

Literacy Connections

Understanding and Reducing Student Distress Policy

Literacy Connections staff are committed to the physical and emotional safety of every student. We recognise that learning environments can contribute to student distress¹ and challenging behaviours, and we seek to respond in helpful and safe ways. We use proactive, mana-enhancing teaching and learning practices that support participation, belonging, and wellbeing for all students.

¹ *Distress is an expression of an unmet need or want. It occurs when the level of stress exceeds students' ability to cope and recover without support. Distress can present as visible behaviours to others. The factors that lead to distress may seem unremarkable to other people.*

Literacy Connections tutors follow a practical and developmental approach to recognising and responding to student distress, as well as restoring a healthy learning environment after a challenging situation. The approach to student distress within these guidelines is defined by the principles of recognise, respond and restore.

Recognise | Mātaitia

We work with students and their parents/caregivers and whānau to recognise signs that a student is becoming overwhelmed or struggling, and find ways of responding that are helpful and appropriate to the student.

Tutors are alert to signs of student distress, including:

- disengaging from the learning or interactions
- making noises, speaking quickly, or repeating other people's words
- agitated physical actions (e.g. rocking, pacing, clenching fists).

Individual support plans

If required, Literacy Connections will use a support plan (that may be in use at home and school) for students to maintain safe and inclusive learning environments that respect the mana of our students. We use support plans to describe and understand triggers for individual students that may result in them experiencing distress. We work with students and their parents/caregivers and whānau to:

- clarify priorities for the student
- agree on shared protocols (including for communication)
- create a shared understanding of privacy requirements
- share details of any available support.

Respond | Atawhaitia

In situations where it appears a student is overwhelmed or not coping, we maintain awareness of our own response, and take a calm co-regulation approach. This may include:

- validating student emotions, using slow, clear action and communication
- being mindful of body language (e.g. approaching from the side instead of the front, using appropriate eye contact)
- moving out of their space and giving time.

If the situation continues to escalate, we take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of all students and staff. This may include:

- finishing the current session
- removing potentially dangerous items
- responding to threats by keeping a safe distance and calling parents to collect.
- calling the police if necessary.

In situations of student distress, tutors may only use physical restraint if all three of these conditions are met, and only as a last resort.

1. If physical restraint is necessary to prevent imminent harm, (*In the context of relevant legislation, imminent harm is an immediate threat that a person will cause and/or suffer harm which jeopardises the health, safety, or wellbeing of themselves or others if protective action is not taken immediately.*) including significant emotional distress (*In the context of relevant legislation, significant emotional distress means harm that is caused by the intentional acts of one person that significantly affects the emotional wellbeing of another person, to such an extent that they need intensive support to cope and recover*) to the student or any person present.
2. If the tutor reasonably believes there is no other option available in the circumstances for preventing harm.
3. If the physical restraint is reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances. This means only applying as much force as is necessary, and for the minimum amount of time necessary.

Notifying the Use of Physical Restraint

If a situation occurs involving physical restraint, we notify the parents straight away.

Restore | Whakawhenuatia

After a challenging incident or a situation involving physical restraint, we take restorative action to support and monitor the wellbeing of anyone affected by the situation.

Following an incident, we refer to strategies within individual support plans, and support all students to re-engage with tutoring.

Tutors involved in a challenging incident take the following steps:

- Share information with parents/caregivers and whānau, and follow up on an existing support plan or consider if one is needed.
- Inform leadership team at Literacy Connections and together decide on next steps and any support needed.



- Take time to reflect individually, and reflect as a team on any further action that is needed.

Monitoring Student Wellbeing

We monitor student wellbeing by watching for signs of ongoing distress and communicate with whānau as required.

We actively reconnect with the student if the teaching relationship is to continue.

Staff Wellbeing

We encourage staff to take steps to look after their own well being and to seek support as needed.

Literacy Connections reserves the right to terminate tutoring at any time.