# PUZZLING PARTNERSHIPS

A guide to rebuilding broken pupil-teacher relationships and supporting pupils with social, behavioural, emotional and well-being needs.

Looking beneath the Surface

You lost your temper… again. This was never the kind of teacher you pictured yourself as, but you see no other option: This pupil just will not listen to you.

This booklet will:

• Help you understand the common underlying causes of poor/disruptive behaviour.

• Provide a guide to repairing a 'broken' pupil-teacher relationship.

• Outline some effective behaviour management strategies to support students with social, behaviour, emotional and well-being needs who demonstrate poor/disruptive externalized behaviour.
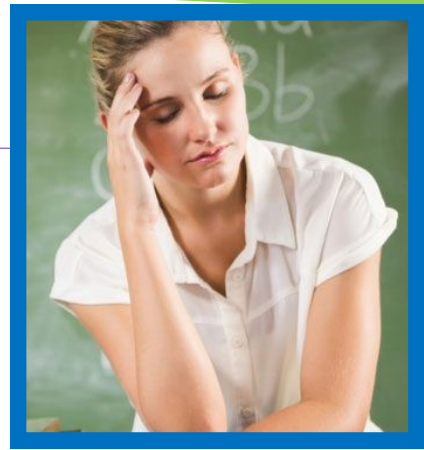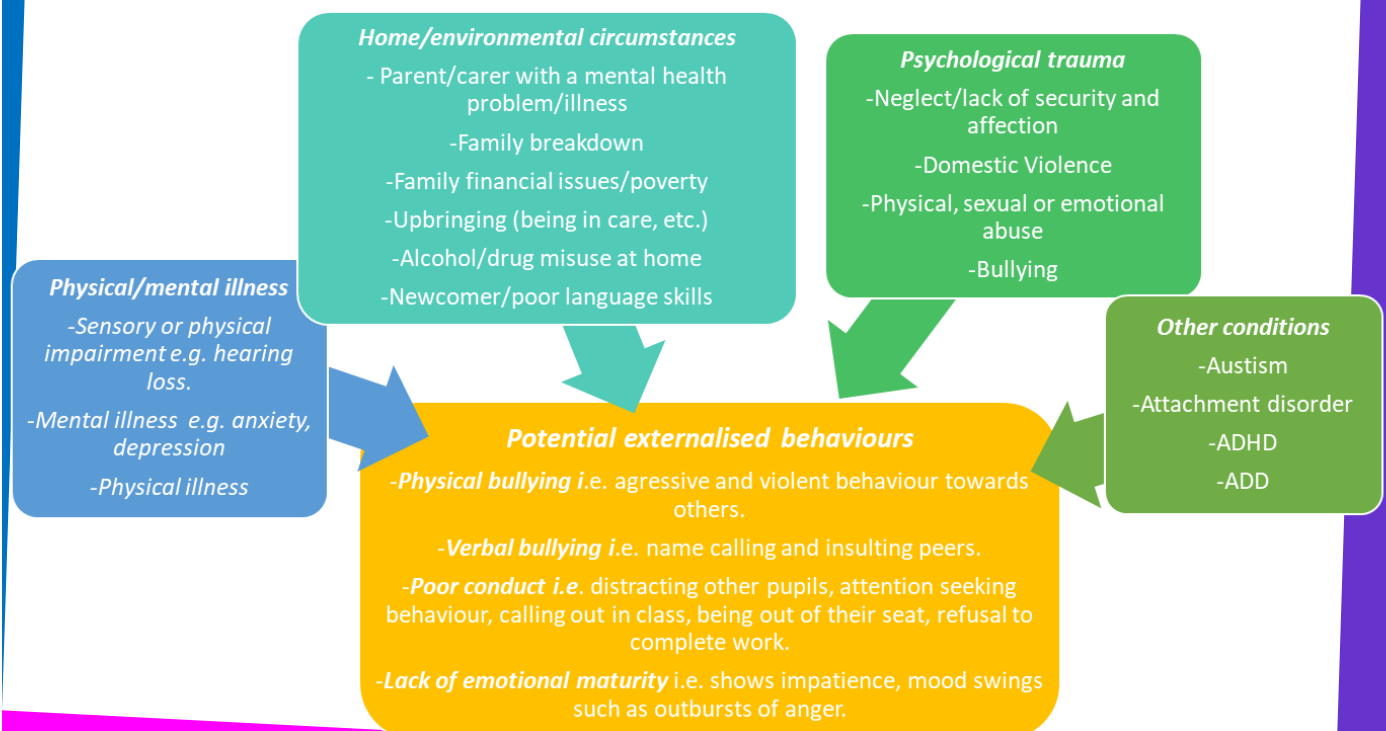
Understanding Externalised Behaviour

DENI (2019) explains pupils who fail to meet expectations in school and in some cases disrupt the learning of others, can be referred to as having social, behavioural, emotional and well-being needs (SBEW). It is important to understand that the problem often does not lie with the learner but with their circumstances (CCEA, 2014).

Therefore, it is vital for teachers to not merely focus on interventions which simply control the behavior of pupils, but rather to take a step back and try to understand the meaning of the behavior (Lawrence, 2017).

Pupils with SBEW may display both internalised behaviours such as stress and anxiety and externalized behaviours such as aggression. The following diagram illustrates the various factors that may be underlying the externalized behavior:

Home/environmental circumstances
- Parent/carer with a mental health problem/illness
- Family breakdown
- Family financial issues/poverty
- Upbringing (being in care, etc.)
- Alcohol/drug misuse at home
- Newcomer/poor language skills

Psychological trauma
- Neglect/lack of security and affection
- Domestic Violence
- Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Bullying

Physical/mental illness
- Sensory or physical impairment e.g. hearing loss.
- Mental illness e.g. anxiety, depression
- Physical illness

Other conditions
- Austism
- Attachment disorder
- ADHD
- ADD

Potential externalised behaviours
- *Physical bullying i.*e. agressive and violent behaviour towards others.
- *Verbal bullying i.*e. name calling and insulting peers.
- *Poor conduct i.e.* distracting other pupils, attention seeking behaviour, calling out in class, being out of their seat, refusal to complete work.
- *Lack of emotional maturity* i.e. shows impatience, mood swings such as outbursts of anger.

What do I do if my relationship with a pupil has broken down, due to their externalised behaviour?

Perhaps you regret how you have handled a pupil's poor/disruptive behaviour and found yourself resorting to shouting.

Maybe you failed to look beyond the behaviour, considering the potential underlying causes.

Has this caused a breakdown in your pupil-teacher relationship?

If so, it is not too late.

The resource outlined below provides a structured and reflective way of rebuilding pupil-teacher relationship after a breakdown.
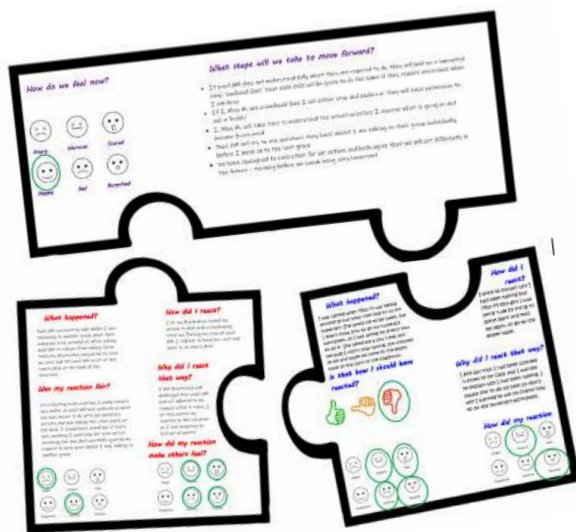
What is the resource?

This resource focuses on repairing the relationship between a pupil and teacher when a break down in their relationship has occurred, as a result of the pupil's poor/disruptive behaviour.

When using this resource the teacher and pupil will engage in an open and honest conversation reflecting on what has occurred, how they reacted and how their actions affected the other party. They will then be guided to discuss what they must do moving forward in order to restore their relationship.

Why is this activity necessary?

A child with SBEW may encounter difficulties with communication, which can often result in poor relationships with peers and adults. This is a serious issue as research shows the teacher pupil relationship is of central importance in promoting and developing children's social and emotional development (Cooper, 2011).

Therefore teachers need to ensure they have positive relationships with all pupils.

In order to achieve this, GTCNI (2011) explains teachers should have:

> "a knowledge and understanding of a range of strategies to promote and maintain positive behaviour, including an acknowledgement of pupil voice to establish an effective learning environment."

(GTCNI, 2011, p.13)

We must be reflective practioners, continually reviewing our behaviour management strategies and acknowledging the voices of our pupils.

Therefore, this resource provides a pro-active way of rebuilding a broken down relationship with a pupil through a structured time of reflection and target setting. This ensures issues do not go unsolved and further hinder a child's social and emotional development.

A step-by-step guide to successfully using this resource within your classrooom

Some point to consider before commencing:

- Teachers should initiate the conversation with the child, as soon as possible, after the incident has occurred.
- This ensures that the incident is fresh in everyone's mind, preventing feelings of anxiety on the pupil's part if the situation was drawn out over a longer period of time.

When?

- A comfortable and non-formal area of the classroom, such as the reading corner, to reduce any nervousness felt by the child.
- In a semi-private area of the classroom, away from the direct view of the rest of the class. This will encourage the pupil to be more honest and open about their feelings.

Where?

- Teachers must have an unbiased and humble perspective, accepting they have flaws too. However, the teacher is still the adult in the situation and will lead the conversation.
- The pupil must be allowed to vocalise their thoughts and feelings on the situation without judgement. Respect from both parties is key to an effective conversation.

How?

Step 1

If an incident occurs, locate the repair puzzle pieces as soon as you can and give the child the **pupil piece** (see fig. 1) to complete independently, preferably in a 'time-out' zone if there is one in your classroom. Provide the pupil with whiteboard markers to complete.

Fig 1 : The pupil piece (blue text). See pg. 5 for a worked example

Step 2

Once you have the rest of your class settled, take time to complete the **teacher piece** (see fig. 2). You will be guided to reflect on what happened and how you reacted. Make sure you also whiteboard markers to complete this.

Fig 2: The teacher piece (red text). See pg. 6 for a worked example.

A closer look at the pupil piece…

The diagram below shows a worked example of a 'pupil piece':

1. What happened?
The pupil should be encouraged to consider what happened, including their own actions and the actions of others (the teacher's and other pupils').

2. How did I react?
This involves the pupil reflecting on their own actions, causing them to consider their appropriateness. This also allows the teacher to understand the pupil's perspective of what happened

What happened?

I was talking when Miss M was telling another group what they had to do for numeracy. She asked me to be quiet, but I didn't know how to do my numeracy worksheet, so I was asking my friend how to do it. She asked me a few times and because I didn't stop talking, she shouted at me and made me move to the empty table at the back of the classroom.

Is that how I should have reacted?

How did I react?

I tried to explain why I had been talking but Miss M thought I was being rude by trying to speak back and told me again, to go to the empty table.

Why did I react that way?

I felt sad that I had been scolded in front of my class and I wanted to explain why I had been talking. I always like to do my best so that's why I wanted to ask my friend how to do the numeracy worksheet.

How was I feeling?

Angry — Nervous — Scared

Happy — Sad — Surprised

How did my reaction make others feel?

Angry — Nervous — Scared

Happy — Sad — Surprised

3. Is that how I should have reacted?
This provides the pupil with the opportunity to evaluate their actions.

4. Why did I react that way?
This provides an opportunity for the pupil to explain to the teacher the reasons for their actions. This may help the teacher identify the underlying causes for their behaviour, such as problems at home.

5. How was I feeling?
These images can especially aid pupils with poor emotional literacy to express how they felt. It also allows the teacher to further emphasise with what motivated the pupil's actions in terms of how they were feeling.

6. How did my reaction make others feel?
This allows the pupil to develop a greater self-awareness, in terms of how their actions affect others (including the teacher and other pupils)

A closer look at the teacher piece…

The diagram below shows a worked example of a 'teacher piece':

1. What happened?
As the teacher you should take time to reflect upon what the pupil's actions were and what your own actions were before, during and after the incident.

2. How did I react?
It is important to revisit the situation and reflect on your reactions carefully before trying to discuss anything with the pupil. Try to be honest here, diluting or altering the truth is a poor example for the pupil and will hinder reconciliation.

What happened?

Pupil AM continued to talk whilst I was explaining to another group what their numeracy task entailed of. After asking pupil AM to refrain from talking three times my frustration caused me to raise my voice and tell pupil AM to sit at the empty desk at the back of the classroom.

Was my reaction fair?

On reflecting on my reaction, I understand it was unfair as pupil AM was confused on what she was meant to do with her numeracy activity and was asking the other pupils at her desk. I should have asked her if there was anything I could help her with before assuming she was disrespectfully ignoring my request to keep quiet whilst I was talking to another group.

How was I feeling?

Angry   Nervous   Scared
Happy   Sad   Surprised

How did I react?

I let my frustration control my actions to deal with a challenging situation. Raising my voice at pupil AM, I told her to leave her seat and move to an empty desk.

Why did I react that way?

I felt frustrated and challenged that pupil AM had not adhered to my request after 3 times. I let this control my reaction to the situation as I was beginning to feel out of control.

How did my reaction make others feel?

Angry   Nervous   Scared
Happy   Sad   Surprised

3. Why did I react that way?
This allows the pupil to see the reasoning behind the teacher's reactions, allowing the development of empathy and understanding towards others
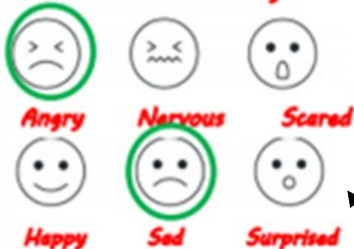
4. Was my reaction fair?
There is a chance here for the teacher to critically evaluate their actions and possibly consider what a more appropriate reaction could be in similar future situations.
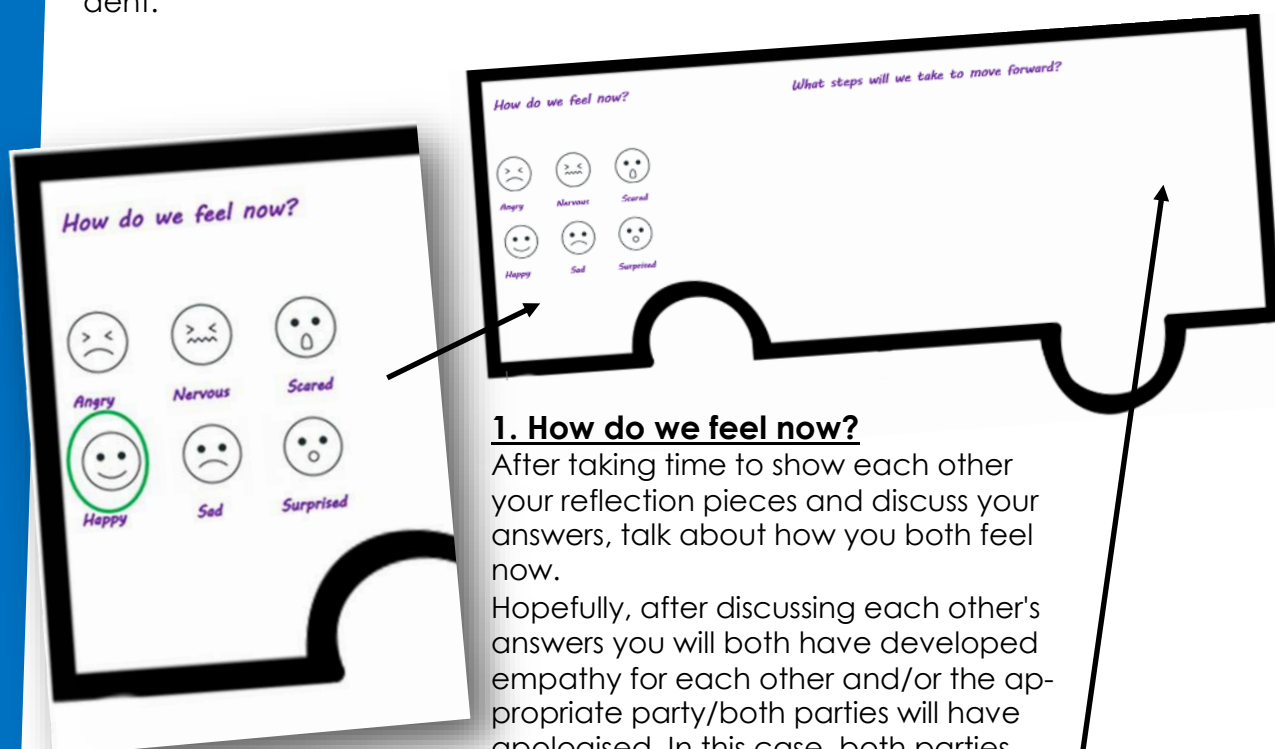
5. How was I feeling?
This activity allows the pupil to see how they made the teacher feel, developing their self awareness in terms of how their actions make others feel.

6. How did my reaction make others feel?
This allows the pupil to see that the teacher understands how they made them feel. This helps the pupil know that their feelings are heard and recognised.
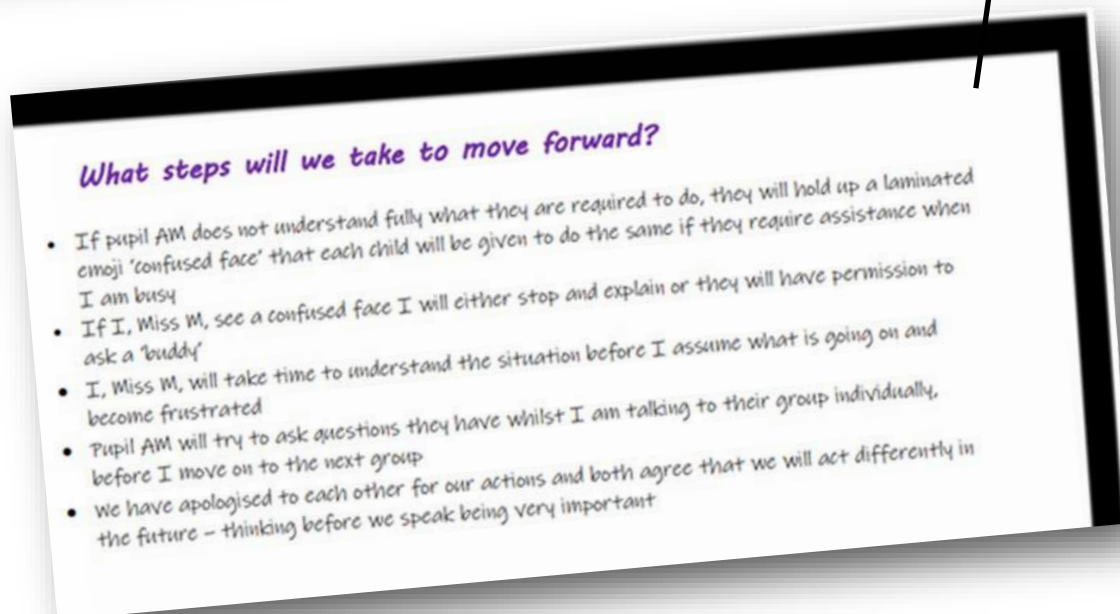
Step 3

After both you and the pupil have reflected on the incident individually, find a quiet place in the classroom to sit down together to complete the third piece of the puzzle (see fig. 3) – A discussion of what happened and how to move forward from the incident.

How do we feel now?

Angry Nervous Scared
Happy Sad Surprised

What steps will we take to move forward?

1. How do we feel now?
After taking time to show each other your reflection pieces and discuss your answers, talk about how you both feel now.

Hopefully, after discussing each other's answers you will both have developed empathy for each other and/or the appropriate party/both parties will have apologised. In this case, both parties felt happy after their discussion.

What steps will we take to move forward?

- If pupil AM does not understand fully what they are required to do, they will hold up a laminated emoji 'confused face' that each child will be given to do the same if they require assistance when I am busy
- If I, Miss M, see a confused face I will either stop and explain or they will have permission to ask a 'buddy'
- I, Miss M, will take time to understand the situation before I assume what is going on and become frustrated
- Pupil AM will try to ask questions they have whilst I am talking to their group individually, before I move on to the next group
- We have apologised to each other for our actions and both agree that we will act differently in the future – thinking before we speak being very important

2. What steps will we take to move forward?
Now there is an opportunity to discuss what both parties will do when a similar scenario may arise. The pupil's part in agreeing and deciding the steps they will take allows them to take ownership of these new agreements.

The steps should include strategies which increase pupil autonomy and their ability to access support and make good choices. Some potential strategies you may choose to use will be discussed on page 8 and 9.

Step 4

On completion of all three puzzle pieces, place them together like a jigsaw and take a photo for evidence which can either be saved on a computer or printed out as a hard copy.

You can explain to the pupil that putting the puzzle together is a symbol of relationship between the pupil and the teacher being 'put together' again.

This resource can be brought out to remind you and the pupil of your agreement. If laminated the resource can also be updated and edited (provided it was carried out with whiteboard markers).
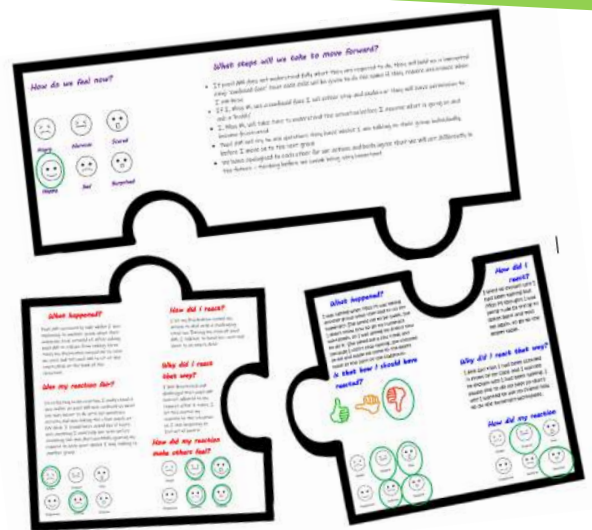
Effective behaviour management strategies

Below are a number of potential steps a pupil/teacher can take to prevent future incidents similar to the one which caused the relationship breakdown:

Positive Feedback and Use of Language

-It is important to notice good behaviour. When you do, make sure to describe it and tell the pupil why it is good, encouraging them to repeat it.

-Furthermore, small changes to the way you address pupils can add impact to what you are saying. Questions can be substitued for assumptions and statements to reduce the risk of a child challenging your commands. 'Thank you for doing _____' is more effective than 'Can you do _____?' By expressing gratitude for their work, you'll be bridging the gap between student and teacher.

Positive Body Language

-Use positive open body language to create a rapport with pupils. This can be achieved through a number of ways such as...

• **Adopting a positive stance** shows pupils you're in control of the lesson.
• **Smiling, using positivie facial expressions and being enthusistic** communicates the message that the lesson content is exciting and worth engaging with.
• **Circulating around the classroom** will show that you are considerate of every pupil in the class

Find and Use Pupils Interests

Use these interests to create tasks which will appeal to the pupil. This will provide an opportunity to build relationships with them through discussion about subjects they are interested in.

Give Explicit Instructions

-Make sure the pupil/pupils know exactly what they are doing and what is expected of them by providing very clear, concise instructions.

-Instruction prompts on the board or on cards may be provided to remind pupils of what to do. This will help improve pupil autonomy in terms of self-management and regulating their own behaviour.

Give the Pupil Specific Responsibilities

If a pupil displays attention seeking or defiant behaviour it may be helpful to give them different responsibilities, such as the being the time keeper for tasks or giving out classwork books.

This allows them to meet their need for empowerment appropriately.

Non-Verbal Cues by Pupil

-Teach pupils non-verbal cues such as thumbs up if they understand what they are working one, thumb pointed to the side if they are still working, one finger in the air if they need a pencil, two fingers in the air if they need the toilet and so on. The pupil could be provided with a sheet to remind them of the signals.

-Pupils who struggle with emotional literacy could also be provided with an emotion chart that they can use to express how they are feeling to the teacher.

Non-Verbal Cues by Teacher

-If a pupil is interrupting or talking over others during classtime, you can agree on a special code word with the pupil which you will say if the pupil's behaviour if becoming inappropriate, in order to make them aware. This prevents embarrassment in front of the class.

-Motion to visual displays/agreements of class rules to remind a pupil of rules.

-Use visual instructions i.e. hold up a red circle to indicate you want everyone to stop and listen and then a green circle which means 'go'.

Seating Plans

If a pupil is displaying attention seeking and disruptive behaviour, it may be helpful to seat them close to you - where you can keep a close eye on them and away from pupils who they may disrupt or who may distract them.

The following references were used to inform the creation of this resource:

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