




Proudly part of

# Safe spaces and settled minds


## Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Early Years

Presented by Viv Trask-Hall [viv.trask-hall@thriveapproach.com](mailto:viv.trask-hall@thriveapproach.com)



1

### Thrive Approach: Independent Evidence of Impact at Scale



ImpactEd Evaluation evidence from a large-scale comparative analysis of over 2,600 schools and a two-year mixed-methods evaluation highlights Thrive's transformational impact.

**01**

**Attendance & Engagement**

3% lower overall absenteeism and 15% lower severe absenteeism. Up to 38% lower severe absence in schools using Thrive most consistently.

**02**

**Behaviour & Exclusion**

National analysis shows a 27% lower exclusion rate than average. Over the two-year evaluation period, exclusions fell by 52% in primary and 35% in secondary schools.

**03**

**Pupil Wellbeing & Inclusion**

Wellbeing meets or exceeds national averages, with particularly strong outcomes for pupils with SEND against a backdrop of wider national declines in pupil wellbeing.

**04**

**Staff Wellbeing & Morale**

Staff wellbeing sits above national workforce benchmarks, with improved morale and reduced emotional strain reported – particularly in intensive support roles.

**05**

**Long-Term Public & System Value**

Reductions in exclusions contribute to long-term public value and greater system sustainability, with an indicative £680,000 in avoided lifetime public costs per 1,000 pupils.

2

2

## What does 'safe' actually mean to a young child?

The environment is never just a backdrop. It is part of the relational system that surrounds a child.



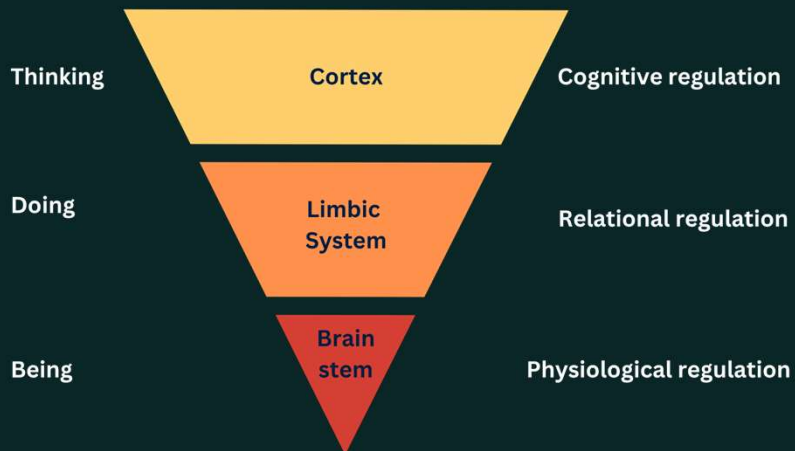
thriveapproach.com  
© Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.



Proudly part of  
Supporting Education Group

3

## The stress-regulation system



thriveapproach.com  
© Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.



Proudly part of  
Supporting Education Group

4

## The environment as a regulating force

Three environments that map to the three levels

1. Physiological environment
2. Relational environment
3. Cognitive environment



thriveapproach.com

© Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.

 **Thrive**

Proudly part of  
 Supporting  
Education  
Group

5

## What an enabling environment does

A genuinely enabling environment supports children to:

- settle and feel safe in the presence of others
- use play as their natural language
- move between experiences
- recover when things feel too much.



thriveapproach.com

© Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.

 **Thrive**

Proudly part of  
 Supporting  
Education  
Group

6

## Unsupportive Environments

Wellbeing, resilience and confidence can be impacted leading to an increase of 'unwanted' behaviours

- Crowded doorways and areas
- Unclear routines
- Rapid transitions
- Noisy, crowded or unpredictable environments



thriveapproach.com

© Fronting the Challenge Projects Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.



7

## Environments that support physiological regulation

What is the space asking young children's brains and bodies to tolerate?

01

**Sound and listening effort**

02

**Light and visual busyness**

03

**Crowding and movement**

04

**Movement, heavy work and regulation**

Safe spaces and settled minds

8

8

## Outdoor spaces and nature

Physiological regulation through nature, movement and sensory input

- 01 Heavy work
- 02 Natural light
- 03 Side by side play
- 04 Open ended provision

Safe spaces, settled minds

9

9

## Environments that support relational regulation

**How adults create the relational environment**

- Tone, consistency and emotional availability
- Settling children in the presence of others
- Practical noticing: seeing each child, checking in, remembering yesterday
- Modelling healthy relationships between staff
- Being willing to sit alongside distress

Safe spaces, settled minds

**Thrive** Proudly part of Supporting Education Group

10



## Co-regulation: the foundation

- We are the child's external stress-regulation system until they can do it for themselves
- Being calmed, soothed and returned to balance is what allows a child to eventually self-regulate
- We don't outgrow relational regulation: even adults reach for others when stressed
- For SEND: co-regulation may look different. Attune to the individual child's needs

11

11

## Environments that support cognitive regulation

- Predictable routines and clear cues so children don't have to hold everything in mind
- Clear zones help children stay with an idea longer
- Intentional display that supports independence and reduces uncertainty
- Enough time to process before tipping into overwhelm
- Accessible, visible resources on open shelves
- For SEND: visual supports, slower language, extra processing time, alternative communication



12

Presentation Title

12



**Thrive**

Proudly part of



**Supporting  
Education  
Group**

## Thank you!

 Broadwalk House, Southernhay West  
Exeter, EX1 1TS

 01392 797555

 [reception@thriveapproach.com](mailto:reception@thriveapproach.com)