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Glasgow Psychological Service
nurturing wellbeing and learning

The Nurturing City - Reconnection to school and early learning centres (ELCs) - a starter paper

1. The importance of Nurture Principle Six following COVID-19 Lockdown

The transition back to school following the COVID-19 closure will be one that is new to all of us. The circumstances which led to a rapid closure of schools in March 2020 meant that staff were limited in the work they could do to plan for and support the transition out of school and to home for what was to be an unknown and extended period of time. During this time of school closure education staff have been acutely aware of the impact of inequality for some of our families; the challenges of maintaining good mental and physical health and the increased risk for some children and will approach reconnecting to school with concern about how these will affect children as they return.

Additionally the time of year that the closures were implemented meant that much of the usual transition work and celebration for children starting a new school, moving classes or leaving school for work or further education did not happen or happened under constrained circumstances.

Staff will also have moved, retired, taken up new posts, gone on maternity leave etc. and teams will have been limited in how they mark these significant events for each other.

How beginnings and endings are managed is important for our wellbeing, our sense of connection and belonging. However within our Nurturing City education staff in Glasgow are very familiar with Nurturing Principle 6 – ***transitions are significant in the lives of children*** - and will already have many skills and strategies which enhance their teaching and inform the relationships they have with children and young people at transition points.

We will need to plan carefully together to ensure this time of reconnection to school is a time of recognising the emotional needs of the whole school community, ensuring children and their families feel welcomed back and looking forward with hope to new learning and renewed relationships.

2. Transition support for school communities

2.1 Reconnecting staff

Time spent with colleagues before children return will allow the whole team to explore the experience of lockdown on them individually and on their school community. Allowing members of staff time to reflect and share will help to identify successes, explore new learning that can be continued and highlight those who may need some additional consideration as school returns.

Modules to support staff wellbeing on return to school are being developed by our Nurture Coordinator and Glasgow Psychological Service (GPS) and will be available on Glasgow Online.

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- What is the SLT vision for the session ahead?
- What has been individuals' experience?
- Have there been significant events -including bereavement and loss?
- What have been the challenges?
- What have colleagues learned? What new changes can be embedded?
- What are you proud of?
- What can be celebrated?
- What are you looking forward to?

2.2 Reconnecting families

Much has been expected of families during lockdown. Maintaining good mental and physical health for all members when resources and opportunities are limited and with additional concerns about finances and employment will have created a unique set of stressors.

Staff discussions about how to reconnect families will support transition for individual children and young people.

- What information do families need now?
- How has contact been during lockdown?
- Which families have coped/ which might need extra support?
- What about families of key workers? What have been the challenges for them?
- What about vulnerable families – for example where domestic abuse has been a feature?
- What has been the wider impact on families? Financial/social/personal/learning/emotional
- What achievements have there been?
- What could the welcome back to school look like? E.g. welcome events for staff, families, children, community members (who may have played a significant part in supporting families and contributing to community resilience).
- Could you have an implementation team to organise first day and first week events and activities?
- How can you support and celebrate transitions?

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2.3 Reconnecting children and young people

Restrictions on social, leisure and learning opportunities may have increased children and young people's sense of powerlessness and for some this will have been an isolating and unpleasant experience.

Others will have developed new ways of learning and made connections to support this beyond the school context. Some may have learnt a new appreciation of school and what it offers!

Give staff an opportunity to think about children and young people's experiences, explore together possibilities of giving them a voice in how they reconnect to school and involving them in school plans for the next session.

- What are children/young people's views about school now?
- What have been their experiences of home schooling?
- What do they think the future looks like for them now?
- How will they be supported to:
 - Transition from home – soft starts, activities, buddies...
 - Reflect on their experiences – curricular supports?
 - Re-establish routines – emphasise what has stayed the same
 - Reconnect with peers
 - Reconnect with staff
 - Reconnect with learning – who might need additional support?

3. All behaviour is communication and the school/classroom as a safe base– understanding additional needs following COVID 16 closures

While many children and young people (and colleagues) will have sufficient resilience and family resources to cope well with the challenges of lockdown for some the experience will have been challenging and perhaps traumatic. Some children may be grieving and others will have experienced abuse. The safe base that school provides will be especially important for these children and their families.

3.1 Identifying a need for additional support

All children will need individual consideration on return to school and staff will already be aware of many children who will need additional support and will have planning in place for them however, given the unique circumstances of this period of closure, staff should be prepared to rapidly identify children who are not coping with the readjustments required to return to school. We should be aware that this might apply to our colleagues too.

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In these circumstances we need to:

- Quickly identify those who are experiencing difficulties,
- Personalise supports for them,
- Be aware of a possible need for specialist assistance and how to access this.

3.2 Children living in Children's Houses

Our children and young people currently residing within Children's Houses across the City remain safe and well. Despite significant staff shortages within this sector the Houses have been very well supported by Social Work students to maintain staffing levels. There have been no identified cases of COVID 19 within the Houses, although several young people and staff have self-isolated. Residential staff report on the whole that Houses have remained safe, calm and in good spirits.

All Houses have received learning resources and supports from all of their schools. The children/young people where possible have been accessing these to keep themselves busy and maintain a routine. Some young people have reported that they are feeling less anxious about not going into school and more relaxed and less pressured learning within their House environment, this may cause some challenges when schools reopen and they have to prepare to return. As a result this transition back may be harder and require more support. Children/young people transitioning in August may also require a more enhanced and structured transition plan. The Care Experienced Team (CET) have built up strong partnerships with all of the Children's Houses and House Managers have been contacted on a regular basis to ensure they have educational support during these times. A number of Houses have asked for additional support for mainly primary aged children and to request IT equipment to support home learning.

Children/young people have been able to keep in touch with family and friends online and by phone. In the main this has been very positive, however, no face to face contact with loved ones has caused some emotional distress and reduced reintegration plans for young people to move back home or to Kinship Care. At the moment many of these plans have had to be put on hold. Some young people who had been increasing their time at home have remained there with close contact and outreach support from residential staff.

3.3 Children who don't return to school

Attendance may have been an issue for some families prior to lockdown and it is possible that this extended period out of school will have exacerbated this. Others may have embraced the time out of school as a time of reduced anxiety and challenge and, if this is the case, will be reluctant to return to a context and routine that increases their discomfort.

Quickly re-establishing contact and connection with these families to understand why their children have not returned to school will be especially important and will most likely have to comprise safe outreach to some children's homes. Key adults with whom these families already have good relationships should be part of the planning to link with children and families and agree appropriate next steps.

Some families may still be frightened about the possibilities of COVID-19 in relation to their own circumstances, for example for family members with underlying health conditions and will require

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additional reassurance about the measures taken in school to maintain social distancing, if this is still applicable, and good hygiene practices.

3.4 Some will have experienced grief and loss

Loss has been a feature of the COVID-19 lockdown for almost all of us. Loss of routine, income, safety and security and connection to friends and family will be factors affecting many children and their families.

This, combined with anxieties about the coronavirus and what it effect it might have on themselves, friends and family, means that children may require additional time to explore their feelings and reassurance that what they are experiencing is normal given the circumstances we all find ourselves in.

Unfortunately during the time away from school some of our children and our colleagues will experience bereavement. This may or may not be COVID-19 related but the restrictions on the normal grieving process will have had a particular impact. Contact with loved ones who have been ill has been limited and funeral processes changed significantly.

Staff should be aware which children and colleagues might be affected and the additional support they may require. The Glasgow Loss and Bereavement Toolkit can be accessed here [A Whole School approach to Supporting Loss and Bereavement](#)

If you feel you require more specific guidance and support please contact the educational psychologist linked to your establishment and they will be able to advise you.

The NHS Education for Scotland bereavement team has developed a charter for good bereavement care, it can be accessed here: [Bereavement Care Charter](#)

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4. Nurturing principles and COVID-19 – some questions to consider and ideas for practice

As part of our nurturing city vision we are all familiar with using the principles to support children, families and staff as a whole establishment approach. We can also use these principles as a framework to reflect on how to use a relationship based approach to support reconnection.

Children's learning is understood developmentally

Questions to consider:

How might children's development have been affected by school closure and lockdown?

How can we gather information and monitor progress?

What impact could this have had on 'closing the gap'?

Some ideas:

- Explaining COVID-19 in a developmentally appropriate way. There are lots of helpful resources including for example: [Dave the dog is worried about corona virus](#) [Child friendly explanation of coronavirus \(available as a pdf\)](#) [COVbook](#) (available in multiple languages)
- Remember to use a holistic approach when gathering baseline data – thinking about learning, social and emotional development. Universally the wellbeing indicators can be used or developmental checklists for some children, such as the early skills checklist from [teaching talking](#) can be used to gather information and monitor progress.
- There may have been a regression in behaviour so revisiting previous strategies could help.

The classroom offers a safe base

Questions to consider:

How can messages of safety be communicated?

What changes have there been to the classroom? (for example social distancing and hygiene) How do children understand and adhere to these?

Some children will be adversely affected by COVID-19 measures, how will you know who they are?

Some ideas:

- Basic needs met first – remember Maslow!
- Re-establish routines to help establish feelings of safety. Reminder of what is still the same can be a comfort. Changes to daily routines explained in a developmentally appropriate way using visuals as a reminder. Language and communication friendly establishment (LCFE) will support this.
- Create a sense of belonging through personalising the environment.
- Environmental checklists could be used - such as from 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach'

Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing

Questions to consider:

How do we ensure children and young people have an opportunity to contribute to plans for reconnection?

What has been the impact on wellbeing? For example physical and mental health, friendships

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What do they think the future might hold?
How can we build resilience?

Some ideas:

- Gathering views of children and young people in a variety of ways to feed into planning
- Use of the wellbeing indicators to monitor wellbeing in a holistic way
- For some children the resilience matrix and the 6 domains of resilience (Daniels & Wassell, 2002) could be used to analyse and plan next steps

Language is understood as a vital means of communication

Questions to consider:

Much of the communication around COVID-19 has been about the threat it poses, how can we help children and young people manage this? How do children and young people feel about COVID-19 measures?

What changes do we need to make to the language we use to communicate safety?

How can we re-attune to children and help them re-attune to us again?

How can we communicate hope?

Some ideas:

- Systems in place to acknowledge and discuss feelings and worrying thoughts
- Focus on attunement strategies, such as using the attunement (contact) principles from VIG and VERP or the attunement profile from Applying Nurture as a whole School Approach for ideas
- Use of positive approaches to communicate hope and gratitude such as 3 good things, facts of kindness and focus on strengths

All behaviour is communication

Some children will still feel frightened and may be struggling with anxiety and mental health issues and will find it difficult to leave their families and reconnect to school. Others may have had traumatic experiences whilst off school and/or may have been abused. We may see a regression in behaviour.

Questions to consider:

How will we know which children and young people are finding it difficult to cope?

What changes do we have to make to reassure and support them?

Some ideas:

- Systems in place to identify which children and young people may need additional support
- Key people are available for children who know them well to help redirect and reassure.
- Staff use their knowledge of attachment and trauma responses to think about what is behind behaviour
- Time for reflective discussion built in as a supportive structure – with children and also for staff too
- Brainstem calming activities built in throughout the day

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Transitions are significant in the lives of children

Questions to consider:

See discussion questions in section 2.1 2.2 and 2.3 above.

Some ideas:

- Unstructured times like break and lunchtime may need more consideration as children and young people reconnect and re-establish safe and supportive relationships. Identify who may be more vulnerable at this time and what supports they might need.
- Friendships are transitions too – social clubs and groups to reconnect with peers and facilitate new friendship groups
- Positive beginnings and endings to the day
- Consider using ‘team around the child’ approach to support some children with transitions throughout the day

For more information on Nurture training materials and resources contact
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However your school plans to support children, young people and their families as we return to school, the core principles of re-establishing safety, connectedness and a sense of belonging will ensure that the wellbeing needs of everyone within your school community will be central to your thinking. Reflecting on what we already know about what children need to feel safe in school and maximising opportunities to re-establish relationships and listen to their experiences will help everyone make the adjustments needed to re-engage in school life.

Useful links

Glasgow Psychological Service Website: [coronavirus and education](https://coronavirusandeducation.com)

Looking Ahead to When Schools Re-open: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/news.html>

Compassionate and connected classroom

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/compassionate-and-connected-classroom>

Trauma sensitive approaches

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<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3091/adversity-and-trauma-informed-practice-guide-for-professionals.pdf>

Wellbeing and mental health supports

<https://clearyourhead.scot/>

<http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2951/supporting-teachers-mental-health-and-wellbeing-english-feb2020.pdf>

<https://www.annafreud.org/>

Suicide and self harm

<http://www.chooselife.net/Home/index.aspx>

Bereavement support

Child Bereavement UK <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Winston's Wish: <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Care experienced children and young people

<https://www.celcis.org/>

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