



**Solihull**  
METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Supporting the return to school in Solihull

Guidance for schools

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## INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that many children and young people can find the transition between schools unsettling and stressful. Following the current Public Health Crisis (Covid-19) it is likely that many children and young people will experience similar feelings when they return to school once social isolation ends, especially those who are vulnerable, have special educational needs, or are moving to a new school.

Research into transitions which follow a serious incident or crisis identifies that within any support or intervention it is crucial to consider culture. This means that a 'one size fits all' approach would not be beneficial. Furthermore, the importance of a stepped approach was evident as the literature highlighted most individuals are highly resilient and do not require psychological intervention. Ensuring normal reactions to the situation, such as responses to grief and high stress, are not pathologized is therefore important. Literature highlighted that within stepped approaches it was important to initially focus upon ensuring basic practical support needs were met before considering emotional support.

The purpose of this guidance is, therefore, to provide advice on how schools can support their staff, children and young people and families, in managing this transition building on the good practice that already happens in schools. The psychological approaches and key principles presented in this document can be flexibly applied by schools when the timescales and measures governing the return are known by individual settings.

## WHY IS TRANSITION IMPORTANT?

It is important that we support all members of a school community to experience successful transitions back to school (school staff, children and young people, families), recognising that transition is a process and not a single event. We know that an individual's experiences during a transitional period can have a powerful and long-lasting impact on their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing, as well as for young people, their academic outcomes.

During a period of transition people can experience:

- environment
- Role and identity uncertainty
- Entry into an environment which is less predictable
- A perceived loss of control
- A feeling of being de-skilled and less valued
- Uncertainty about the future

In addition, we must acknowledge the ongoing thoughts and worries about safety and health at these times.

## KEY PRINCIPLES THAT SUPPORT A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

Whilst the current circumstances are unprecedented, schools are skilled in planning and preparing for transitions and demonstrate this on a regular basis. The key principles of successful transitions still apply to the present situations (whether children are returning to the same class / setting before the end of the academic year or joining a new class / setting) although the means of executing transition processes may need to look different.

Effective transitions are supported by:

- ***Advanced planning and preparation***
- ***Clear processes for communication***
- ***Consideration of relationships***

### *Advanced Planning and Preparation*

- Identify information to be shared with pupils and families:
  - What class they are going into?
  - Which staff they will be with?
  - Which pupils they will be with?
  - What the routines will be? etc.
- Plan activities / projects that can support the transition process. Ensure these are accessible to all pupils.
- Work with parents / carers to enable them to support their child(ren) and prepare them for a successful return to school.
- Identify the pupils who will need a more enhanced and individualised transition plan.

### *Clear Communication*

- Ensure regular communication is made with parents / carers. This will help to ensure that the right information is being shared at the right time, and will help parents to feel confident in the process.
- Communicate with the pupils in an age-appropriate manner i.e. use of video messages from staff, emails, newsletters.
- Communicate regularly with all staff to make them aware of plans and any changes from the 'normal' ways of working.
- Communicate with feeder / receiving schools and ensure processes are in place for the transfer of all necessary information for those children who may be entering a new setting.
- Plan 'check-in' processes to review how children are settling in and to enable two-way feedback processes with parents / carers.

### *Consideration of Relationships*

- Plan time for pupils and staff to develop relationships and to get to know each other.
- Identify pupils who need key workers. Review who this will be, plan for how this relationship be established / re-established.
- Consider the social relationships available to individual pupils i.e. are they with established and known friends?

Examples of good transition practices could be:

- Communication between staff and settings to find out about the pupils. This should not solely be for the purpose of sharing academic attainment but also involve personal information that is needed – such as good at sports, lost a parent, particular interest in dinosaurs etc.
- Communication about specific experiences linked to the COVID-19 outbreak, such as the loss or serious illness of close family members or friends, time in hospital, etc
- Children and young people to be involved as much as possible in the transition process, provide them with the ability to share their likes and dislikes. Examples could include completion of 'All about me' activity.
- Communication with parents/carers, not only to gather additional information but also to allow parents/carers to raise any specific concerns about recent events or ask questions.
- Schools to think about how they can use technology to aid transition if it is not possible for children and young people to directly access settings. This could be in the form of virtual tours, question and answer sessions etc.
- Visual resources to be produced that can be accessed online such as examples of lunchtime menus, what the uniform looks like, an example of a typical timetable etc.

## SUPPORTING STAFF

### What can teachers do to help themselves?

*Knowing your children and young people is what makes your school a place that the community will turn to as a key support for children and young people, and in whom the community is placing their trust to aid children and youth in their recovery.*

It's a big responsibility, especially when we acknowledge that many adults in the school community will also be experiencing a similar range of emotions and reactions as the children, young people and their families. Experiences of bereavement and loss, caring for someone shielding, living with a frontline NHS worker or carer, coping with additional stressors, worry and anxiety will be shared and lived experiences for many.

However, we also know that resilience research frequently cites teachers as trusted significant adults and positive role models for children and young people. Teachers have the skills needed to support children and young people through difficult times, to help inspire their resiliency and hope and to help them recover their wholeness and find comfort in their community.

Now is the time that the work you have done previously with the children and young people in your class and school will help them in their response to the challenges that the transition and recovery period will present. And, as always, we can continue to 'top up' resilience in the way we teach, interact with and model positive behaviour. This doesn't mean we pretend that nothing is different or that we haven't found the pandemic scary, difficult or sad. What it means is we show that people can endure such challenges and are especially able to withstand such hard times when those around them are supportive and caring. It is important to acknowledge that everyone will have their good and bad days and that there are things that we can do that will help us to feel less distressed.

### *Before we can help others, we need to help ourselves*

As teachers we need to be seen to be practicing what we are encouraging children and young people to do. Congruence between our actions and our expectations is vital for trusting relationships. During the transition period after lockdown you will most likely be exposed to stories and information that are distressing to hear. This can result in stress and distress. Taking time to firstly recognise this and then to adopt strategies that provide psychological resilience and reduce stress is not only important, but professionally responsible.



## Managing stress

### Try to

- Take time out to get sufficient sleep, rest, relax and eat regularly and healthily
- Talk to people you trust and allow yourself to be comforted. You don't have to tell everyone everything, but not saying anything to anyone is often unhelpful
- Reduce outside demands and avoid taking on additional responsibilities
- Spend time in a place where you feel safe and calm to go over what's happened over the course of the day/week. Don't force yourself to do this if the feelings are too strong or intense at the time
- Try to reduce your access to the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Try scheduling 'digital power off' times.
- Use relaxation strategies e.g. slow breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, self-talk
- Build in opportunities for recognising hope and positive strength
- Allow yourself experiences of sadness and grief

### Try to avoid

- Bottling up feelings. Consider whether it would be helpful to talk about them with someone you trust
- Feeling embarrassed by your thoughts, feelings or those of others. These are normal reactions to a stressful event and period of time
- Isolating yourself from those you trust and feel safe around

### What might be helpful during the transition period:

- Think about having a buddy in school, so you can check in with each other at various times if needed. It might also be helpful to have someone on hand to help you think through any questions that might come up in class and work through them together.
- Don't put any pressure on yourself to do any activities or have any discussions you don't feel up to, that is absolutely fine.
- Talk to each other, support each other- the staffroom can become a real sanctuary at times when things are feeling difficult. It never hurts to bring in a few snacks and treats to share or to try and come together for a quick catch-up at break time.
- Mindfulness based activities- having strategies you can use in the moment to support you to stop.....clear your mind for a few seconds....focus on your breathing....carry on again.
- It may be helpful for staff to reflect on the learning activity in Appendix A. Can staff identify four methods of reducing their own stress and the factors which contribute to increasing levels of stress. Have any previous strategies staff implemented been forgotten or placed to one side due to the epidemic? Can these be reinstated or adapted to suit the current climate? (E.G. If staff can't access the gym, could they instead structure time into their day for other forms of physical exercise?)



## PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

### *What can teachers do to help each other?*

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.

The following may be useful for staff when providing psychological first aid for each other:

- Ask simple questions to ascertain what help may be needed.
- Emphasise the support available.
- Initiate contact only after you have observed and appraised the situation. It is important to make sure that contact will not be seen as intrusive or disruptive.
- Review the situation and emphasise the positive actions taken by colleagues in managing the situation.
- Listen with compassion.
- Offer to make them a cup of tea/coffee.
- Reflect the words of the person. Don't judge the statements a person makes.
- Ask non-intrusive questions (e.g. "Where were you during...?")
- Keep the discussion based on what happened. Avoid "What if...?" or "I should have..." statements. If your colleague takes this line, bring the talk back to real events.
- In some instances staff members may have an intense and lasting response and need professional psychological help. However, your interventions as a line manager or a colleague can do much to reduce or even remove the need for counselling.
- Follow-up should be at a level appropriate to the relationship between the person and helper. In some instances it may be as simple as asking "How are you now?"
- Remember that psychological first aid is about reducing distress, assisting with the current needs of colleagues and making sure that colleagues are offered the support to allow them to function within their professional setting. It is not about revisiting traumatic experiences.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BACK TO SCHOOL?

As much as returning to school may feel like a relief, or even feel exciting for some children and young people, it is also likely to be a time when many children and young people feel anxious, particularly those who have underlying health conditions or who live with someone who is shielding. Feeling safe may have come to be associated with 'staying at home', 'social distancing' and frequent handwashing and so we all need to learn new ways to continue to feel safe whilst connecting with our friends and peers and learning together back in our school setting. It is important for us to hold on to the idea of a **transition period** as we develop new ways of learning together in the aftermath, rather than rushing or putting unnecessary pressure on ourselves or each other to 'feel or get back to normal'.

It is important to remember that each child will have had their own experience. Whilst there has been discussion in educational and psychological circles about the need for 'trauma informed practices,' it is essential to highlight that trauma is a response not an event. All staff, children and families have experiences of the impact of COVID 19 on our lives; not everyone will present with trauma. A wide spectrum of emotional needs and responses should be expected.

It will take time for children to re-establish and re-learn routines and expectations in schools. It will be important to respond to what children have learnt, not what we expect them to have learnt, and what they may have forgotten. It could well be over-whelming and frightening to be amongst groups of children and adults, especially given the concentrated time spent in the home environment because of 'lockdown'. Children will have become accustomed to being with their parents and immediate family for an extended period. This will be a potential source of anxiety for young children upon their return to school.

We know that transition is a process and not an event. Recent research from The Sutton Trust (April 2020) reports that only 45% of students had communicated with the teachers in the past week. Further research from Oxford University (The Guardian, April 2020) states that a fifth of primary aged school children are afraid to leave the house, where older children are more concerned with their health and that of their families, reporting that two fifths of young people are worried that their friends or family will catch the virus and one fifth worried about catching it themselves.

Teachers and other adults who listen with empathy perform an important therapeutic function, without being therapists. Some children may be carrying a large emotional burden and school might be their only place to talk about this.

Therefore a number of key principles can be applied when thinking about how to support all pupils upon their return to school. Research has identified five key principles that support recovery following a disaster or serious incident (Hobfoll et al., 2007). These principles will be important to consider when supporting members of staff, children and young people upon their return to school.

The five principles are:

- **A sense of safety:** It is important that adults, children and young people feel safe upon their return to school.
- **A sense of calm:** Children and young people are likely to experience a range of emotions including both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. It is important that these are normalised and they are provided with support to help them manage their emotions and return to a state of calm.
- **A sense of self- and collective- efficacy:** Children need to feel they have some control over what is happening to them, and a belief that their actions are likely to lead to generally

positive outcomes (Bandura, 1997). They need to feel they belong to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes. This is known as collective efficacy (Antonovsky, 1979; Benight, 2004).

- **Social connectedness:** It is important that adults, children and young people feel they belong and have a social network who can support them within the educational setting.
- Promoting hope:** Whilst things may feel difficult at the moment, it is important that adults, children and young people feel things will get better and work out in future. They need to be provided with reassurance, and understand that in the long term they will feel positive again.

### Creating a sense of safety

Many adults, children and young people will be worried about returning to school and be feeling unsafe about being in such close proximity to others again. There has been extensive media coverage around increasing hygiene and social distancing practices and children and young people will be aware of this. It is therefore vital that schools create an environment where all members can feel a sense of safety and able to cope with their emotions. The following can help to promote a sense of safety in school:

- **A clear structure and expectations for everyone;** staff, pupils, parents/carers and visitors.
- **Continuation of routine activities**
- **Be explicit about physical safety;** the location of rooms, people and activities. Be clear about when and where lessons and meetings will happen and whom pupils can speak to if they are uncertain or need to talk
- **Be explicit about psychological safety;** support students understanding of how they can manage their wellbeing within the classroom and school environment; for example, providing a visual aid or flowchart outlining wellbeing processes in place (e.g. regulation station/zone, time out/in, mentor), as well as, when and how resources can be accessed
- **Use transitional objects to support the children to feel safer.** This can help pupils to feel connected to someone who cares about them whilst in school
- **Offer kindness and comfort,** ask pupils what you can do to help them and give information
- **Keep pupils involved and included.** Give children a voice
- **Staff need to be aware of, label and acknowledge their own feelings.** This is important before adults offer support to pupils in co-regulating their emotions. Validate feelings and address the fears and anxieties of pupils
- **Watch and listen.** Behaviour is a form of communication and careful observation can help the adults to understand how the pupil might be feeling, particularly when the child or young person has not yet developed the vocabulary or language skills to express themselves clearly. Be curious about what the child's behaviour might mean

### Promoting calm

Many children and families will be feeling anxious about the transition back to school once the lockdown regulations around COVID-19 are relaxed. Supporting children, young people and parents/carers with these anxieties will be important for successful transitions. You may wish to consider the following:

*Before children return:*

- **Offer pupils a virtual tour** of their classroom and school
- **Introduce teachers or form tutors using video technology** to prepare pupils for the school environment. Offer virtual question and answer sessions
- **To assist with planning transition activities, try to gather the views of students prior to returning to school.** You may provide children with an online link to a survey or word cloud survey to gather information on their concerns, what has helped them and other factors which could be utilised to direct a whole-class activity. It will be important that these are anonymous and it may enable children to voice their concerns which they might not feel comfortable sharing in front of the class. For example, “If you had to describe how you feel about returning to school in one word what would that be?” This may present a range of emotions which as a class teacher you can present to the class and discuss, validate and problem-solve. (Template for a pupil survey can be found in Appendix 1).
- **Acknowledge and directly address concerns.** Contacting families or having virtual meetings can provide an idea about what their concerns might be. Provide clear information about the type of support and strategies you plan to provide for the pupils on their return (see Appendix 2 for example template)
- **Identify which pupils may require extra support** at the time of transition, such as children who have previously experienced emotionally-based school avoidance. Consider what their individual needs might be (See Page 17: Supporting children with Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance)
- **Offer affirmation messages**, e.g. ‘we look forward to meeting you’ and ‘our priority is to keep you safe’
- **Signpost parents/carers to resources** which they can use at home with their children to reduce potential anxieties

*When the children return:*

- **Spend time welcoming the children back to school** and build in opportunities for discussions about their thoughts and feelings
  - **This may include the use of the following:**
  - **Appendix A – The Stress Bucket** – This is a worksheet which can be completed as a whole class activity in which students asked to identify and share their own experiences of factors which increase their stress. In addition, it will assist student’s in identifying or co-constructing strategies which they may implement when they are feeling stressed. Staff may find it useful to prepare a few strategies which are age appropriate to share with the class. A few examples could be milkshake breathing, pizza massage, mindfulness, deep breathing techniques.
  - **Appendix B – Hot Cross Bun CBT resource** - to help students understand and explore the differences between thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
- **Make use of emotion regulation strategies** in the classroom such as calm corners, regulation stations and relaxation resources. Provide discreet ways that students can communicate how they are feeling without having to draw attention to themselves, for example, having a colour coded card on each students desk that they turn over when they are ‘bubbling’ to signify that they need to access a regulatory activity e.g. take a break or access to the regulation station or zone.
- **Model emotion regulation** and how to stay calm. Co-regulation is important. Hold whole-class sessions, such as mindfulness exercises and ensure that all staff take part.

See Appendix 10 for potential scripts for discussing emotions and supporting emotional regulation.

- **Provide additional pastoral care** for those who require it, either individually or in small groups. This might include opportunities for pupils to leave the classroom if they become overwhelmed, or providing pupils with access to an identified key adult who is available if they need to talk
- **Promote frequent check-ins** within small groups throughout the week e.g. <https://www.carrmanor.org.uk/coaching/>

#### Promoting self- and collective- efficacy

During the COVID-19 crisis, many children and young people may feel a lack of control over what has happened to them, and may doubt the impact their own actions can have. It is therefore important that a sense of self-efficacy is developed on their return to the educational setting. This can be promoted in the following ways:

- **Provide controlled choices** through a range of differentiated tasks and activities that students can access depending upon their emotional readiness to engage. Empower children/young people by respecting their wishes.
- **Co-construct with the children how they will ensure they are safe within the classroom and school**, for example discussing their understanding of social distancing and promoting their involvement in new classroom routines to ensure safety
- **Provide children and young people with responsibilities** such as specific jobs or tasks
- **Work with children and young people to set targets and goals**
- **Help children and young people to regulate their emotions** (see above) thus feeling they are in control of and can manage any unpleasant feelings they may experience.
- **Teach children and young people problem-solving skills** which they can apply when facing difficult situations or when trying to overcome a problem. This could include using 'Steps to my Goal' or 'Exploring Solutions to Difficult Situations'. Help children and young people to recall times when they have coped with change in the past
- **Use cognitive behavioural approaches** to help children and young people recognise the link between their thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Carefully challenge unhelpful thoughts which may be impacting on their feelings and behaviours. Appendix 6 has a useful worksheet which you can adapt and develop into a lesson to explain the difference between feelings, thoughts and behaviours. It may be useful to ask children to reflect on an example of their own and walk them through how to deconstruct feelings and thoughts from behaviour.
- **Create a sense of community within the classroom**. This can be achieved through involving pupils in the planning and implementation of activities, and social activities that create a sense of belonging. Communal language such as 'our school' or 'our project' is also helpful.
- **Obtain the voice of children and young people** in the school, and identify what they feel will support them within the school environment

#### Promoting social connectedness

Reinforcing connectedness to the school and peers will be crucial for the pupils during this period of transition, and will enhance their enjoyment and genuine connection to the school community. Facilitating a sense of connectedness in school where pupils feel they are genuinely cared about, wanted, listened to and supported can positively impact on their engagement, achievement and emotional wellbeing (Keay, Lang and Frederickson, 2015).

Many children and young people are likely to have been in contact via social media, however, most will have experienced a range of losses including close contact with friends, school-based and recreational activities and connections with many other people. Schools can promote social connectedness in the following ways:

- **Provide peer to peer programmes:** to help the pupils reach out to each other and facilitate connections, e.g. buddy and befriending schemes which can support children to build friendships and a sense of belonging
- **Use Circle Time or Tutor periods:** to promote a collective understanding of how to support each other and encourage small acts of kindness
- **Build relationships or reconnections with key adults:** for some children and young people, it may be beneficial to assign staff to help support them in school. This aims to establish trust and rapport and promotes a feeling of safety and being supported through this transitional period. Ensure that staff who are supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in school are emotionally stable and resilient
- **Social connectedness programmes:** develop the use of areas in school to increase interaction among pupils and staff. This could involve facilitating discussions on various health and mental health related topics pertinent to the crisis
- **Engage pupils in extracurricular / out of school activities:** activities and games could be implemented with flexibility around school hours in order to re-establish relationships with both peers and school staff
- **Support pupils through peer conflicts:** relational approaches that are supportive rather than punitive would benefit both staff and pupils' understanding of emotions and possible causes for challenging behaviour. This could include the use of Restorative Approaches
- **Model the behaviour you want to see in others:** on return to school, it is important for staff members to model a sense of community to support children to develop and maintain attachments. Using communal language such as 'our school', 'our project' will help to develop a feeling of social connectedness and belonging

#### Promoting a sense of hope

'Active hope' is a practice, it is something we **do** not something we **have** as a personality trait. Recovering from the COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity like no other to engage the whole school community in thinking about what really matters. 'Are we the same or have we changed?' and 'What matters most to us now and how do we live with that?' (Meredith, 2020). 'Active hope' is rooted in our ability to create and sustain resiliency, first in ourselves and then for the children and young people in our schools and communities. It is founded on principles of Relational Practice, rooted in hope.

- **Adults need to create protective factors** in the school environment as their pupils return and they need to build them intentionally
- **Resilience is influenced by the relationships and connections between staff** at all levels within the organisation. The school environment is one of hope when it moves from being reactive to being responsive (McKnight, 2020). The Resiliency Wheel (Appendix 7) is a visual synthesis of the six key ways in which as practitioners we can develop a child's resilience and ability to "bounce back". Each of these slices can be dissected and utilised as a foundation for a learning activity. Another useful resiliency resource is that of the interactive resiliency framework <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/interactive-resilience-framework/>, which provides a collection of concepts which have an evidence base for



increasing an individual's resilience. The interactive framework enables you to click on each concept and will provide a brief synopsis of the concept, the evidence underpinning it and ideas for how development in this domain may be supported.

- Appendix 8 and 9 include practical guidance and activities to promote resilience and connectedness within the classroom.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC COHORTS OR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THAT MAY REQUIRE GREATER SUPPORT

In addition to considering the processes in place to support all children and young people returning to school, there are some specific groups that may require additional planning. These children and young people include (but not limited to) those who will be transitioning to a new school (those moving into UFS, Year 3, Year 7, Year 12), those with an identified SEND (with or without an EHCP), children in care and those who are on child protection plans.

##### **Identification of individual children and young people who may require greater support**

Identifying and supporting vulnerable children will be important, and settings must recognise that these cannot be assumed to just be the children with previously identified needs, but also some children who are considered to typically manage well.

A simple emotional well-being rating could be completed by all pupils. Based on previously identified needs, and through information shared with the setting in their communication with parents (this will take into account any recent events, experiences of loss, identified worries about returning to school), settings may consider 'RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating' pupils to identify the level of support that may be needed to facilitate a successful return to school.

The emotional needs of some children may become more apparent once they are back in the school setting. It is therefore important that staff continue to monitor pupils, showing sensitivity to the signs that they need to be supported in a different or enhanced way. It may be helpful to continue to use a RAG rating system over the period of a term following the return to school, making adjustments to the level of emotional and social support in place as required.

It is also important that settings take into consideration young people who may not be returning into school at this time. It is possible that on-going shielding and social distancing measures, may prevent some pupils returning at this time. There are also young people who are currently placed at alternative provisions. Settings must plan as to how to remain connected to those pupils and consider their emotional and relationships needs.

#### Managing transitions between settings during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some children will be moving from early years settings to primary school, from infant to junior schools or between primary and secondary schools in September 2020. These are very important transition periods and children, young people and parents/carers may have additional concerns around this given the uncertainty of the current situation. We need to plan carefully for this process for all children and particularly for some groups of children with additional needs or vulnerabilities. Here are some possible considerations for each stage of transition.

##### Planning for transition between all settings

- **Having friends in the same class** helps children to adjust to being in a new setting and creates a sense of continuity for them when everything else has changed. Ask parents/carers or staff at the child's previous setting about friendship groups. Staff could

also ask the children themselves if they are transitioning from primary to secondary school

- **Predictability and routines** are important, especially when children are first settling in to their new school. For children entering their Reception year, times of sustained play will still be essential. Providing timetables in advance could be helpful for children moving to secondary school
- **Listening to children** provides the opportunity for children to voice their concerns or ask questions. Younger children may find exploring feelings and ideas about transition easier through play-based activities and stories. Therapeutic stories such as those written by Margot Sunderland are also helpful. Check-ins in small groups may be a useful way of exploring thoughts and feelings with older children
- **Recognise the importance of acknowledging feelings.** The Emotion Coaching approach is helpful when helping to support children with anxious thoughts and feelings. It enables us to use emotional moments to develop the young person's resilience, coping strategies and well-being. Emotion coaching has four steps and focuses upon helping children identify and label their feelings, co-regulate their emotions and problem solve strategies to support their emotional regulation. Please see Appendix 10 for possible scripts and conversation starters which are grounded in an emotion coaching approach.
- **Using a trauma-informed approach** will be essential throughout transitions. More children than ever will be living with anxiety as a result of the pandemic and this will affect their ability to learn. This may include children who were not previously identified as experiencing anxiety. Staff need to have an awareness that children's learning and development may have been impacted by the crisis, especially for the youngest learners and they may not be where they were predicted to be in their attainments

#### Transition of Children from Nursery into School

The transition from nursery to full time school can be a particularly anxious time for parents/carers and children as they begin their formal education. Due to the current pandemic, typical events may not have happened to support transition. It is important to think about transition as a process rather than an event, as it will take time for both children and parents/carers to settle into the new structure. Below are some possible ideas that could be helpful.

- Place an even stronger emphasis on consulting with parents/carers this will help to reduce their stress which can otherwise transmit to their child.
- Share information: additional questions to consider when completing/discussing your transition documentation might be: sleep, what comforts them, how they show distress etc.
- Having friends in the same class helps children adjust to the demands of the new setting. Ask parents/carers as well as staff from previous settings if any.
- Help the child to become familiar with your setting which under current circumstances could be by providing virtual photo books and/or video tours of key features of the school/classroom e.g. entrance, toilets, pegs, break out area, playground, a selection of toys/equipment available by providing these on your website.
- Relaxed/staggered starts under the current situation will be evermore important to allow the child and their parent/carer to take their time separating and to choose what the child is ready to engage in. However, parental agreement must be previously sought and accommodating of parents and their needs, such as returning to work or other commitments.



- Adopt an individualised approach to separation; be watchful and flexible to respond to the variable needs of individual children and families. These are likely to be accentuated after the pandemic. Observe attachment behaviours. Young children who are securely attached need to continue to experience an optimum level of support and nurturing care with their key adults. Children who are showing insecure or avoidant attachment behaviours need help building relationships.
- Transitional objects: understanding and appreciating the role that comforters play helps us to respond sensitively to their presence.
- Hellos and goodbyes: the time when parents/carers will need to feel most connected with and supported by practitioners, especially at this challenging time will be at the beginning and end of sessions. What parents and children will need at handover transition times is the soothing presence of a sensitive practitioner who understands and empathises with them.
- Predictability and routines will be important, especially during the settling in phase without too many interruptions to sustained play or too many breaks for adult-driven tasks, such as snack times, assemblies and whole-class discussions.
- Listening to children - ask gentle questions, provide opportunity for children to voice concerns. Incorporate ideas and feelings about change and transition into their play, through story and drama, role play and in their 'small world' play.

#### Planning for transition to junior or secondary school

*For the school they are leaving:*

- **Plan an end of year celebration.** It is possible that children will be leaving their infant or primary school without all the usual celebrations, such as a leaver's assembly. Saying goodbye to friends who may not be attending the same junior or secondary school as them will be important for pupils, as will saying goodbye to teachers. Perhaps a celebration could be planned for the Autumn term instead to allow for this
- **Consider building peer relationships** which may have ordinarily begun during 'move-up days' or events. This might need to be built into the beginning of Year 3 or Year 7 instead through activities in class, tutor periods or after-school events
- **Have a virtual worry box** or build in time for concerns to be addressed. Children will no doubt have questions and staff from the infant and junior or primary and secondary schools could work together to address these now in a virtual format
- **Consider repeating aspects of the curriculum between year groups.** Much of the curriculum that Year 2 and Year 6 pupils would normally be accessing at this time of year may only have been accessed on a limited basis or not at all for some children. Infant and junior or primary and secondary schools will need to work together to make sure there is some continuity of the curriculum and to ameliorate

*For the new school:*

- Create a virtual tour of the school which can be posted on the school's website. This could even be done by children who are attending school (with parental permission).
- A visual resource with photos of key people/places in school. This can be sent directly to children who are have SEND or considered vulnerable. Again can be posted on schools website for all to access.

- Provide other visual resources regarding the rules and routines of the day such as pictures of the uniform, how many lessons a day, timing of lunch time etc
- If class teacher/form tutor is identified, for them to give parents a ring and dependent upon age speak to child/young person.
- Consideration of whether class teacher/form tutor send the child/young person a letter to let them know they are thinking about them.
- School to provide a Q&A sheet for parents with key questions and answers that often are asked.
- Schools to try and gain as much information as they can about the child/young person from parents, the child, the previous school or any agencies that are currently involved with the child.
- Consideration of sending home some activities that children can complete about themselves (age dependent) that can give adults opportunity to find out their thoughts. This could be things such as 'All about me' sheets containing photos of the child.

#### Children who were identifying attendance difficulties prior to school closures

A subgroup of children at school will have been experiencing attendance difficulties, and in some cases persistent non-attendance, prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The reasons for non-attendance are wide ranging and the British Psychological Society (2017) report that this can include:

- Emotionally based non-attendance where mental health difficulties affect the student or family members.
- Physical health related ranging from unusually frequent illnesses to chronic conditions that necessitate extended absences from school and sometimes in-patient treatment.
- Attitudinal/systemic absenteeism that becomes significant when it is habitual or too frequently a pragmatic solution e.g. where the value of 100 percent school attendance is not supported by the value system or a student, their family or the student's peer culture.
- School behaviour-related such as exclusions, managed moves, alternative provisions and part-time timetables.

There are also secondary maintenance factors that can make it more difficult for children to re-engage with school following periods of absence, such as:

- Loss of relationships (peer friendships/relationships with staff) and feeling disconnected from others due to isolation
- Falling behind in school work and/or fear of falling behind
- Decreased motivation to attend school
- Anxiety and negative thoughts about ability to return to school linked to above factors

It is anticipated that extended school closures and possible emotional consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak may exacerbate children's school attendance problems and the underlying factors that may have been contributing to this. It is also recognised that children who are vulnerable to possible school attendance problems may find the return to school particularly challenging.

The advice below should be referred to alongside the 'Collaborative Working to Promote Attendance and Psychological Well-being' guidance developed by the Community Educational Psychology Service and Solihull which can be found on the Local Offer:

<https://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer/education/children-and-young-peoples-send-service/collaborative-working-to-promote-attendance-and-psychological-wellbeing/>

### Planning for child's return to school:

Identify children who may be 'high risk' or vulnerable to school attendance difficulties – this can be based on a combination of data such as:

- Children who have experienced known trauma during COVID-19 – this may include loss or bereavement or heightened mental health difficulties
- Children at key transition points as noted elsewhere in this document
- Children who may be considered 'vulnerable' for example due to: special educational needs and disabilities, peer difficulties, bullying or known difficulties in the family
- Children who were experiencing absences prior to COVID-19 – where possible categorise absence data e.g. demographically (by gender, age, ethnicity, year group), by degree of absenteeism (chronic, emerging etc) and by high risk or vulnerable groups (students with social, emotional or learning difficulties). An understanding of which groups at school are most at risk for absenteeism helps to identify where to assign preventative resources.

The 'Early Indicators' checklist in the 'Collaborative Working to Promote Attendance and Psychological Well-Being' (CAPW) guidance can be used to support this.

It is likely that staff have been in regular contact with vulnerable children and families and will have up to date information regarding their well-being and feelings about returning to school. In planning for the child's return to school it will be important to gather the child and parent's views directly and as far as practically possible involve them in designing what their return to school may look like. Plans for vulnerable children may need to be individual and where possible linked to their views. The process of children and families feeling listened to will support partnership working and contribute to their return to school. There are templates for gaining views contained in the CAPW guidance.

Establish short term and long-term goals with the child and their family so that everybody is clear on the plan moving forward, with the recognition that these are fluid and possible to change if required. Some families may want to map this out on their calendar or a visual timetable – but this shouldn't be mandatory as some families may find this stress inducing.

Discuss and agree what the plan might be for days and times where school might feel overwhelming for the child and family.

Other preparations for the young person's return to school may include briefing peers (where appropriate and agreed with the child and parent), selecting suitable buddies and arranging a time and place for the young person to be met by welcoming staff.

### *Starting and maintaining children's return to school:*

- Key staff to meet and greet the young person to check in with them and discuss the day ahead.
- Ensure that the young person has access to supportive staff or mentors
- Maintain close communication with parents regarding progress and successive steps in the plan for increasing attendance. Agree ways to celebrate successes and problem solve how to overcome obstacles with the parent and child.
- Regularly review procedures with key staff in school as a standing item on staff briefing/inclusion meetings.

- Recognise that initial progress could be slow and that attendance may improve and dip again over time – this will be particularly important as the child but also their family and the wider school system learn to adjust and process the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prepare all key people (including child and parents) for ‘bumps in the road’ so that people do not lose hope in the young person’s ability to eventually return to school full-time.
- If attendance difficulties do persist over time or worsen, despite appropriate interventions, then consider accessing appropriate services if the child and parent consent to this (e.g. early help, Community and Educational Psychology, SISS etc).

**All staff** to be alert and responsive to early warning signs of school attendance problems which may include:

- Difficulties attending certain classes (e.g. P.E) or other times (e.g. lunchtime)
- Difficulties eating lunch or attending the dinner hall
- Difficulties entering the school building upon entry to school
- Difficulties transitioning from class to class
- Frequent visits to student support or the main office
- Increased requests to leave the classroom to attend the toilet
- Persistent distress in the classroom (crying or withdrawal)
- Persistent distress upon separation from family members (e.g. crying or clinging)
- Persistent requests during the school day to contact parents or frequent daily contact with parents or others outside of school
- Sudden declines in attainments or completed work

### Supporting children with additional needs

There are specific groups of pupils that settings must be thinking about when planning the return to school. These include pupils who are likely to have found the changes in routines or disruption to relationships extremely challenging, such as those with social communication needs and / social emotional and mental health needs.

These groups of students may need to have specific plans in place that take into account the support and teaching approaches that have proved effective in the past.

Schools are advised to seek additional advice and guidance from SISS or CEPS in relation to those pupils with identified social communication and social emotional mental health needs.

For children who have (or continue to experience) disruptions in their home life and events which have impacted well-being, such as those in the care system or who have Child in Need and Child Protection plans, they will likely require an enhanced level of planned emotional support and nurture through caring relationships to enable a successful return to school. Settings should consider developing plans jointly in liaison with services known to the young person / family and ensuring regular and effective planning with families to enable a holistic and family centred approach to working.

### Supporting transitions for Children in Care

Children who have had unsettled or traumatic early life experiences are likely to respond to starting school in ways that are different from other children of their age.

*‘Major transitions, such as the start of a new school year or moving to a new school, as well as minor transitions such as moving from classroom to classroom or from school to home at the end of the day, can be challenging for many foster children. When a child has had times in her life when she has felt unsure or unsafe and lacked a sense of a ‘secure base’, a transition can trigger the anxiety and fear she has felt before’ (Fursland, 2013).*

The following advice and considerations apply to a variety of situations, including children in foster care, adopted children or those that have been in care and now returned to their birth family. Staff will need to:

- **Have an awareness that due to periods of frequent or prolonged stress, the child’s development may be affected in significant ways and they may have emotional responses typical of a much younger child.** This will need to be taken into account when planning transitions. Teaching and learning approaches will need to match the emotional developmental level of the child
- **Understand that engaging in learning feels risky for children in care. They risk failure and damage to their self-esteem.** No matter the age of the child, their efforts in engaging in learning should be recognised and praised
- **Consider extending the transition process.** Children may take longer to feel safe and comfortable within the school environment
- **Share information about the child.** School staff need to involve the parents/carers and key school staff in this process so that the individual child and their context can be understood as much as possible before they start or return to school. Wherever possible, involve the child in this, asking them what they would like their new school to know about them. Remember that the child is so much more than their care status and it is important to capture the strengths, interests and achievements of the child alongside their story of coming into care
- **Create positive relationships with a key adult within school.** Staff should set aside time to spend with the child and engage them in preferred activities and provide emotional co-regulation. Sensory and physical activities, rather than talking, would also be good strategies to use at the start
- **Establish clear routines and consistency.** These are important for all children and even more so for children who have experienced traumatic backgrounds. It will be essential to support children in learning which behaviours are expected in a new situation, such as moving to a new school, due to the different coping strategies children in care may have developed (Graham-Bermann, 1998)
- **Focus on ways to help the child feel safe.** This needs to be considered before transition to school as well as during and following the move. Remember that a child who has experienced prolonged episodes of stress, been used to fending for themselves or been hurt or ignored by adults will not see the school environment in the same way as a child who has come from a more settled home life
- **Begin preparation in plenty of time and support independence.** A pupil transitioning from primary to secondary school, for example, may need to have several practice runs at travelling to their new school. It is also a good idea to begin cultivating positive relationships with other children attending the same school

### Supporting transitions for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Children with ASD will need additional opportunities to process the transition back to school in advance and afterwards. The following strategies are recommended:

- **Make use of a Social Story or other visual supports and share these regularly with the child or young person**
- **Share virtual tours, photographs or maps of the new school setting** and allow children to access these repeatedly
- **Allow time for the pupil to readjust to the physical and sensory environment in school.** Be aware that children and young people with ASD are likely to experience additional anxieties around returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic. There will have been many rapid changes to their routine and everyday life. Even if they have been able to remain in school this will have been a very different experience from usual including changes in their physical and sensory environments
- **Ensure children feel safe back at school.** Some children and young people with ASD may also have health-related anxiety and this will have been heightened by the current situation
- **Give consideration to different ways that timetables can be displayed for individuals.** Does the pupil need information displaying in a different format?
- **Create daily checklists** so that children and young people can make sure they have the correct equipment for the day and this will help to promote their independence (refer to the Young Minds resource below)

Further information about supporting the transition of pupils with ASD is available from the SISS ASD team.

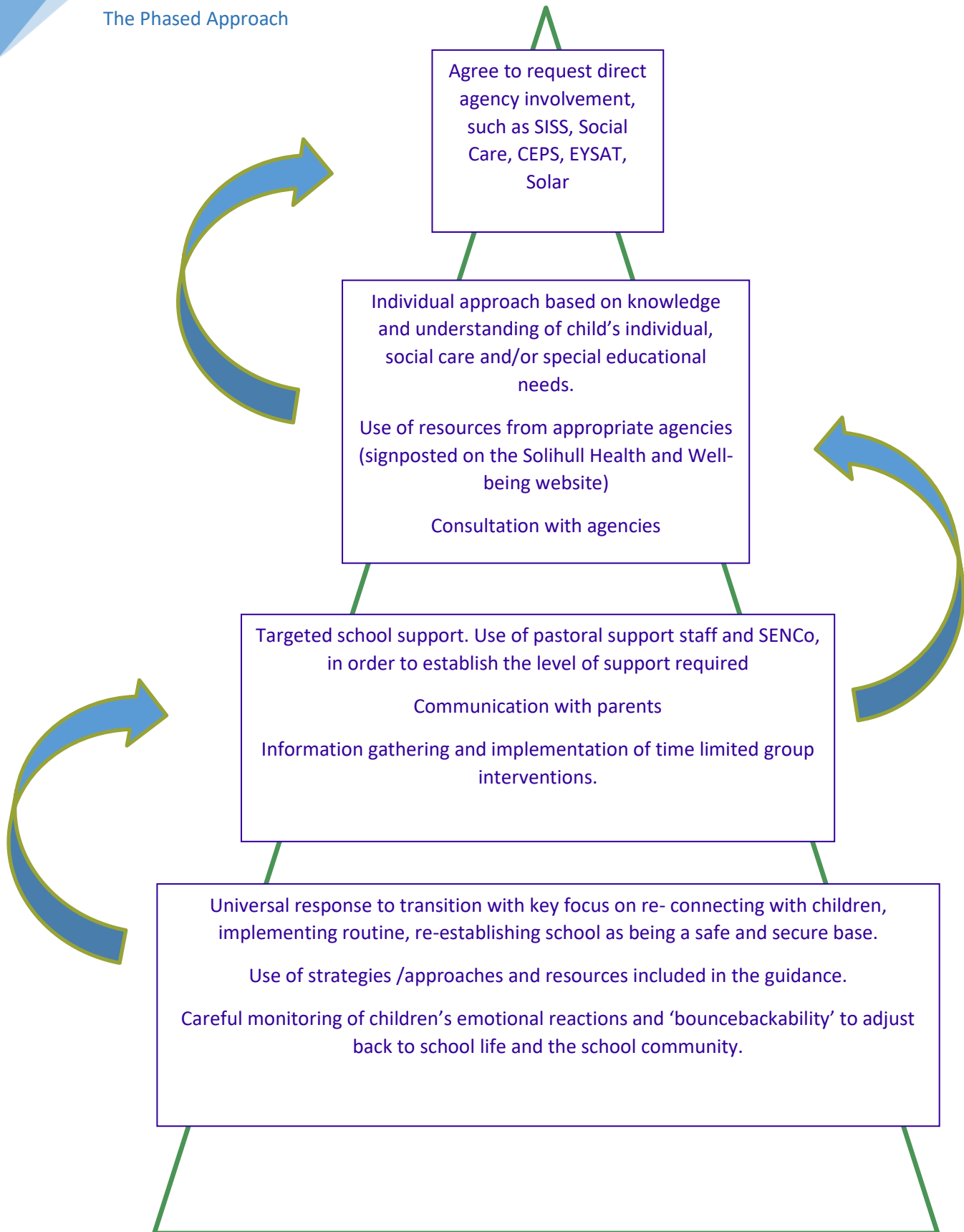
### Supporting children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs

A study by Young Minds (2020) sought the views of young people with identified mental health needs to explore the impact of COVID-19 on their emotional wellbeing. The study identified that:

- For some children the COVID-19 situation meant that they did not have access to their usual support networks and strategies. **Support networks will need to be rebuilt for pupils and it will take time for them to be effective again**
- 83 per cent of young people who already had mental health needs said the Coronavirus had made their mental health condition worse, either a little or a lot. **Children returning to school may need more support than they did before, and children who were previously coping may now not be**
- Young people experienced anxiety, panic attacks, problems with sleep, and urges to self-harm, especially those who had previously self-harmed. **It is important to be aware of these anxiety related issues and the risks of self-harm when pupils return to school**
- Many young people were anxious about family members being ill or themselves passing COVID-19 onto more vulnerable family members. **The return to school may well heighten concerns about becoming ill or infecting others and this will need to be carefully managed**
- COVID-19 appears to have had a big impact on those already suffering with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in terms of their focus on hygiene and handwashing rituals. **Children and young people displaying OCD behaviours will need understanding and additional support**

- **Primary and secondary school staff need to be in contact before transition to share information.** It will be vital for primary school staff to pass on the wealth of information they have learned about a pupil with SEMH needs, including which particular strategies have been helpful
- Staff will need to consider children who may have been able to manage at primary school but for whom secondary school is predicted to be a challenge. **Be aware that many more children may have developed anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for this in advance**

## The Phased Approach





## APPENDIX 1: SURVEY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PRE-TRANSITION

1. On a scale of 0-5, how do you feel about returning to school when that happens? Rate this concern 0 = no concern; 1 = very low level concern, 2 = a bit concerned, 3 = quite concerned, 4 = concerned, 5 = high level of concern
  
2. How do you feel about returning to school, in more detail? For example, what words/phrases describe how you are currently feeling about returning to school?
  
3. What are you looking forward to about returning to school?
  - Seeing my friends
  - Getting back to lessons
  - Seeing my teachers
  - Working towards my qualifications.
  - Keeping up with schoolwork
  - It will help me stay motivated in my schoolwork
  - Being able to do sport.
  - It will help me feel happier and / or calmer
  - Getting out of the house
  - I think it will help me deal with losing someone close to me
  - It will make me physically fitter
  - Other. Please add.

4. What are you not looking forward to about returning to school?/ When you think about returning to school, is there anything in particular makes your feel worried or that you think will be difficult?

- Having too much work to do
- Having to get up early
- Doing exams/retakes
- Homework
- Having less free time
- Not being sure what being back at school will look like, e.g. how lessons will be organised
- Wondering how we will revise/go over the learning that we have covered at home
- Other. Please add.

5. What do you think the school can do to help make it easier to return to school? – or straightforward/comfortable Need more here

- Keep the same teachers/tutors
- Having someone check how I'm feeling
- Being able to have a break if I feel anxious/stressed
- Additional time to reconnect with friends
- Being told what will happen before we go back
- Other. Please add.

6. Would you find it helpful for an adult to be available for you to talk to? Y/N

7. Do you have someone at school you feel that you can talk to about any issues? Y/N

8. What do you think you and your family can do to make it easier to return to school?

9. Any other comments.

## APPENDIX 2: Survey to families prior to transition

1. What would be the positive aspects about your child's return to school? Please tick all that apply.

- a) Your child learning in school
- b) Your child having the social aspects of school (including seeing their friends)
- c) Your child having a structured day
- d) Your child having a teacher/teachers again
- e) Your child being able to take part in sports activities
- f) Other. Please add.

2. How concerned are you about your child returning to school?

- Please rate this concern: 0 = no concern, 5 = high level of concern.

3. What are your concerns for your child returning to school? Please tick all that apply.

- a) Reluctance to go back to school
- b) Being behind in academic progress
- c) Missed exams (including estimated grades being used)
- d) Keeping up with schoolwork
- e) Motivation
- f) Mental health
- g) Financial implications of Covid-19 on your family & child
- h) Bereavement
- i) Physical health
- j) Social aspects of school
- k) Other: please add.

4. What do you think your child might be concerned about in the return to school? Please tick all that apply.

- a) Adapting back to the school routine.
- b) Being behind in academic progress
- c) Missed exams (including estimated grades being used)
- d) Social aspects of school
- e) Concerns for the future
- f) Mental health
- g) Physical health
- h) Other: please add.

5. What kind of support would you like from school to help with your child's transition back to school? Please tick all that apply.

- a) Information sharing on how to help your child transition back to school
- b) Support on how help your child academically
- c) Support for a child with special educational needs during the transition
- d) Other, please add.

6. Is there any other organisation you would like support from to help with your child's transition back to school? Please state whom.

### APPENDIX 3: Ideas for schools to support pupils at each level of the phased approach

#### UNIVERSAL:

- Acknowledge that for some children and young people, they will be frustrated by the situation and want to be back in school.
- Acknowledgement that some children and young people will have experienced safeguarding issues being at home.
- Priority to be given to the re-affirming of relationships between both staff and children/young people. Although there will be some learning lost, not to get straight into formal assessment.
- Flexibility – a way of demonstrating that wellbeing is the first priority.
- Awareness of any Key Worker children, if they have remained in school and their feelings towards others who have not been attending school.
- Consideration of the day especially in the first instance to think about activities that build on relationships, feeling safe, repetition of routines and structures. This can involve Circle Time, games, welcome back assembly (re-establishing school community) to celebrate any missed birthdays, show appreciation for key workers, reinforce everyone safe and back together.
- Time within the curriculum to acknowledge that everything has not just 'returned to normal'
- Thought around displays in school to reflect the situation, for example things that we are sad about and things we should be happy about.
- Adults to model appropriate behaviours and talk about experiences when needed
- The use of visual resources to explain and reinforce routines and structures of the day. This could be via visual time tables, checklists etc...
- Clear and consistent rules and routines expressed – re-teach these.
- Use of social stories.
- Repetition and reminders that are supportive rather than assertive.
- The use of positive praise at all levels.
- Staff to not directly question children on what work they may or may not have completed at home.
- Children who have completed home working to be praised privately.
- Parents to be included in plans of the school with opportunities for parents to share if their child has experienced any difficulties during the lockdown (e.g. emotional, bereavement, illness).
- Safe spaces for children to talk about experiences.
- Ensure pastoral support is available throughout the day and is not by timetable/appointment only.
- Clear communication regarding the whereabouts of members of the school community.

- Opportunities to celebrate members of the school community who have died, this could be in the form of a remembrance assembly where names could be read it of family members of children, as well as celebrating the work of the NHS and key workers (in line with parental / family wishes and only when consent from bereaved families has been sought to do this).
- Opportunities to talk about feelings/emotions embedded throughout the curriculum.
- Careful balance of prioritising wellbeing and also ensuring boundaries are in place, as these are safe, i.e. (it's OK to feel scared about being at school but it's not OK to hit staff).
- Expect 'behaviours' – plans in place for these.
- Gradual approach to reintroducing academic demands. Children and young people have to be emotionally ready before they can learn.
- Staff wellbeing also a priority – “need to feel nurtured to nurture”.
- New rules and restrictions articulated as 'do' statements rather than 'don't' – such as 'do wash your hands'.
- Use of therapeutic stories for the whole class.
- Peer mentoring schemes.
- The use of transitional objects to be used with younger children.
- DSL to be in contact with Virtual School if support needed.

#### **TARGETED SCHOOL RESPONSE:**

All of the above and:

- A number of adults being 'available' to support children if and when needed.
- Ensure that key members of staff such as SENCo and DSL have additional time to attend to any matters that have arisen.
- Small group work, specifically targeting area of need, such as specific work around emotions, emotional regulation, bereavement...
- Examples of support: Zones of Regulation, Lego Therapy, Talking Partners.

#### **TARGETED INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE:**

All of the above and:

- Provide a consistent adult that a child can develop a positive and trusting relationship with.
- Specific targeted work with a familiar adult trained in delivering the programme.
- Information gathering and action plan set out to meet needs.
- Personalised timetable in the short term
- Allocated a member of staff/key worker, in the short term to help re-adjust.

- The use of both social and therapeutic stories with individuals if needed.
- Some specific children may experience separation anxiety from parents/carers – individual support may be needed to offer reassurance.
- Some children may experience specific anxiety. Looking at individual ways that they can be supported to offer reassurance, such as the use of CBT approaches.
- Some children may have experienced loss and bereavement and will need some additional adult support.

#### APPENDIX 4: USEFUL WEBSITES

Below are a list of websites that may offer further advice and guidance. If you would like to discuss any of the content in this information pack, then please speak to your named Educational Psychologist (EP) who will be able to help. Many thanks to Peterborough Educational Psychology Service for developing a comprehensive resource list which provided the foundation for this list.

##### **Transitioning:**

Transitioning to secondary school: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guides/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-primary/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/our-work/employment-education/moving-on-to-secondary-school/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/transitioning-to-secondary-school/zkc9pg8>

Supporting SEND students to transition positively: <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/transition-tips-for-pupils-with-send/>

Problems encountered when returning to school: <https://www.seainclusion.co.uk/post/the-many-problems-of-returning-to-school>

##### **Attachment and Trauma Awareness**

Attachment and Trauma Awareness - <https://www.early-education.org.uk/attachment-and-trauma-awareness>

Trauma informed and attachment friendly strategies: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

The attachment research community: <https://the-arc.org.uk/>

Attachment aware schools: <https://www.attachmentleadnetwork.net/what-is-an-attachment-aware-school.php>

##### **Resources to support Staff Wellbeing:**

Advice from the charity Mind with a range of techniques to support wellbeing: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

A range of mindfulness meditation and relaxation resources, including NHS resources: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUgSq3itBTJMjC6SvGjByA>

<https://www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>

Free fitness videos to support movement when socially distancing: <https://www.fitnessblender.com/videos>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/>

Advice from the BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>



Advice from the World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>

Advice to support homeworking: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/business-52009076/remote-working-seven-tips-for-successful-video-meetings>

A staff wellbeing positive mental health resource pack: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/staff-wellbeing-positive-mental-health-resource-pack-t-lf-2548806>

## Resilience

What is resilience?: <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/resilience/definitions-resilience/>

Resiliency Framework: <https://www.boingboing.org.uk/interactive-resilience-framework/>

## Bereavement

Cruse resources aimed at supporting adults to manage the feelings associated with grief and loss: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

Resources from Winston's Wish to help adults talk to children bereaved by Covid-19: <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-supporting-bereaved-children-and-young-people/>

Online resources, including free training, to support bereaved children and families, also a live chat help service: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

## Emotional Support for Children and Young People

British Psychological Society advice for talking to children about Covid-19: <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-highlights-importance-talking-children-about-coronavirus>

Tips to answer children's questions regarding Covid-19: <https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-forchildren/>

Advice for supporting children with ASD: <https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus.aspx>

A range of free resources, games and activities to support children using ELSA approaches: <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/category/free-resources/>

Infographic showing simple steps parents can take to support their children: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stressprint.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stressprint.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2)

Support for older children when social distancing/ self-isolating: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/>  
<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

A collection of resources for families, communities and practitioners to utilise to support the mental health needs of children and youth: <https://childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org/resources/covid-19-resources>

#### APPENDIX 5 – The Stress Bucket

***The stress bucket can be completed as an activity with students to consider the balance between things “filling up” or “emptying” their own stress bucket.***

We all experience stress to some degree. Some stress can be good, it can push us to work hard. But too much stress can make us feel overwhelmed, and prolonged stress can eventually lead to problems. The stress bucket is a way to visualise this.

Above the bucket are clouds – the things that cause you stress. These rain into the bucket and gradually fill it up. You release the stress by doing things you enjoy or that help you to stress less.

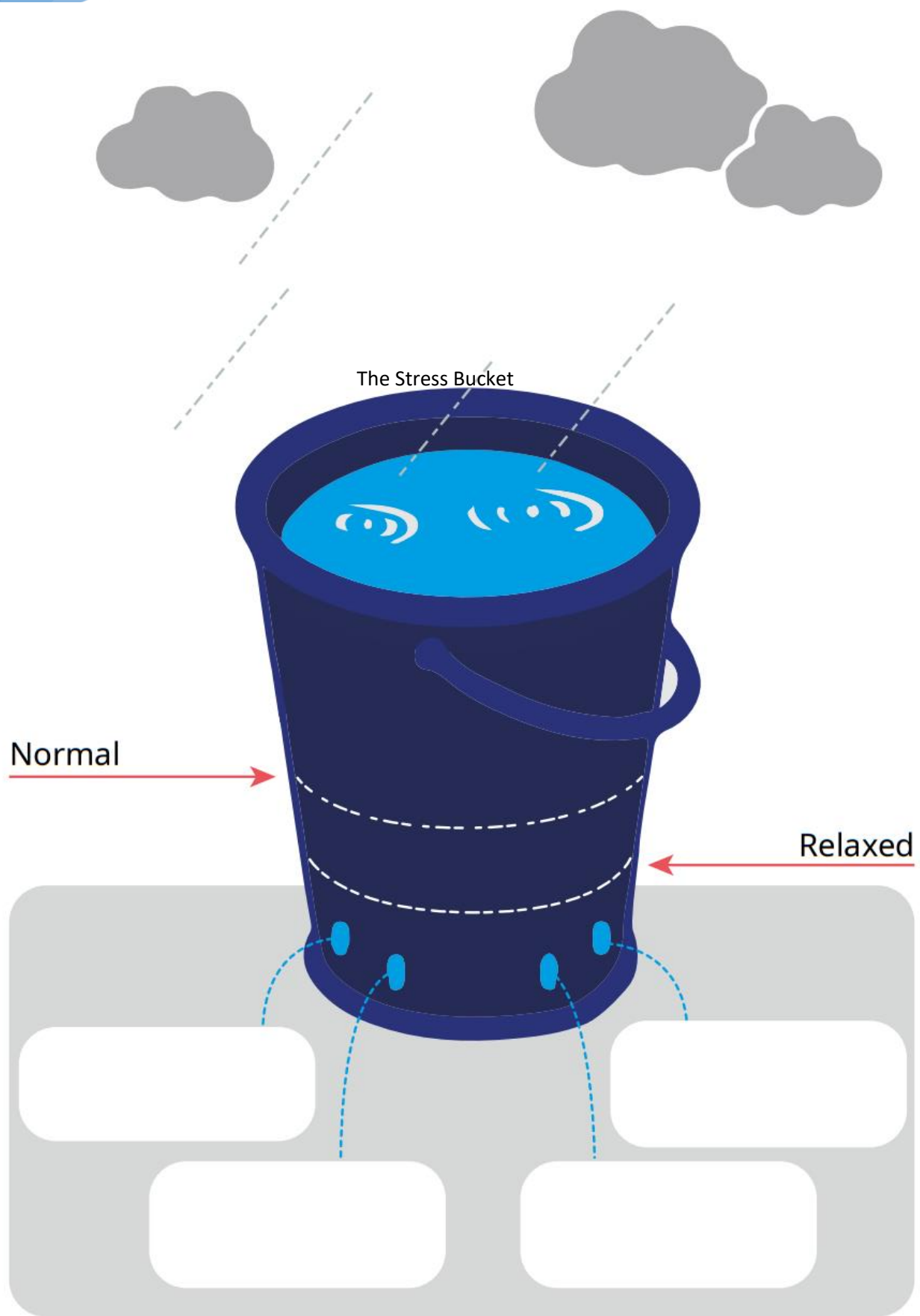
Identify the things that cause you stress (the clouds) and the things you do to manage them (your taps).

Consider:

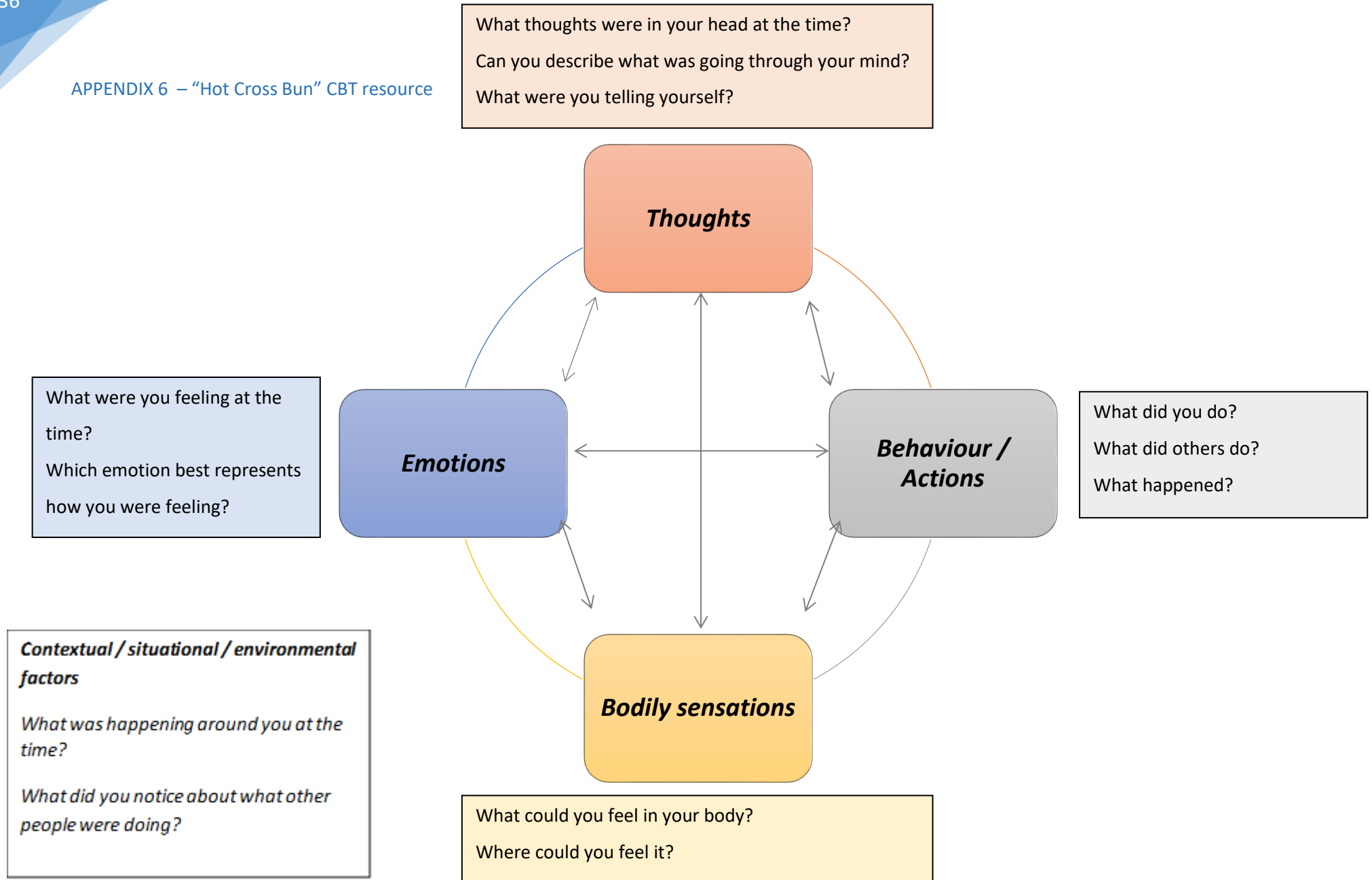
- What size and shape is your stress bucket?
- How full is it?
- What are the signs that your bucket is getting too full?
- Are all of your taps working?
- Do you turn to unhealthy ways to release stress and what does this look like?

This resource was adapted from Mental Health UK and accessed from:

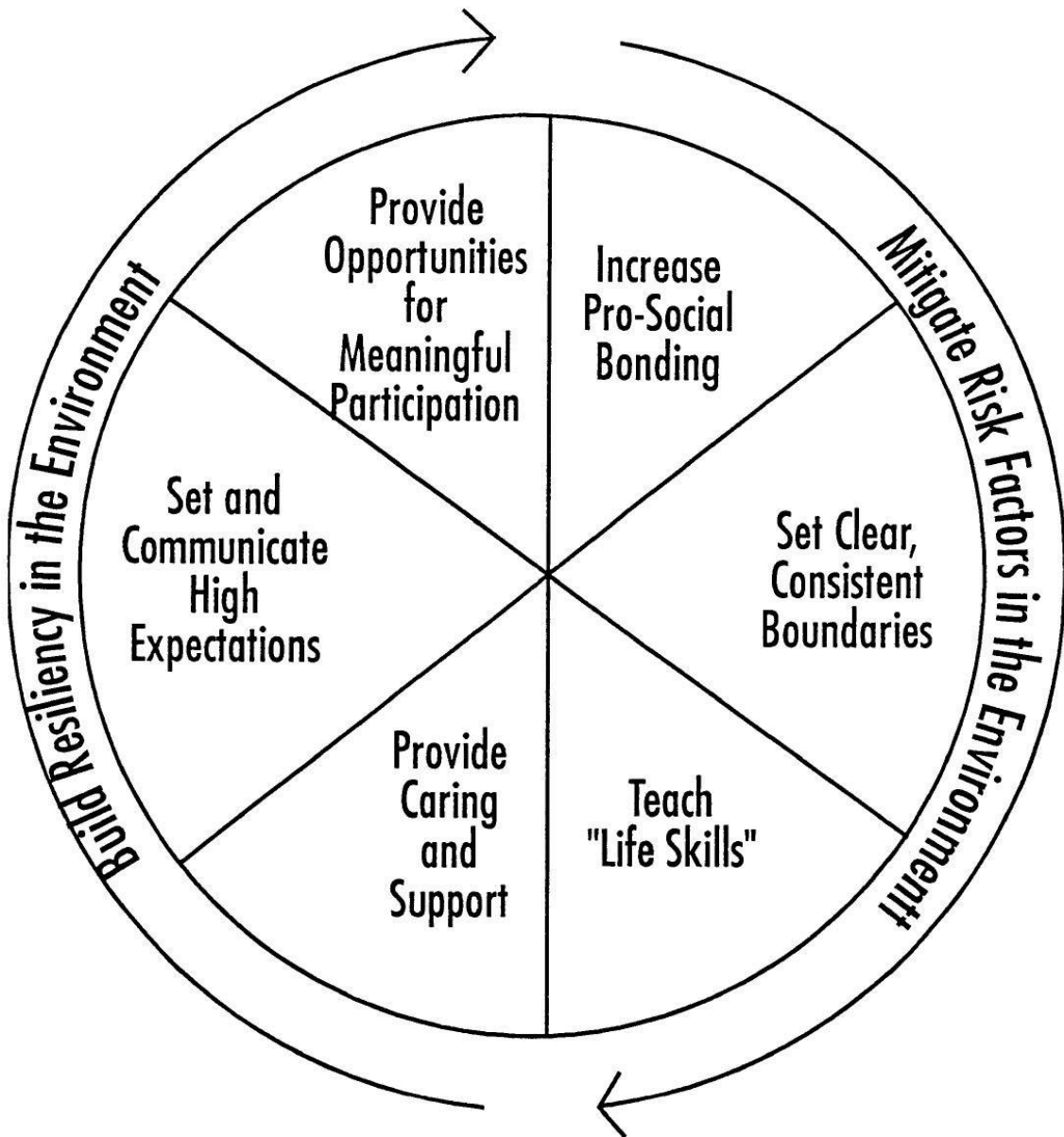
<https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/mhukcdn/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/16103320/Stress-Bucket-Template.pdf>



Developed from an idea by Brabban and Turkington (2002). Resource accessible from Mental Health UK



# The Resiliency Wheel



## APPENDIX 8 – Tips for creating a resilient and well-being focused classroom<sup>1</sup>

As much as returning to school may feel like a relief, or even feel exciting for some young people, it is also likely to be a time when many young people feel anxious, particularly those who have underlying health conditions or who live with someone who is shielding. Feeling safe may have come to be associated with ‘staying at home’, ‘social distancing’ and frequent handwashing and so we all need to learn new ways to continue to feel safe whilst connecting with our friends and peers and learning together back in our school setting. Teachers can help to create classroom environments that provide reassurance, for example, how they are following the latest government and scientific guidelines, and make expectations clear about how we can all look after ourselves and each other. This may take time and it is important for us to hold on to the idea of a **transition period** as we develop new ways of learning together in the aftermath; rather than rushing or putting unnecessary pressure on ourselves or each other to ‘feel or get back to normal’.

- **Look after your own emotional needs**

Many of you within the school community could be experiencing a similar range of reactions and feelings in response to the pandemic and lockdown period as the young people in your classes. This can make it particularly difficult to focus on the needs of the others. As adults, we have a wider range of coping skills than are available to young people and know that we can survive adversity. Young people often haven’t yet learnt through experience that they too have these coping capacities.

Working with young people who have had a particularly stressful and frightening experience of the pandemic could be challenging, and it is possible that in hearing their stories you may also experience stress symptoms. It is not uncommon for teachers to feel some of the anxiety, helplessness and anger that their young people feel.

- **Create a safe classroom and school environment**

For young people to feel safe, schools and classrooms need to be high in both nurture and structure, and need to be predictable and organised, with clearly stated, reasonable expectations. Ground rules focusing on how we can keep ourselves and each other as safe as possible together can be co-constructed with groups and classes, with reviews planned to allow for changes and adaptations in response to new developments. New routines and boundaries can be discussed and agreed to provide reassurance to allow young people to negotiate their day with confidence.

Provide a safe place to talk and distraction activities if pupils are not able to talk. It is important that students have an opportunity to be heard and opportunities are created for staff to listen in a safe environment. Some topics may not be appropriate to raise or discuss a whole class, therefore, having a ‘feelings box’ or ‘worry box’ may encourage students to write down or draw their worries and mentally leave them to one side, knowing that an adult will read them and they will not be forgotten about. For younger children, they could write their worries on the back of a laminated card and physically put the card in the ‘card park’. Depending upon what ground rules are co-constructed with students, it may be that these worries and comments provide the basis of a group activity based around key themes and patterns that are identified from the comments.

- **Help students to regulate their emotions so that they can learn**

In addition to having a calm classroom, teaching young people strategies to self-calm is useful and conducive to creating a positive learning atmosphere. Sometimes for there to be calmness there needs to be opportunity for movement and the expenditure of energy. Young people who seem to be particularly jumpy, anxious, nervous or on edge may find that a brief time out that allows for time outside or even being able to get out of their seat and hand out sheets for a class task allows them to reset. Watch a video by Pooky Knightsmith for ideas of how staff can support students to manage difficult feelings in the school environment, including 'share it, shelf it, shout it':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mN84PB8Ays>



Talking about feelings, having posters around the classroom that provide words for feelings and emotions and cueing children and young people into their feelings are all strategies that develop emotional literacy and help children and young people to understand their own and others' feelings. If a student seems particularly upset, distressed or angry, it is important to first let them calm down- perhaps have some time out of the classroom, before helping them to identify their feelings.

It may be helpful to have designated times to talk e.g, the first 5-10 minutes of a lesson is dedicated to checking in with one another, some sentence starters could be provided for this to prevent overly sensitive or personal information being shared. If a child or young person shares something which seems inappropriate to address within a classroom context, it is important that measures are taken to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the student. Offer empathy and invite them to talk in a more private setting with a designated key adult. Seek advice from your designated safeguarding lead (DSL) regarding how the situation could be managed best.

- **Believe that students can achieve academic success**

The temptation to expect less from young people after frightening events is common. Although their capacity for concentration may be affected it can be re-developed through good teaching strategies, support and time. Make all expectations clear, break tasks down to subsets and provide supportive and clear feedback during and after each subtask to check that the student is on task and has understood the task correctly. Scaffold the task and the skills required to achieve learning. Acknowledge successes and provide explicit feedback on what has been achieved.

- **Restore a sense of control and personal efficacy**

Provide a place to calm down such as a 'peaceful corner' or a quiet reflective place in school where young people can take time out in a quiet place to regain composure and reduce stimulation. Zoning out with music, spending time in libraries, beanbag areas for chilling out with creative arts or a game of basketball are all strategies that students have found useful. Talk to students about how they can



support their own sense of well-being by building positive actions into their daily life such as **'Keeping active, connecting with others, taking notice, giving and keeping learning.'**<sup>1</sup>

- **Build strengths and capacity**

Every child and young person has strengths, aspirations, hopes and dreams. Use solution focused conversations to find out about these. (Asking with interest, *'what are you good at? And what else?'* And if possible deepening the conversation *'When you are at your best what are you pleased and proud to notice about yourself? What does this tell you about what you might be capable of?'*). Promote opportunities for the child or young person to experience success and help them to work out ways they can put these skills to use in other areas of their learning and life. Sometimes they will need help to make the connections and generalise the skills.

### Values in Action Character Strengths



2

Social scientists tell us that everyone possesses all 24 of the above character strengths in different degrees, and these are universal across cultures and nations. Ask young people to identify their top 5 strengths (and do the same for yourself!). Discuss other strengths you and they have noticed and build in opportunities to remind them of these. Planning actions and activities to help children and young people to be their best helps to bring a sense of personal control and achievement to the day-to-day life.

- **Be hopeful and optimistic**

Some young people may experience a loss of trust in the world after something as frightening and unpredictable as a global pandemic; they may believe that because a terrifying thing has happened, they can no longer dare to hope that life can be happy and safe again. Modelling optimism and encouraging them to see the strengths and coping skills they have and encouraging them to notice acts of courage and kindness will help develop a sense of personal efficacy and future.

<sup>1</sup> Five Ways to Wellbeing New economics foundation. Centre for Well-being. 2008

<sup>2</sup> Values in Action Character Strengths



It is not uncommon for students to have a less optimistic view of the future after events such as these. Reminding them of their strengths, hopes and aspirations and providing opportunities for them to achieve and experience success will help them to take a positive view of their lives. Remember optimism can be taught and that it is contagious.

- **Engagement, social connection and trusting relationships that are built on respect and positive regard**

Communities and societies provide resources which are key to facilitating resilience - being part of a social group is protective and can help people overcome adverse events. However, after events that are frightening such as a global pandemic and social distancing, communities and school communities can change. School provides a community of care for children and young people and it is through the relationships that they have with friends and teachers that they can begin to recover from and make sense of the events.

Some children and young people (and staff) come to school for normality. They may not want to have to talk or think about what's happened as a result of the pandemic, but would rather have as normal as possible a school day of learning and play. Being sad and dealing with the emotions and consequences takes a lot of energy and head space. Not talking about what happened doesn't mean that the child or young person isn't thinking about it or is being unusually avoidant. It's important to take our cues from the child or young person and for them to know there is no one right reaction. It's okay to ask them quietly what their preference is.



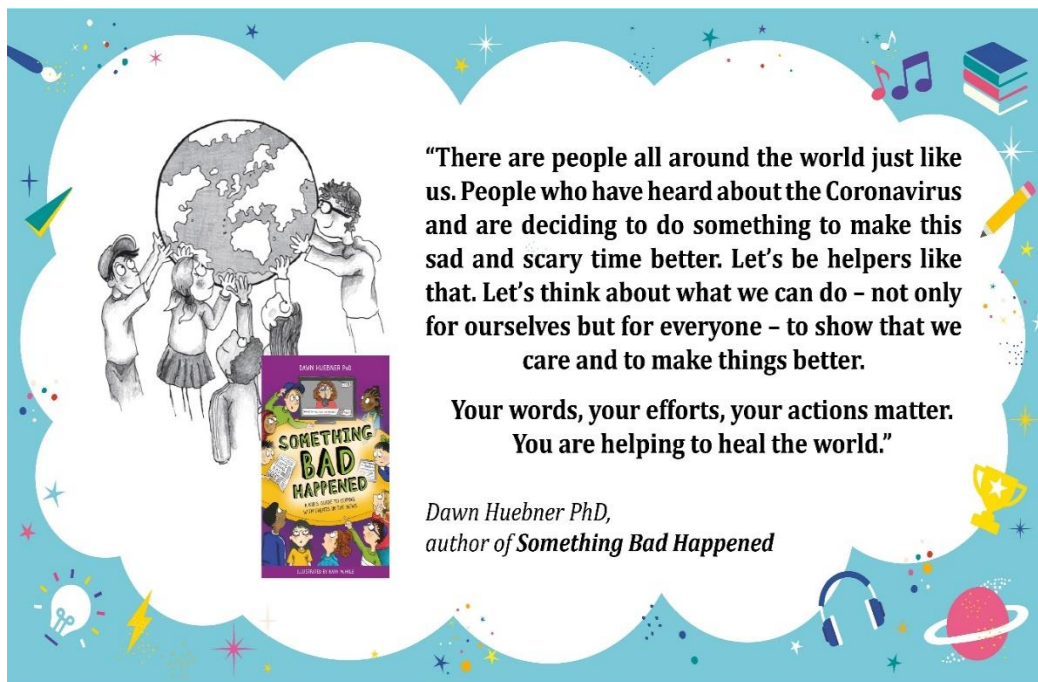
For many young people, their teachers and supportive adults in school are adults in whom they can confide and ask difficult questions. Many young people express the view that they don't want to upset their parents or further stress them by asking questions or saying that they are struggling. This is when a trusted relationship with an adult at school will allow the young person to gain the help and support they need.

## APPENDIX 9 - Activities promoting connectedness and resilience

**Sharing stories and experiences:** During disasters and emergencies, alongside the stories of loss and grief, we also hear extraordinary stories of how different individuals, families and communities come together and act with kindness, courage and initiative. We can encourage children and young people to share their stories about ways in which their community helped each other. For example, neighbourhood delivery networks springing up to provide medicines or shopping to people who couldn't get out. We can reflect on what might have changed possibly for the better or what has been brought into sharper focus for us. For example, stories about the impact on the climate such as reduced industrial activity, road traffic and expanded bike lanes leading to air pollution plummeting and birdsong returning to neighbourhoods.

*Many events plant seeds, imperceptible at the time,  
that bear fruit long afterward.<sup>3</sup>*

**Reading Well** - Books on Prescription! A survey by the Reading Agency (April 2020) indicated that 34% of people in London are reading more during lockdown. **Reading Well for young people** recommends expert endorsed books about mental health, providing 13 to 18 year olds with advice and information about issues like anxiety, stress and OCD, and difficult experiences like bullying and exams. <https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/young-people-mental-health>



<sup>3</sup> *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* Rebecca Solnit 2009

### Ideas for group activities

Depending on the age of the children and young people, activities listed below may be helpful in promoting connectedness and resilience. Teachers should work together with colleagues to agree which of the activities would be most relevant and appropriate for their class.

**Caution!** Be mindful that not all students will want to talk about the pandemic and listening to others talk about it may increase anxiety and stress. Be aware of individuals who may not want to take part and provide alternative meaningful activities for those who do not want to participate without them feeling 'different' or less relevant in any way (e.g. using controlled choices, 'this afternoon you can either participate in the debate with Mr X OR you can do X with Mrs X'). For older children and young people team projects can develop a sense of shared experience and togetherness. Activities can focus on the positive gains made.

**Group discussions:** staff could take news articles or media sources and using them as a topic for debate and discussion, 'what did you think of the news that...', 'I came across this article and was interested to know what you thought about it'. Alternatively, questions that could form the basis of a discussion could include: What can we learn, in big and small ways, from this crisis? What needs to change in our homes, our communities, our nation, and our world?

**Question and answers:** Asking students to write down one reflection or question prior to a group Q&A discussion session, so that staff have time to prepare their responses. It could be that their contributions are anonymised (e.g. all children/young people provide a response on a piece of paper and placed into a bag).

**Resources and strengths:** Sharing the creative ways that children, young people and families have expressed themselves over the lockdown period - by drawing, painting, writing, or through music, drama, dance, Tik-Tok challenges etc.

**Collaborative projects:** creating activities that collectively support the community, those affected by the virus or raise awareness about a particular issue e.g. through a campaign project. Students could use media, create songs, marketing materials, stories and/or articles to promote their campaign.

Topics that can be used in discussions, digital media and projects may include:

- *The role of the individual, family and community.* Thinking about how different communities came together through this time; for example, #Viralkindness, COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK, Community Choirs, Clap for Carers, 5k for Heroes.
- *Reflecting on what might have changed for the better.* For example, impact on the climate, opportunities to pursue a new interest, appreciation of loved ones.
- *Local heroes* – family and friends who are carers or keyworkers, work for the NHS, leaders in the local community etc

**Cook and Talk activities** Groups of 8 children with 2 adults come together to make a fruit salad. The table leader gives step by step cooking instructions and at each step the leader reads out a scripted question for the pairs or groups to discuss. For example, '*It's important to try to find times to relax and have fun even when scary or sad things have happened. Talk about a time when you were able to relax and have fun*'. See Appendix 3 for a Cook & Talk Fruit Salad activity sheet.



We have all had to find ways to cope and to try to stay strong and carry on this year.

**Writing to Heal (Pennebaker):** Research suggests that expressive writing can be a route to healing. Writing to Heal is an activity that involves people writing down deepest feelings about an emotional upheaval in their life for 15 to 20 minutes a day for four consecutive days. *See Appendix 1 for a Writing to Heal activity handout.*

**Activities to promote wellbeing:** a range of suggestions for activities for different ages and stages can be found here: <https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-for-schools/mental-health-resources-for-schools/coronavirus-wellbeing-activity-ideas-for-schools/>

**Ways to Wellbeing activities.** Plan curriculum activities throughout the day/week linked to the 5 ways to wellbeing: **Connect, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Keep Active and Give.**



**THUNKS on DEATH (Winston's Wish).** Thunks are beguilingly simple questions developed by Winston's Wish with Independent Thinking 'that make your brain go ouch'. This set was designed to open up group discussion about grief, death and bereavement. *See Appendix 4 for Thunks activity.*

**WORDLES** can be helpful in allowing young people to explore the feelings and thoughts they are experiencing - using online tools, children can generate word clouds from the text that they input. The Wordle gives more prominence to words that appear more frequently in the inputted text.





### Ideas for 1:1 activities

**Play:** can provide valuable opportunities for connection and expression. Not all students will be ready to talk, or have the ability to articulate their feelings. In order to reduce the threat of direct questioning and create opportunities for attunement, creative and/or practical activities may help reduce barriers e.g. going for a walk, playing a game together, story writing, cooking, drawing, modelling or painting. Play can be adapted to all ages and developmental stages, try taking their lead and offer a range of options that you can jointly engage with.

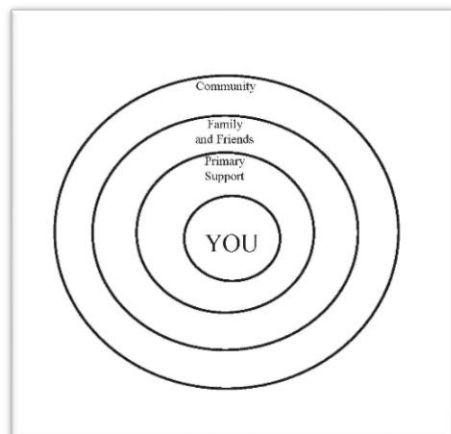
**Strength finding:** explore the young person's coping strategies and personal resources that helped them. How did you cope / what strategies did you use to manage? Can you tell me something positive that happened during period you spent at home? Can you describe one occasion when you felt happy? Can you describe a time where you overcame something challenging? Explore strategies and approaches that have really helped when things have felt tough, this could include mindfulness for example, or sharing stories about social activities that stand out for them. See Appendix 2 for Mindfulness Based Activities.

**Circle of support:** help the child/young person to identify who is in their circle of support, who they can go to and when (e.g. for different purposes/reasons/types of support).

**Problem-free talk:** talking about the student's strengths and resources, using open questions such as 'what are you good at?' 'what do you like?', 'what are you most proud of?'.

**Regulation strategies:** make a thought shower of different healthy coping strategies that the student uses and rate how effective they are. Research and explore new relaxation techniques together and promote opportunities to test them out to see how effective they are (this could be a family or whole class activity also). There are lots of ideas for relaxation and self-regulation strategies here:

- <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>
- <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>
- <http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/covid-anxiety-stress-resources-links/>
- Consider supporting the child/young person to create bespoke regulation supports; for example, making a self-soothe box. More information can be found here: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box/> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zfy3382>



### **Guidelines for supporting students during activities:**

**Confidentiality:** When talking with students there are always limits to confidentiality. Be clear with children/young people before initiating any individual or group activity, what will happen with the information shared and the reasons why information may need to be shared with others (e.g. if you are concerned about a child's safety or wellbeing, or believe they or someone else could be at risk). Make sure that students are aware that you may seek advice or guidance from other professionals.

**Clear expectations:** Help children and young people to feel safe in their contributions. In order to protect vulnerable students it is important that clear parameters and boundaries are in place regarding the remit of topics that would be appropriate to cover in a class or group context vs topics or concerns that need to be taken elsewhere; for example, to a designated member of staff who can be found in the safety / regulation zone.

**Developmentally appropriate information:** when providing responses, consider the level of information that is appropriate in relation to the developmental stages of students, as opposed to their chronological age. It is important to bear in mind that some children/young people may display emotional and/or behavioural regression. More guidance can be found here: <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/advice-talking-children-about-illness>

**Be curious:** Remember that sometimes when students are finding something emotionally difficult, the first signs might be through changes in their behaviour. This can be especially true for students with existing needs or those that were most affected and are finding it difficult to communicate how they are feeling. Be curious about what the child/young person's behaviour may be communicating.

**Setting ground rules:** At the start of the session it will be important to co-construct a set of ground rules with you people. Consider posing questions such as: how do we make this a safe space? What rules do you think we need to have in place (e.g. one person talks at a time, everyone is provided with an opportunity to contribute their views)? What can we do to ensure everyone feels heard? Ensure that one of the ground rules is the 'law of two feet' so that students know they are free to leave if they feel uncomfortable, and a member of staff will be available to check in with them.

**Additional adult support:** closely monitor students' wellbeing during such activities through their responses, tone of voice and body language. Discreetly intervene if you think someone is 'bubbling' or becoming overwhelmed. Have supportive and trusted adults available to help in case children and young people become overwhelmed by their feelings and reactions.

**Validate and normalise:** Acknowledge losses, fears and other emotions when present. Provide reassurance that the thoughts, feelings and reactions are a normal part of recovering from the losses associated with the pandemic, even though they may be upsetting, and that they will lessen in intensity over time.

**All feelings are ok:** we are all different and likely to respond in our own unique ways. Children and young people are likely to have had different lived experiences during their time out of school. It is important to communicate that all feelings and emotions are OK and accepted.

**Exception-finding:** Celebrate students' strengths and progress. Remind children and young people of their coping strategies through your genuine observations and knowledge of them.

**Resist the urge to fix:** you do not need to have a solution or know the answers in order to help. One of the most powerful things you can do is create a space in which a child/young person can share their feelings and be authentically listened to. Focus upon offering empathy and understanding, not solutions.

*'the truth is, rarely can a response make something better — what makes something better is connection. And that connection often requires mutual vulnerability' (Brene Brown)*

**Transparency:** It's ok to not have all the answers. Try not to avoid difficult questions, and instead be honest about what you do and do not know.





Activity 1 - Writing to Heal<sup>4</sup>

### Dr. Pennebaker's Basic Writing Assignment

Over the next four days, write about your deepest emotions and thoughts about the emotional upheaval that has been influencing your life the most. In your writing, really let go and explore the event and how it has affected you. You might tie this experience to your childhood, your relationship with your parents, people you have loved or love now, or even your career. Write continuously for 20 minutes.

### Tips for Writing to Heal

- Find a time and place where you won't be disturbed
- Write continuously for at least 20 minutes
- Don't worry about spelling or grammar
- Write only for yourself
- Write about something extremely personal and important for you
- Deal only with events or situations you can handle now

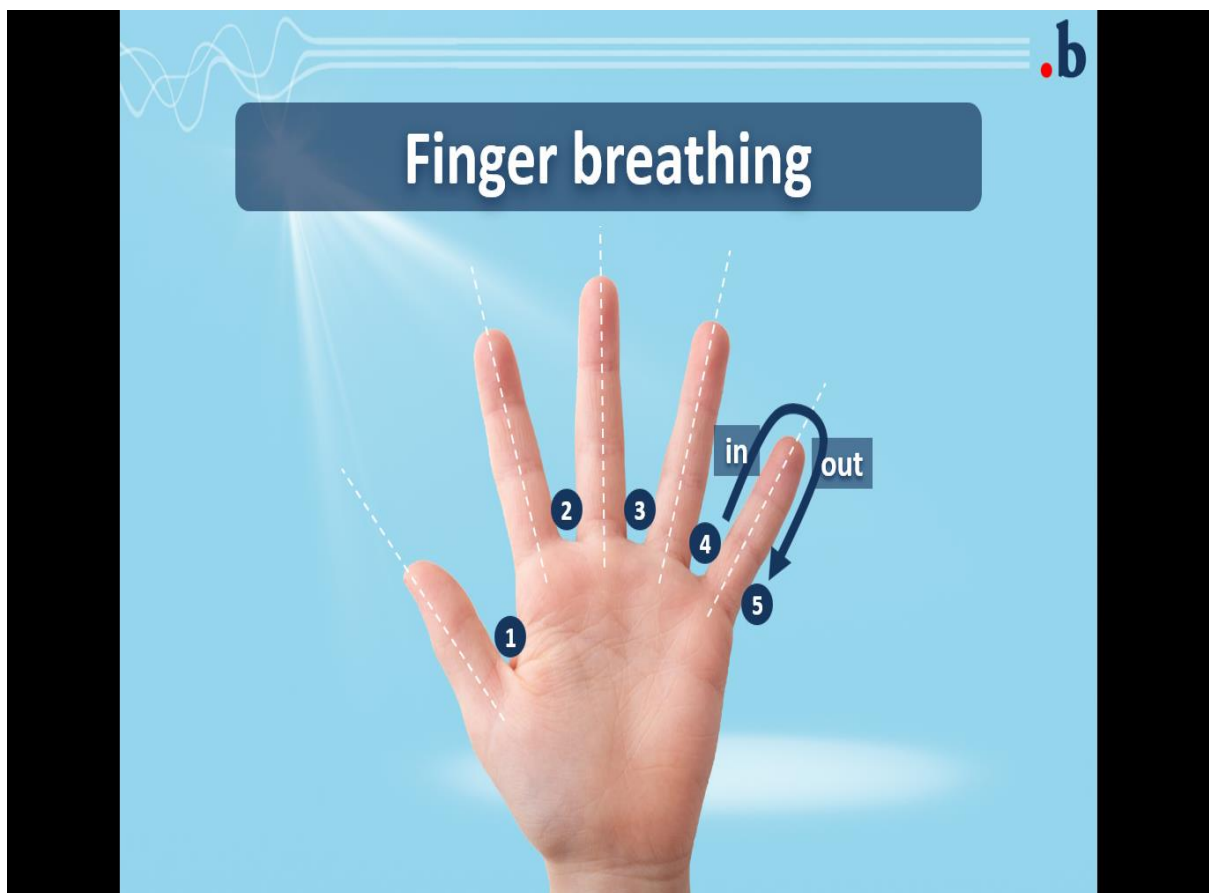
"People who engage in expressive writing report feeling happier and less negative than before writing. Similarly, reports of depressive symptoms, rumination, and general anxiety tend to drop in the weeks and months after writing about emotional upheavals."

From "Writing to Heal"  
by James W. Pennebaker

<sup>4</sup> Reference Vive Griffith Children and War Foundation [Childrenandwar.org.uk](http://Childrenandwar.org.uk)

Activity 2 - Mindfulness Based Activities<sup>5</sup>**i. Finger Breathing**

- 1) Rest your hands on your lap or a table and tune into the feeling of your breathing.
  - 2) Feel the in and out movements of your breath wherever you notice it in your body.
  - 3) Secondly hold one hand up to your face and trace with a finger from the other hand up and down the fingers.
  - 4) Trace the breath flow with your finger, pausing at the tip of your finger at the end of the in-breath and at the bottom of your finger at the end of the out-breath.
  - 5) Do this along the other fingers on your hand, breathing in and out as you trace up and down your finger.
- If your mind wanders, that's ok, just begin again whenever you need to at the next in-breath or out-breath you notice.

**ii. Stop and breathe**

During the day, there usually isn't time to do a lengthy meditation exercise.

Instead, it is possible to do a brief .b to freshen your awareness, change mental gear, and wake up to exactly what's going on in the moment.

Doing a .b is a quick way to help your brain change mode – from being busy and thinking and doing to sensing / and being. The basics of mindfulness are summed up in this practice. Shifting mode, or changing the gear of the mind is the "Core Skill" of mindfulness.

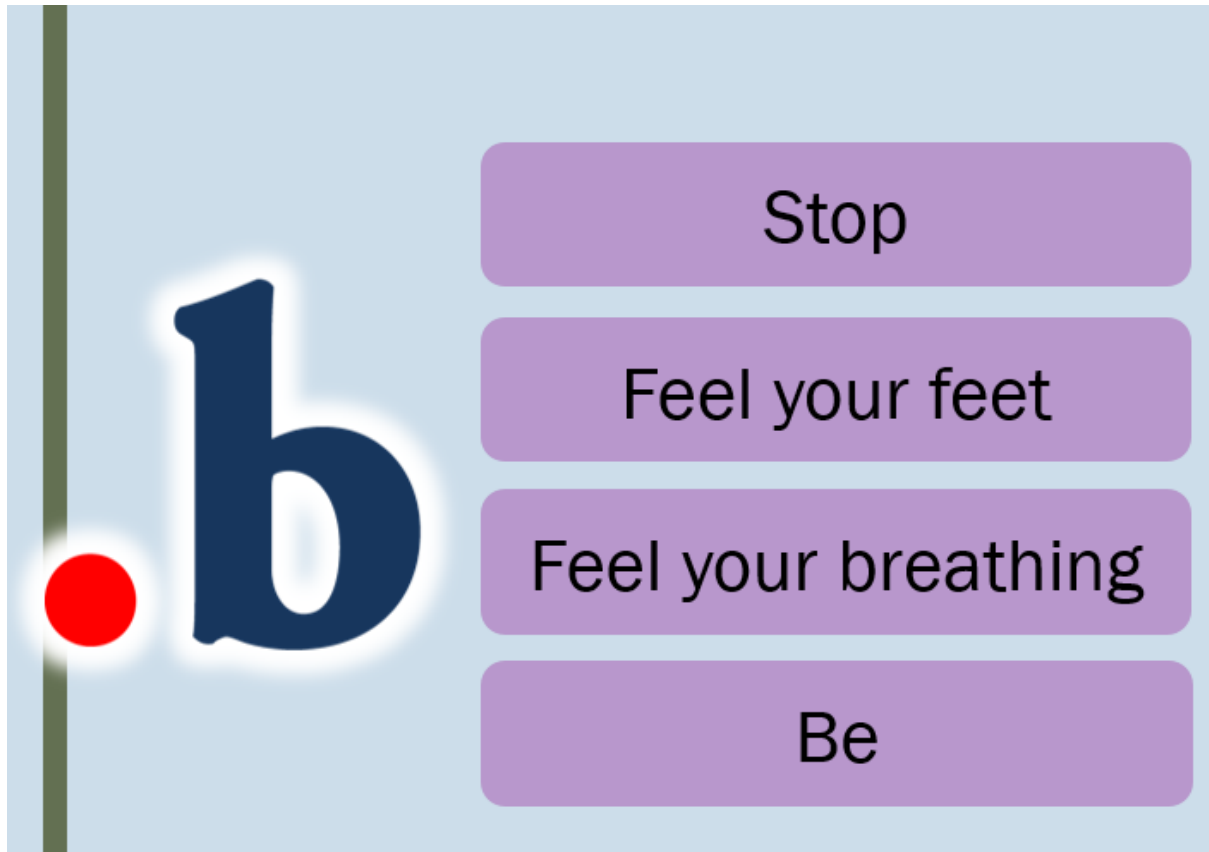
<sup>5</sup> Based on Mindfulness in School Project .b and Paws.b materials

Doing a “.b” is the way to achieve this. .b is a portable 4-step exercise which goes like this:

1. STOP whatever you're doing, maybe noticing you've been in autopilot.
2. FEEL YOUR FEET on the ground. Let this ground/anchor you.
3. FEEL THE SENSATIONS OF BREATHING as it moves through your body.
4. Practise BEING – relaxing into the present moment, BEING HERE NOW!

Very easy one to do with students- in the moment- if they are especially anxious or upset.

Anchoring and calming.



Activity 3 - Cook & Talk - Fruit Salad Activity<sup>6</sup>

This recipe is vegan and does not contain any of the 14 major allergens

### Ingredients

Total ingredients needed (for 8)	Ingredients per pair
4 small cups of fresh strawberries	1 small cup of fresh strawberries
4 small cups of green seedless grapes	1 small cup of green seedless grapes
4 firm bananas	1 firm banana
1 cantaloupe melon	2 slices of cantaloupe melon
4 Granny Smith apples	1 Granny Smith apple
4 kiwi fruit	1 kiwi fruit
Fresh Orange juice	1 small cup of orange juice

**Preparation:** Wipe down the table. Work out how many pairs you have at the table (max 4 pairs) and work out how best to position the following utensils per pair. There should be one adult leader per group.

Divide the ingredients between pairs.

Cut the melon into slices and give 2 to each pair.

1 large bowl needed for food waste.

### **You will need (per pair)**

1 chopping board, 1 sharp knife, 1 peeler, 2 mixing bowls, 1 tablespoon.

1 large bowl for food waste, Bowls to serve, spoons to eat with.

### **Introductory script**

Today we're going to learn how to make some salads in pairs at our tables, and at the same time we're going to answer some questions about ways you/we have been coping and staying strong. It's

<sup>6</sup> Adapted by Jane Roller Senior Educational Psychologist @Bi-Borough EPCS with thanks to Localwelcome.org

important that we remind ourselves of the courage we have shown and the skills and strengths we have learned this year. We're going to talk to each other about what we have done and what has helped us to do that while we make our salads.

**Ask if there are any questions and don't forget to WASH HANDS before starting.**

Steps:	Leader script and Questions for pairs:
1. Cut the top off the strawberries and cut in half. Add to bowl.	Optional script: We all find different ways of coping during difficult times. Q: Tell your partner/ the group one way that you have tried to 'stay strong'.
2. Cut the grapes in half. Add to bowl.	Optional script: We all have different challenges to overcome. Q: Tell your partner/ the group one of the challenges you have overcome and what has helped.
3. Peel and slice the banana into small pieces. Add to bowl.	Optional script: It's important to try to find times to relax and have fun even when scary or sad things have happened. Q: Tell your partner/ the group about a time when you were able to relax and have fun.
4. Cut the melon slices into small pieces. Add to bowl.	Optional script: Sometimes there are opportunities to learn new things during times of crisis. Q: What strengths or new skills have you developed?
5. Peel and core the apple and cut into small pieces.	Optional script: When scary or sad things happen, the smallest act of kindness can have enormous power. Q: What kindnesses have you noticed and appreciated?
6. Peel and slice the kiwi fruit.	Optional script: Connecting with other people can help us stay strong. Q: What have other people done to help you?
7. Combine the fruit. Pour over the orange juice and toss to coat. Enjoy!	Optional script: Learning new things makes us more confident as well as being fun. Q: What new things would you like to learn or try next year?

## Activity 4 - THUNKS on Death

# THUNKS ON DEATH

## Introduction

Thunks™ are 'beguilingly simple-looking questions' that make your brain go ouch. They grew out of educator and writer Ian Gilbert's work on Philosophy for Children and have proved incredibly popular with teachers around the world as a quick and easy tool for getting children and young people's brains to hurt. This particular set, a collaboration between Winston's Wish and Independent Thinking, is specifically designed to open up thinking and discussion around the topics of death, grief and bereavement.

## Instructions

The only Golden Rule when it comes to Thunks is that there are no 'right' answers. Their purpose is to encourage thought, debate, argument and philosophical reflection as well as practising speaking and listening skills. From working on a single Thunk as an entire class to having one each, one between two or working in smaller 'communities of enquiry', from using them as lessons starters to building whole lessons around a single Thunk, teachers have used them in many, many ways with children of all ages and academic backgrounds. Good luck!

Winston's Wish is a Registered Charity (England and Wales) 1061359, (Scotland) SC041140 | 0308



**Is being alive a choice?**



**If every time you laughed, it knocked a minute off your life, would you stop laughing?**



**Is it better to die suddenly than be given a month to live?**



**Is it ever cruel to save a life?**



**Can you choose not to be sad?**



**Do you love a family member less after they've died?**





**Can you love someone you  
can't see?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Is it really better to have  
loved and lost than not have  
loved at all?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Do you still own the things  
you've lost forever?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Can you choose to be happy?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Is quantity more important  
than quality when it comes to  
your life?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Are funerals always sad?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Are you a different person  
once both your parents die?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Is it an act of love to let  
someone you love die  
before you?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**If you put the brain of someone  
who has died into a robot, have you  
brought that person back to life?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Is a funeral a party?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Should your online profile be  
deleted as soon as you die?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**If someone is being kept  
alive, are they living?**

independent  
thinking

WINSTON'S  
WISH WW

**Should we be made to live longer if we can?**

independent thinking 

WINSTON'S  
WISH WWW

independent thinking 

WINSTON'S  
WISH WWW

**Can you love someone who's not around?**

independent thinking 

WINSTON'S  
WISH WWW

independent thinking 

WINSTON'S  
WISH WWW

**Is anything worth dying for?**

independent thinking 

WINSTON'S  
WISH WWW

independent thinking 

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**If you dream of someone who has died, are you dreaming of their ghost?**

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**Does a child know what death is?**

**If you could live forever, would you want to?**

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**Can death ever be happy?**

**Is losing a loved one harder the older they are?**

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**Do you die when the last person who remembers you dies?**



## APPENDIX 10: Possible scripts and conversation starters

### Key messages from the whole staff team:

**Welcome back:** 'it's great to see you', 'we've missed you', 'I was thinking about you recently when...', 'it's good to be back'

**We're here to keep you safe:** 'we have been carefully planning the school re-opening and have put measures in place to keep you safe', 'we are doing all we can to minimise the risks and ensure your safety', 'your wellbeing is our priority'

**We're in this together:** 'we are keen to hear about your thoughts and experiences', 'we will be working with you to decide upon the next steps in our school', 'there are lots of things we can all do to help keep each other safe', 'although we don't have the answers to everything right now, we will let you and your families know once we know more'

### Conversation starters for 1:1 interactions (e.g. check in with form tutor)

- Is there anything you want to talk about?
- During circle time / the debate, you said something interesting about how you felt when... I'm wondering how you feel about it now?
- Can you tell me a little bit about what the last couple of months have been like for you? What words might you use to describe your experience?
- How did you feel about being at home? / learning from home?
- How do you feel about things changing?
- How do you feel about returning to school?
- What helps you to feel safe in school?
- Is there anything you are struggling with / finding difficult at the moment?
- Is there anything you're concerned / worried about?
- Is there anything I/we can do to help you?
- Is there anything you're looking forward to?

### Responses to young people's concerns, queries or worries:

**Tune in to observational cues:** 'I can see that you're feeling angry because...', 'I can see that you're really worried about this, you're frowning and biting your fingers, I hear you', 'I can see you're kicking the wall and I'm wondering if you're feeling frustrated at the moment because of all the changes?', 'I can see something not quite right, can you tell me about it?' 'you seem sad/angry/worried/frustrated to me'

**Normalise and validate:** 'it's ok to feel angry / sad / worried' 'I know there are other people who are also feeling worried at the moment, and that's ok', 'I bet many of your class are feeling the same'

**Empathise:** 'it's understandable to be feeling angry, I've experienced similar emotions myself recently', 'it can be difficult to manage not knowing, I have also found it frustrating', 'I would feel angry if that happened to me'

**Transparency:** ‘we do not have all the answers, but we are following guidance from the government and experts on this’, ‘we will take on board your views in our decision making as we go forward’, ‘I don’t know the answer to that currently, but when I do, I will get back to you’

**Active listening:** ‘I am listening carefully to what you’re saying and I am trying to understand. This is what I heard / it sounds like you’re saying... (*reflect back, summarise what you heard*) did I get it right (*clarify*)?’

**Redirecting:** ‘this is a really important question. Let’s spend some time thinking about this at the end of the lesson’, ‘I’m really glad you shared that with me, shall we write it down so that we can come back to it at break time?’, ‘it’s ok to worry about this and it is important to share your feelings, shall we designate a time that we can discuss this?’

Responses to ‘big’ emotions and/or challenging behaviours:

**Set boundaries:** ‘I understand that you’re feeling angry, however, it’s not ok to rip down the display’, ‘I know you’re frustrated that I took your phone away but the rules are the same for everyone, I will keep it safe for you’, ‘it’s not ok to behave like that, even when you’re feeling frustrated because it’s not safe’, ‘it’s ok to feel angry, but it’s not ok to hurt people’

**Problem solve:** ‘next time you feel like that, what can I do to help you?, ‘what could you do differently next time?’, ‘let’s think of other things you can do when you feel this way’, ‘I can help you to think of different ways to cope’, ‘so what are we going to do about this, we can’t do X, but we could do Y’, ‘what could we do to help you feel safer?’

**Solution finding:** ‘can you remember what we agreed last time?’ ‘how did you manage last time you felt like this?’, ‘let’s come up with a plan of what you will do next time you feel like this’, ‘do you think doing X would be more helpful to yourself and others?’, ‘what would be the pros and cons of doing X instead?’