

REDUCING STUDENT DISTRESS

Reducing Student Distress

Mt Richmond Specialist School is committed to the physical and emotional safety of every student, as required by the Education and Training Act 2020. We recognise that school and classroom environments can contribute to student distress, 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.

Mt Richmond Specialist School follows Aramai He Tetekura: A guide to understanding distress and minimising the use of physical restraint, which provides a practical 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 mataitia, atawhaitia, and whakawhenuatia – to recognise, respond, and restore.

For more information about how terms in te reo Maori within Aramai He Tetekura relate to this policy, see this glossary.

Mātaitia | Recognise

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

School staff are alert to signs of student distress, including:

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

Individual Support Plans

Mt Richmond Specialist School uses support plans for students as needed to maintain safe and inclusive learning environments that respect the mana of all students. We use support plans to describe and understand triggers for individual students that may result in them experiencing distress. We ensure any plan is appropriate to the student and their parents/caregivers and whanau.

We work with students and their parents/caregivers and whanau 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.

See Aramai He Tetekura for strategies to recognise and respond to student distress that may be included in a support plan.

A support plan may identify physical restraint as a last resort. We do not include physical restraint in a support plan unless all other possible strategies have been explored. Mt Richmond Specialist School requires informed consent from parents/caregivers and whanau if physical restraint is included in a support plan. The school notifies the Ministry of Education if physical restraint is part of a support plan.

We monitor the frequency of physical restraint with the intention to minimise and, where possible, eliminate its use.

Atawhaitia | Respond

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

- 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 other students out of the space and seeking extra support.

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

- removing potentially dangerous items
- responding to threats using our emergency management plan
- calling the police if necessary.

In situations of student distress, Mt Richmond Specialist School teachers or authorised staff 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, including significant emotional distress to the student or another person.
2. If the teacher or authorised staff member 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 following parties:

- Staff inform the principal (or their delegate) as soon as possible in order to support students, other staff, and anyone affected by the situation.
- The school notifies parents/caregivers as soon as possible after physical restraint has been used (at minimum before the student is returned to their care). Parents/Caregivers are provided with a reasonable opportunity to actively participate in a debrief about the incident, including how it was managed with regard to the guidelines, within three working days of the incident (or later by mutual agreement).
- The school notifies the Ministry of Education through the online incident reporting form or our student management system. We keep a secure copy of the notification, in line with the Privacy Act 2020 and the Official Information Act 1982.
- If the principal considers that the use of restraint was unjustified, they are responsible for following up with the board and subsequent reporting to the Teaching Council.
- The principal notifies the board of physical restraint, and reports on any trends of physical restraint use at the school.

Whakawhenuatia | Restore

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 classroom activities.

As recommended by Aramai He Tetekura, staff involved in a challenging incident take the following steps:

Inform a colleague, senior staff member, or the principal, and decide together on next steps and any support needed.

- Share information with parents/caregivers and whanau, and follow up on an existing support plan or

consider if

- one is needed.
- Take time to reflect individually, debrief with other relevant staff members, 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, such as absences from usual activities, or changes in their interactions with other students and staff. We respond to concerns raised by other members of the school community, including students.

Monitoring Staff Wellbeing

We ensure that affected staff receive appropriate support. This may include debriefing, emotional support, an employee assistance programme, additional breaks, or help with workload.

Related Topics

- Behaviour Management
- Child Protection
- Student Wellbeing and Safety
- Staff Wellbeing and Safety

Legislation

- Education and Training Act 2020

Resources

- Ministry of Education | Te Tahuu o te Matauranga:
 - Education (Physical Restraint) rules
 - Aramai He Tetekura: A guide to understanding distress and minimising the use of physical restraint
 - Minimising physical restraint in New Zealand schools and kura