



Vulnerable, disabled children and young people are being harmed as a result of restraint and seclusion in schools

The RRISC group, which includes the Challenging Behaviour Foundation (CBF) and Positive and Active Behaviour Support Scotland (PABSS) published a report today based on information gathered from over 700 families, which identifies injuries to children including bruises (ranging in size and severity), abrasions, scratches, head injuries, cuts and broken bones as a result of restraint, seclusion and other restrictive interventions in schools across the UK. The data were analysed in collaboration with academics from the University of Warwick.

Some families have discovered that their children have been restrained multiple times at school, without their knowledge. Schools are not required to record or report instances of restraint or seclusion and do not have to inform families. The impact of restrictive intervention on children and their families can be lifelong and significant as told by families who took part in the study. “Our whole family have been profoundly affected by what happened to Annie at school. And profoundly affected by the lack of accountability schools have, even when a child in their care has been left with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)”.

The data suggest that restrictive interventions are being used in circumstances that are not extreme and immediate instances to protect the child from harming themselves and others. Families reported reasons given for restraint included unclear reasons such as “misbehaviour”, “aggression”, “meltdowns” and “non-compliance”. Also, specific reasons included hitting, swearing and spitting.

Training had been provided to staff in some of the schools where restrictive intervention took place, but it is not clear what this training involved or how it was implemented. Some campaigners fear that training in some schools focuses on how to restrain rather than evidenced based approaches known to reduce the need for restrictive interventions.

We know there is a way to support children and avoid restrictive interventions. One of the families in our study told us about their child, Annie. She was harmed as a result of restrictive interventions used in school and left that school. They told us that “Annie is now having trauma therapy and she is in a school with a very different approach. A school who truly use Positive Behaviour Support and have an unconditional positive regard for each child in their care. There are times when Annie’s behaviour can still challenge those caring for her, times when she flips into fight/flight and resorts to old behaviours. But these times are becoming much less frequent and less extreme as staff seek to understand the “why” and seek to meet need rather than restrain and seclude”.

Recently there has been increased scrutiny of the poor treatment of children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism, including the use of restrictive interventions such as restraint and seclusion, in inpatient hospital settings.

Although we welcome this scrutiny, we remain concerned by the ongoing gap in knowledge and data collection on restrictive interventions such as restraint and seclusion taking place in schools, and the lack of action to address the issues the reports have highlighted.

Vivien Cooper, Chief Executive of the Challenging Behaviour Foundation said:

Children are being harmed in environments where they should be supported to thrive and develop. Yet again it has fallen to small family-led charities to shine a light on the hidden issue of restraint, seclusion and other restrictive interventions taking place in schools. The Government and regulators must take urgent action to better understand what is going on, mandate recording and reporting and put in place the evidence-based approaches which are proven to work. We know how to support children well and avoid restrictive interventions so there is no excuse for injuring children through use of outdated and harmful practices.

Beth Morrison, Founder and CEO of PABSS said:

Families have been so brave in sharing their experiences; the impact on children is shocking. It is time for this to stop. We need to see much more robust training, with clear standards and accreditation and better expertise available to schools so they have the skills required to support disabled children whose behaviours challenge. We need to see better accountability – with stronger laws and guidance and honesty with families.

Professor Richard Hastings, one of the University of Warwick research team said:

The information shared by families is likely to be the tip of an iceberg of inappropriate treatment of children whose behaviour can be challenging at school. Restrictive practices are clearly not being used in “last resort” circumstances, and are being used with very young children. There are evidence-based practices that can help schools, but the whole educational system needs to first shift its focus away from a “no tolerance” approach to the behaviour of vulnerable young people.

Notes to Editors

The CBF, PABSS and RRISC group

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation (**CBF**) is the only UK independent registered charity specifically focussed on children and adults with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges. We provide information and support; run workshops; share evidence and best practice and speak up for families on a national level.

Positive and Active Behaviour Support (**PABSS**) is an independent charitable organisation that aims to provide awareness, training, support, campaigning and advocacy in Positive Behaviour Support to those families and professionals involved in the care and education of children and adults with learning disabilities and/or support needs.

The Reducing Restrictive Interventions – Safeguarding Children and Young People (**RRISC**) group is a group of organisations working with families to tackle the issue of restrictive interventions across the UK.

CEDAR

The Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) is a part of the Faculty of Social Sciences within the University of Warwick. CEDAR has established a reputation for research across a range of topics, focusing on research into parenting and family support, and special educational needs and disabilities across the lifespan.

The report

Both charities have been contacted by family carers telling us about restrictive interventions used on their disabled children, particularly within school settings but also in the wider community. This has been an area of growing concern, particularly as there is no formal requirement for local authorities or the Government to collect national data about the extent or frequency of this practice and the resulting impact on children and families.

The data presented in this report build on the case study data collected by PABSS presented in the joint CBF and PABSS report “[Reducing Restrictive Intervention of Children and Young People](#)” from January 2019. To collect case study data, PABSS invited family carers to anonymously share their child’s experiences of restrictive interventions in schools. Family carers completed a case study questionnaire by email or phone call. Case study data were collected from parents of **720 children and young people** across the UK, who were reported to have experienced restrictive intervention, including restraint and/or seclusion. Researchers from the University of Warwick helped to analyse the data for the new report.

Background

Long awaited guidance in England was published June 2019 but it has been criticised because it was non-statutory and no plans were provided to deliver change. (See our statement issued at the time [\[i\]](#). Guidance [\[ii\]](#) was published in Scotland in June 2017 despite this, families told us that the use of restraint in Scottish schools remained too high and an investigation by the Scottish Children’s Commissioner in December 2018 found a significant number of restrictive interventions reported by local authorities which had no restrictive intervention policies in place [\[iii\]](#). In December 2019 the Scottish Government committed to producing guidance on restraint and seclusion in school [\[iv\]](#).

NICE [\[v\]](#) guidelines and Department of Health and Social Care guidance [\[vi\]](#) are clear that restrictive interventions should only ever be used as a last resort. They recommend Positive Behaviour Support- an evidence-based approach which aims to understand the reasons for a behaviour (or its function) - for example, addressing the reason why a child is screaming and shouting during the lunch break every day, rather than locking them in a room on their own away from other children.

Contact Details:

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Positive and Active Behaviour Support Scotland, email: calumsmummy@yahoo.com
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The Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), email Sheila Kiggins, Media Relations Manager, University of Warwick: s.kiggins@warwick.ac.uk

[\[i\]](#) *Reducing the Need for Restraint and Restrictive Intervention, June 2019*

[\[ii\]](#) *Included, Engaged and Involved: preventing and managing school exclusions. Scottish Government, (June 2017.)*

[\[iii\]](#) *No safe place: restraint and seclusion in Scotland's schools, Children and Young People's Commissioner, Scotland (Dec 2018)*

[\[iv\]](#) *The Scottish government have committed to producing guidance on restraint and seclusion in schools, December 2019*

[\[v\]](#) *Challenging behaviour and learning disabilities: prevention and interventions for people with learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges, NICE guideline [NG11] (May 2015)*

[\[vi\]](#) *Positive and Proactive Care: Reducing the need for restrictive interventions, Department of Health, (2014)*