



Supporting the Return to School Following COVID-19

Practical activities and resources

Caerphilly Educational Psychology Service



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Introduction and Rationale

This booklet accompanies the *'Supporting the Return to School Following COVID-19: A guide for schools and other educational settings'* booklet supplied by Caerphilly Educational Psychology Service. It will use the theory and tips mentioned in the previous booklet to provide you with examples of practical activities to support staff and pupil wellbeing during this term and in September.

Amidst the return to school we will all probably be experiencing a range of emotions. Some staff and pupils may be relieved to return to some form of normality and routine. They may be pleased to connect with each other again face to face for either a check-in or support around wellbeing, particularly those that are most vulnerable. Others may be experiencing levels of anxiety and concern surrounding the health risk posed by COVID-19 or wellbeing. Some staff may be concerned about how to look after their own and their pupils' wellbeing whilst achieving a balance between current home life and work. Whether we are feeling apprehensive or positive about the return to school we will probably all feel a sense of uncertainty around what's to come and an awareness that wellbeing needs to be a priority in the 'Check in, Catch up and Prepare' focus of this term and when school returns in September.

A recent Education Support survey conducted in the UK found that 44% of school staff are worried about what will happen this term, while 46% of school staff are uncertain about what may happen in the new school year in September. In general, it found that COVID-19 is having an impact on staff wellbeing with approximately half of the staff feeling more stressed and anxious than usual. Concerns were also raised about how to support the wellbeing of pupils in these unprecedented times.

A document called 'COVID and me' has been shared by the Children's Commissioner for Wales following a survey of over 23,000 children and young people. Some of the findings are listed below:

- 37% of children and young people stated they were not worried about coronavirus
- 58% of children and young people reported that they have felt happy most of the time and 84% reported feeling safe most of the time
- When asked which stay at home rules have impacted them the most in terms of how they feel, 72% of young people stated 'not being able to spend time with friends', 59% stated 'not being able to visit family members' and 42% stated 'school or college closing'

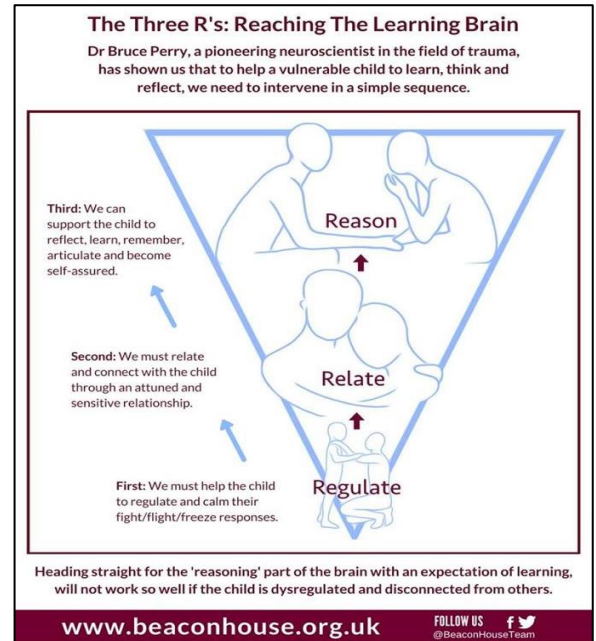
During these past few months we have been part of a collective trauma that has affected us physically and emotionally in ways we would not have been prepared for. Therefore when supporting ourselves and the pupils we work with it is useful to consider the PRRR model and the PACE approach. More information on these can be found in the accompanying 'Supporting the Return to School Following COVID-19: A guide for schools and other educational settings' booklet supplied by Caerphilly Educational Psychology Service.

The PRRR model

Bruce Perry's Three R's work (2017) helps us to understand the order in which we can intervene to co-regulate alongside children and young people, using what we know about the organisation of the human brain.

Bruce Perry's work has been extended to include **Protect** as our foundation (Trauma and Mental Health Informed schools model). Protect seeks to target the brainstem, by focusing on creating a sense of safety for the child.

Image credit: Beacon House



The Pace Approach

PACE is an approach created by Dr Dan Hughes. It stands for play, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. PACE is a way of 'being' with a child or young person, it governs how we think, feel and communicate with a child to make them feel safe, open and engaged with an adult. With attachment theory at its core, children and young people learn to go to you for safety, then support, then enjoyment.





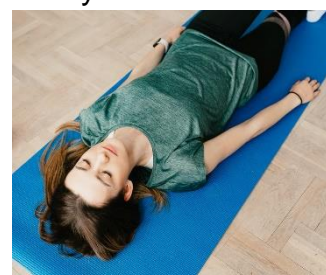
Practical Ideas for Staff Wellbeing

When in school, staff often prioritise the wellbeing of their pupils over their own wellbeing. As adults we need to ensure that our own wellbeing is also prioritised, otherwise our functioning and mental health can be affected and we won't be able to support the pupils we are in contact with; we can't pour from an empty cup. Below are some ideas of how you as school staff can focus on looking after your own wellbeing:

Relaxation and Mindfulness activities.

This could include:

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Mindful breathing or body scan
- Mindful colouring



Scripts of the above can be downloaded from the internet or listened to on YouTube. There are also some examples in the pupil wellbeing section below.

Staff rooms

Create a safe place within the staff room; calming colours, visuals and relaxing music can be used to provide staff with a retreat from COVID-19 and the pressures of schools. Visuals could be displayed on the walls or tables and may include motivational quotes, positive affirmations, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, and contact details for organisations such as Care First and Education Support.

Staff meetings and debriefs

Frequent staff meetings allow updates to be communicated effectively and with ease. Try and start the meetings with a check in, if appropriate and end them with a positive thought for the day. Conducting debriefs offers a safe space for staff to express how they are feeling and discuss how any worries or concerns can be addressed. This can be considered on a whole school or department basis and could be useful during the first few weeks of re-opening, within this term and in September. It will also be particularly important following a significant incident, or a difficult day.

Individual relaxation techniques

Think of the techniques that work best for you and can be easily accessed on a daily basis such as listening to music, going for a walk, spending time outside, exercise, having a bath or a cup of tea.

Buddy scheme

When children are faced with unfamiliar or anxiety provoking situations such as a new school, a buddy scheme is often used so they have someone to talk to and that can help them when needed. This could also be applied to staff due to the anxiety provoking situation we are currently in; linking up with a 'buddy' or 'buddies' can provide staff with someone to turn to if they just need a chat and the buddy can make regular check ins with the staff to see how they are.

Random acts of kindness

It has been proven that performing an act of kindness for someone else can improve the wellbeing of the person showing and receiving the kindness. Many schools are already good at engaging in kindness initiatives although these are some ideas you could use:

- 'You've been mugged' – Pick a member of staff that you appreciate or feel deserves a treat. You then fill a mug with things they may like such as tea, coffee, chocolate etc. and leave it on their desk as a surprise. Once they receive the mug they can then think of someone else to fill the mug for. This can continue throughout the year so that each member of staff is surprised with the mug and showed they are valued.
- 'Office angel' – This is similar to 'Secret Santa', in that each member of staff is given the name of another member of staff to do something nice for. Although instead of it being for Christmas this can be done at any time during the year. The something nice could be buying them their favourite snack, making them a cup of tea, covering their break time supervision when you think they need a break, leaving a motivational note, the ideas are endless.
- 'Take what you need basket' – A basket is filled with things that are sought after within your school; these could be stationary, biscuits, tea, coffee, sugar etc. Items from the basket can be taken by anyone at any time. Once you have taken an item you would then replace it with another item when you have the chance.



Stay connected

Staff may not be able to see each other as often as they may have done previously. Connection is important and you may need to be more creative in how you can achieve this within the current situation.

- Participate in virtual talking groups. Allocate each staff member four minutes of time, split into talking and feedback (e.g. 2 minutes talking, 2 minutes feedback). Allow the staff member to talk about anything they want to without being interrupted, once they have finished, feedback to that staff member as a group using an empathic response.
- Staff socials – Virtual quizzes, coffee breaks, and lunch breaks can help staff from different bubbles still feel connected. Opportunities for staff exercise classes and creative groups will also promote wellbeing among the team.

Staff boards

These can be placed in or around a staff room to promote wellbeing in addition to providing staff with important information for the school.

- Staff shout-out board – This can be a lovely way to show your appreciation and acknowledgment for a staff member, either for something they have done or generally the type of person they are. School is so busy that staff may not get the time to verbally provide each other with positive feedback. This board allows staff to write something down in their own time and place it on the board to be read by others. If this is outside the staff room, pupils could also take part.



Image credit: <https://katemoxleyeyc.co.uk>

- Focus of the week – Our wellbeing can be promoted in a number of different ways: physically, emotionally, and psychologically. If your school has a Wellbeing Lead or someone who is willing to take this on, a board can be created that provides a different wellbeing focus each week or half term, for example relaxation, drinking water or laughter. The boards could provide tips and ideas and use pictures, quotes or articles to engage staff in the targeted area. For schools that have received the staff wellbeing training from Caerphilly EPS or plan to attend the training, a resource accompanies the training that provides a weekly wellbeing resource for the whole academic year.
- Take what you need board – Words and phrases can be placed on a board for staff to take what they need to function effectively and feel good about themselves. This could include practical ideas such as sleep and relaxation, affirmations such as 'I can do this' or states of mind such as optimism and hope. Staff can take the post-it they need as a reminder.



Image credit: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/WSUNRHH/>

ACE – Achievement, Connection and Enjoyment

With schools re-opening there is the potential for staff to get caught up in what needs to be achieved to help this return to school be a positive experience for staff and pupils. Whilst this is important, in order to maintain a healthy sense of wellbeing, each day we must create a healthy balance between achievement, connection and enjoyment. Make time for yourself; allow time for activities you enjoy and to connect with others. Be sure to regularly check on whether you are creating a balance and schedule things in if need be.

Positive psychology

With what is happening at the moment, it is important that we allow ourselves time to think of the positive aspects of our experiences and what makes life worth living. You could think of three things that have gone well recently, how did it make you feel? What made it so special? Practising this daily has been found to promote wellbeing. You could also take time to reflect on a 'golden moment' however big or small.

Positive affirmations

Display positive affirmations or embed them in staff meetings to start each day with a positive thought so that you can feel calmer for the rest of the day.

Examples of positive affirmations:

- My best is good enough
- Today is going to be a great day
- No one is perfect, I can forgive my mistakes
- I will be kind to myself and others today
- I am proud of myself

Gratitude

To practice gratitude, try and record and reflect on things you are grateful for on a regular basis (typically three things). Try and be specific about these, for example 'Jane made me laugh during the meeting today' rather than 'I have kind work colleagues'. Try and vary the names of those in your journal so that your positive experiences are not just based on limited individuals, consider other relationships, environments, and your health. Think about things that have made you smile, someone who is bringing joy to your life, experiences with nature and things which are going well. You could write a gratitude letter to someone you have been meaning to thank, or create a gratitude jar with your family.



Compassionate self

Our thoughts are often filled with critical voices. Try to turn those critical voices into compassionate voices. First, notice when you are being self-critical, and then try to reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a friendly, positive way. Visualise what your compassionate self looks like, how would their voice sound? Our critical voice can often be harsh or condescending, whereas our compassionate voice will probably be calm, soft and sincere.

Balancing home and work

When you are looking after children daily, it can be difficult to put yourself first when all you want is to see your pupils grow. However, in order for you and your class to achieve their full potential it is important that you look after yourself. Here are some tips to maintain a healthy work life balance:

- Prioritise the tasks which are most important
- Set your own goals
- Use your diary to your advantage – planning and organisation will help you focus
- Be aware of when you have reached your capacity to work effectively and ask for help if you need it
- Select a cut-off point on your way home from school to leave your worries and concerns
- Set a time to finish each day and leave time for dinner, exercise and to spend time with family

Enjoy time outdoors

In addition to the COVID-19 guidance for being outside, spending time in green spaces lowers cortisol and calms the body. Try to spend time outdoors on your lunch breaks, or take a nature walk in your down time.



Go back to basics - Exercise, sleep, and healthy eating

With intrinsic links between our mental and physical health, it is important to build exercise into our routine where possible. Take advantage of online exercise classes on YouTube and make the most of outside exercise. Plan a walk in a quiet place or take a nearby nature walk if possible. If you are having difficulties sleeping there are various things you can do to try and help. For example, create a routine, take a bath, practice meditation, make a bedroom 'haven', journal to leave thoughts behind and practice positive thinking. Eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet can contribute to a whole range of benefits, including decreased stress and anxiety, and boosts in mood and energy levels.

Staff Check ins

As management staff and colleagues check in with the staff members in your team. We have probably all experienced that during this pandemic some days can be better than others. Conduct regular check ins to see how people are doing, this can be done through phone or video calls, text messages or when you see each other in school, use what works best for you. They can be used to see how staff are managing their workload and own wellbeing or whether they require some support or time to regulate themselves. Where possible, be aware of who has experienced grief through the death of a loved one so they can be appropriately supported. Also, for all staff, be aware of your own mental health, when you can continue going and when you need to take action. This may take the form of scheduling in more 'you time' or swapping in or out with another member of staff so you can have a break, even if this is to go to the toilet or get a cup of tea.



Practical Ideas for pupil wellbeing

This booklet will use the work of Bruce Perry (2017) and the Trauma and Mental Health Informed Schools model to consider how we can support the wellbeing of pupils. An overview of Bruce Perry's Three R's work (2017) can be found on page 4, for more information please refer to the '*Supporting the Return to School Following COVID-19: A guide for schools and other educational settings*' booklet supplied by Caerphilly Educational Psychology Service.

Protect

Routine

Routines for both adults and children help us to feel safe and secure within our daily life. Assist children to understand why routines are helpful to us, and why disruptions to our routines can impact our emotional resilience. Use visual timetables for all pupils, not just those with additional needs, to promote routine and feelings of safety and structure. See appendix 1 for an example timetable.

Pupil voice

Allow pupils choices in what makes them feel physically and emotionally safe and ask them how you can help to support that. Depending on school requirements, pupils could be given the chance to structure the day when they come back in this term and in September. Some may prioritise connecting back with friends and staff whereas some pupils, particularly in secondary school may want most of their day to be focused on helping them with school work or discussing the anxieties they have around missed exams. A 'pupil voice box' gives pupils the opportunity to make comments and suggest ideas on slips and post them into the box. These comments could be addressed during virtual school council meetings or assemblies. This shows pupils that their voices are being heard.



Soft landings

This is a positive first interaction for a child using nurturing principles. A simple, enjoyable activity on arriving to school in the morning can help the child settle into the school day as it provides predictability and structure. For example, mindfulness colouring or sensory activities, see link in regulate section.

Positive first interactions

Due to social distancing guidelines staff may not be able to greet their pupils in the way they normally would or would like to following a prolonged period off school. Get creative in the way you say hello and goodbye to pupils. Each pupil could create their own unique greeting when entering the classroom which could range from saying hello, waving or a signal to performing a dance or fun routine. 'While we can't Hug', is a nice story for younger children about a hedgehog and tortoise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnnFrPaRgY>

Butterfly hug

Hugs may not always be possible with the current guidelines, although children may still seek this as a form of comfort. A butterfly hug can be used in these circumstances by the pupil and the member of staff they are seeking the hug from. The individual wraps their arms around themselves so their left hand touches their right arm or shoulder and their right hand touches their left arm or shoulder. They can then tap their arms or shoulder in an alternating rhythm like the wings of a butterfly, a video of this technique can be found in the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqSllobux6iE>

Emotional check in's

Check in's will be important under the current circumstances as pupils have had the longest time without attending school they have ever experienced and may go days from one session to the next. Try to get into the routine of checking in with pupils each day. In addition to emotion cards, use photos of landscapes, colours, animals, weather, or something in nature (be creative!) to help children and young people express how they are feeling.



Play

Presenting with a playful nature shows children that you are socially engaged, allowing children to feel safe. Singing nursery rhymes, prosody in your voice, smiling and providing eye-contact are simple ways to implement play. Some games may need to be altered due to social distancing rules, although they can still be made fun. For instance on a sunny day, younger children could play 'tag with shadows' instead of coming into contact with each other. Play and fun could also be incorporated more into secondary schools through non-contact outdoor sports and quizzes.

Off task sensory time

Small sensory breaks such as doodling, bouncing a ball, and emotional wellbeing targeted activities can help children reset and feel grounded.

Positive affirmations

For a playful way to practice positive affirmations, print a blank fortune teller (free printable available online), ask children to write their own, personal positive affirmations on the fortune teller. Practice these every day. Examples of these could include:

- I believe in myself and my abilities
- I can control my own happiness
- Today is going to be an awesome day
- I am proud of myself

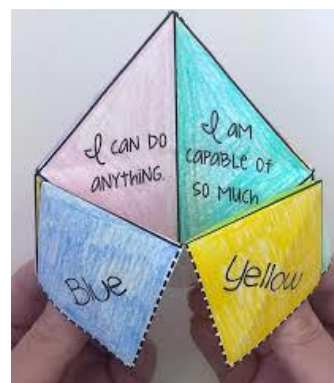


Image credit: <http://pattowellbeing.weebly.com>

Promote belonging and connectedness

Children who have a sense of belonging to school believe that adults in school care about their learning, have high expectations of them and are interested in them as individuals. This reinforces positive relationships and feelings of safety. Here are some simple ways to promote a sense of belonging:

- Door poster – Create a door poster with ‘Class of 2020’ or ‘Bubble of 2020’ or use the free template from ELSA support below. Children can sign or write their name in coloured pens in the numbers of the year and write a memory of lockdown in a speech bubble. This can be as creative as possible, use the skills of the pupils, particularly in secondary school if pupils enjoy art, graffiti or bubble writing. <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/We-are-the-bubble-of-2020.pdf>
- Jigsaw activity – Each child can complete a jigsaw piece with facts about themselves. For example, their name, likes and dislikes. This activity recognises that we are all unique individuals, but we can also come together as a class, bubble, or year group.



Audio messages

These could be done through pre-recorded messages, phone calls or video calls (many schools have already been extremely creative and fun in their messages to pupils in lockdown). They could be sent to pupils in between their in-school sessions or from key adults for vulnerable children who are absent from school, to maintain relationships and ensure a sense of belonging. Video calls and pre-recorded messages could also be done between children in school and those that are still at home to maintain connectedness and to reassure them that school will be safe when they return.

Peer and buddy programmes

Buddy schemes can be a great sense of support particularly for pupils who are experiencing a heightened level of anxiety due to the current circumstances. This can also be particularly useful for secondary school pupils if they have found themselves in a bubble based on academic ability without their closest friends.

Regulate

Regulation activities can be built into each day and can be used at transition points such as when pupils first come into school or before they go home, around times of high stress or anxiety and throughout the school day as a preventative measure.

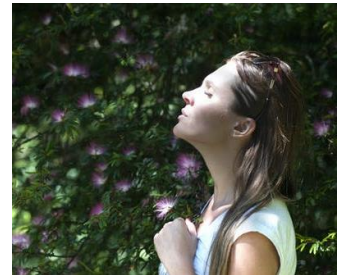
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This teaches you how to relax your muscles through a two-step process. First, you systematically tense particular muscle groups in your body. Then you release the tension and notice how your muscles feel when you relax them. A script suitable for Primary and Secondary School can be found in Appendix 2 and 3.

Diaphragmatic breathing

Breathing exercises help to release the tension in our body and encourages a state of relaxation. Depending on the space available due to social distancing guidelines pupils can either sit or lie down for this exercise. Instruct the pupils to breathe in through their nose, whilst counting to 5, and then breathe out through their mouth to the count of 7. The count to which people are able to breathe in and out may differ, although aim for the breath out to be longer than the breath in. They can ensure each breath is reaching the diaphragm by placing one hand on their stomach and one hand on their chest, ensuring the hand on their stomach is moving the most. Adaptions of this can include:

- Imagine you are smelling a flower when breathing in and blowing out a candle or blowing a bubble with your out breath.
- Imagine you stomach is like a balloon, filling up with air when you breathe in and deflating when you breathe out.
- For children who struggle with this exercise a cup of water and a straw can be used. Ask the pupils to breathe in through their nose without sucking up any water and then breathe out through the straw to create calm continuous bubbles.



Mindful breathing

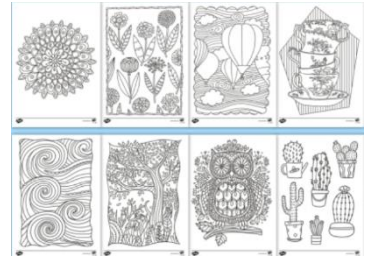
This can be achieved using a number of different techniques:

- A pupil could use the index finger on their right hand to work their way around the outside of each finger on their left hand. When going up the finger they can breathe in and then breathe out when travelling down the finger. This allows them to take 5 deep breaths while concentrating on the outline of their hand. It doesn't matter if this is done with their left or right hand, this will be down to preference.
- An image of a star can be used, the pupil follows the outline of the star, taking it in turns to breathe in or out with each side of the star.
- Pupils can use their fingers to follow the direction of the figure 8, again taking it in turns to breathe in and out at end bend. This could be designed like a road for anyone who likes cars.

Many more ideas can be found online, using a variety of other images. Within the current circumstances, if techniques are printed, these could be laminated so they can be cleaned, or you may want to create packs for each child to have their own.

Mindful colouring

This can be suitable for all ages, including children, young people, and adults. You may already have some colouring books or pages in your school that can be photocopied or these can be easily found on the internet. When selecting the complexity of the colouring, you want it to be engaging but not too complicated that it evokes emotions such as frustration.



(<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-1551-mindfulness-colouring-sheets-bumper-pack>)

Grounding Technique

Often when people are anxious they lose sight of the present moment and worry about what could happen in the future or ruminate over past events. The grounding technique allows them to physically bring themselves back to the place and time they are in using all 5 of their senses. Ask the pupil to search for:

- 5 things they can see
- 4 things they can touch
- 3 things they can hear
- 2 things they can smell
- 1 thing they can taste

They could either do this physically by actually touching, smelling and tasting the things they find or if this is not possible due to social distancing guidelines they could just notice the items. Often the taste aspect can be difficult so this could be replaced by taking 1 deep breath.

Exercise

Allow opportunities for children to participate in some form of physical activity every day to enable them to burn off some energy. Being active will get rid some of the chemicals in the body which are released when we are anxious, helping with the physical symptoms of stress. Going out to the playground to play or participate in outdoor education can support this. These activities can be tailored to the age of the pupil and may include assault courses, circuits, dancing, non-contact sports and online exercise classes.

Movement breaks

It has been months since a pupil has attended school, and they probably haven't sat still during lockdown for as long as they will be asked to when they are back in school. Simple activities such as the daily mile, online exercise classes, playing outside and short burst exercises such as star jumps, running on the spot, hopping and stretching help children feel ready for learning. Get into the routine of offering a movement break before a cognitive task. Additionally, activities such as pummelling a ball of clay, drumming, tearing paper and kicking a ball can help relieve tension.



Menu of strategies

Create a choice board of regulatory strategies. For example, listen to music, talk to someone, or take deep breaths. Ensure it is easily accessible for children to use when they are feeling dysregulated. Pupils could either decide what strategies are available or make their own menus. Ensure everyone's voice is heard as the effectiveness of strategies will differ for different people. For younger children, the 'tortoise shell safe place' activity can help children articulate what brings them out of their shell. (<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Safe-place-for-the-turtle.pdf>)

Outdoor experiences

Playing in nature allows children to breathe more deeply, connect more freely, learn about change, and have the opportunity to take risks and challenge themselves. Activities such as creating clay people using natural resources or sensory scavenger hunts can support this.

For example:

- Find something you can climb
- Find something rough/smooth
- Find something that makes a noise
- Find a flower with a scent
- Find something an animal could eat



Calm corners

This space would be equipped with items that can help children to regulate their emotions and feel calm. This may include warm lighting, music, relaxing scents, stuffed animals, storybooks, tactile items (in line with government guidelines), craft sticks with positive affirmations etc. You will also need to teach students how to use the space, along with calming techniques like deep breathing.

Sensory zones

A sensory zone with its combination of a dark space with calming lights, music and sensory toys activates anti-anxiety chemicals in the brain. In line with government guidelines, create individual sensory bags, sensory bottles and sensory boxes to help children regulate and relax.



<https://handsonaswegrow.com/48-sensory-bags-roundup/>

Active listening and empathy

'Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak.' - Steven R Convey

With this quote in mind, it is important that we take the time to listen to pupils without our own agenda. When actively listen to pupils, ensure you are paying full attention and show that you are listening. During this time you will not be thinking about what to say or what needs to be done. Instead you would be listening intently, deferring judgement, validating their feelings, and providing feedback. This can be done by reflecting and summarising back to the pupil what they have said and showing empathy through statements such as "It sounds like you felt really worried when you thought about that". Children and young people who experience regular empathic listening from the adults in their lives are better able to learn, enjoy relationships, concentrate and be kind to others. This YouTube video by Brene Brown (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>) provides a good insight into empathy.

Promote connectedness and pupil voice

It may have been a long time since pupils saw their friends and members of staff. Some may be happy and comforted to be back together, whereas some may find it overwhelming. Due to social guidelines, pupils may not be able to connect in the same way as before and some may find it more difficult to interact, socialise and empathise with each other following a prolonged period apart. It is therefore important that activities take place to promote relationships so pupils feel they are part of a team, and listened to. Here are just a few ideas:

- Plan something fun together as a class or bubble, 'golden time', this could be a celebration event or talent show.
- Ask each pupil to write the good things about being back together on a gingerbread man, these can then be linked together by the hand and displayed in the classroom. These can also be used to decide on upcoming tasks and activities
- Recognise positive qualities – Ask the pupils to take a sheet of paper and write their name in the middle. Pass around the group or class and write a positive comment for each person in turn (this could be done through circle time discussions or using individual pieces of paper or post it notes then typed up or laminated if paper is not to be shared).
- As a group put together a playlist with songs about being connected, to be played in class, these could include Disney songs or chart music depending on the age of the pupils. For younger children this could include 'You've got a friend in me' from the Toy Story film.

Trauma Informed Schools have created a document highlighting a variety of ways that staff can connect with children, young people, and their families across the period of lockdown. The 'Creating opportunities for connection: experiencing being held in mind' document can be accessed via the following link:

https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk/images/TIS_Creating_Opportunities_2.pdf

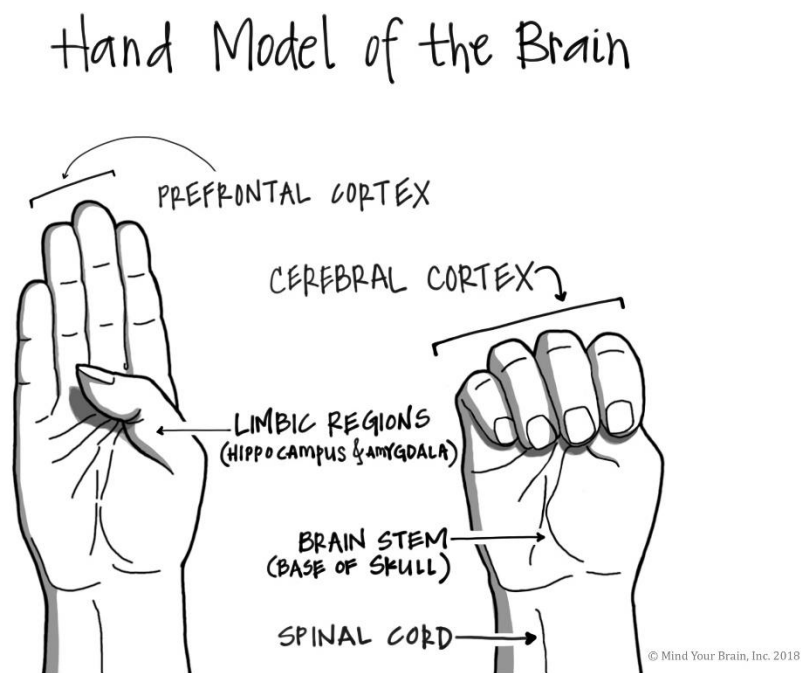
Reason

By helping children and young people understand their thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and reactions, we can make sense of their experiences. It also allows you to stay curious as to why the child has behaved in a certain way.

Hand model of the brain

Dr Daniel Siegel is well known in the field of interpersonal neurobiology and was responsible for the development of the hand model. This can be a useful tool when understanding our own and the pupils' emotional responses, as well as for children's understanding of their own emotions and behaviour. It uses our hand to describe our brain as having an upstairs and downstairs component and shows what happens when pupils 'flip their lid'. Our wrist represents the brain stem which is responsible for basic functions such as breathing and pumping blood around the body. The thumb is responsible for a fight, flight and freeze response and sits in the palm of our hand. Our fingers then fold over representing our pre-frontal cortex which is responsible for complex thinking such as problem solving. When fear activates the amygdala resulting in a fight, flight or freeze response it causes the pre-frontal cortex to go off-line and we 'flip our lid'. When the upstairs and downstairs brain are no longer connected, we need to work on all the above ideas in this booklet to ensure the pupils feel safe and regulated, before we can relate to them and then reason with them. In this video, Dr Daniel Siegel presents the hand model of the brain.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>



Aware by Dr. Dan Siegel.

(Image Credit: <https://www.drdansiegel.com/>)

Circle time

Circle time is already used by many schools and provides pupils with opportunities to develop relationships, emotional literacy and communication. Here are some examples of circle time conversation starters that are relevant to the current situation, and useful for both Primary and Secondary ages:

1. How are you feeling about being back in school? In school routine? With your friends and teachers? In uniform?
2. Take a moment to think about where you are at this moment. Maybe you are in your classroom, maybe you are outside or perhaps in the hall. Just think about now, where you are, who is with you and how you really feel.
3. What have you missed about being in school that you would like to do during the next week?
4. What questions do you have about being back in school? Being here today?
5. What do you think you have learned about yourself and the world which you did not know when we were all in school together before?
6. How have you changed and grown as a person since you were in school before the school closure.
7. You may have been learning at home with the guidance of your parents, did you have a visual timetable? What lessons did you decide to do? If you could use your home learning experience to devise a visual timetable for your class, what lessons/ learning quests would be on it?
8. How do you feel about restarting school at this time of the academic year?
9. Now you can see your friends again and play in the outside environment, what kind of rules should we have to keep everyone safe? Which games could be adapted to allow children their personal space? Can you devise or make up a new game?

Emotion coaching approach

Use an emotion coaching approach to problem solve together:

- Explore the feelings that give rise to the behaviour/problem/incident
- Scaffold alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes
- Empower the child to believe s/he can overcome difficulties and manage feelings and behaviours

I wish my teacher knew exercise

Complete as an anonymous activity, ask children to write down 'what I want my teacher to know'. This gives you an open and honest view of the challenges the children are facing. This could also be adapted to spark discussion to understand any worries or concerns children have about returning to school in September.

Creative activities

To celebrate being back together activities such as, a class paper chain, a mosaic, or a display of everyone's handprints are fun and engaging ways to celebrate. Children could write about a new skill they have learnt, or what they are looking forward to now they are back at school. These activities can also be used to promote a sense of belonging.



Appreciation and gratitude

As mentioned earlier in the booklet we have all been part of a collective trauma, something unexpected that we were unprepared for. In addition to acknowledging the difficult times we have all been through, it is also important to consider resilience and post traumatic growth when reflecting on the time we have experienced and are still experiencing. Allow pupils the time to think about what they have appreciated about their time in 'lockdown'. What are they thankful for, what have they learnt or enjoyed. Below are some ideas of this this can be done:

- Appreciation trees or jars – Depending on the available space you have in your classroom, pupils could write down something they appreciate or are grateful for and place it in a jar to be read out each week or displayed on a wall display. Making use of the outdoors, these could also be laminated and hung on any trees in the school yard.
- Create a 'Good News' Newspaper. Ask each pupil to write about something good they have either experienced or heard about. These stories could then be collated into a newspaper on a 'bubble', class or whole school basis. Some pupils may find this difficult depending on their home situations or may not want to write about their person experiences. To help with this have some stories to hand that they can write about such as Captain Tom Moore. There will be lots of others available.
- Postcards or letters – Give pupils the time to think about who they would like to thank for their time during 'lockdown'. This could be a relative, staff member or friend. Give them the option to write a letter or postcard to say thank you to them and explain why they are grateful to them or have appreciated having them around.
- Gratitude walk – Taking advantage of your time outdoors, take a walk around the school yard or school premises noticing what you are grateful for. Encourage pupils to engage all their senses, thinking about what they appreciate now they are back in school in terms of what they can see, touch, hear, smell and taste. Care will need to be taken with younger children so they adhere to social distancing guidelines.
- Awards could be given out to each pupil for kindness, consideration, helpfulness etc.



Time capsule

To create a sense of community amongst your bubble, create a class time capsule. This gives children the opportunity to share their experiences. Children might want to share positive stories from their time at home, or from their first few days back at school. Ideas can be taken from the 'My 2020 Covid-19 Time Capsule' booklet. <https://www.kiddycharts.com/printables/free-covid-19-time-capsule-worksheets/>

Return to school plan

A step by step reintegration plan might be helpful for children who are too anxious to return to school. This would be individualised based on the child's needs, but it might look like a flexible timetable, or a phased return. They would outline short- and long-term targets for the child, ensure the targets are achievable.

Grief

Grief may have been experienced in several different ways for both you and the pupils you work with. There has been a loss in terms of routine, relationships and accessibility to activities for all of us. In addition to this some of us may be grieving for a loved one who has died during the recent months. However this grief has been experienced, it is important that it is acknowledged and that pupils are given the opportunity to discuss it as and when needed. To allow for this to happen all pupils need to feel a sense of safety, regulation and relatedness, and this may take longer for some than others. Some ideas of how you can discuss and explore grief with your pupils is listed below:



- Sadness tree or remembrance board – communicate to pupils that it is okay to not feel okay, feeling sad, is a normal response to a difficult situation. Allow pupils to communicate what has made them feel sad or what or who they have lost. Remember that even though COVID-19 has been at the forefront of our minds during these last few months, pupils may still have experienced the usual losses such as the death of a family member or pet, a pet going missing or the breakdown of relationships. How this is stored or displayed can be decided as a group.
- Some pupils may not want to write down or verbalise what has made them feel sad, allow them to represent this as a picture, colour or texture.
- Talk through how they comfort themselves when they feel sad, what do they look at, who do they talk to or what do they do.
- Memory activities – For some pupils, particularly those that have lost a loved one, it may be beneficial to engage in more therapeutic work with them as time goes on and it's appropriate to do so. This could include creating memory jars, writing letters or making keepsakes. Utilise the skills of staff within your school for pupils experiencing bereavement such as those trained in ELSA or Trauma Informed Schools. You may want to make use of resources such as the *Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine* book by Diane Crossley or the *Out of the blue* book by Julie Stokes and Paul Oxley.
- Be aware of those who have experienced the death of a loved one and how they were able to grieve, due to social distancing guidelines some may not have been able to attend the funeral. Later work may consider how they can say their goodbyes in a different way such as writing a letter or visiting the cemetery or their special place where they may want to say something or leave something such as flowers. It will be important to involve the parents in this work. Be careful when considering how to say goodbye so to not duplicate the bereavement, as flowers will eventually die, and cuddly toys left in cemeteries can often be removed.

Repair

During this time there may be breakdowns in relationships between peer relationships and pupil – staff relationships. We are all in a state of heightened anxiety so this is expected. When this happens it is important to acknowledge this rupture and work on repairing the relationship. Think back to PRRR: ensure they feel safe; help them to regulate whether this be through co-regulation or encouraging them to engage in regulatory techniques; connect with them using a calm and attuned manner; and then talk through what has just happened and how everyone can move forward.

Marking Endings and New Beginnings

Within the ‘Coronavirus and me’ document released by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, they found that 76% of year 6 children want to say goodbye to their primary school and that 75% want to visit their secondary school before they start. Below are a number of activities that could be used to help children mark their transition to another class or school. These can be achieved with pupils when they return to school in the last few weeks of term but also with the pupils who are at home unable to return, to ensure they have the same opportunity to say hello and goodbye.

- Bring pupils back together and enable them to say their goodbyes. Activities such as a virtual assembly, time capsules, photo reels, thank you notes, and virtual class parties might be helpful.
- Create a space for pupils and staff to share their memories of the time they have had together. For a key adult relationship, this activity could look like creating a memory book together.
- Consider creating transitional objects together, for example painting pebbles, pictures, making bracelets, artwork, poetry that the pupil can take and keep, and the teacher can put up in school. Again, acknowledge that just because the child may not see the adult every day, they are not forgotten.
- In amongst quick transitions, it may be helpful for a staff member to visit a pupil/class in their new setting to say hello and see how they have settled.
- Use a card or letter to mark final goodbyes so that the child is left with something tangible from that relationship.
- A class video clip celebrating achievements is a visual way to mark the end of the academic year. Pupils can look back on this and remind themselves of the memories they created.
- Pupils can be introduced to their new school, classroom, and teaching staff virtually through videos of school tours and staff introductions.

*“At their best, schools can function as islands of safety in a chaotic world”
(Van der Kolk, 2014)*

Appendix 1 – Example timetable

	 9:00	 10:00	 10:30	 11:30	 12:30	 1.30	 2:00
Monday		 Break		 Lunch		 Break	
Tuesday		 Break		 Lunch		 Break	
Wednesday		 Break		 Lunch		 Break	
Thursday		 Break		 Lunch		 Break	
Friday		 Break		 Lunch		 Break	

To create your own personalised visual timetable, visit Widgit Online for a free 21 day trial <https://widgitonline.com/>

Appendix 2 – Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script for Primary School

Hands and Arms

Pretend you are squeezing a whole lemon in your left hand. Squeeze it hard. Try to squeeze all the juice out. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now drop the lemon and relax. See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed. Repeat with other hand.

Arms and Shoulders

Pretend you are a furry, lazy cat. You want to stretch. Stretch your arms out in front of you. Raise them up high over your head. Way back. Feel the pull in your shoulders. Stretch higher. Now just let your arms drop back to your side. Okay kitten, stretch again. Repeat.

Shoulder and Neck

Now pretend you are a turtle. You're sitting out on a rock by a nice, peaceful pond, just relaxing in the warm sun. It feels nice and warm and safe here. Oh-Oh! You sense danger. Pull your head into your house. Try to pull your shoulders up to your ears and push your head down into your shoulders. Hold in tight. It isn't easy to be a turtle in a shell. The danger is past now. You can come out into the warm sunshine and once again you can relax and feel the warm sunshine. Watch out now. More danger. Hurry pull your head back into your house and hold it tight. Repeat.

Jaw

You have a giant bubble gum in your mouth. It's very hard to chew. Bite down on it. Hard! Let your neck muscles help you. Now relax. Just let your jaw hang loose. Notice how good it feels just to let your jaw drop. Okay, let's tackle that jawbreaker again now. Repeat

Face and Nose

Here comes a pesky old fly. He has landed on your nose. Try to get him off without using your hands. That's right wrinkle up your nose. Make as many wrinkles in your nose as you can. Scrunch your nose up real hard. Good. You've chased him away. Now you can relax your nose. Oops here he comes back again. Repeat.

Stomach

Hey! Here comes a cute baby elephant. But he's not watching where he's going. He doesn't see you lying there in the grass, and he's about to step on your stomach. Don't move. You don't have time to get out of the way. Just get ready for him. Make your stomach very hard. Tighten up your stomach muscles real tight. Hold it. It looks like he is going the other way. You can relax now. Let your stomach go soft. Let it be as relaxed as you can. That feels so much better. Oops, he's coming this way again. Get ready. Repeat.

Legs and Feet

Now pretend that you are standing barefoot in a big fat mud puddle. Squish your toes down deep in to the mud. Try to get your feet down to the bottom of the mud puddle.

Push down, spread your toes apart, and feel the mud squish up between your toes. Now step out of the mud puddle. Relax your feet. Let your toes go loose and feel how nice that is. It feels good to be relaxed. Repeat.

Credit: Monica Fitzgerald, Ph.D. TF-CBT Training

References: Carkhuff, R.R. Helping and human relations, Vol. 1, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

Appendix 3 – Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Secondary School

For the best results practise this on a daily basis for ten to twenty minutes, lying or sitting somewhere that your body will be fully supported and you will not be disturbed. Try to practice at the same time each day, before going to bed is a useful time to practice although whenever you do practice it is best to do it on an empty stomach.

For each muscle group, tense the muscle for 7 seconds, release fairly quickly and allow your body to relax for 15 seconds before moving on to the next muscle group. If you find that a particular muscle hurts, stop tensing and move on to the next muscle. If you notice your mind wandering, bring your attention back to your muscle group and remember to keep breathing throughout. Allow yourself this time to just 'be', don't worry about your day or how you are performing in the activity. Do not try to control your body or make yourself relax; the important thing is to let it happen as you practice.

Forehead (raise your eyebrows as far as you can)

Eyes (clench your eyelids tightly shut)

Mouth (open your mouth wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw, not too wide)

Neck (stretch your head backwards, be careful not to overstretch)

Shoulders (raise your shoulders up towards your ears)

Arm (stretch your arms out in front of you and clench your fists)

Chest (tighten by taking a deep breath in and out)

Stomach (suck your stomach in)

Lower back (stretch by arching it up)

Buttocks (tighten as if pushing yourself up off the chair)

Leg (Stretch your legs out in front of you and point your toes)

Mentally scan your body and repeat one or two tense-relax cycles if necessary.

Imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading through your body from your head to your toes.

Websites

For further educational and wellbeing ideas and printouts the following websites are useful. Though most resources are available for a small fee, many sites are offering some free ideas and resources to support educational settings and parents throughout the Coronavirus outbreak.

- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk>
- <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk>
- <https://www.relaxkids.com>
- <http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/covid-anxiety-stress-resources-links/>
- <https://www.winstonswish.org>