



# HEALTHIER MINDS



## Transition and Recovery Safety, Reconnection, Self-Regulation, Individualised Responses and Resilience

*East Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service*



[Healthier Minds Link](#)

## **Introduction**

The transition back to school following the Covid-19 closure will be challenging. Decisions to impose lockdown were taken quickly and in a context of anxiety about the virus and uncertainty about how long the restrictions would be in place. The lockdown also prevented pupils from experiencing the usual rites of passage such as exams and leavers' parties; and transition opportunities to visit and connect with new teachers, schools and Early Learning and Childcare Establishments.

School staff have risen to the challenge of continuing to support the learning and development of East Renfrewshire pupils adapting to new virtual platforms. Now we face a new challenge; that of helping pupils and staff to feel safe and confident to return to schools and ELCs, to reconnect with others, to promote wellbeing and resilience and to continue high quality learning.

In May 2020 the EPS produced a position paper [Returning to School During Covid -19: Transition and Recovery](#). In this paper, 3 key themes were identified as central to promoting effective transition and recovery planning:

**A focus on reconnecting, relationship-building and wellbeing**

**Creating a sense of safety by adapting the environment and teaching new behaviours**

**A curriculum which focuses on developing self-regulation through play, movement and relaxation**

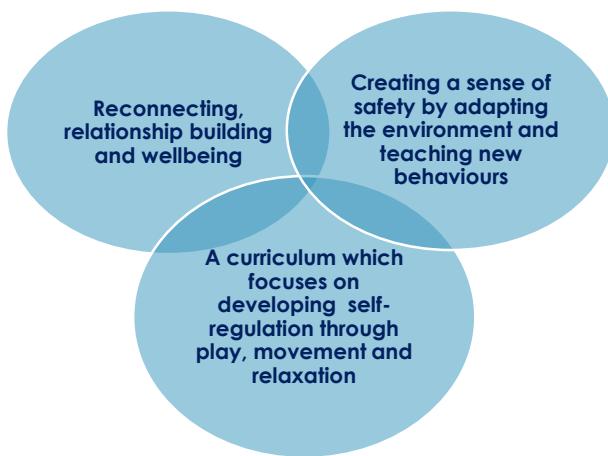
Most children, young people and staff will recover from the effects of the current situation with little psychological intervention. However, this relies upon whole school approaches which prioritise relationships and connections, and which are mindful of, and responsive to each individual's unique experience of lockdown and its impact.

This document is designed to assist school and ELC teams to reflect on their transition and recovery planning and can be used alongside 'Healthier Minds Transition and Recovery video'. It considers **universal and targeted approaches** to support staff children and young people as they return to school and following **5 trauma-informed principles**.

1. Safety
2. Reconnection
3. Self-Regulation
4. Individualised Responses
5. Resilience



## Promoting Effective Transition and Recovery:



### Through a focus on the following trauma-informed principles:

#### **Safety**

For a child or young person to be able to interact, play, learn and develop, feeling emotionally and physically safe is crucial. Consistency, routines and predictability increase a child's feeling of safety and will more effectively prepare them to settle back into the education environment with a confidence to connect and learn.

#### **Reconnection**

Restoring relationships and connectedness to each other is key to facilitating the transition back to school and nursery. This will help to re-establish a sense of belonging, promote engagement and enjoyment and will help staff and pupils feel valued and supported.

#### **Self-Regulation**

Children and Young Peoples' readiness to learn is dependent on the levels of anxiety they experience. If these are high, it is much more difficult for them to focus. This is why it is important to build in regular nurturing, self-regulatory and motivating activities, such as relaxation, mindfulness, physical movement and play.

#### **Individualised Responses**

How we support a child and young person's transition back to school will vary according to the individual needs of a child or young person. This will be heavily influenced by factors such as the child's stage of development, their personal home circumstances and their additional support needs.

#### **Resilience**

The ability of a child or young person to manage the return will depend upon the support around them both in and out of school, and the coping strategies they have previously learned and developed in response to different and challenging situations. Prioritising this as an integral part of the curriculum will be key to promoting wellbeing.

## **Staff Wellbeing**

At the heart of East Renfrewshire's transition and recovery planning is staff wellbeing. We recognise that many of us will have experienced some of the same losses as our children and young people. The loss of routine, loss of face to face socialising and potentially loss of loved ones. Many of us will have found adapting to new ways of working particularly challenging and this coupled with the demands of family life may have had a negative impact on our emotional wellbeing. It is not uncommon for education staff to feel the same sense of helplessness, anxiety, anger and confusion as our young people and as such, be apprehensive about returning to work. It is therefore vital that staff feel physically and emotionally safe to do so.

East Renfrewshire Council recognises how important it is, during the recovery phase, that we do not simply return to business as usual without first considering the current and future needs of our staff. Time will need to be given to asking ourselves some of the following questions:

- How can senior leadership teams ensure time is available for re-connection and peer support?
- How do we manage reconnection and peer support opportunities in the context of physical distancing restrictions?
- What will staff find helpful during this transition and recovery phase?
- How can we identify the needs of staff and monitor wellbeing?
- What supports will be needed to promote staff self-care and wellbeing?
- What can other services offer to support the wellbeing of staff?

It will be important for senior leadership teams to create networks of support within their establishments that ensure the thoughts and feelings of staff are heard, accepted and responded to with empathy and understanding. This may include increased opportunities for staff to connect throughout the day with a focus on peer support as well as enhancing enjoyment and genuine connection to the school community.

During the lockdown many staff may feel that they have little control over what is happening and therefore feel they have limited capacity to influence or improve the situation. It is important that we create opportunities for staff to be involved in shaping and talking about next steps as we move forward into this new phase. Questions that might be useful to ask as a staff team:

- How can our core values help us to manage the challenges and opportunities of returning to school?
- What things can we control, influence or need to accept?
- How do we ensure all staff feel valued, involved and heard in decision making?

## **Key Universal Considerations as We Welcome Staff, Children and Young People Back to School and ELC**

Consider how to identify, support and monitor the wellbeing needs of staff

Gather the views of pupils and parents about their experience of lockdown and their feelings about the return to school!

Create a 'Welcome Back' video or photographs featuring SMT and staff providing a virtual tour of the school

Highlight key differences to the physical layout, hygiene measures, break and lunchtime adaptations, entering and exiting procedures

Encourage parents, through social media channels to prepare children for school e.g. walking to school, connecting with peers, establishing a routine

Create school and class wall displays focusing on nurture/wellbeing principles and promoting a 'good to talk' approach

Display 'Welcome Back' banners or decorations to welcome pupils on their 1<sup>st</sup> day

Display visual prompts around the school which clearly inform pupils of new measures

Plan the environment based on nurture and trauma-informed principles including planned quiet areas/safe spaces in the school and in each class.

Consider activities you will use to promote emotional development and self-regulation which are age and stage appropriate

Consider the confidence of all school staff to respond to the experience and worries of pupils including developing active listening skills

## **Key Targeted Considerations as We Welcome Staff, Children and Young People Back to School and ELC**

Link as early as possible with parents and pupils who are likely to find the return to school particularly challenging

Consider strategies to meet the needs of pupils who will find the transition more challenging including social stories providing specific information and photographs or film clip about what the pupil can expect on their return to school

Collaborate with pupils and parents to create Pupil Passports to ensure key staff have relevant and up to date information

Liaise with other professionals as appropriate to ensure the most relevant and up to date information is available to most effectively plan for the additional support needs of the pupil

Identify at least one key adult who is responsible for managing the pupil's return to school

Create an opportunity for a transition visit ahead of the return to school to see the new layout, meet key staff and experience new routines

Plan how to assess and monitor the wellbeing of children with ASN

## **Key Universal Considerations when Children and Young People are Back in School and ELC**

Create clear routines and explain rules:

- Make use of whole class visual schedules to establish routines
- Create or develop with the children, visual prompts for rules emphasising 'do's' rather than 'don'ts'
- Create or learn a song to reinforce hygiene and social distancing rules
- Teach, model and practise new routines and behaviours

Prioritise activities which allow pupils to:

- Reconnect with peers and adults and promote a sense of community
- Encourage children and young people to share their experiences of lockdown in a variety of different ways
- Check-in with staff as a group or individual
- Experience a sense of achievement
- Practise skills in emotional awareness and emotional regulation
- Feel involved and valued as part of the school community
- Discuss loss, change and bereavement in an appropriate and responsive way
- Express how they are feeling using approaches which enable them to reflect and challenge their negative thinking

Consider how you respond to the experiences and worries of pupils, and your skills in listening and validating feelings

Assess and monitor emotional wellbeing

Adopt movement, mindfulness and relaxation strategies as core elements of the day

Consider how to create whole school community activities where assemblies are not possible

Continue to be mindful of the experience of staff members and create regular opportunities to check in with staff and support staff wellbeing

## **Key Targeted Considerations when Children and Young People are Back in School and ELC**

Create personalised social stories and visual prompts using Boardmaker visuals or photographs of the child completing activities

Model, encourage practice and where appropriate reward behaviours

Consider how to manage the pupil's time in the classroom making use of movement breaks, quiet time and sensory breaks

Monitor the experience of the pupil through observation, encouraging self-expression, using visuals and involving regular discussion with parents

Consider ways for the pupil to experience success using interests and talents

Develop updated SMART targets in collaboration with the pupil where possible and based on a thorough assessment of the child's needs

Teach self-regulation strategies and make time to practise and model