



## **Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach**

# **Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better**

A Summary of Trauma Informed Priorities for  
Educational Establishments

## RNRA as a Framework for Recovery

The wellbeing of staff, children and young people and their families must be our highest priority as we reopen schools. The knowledge, expertise and practices already in place as a result of Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach (RNRA) are exactly those that will support recovery from the effects of COVID-19. Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service (REPS) has refined and enhanced RNRA so that it serves as a framework for understanding the community trauma caused by COVID-19, supporting staff and children and young people back to establishments when they re-open and in aiding recovery over the longer term.

This summary highlights key priorities from the extended resource, which are particularly relevant to education establishments in the first phase of planning for children and young peoples' return to our establishment buildings. **For more detailed information, including specific information in relation to trauma and bereavement, please refer to the full document 'Nurturing Wellbeing: A Trauma Informed Resource'.**

### What are the key messages from RNRA for COVID-19 recovery planning?

*"A child or young person experiencing chronic stress may appear jumpy, volatile, hyper-vigilant and perhaps operating in survival mode; easily triggered into fight or flight survival reactions. Others may seem dazed or tuned-out. More likely to be girls, these are the children whose survival strategy is to freeze or submit, retreating from a world they view as scary and/or unpredictable into a mind that feels safer."*

Meredith (2020)

- You may see lots of different behaviours which communicate stress and/or anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery process, from children and young people, staff and parents/caregivers. It is important to remain aware of this and expect to see some cases where psychological distress manifests through behaviour.
- We have all spent a significant period of time being told and thinking that we have to stay at home to be safe. We are all going to need reassurance and time to trust that other places are safe for us. The physical environment of our education establishments will have to adapt in line with public health guidance. It is important that we consider ways to achieve these requirements which also take into account the psychological needs of the children, young people and staff in doing so.
- Reflecting on the language we use is more pertinent than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery process, as the language we use can help create a sense of belonging and reconnection and help staff, children and young people and families to understand, process and manage their emotions.
- A predictable routine and structure can help ease anxiety about transitions, because it helps us to know what to expect, however COVID-19 has changed all of our usual routines and our ability to predict what the future, even in the short term is going to look like. This is likely to cause a level of anxiety in everyone.

### What we can do: Preparation for transition

- **View all staff, children and young people as new starts**
  - Plan a welcome back and curriculum that focuses on staff and children and young peoples' wellbeing. Consider ways to listen to staff and children and young peoples' worries and respond to their needs by using this information to construct a curriculum together.
- **Engage with staff and children and young people about what the transition will look like**
  - Communicate information about school routines – model routines via video/communication friendly resources (e.g. social stories).
  - Virtual tours: to show layout of classrooms, corridors and communal areas, stressing what has been done to try and make the environment as safe as possible.
  - Try to make a personal connection with your class/pastoral group/year group. E.g. video messages, phone calls, post cards.
  - Transition passports- send out to be completed at home.
- **Be explicit about ways establishments are keeping staff, children and young people safe**
  - Keep COVID-19 related rules to a small number. State these simply and positively, use limited language and reinforce with visuals.
- **Create a physical environment that promotes a sense of belonging**
  - Involve the whole establishment community in re-creating their environment, for example, prominently display pictures of staff, children and young people, perhaps what they did in lockdown, what they are looking forward to now and the good things about lockdown that they would like to try and keep.
  - Display pictures/photos of people who have helped the local community.
  - Have a way of remembering the people who have sadly died.
- **Supporting transitions**
  - Mini-rituals; simple sequences of activity can set the tone of the day and be of real benefit e.g. morning song, mindfulness, music after intervals.
  - For those needing more support, time and space at the beginning of the day to scan their environment, key adult meet and greet and planning for the day, highlighting times that more support may be needed.
- **Teach children, young people and adults about their stress responses**
  - Help children, young people and adults to notice how their body feels when they are anxious and what kind of activities help them to feel calmer.
- **Model positive ways of managing anxiety**
  - Adults, children and young people can benefit from short regulation breaks throughout the day (1-2 minutes can be enough!). E.g. breathing exercises, mindfulness, movement or checking in with a trusted person.
  - Collaborate with the child or young person to select and plan regulation activities.
  - Practice these regularly when the child or young person is calm so that they become familiar with them and can use them during times of stress.
  - Use playfulness to reduce anxiety. Creating new fun morning routines, telling jokes, sharing funny stories and learning through music and rhythm are all ways to help promote calm.

## What we can do: supporting children & young people through interactions

- **Think about levels of development**
  - Be aware that children and young people might have a lower emotional than chronological age and could regress to earlier levels of development because of the stressful times we have been living in. They may need information and support appropriate to a younger age group.
- **When they return to establishments, children and young people will need opportunities to explore:**
  - What has been difficult for them (it is important to accept and acknowledge difficult feelings about missed opportunities, disappointments and specific challenges they have faced).
  - What they have learned about their own ways of coping with challenge.
  - What they feel hopeful about for the future.
- **Support emotional development**
  - Identify children and young people who are finding things difficult and need individualised support, e.g. using the wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI), the GIRFEC resilience matrix, emotional check-ins/scaling/worry boxes. Remember some children and young people will internalise their distress.
  - Children can think that they are responsible for things that happen, and might be feeling guilty, for example, thinking they had not washed their hands properly. Provide reassurance and relay that it is okay for them to play, have fun and enjoy the things that they find positive and fulfilling.
- **Listen and validate emotions**
  - Listening to others and validating their emotions helps to make people feel heard, valued, safe and secure. *'I understand it's very hard for you when you are worrying about your mum working in the hospital.'*
- **Running commentaries**
  - Adults providing a running commentary (say what you see) can help children and young people (and other adults) make sense of situations and understand their feelings. Using phrases such as 'I wonder' and 'I notice' can be a nice way to do this. E.g. *'I notice that you seem a little upset, I wonder if that is because you're missing being at home with your family.'*
- **'Name it to tame it' (Siegel & Bryson, 2012)**
  - Naming feelings can help people process what they are feeling and make the connection between emotions and behaviours. It can also help people feel heard and understood.
- **Identify hidden needs**
  - Remember that behaviour is always telling us something. Respond to the **need** rather than to the **behaviour** you see. For example, if a child or young person is displaying controlling behaviour, it may mean they feel the world around them is out of control, which is very understandable given COVID-19 circumstances. Try offering choice or giving a role to allow them to feel more in control.
- **Provide a sense of agency**
  - Encourage problem solving rather than always simply offering reassurance. E.g. *'I know you are worried about getting sick, but what are the things you are doing to keep yourself safe?'*

Many of the principles and strategies described above will also support your staff members and parents. The section below adds to this with some specific suggestions to support adults in your school community.

### What we can do: to support adults

- **Staff wellbeing should be a fundamental consideration in the plan to nurture the wellbeing of our children and families.** A dysregulated adult cannot calm a dysregulated child. Good organisational structures and processes to promote and protect staff wellbeing are essential.
- **Remember self-care and self-compassion**
  - Look after your own wellbeing. Rest, relax, recuperate.
  - Monitor your own emotional reactions.
  - Seek help when you need it.
  - Connect with others
  - Remind yourself that you are doing your best
- **Support staff emotionally**
  - Staff members will have been affected by and will be coping in differing ways to COVID-19. Notice signs of stress/distress in colleagues and have an agreement about how they would like to be supported. Consider using the Wellness Action Plan to do this (Mind UK, 2020).
  - For staff members and parents, the NHS recommend '5 ways to wellbeing.'
- **Start a conversation with your whole establishment community about what really matters to them (person centred planning approaches could provide a useful framework for this):**
  - Are we the same or have we changed?
  - What matters most to us now?
  - How do we translate that into how we go about our lives?
- **Open a dialogue with staff members to try to identify what promotes or prevents the meeting of their professional, social and psychological needs in the workplace.** The following prompts may help this dialogue with staff:
  - What makes you proud to work here?
  - What matters to you in your work?
  - When we are at our best, what does that look like?
  - What gets in the way of a good day?
- **Provide a sense of agency**
  - Feelings of having choice and autonomy make important contributions to adult wellbeing too. Consider the following:
    - Do staff feel like they have some choice in how they do their job?
    - Do they have voice in the way things are done?
    - Are they a part of decisions on processes, changes and improvements that affect them?

### Find out more: Preparation for transition

- Anna Freud Centre: Managing unexpected endings and transitions:  
<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11627/managing-unexpected-endings-transitions-may2020.pdf>
- Trauma Informed Schools UK provides advice on how to provide psychological safety when physical distance is required: <https://youtu.be/ep7Y5fpk8mA>
- Ideas for creating a safe classroom: <https://medium.com/@trainertribe/9-effective-ways-to-create-safe-spaces-in-your-classrooms-6cdfcc60a364>
- Beacon House, 'Brainstem Calmers' – simple activities involving patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activities which help to regulate our nervous system:  
<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Brainstem-Calmer-Activities.pdf>

### Find out more: Supporting children & young people through interactions

- Barnardo's video, 'It's all about relationships':  
<https://youtu.be/0RyD-ueKCOc>
- 5 ways to help children heal following lockdown (useful trauma informed article):  
<https://marymered.wordpress.com/2020/04/14/five-ways-to-help-children-heal-when-schools-reopen/>
- '7 ways to support children and young people who are worried' Anna Freud Centre  
<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11453/7waysanxiety.pdf>
- Renfrewshire EPS wellbeing resources  
<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/re/renfrewshireedpsych/wellbeing/>

### Find out more: Supporting adults

- '10 steps to staff wellbeing' Anna Freud Centre:  
<https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resources-for-schools/ten-steps-towards-school-staff-wellbeing/>
- Mind UK, Wellness Action Plan:  
<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/>