

The Environment Offers a Safe Base

What is this nurture principle about?

"The healing environment is a safe relationally rich environment"
Perry (2008)

This principle stresses the importance of providing a welcoming, safe environment with an ethos which promotes warmth and emotional safety as well as physical safety.

Why is this important for COVID-19 recovery planning?

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.

What I can do:

- **Re-establish positive relationships and help all re-join the establishment community**
 - Build on the good contact and relationships with children, young people and parents that have been established through remote learning. Refer to 'what worked' during lock down and think of ways you might keep some of those things going.
 - Prioritise re-establishing a sense of belonging (See also: Environment and Transition Principles).
 - Prioritise and provide ample opportunities to rebuild relationships with peers and adults. Consider daily routines to promote wellbeing and build relationships: structured games, circle time, news etc. For children who require enhanced support consider small group time with a consistent key adult.
- **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.
 - Develop individualised plans for those who require more reassurance.
- **Provide a stable, predictable routine**
 - Routines create a sense of safety because they are predictable, allowing those who are hyper-vigilant to lower their guard.
 - Routines will be different when establishments re-open; provide visual as well as verbal reminders.
 - Prepare for changes to routine, for example, virtual tours of the establishment (see also: Transitions principle).

- **Encourage staff consistency**
 - Use consistent approaches and language to support wellbeing and self-regulation (see also: Language and Wellbeing principles).
 - Designated key adult/staff peer can play a role in deescalating and supporting children and young people/adults in distress.
 - Consider identifying a stable, staff team to support each child/young person and for staff to support each other.
- **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 (see also: Bereavement and loss section).
- **Emotional containment**
 - Use empathetic listening and naming of emotions to receive children and young people and staff members' distress and worries.
 - Convey the message 'it's okay to express your feelings safely with me'.
 - Identify designated safe areas and calm corners in the establishment and encourage the use of these to help regulate distress.

Find out more:

- Trauma Informed Schools UK provides advice on how to provide psychological safety when physical distance is required: <https://youtu.be/ep7Y5fpk8mA>
- Five ways to help children heal when schools reopen: https://marymered.wordpress.com/2020/04/14/five-ways-to-help-children-heal-when-schools-reopen/amp/?_twitter_impression=true
- Providing a 'Recovery Curriculum' following the pandemic: <https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/>
- Ideas for creating a safe classroom: <https://medium.com/@trainertribe/9-effective-ways-to-create-safe-spaces-in-your-classrooms-6cdfcc60a364>

Contact your Educational Psychologist for further information about:

- Calm Corners and Safe Spaces
- Establishing Clear Routines
- Renfrewshire's Inclusive Communication Environments (RICE)