

3

Coming Back to School

The Educational Psychology Service



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Introduction and context

Schools have played a central role in the nation's response to COVID-19, responding with immense flexibility, creativity and resilience. These key strengths will continue to play an important role as we now shift our focus towards getting communities ready for a return to school. Many will continue to look to their local school for stability and support. The purpose of this document is to provide you with practical and psychologically informed advice to support your current thinking and future planning for staff well-being and supporting students during the 're-adjustment' period.

You may also wish to refer to the following COVID-19 response documents available through School Zone:

- Looking after yourself, looking after your child throughout the COVID19 pandemic
- EPS offer of support during COVID-19
- Bereavement Guidance and Critical Incident Policy
- Transition Guidance for Year 7 students

Psychological impact of covid-19

The psychological impact of COVID19 on a child/young person will depend on their experiences, the social and economic circumstances of their family and community, and the availability of support. Not all children will respond in the same way. Some might have more severe, longer-lasting reactions. The following factors may affect a child's emotional response:

- Direct personal impact of COVID19 on the child and their family
- Previous traumatic or stressful event
- Belief that the child or a loved one may die
- Loss of a family member or close friend
- Separation from caregivers
- How parents and caregivers respond
- Relationships and communication among family members
- Repeated exposure to mass media coverage of the pandemic and aftermath
- Ongoing stress due to the change in familiar routines

Currently not much is known about the long-term

effects of pandemics on the mental health of children and young people (Lee, 2020). However, our population continues to face an extended period of social isolation, bereavements, unemployment, financial strain and uncertainty, increased domestic violence, families are separated, and our medical system is under strain. Preliminary findings from polls and lessons learned from previous virus outbreaks indicate that the virus will impact us all in some way. It is likely that all children and young people will need some level of support to ease the transition back to school.

By the time school begin to re-open, children and young people will have been absent from their regular school routines for over two months. Research indicates that when children are out of school (during typical periods such as weekends and summer holidays), they are physically less active, have much longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns, and less favourable diets (Brazendale, Beets & Weaver, 2017; Wang, Zhang & Lam, 2019). COVID-19 has led to many added stressors for children and young people. For example, prolonged duration of home confinement, fear of infection, frustration and boredom, lack of in person contact with peers and teachers, potential lack of personal space at home, and family strains. We may see an increase in new behaviours that challenge us as children and young people learn to readjust in the 'new normal' (possibly wearing PPE, social distanced learning and interactions, increased hygiene levels) and process their experiences.

We may also see varying degrees of separation anxiety when schools re-open. This will be particularly true for young children and we must reflect on how we can support students and their parents to navigate this. Sadly, some children will have experienced trauma and loss during their time away from school. Social distancing measures mean that the grieving process and related rituals are disrupted. Many returning students may not have been able to say goodbye to their loved ones in the way they would have wished.

For children and young people with existing mental health needs, social distancing and school closures can mean a lack of access to supportive relationships and resources. School routines can play an important role in coping mechanisms for many young people. Young Minds recently carried out a survey with young people (aged up to 25 years old) with a history of mental health needs in the UK. 83% said

that their mental health had suffered further due to the pandemic. 26% said they were unable to access mental health support; peer support groups and face-to-face services have been cancelled.

We must also consider the rush of emotion as we begin to regroup in schools. This will bring many positive feelings but also a feeling of being suddenly overwhelmed by heavy emotions. This will be partly due to what psychologists refer to as 'Emotion Contagion'. Emotional contagion refers to the process where individuals tend to express and feel emotions that are similar to those of others. This is controlled by a system of signals firing within our brain (called the Mirror Neuron System). The signals begin firing as we (often unconsciously) begin to mimic the body language and facial expressions of those around us. Through this mimicking, you then begin to experience the emotion and it can become part of your own experience. School staff will be in a position where they are managing and containing a high level of emotion and demand as well as coping with their own experience of quarantine. It is important that we take time to plan how they can be best supported.

Guiding principles

There will not be a one size fits all approach to supporting schools. Each school has their own unique leadership, culture and community. However, many will agree that in order to successfully reintegrate students, we need to plan for an extended period of 're-adjustment'. This means making significant changes to how schools typically approach learning to allow for a 'Recovery Curriculum' (Carpenter, 2020). At the core, this consists of a relationship-based approach that focuses upon emotional well-being and a gradual re-learning of group learning/classroom skills. There will be as many ways of implementing a recovery curriculum as there are schools. However, we can follow some key principles as a guide.

Researchers (Hobfoll et al, 2007) have distinguished five key principles of psychosocial care for people confronted with disaster, tragedy and loss. The principles are based upon a synthesis of available scientific research. They are outlined below from the perspective of a school. Much of the thinking behind these principles will be familiar to schools as they share key ideas with resilience: overcoming adversity and being able to adapt to challenging situations.

Principle 1: Promoting a sense of safety

It is important that we deliver a message of physical, social and emotional safety in school. We can work to re-establish schools as a place of safety and security by providing structure, routine, relationships and access to resources (support from external agencies when needed).

Principle 2: Promotion of Calming

Exposure to an event such as a global pandemic can result in heightened emotions or a numbing response. Some anxiety is normal and there is no reason to be alarmed by this. Adopting a recovery curriculum (Carpenter, 2020) will set schools up well for containing emotions and providing all with a sense of calming and stability.

Principle 3: Promotion of self and community efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief we have in our own abilities, specifically our ability to meet the challenges ahead of us and complete a task successfully. Students are learning in different environments during the pandemic. It is important that we take time to re-establish classroom learning skills and rebuild student confidence. Some may feel that they are behind. We must show them how we plan to address gaps in learning. Supporting a school through a period of crisis can place immense pressure on staff and the list of tasks can be overwhelming. It will be important to support staff to recognise the skills they already have and foster support when needed.

Principle 4: Social connectedness

We are all now in a period of extended quarantine with restrictive measures across the nation on our movement. Research has clearly established that social support and attachment is pivotal to combat stress and trauma. Connecting with others is of fundamental importance to children and young people. It will be important that we place relationships first by allowing time for students to and staff to reconnect with one another.

Principle 5: Hope

Instilling hope is fundamental principal in paving our road to recovery. Living through a threatening experiencing such as a global pandemic and all the uncertainty it has introduced to our lives, can leave us with a "shattered worldview" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). The very act of schools re-opening sends a strong message to the public that we are entering a phase of recovery.

Prior to schools opening

This section focuses on guidance for initial communication with your school community, beginning to mentally prepare children for their return and ensuring staff are feeling grounded and ready.

Preparing parents, children and young people

We have seen our government in recent weeks grapple with risk communication due to COVID-19. Risk communication refers to providing expert advice to people facing threats to their health, economic or social well-being. The ultimate purpose of risk communication is to enable people at risk to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones. Schools too will need to consider their own version of risk communication regarding their new procedures. The aim will be to provide parents and students with important and accurate information without overwhelming people or oversharing which can lead to people disengaging.

Aside from a health and safety perspective, it is important psychologically to share information. Our brains are hard wired to struggle with uncertainty and not knowing what is around the corner can leave us feeling stressed. Initial communication around the return to school should aim to deliver a message of school being a place of safety for all. The following are some points to consider when deciding what to share prior to opening:

What you can do

1. New routines:

There will be new routines and procedures in place. As such, all students could be considered as 'new starters'. It may help to reflect on what you typically do for a new starters and how this can be applied on a whole school level.

2. Keeping in touch:

Schools have established creative ways of keeping in touch with students. To continue with this, it is suggested that a letter is sent out to students to show that you continue to keep them in mind, and you are preparing for their return to school. This could include outlining your current plan for day one and the

first week back. This plan does not need to contain finer details. The aim is to normalise worries about returning, give students a sense of how the school day might look different (and familiar), and instil a message of hope. Please see Appendix 1 for a sample format for primary school children.

3. Back to school activities:

It will be important to try as best we can to mentally prepare students for their return. We can acknowledge the challenges we face however the focus of 'Back to School' activities should come from a strengths-based approach that instils a message of hope and reminds children about what they like about going to school. Activities could touch upon themes such as initial thoughts/feelings about returning, an emotion diary logging their journey back to school, what they are most looking forward to (what will be the same/different), how they can help themselves and others, and goal setting. It may help to use storytelling and drawings for younger children e.g. 'picture of me and my teacher during my favourite lesson/when I am feeling brave/happy' etc.

4. Closure for those who remained on site:

It will be important to provide students who remained on site with some form of closure and prepare them for the return of other students. This may involve simple tasks such as helping to get the classroom 'ready' for their peers or you may wish to engage them with a project.

5. Parental support:

The news of schools beginning phased re-opening to a wider number of students received a mixed response. Many parents welcomed the news whilst others felt anxious. It will be important to support both groups of parents. It is an anxious time for us all and we must approach parental concerns with compassion. Please see Appendix 2 for some tips to share with parents.

Depending on safety measures, schools may wish to arrange regular parent coffee mornings hosted by school staff (virtual or in an open space away from the main school building if possible). Themes for the sessions could come from topics raised by parents. Alternatively, the issues/topics raised could be addressed in a newsletter format or 'top tips' articles produced by the school or external agencies.

6. Reliable information:

There is unfortunately misleading information about COVID-19. Your school community is likely being exposed to this information through social media, well-meaning friends and family, and sometimes our newspapers and news channels. When we begin to regroup, this could lead to what is termed 'the pressure cooker' effect (Hobfoll & London, 1986) where following a traumatic event, people share rumours and 'horror stories'. As such, it may help to dispel myths and focus upon how we can continue to help ourselves. The World Health Organisation has created a range of downloadable posters on how to protect yourself and fact/fiction sheets. It may help to provide students with these facts on a display board or through the school welcome screen in reception. Please see: <https://www.who.int/southeastasia/outbreaks-and-emergencies/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Supporting school staff

The strain on staff of leading a school through a challenging period may not be identified until after the crisis. Staff, both teaching and non-teaching, can often underestimate the impact of their work upon themselves and may not have the time or space to acknowledge the pressure and stress they are under. It will be important to ensure that staff are feeling grounded and supported themselves.

What you can do

1. Establish a staff check-in system:

As a first step, it would help to create a robust check-in system amongst staff. You may have already begun to think about how you can implement this. Dr Bruce Perry recommends what he terms the 'Relational Three' whereby one member of staff e.g. Head Teacher, checks in with three colleagues who each in turn checks in with three others and so on. Another method is to create a 'buddy system' of pairs or small groups. Each group can meet and establish a check-in system that they are comfortable with. Regardless of the method, the aim is for everyone to be checking in with at least one other person. Please see Appendix 3 for tips on checking with colleagues.

2. Break out space:

Some NHS Trusts have introduced what they term a 'Wobble Room' during the pandemic to support the well-being of staff. It is likely that there will be challenges in implementing such a strategy in a school environment as room space is often limited. However, it would help to have a protocol in place for staff should they need to take a step back.

3. Extended INSET:

The school year typically starts with a staff inset day for obvious reasons such as allowing staff to regroup, training, and generally easing the transition back to school. However, this return to school will be significantly different and as such it is suggested that staff are provided with an extended period of regrouping. This will be important to allow all staff the opportunity to reconnect with each other, identify staff who may need additional support and address any training needs you feel are important. It is important that staff are feeling grounded themselves. Please contact your link EP if you would like support for debriefing sessions and/or training.

4. Joint Problem-Solving Sessions:

It is important that teachers and support staff are given time to reflect on the previous months and how this might play out in the classroom. Classroom teachers and support staff have a wealth of knowledge and experience that they can draw upon to prepare themselves and their students to return to the classroom. It is suggested that time is set aside either now or when schools re-open to reflect on this. This could involve a virtual brainstorming workshop led by a member of staff: 'The impact of school closures and quarantine in the classroom'. Topics to consider could include:

- Re-establishing social and group learning skills.
- Supporting concentration levels (consider impact of bereavement, anxiety, body
- Clocks, being out of routine).
- Individual experiences of quarantine and home learning.
- Gaps in learning.

Please see Appendix 3, for reflective activities designed to support your preparation and planning for when schools re-open. You can complete these activities in your own time or discuss them virtually with a colleague or within department teams.

Initial weeks

Creating belonging and connectedness

A sense of belonging is important for healthy development in all children and young people. Students who feel connected to their school are more motivated and achieve better academically (Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni, 2013). A sense of belonging is also important for the development of self and identity building which is particularly important during adolescence (Friedman, 2009).

Our relationships provide us with a sense of connectedness and act as a buffer during times of stress. Schools are doing an incredible job ensuring that they remain connected to their students during closures. This will of course continue to be vital as students return to the classroom.

What you can do

1. Gather community views:

Learning is taking place in the community and as such it would be helpful to gather views from the community. Views of parents, children and young people could be captured on topics such as: experience of quarantine and home learning, general well-being, and their ideas of what would support them to prepare for schools re-opening. The complexity of this task will of course depend on staff capacity and the size of the school. It may not be possible to gather views from all. Schools may decide to collect views from groups or take a random sample or through 'virtual worry and hope' boxes. This information could, later, be collated in some way to mark your collective memory as a school during COVID-19. Please see Appendix 5 for suggested themes.

On-going feedback can be sought from children and young people once they are back in school. For example, through class discussions, using a worry and strength box, teacher's reading of the emotional climate of the classroom and informal feedback.

2. Belonginess in the classroom:

Belonging is an important aspect of resilience-building. Teachers have likely collected a range of resources to create a sense of belonging in their classroom. It may help to set up a platform (if not already in use) where teachers can share ideas for welcoming students back into the classroom.

For additional ideas, please see 'The Resilient Classroom'. This is a resource pack for tutor groups and pastoral school staff that has been developed in partnership between YoungMinds, Boing Boing, Lisa Williams Consulting and the University of Brighton. It contains a variety of activities that can be adapted for a wider age range. It is organised into five themes: Basics, Belonging, Learning, Learning, Coping, and Core Self. Please see <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/the-resilient-classroom/>

3. Provide a sense of continuity:

It is suggested that a link is made between home learning and the first day back in the classroom. This will help provide students a sense of continuity. For primary school children this could involve:

- A reunion bag of key items
- Display board with pictures of their home learning
- Show and tell where they share something from their home learning experience
- Some younger children may benefit from using a transitional object (any object/item that gives them psychological comfort) during their first days back

For secondary school young people, this could include:

- Discussion led activities so they can share their experiences.
- Presenting on a variety of topics related to returning to school/home learning.
- Asking them prior to their return to describe their experience in one word. This could then be collated by tutor groups teachers and displayed as a Wordle.

4. Empowering Students

It will be important that students feel that they can have some control over what is happening in school. It would help to build a sense of 'working together' when communicating the new rules that we must all follow. Below are some suggestions on how to involve children and young people:

- Have children create posters for the new rules during the first week and display them throughout the school. You may also wish to send home a copy of the 'rules' for each student.
- Create a song or acronym for your new rules or some 'hook' to help everyone remember them.
- Modelling – it will be important that students see adults model the rules. This will create a strong sense of being 'in it together'.
- Involve students in creating group rules e.g. 'how we can help each other in the playground'.

Embedding well-being in the curriculum

Psychological first aid refers to the actions that can be taken by people without formal psychological or counselling training to provide emotional support for people following an emergency or critical incident.

It is important to recognise that people's reactions to COVID-19 should not necessarily be regarded as pathological responses. It is normal to find the transition period challenging and feel unsettled and possibly frightened.

What you can do

1. Re-defining success in the classroom:

It would help to initially shift the focus away from attainment and begin to define success in the classroom differently e.g. through acts of kindness. Students may find that they are struggling to concentrate and apply their typical learning skills. It would help to create learning opportunities where you feel students are likely to succeed e.g. topics they were previously confident in. It would also help to set aside more time than you typically would on metacognition skills, providing sample answers, answer frameworks, and more detailed task planners.

2. Subjects that offer expression:

We have various outlets and ways of expressing emotions. Consider the various forms of expression that are available in school such as physical activity, drama, art and music.

3. Create a Wheel of Coping:

Schools already have a wealth of experience and knowledge in supporting the emotional needs of their students. It is suggested that staff draw upon this to create a mental health first aid box/wheel of coping etc in their classrooms. The content could be based upon resources that are available within the school. Further resources (if needed) can be found through:

Mentally Healthy Schools

- www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2025/coronavirus-anxiety-toolkit.pdf

The Anna Freud Centre

- <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/?sort=az>

4. PSHE Lessons:

Provide students with access to regular PSHE lessons focusing upon topics such as coping with change, identifying and managing feelings. The PSHE Association have created a series of lesson plans on pertinent topics:

Key stage 1-2:

- Identifying and talking about feelings
- Understanding how feelings affect behaviours
- Strategies to manage feelings
- Link between mental health and physical health
- Managing transition to secondary

Key Stage 3:

- Stigma related to mental health
- Promoting emotional well-being
- Reframing negative thinking
- Awareness of unhealthy coping strategies such as self-harm and eating disorders
- Please see: www.connect-pshe.org/sign-up

Enhanced transitions

All students will benefit from the universal support that you put in place. However, some children and young people will need a higher level of input to help ease the transition process. Times of transition and change can be particularly challenging for some children and young people. Following COVID-19, we may see this group widen. This could include students who experienced bereavement, trauma or anxiety related to COVID-19. School can be quite stressful for some students despite the best endeavours of staff. Some students may have found that they are more relaxed when they are away from the pressures of school life. The step back into school may be even harder for this group. Below are some of the key suggestions that are being put forward to support vulnerable young people return to school:

What you can do

1. Assess and identify

Schools have already identified their known vulnerable groups and established ways of connecting with them. Feedback from teachers will be helpful to identify any students who were not previously considered vulnerable. You may wish to take a formal assessment of your most vulnerable students' well-being using a tool such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) or through more informal means such as phone check-ins.

2. Child/young person in context

When creating transition plans, it will be important to reflect on how COVID-19 and school closures have impacted vulnerable students. Transition and change are challenging for us all. However, some children and young people may feel this more acutely. For example, the impact of a loss of routine and an 'unknown' future on the well-being of a child with autism or a Looked After Child.

We will also need to consider what 'needs' of the child have been impacted by school closures. You may wish to refer to the 'Resilience Framework' created by Angie Hart and colleagues. This framework divides needs into categories: Basic, Belonging, Learning, Coping and Core Self. An interactive framework is available which allows you to click on areas you wish to find out more about.

Please see: www.boingboing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Interactive_Resilience_Framework.pdf

3. Key worker system

Most of your vulnerable students will have had a key person who is checking in on them. It would help to think about their capacity to be involved in transition plans and their availability to students once the schools are open. It will be important that vulnerable students have a key person/group of people who are consistently available.

It may also help to continue to offer (where possible) emotional check ins with vulnerable families. This can be negotiated with the family (how often? By whom?).

4. Phased returns

The government have let us know that schools will re-open in phases. It best to work with families and those who know the child/young person best to establish a good point to begin re-integrating vulnerable young people. Some young people may have been exposed to reduced sensory, social and communicative demands during school closures.

Preparation will be key for many vulnerable children. Schools have already begun to share the strategies they are using such as virtual tours (showing what is the same/different), photos, vlogs from teachers, and provisional timetables amongst many others. It would help where possible to ground the 'new' in the familiar. For example, although the classroom may look different, having access to the same supportive materials/workstations etc.

If possible, it may help to provide some vulnerable young people with a debrief session following their virtual school visit prior to their first day back in the classroom. This can provide an opportunity to discuss what is the same and different, capture their views, worries and what they are looking forward to. It will also provide the child with an opportunity to ask questions now that they know what their day will look like.

5. Voice of child/young person

We know that it is important to include children and young people in decisions that are being made about them. The uncertainty that COVID-19 has brought into our lives may have raised feelings of being out of control and helplessness for some. It is important that children/young people feel that their worries and hopes are listened to. They could be involved in any stage of planning for their return. For example, sharing their views in a meeting, in a short video which can be played at meetings or completing activities that reflect their perspective on returning to school.

It will be important not to overwhelm students with self-help strategies. It would help to identify one or two key strategies that they can use if they are feeling worried. Additional strategies can be added once the student feels ready. Students can also be involved in deciding who their key members of staff will be when they return.

6. Multi-agency working

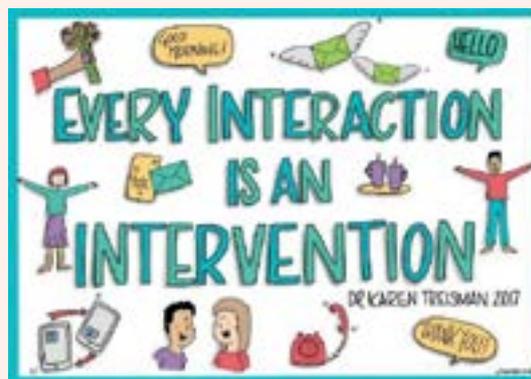
Schools are by now experienced in virtual meetings. Some young people would greatly benefit from multi-agency support to create a transition plan. This may be partly achieved through virtual meetings. It may help to provide support and training to staff members to widen the pool of staff members who can host such meetings.

7. Support networks

Our relationships are vital for our well-being as they provide us with a buffer from stress. Some students will need extra support to rebuild or reconnect key supportive relationships they had in school with adults and peers. The lower number of students in class each day will help to foster relationships. However, some children/young people may need more dedicated time to rebuild their connections with others. This could be achieved through small group (social distanced) activities with a pastoral focus or in a 1:1 session.

Some students, such as those with a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder, may benefit from creating scripts to help them start conversations with others (appropriate and inappropriate questions). It would help to practice these scripts using role play.

Approaches and interventions



The PACE Model – A Relational Approach to Behaviour

As discussed above, emotions may be running high when we return to school. Schools may find that they are needing to contain higher than usual levels of emotions and related behaviour. Behavioural frameworks, consisting of rewards and punishments, are very common in schools and it is important that schools feel that they can communicate their boundaries and expectations to students.

Research from attachment theory indicates that a relational rather than a behavioural framework is more effective in supporting children's behaviour. The PACE model was created by Dan Hughes to support children who experienced trauma and attachment difficulties. It can be used by any adult to validate, explore and understand children's feelings. It is a 'way of thinking' and it can be easily implemented. PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy.

Playfulness

Playfulness is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice, like you might use when story-telling. Having a playful stance is not about being funny all the time or making jokes. It is about helping children be more open to and experience what is positive in their life.

When children find it hard to regulate their feelings, anger can become rage, fear can become terror and sadness can become despair. If this is the case, then children may also find it hard to regulate feelings of excitement, joy and love. While such a response would not be appropriate at the time of major misbehaviour, when applied to minor behaviours, playfulness can help keep it all in perspective.

Acceptance

Unconditional acceptance is at the core of the child's sense of safety. Acceptance is about actively communicating to the child that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation, the child's inner life. The child's inner life simply is; it is not right or wrong.

Accepting the child's intentions does not mean that you are accepting behaviour, which may be hurtful or harmful to another person or to self. Rather you can remain firm in limiting behaviour while at the same time accepting the motivations behind it.

Curiosity

Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware of their inner life and reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour. Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child and letting the child know that you understand. Children often know that their behaviour was not appropriate, but they may not know why they did something or feel shame about it.

Curiosity involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys to the child that you want to understand: "What do you think was going on? What do you think that was about?" or "I wonder what...?" You might make guesses about what a child may be thinking and feeling, saying this aloud, and keeping it connected to the present. It can be about having a conversation, almost with yourself, with the child in the room, without anticipating a response.

Empathy

Empathy lets the child feel the adult's compassion. Being empathic means the adult is actively showing the child that the his/her inner life is important, and the adult wants to be with the child in hard times.

Carrying a positive memory in my hand

'Carrying a Positive Memory in my Hand' (Marcelli, 2015) is a simple yet powerful technique to help children feel safe and calm. The activity engages the child with a positive and grounding memory. Sensory cues are used to help the brain and body more fully relate to the sense of calm and happiness from the memory. The steps are outlined below:

1. First have the child or young person trace their hand on a sheet of paper.
2. The person then thinks of a positive memory that would help them feel safe and calm to remember even in the midst of stressful and triggering situations.
3. Write each of the five senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling) on each of the five fingers.
4. The child or adult with them will draw and/or write about the memory in the palm of the hand.
5. Encourage the individual to identify how the memory is experienced using each of the five senses on each finger and write or draw a picture for each.
6. Lastly, talk about how thinking of this memory can help the person feel a sense of safety and inner calmness despite outer life circumstances.

Marcelli (2015) suggests some adaptations to this technique such as having the child draw the picture onto their own palm or on a small stone which they can then carry with them. Alternatively, students could be provided with a small laminated version of their picture which they could carry in their pocket. The technique lends itself well to adaptations - see below, 'My Helper', 'My Strategies'.





The use of stories

Therapeutic storytelling is a gentle yet often very effective means of addressing difficult topics with children. Children often don't talk naturally or find it easy to articulate their thoughts on topics that they find very upsetting.

Therapeutic stories differ from social stories. A social story is a way to communicate expectations for situations and develop the child's understanding of a situation from their own and other's perspective.

A therapeutic story aims to help a child better understand their worries through creating a narrative about what might be happening. They tend to use metaphors and/or characters who have experienced similar challenges. This provides a framework and a way of thinking that the child can relate to and begin to identify their own needs. There are many story books available and some suggestions are provided in the resource section.

Alternatively, teachers or support staff may wish to create their own therapeutic story. To support you, it is suggested that you work with your school's Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) – if your school has one - or your link EP.

Tree of Life

Adapted by Jill Olver from Ncube-Mlilo (2006)

The Tree of Life is an exercise using a visual metaphor in which a tree represents your life and the various elements that make it up—past, present, and future.

It supports children to process trauma and loss and begin to move forward. The activities focus on the child's personal strengths and increases their sense of belonging within their community. A brief outline is provided below. It is suggested that you contact your Link EP if you wish to use this approach.

The Ground (representing the present)

- Where are the important places in your life now?
- Who are the important people in your life now?
- What are the important things happening now?



The Roots (represents the past)

- Where do you come from?
- Who do you come from?
- What are the important things in your history (whether they are good bad or other)?
- Who are the people, places, animals and things throughout your life that have had a significant impact on you? (e.g. historical events, family members, significant teachers or those of influence, friends, care givers, pets, books, toys, music, etc.)

The Trunk (represents You)

- Your skills and knowledge, the things you can do, the qualities you possess, what makes you the person you are (e.g. serious, tolerant, kind, silly, practical joker etc.).
- What roles do you play in your life (e.g. sibling, son/daughter, partner, parent, artist, environmentalist).
- What are the acts of kindness you show others? Where did you learn these things? What was important to you about this?

The Branches (represents the future)

- Your hopes, dreams and wishes for yourself (e.g. to have a safe and happy family, to travel, to feel calm, to not have to worry about money, to become a vet, to have new friends etc.)

The Leaves (represents the important, valued people in your life)

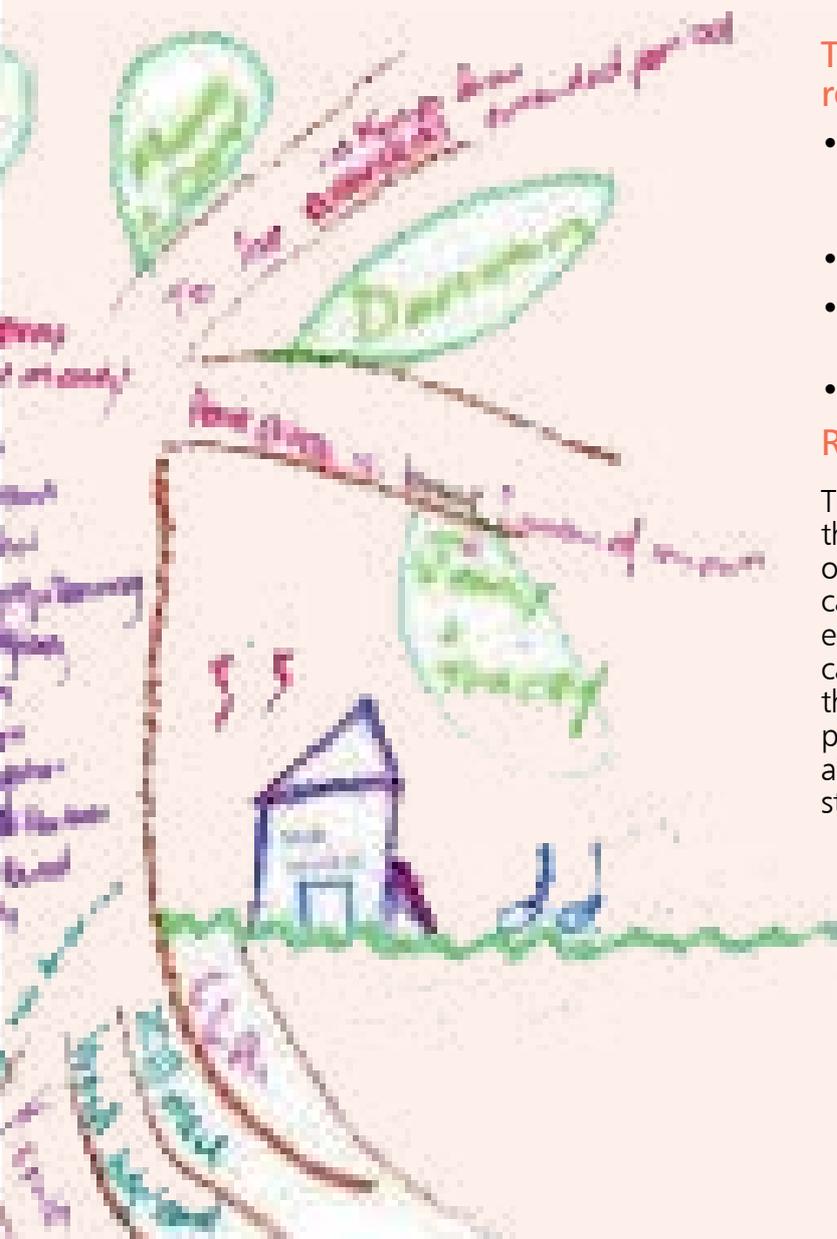
- From the past and present (e.g. family, friends, carers, teachers, other people of significant influence.)

The Fruit (represents what you have received from others)

- Gifts from the important, valued people in your life (e.g. safety, love, support, kindness, education, income, laughter).
- Why were you given these gifts?
- What is it about you that meant people gave you these gifts?
- What fruits have you given to others?

Reflection

This can be done individually or as a group. If using this exercise with a group, you can create a 'forest of life' where you display all the trees together. You can encourage group members to offer words of encouragement and support for others. The exercise can be extended to include 'The Storms of Life' where the children are encouraged to externalise their problems. You can also point out that it doesn't storm all the time. What are the times when there are no storms? What is happening then?



On-going support

Training needs

We hope to work collaboratively with schools to support their training needs. EPs can offer training on a range of topics which may be relevant to your COVID-19 response:

- Critical Incidents
- Bereavement and loss
- Resilience and Coping Skills
- Emotional Regulation
- Attachment
- Staff Well-Being

This list is not exhaustive and we welcome enquiries from schools.

Supervision

School staff are experienced in supporting the social and emotional needs of their students (whilst also offering support to parents/carers). We can expect that the number of vulnerable families in schools will increase as such the personal impact on staff may also be greater. For school staff who are dealing with stressful circumstances around the needs of children and young people, isolation can compound this feeling. In this way, regular, planned supervision can play a role in ensuring that staff have appropriate support.

There are many models of supervision within the helping professions. When managing challenging and stressful situations, it can be hugely beneficial to separate line management issues and supervision. In this way, supervision functions to:

- Support reflective practice
- Provide supportive challenge
- Support personal well-being

Supervision can be offered on a 1:1 basis or as a group. Schools can contact their link EP if they would like to review their supervision model. EPs can offer 1:1 and group supervision and/or support schools to create their own model.

Drop in consultation

A 'drop-in consultation' is a short session offered to school staff to meet an Educational Psychologist and talk about issues or concerns they would like to raise in a focused discussion. This concern may be about an anonymised individual or a group of children and it may be about their well-being or learning. The conversation can take a number of forms and may be somewhat dictated by the nature of the query being raised. However, as a guide we use the following structure:

Description of concern by staff member	5 mins
Clarification and information seeking by EP	5 mins
Discussion of issues using Solution Focused questions and focus for change	10 mins
Joint exploration of ways forward	10 mins
Create joint action plan including next steps	5 mins

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample format for head teacher letter

This template can be easily adapted for older children, adolescents and those with SEND.

Dear [insert child's name]

I hope this finds you safe and well.

It has been a while since we last saw each other. All of us at [insert school name] have been thinking of you and waiting patiently for your return to school. It has not been the same without you.

You probably heard a lot about coronavirus, and you may be worried about coming back to school. It is okay to feel worried or even scared, these feelings are normal. Think of this time as an adventure to be with your family. And remember lots of brilliant grown-ups are helping sort this tricky pandemic. These clever men and women are giving us some very clear guidance and working hard to help us return to school.

We are still unsure of the exact date you will be back to school with us, but we are preparing every day to make your return as safe as possible. And as soon we know the date, we will start counting down until you are back with us.

Once we are back in school, you may notice that there are some changes in the classroom and around the playground. For example, you may notice some markings on the floor which have the sign 2 meters apart or you may notice in the classroom that seating arrangements looks different. All the classrooms have been cleaned and extra handwash are being put in place. This is so to keep you and all the adults safe.

We will see you again very soon, in the meantime please take care and please continue to stay safe.

Best wishes,

Either with an adult or on your own, have a go at completing these two questions.

1. Here are a range of feelings. Circle the picture that describes how you might be feeling about returning to school:



HAPPY



WORRIED



ANGRY



HOPEFUL



SAD



PROUD



SCARED



EXCITED



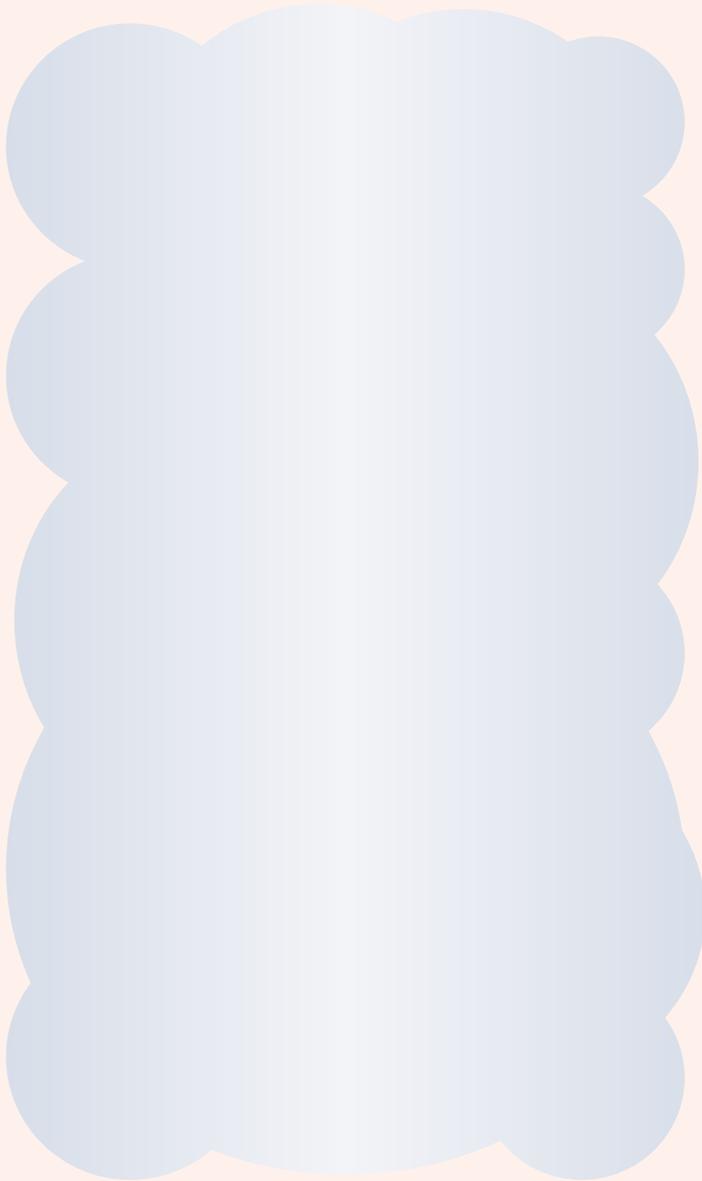
DISAPPOINTED

If none of these feelings describe how you might be feeling, that's okay you can give us your own description.

I am feeling:

2. Think about a hope or dream for returning to school and write it down (you can get an adult to help you do this).

My Hope Cloud:



Please return this slip by emailing the school admin on [insert school email] or by posting it back to the school.

Child name:

Year group:

Appendix 2: Preparing your child to return to school

Preparing your child for school

1. Seek reliable information

It will be important that parents are supported to make informed decisions about their child's return to school. There is unfortunately much misinformation about COVID19. If you have questions regarding the government's decision-making process, please refer to only reliable sources of information such as the Department of Education's guidance document titled 'Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1 June: guidance for parents and carers'.

Your child's school will also provide you with information about their new procedures. Seek clarification for anything you are unsure about. It may also help to connect with other parents in your child's school community.

2. Re-establish school routines

Getting back into the 'school run' routine may initially be a challenge. Many of us have relaxed routines to manage all the demands that are being placed upon us. It would help to gradually prepare your child for their school morning routine. For example, perhaps in the following weeks, getting up and ready, closer and closer to the time you would typically leave the house.

We may also need to think about our sleep routines. Sleep is important for healthy development for all. Arriving at school feeling rested will help your child process all the new procedures and 'rules'. Sleep is also important for classroom concentration. For everything you need to know about sleep! - <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>

3. 'You can't drink from an empty cup'

Many parents are currently feeling the pressure of trying to fulfil many roles in their child's life – mother, father, friend, English teacher, Maths teacher, P.E. teacher, counsellor. This list could go on! Additionally, some parents juggle these roles while trying to work from home and/or run their household. This can leave you feeling frustrated and exhausted as it is not possible to be 'everything'. It is important to take the time (where possible!) to allow yourself some moments of calm.

You may also wish to refer to 'Looking after yourself, looking after your children throughout the COVID19 pandemic' guidance created by the Educational Psychology Service.

4. Manage your worries

Children pick up on how you are feeling, often even if it is not openly expressed. Take time to think about what helps you manage stress. Use this as an opportunity to teach your child coping skills. Model how you approach your worries and the actions you take.

The NHS have provided six top tips to improve your mental well-being. Each tip is accompanied by a short video to explain how you can put it into practice. Please see: www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/top-tips-to-improve-your-mental-wellbeing/

5. Prepare your child for change

The school day will likely 'look' very different. Take time to go through this with your child before they return. Parents will know how to best approach this topic for their child.

Primary school children:

- **Drawing** – ask your child to draw a picture of themselves back in their classroom, in the playground, safe spaces etc Discuss what may look the same and different.
- **Stories** – reading stories about change (The Very Quiet Cricket or The Very Hungry Caterpillar) - what changed? Why did change need to happen? Was the change good?

Secondary school young people:

- **Informal discussion** – for some young people conversations are better held 'informally' whilst you are doing something else e.g. doing chores, cooking.
- **Materials provided by the school** – schools will communicate their new practices with you. You may wish to share this information with your child. Answer questions as best you can and seek clarification from the school when needed.

6. Managing your child's worries

Children may understandably find it difficult to separate from you and go to school. This is likely to be an area of challenge for younger children.

- Place a note in your child's school bag for them to read during the school day.
- Give the child an item belonging to you to 'look after'.
- 'Heart in my hand': if your child misses you, they can trace a heart in their hand with their finger and you can do the same.
- Remind your child about the 'best bits' of school.
- Create a plan with your child to help you both relax the evening/night before they return to school.
- After school fun: It may help to create some extra special time together when after school. This can also be an opportunity to talk about your day and share your experiences as a model.

Appendix 3: Checking in with colleagues

Checking-in with colleagues is best when kept simple. Researchers at Harvard University (Twaronite, 2019) conducted a survey to explore a sense of belonging in the workplace. They found people felt the greatest sense of belonging when their colleagues checked in with them both professionally and personally. The points below are adapted from the main conclusions drawn by the authors in their paper titled 'The Surprising Power of Simply Asking Co-Workers, How They're Doing?' (Twaronite, 2019):



1. Seize the small opportunities to connect

Be present and curious and look for small opportunities to connect authentically with your colleagues. For example, meeting in the car park, waiting for the kettle to boil in the staff room. Simply asking 'how are you doing?' can go a long way.



2. Check bias at the door

Most of you are probably familiar with the key principles of active listening. This involves listening intently without interruption (it is sometimes tempting to jump in quickly to reassure someone). Instead, try asking questions such as 'tell me more'.



3. Assume positive intent

Start any conversation with your colleagues believing that those talking or listening mean well, especially when it comes to difficult issues. If you find the conversation challenging, take a pause and ask clarifying questions. Sometimes, these pauses make a huge difference. It is fine to say, "I am pausing because I just don't know what to say," or "I am pausing because I never thought about it from that perspective before".



4. It is okay to be vulnerable

It can help to build trust if people at all levels of an organisation acknowledge what they have found challenging. Talk as openly as you feel comfortable and seek feedback and/or advice from others.



5. Be consistent and accountable

Be transparent and model consistent, inclusive behaviour, even under pressure or during difficult conversations.

Appendix 4: Reflective activities for classroom teachers and support staff

Reflective questions

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

What do you find most challenging about teaching?

How do you typically welcome students?

Do you think the needs of your students will be different in any way?

If so, are there adjustments you could make to your practice?

- Rate on a scale of 1 (very anxious) to 10 (relaxed and ready), how you imagine you will feel during the first week back at work?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What would help you move up one point?

- Rate on a scale of 1 (very anxious) to 10 (relaxed and ready), how you imagine students may generally feel during the first week back at school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What do you think you could do to help them move up a point?



SWOT analysis

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It is a tool that can be used to analyse any situation and your resource to meet the challenge. This format can be used to reflect during planning for first week/month/term back in the classroom:



Strengths

- What do you do well?
- What unique resources can you draw upon?
- What do others say you do well?



Opportunities

- What is going on around you that seems to be useful?
- Can you use your strengths to help colleagues?



Weaknesses

- What could you improve?
- What do you find most challenging?
- Where do you have fewer resources?



Threats

- What obstacles do you face right now and what/who can support you?
- Where do you think you are not using time well?

Blank template

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

Ideal lesson

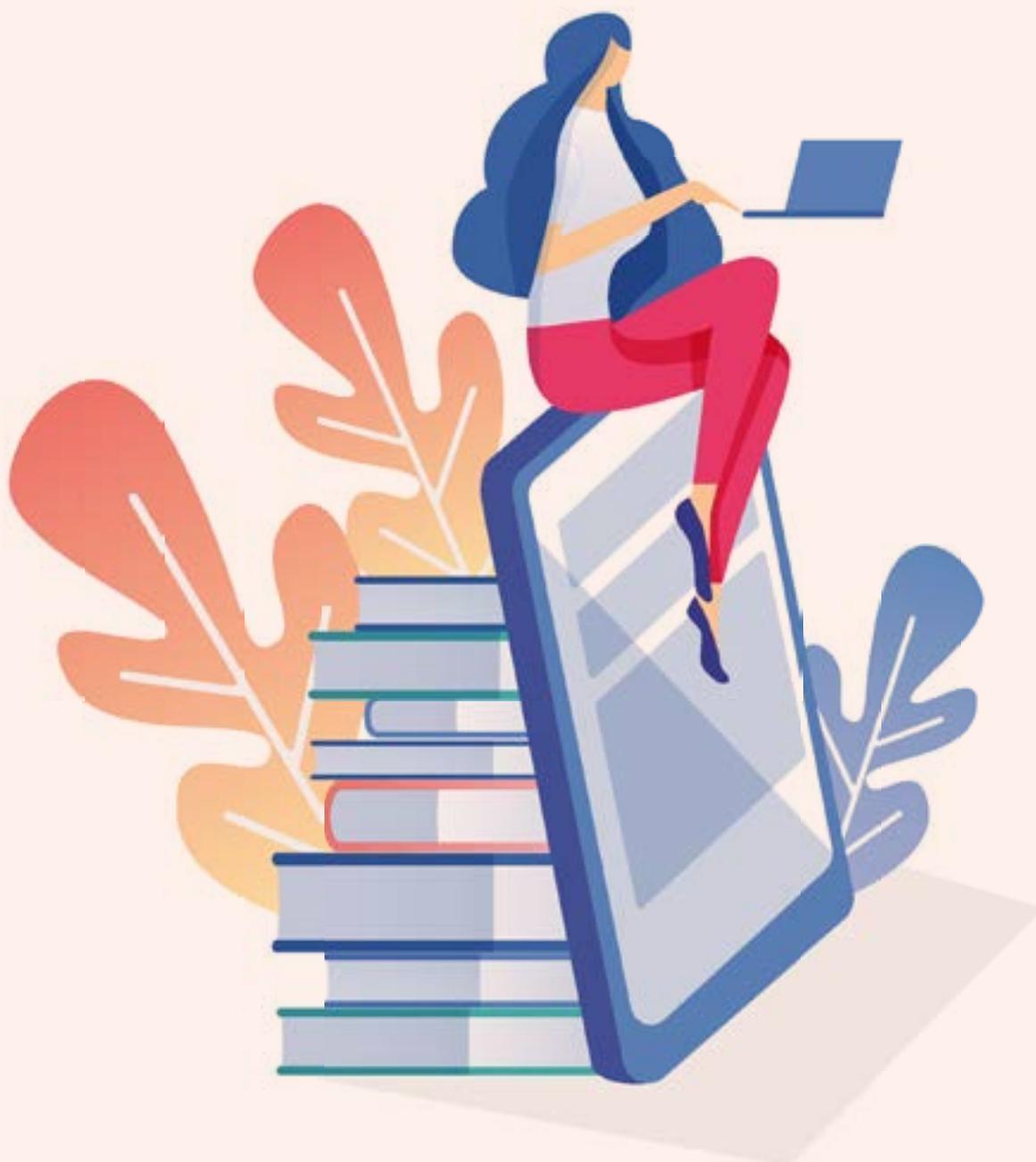
Imagine it is the end of the first term back at school and you have just finished your last lesson for the term. Despite all the recent challenges, you are feeling pleased with how you and your students have coped this term.

Reflect on some of the following:

- What kind of support do you think your students will have needed to help them reach this point?
- How did you support your students to re-adjust to a school setting?

Suggested points to consider:

- Re-establishing a school routine
- Initial modification of behavioural expectations
- Social skills and group learning following an extended period of social isolation
- Concentration levels
- Body clocks!
- Developing emotional safety in the classroom



Appendix 5: Engaging parent and pupil views

Following the period of lockdown, as well as health and safety from the virus being of continuing paramount importance to families, it will be important to explore the views of parents and pupils of the school body.

The SEND Code of Practice, and other legislation, places value on the voice of the child and their views and wishes in guiding practice and provision. Best practice would include allowing pupils, and parents, to share with the school, some of their lived experiences of lockdown, as well as concerns and hopes for return to school.

Engaging with these voices will allow for shared understanding amongst the school community to develop.

As a guide, the following themes and questions could support you in deciding to explore this as a school. The following can be activities pupils engage with on return to school but also be sent home pre-emptively.

The list is not exhaustive but provides a starting point for schools hoping to gather collective memories to mark this point in our lives.

Theme	Key questions	Example activity
Lived Experiences	<p>What have been the highs of school closure for you?</p> <p>What have been the lows of school closure for you?</p>	Tree of Life themed activities. These can be individual trees which can then create a whole school visual of experiences.
Keeping in Touch	<p>How did you connect with people you could not visit?</p> <p>What are your Top Tips for keeping in touch while staying safe?</p>	<p>Write a letter or an email to somebody you have missed speaking to in lockdown.</p> <p>Can be an opportunity for pupils to reflect on different members of their school community.</p>
The New Normal	<p>What are you most looking forward to about school re-opening?</p> <p>What are your worries about school re-opening?</p> <p>How can the school help you in feeling less worried about coming back?</p>	<p>- The Ideal Re-Opening</p> <p>- The Ideal School (explore separate parts e.g. classroom, playground)</p> <p>Pupils design a safe environment, allowing expression of what is most important for them to 'still have' while engaging with safety measures which have to be in place.</p>

Resources by topic

A range of additional resources are available from The Educational Psychology Service. Please get in touch with your link EP.

Anxiety

Children and Young People

Everybody Worries, a picture book by Jon Burgerman

- <https://en.calameo.com/read/000777721945cfe5b9cc?authid=Xu9pcOzU3TQx>

First Aid for Feelings:

A workbook to help kids cope during the Coronavirus Pandemic

- <http://teacher.scholastic.com/education/coronavirusworkbook/index.html>

From Fear to Hope Workbook, primary school children

- <https://otherlifelessons.com/products/fromfearthohopeworkbook>

Anna Freud Centre:

7 ways to support children and young people who are worried.

- www.annafreud.org/media/11453/7waysanxiety.pdf

Understanding anxiety

A child friendly video explaining how the brain works:

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=so8QN9an3t8

The Priory Group have created a colourful guide to understanding anxiety in children

- www.priorygroup.com/blog/a-guide-to-understanding-anxiety-in-children

Calming breathing and stretching

Exercises for children based on yoga:

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyvuaL_2avY

Mindful Monsters

They currently have a free Digital Pack of activities:

Autism

The Autism Community Research Network

The Autism Community Research Network at the University of Southampton have developed some new resources to help professionals and schools learn about children before they transition in September. The resources are based on creating Digital Stories, which are short videos that show who the child is, including their strengths, capabilities and preferences, rather than focusing on their difficulties and challenges. <https://autismtransitions.org/>

The Schudio TV website provides a 60 minute course on supporting autistic students with transition. Once you have signed up (it's free) you can access a series of modules on preparing children with ASD and SEND to go back to school. Please see:

- www.schudio.tv/courses/preparing-autistic-send-children-for-going-back-to-school

The National Autistic Society

Article highlighting ways to support children and young people who have been absent from school or who are presenting with school refusal

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/in-education/exclusion/school-refusal-strategies.aspx>

Social Stories

Wearing PPE

- <https://www.autism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/I-can-wear-a-mask-1-1.pdf>

Returning to school resources and a Transition Booklet

- www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources
- www.lgfl.net/COVID-19socialstories

Bereavement

The Copper Tree

by Hilary Robinson and Mandy Stanley

When Olivia's teacher dies, the children at her school are encouraged to think of everything that reminds them of her. Written with sensitivity and sprinkled with light hearted moments, The Copper Tree approaches grief with sensitivity and sound judgement. A delightful and touching short story.

When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief

by Marge Heegaard

A workbook to help children work out feelings about death. Heegaard provides a practical format for allowing children to understand the concept of death and develop coping skills for life. Children, with the supervision of an adult, are invited to illustrate and personalise their loss through art. When Someone Very Special Dies encourages the child to identify support systems and personal strengths.

Good Grief 1: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under 11s: 2nd Edition

By Ward & Associates

With twenty educators contributing ideas piloted with children of different abilities and backgrounds in their care. To explore and demystify the experience of loss within the framework of the National Curriculum.

Good Grief 2: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Over Elevens and Adults: 2nd Edition (Ward & Associates).

With twenty educators contributing ideas piloted with children of different abilities and backgrounds in their care, Good Grief has been designed to explore and demystify the experience of loss in different contexts within the framework of the National Curriculum. This second edition has been updated and revised, to include a new chapter on the effects of disasters on children. Suitable for all professionals, carers and parents, both books are activity based. Good Grief 1 facilitates the use of children's own experiences and encouraging improvisation and extension. Primarily designed for mixed ability secondary and adult education, Good Grief 2 will also be invaluable for many other statutory, professional and community organisations.

PSHE

The Connect PSHE Wellbeing Curriculum has around 250 detailed lesson plans (all with ppts handouts and resources) for Reception through to Year 6. Everyone has an opening mindfulness activity and brief follow up enquiry. The initial online training, and a sample of lessons and resources, is currently being offered free to support teacher CPD during the global response to COVID-19. Schools and educational professionals can sign up here: <https://www.connect-pshe.org/sign-up>

Mind's Five Ways to Wellbeing can be found here:

- www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing

Anna Freud Centre: Schools in Mind

Schools in Mind is a free network for school staff and allied professionals which shares practical, academic and clinical expertise regarding the wellbeing and mental health issues that affect schools. The network provides a trusted source of up-to-date and accessible information and resources that school leaders, teachers and support staff can use to support the mental health and wellbeing of the children and young people in their care.

- www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind

Anna Freud Centre: Mentally Healthy Schools

Mentally Healthy Schools brings together quality-assured resources to help primary schools promote children's mental health and wellbeing. To support staff and parents during these uncertain times, they are producing fortnightly curated toolkits.

- www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk

Place2BE - Back to School Resources

Place2be have a range of free activities for primary and secondary age pupils.

- www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-for-schools/mental-health-resources-for-schools/return-to-school-resources/

Resilience

Boing Boing

A website dedicated to promoting resilience research and practice. The website has a range of resources.

- www.boingboing.org.uk

Young Minds

A dedicated area on their website for academic resilience. This also contains a copy of the 'Resilient Classroom' pack.

- <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/academic-resilience-resources>

Staff Well-Being

Psychology Tools

created a booklet 'Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty'

- www.psychologytools.com/assets/covid-19/guide_to_living_with_worry_and_anxiety_amidst_global_uncertainty_en-us.pdf

Free mindfulness app and resources

For adults or young people:

- www.smilingmind.com.au

NHS information and guidance for mindfulness

Some useful links for adults

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness

The NHS six top tips to improve your mental well-being. Each tip is accompanied by a short video to explain how you can put it into practice. Please see:

- www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/top-tips-to-improve-your-mental-wellbeing

Suggested Podcasts

List of podcasts looking at trauma-informed practice and resilience

- www.lisacherry.co.uk/8top-podcasts/

Understanding the architecture of the brain

- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/thebrain-architects-podcast-brain-architecture-laying-the-foundation>

Child in Mind looking at mental health

- www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-inmind/expert-advice-and-guidance/child-in-mind-podcasts

