



January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Dear Jayne Byrant, MS, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee,

**RE: Trauma informed Schools in Wales and least restrictive practice to support CYP's mental health**

We write to you to express concern about the use of restrictive practice within high schools in Wales, particularly Newport. It has come to our attention that a behaviour management programme called 'Ready to learn' is being used within a number of high schools in Wales. It has also come to our attention that a number of schools are not trauma aware or informed and have not received appropriate training on the impact of adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, adversity and trauma and how to best support children and young people with these challenges.

Through our own research it appears that the 'Ready to Learn' programme originated in a Bristol high school and was created by a school leader called Matthew Stevenson. It is described as a binary system that assesses if children are 'ready to learn or not'. Its original target group was disadvantaged students for whom it was recognised were more likely to experience 'poor behaviour during lessons'. [Mr Stevenson said writing for SecEd:](#)

*"If students aren't focused in lessons, they receive a warning, with their name written on the board. Students automatically receive a warning for talking over the teacher or another student, or for being off task. Students who receive a second warning in a single lesson are sent to our **isolation room for a full school day** (that is, five full lessons including an hour's detention after-school). This is a massive deterrent, and despite high numbers initially, we have relatively few students in isolation now.*

*Underlying everything we did was a huge increase in student responsibility. Students are expected to **make their own way to the isolation room and are responsible for their behaviour once there** (three warnings in the isolation room results in a day's exclusion). This reflected our belief that the vast, vast majority of students **can behave well, if they choose to.**"*

The Centre for Mental Health Trauma, challenging behaviour and restrictive interventions in schools [policy briefing](#) states that challenging behaviour and trauma are associated. Young people who show challenging behaviour are more likely than average to have been exposed to trauma.

In some cases, challenging behaviour is a symptom of trauma. Thousands of young people are subject to some form of restrictive intervention in schools in the UK every year for challenging behaviour. There is reason to believe that these interventions have a negative impact on mental health, irrespective of previous trauma exposure.

Young people who have experienced trauma in the past are especially at risk of experiencing psychological harm from restrictive interventions. For example, exclusion and seclusion can echo relational trauma and systemic trauma; while physical restraint can echo physical and sexual abuse. As a result, these interventions may cause harm and potentially drive even more challenging behaviour.



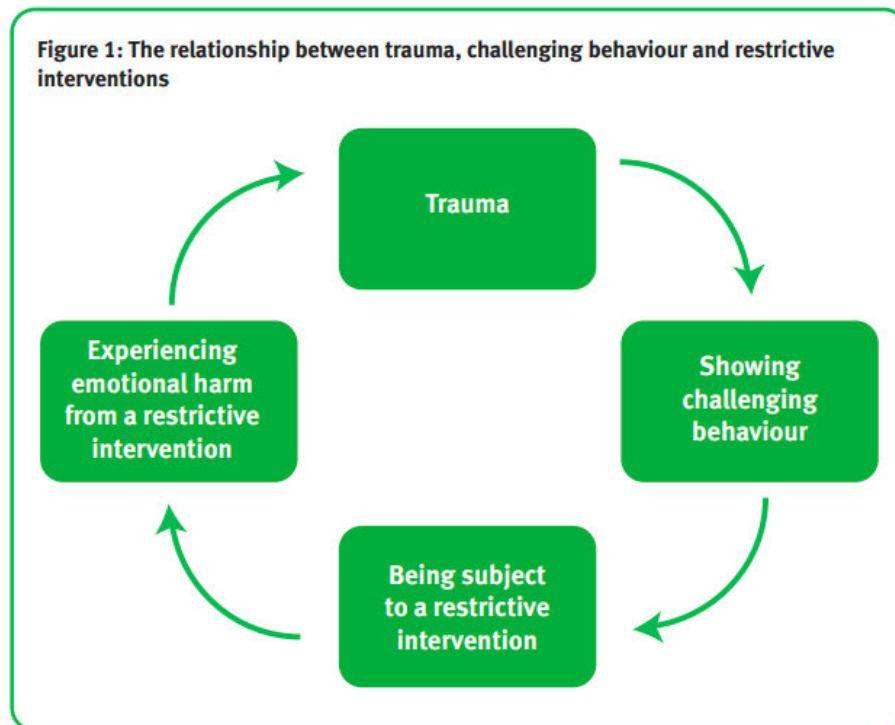


Figure one: Centre for Mental Health Trauma, challenging behaviour, and restrictive interventions in school cycle

**We have the following principal concerns about the Ready to Learn programme’s ethos, approach, and use:**

- It is not a trauma or relationally informed approach.
- It is not in line with the [Welsh Government Reducing Restrictive Practice Guidelines](#)
- It is not in keeping with the [Trauma informed Wales: A Societal Approach](#)
- To our knowledge the programme does not have any formal monitoring system and practice is not over seen by any governing or best standards body. There is no mechanism for ensuring children’s rights are not being breached.
- There is not publicly available routinely collected data, no evaluation methodology and no evidence base to support its effectiveness, efficacy, or safe use.
- There is evidence to suggest its use is contra-indicated to the promotion of good mental health and the reduction of incidents of behaviours that challenge/behaviours of distress.
- It is out of step with other psychosocial and trauma informed interventions, the evidence base and [policy position statements](#) on child development.

In contrast, the use of approaches such as positive behavioural support (PBS) which is recommended by the WG Reducing Restrictive Practice Guidelines reduces the use of restrictive interventions and incidences of ‘behaviours that challenge’/behaviours of distress. Trauma-informed schools seek to minimise the trauma-causing potential of the school environment, and to maximise the healing potential of the school environment. This alongside the implementation of a whole school approach





are practices that are supportive of creating psychosocially and relationally healthy school culture which in turn reduces children and young people's exposure to distress as well as is supportive of providing safe secure and nurturing relationships which are necessary to heal from trauma and adversity.

We would like to see all schools and education settings in Wales:

- To undertake trauma informed training that includes an understanding of children and young people's developmental, attachment and relational needs.
- To implement the WG Reducing Restrictive Practice Guidelines and to use least restrictive approaches to managing children and young people's distress (behaviours that challenge).

