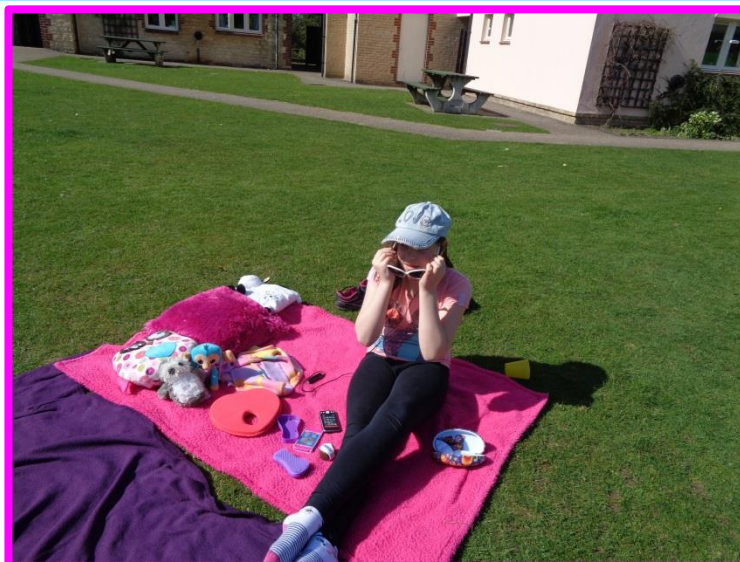
Generally parents and carers arrange for children's hair to be cut during the holidays. We can, however, respond to requests for school staff to arrange this. We do also endeavour to monitor hair for head lice and will treat children with appropriate medication if this is needed.

JEWELLERY

For health and safety reasons it is important that children do not wear jewellery that is likely to cause injury to themselves or others. Children who have their ears pierced should only wear studs or sleepers when at school. No other earrings or jewellery is allowed unless the treatment team has agreed that the item is of such personal importance that it cannot be taken off (this may relate to religion, culture or emotional significance).

UNIFORM

The school provides children with school uniform, which includes polo shirts, sweat tops and PE kits. The children can choose whether they want a red or blue uniform. We encourage the children to wear school trousers or skirts to class, and we prefer children to wear black trainers rather than school shoes.



CLOTHING LIST – for guidance only

8 pairs pants	1 dressing gown
8 pairs socks	1 pair slippers
2 pairs dark school trousers (not jeans) / dark skirts	1 coat (warm in the winter)
2 pairs dark school shorts	2 pairs trainers
3 pairs casual trousers / skirts	1 x pair school trainers (black)
3 summer shorts	2 pairs of swimming trunks/ 2 swimsuits **
6 T-shirts or long sleeved tops	1 pair Wellington boots (optional)
4 jumpers/sweatshirts/cardigans	Hat, scarf and gloves
3 pairs pyjamas*	Cycle helmet (optional)

* The children, boys and girls, sometimes play together after they have changed for bed in the evening therefore it is felt to be more practical if girls have pyjamas rather than nightdresses.

** School will provide one swim suit/pair of trunks as part of the uniform. As some people prefer to choose / supply their own in addition to this, it is helpful if two can be provided, if possible.

Please feel free to adapt the quantities in this list to your child's needs – for example, if your child wets the bed, then more pyjamas may be helpful!

The children's activities, indoors and outdoors, mean that clothes get heavy use; due to this they are also frequently washed in commercial size machines. It is helpful if the clothes are hard-wearing and we would suggest that designer labels are avoided, since they may be unnecessarily expensive. House staff are only too glad to talk about any difficulties which may arise about clothing. We will supply school jumpers, T-shirts and sweatshirts.



SCHOOL UNIFORM DRESS CODE

The purpose of this code is to support each child every day to be in the best possible frame of mind to fully engage in the learning process in class.

Uniform

School fleece or sweat top

School polo shirt

Dark long or short school style trousers (not jeans or combat style) or skirt (skirt needs to touch the floor when kneeling down)

Black school trainers

Black socks, tights or leggings by choice

Coats to be worn to class but not in class

Crocs (for indoor classroom use)



Other information

CHILD PROTECTION

Claire McCarthy and Angus Burnett are the Designated Safeguarding Leads at the school. They are informed of any potential child protection incidents that have happened at the school, and are in regular contact with Oxfordshire Child Protection Team in Banbury, Oxon. They work closely with all the staff to promote the safety and welfare of the children.

INTERNAL CASE CONFERENCES (ICCs) - ASSESSING PROGRESS - REVIEWS

In the first twelve weeks of the child's stay at the school, we carry out a wide range of assessments relating to their level of functioning academically, socially and emotionally. They will be largely unaware of these assessments taking place. The outcomes of these assessments are used to inform education and treatment planning throughout the placement. The assessments are repeated at regular intervals to provide indications of progress and this information is reported in the review information pack you will receive. Within the school there are regular treatment team meetings to review this information and these discussions lead to changes in the way we teach and look after each child.

TREATMENT TEAMS

All children have a treatment team from the beginning of their placement. The treatment team includes the child's key worker, teacher, family worker, a therapist and a team manager. The treatment team has the responsibility for the oversight of the therapeutic education and treatment of the child throughout their stay at the school.

INCIDENT / RESTRAINT LOGGING

All significant incidents and restraints are logged by members of staff in Log books and the detail recorded electronically in a system named 'Clear Care'.

INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY

We employ an organisation called VOICE to arrange for a member of their team to act as an advocate for any child who wishes it. An advocate visits the school once a month, spending time with the children, getting to know them, and letting them know what their role is. If the child wants them to help them with any concerns they have then they will do so independently of the school. As they are an independent visitor to the school they also are in a position to raise any of their own concerns about what they see going on in the school, which can be very helpful.

INSPECTIONS

The school is regularly inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The recent inspection reports are available on the internet. We are very proud of the content of these and if you would like a paper copy please ask one of our admin team.

INTERNET USE

Children and their parents/carers have to sign an agreement before children are able to use the Internet. The children have supervised access to the Internet in their classrooms and households. The school uses a company to screen what comes into the school via the Internet. Children are able to play on-line computer games whilst at the school. These games are monitored and children are not allowed to play those where they can have on-line conversations with other people. Currently some of these games enable people to spend money on-line through the use of vouchers that can be purchased at retail outlets with pocket money or bought as gifts. The school does not encourage children to buy these vouchers but it is acknowledged that there may be an appropriate time when they can be purchased. This will be discussed within the school by staff and a decision taken with the child and parents about how much money can be spent and when this can happen.

LEAVING CEREMONIES

When children leave the school at the end of their placement the school holds a leaving ceremony. The whole school attends and we very much hope parents and carers are able to come. As this can be an emotional time, we request that people arrive promptly and leave soon after the ceremony.

POCKET MONEY

Children are given weekly pocket money, which they can spend at the local shops. They are encouraged to spend it on toys, books, and comics. **We request that parents and carers do not give children additional money.**

MBS POLICY ON GIFT GIVING AND RECEIVING

For children who are placed at the Mulberry Bush, giving and receiving gifts can be a focus for complicated feelings.

For this reason, children are not generally allowed to offer purchased or monetary gifts to another child. However, if there is an established friendship between two children, a birthday gift or leaving gift (as an exception) might be appropriate. Thought and discussions with appropriate members of staff (and possibly the children's parents/carers) is required. Children can be encouraged to give home-made presents to other children e.g. baking, arts and crafts instead of buying gifts.

Due to the tensions and difficulties this can potentially cause, children are not allowed to offer or give their own belongings to other children. However, children are allowed to loan other children their belongings with levels of staff oversight appropriate to the children involved. This can be a very normal and positive part of a friendship. Staff members are to judge in each instance that it is appropriate and doesn't involve a power differential or a buying of friendship. The same applies to children sharing sweets or small 'pocket money' items (balloons, stickers, etc). An exception to this is 'trading cards' and similar items whose purpose is to be swapped and traded. However, this will always be at the discretion of a household manager or teacher.

Individual staff members should not give or receive purchased gifts to or from individual children. The school will purchase birthday and Christmas presents for each child and this should be discussed and agreed with parents and carers to avoid any possible duplication.

POSSESSIONS

It is really important that the children are able to bring their own possessions to school, to help them link between home and school. We would request that valuable items (emotional or monetary) are kept at home, as we cannot guarantee that they will be safe at school. Any unsuitable items brought back to school will be removed and returned to parents and carers.

MOBILE PHONES

Children are not permitted to have mobile phones at school.

THERAPY

All children have a Psychotherapy and Story Stem assessment in their first six weeks at the school. This is to help staff at the school get a picture of the child's emotional world when they first arrive at the school. Most of our children will benefit most from the therapeutic environment of their house and class, but some children may see one of our therapists for a period of time; parents and carers would always be notified first and children rarely start therapy before they have been at the school for at least six months. Children who are offered therapy will be seen by a drama therapist, music therapist or psychotherapist depending on need. These therapies take place either individually or in groups.

Psychotherapists also talk regularly with the staff helping them to think about their work with the children. If you would like any more information on this part of our work please contact the school for more information.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVATION

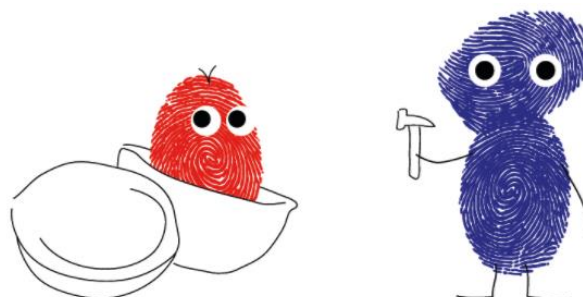
If it is requested we will take individual children to places of worship. However the school does mark significant events such as Christmas, Easter, harvest, Diwali and Hanukah. Although we can encourage children to follow their parents/carers religious wishes we will not force children who do not want to.

DAMAGE

We try hard to encourage the children to value and care for their own and other people's property. When they do damage property we would support them to work with others to mend the damage, find other ways of making amends with the person whose property they damaged.

PHOTOGRAPHS

The school arranges for a local photographer to photograph each child individually each year in their school uniform, and to take a school group picture. This takes place in the summer term. Parents and carers are then asked if they wish to purchase these.



How do we work with challenging behaviour?

At the Mulberry Bush we are very focussed on supporting children to find more appropriate ways of communicating their strong emotions rather than acting them out. However we do expect staff to intervene physically to secure the safety of the child or others when alternative strategies are not effective.

PHYSICAL INTERVENTION (Positive handling / restraint)

Staff are all trained in Team Teach, a strategy for avoiding physical intervention where possible and safe ways of intervening physically where necessary. Where staff have responsibility for the teaching, care and management of the children they are trained to Intermediate Level with Dedicated Advanced Modules. Where they do not have any responsibility in their job descriptions for the children they are trained at Foundation Level.

Authorisation is given to staff to use the techniques included in their training as indicated in their training records.

All physical interventions are recorded and any ground holds are reported to Team Teach every 6-8 weeks for monitoring.

We also employ a Practice Development Practitioner who is a highly trained and skilled Team-Teach trainer. This person monitors and advises on the use of physical interventions to support staff and children.

Further information can be found on their website: <http://www.team-teach.co.uk/>

PRAISE CULTURE

At school we find the best way to encourage the children to make positive choices is by providing regular, consistent, enthusiastic praise for when they are doing the right thing. When our focus shifts to mainly criticising bad behaviour (which is very easy to do) the children can become very stuck in this negative way of behaving.

We believe – ‘**you get more of what you talk about**’.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

Like all other organisations we are required to complete risk assessments to ensure that we are both identifying potential risks for staff and children at the school, and taking steps to minimise these. To do this we complete a risk assessment for each child identifying particular risks (included in the child's Integrated Treatment Plan), and we have school risk assessments that look at minimising risks for the bigger trips that we run.

SANCTIONS

Our approach to sanctions has been developed over many years. We try to set firm, clear boundaries to reinforce socially acceptable behaviour, and to maintain a calm and well-ordered school environment. We are very mindful of the capability of each child, ensuring that expectations are realistic and achievable. Our response to each child needs to make sense to the child and assist them in their ability to make better choices in the future. Copies of our Sanctions Policy is available on our website

Why does my child behave differently at home and at school?

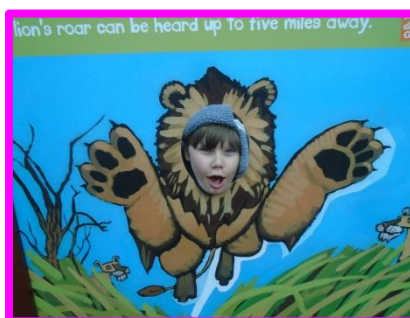
1. My child behaves much worse at school than at home and it makes me wonder if he/she should be at the school. Why is there this difference in behaviour?

This is a common experience for many of our parents and carers who may begin to feel that the school is 'bad' for their child. Children usually come to the Mulberry Bush having had a long history of difficulties at home or in foster placements and in school. Therefore, although it is great news that they are behaving well at home, it is likely that it is the combination of the stability of home and the school placement that are coming together to make the difference for your child.

Children with broken attachment histories tend to test out relationships and push them to their limits. Our children often do the testing out at school, where there are a large number of people to work with them and care for them. This can give a greater opportunity for the child to experiment with rejecting/ accepting the relationship to see if it is going to last and survive, knowing that there are other people there just in case this fails. On the other hand, they may try to preserve their homes or foster placements as the place for their warmer feelings and their good behaviour. Our experience tells us that, until the emotional difficulties and the feelings that brought them to the school have been addressed, often by the child exhibiting quite challenging behaviour, they are not likely to be able to sustain these positive relationships at home in the long term. Sometimes this can feel like a backward step, but we see both the good stable family experiences that your child receives at home with you and the work that we do with him/her at the school as equal partners in meeting your child's needs.

2. If my child behaves well at home but not at school, shouldn't he/she be at home with us all the time?

We often see children whose behaviour at home has been extremely difficult before they came to the Mulberry Bush. Usually, they have become unmanageable at home and at school. Some of the time, once they come to us, their behaviour at home improves whilst it remains very difficult while they are here. Our understanding is that having the space within the safety of the school to deal with the anger and sadness from the difficult experiences they have had in the past allows them the freedom to build and maintain better relationships within their home life. Without the time spent at the school, they are likely to find it much harder to sustain their relationships at home and may test them to breaking point.



3. At home, my child stops his/her difficult behaviour when I say no to him/her. I worry that my child behaves badly at school because he/she is allowed. Could this be true?

We understand that it's hard to make sense of the fact that your child seems to listen to you at home but not to us! We want to reassure you that we are firm and clear about acceptable behaviour and that we know how to say no. From our point of view, being therapeutic starts with firm and clear boundaries, after which we can move on to exploring and understanding feelings. However, in the safe environment of a large staff group, and in an environment when children are challenged by school and social demands, strong feelings can rise up in children that may not in other environments. These are the feelings that they need to learn to contend with if they are going to be able to function in their wider communities and in society.

We do not condone or permit anti-social behaviour and we are firm and clear about it. But we do expect to see it, as children do not come to the Mulberry Bush unless they have been displaying this kind of behaviour beforehand.

4. I worry that my child behaves badly at school because he/she is copying other children. Could this be true?

Just as in other schools, children are influenced by their peers, and they may occasionally pick up new behaviours in the short term. One of our goals is to help children gain a sense of themselves in order to help them resist the many unhelpful influences that they will encounter throughout their lives and to opt for the more helpful ones. The children at The Mulberry Bush start off as vulnerable to those unhelpful influences, which would equally exist within any community that they live in, so learning to manage that side of life is very important and doing so in the protected environment of the school is a safe place to start.

5. My child shows very difficult behaviour at home but doesn't seem to be showing this behaviour at school. Why is this?

We know that this is tricky and sometimes frustrating for parents and carers, if their child is not showing the behaviour at the school for which they came to the school in the first place. We very rarely have children who never show us their difficulties during their whole time at the school. Usually, at some point, they begin to emerge.

For some children, family life can feel very complicated. Relationships with parents and parental figures can raise all kinds of strong feelings that are hard for them to manage and that can be hard for family members to help them with. Sometimes, school doesn't feel as complicated and emotionally threatening to them, and therefore the strong feelings which lead to the difficult behaviour are not as easily aroused in them. We can still work with your child and with you to help with the difficulties your child and your family face at home.

On the other hand once children have established stronger relationships at the school, we do sometimes begin to see the same kinds of feelings aroused in the children and the same kinds of behaviour as you see at home. So it may be that it is just a matter of time.

6. My child is much more difficult at home than at school. I'm worried that the school won't believe me when I describe how difficult things can get. Is that a possibility?

We will always listen to you when you describe the struggles that you are having with your child. We know that children don't come to the Mulberry Bush unless the difficulties have become very serious and so we will always believe you. Although your child might not show some of their most difficult behaviours right from the start, it is more than likely that they will do so at some point and is always helpful for us to know what we might expect to see.

We may also feel that we can help you and your child with some of the difficulties. We would like to feel that we can work collaboratively with you so that we can help and support you where possible and that we can call on your knowledge of your child at times when we may need to.

7. Sometimes I disagree with how the school is dealing with my child's behaviour. What should I do and who should I talk to?

It's pretty likely that there will be times during your child's time at the school when we won't agree with each other! We hope you will feel able to talk to us. You could talk to your child's keyworker or household manager, in the first instance. We have a lot to learn from you and we hope that there will be times when you can learn from us too. But you will also sometimes have different ways than us of thinking about your child. Also your family's needs will, at times, be different from the needs of the groups of children at the school. So you will sometimes need to do things differently from us and we will sometimes need to do things differently from you.

If we can keep an open and tolerant dialogue with each other, we are most likely to be able to hear each other's points of view and work well together. We don't think it's necessary for you and the Mulberry Bush to always to do things or respond in exactly the same way: part of growing up is learning to manage feelings and behaviour in different environments that have different rules, such as at home, out shopping, or at a friend's house. So if you and the school can give your child the message that we support each other, even if we have different ways of doing things, this is likely to help your child learn to cope with and adjust to the different environments that they will find themselves in throughout their lives.



Managing phone calls

1. My child is very tearful on the phone and does not want to hang up. He/she tells me how homesick he/she is. What should I do?

You are not alone with this concern and many parents find this difficult and painful. However, it is very normal for your child to miss you and the things that are familiar to them. Missing you is a sign that you are important to him/her. Some parents worry that they should not be letting their child know about their own feelings. It is OK and helpful to let your child know that you miss them too. Here are some ideas you can try:

You could say that you understand how hard it is for them but you know that when they are busy doing something that they enjoy, they will feel better.

You could talk about the next phone call or time you will see them – e.g. “when we speak on Thursday, will you tell me about ... “ This can help them hold on to the fact that they are in contact with you and that you are thinking about them and the next time you will talk or see them. When it is time to say goodbye, you could try to end the conversation with affection but confidently, rather than prolonging it.

Please know that adults at the school will be sensitive to your child when they get off the phone from you and will help them to feel better. Feel free to contact us later to find out how they were after the conversation and to get some support from staff here.

2. My child doesn't want to speak to me when I phone. Why is this? What should I do?

This can be upsetting and painful for parents and carers as they can feel rejected or unwanted. Try to remember that there is so much going on here and children are often worried about missing out on something if they are on the phone. If this is happening on a regular basis, you could talk to staff in your child's house about when might be a better time for your phone calls to take place.

Although this may be hard to think about, it is also possible that your child is trying to manage his or her feelings about being away from home by having some control over whether or not they speak to you. This does not mean that they do not care about you or that it will always be like this. It is most likely to help your relationship with them if they know that you can tolerate them having this control, without being angry with them for it.

Please be assured that staff here will always encourage them to speak with you when you phone and will support you and them with any feelings that come up.

3. My child wants me to promise that I will buy or do things for him when he comes home that I am not likely to be able to do. I'm often worried that if I say no, he/she will get very cross or upset on the phone. What should I do?

Unrealistic promises are likely to cause problems at some point! Your child will find it hard to believe you or trust you if you make promises that you can't keep. They also need to know that you can say no when you need to and that you really mean it when you say yes.

If you need to say no, we will always support your decisions in a non-judgmental way and we don't mind if your child gets off the phone from you in an angry state of mind. We will help them with this and support your decisions. We will also help you both to come back together on the phone in a better way when the time is right. Arguments are a normal part of family life, and although they can feel extra hard when your child is not at home with you, they are still part of ordinary relationships. It might be easiest to think of these difficult conversations as part of your child's way of learning how to deal with disappointment, tensions and differences of opinion.

Similarly, your child is not likely to find it helpful if you offer big incentives for huge behavioural improvements. Most of the children that come to The Mulberry Bush can't just be 'good' for long periods of time even if they have been promised something really big. You and they are more likely to feel disappointed if you enter an agreement like that with them and they fail. Instead, you could try:

Praising the small achievements that you see at home or that we report to you.

Making sure that they know that you have enjoyed nice times that you have spent with them or nice phone conversations

Letting them know that you are looking forward to seeing them or speaking to them again

Finding small and simple ways of letting them know that you think about them when you are not with them or on the phone to them.

4. Sometimes staff members at the school have told me about things that my child has done that he/she should not have done. How should I manage this on the phone?

We like to let you know the range of positive and less positive things that your child has done at the school. It gives a realistic picture of your child and enables you to know more about your child's day-to-day experience. However, with the more negative issues, we have usually managed them and dealt with them here, so we never expect you to tell off your child or punish them for their behaviour. But your child will find it helpful, even if they don't like it very much, if you can let them know that you know about it and are interested. You could try saying:

"I heard you had a hard day today because ... happened" or

"I heard that ... helped you when you were doing...today"

"I heard that ... happened today and that you've doneand ... to make it better. Well done!"

A non-punitive response such as those is supportive both to your child and to the school and is more likely to lead to your child talking to you about their life at the school.

Further information

If you would like any further information on school policies, important dates or the school itself then please have a look at our website:

www.mulberrybush.org.uk

On this website you will find useful information on;

- the latest news
- the school curriculum
- a number of the school policies (including policies on anti-bullying, safeguarding and working with challenging behaviour)
- the school calendar
- important dates (including travel days and holiday dates).

