THE TOM TOM WAY

THE FOUR PILLARS

Complete School Implementation & Teaching Pack



Brian's | Waves | Circles | Bridges

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS, TEACHERS, SENCOS & SUPPORT STAFF

A practical, child-centred framework for recognising feelings, finding safety, strengthening identity and building connection. Includes staff guidance, a six-lesson sequence, real classroom examples, printable templates and evaluation tools.

Author: Counsellor Tomass J. Wood | **Edition:** October 2026 | **Context:** England, primary education

Important: The Four Pillars are a developing educational approach, not an independently evaluated programme or substitute for school safeguarding, SEND or professional mental-health provision.

How to use this resource

A ready-to-use staff manual, not a diagnostic assessment or a therapy programme.

THE CENTRAL IDEA

Children are more likely to engage when adults seek to understand **what is happening inside**, **how intense it feels**, **what helps them feel safe**, and **how connection becomes possible**. The Four Pillars provide a memorable language for these conversations.

What you will find

- **PART 1 — Understand** Purpose, values, educational rationale and all Four Pillars explained in depth.
- **PART 2 — Put it into practice** A four-question response cycle, daily routines, reasonable adjustments, practical staff language and scenarios.
- **PART 3 — Teach it** Six sequenced lessons with aims, instructions, adaptations, success checks and follow-up tasks.
- **PART 4 — Use the tools** Pupil activity pages, staff observation template, parent guide, evaluation and implementation checklists.

Suggested starting route

1. Senior leader and SENCO review pages on inclusion, safeguarding and implementation.
2. Staff practise one shared set of phrases before introducing the framework to pupils.
3. Teach the six lessons at an appropriate pace and invite every child to participate in their own way.
4. Co-produce individual supports, review what helps and record only the information genuinely needed.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Use the Four Pillars to understand and support a child, **never** to force disclosure, label a child as difficult, deny a reasonable adjustment or require them to appear calm for adult convenience.

The Tom Tom way of learning

A child-centred lens for identity, emotional awareness and supportive relationships.

Start with the child, not the behaviour

Tom Tom is a curious, music-loving boy whose experiences are influenced by imagination, familiar routines, strong feelings and the people who help him feel understood. These stories invite adults to ask what an action might be communicating before deciding how to respond. They do not deny responsibility or remove boundaries: they add curiosity, support and dignity to the response.

Five commitments

- **Identity before labels:** children are whole people, not a diagnosis, difficulty or behaviour chart.
- **Connection before correction:** establish safety and understanding before teaching a new skill.
- **Co-regulation before independent regulation:** many children learn coping skills through patient adult support.
- **Participation without pressure:** children can point, draw, move, use AAC, observe or decline to answer.
- **Safety and rights throughout:** safeguarding duties, access arrangements and reasonable adjustments stay in place.

How the four ideas fit together

1. BRIAN'S
What am I thinking or feeling? Which different thoughts are showing up?

2. WAVES
How intense is the experience? What support do I need right now?

3. CIRCLES
What familiar person, object, place or routine could help me feel safer?

4. BRIDGES
Who or what can help me connect, communicate and learn?

STAFF REFLECTION
What changes when we ask "What might this child be experiencing and needing?" before asking "How do I stop this behaviour?"

Why identity and feelings matter

The educational intention is agency and understanding, not emotional compliance.

Emotional identification

Children may benefit from opportunities to notice sensations, name or depict feelings, recognise mixed emotions and identify what helps. Emotional vocabulary can give pupils a way to ask for support; however, not every child experiences or communicates feelings in the same way. Some need pictures, time, movement, body-based cues or an adult to offer possibilities without guessing.

Identity and self-advocacy

Identity-supportive teaching communicates: “Your experiences matter; your needs are legitimate; there are different ways to learn.” Children can practise identifying interests, strengths, sensory preferences and trusted supports. The long-term hope is that pupils can make informed choices, express boundaries and seek help, rather than learning to mask discomfort.

Managing feelings: what this really means

Self-management is not suppressing anger, preventing tears or looking calm. It may mean spotting an early sign of overload, moving to a quieter place, telling an adult, using a known routine, using safe movement or waiting until speech is possible. Adults continue to help when children cannot yet manage alone.

Potential benefits to look for — not guaranteed outcomes

- An increased range of feeling words, symbols or gestures.
- More confident requests for breaks, clarification and support.
- Improved understanding of what helps a child participate.
- More respectful peer conversations about difference and perspective.
- More predictable adult responses and fewer avoidable escalation points.

EVIDENCE POSITION

The wider field of social and emotional learning has an evidence base; the **Tom Tom Four Pillars themselves have not been independently evaluated**. Schools should treat the benefits above as aims to observe and test locally, not demonstrated effects of this particular framework.

Brian's: our inner worlds

A child-friendly way to recognise that several thoughts and feelings can exist together.

CHILD-FRIENDLY INTRODUCTION

"Inside Tom Tom, different Brians sometimes have something to say. Curious Brian wants to explore. Worry Brian asks what might go wrong. Safety Brian remembers how to stay safe. Kind Brian wonders how someone else feels."

What adults teach

- We can notice a thought without having to act on it.
- Two Brians can speak at once: I can be excited **and** worried.
- No Brian is bad; some thoughts signal needs, risks or hopes.
- We can ask Safety Brian and a trusted adult before taking action.
- Children can name their own Brians or use completely different words.

Teaching move: a two-Brian moment

Tell a gentle scenario: "Tom Tom sees an unfamiliar activity at school." Model: "My Curious Brian wants to try it; my Worry Brian wants to watch first." Ask pupils to suggest other thoughts. Then ask: "What could Tom Tom choose to do?" Provide a choice board: join, observe, ask, take a break, practise with a friend.

Look out for

A pupil who says "My Angry Brian made me do it" may need help to separate a feeling from a choice. Respond: "That anger was strong. You are still learning safe choices. I will help." Do not position a pupil's identity as "the angry child".

Brian's: teaching and rehearsal

A ready-to-run 15-minute activity plus staff language that can be reused.

Activity: My Council of Brians

1. Show four simple cards: Curious, Safety, Worry, Hope. Explain that a Brian is a story character for a thought or feeling.
2. Read: "Tom Tom is invited to play a new musical instrument." Invite children to choose one or two Brian cards.
3. Model thinking aloud: "Excited Brian says yes; Worry Brian wants to know how loud it might be."
4. Ask: "What would help Tom Tom decide?" Offer options: listen first, use hearing protection if appropriate, ask for a quieter turn, or choose another activity.
5. Let children draw, point to or invent a Brian; do not require them to discuss personal experiences.

Try these sentence stems

ADULT MODELS

"Part of me feels excited; another part needs a little time."

CHILD OPTIONS

"My ___ Brian is talking." / "I am not sure." / "Can I show you?"

When emotions are intense

Do not use a naming exercise to prolong a distressed conversation. Prioritise safety, lower demands, offer co-regulation and revisit the idea later. Children are not required to explain the cause of their feelings.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITY

During a story discussion, can the child identify **one or more possible** character thoughts through speech, symbols, gestures or drawing? Note the communication mode and any support provided; do not grade children for personal disclosure.

Waves: the rise and fall of feelings

A simple metaphor for emotional and sensory intensity, without ranking feelings as good or bad.



CHILD-FRIENDLY INTRODUCTION

"Some moments feel like gentle ripples. Others feel like big waves or storms. We all have different Waves, and we can look for safe ways to ride them."

What adults teach

- Feelings have varying levels of intensity; that intensity may shift.
- We might notice clues in our bodies, thoughts, movement or attention.
- A child can use colours, fingers, numbers, pictures or no scale at all.
- Adult support matters: offer choices rather than demanding self-calming.
- Help plans should be practised when settled, not introduced for the first time in crisis.

The five-wave language

1	A ripple: settled or low intensity
2	A small wave: something is changing
3	A growing wave: I may need support
4	A big wave: I need fewer demands or more space
5	A storm: prioritise safety, protection and adult help

AVOID

Never use wave ratings to penalise a pupil, rank distress, force a public check-in or imply that calm-looking behaviour means the child is safe.

Waves: a shared support ladder

Teach coping options, and remember that the adult response changes with intensity.

1–2 NOTICE & PREPARE
Offer a quiet check-in, movement, water if allowed, a visual timetable or a predictable transition.

3 REDUCE & CONNECT
Simplify language; offer a choice of two supports; reduce noise or social demand where possible.

4 CO-REGULATE
Use calm presence and brief phrases; avoid public questioning; give time and physical space.

5 PROTECT & FOLLOW POLICY
Prioritise immediate safety and safeguarding. Follow approved risk and behaviour plans. Seek trained assistance when needed.

Practise the plan before you need it

1. Invite the pupil, when comfortable, to select one or two early signs of a rising Wave.
2. Offer a small, accessible menu of supports: break card, trusted adult, quiet space, safe movement, headphones if suitable.
3. Agree how the pupil can request help privately; confirm the adult response.
4. Practise at a neutral time; review with the child and family, where appropriate.

USEFUL PHRASE
“I can see this is difficult. You do not have to explain right now. Would some space or someone beside you help?”

Circles: safety, belonging and routine

The familiar supports that help a child know where they are and what may come next.

CHILD-FRIENDLY INTRODUCTION

"Tom Tom has things that make his world feel familiar: music, family, trusted people and his two Pound Puppies. Your Circles may look completely different."

What can belong in a Circle?

PEOPLE & PLACES

A trusted adult, a library corner, a friend, a predictable place to sit.

OBJECTS & ROUTINES

A comfort object, a checklist, a special interest, a hello ritual, a sensory aid.

How to teach it

1. Ask pupils to think about a fictional child who is starting a new school day.
2. Offer a choice of Circle pictures: familiar person, timetable, object, activity, space and routine.
3. Invite children to build a Circle map without revealing their own private information.
4. Discuss how adults can protect a useful Circle while helping a pupil access change safely.

Transitions and change

Circles are not always literal repetition. A child may need advance information about change, a choice of familiar anchors or a low-demand route back into learning. Avoid removing a comfort object as a punishment or assuming that an attachment has no educational significance.

EXAMPLE

Before assembly, the teacher shows the timetable, offers a familiar seat and allows a child to carry a small approved comfort item. These are not "rewards"; they are access supports selected according to individual need and school safety requirements.

Circles: design predictable access

An environmental audit and a simple co-produced transition plan.

Five questions for the classroom team

- Does the pupil know what will happen first, next and afterwards?
- Can they see or access changes to the routine in a way they understand?
- Do they know who to approach and how to request help privately?
- Are reasonable sensory, communication and movement supports available?
- Which familiar routine can be retained during a difficult transition?

Example: a planned change to the day

Before: An adult quietly previews that the hall is unavailable, shows an updated schedule and checks understanding without forcing speech. **During:** The pupil uses their agreed alternative seat and brings a familiar visual reminder. **After:** The adult asks what helped and updates the plan if needed.

Circle planning template

A familiar start to the day:

A predictable sign of change:

A safe request for help:

A trusted adult or place:

One support to protect during transitions:

STAFF REMINDER

An individual Circle is a support, not a privilege to be earned. Work with pupils and carers where possible, and remain consistent with EHCPs, reasonable adjustments and safeguarding arrangements.

Bridges: finding connection

Relationships, interests and accessible communication create routes into belonging and learning.

CHILD-FRIENDLY INTRODUCTION

"A Bridge helps us meet in the middle. Tom Tom sometimes finds that music makes it easier to connect. You might build your Bridges through drawing, play, books, shared interests, signs or words."

Four kinds of Bridge

- **RELATIONAL:** A trusted adult who takes time, listens and follows through.
- **COMMUNICATION:** Visual choices, AAC, sign, writing, gestures, processing time or speech.
- **INTEREST:** A shared song, special topic, favourite book or collaborative activity.
- **LEARNING:** A scaffold, worked example, sensory-adjusted space or alternative way to show understanding.

Bridge-building moves

1. Notice a child's strengths, interests and preferred communication methods.
2. Offer two or more routes into a task without suggesting one is superior.
3. Show interest without making the child perform or explain their special interest.
4. Invite mutual participation, watch for consent and provide an easy opt-out.

KEY PRINCIPLE

A Bridge is built **with** a child, not imposed **on** them. Eye contact, physical touch, speech and group participation should never be used as compulsory signs of engagement.

Bridges: start from strengths

A practical way to improve access to learning without lowering expectations.

Example: the writing task

A pupil enjoys music and has many ideas, but a blank writing page feels overwhelming. The teacher begins with a favourite rhythm and invites the pupil to describe, draw, dictate or type an idea. The adult uses the shared interest as a Bridge to vocabulary, sentence structure and eventual independent choice. The learning goal stays clear; the route becomes flexible.

A simple Bridge-planning sequence

1. **Learning goal:** What is the essential knowledge or skill? Separate this from the expected output format.
2. **Interest:** Which subject, story, sound, sensory element or real-world link matters to this pupil?
3. **Communication:** How can the child receive instructions and show understanding?
4. **Belonging:** Who can offer safe, respectful participation?
5. **Review:** Did the chosen Bridge increase access and choice? What would the pupil change?

Peer empathy exercise

Read a short Tom Tom story moment, then ask: “If two pupils enjoy different things, how could they find a shared activity?” Adults should model curiosity and avoid putting the spotlight on any one neurodivergent pupil.

STAFF LANGUAGE

“You can show me in words, pictures or another agreed way.”
“I can make the first step smaller. Would that help?”
“What part of this interests you?”

The Tom Tom response cycle

A practical four-question sequence for everyday classroom moments.

NOTICE — Brian's
What thoughts, feelings or competing needs may be present? Invite possibilities; do not claim to read the child's mind.

GAUGE — Waves
How intense might this be? Is the pupil ready to talk, or do they first need time and co-regulation?

ANCHOR — Circles
What familiar support could reduce uncertainty, discomfort or demand?

CONNECT — Bridges
What relationship, interest or communication route could help the pupil re-engage safely?

THEN REVIEW
When calm and ready, ask what helped, what did not, and what the child wants to try next. Agree a safe next step. Accountability, repair and curriculum expectations can be addressed respectfully after immediate needs are met.

The short version

"What's happening inside? How big is it? What feels safe? How can we connect?" These questions guide the adult's thinking; they are not a script to interrogate a distressed pupil.

Making it consistent across school

A shared language is only useful when staff responses are calm, equitable and dependable.

Leadership responsibilities

- Nominate a lead teacher or SENCO to coordinate an initial trial and staff feedback.
- Check compatibility with the school's safeguarding, SEND, behaviour, accessibility and data protection procedures.
- Agree which year groups, classes or small groups will use the approach and why.
- Choose accessible alternatives to all worksheets, scales and verbal activities.
- Explain to families that the Four Pillars are developing learning language, not a diagnosis or treatment.

A sensible first term

1. **Weeks 0–2:** staff briefing, safeguarding review, pupil voice and modest baseline observations.
2. **Weeks 3–8:** six lessons, brief daily routines and individualised supports where helpful.
3. **Weeks 9–10:** review pupil experience, family feedback, access to learning and staff consistency.
4. **Decision:** refine, expand carefully or discontinue practices that are unhelpful.

What good implementation looks like

Children can opt in to language that suits them; adults know the child's agreed supports; changes are communicated; peer differences are discussed respectfully; and the framework complements teaching, rather than becoming a separate reward or sanction system.

DO NOT USE AS

A mandatory behaviour chart, a standalone safeguarding assessment, a replacement for tailored provision, an explanation for every behaviour, or a mechanism to pressure children into disclosure.

One-hour staff training agenda

Facilitator-ready introduction suitable for an INSET or department meeting.

00–10 MIN | CHILD-CENTRED START
Share the purpose and case study of Tom Tom and his Pound Puppy: fear, guilt, comfort and the compassion of Firefighter Ben.

10–25 MIN | FOUR PILLARS
Explain Brian's, Waves, Circles and Bridges. Model a fictional child moment and take questions.

25–40 MIN | TABLE DISCUSSION
In small groups, apply the Four Pillars to a transition or noisy classroom scenario. List adult adjustments before pupil demands.

40–50 MIN | LANGUAGE PRACTICE
Rewrite three adult phrases so they acknowledge a child's experience and still maintain clear boundaries.

50–60 MIN | ACTION & SAFETY
Agree one classroom routine, escalation contacts, an inclusion adjustment and a review date.

Facilitator asks

"Where might we accidentally reward a child for hiding distress?" "How do we protect privacy?" "Which school policy applies if a child discloses harm?"

LEAVE WITH
A common vocabulary, an accessible opt-out, at least one agreed co-regulation response and a clear route to the designated safeguarding lead.

The daily Tom Tom routine

Low-demand, repeatable moments to turn learning into practice.

Arrival — 2 minutes

Offer a private, optional hello: “Would you like to show me your Wave or just settle in?” A visual timetable and familiar greeting can support Circles. Never require a public emotional check-in.

Before change — 1 minute

Preview first/next/after. Ask whether a familiar Circle or a Bridge would help. Make agreed accommodations available without negotiation.

During learning — 30 seconds

Offer a choice of response mode and one accessible next step. The adult may model: “My Curious Brian wants to know what happens next; I will check the instructions.”

After a difficult moment — when ready

Start with reconnection and practical review. Ask what helped, what did not and whether anyone needs repair or reassurance. Do not demand an apology or a personal explanation while the child is distressed.

End of day — 2 minutes

Invite a voluntary celebration: one small Bridge, one comfort that helped, a skill practised or a next-day request. Avoid comparing pupils’ emotional states.

A FOUR-PILLAR CLASSROOM DISPLAY

Brian’s: Many thoughts can coexist.
Waves: All feelings are allowed; safe choices matter.
Circles: Comfort and predictability help us access learning.
Bridges: Everyone can connect in their own way.

Six lessons at a glance

Adapt pacing and communication for Early Years, Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2.

1. **Meet Tom Tom**
   Recognise individuality and different learning needs.
2. **Meet the Brians**
   Notice multiple thoughts and feelings.
3. **Ride the Waves**
   Name intensity and choose safe help.
4. **Build Your Circles**
   Identify familiar, protective supports.
5. **Make a Bridge**
   Explore belonging and communication choices.
6. **Use All Four**
   Apply the ideas to a fictional story and review.

Routine lesson structure

Connect (5 mins) → **Model (5–10)** → **Explore (10–15)** → **Reflect (5)**. Every lesson can be shortened or delivered in small chunks.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Ask children to apply an idea to a **fictional character**. Personal disclosure is never a required success criterion.

Lesson 1: Meet Tom Tom

Learning aim: see difference as normal and identify ways people can be helped to join in.

Materials

Tom Tom character image or brief introduction; two toy puppies or images; paper and colouring materials; optional picture symbols.

Teach it — 30 minutes

1. **Connect:** Introduce Tom Tom as a curious child who loves music and familiar things. Explain that everybody has their own interests and needs.
2. **Model:** Tell a brief, age-appropriate story about Tom Tom wanting to enjoy a new activity but feeling uncertain. Avoid details of frightening events for this introductory lesson.
3. **Explore:** Ask what Tom Tom might like, worry about or need. Pupils draw three “important things” for a fictional character or themselves if they choose.
4. **Connect:** Pairs or small groups find one way to make someone feel welcome without requiring eye contact, speech or physical touch.
5. **Reflect:** Finish: “One thing that helps a character feel included is …” Accept drawing, pointing or passing.

Adapt and extend

Early years: offer picture choices and a short puppet exchange. **KS2:** explore the difference between being included and being made to join in. **Additional needs:** use AAC, visual first/then supports, movement or a quieter setting.

LOOK FOR

Can pupils describe one possible interest, need or supportive adult action? Is the activity accessible and enjoyable for different communicators?

Lesson 2: Meet the Brians

Learning aim: recognise that a person can have more than one thought or feeling.

Materials

Four cards labelled Curious, Safety, Worry and Hope; story prompt; colouring pencils; optional symbol choices.

Teach it — 30 minutes

1. **Connect:** Ask “Can a person feel happy and nervous at the same time?” Model your own imaginary answer.
2. **Model:** Introduce Curious Brian and Safety Brian; explain that they are pretend names for thoughts, not little people inside the brain.
3. **Story:** “Tom Tom wants to explore a new instrument, but he does not know how loud it will be.” Which Brians could be talking?
4. **Explore:** Pupils choose, draw or invent two Brians; adults accept alternatives such as “I am not sure”.
5. **Decision:** Together identify a safe choice: ask an adult, watch first, try briefly or choose something else.

Key messages

Thoughts and feelings are information. They are not orders. All feelings are welcome; some actions are unsafe. Adults will help children make safe choices.

Common misunderstanding to avoid

Do not use Brians to attribute blame, create diagnostic labels or suggest unwanted thoughts are the child’s fault.

ASSESS

Children can select or suggest two possible thoughts for a fictional person, using any agreed communication method.

Lesson 3: Ride the Waves

Learning aim: understand that feelings change in intensity and know how to request safe support.

Materials

A five-step wave picture or numbered strip; calm strategy options; a familiar toy; optional body-signal cards.

Teach it — 30 minutes

1. **Connect:** Trace a wave in the air. Explain that the same feeling can be small or big at different times.
2. **Model:** Tell a fictional example: a room becomes noisy and Tom Tom's Wave grows. The adult notices and offers a quiet option.
3. **Explore:** Show five wave levels. Pupils match fictional situations to a possible wave; clarify that different people may rate the same event differently.
4. **Practise:** Model a help request: "A break, please," a card, gesture or AAC message. Rehearse offering two safe choices.
5. **Reflect:** Invite pupils to make a "what might help?" menu for a character; do not ask for public ratings of their current feelings.

Adapt and extend

Some pupils may dislike scales or experience emotions without a clear rise-and-fall pattern. Allow descriptive language, colour, imagery or adult observation instead of numbers.

ASSESS

Can pupils name or choose one safe support that an adult could offer someone with a big Wave?

Lesson 4: Build Your Circles

Learning aim: recognise the role of familiar supports, routines and trusted people.

Materials

Large paper circles; picture cards showing people, objects, places and routines; pens or stickers.

Teach it — 30 minutes

1. **Connect:** Show Tom Tom with his Pound Puppies. Explain that familiar things can carry memories and reassurance.
2. **Model:** Make a fictional Circle map with a trusted adult, library, music, and a predictable morning routine.
3. **Explore:** In groups, design a Circle map for a new pupil arriving at school. Identify what adults could provide.
4. **Problem-solving:** A trip changes the timetable. Which familiar Circle could be protected? Which new support could be added?
5. **Reflect:** Children may create private maps, but they do not have to show them or name personal relationships.

Sensitive facilitation

Do not assume every child has a safe home, family member or possession. Use fictional characters; provide “trusted grown-up”, “quiet spot” or “favourite school routine” as inclusive alternatives.

ASSESS

Can children suggest two types of comfort or predictability that a school could offer a fictional pupil?

Lesson 5: Make a Bridge

Learning aim: explore multiple respectful ways to connect, participate and ask for help.

Materials

Pictures of different communication modes, shared-interest cards and an optional bridge drawing sheet.

Teach it — 30 minutes

1. **Connect:** Explain that Bridges connect people without making them identical.
2. **Model:** Tom Tom likes music; another child likes drawing. Both could make a picture about a favourite song.
3. **Explore:** Offer examples of connecting: talking, playing, shared reading, writing, AAC, drawing or sitting together.
4. **Practise:** Pupils design an accessible welcome for a fictional new classmate. Give explicit choices and a non-participation option.
5. **Reflect:** Ask: “How can we make space for someone who joins in differently?”

Staff check

A Bridge should improve access and consent. It must not become pressure to communicate in the adult’s preferred style.

ASSESS

Can pupils suggest a respectful invitation or accommodation that makes participation easier for someone else?

Lesson 6: All four in one story

Learning aim: use the framework to understand a character and choose a supportive next step.

STORY STARTER

Tom Tom arrives for music time. The usual classroom is closed, the replacement room is busy, and his favourite song is about to begin. He wants to take part but is uncertain what to expect.

Teach it — 30–35 minutes

1. Read the story slowly and offer a visual version.
2. **Brian's:** What thoughts or feelings could Tom Tom have? Invite more than one possibility.
3. **Waves:** How intense might this feel for him? What clues might an adult notice?
4. **Circles:** Which familiar routine, object or person could help?
5. **Bridges:** How could someone invite Tom Tom into music in a way he can choose?
6. Groups design two endings: one that increases pressure and one that supports safety and participation. Discuss the difference.

Celebrate learning

Offer a Four Pillars certificate, optional display, pupil explanation or class story. Praise curiosity, kindness and problem-solving rather than publicly celebrating disclosures or low Wave scores.

REFLECT

"What would a supportive adult do first? What could the child decide for themselves? What might we change in our classroom?"

Worked example: an unexpected change

A staff decision pathway showing the difference between interpreting and supporting.

Situation

A pupil expected PE but the hall is unavailable. They stop at the classroom door, refuse to enter and appear increasingly distressed. A teacher is managing the whole class.

BRIAN'S — possible thoughts
"The plan changed." "What happens now?" "Will I miss PE?" These are hypotheses, not facts.

WAVES — intensity
The adult notices quick movement, tense posture and difficulty responding. The priority is support, not an explanation.

CIRCLES — predictability
Show the updated sequence, identify what is unchanged, and offer the child a familiar adult or quiet entry route.

BRIDGES — access
Provide a visual choice: wait with support, enter via an agreed route or join a quieter first task.

After the moment

When the pupil is settled, ask which support helped; check any agreed plan with the pupil and carers as appropriate. If risk or safety concerns were present, follow school procedures and record proportionately.

AVOID
"You are being difficult because PE is cancelled."
TRY: "The plan changed suddenly. I can show you what happens next. Would you like to see it here or with the support adult?"

Worked example: friendship and noise

Two situations that test how the pillars work together.

Scenario A — playground misunderstanding

Two pupils disagree over a game. One shouts and leaves. **Brian's:** frustration and worry about exclusion might coexist. **Waves:** check whether either pupil needs space or support. **Circles:** offer a predictable place and a known repair routine. **Bridges:** support each child to share their view through talk, drawing or an adult mediator. Address unkind or unsafe actions consistently, without treating emotional intensity as wrongdoing.

Scenario B — noisy group work

A pupil covers their ears and stops writing. **Brian's:** they may want to participate while fearing the noise. **Waves:** reduce the sensory demand and ask briefly what helps. **Circles:** use an agreed break place or routine. **Bridges:** allow an alternative working arrangement, task chunk or quieter partner. Do not insist the pupil describes sensory pain in front of peers.

What adults record

Use factual language: the event, observable response, support offered, pupil choice if known, safety action and whether access improved. Avoid unsupported labels such as manipulative, attention-seeking or simply "having a bad Brian".

REPAIR WITHOUT SHAME

Accountability remains important. Once ready, children can practise repair, restitution, social problem-solving and safe boundaries in a respectful, developmentally appropriate way.

What to say — and what to avoid

Language that supports identification, choice and emotional dignity.

AVOID	TRY
“Stop being dramatic.”	“I can see something is difficult. I am here to help you find a safe next step.”
“Calm down and tell me why.”	“You do not have to explain now. Shall I stay nearby or give you some space?”
“Everyone else can do this.”	“What part is getting in the way? We can look at another route.”
“That is just a toy.”	“It seems important to you. How can we keep it safe?”
“Look at me when I talk.”	“You can listen in the way that works for you.”
“Use your words.”	“You can show, write, point or use your communication support.”

BOUNDARIES MATTER

Compassion and clear safety limits can coexist: “I cannot let anybody be hurt. I will help everyone stay safe, and we can work out the next step together.”

My Four Pillars profile

Optional pupil voice page • Keep private unless the child chooses to share.

Name or preferred name: _____ Date: _____

BRIAN'S | My thoughts and feelings

WAVES | My early clues

CIRCLES | Things that help me

BRIDGES | Ways I like to connect

A helpful grown-up can...

My preferred way to tell someone I need help...

CHOICE & PRIVACY

I can draw, write, point, use symbols, ask for help, keep some things private or choose not to complete this page.

My Waves support plan

Co-produce when the pupil is settled; adapt or omit the numbered scale.

Name: _____ Date / review date: _____

My Wave levels

1 Ripple / settled

2 Small wave / noticing

3 Growing wave / support soon

4 Big wave / reduce demands

5 Storm / adult safety help

Signs I or an adult may notice

Support I can choose from

- ☐ A pause or quiet space
- ☐ A familiar person
- ☐ Movement or a sensory aid
- ☐ A visual plan or a smaller next step
- ☐ Other: _____

I can ask for help by...

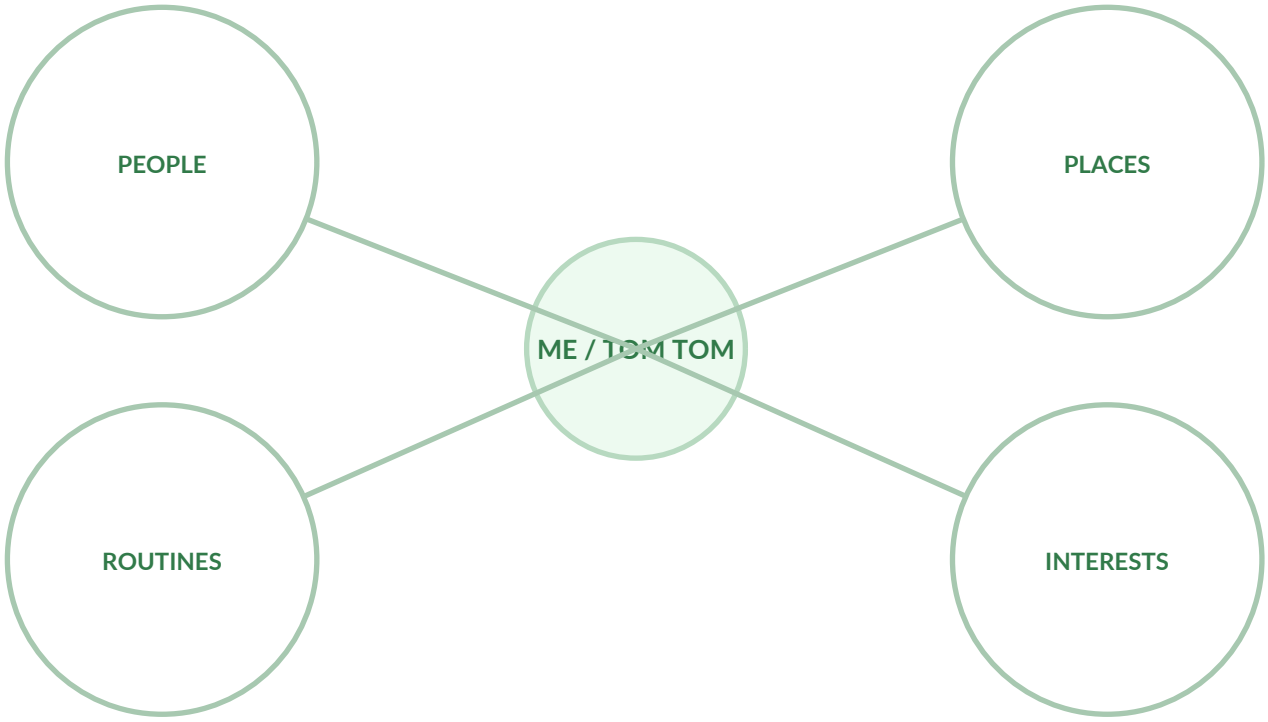
ADULT AGREEMENT

Staff will respond to the agreed signal without public challenge. Any significant safety risk is managed using existing school procedures.

My Circles map

Helpful people, places, routines, interests and objects.

Make a map for a fictional character or yourself. Share only what you wish.



One Circle that helps with changes

A support I would like adults to remember

REMEMBER

Comfort is personal. Someone else's important object, routine or interest deserves respect.

My Bridges plan

Ways to connect with people, learning and the wider class.

How I like to communicate

- [ ] Talking
- [ ] Drawing or writing
- [ ] Pointing or choosing pictures
- [ ] AAC, signing or another communication method
- [ ] Listening or sitting together
- [ ] Something else: _____

Things I enjoy or know a lot about

What makes joining in easier

Adults can build a Bridge with me by...

BRIDGE PROMISE

My way of communicating and participating counts. Adults will offer choice, respect my boundaries and help me access learning.

Staff observation and review

A practical, non-diagnostic record of access, support and child voice.

Class / group (use local identifier only):

Date, activity and context:

What was observed? (facts, not assumed motives)

Brian's: possible thoughts or communication cues (mark as hypothesis)

Waves: signs of intensity and support needs

Circles: what predictable support was offered?

Bridges: what accessible connection or learning route was offered?

Child view (only if freely offered):

What changed? What next step is agreed?

DATA & SAFEGUARDING

Store records according to school policy and data protection requirements. Do not use this sheet to replace a safeguarding concern form, incident report, EHCP review or statutory assessment.

A one-page family introduction

Schools may share this explanation with parents and carers.

WELCOME TO THE TOM TOM FOUR PILLARS
Our class is exploring four child-friendly ideas to help us talk about thoughts, emotions, familiar comforts and the ways we connect. These ideas are not a diagnosis, a treatment or a behaviour-scoring system.

BRIAN'S
Different thoughts and feelings can exist at the same time.

WAVES
Feelings can feel small, growing or intense; children may need help.

CIRCLES
Familiar people, routines, objects and activities can provide reassurance.

BRIDGES
Relationships, strengths and accessible communication help us learn and belong.

Try it at home — only if it feels helpful

Read a story together and ask how a character might feel. Notice what comforts them. Wonder what a kind adult or friend could do. Children can draw, point, talk or choose not to answer. No family is expected to use the terminology outside school.

Family voice matters

We welcome information you choose to share about helpful routines, preferred communication and safe supports. You can also tell us if any activity does not suit your child.

Find out more: www.tomtomuniverse.co.uk

How schools can evaluate use responsibly

Use small, concrete indicators and pupil voice. Do not mistake compliance for wellbeing.

What to measure

- **Access:** participation options taken up, time spent meaningfully accessing learning and barriers removed.
- **Communication:** whether a child can express a need in their preferred way when they choose.
- **Consistency:** how often agreed adult supports are offered as planned.
- **Experience:** anonymous or low-pressure child and family feedback on comfort, belonging and dignity.
- **Safety:** appropriate safeguarding and incident processes followed; no delayed referrals.

A proportionate six-week evaluation

1. Collect a brief baseline: one priority barrier to access, the pupil's preferred support and relevant observational context.
2. Implement lessons and adjustments consistently, recording the adult action as well as pupil response.
3. After three weeks, ask whether the support is acceptable and accessible; adapt where needed.
4. At six weeks, review examples of improved access, unchanged barriers, unintended pressure and staff workload.
5. Share aggregate findings only with appropriate consent and governance; do not present results as proof of effectiveness.

EXAMPLE — SPECIFIC OBSERVATION

Instead of "Child self-regulated better", record: "On four out of five transitions, a visual preview and quiet entry option were offered; the pupil used their agreed break card twice and joined the next task after support." This records the adult provision and meaningful pupil choices.

Non-negotiable safeguards

Staff must follow current school policies and statutory guidance.

Safeguarding comes first

If a child discloses harm, neglect or abuse, listen, do not promise secrecy, and report without delay through the school's safeguarding route. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies remain responsible for the school's processes. In immediate danger, use emergency procedures. Do not investigate with Four Pillars questions.

Inclusive access

Adapt materials for pupils who use AAC, have language differences, selective mutism, sensory sensitivities, limited interoceptive awareness, cognitive disabilities or trauma-related distress. Do not require eye contact, talking, body scanning or emotional scales. Check colour contrast, text size and sensory load.

Privacy, consent and confidentiality

Keep personal profiles optional. Do not display individual emotional data publicly, share pupils' stories without suitable permission or collect unnecessary health information. Use school data governance requirements for storage and retention.

Professional boundaries

The framework is educational discussion language. It does not diagnose ADHD or autism, provide clinical treatment, establish a safeguarding risk level or replace specialist advice. Maintain reasonable adjustments, EHCP provision and referral pathways.

CURRENT ENGLAND GUIDANCE

Relevant reference points include **Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026** (in force September 2026) and the **SEND Code of Practice: 0–25 years**. The school must check current versions and apply its own policies.

School readiness and quality checklist

Use this at the beginning and at the end of an initial pilot.

Before teaching

- [ ] A lead member of staff and review date are agreed.
- [ ] The DSL and SENCO have reviewed the approach and existing school obligations.
- [ ] Families receive clear, non-promotional information where appropriate.
- [ ] Staff have practised the Four Pillars without labelling pupils.
- [ ] All activities have suitable alternatives and opt-outs.
- [ ] Individual reasonable adjustments and support plans are protected.

During use

- [ ] Adults model language and co-regulation rather than demanding explanations.
- [ ] Children can choose whether to use the terms and share personal information.
- [ ] Supports are offered proactively and reviewed with pupil voice.
- [ ] Staff record adult provision and barriers, not just pupil behaviour.

At review

- [ ] Pupils and families have a safe route to say what is not working.
- [ ] Leaders decide whether to refine, continue or stop based on practical evidence.

A GOOD IMPLEMENTATION QUESTION

"Has this approach made it easier for this child to be understood, feel safe, exercise choice and access learning?" — not "Has this child become quieter or more compliant?"

Evidence, guidance and next steps

The Tom Tom approach is a proposed teaching framework informed by lived experience and wider educational principles.

Further reading and statutory reference points

Education Endowment Foundation (2019) — Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools.
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/primary-sel

Education Endowment Foundation (2019) — Improving Behaviour in Schools.
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/behaviour/

Department for Education (2026) — Keeping Children Safe in Education — current statutory guidance for England.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

Department for Education / DHSC — SEND Code of Practice: 0–25 years.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

Department for Education — SEND guide for schools and alternative provision settings.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings

Important distinction

These sources inform relevant wider practice and statutory responsibilities. **They do not constitute independent validation or endorsement of the Four Pillars framework**. Any impact statements about the Tom Tom approach should be based on future, transparent evaluation.

About the creator

Counsellor Tomass J. Wood is a neurodivergent author and creator of Tom Tom Universe. His Four Pillars draw on personal experience, counselling perspectives and a commitment to helping children understand themselves and each other. His first illustrated books include *Tom Tom, the Fire, and the Special Pound Puppy*, *Tom Tom and the Music Box*, *Tom Tom and the Marching Bands* and *Meet Tom Tom*.

CONTACT & USE

www.tomtomuniverse.co.uk

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