

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING POLICY

The Tree House International, Sri Lanka

Policy Information

Policy information	Details
Policy title	Social and Emotional Learning Policy
School	The Tree House International, Sri Lanka
Policy owner	Directors
Strategic oversight	Dr Anton James and Ms Honsaker
Implementation oversight	Team Leaders and Clinical Coordinators
Applies to	All students and all staff involved in education, clinical support, behaviour support, supervision and student welfare
Framework	CASEL Social and Emotional Learning framework
Supporting international framework	Social Emotional Learning and Child Self Protection Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks for International Schools
Professional ethical foundation	Relevant professional codes applicable to individual staff, including the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Ethics Code where applicable
Approval date	To be entered following formal approval
Effective date	1 January 2026
Review	At least annually, and earlier where changes in evidence, professional standards, safeguarding requirements or school practice require review
Version	3.0

1. Policy Statement

1.1 The Tree House International recognises social and emotional development as an integral part of education, wellbeing, safety, communication, independence and meaningful participation.

1.2 The Tree House International provides individualised one to one education for children with special educational needs. Students may have diverse developmental, cognitive, communication, sensory, behavioural, social and emotional profiles. Some students may have limited spoken language, may be non speaking, or may not yet have a consistently reliable means of communicating everything that they experience, feel, prefer, need or wish to refuse.

1.3 For that reason, Social and Emotional Learning at The Tree House International is not based on an assumption of typical speech, typical social communication, typical sensory processing, chronological age expectations or a single pathway of social development.

1.4 The school has adopted the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework, known as CASEL. CASEL identifies five interconnected areas of competence: self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. CASEL places these competencies within a wider system that includes supportive learning environments, families, communities and schoolwide practices rather than treating SEL simply as a stand alone lesson. The policy is also informed by the **Social Emotional Learning and Child Self Protection Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks for International Schools**. These standards were developed in 2023 by CASEL and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children through a grant from the United States Department of State Office of Overseas Schools. The framework was expressly designed so that individual international schools would create implementation arrangements suited to their own students and circumstances. It recommends integration across school, home and community environments and describes the standards as intended for whole school delivery. This is therefore an original school policy developed specifically for the one to one special educational model of The Tree House International. It does not seek to reproduce the policy of another school or to apply a mainstream classroom model to students whose learning and communication needs may be substantially different.

1.5 The central principle of this policy is:

Social and Emotional Learning should increase a student's ability to understand and communicate themselves, participate meaningfully, develop relationships, make choices, seek assistance, remain safe and experience greater autonomy and wellbeing. It must not be reduced to obtaining outward compliance from the student.

1.6 The school will therefore distinguish between a student being calm, a student complying with an adult request, a student demonstrating a taught behaviour and a student experiencing genuine social and emotional wellbeing. These are not assumed to be the same thing.

2. Purpose, Scope and Guiding Principles

2.1 Purpose

2.1.1 The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent schoolwide approach to Social and Emotional Learning that is appropriate for students with special educational needs receiving predominantly one to one education.

2.1.2 It establishes how The Tree House International will understand, individualise, teach, support, monitor and safeguard social and emotional development.

2.1.3 The policy also establishes how the school's CASEL framework interacts with communication support, Individual Education Plans, positive behaviour support, student consent and assent, safeguarding, peer interaction, family partnership and the professional responsibilities of staff.

2.1.4 The international standards developed through the Department of State supported CASEL and ICMEC project specifically recommend a supportive environment characterised by belonging and emotional safety, explicit instruction in social and emotional skills, and

integration of SEL with the wider educational programme. They also recommend that SEL should be a responsibility of school leadership and teaching staff collectively rather than belonging solely to one specialist teacher.

2.2 Scope

2.2.1 This policy applies to all students enrolled at The Tree House International and to all staff whose work affects students' educational, behavioural, social, emotional or safeguarding experiences.

2.2.2 Where staff hold professional certification, registration or membership of a professional body, this policy operates alongside the ethical and professional standards applicable to that individual.

2.2.3 Where a member of staff is a Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) certificant, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Ethics Code applies to that certificant's professional activities rather than automatically regulating The Tree House International as an organisation. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) itself states that its Ethics Code applies to relevant certificants and applicants and that the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) does not have separate jurisdiction over organisations or corporations. Accordingly, this policy does **not** state that the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) requires The Tree House International to adopt CASEL or an SEL policy. Rather, the school has chosen to incorporate relevant ethical principles because they are consistent with the school's commitment to student welfare.

2.3 Guiding Principles

2.3.1 The Tree House International believes that students are more able to demonstrate their potential when they are provided with an environment, communication system, teaching approach, level of support and opportunities for participation suited to their individual needs.

2.3.2 A student's difficulty in a particular environment will not automatically be interpreted as defiance, unwillingness, absence of ability or absence of understanding.

2.3.3 The school will seek first to understand the student and the conditions under which learning and participation are occurring.

2.3.4 The school's SEL approach will be guided by student welfare, dignity, compassion, respect, communication, safety, autonomy, self determination, individual differences, meaningful participation, minimisation of harm, evidence informed practice, functional independence, relationships and quality of life.

2.3.5 These principles closely correspond with the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB)'s current Core Principles for behaviour analysts. The Code identifies benefiting others, compassion, dignity, respect, integrity and professional competence as foundational principles. It specifically calls for protection of client welfare and rights, attention to both short term and long term effects, promotion of self determination to the best of the client's abilities, and recognition of personal choice in service delivery. The international CASEL and ICMEC framework similarly places emotional and physical safety, identity, self efficacy, bodily autonomy, belonging, coping, relationships, trusted adults, problem solving and self advocacy within its combined SEL and child protection standards.

2.4 Rights and Student Voice

2.4.1 The school recognises that disability does not reduce a student's inherent dignity or importance as a participant in decisions affecting their life.

2.4.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities identifies the equal rights of children with disabilities and requires that children with disabilities be able to express their views on matters affecting them, with disability and age appropriate assistance where necessary. The Convention also recognises communication broadly, rather than limiting it to speech. The Tree House International therefore adopts the principle that **student voice must not be equated with spoken voice**.

2.4.3 A student may communicate preference, interest, acceptance, discomfort, refusal, distress or a request for change through speech, an established augmentative or alternative communication system, signs, gestures or other communication forms appropriate to that individual.

2.4.4 Observed behaviour may also provide information that staff need to investigate, although staff must exercise care not to assign a specific meaning to behaviour without adequate evidence.

3. Framework and Individualised Social and Emotional Learning Practice

3.1 The CASEL Framework

3.1.1 The school's SEL provision is organised around the five CASEL competencies. The competencies are used as broad domains rather than rigid developmental stages. CASEL itself describes them as interrelated areas that can be applied across developmental stages and diverse cultural contexts. At The Tree House International, the competencies will be interpreted in relation to each student's developmental profile, communication abilities, current skills, needs and priorities.

3.2 Self Awareness

3.2.1 Self awareness concerns the student's developing understanding of themselves.

3.2.2 Depending on the individual student, teaching may address recognition or communication of emotions, identification of likes and dislikes, awareness of strengths, recognition of bodily or emotional signals, identification of personal needs, understanding when assistance is needed, recognising discomfort, developing a concept of self, making choices and communicating personal preferences.

3.2.3 For some students, the appropriate objective may be identifying and naming a complex emotional state. For another student, an equally meaningful self awareness objective may be discriminating between comfortable and uncomfortable states or using an established communication response to indicate a need for help.

3.2.4 The CASEL and ICMEC standards connect self awareness with understanding emotions, recognising strengths and challenges, identity, rights, bodily autonomy and the ability to advocate for safety and support.

3.3 Self Management

3.3.1 Self management concerns the development of skills that enable a student, with appropriate support, to manage emotions, stress, behaviour, goals and participation.

3.3.2 Depending on individual need, this may involve communicating distress, recognising triggers, requesting assistance, requesting a break, accessing an appropriate regulation strategy, tolerating manageable changes, learning strategies for frustration, recovering following distress, setting personal goals or increasing independence.

3.3.3 The CASEL and ICMEC international standards include constructive expression and management of emotions and stress, goal development, agency, self care and coping strategies within self management. At The Tree House International, **self management is not synonymous with remaining quiet, sitting still, obeying an instruction or suppressing visible signs of distress.**

3.3.4 A student's observable behaviour will be interpreted within its context. Staff should consider communication, physical health, emotional state, sensory conditions, motivation, task demands, learning history, environmental conditions and the availability of appropriate coping or communication skills.

3.3.5 Where a student's behaviour changes significantly and there is a reasonable possibility that medical or biological variables are contributing, appropriately qualified staff should consider the need for medical assessment or referral rather than assuming that the matter is solely behavioural. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Code places an explicit responsibility on behaviour analysts to consider medical needs where behaviour may be influenced by medical or biological variables.

3.4 Social Awareness

3.4.1 Social awareness concerns awareness of and participation in the social world at a level appropriate to the individual student.

3.4.2 Teaching may include attending to other people, understanding that other people can have preferences different from one's own, recognising emotions in others where appropriate, developing perspective taking, respecting differences, understanding social situations, recognising boundaries, responding appropriately to another person's communication and learning that other people also have a right to say no.

3.4.3 The international standards expand social awareness to include belonging, empathy, respect for differences, awareness of norms and systems, and recognition of diversity across culture, language and ability. The school will not assume that conventional eye contact, conventional facial expression, typical conversational style or a typical level of social interest is necessary evidence of social awareness.

3.4.4 Social goals must have a meaningful benefit to the student or others.

3.4.5 A harmless neurodivergent characteristic should not be selected for change merely because it appears unusual or differs from a conventional social expectation.

3.5 Relationship Skills

3.5.1 Relationship skills may include functional communication, responding to communication from others, play, joint engagement, sharing activities, turn taking where meaningful, cooperation, seeking assistance, expressing disagreement, understanding another person's boundaries, conflict resolution, friendship skills, self advocacy and maintaining safe relationships.

3.5.2 The CASEL and ICMEC standards describe relationship skills in terms of communication across diverse backgrounds and abilities, constructive relationships and respectful resolution of interpersonal conflict. The goal is not to produce a predetermined outward version of sociability. It is to expand each student's ability to form and navigate relationships that are safe, meaningful and appropriate for that student.

3.6 Responsible Decision Making

3.6.1 Responsible decision making will be interpreted according to each student's developmental and communication abilities.

3.6.2 For one student, this may mean evaluating consequences and solving a complex interpersonal problem.

3.6.3 For another, it may mean choosing between two activities.

3.6.4 For another, it may mean communicating “no”, requesting help, selecting a preferred regulation option, avoiding an unsafe situation, following an individual safety routine or identifying a trusted person.

3.6.5 Decision making should progressively increase meaningful participation and independence wherever appropriate.

3.7 Individualisation

3.7.1 The school's adopted international framework explicitly states that schools and students are unique and that schools should establish their own implementation plans. It also directs schools to make lessons accessible to neurodiverse students and students with learning differences. The Tree House International therefore rejects a uniform SEL curriculum in which every student is expected to achieve the same competency in the same way at the same chronological age.

3.7.2 Planning will take account of the student's developmental level, receptive communication, expressive communication, AAC use where applicable, cognitive profile, sensory profile, adaptive functioning, social understanding, emotional regulation, existing skills, learning needs, strengths, interests, preferences, family context, cultural context and Individual Education Plan priorities.

3.7.3 This approach is also consistent with the available research on SEL for students with special educational needs. A systematic review found some positive effects but concluded that the evidence base is substantially smaller than that for students without special educational needs and that effects were generally small. The review also stressed the importance of appropriate assessment and implementation quality. The school will therefore avoid assuming that a standard mainstream SEL programme is automatically effective for every student with special educational needs.

3.8 SEL within Individual Education Plans

3.8.1 Where an SEL need is educationally or functionally significant for an individual student, it may be incorporated into the student's Individual Education Plan.

3.8.2 Objectives should be appropriate to the student's current level and meaningful in everyday life.

3.8.3 Where measurement is appropriate, objectives should be sufficiently defined for the team to determine whether progress is occurring.

3.8.4 Measurement should not, however, reduce complex emotional experiences to a single behavioural indicator when this would produce an inaccurate picture of wellbeing.

3.8.5 The student's own baseline and individual progress should ordinarily carry greater weight than comparison with typically developing peers.

3.8.6 The systematic review of SEL for students with special educational needs specifically identifies the need for assessment instruments appropriate to the population being evaluated.

3.9 SEL Throughout the Day

3.9.1 SEL at The Tree House International is not required to exist only as a scheduled lesson.

3.9.2 The school's one to one model allows social and emotional learning to be incorporated naturally into communication, transitions, academic instruction, problem solving, leisure, peer interaction, choices, emotional events and daily routines.

3.9.3 The international framework supports both explicit SEL teaching and integration of SEL across wider instruction. It recommends opportunities to practise and reinforce SEL skills throughout learning rather than teaching them exclusively in isolation. Where child self protection material is taught, however, the school will give particular consideration to the sensitivity of the subject, student readiness, communication accessibility, safeguarding arrangements and appropriate professional support. The CASEL and ICMEC framework recommends that safeguarding content be introduced only when strong protection procedures and staff training are already in place.

4. Communication, Consent, Assent, Dignity and Autonomy

4.1 Communication as a Foundation

4.1.1 The Tree House International regards functional communication as central to social and emotional wellbeing.

4.1.2 Students should, according to their individual abilities and needs, be supported to communicate wants, needs, preferences, emotions, discomfort, pain, refusal, requests for assistance, requests for attention, requests for a break, concerns about safety and information that something is wrong.

4.1.3 Students should also be supported to participate in decisions affecting them to the greatest extent reasonably possible.

4.1.4 Communication is not limited to speech.

4.1.5 AAC can include both unaided communication such as gestures, facial expressions, signs and vocalisations, and aided methods such as communication boards, pictures, writing, tablets, communication applications and speech generating devices. ASHA recommends multimodal communication support across school environments and states that AAC systems should be designed around individual strengths and needs. Where a student has an established AAC system, staff responsible for that student's education should support reasonable access to it during the school day, including during social and emotional teaching and when the student may need to communicate discomfort, refusal or a request for assistance.

4.1.6 ASHA specifically states that people using AAC should have access to their communication tools and recommends involving the individual and family in decision making to the greatest extent possible. No student should be presumed to have no meaningful preference merely because they cannot express that preference through speech.

4.2 Communication and Behaviour

4.2.1 Behaviour can provide important information.

4.2.2 A sudden increase in avoidance, withdrawal, agitation, repetitive behaviour, self injury, aggression, attempts to leave, changes in engagement or other changes from a student's normal presentation may warrant investigation of communication, emotional, physical, social, sensory and environmental variables.

4.2.3 Staff must not automatically conclude that a particular behaviour has one meaning.

4.2.4 Where behaviour analysis is involved, assessment should be based on evidence and individual context. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Code requires behaviour analysts to design assessments and interventions according to scientific evidence, client needs, context and resources while maximising benefit and minimising harm.

4.3 Consent

4.3.1 Consent and assent serve related but different functions.

4.3.2 For behaviour analytic services provided by Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) certificants, the current Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Ethics Code requires behaviour analysts to know when informed consent is required and to explain, obtain, reobtain and document that consent. The Code identifies implementation of assessments and behaviour change interventions and substantial changes to intervention as examples of circumstances in which consent requirements may apply. At The Tree House International, appropriate informed consent will therefore be obtained for assessments, new interventions and significant changes to intervention where required by applicable law, professional standards or school procedures.

4.3.3 Where the student does not have legal authority or capacity to provide the required informed consent, consent will be sought from the appropriate parent, guardian or legally authorised representative in accordance with applicable requirements.

4.3.4 This policy does not attempt to determine legal capacity by diagnosis, age or disability alone. Legal questions concerning consent will be handled according to applicable Sri Lankan law and any professional requirements governing the service concerned.

4.4 Assent

4.4.1 Consent from an authorised adult does not make the student's own willingness irrelevant.

4.4.2 The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Ethics Code defines assent separately from informed consent and requires behaviour analysts to obtain client assent when applicable. Its formal glossary describes assent as vocal or nonvocal verbal behaviour indicating willingness to participate by a person who cannot provide informed consent. The Tree House International will therefore seek to recognise student assent and indicators of withdrawal of willingness on an ongoing basis where this can meaningfully be assessed.

4.4.3 For a student using speech, this may include verbal agreement or refusal.

4.4.4 For a student using AAC, assent or refusal may be communicated through that system.

4.4.5 For other students, individually understood communicative gestures, signs or responses may contribute to determining willingness.

4.4.6 In addition, observable behaviour that repeatedly accompanies participation, avoidance, distress or withdrawal should be taken seriously as information requiring assessment even when it does not independently meet the formal Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) definition of assent.

4.4.7 This distinction is important. **Staff should not casually label every behaviour as assent or withdrawal of assent. At the same time, limited communication must never become a reason to ignore obvious distress or repeated attempts to escape an activity.**

4.4.8 Peer reviewed discussion of assent within ABA and positive behaviour support has similarly emphasised person centred participation and recognition of both vocal and nonvocal expressions of willingness and withdrawal, although the empirical literature on assent based practice remains developing.

4.5 Responding to Withdrawal of Willingness

4.5.1 Where a student communicates refusal or demonstrates credible indicators of withdrawal of willingness, staff should, whenever safely and reasonably possible, pause and assess the situation rather than automatically increasing pressure for compliance.

4.5.2 The team should consider the student's communication, physical condition, emotional state, environmental conditions, sensory factors, task demands, teaching method, familiarity with the adult, reinforcement conditions, difficulty level and the student's access to an appropriate means of requesting assistance or a break.

4.5.3 Repeated refusal or distress associated with a programme should trigger clinical or educational review where appropriate.

4.5.4 This principle does not mean that every request, educational expectation or safety requirement becomes optional. There may be circumstances involving immediate safety, serious risk of harm or essential protective action in which adults have a duty to intervene.

4.5.5 Where this occurs, any intervention should be proportionate to the situation, consistent with safeguarding requirements and applicable professional standards, and should protect the student's dignity to the greatest extent possible.

4.5.6 For Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) certificants, the Code requires behaviour change interventions to minimise harm, gives preference to positive reinforcement procedures and places significant restrictions on the use of restrictive or punishment based procedures.

4.6 Choice and Self Determination

4.6.1 Students should have meaningful opportunities to make choices appropriate to their abilities.

4.6.2 Choice may concern activities, materials, order of tasks, communication, social interaction, leisure, regulation options, personal preferences or other aspects of daily school life.

4.6.3 Choice must be genuine wherever it is presented as a choice. Staff should not routinely present an instruction as an apparent choice when only one response will actually be accepted.

4.6.4 Developing the ability to say yes is important.

4.6.5 Developing the ability to say no is also important.

4.6.6 The CASEL and ICMEC framework includes bodily autonomy, consent, personal boundaries, self advocacy, expression of personal needs and preferences and seeking support within its child protection standards. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Core Principles similarly require behaviour analysts to respect and actively promote self determination to the best of the client's abilities and recognise personal choice within services.

4.7 Dignity and Target Selection

4.7.1 The school will not select social or behavioural objectives solely for cosmetic normalisation.

4.7.2 A social or behavioural goal should have a defensible relationship to learning, communication, safety, wellbeing, relationships, independence, access to the environment, self advocacy or quality of life.

4.7.3 The fact that a behaviour looks unusual is not sufficient reason on its own to change it.

4.7.4 When deciding whether an objective is appropriate, staff should ask whether the proposed change primarily benefits the student or primarily makes the student's disability less visible or more convenient for other people.

4.7.5 Where Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) certificants are involved, clients and relevant stakeholders should be appropriately involved in selecting goals and designing interventions. The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Code expressly requires such involvement throughout the service relationship.

5. Relationships, Bullying, Safeguarding and One to One Provision

5.1 The Implications of One to One Education

5.1.1 The Tree House International's one to one model creates a distinctive social environment.

5.1.2 Individual teaching allows a staff member to develop detailed knowledge of a student's communication, learning profile, preferences, strengths, regulation patterns and individual indicators of distress.

5.1.3 At the same time, one to one education means that many peer learning opportunities that occur incidentally in larger classrooms may need to be created deliberately.

5.1.4 The school will therefore use one to one teaching both to establish foundational SEL skills and, where appropriate, to prepare students to use those skills with other people.

5.1.5 The school will not assume that successful performance with a familiar teacher proves that a skill is established across other relationships or environments.

5.2 Planned Peer Interaction

5.2.1 Where appropriate to the student's Individual Education Plan, abilities, interests and preferences, the school may plan supported opportunities for interaction with peers.

5.2.2 These may involve play, recreation, turn taking, shared interests, collaborative activities, leisure, communication, structured social opportunities or other meaningful interactions.

5.2.3 The purpose is not to maximise the quantity of peer contact regardless of student preference.

5.2.4 The purpose is to provide appropriate opportunities for students who would benefit from developing, practising or enjoying peer relationships.

5.2.5 A student's preference for solitude, predictable interaction or a smaller social circle is not automatically treated as a social deficit.

5.3 Generalisation

5.3.1 Generalisation is particularly important in a one to one school.

5.3.2 A student may learn to request a break from one familiar teacher without being able to do so with another adult.

5.3.3 A student may identify an emotion from a teaching card without being able to communicate their own distress.

5.3.4 A student may perform a conflict resolution response in a structured teaching situation without being able to use the skill when genuinely upset.

5.3.5 A student may communicate “no” successfully in teaching but fail to do so in a situation involving a significant power imbalance.

5.3.6 For this reason, learning will not be judged solely by performance during structured instruction.

5.3.7 Where appropriate, the school should examine whether a skill transfers across relevant people, activities, materials, environments and naturally occurring situations.

5.3.8 For behaviour analysts, this is consistent with Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Standard 2.14, which requires consideration of interventions likely to produce outcomes that maintain under naturalistic conditions.

5.4 Bullying

5.4.1 The Tree House International's one to one educational arrangement means students are not continuously placed in a large peer classroom. This changes the contexts in which bullying can arise, but it does **not** eliminate the possibility of bullying.

5.4.2 Bullying or other harmful peer interaction may occur whenever students interact, including during shared activities, recreation, transitions, social opportunities, events, community participation or other school settings.

5.4.3 The school will therefore neither exaggerate bullying risk nor claim that bullying cannot happen.

5.4.4 This is especially important in special education. Research has found that autistic students and students with disabilities can experience substantial levels of bullying victimisation, although estimates vary markedly by study, population and measurement method. The CASEL and ICMEC international standards explicitly include bullying, child on child abuse, unsafe relationships, seeking help, personal boundaries and trusted adults within child self protection learning. Any allegation, observation or reasonable suspicion of bullying will therefore be taken seriously.

5.4.5 Staff should intervene appropriately to stop immediate harm, support the student, document and report the concern according to the school's applicable procedures, investigate through accessible communication where appropriate, consider safeguarding implications and implement measures intended to reduce recurrence.

5.4.6 Responses should consider the needs of both the student experiencing harm and any student displaying harmful behaviour. Where a student who engages in harmful behaviour has special educational needs, the school should consider teaching, communication, environmental and behavioural supports as part of the response without minimising the effect on the student who experienced harm.

5.5 Bullying When a Student Has Limited Communication

5.5.1 The school will never make verbal disclosure a prerequisite for responding to a concern.

5.5.2 A student with limited speech may be unable to provide a conventional account of what happened.

5.5.3 Staff should therefore remain alert to significant and unexplained changes such as avoidance of a particular person or location, distress associated with an activity, withdrawal, changes in engagement, repeated attempts to leave a situation or other changes from the student's established pattern.

5.5.4 Such changes are not proof that bullying or abuse has occurred. They are indicators that may require further assessment.

5.5.5 Where concerns arise, staff should use the student's established and reliable communication methods and follow safeguarding procedures.

5.6 Child Self Protection

5.6.1 The SEL programme will support child self protection at an individually appropriate level.

5.6.2 Relevant learning may include recognising safe and unsafe situations, identifying trusted adults, communicating discomfort, communicating refusal, respecting another person's refusal, understanding personal boundaries, body autonomy, seeking assistance, distinguishing safe from unsafe relationships and continuing to seek help when the first attempt is unsuccessful.

5.6.3 These areas reflect the Department of State supported CASEL and ICMEC standards, which specifically include bodily autonomy, consent, abuse recognition, safe and unsafe situations, trusted networks and self advocacy. SEL teaching **does not replace adult safeguarding responsibility**.

5.6.4 The ability of a student to identify danger, report abuse or communicate refusal must never be treated as the primary mechanism protecting that student from harm.

5.6.5 The adult and organisational systems surrounding the child remain essential.

5.7 Safeguarding in a One to One Model

5.7.1 The school recognises that extensive one to one contact between students and adults requires particularly clear professional boundaries, supervision and safeguarding arrangements.

5.7.2 ICMEC safeguarding guidance emphasises professional boundaries and the importance, where one to one contact occurs, of interactions being observable and interruptible as a risk mitigation principle for vulnerable students. Because one to one instruction is central to The Tree House International rather than exceptional, safeguarding systems must be designed around that reality.

5.7.3 Where practicable, one to one educational interactions should take place in environments that are observable or reasonably interruptible.

5.7.4 Staff must comply with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Staff Code of Conduct.

5.7.5 One to one status does not permit unnecessary secrecy, inappropriate personal relationships, inappropriate physical contact or departure from professional boundaries.

5.7.6 Where privacy is genuinely required because of personal care, dignity, medical needs, assessment, emotional support or another legitimate educational reason, staff must follow the safeguards and procedures applicable to that activity.

5.7.7 Concerns regarding the conduct of an adult must be handled under the school's safeguarding procedures and must never be addressed solely as an SEL matter.

5.7.8 ICMEC guidance for international schools emphasises that concerns about adult conduct should be addressed through explicit child protection processes, documented and handled with the child's best interests central to the response.

5.8 Receiving Disclosures

5.8.1 Staff must know how to respond if a student communicates information suggesting abuse, bullying, exploitation, unsafe contact or another safeguarding concern.

5.8.2 A student's disability or communication method must not lower the seriousness with which a disclosure is treated.

5.8.3 The international CASEL and ICMEC framework specifically states that staff teaching child protection content must know how to receive disclosures and report concerns to the school's safeguarding lead or child protection team. It also warns schools to have strong safeguarding systems in place before implementing child protection curriculum because teaching such material may prompt disclosures. Where safeguarding concerns arise, safeguarding procedures take precedence over ordinary educational confidentiality.

6. Implementation, Assessment, Family Partnership and Professional Responsibilities

6.1 Positive Behaviour Support and SEL

6.1.1 SEL and applied behaviour analysis are not synonymous.

6.1.2 SEL identifies areas of social and emotional development.

6.1.3 Behaviour analytic assessment and teaching methods may contribute to particular objectives where they are appropriate, scientifically supported, ethically implemented and within staff competence.

6.1.4 The school will avoid using SEL language merely to reclassify a behaviour reduction programme.

6.1.5 When behaviour is of concern, the team should consider what the behaviour may indicate about communication, skills, emotional state, physical wellbeing, sensory conditions, environmental demands, reinforcement history and other relevant variables.

6.1.6 Where intervention is necessary, priority should be given, where appropriate, to teaching functional communication, meaningful alternative skills, coping, self advocacy, safer responses, independence and access to supportive environmental conditions.

6.1.7 Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Standards 2.13 to 2.19 require evidence based assessment, positive reinforcement as a priority, consideration of client preferences and context, minimisation of harm, ongoing data based evaluation and attention to environmental conditions interfering with service delivery. Reduction in the frequency of a concerning behaviour may be a relevant outcome, but it will not by itself be treated as proof that the student's emotional wellbeing has improved.

6.1.8 Where wellbeing is an intended outcome, the team should consider additional evidence appropriate to the student.

6.2 Sensory and Environmental Considerations

6.2.1 The school recognises that participation and emotional regulation occur within an environment.

6.2.2 Before assuming that a student lacks a social or emotional skill, staff should consider whether the environment enables the student to demonstrate that skill.

6.2.3 Relevant factors may include noise, crowding, predictability, transitions, sensory demands, communication accessibility, complexity of instruction, unfamiliar adults and the availability of regulation supports.

6.2.4 Any specific sensory intervention should be used within the relevant professional scope of competence and based on appropriate assessment rather than assumed to be beneficial merely because it is described as sensory.

6.2.5 For behaviour analysts, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Code specifically requires identification and response to environmental conditions that interfere with effective service delivery.

6.3 Assessment

6.3.1 SEL assessment should begin with the individual student.

6.3.2 Sources of information may include direct observation, communication assessment, existing educational and clinical assessment, Individual Education Plan review, family

information, data from relevant interventions, student preferences, student communication, staff observations and multidisciplinary professional input where appropriate.

6.3.3 Assessment should seek to identify both strengths and needs.

6.3.4 The school should avoid converting difference into deficit simply because the student does not perform an SEL skill in a conventional way.

6.3.5 Where standardised instruments are used, staff should consider whether the instrument is appropriate for the student's developmental, linguistic, cognitive and communication profile. Modified administration may affect the validity of standardised scores. ASHA similarly cautions that modifications to standardised communication assessments can invalidate standardised scoring and recommends observation and other natural context assessment where appropriate.

6.4 Monitoring Progress

6.4.1 Monitoring should answer meaningful questions.

6.4.2 Can the student use the skill?

6.4.3 Can the student use it independently or with reduced support?

6.4.4 Can the student use it when it matters?

6.4.5 Can the student use it with more than one person?

6.4.6 Can the student use it outside the original teaching context?

6.4.7 Has the intervention increased meaningful communication, safety, participation, autonomy or wellbeing?

6.4.8 Has it produced unintended distress or avoidance?

6.4.9 Does the student continue to show willingness to participate?

6.4.10 Where progress data show that an approach is ineffective or is creating significant difficulty, the programme should be reviewed rather than continued indefinitely because it was originally planned.

6.4.11 This is consistent with the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) requirement for continual evaluation and corrective action when intended outcomes are not being realised.

6.5 Family Partnership

6.5.1 Parents and caregivers are important partners in SEL planning.

6.5.2 Families may provide information that cannot be obtained from school observation alone, including the student's communication outside school, regulation patterns, preferences, fears, relationships, cultural context, behaviour across environments, family priorities and skills that have or have not generalised.

6.5.3 The school should provide meaningful opportunities for family input into significant individual SEL priorities.

6.5.4 Where appropriate, families may also be supported to understand strategies that help a student use a skill outside school.

6.5.5 Consistency should not mean requiring families to reproduce school instruction exactly.

6.5.6 Strategies must take account of family circumstances, values and priorities.

6.5.7 CASEL's schoolwide model identifies family and community partnerships as part of systemic SEL and recommends reciprocal partnerships that allow families to inform and support students' social and emotional development. For AAC users, family involvement is also consistent with professional communication guidance. ASHA recommends involving individuals and family members in decision making to the greatest extent possible and providing communication support across environments.

6.6 Staff Responsibilities

6.6.1 All staff who interact with students contribute to the social and emotional environment of the school.

6.6.2 Staff are expected to treat students with dignity and respect, support individual communication, respond appropriately to distress, create opportunities for meaningful choice, model respectful interaction, recognise professional boundaries, follow safeguarding procedures, avoid unnecessary coercion, work within their competence and implement agreed individual programmes appropriately.

6.6.3 SEL is therefore not assigned to one "SEL teacher".

6.6.4 This whole school approach is consistent with the Department of State supported framework, which states that SEL and child self protection should be a responsibility and priority of school leadership and teaching staff and stresses the importance of adult modelling.

6.7 Team Leaders and Clinical Coordinators

6.7.1 Team Leaders and Clinical Coordinators are responsible for supporting implementation within their areas of responsibility.

6.7.2 This includes helping staff understand the policy, supporting consistent implementation, reviewing concerns, ensuring individualisation, contributing to monitoring, identifying training needs and escalating matters requiring Director level or safeguarding attention.

6.7.3 Where behaviour analytic programming is involved, appropriately qualified supervisors must ensure that clinical work remains within their competence and applicable ethical responsibilities.

6.8 Professional Competence

6.8.1 Members of staff who hold professional credentials remain responsible for practising within the scope of those credentials.

6.8.2 For Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) certificants, the Code requires practice within scope of competence and appropriate additional study, training or supervised experience before entering new areas of practice. This means that describing an intervention as SEL does not authorise an individual to provide psychological, speech and language, occupational therapy, medical or other specialised services outside their professional competence.

6.8.3 Where a student's needs exceed the competence available within a particular role, appropriate consultation or referral should be considered.

6.9 Professional Development

6.9.1 The school should provide staff with training appropriate to their responsibilities in areas relevant to implementation of this policy.

6.9.2 Training priorities may include CASEL competencies, communication and AAC awareness, recognising student distress, consent and assent, self advocacy, child protection, bullying, professional boundaries, supporting neurodivergent students, positive behaviour support, data interpretation and generalisation.

6.9.3 The CASEL and ICMEC international standards specifically identify teacher training as essential before delivering SEL and child protection objectives, including training in safe psychological spaces, trauma awareness, accessibility for neurodiverse students, disclosures and reporting. Adult SEL should also form part of implementation. The international framework recommends that staff have opportunities to reflect on their own social and emotional competencies, identities and biases because adult behaviour and modelling influence implementation.

6.10 Mental Health and Multidisciplinary Support

6.10.1 SEL is educational. It is not a substitute for mental health assessment or treatment.

6.10.2 Where a student's presentation suggests significant anxiety, depression, trauma, medical difficulty, mental health risk or another concern requiring expertise beyond the role of the staff involved, the matter should be escalated and appropriate professional input considered.

6.10.3 The school should not attempt to explain every form of distress exclusively through behaviour or SEL.

7. Governance, Implementation, Review and Related Policies

7.1 Governance

7.1.1 The Social and Emotional Learning Policy is overseen by the Directors of The Tree House International, **Dr Anton James and Ms Honsaker**.

7.1.2 The Directors have strategic responsibility for ensuring that the school's approach to SEL remains consistent with its educational philosophy, student welfare responsibilities, safeguarding obligations, evidence informed practice and relevant professional standards.

7.1.3 Team Leaders and Clinical Coordinators have operational responsibility for supporting and monitoring implementation within their areas.

7.1.4 Staff responsible for individual students are responsible for applying the principles of the policy within their roles and competence.

7.2 Implementation Responsibilities

7.2.1 Implementation should be evident in everyday practice rather than demonstrated only by possession of the policy.

7.2.2 The school should be able to demonstrate that individual student needs are considered, communication is supported, relevant SEL goals appear in educational planning where appropriate, staff can recognise and escalate safeguarding concerns, students have meaningful

opportunities for choice and self advocacy, progress is monitored, and social skills are generalised beyond one familiar adult when this is an appropriate objective.

7.2.3 The CASEL and ICMEC standards were intentionally designed for whole school implementation and call upon leadership to devote time, expertise and resources to their development and implementation.

7.3 Policy Monitoring

7.3.1 Implementation may be monitored through review of Individual Education Plans, supervision, staff observation, family feedback, student communication where accessible, safeguarding information, bullying or peer incident records, programme review, progress data, staff training records and clinical or educational review.

7.3.2 Monitoring should include both intended benefits and possible unintended effects.

7.3.3 Where there is evidence that an intervention is producing persistent distress, excessive avoidance, loss of communication opportunities, unnecessary dependency, inappropriate restriction of autonomy or another adverse outcome, the team should review the intervention.

7.4 Student Involvement

7.4.1 Students should be involved in SEL decisions at the greatest level accessible to them.

7.4.2 For students who can participate in formal planning discussions, their views should be sought directly.

7.4.3 For students who communicate through AAC, an accessible communication method should be available.

7.4.4 For students whose communication is emerging or less conventional, the team should make reasonable efforts to identify reliable indicators of preference and involve those who know the student's communication well.

7.4.5 The CASEL and ICMEC implementation guidance specifically identifies student voice as important and recommends giving students opportunities to contribute to curriculum topics, delivery and feedback.

7.5 Review Following Significant Events

7.5.1 This policy should be reviewed earlier than the normal annual review where necessary following a serious safeguarding event, significant bullying concern, substantial change in school provision, important change to professional ethical requirements, relevant new evidence, a pattern of concerns relating to implementation or another event demonstrating that current procedures may be insufficient.

7.6 Relationship with Safeguarding

7.6.1 This policy operates alongside, and never in place of, the school's formal Safeguarding and Child Protection arrangements.

7.6.2 Where an SEL concern becomes a safeguarding concern, safeguarding procedures take precedence.

7.6.3 A student disclosing or communicating possible harm should not simply be redirected into an emotional regulation programme.

7.6.4 The concern should be handled according to the school's safeguarding procedures.

7.7 Relationship with Behaviour Support

7.7.1 SEL and behaviour support overlap but have different purposes.

7.7.2 A Behaviour Support Policy or individual behaviour support plan may establish procedures for understanding and responding to behaviour.

7.7.3 This SEL Policy establishes the wider principles governing social and emotional development, communication, autonomy, relationships, self advocacy and wellbeing.

7.7.4 Neither should be used to circumvent safeguarding, consent or professional ethical requirements.

7.8 Relationship with Other School Documentation

7.8.1 Subject to confirmation of the formal titles used by The Tree House International, this policy should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy; Behaviour Support procedures; Anti Bullying procedures or policy; Individual Education Planning procedures; Curriculum documentation; Health and Safety requirements; Staff Code of Conduct; professional supervision requirements; and relevant communication or AAC plans.

7.8.2 No policy title in this paragraph should be treated as confirmation that a separate document currently exists unless formally adopted by The Tree House International.

7.9 Annual Review Questions

7.9.1 As part of review, the Directors, Team Leaders and Clinical Coordinators should consider whether students with limited communication can meaningfully express choice, discomfort and requests for help; whether SEL objectives are individualised rather than based solely on chronological age; whether staff can distinguish regulation from compliance; whether harmless neurodivergent behaviour is being inappropriately targeted; whether peer interaction is available where beneficial; whether generalisation is being adequately addressed; whether bullying concerns can be identified without dependence on verbal disclosure; whether one to one provision remains appropriately safeguarded; whether staff understand consent and assent; whether family input is incorporated appropriately; and whether the policy is reflected in actual school practice.

7.9.2 The answer to these questions should guide improvement rather than merely confirm compliance.

8. Evidence Base and References

8.1 Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

8.1.1 This policy deliberately uses several complementary sources rather than copying a policy created for another school.

8.1.2 CASEL's current framework identifies self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making as the five interconnected SEL

competencies and places them within a systemic model involving classrooms, schools, families and communities.

8.2 Social Emotional Learning and Child Self Protection Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks for International Schools

8.2.1 This is the principal international school framework informing the policy. CASEL and ICMEC developed it in 2023 through a grant from the United States Department of State Office of Overseas Schools. The document states that international schools should create their own implementation plans and that the standards are intended for whole school delivery. It includes accessibility for neurodiverse students and students with learning differences, student voice, adult SEL, emotional safety, child self protection, consent, trusted networks, bullying, relationships and self advocacy.

8.4 Behavior Analyst Certification Board Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts

8.4.1 The current Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Code provides the ethical foundation used in this policy where behaviour analytic services are involved. Particularly relevant requirements concern client welfare and rights, dignity, compassion, self determination, personal choice, competence, client involvement, informed consent, assent, evidence based assessment, individualised intervention, positive reinforcement, minimisation of harm, continual evaluation, environmental conditions and responsibility to clients. The Code regulates relevant certificants rather than The Tree House International itself, which is why this policy does not state that the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) mandates SEL for the school.

8.5 Communication and AAC

8.5.1 The American Speech Language Hearing Association's AAC guidance supports individualised multimodal communication, family and student participation, AAC use across school environments and access to communication systems. It also recognises that AAC may be required by people with autism, intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities and other communication conditions.

8.6 SEL and Special Educational Needs Research

8.6.1 A systematic review of school based SEL interventions for students with special educational needs identified some positive effects, but generally small ones, and stressed that the research base for this population remains limited. It also highlighted training, implementation quality and appropriate assessment as important considerations. This evidence supports the school's decision to individualise CASEL rather than assume that a standard mainstream SEL programme will produce the same effects for every student.

8.7 Assent

8.7.1 The policy's distinction between legal informed consent and student assent is grounded first in the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) Code, which separately defines the two and requires assent when applicable. Peer reviewed work by Breaux and Smith additionally argues for a person centred approach in which willingness and withdrawal are meaningfully incorporated into ABA and positive behaviour support practice, while acknowledging that the empirical literature is still developing.

8.8 Disability Rights

8.8.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides an additional rights based foundation for dignity, participation, communication, expression of views and respect for children with disabilities.

8.9 Safeguarding

8.9.1 ICMEC's international school safeguarding resources emphasise strong child protection policies, professional boundaries, staff training, documented reporting systems and appropriate safeguards around individual adult and student contact. These principles are particularly relevant because The Tree House International's educational model intentionally involves extensive one to one interaction.

9. Policy Conclusion

9.1 The Tree House International adopts Social and Emotional Learning not as a programme for making students appear more typical, and not as another name for behaviour compliance, but as a structured and individualised commitment to helping students develop the communication, awareness, regulation, agency, relationships, decision making, self advocacy and safety skills that are meaningful to their lives.

9.2 Within a one to one special educational model, this requires deliberate attention to both the advantages and the responsibilities created by individualised education.

9.3 The school therefore commits to using the CASEL framework flexibly; adapting learning to disability, development and communication; protecting dignity and welfare; supporting communication in all appropriate forms; distinguishing consent from assent; taking refusal and distress seriously; creating peer opportunities where meaningful; safeguarding all one to one interactions; responding to bullying even where verbal disclosure is not possible; evaluating progress beyond the teaching table; involving families; and ensuring that social and emotional development contributes to **greater wellbeing, safety, autonomy, participation, relationships and quality of life for the individual student.**