

All Behaviour is Communication

What is this nurture principle about?

This principle emphasises the importance of looking deeper into the behaviour that a child or young person (or adult) is displaying and trying to figure out, 'what is this child or young person (or adult) trying to tell me?'. Children and young people (or adults) who have been severely impacted by the pandemic may not find it easy to settle and be ready to learn/work once returning to the establishment.

Why is this important for COVID-19 recovery planning?

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.

"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)

This can also apply to adults.

What I can do:

- **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.
- **Demonstrate empathy and acceptance of the child or young person's thoughts and feelings:**
 - 'Your feelings are okay with me.'
 - 'I know how difficult it must be to come back to school after all that time off- I'm really tired too!'
- **Reframe the behaviour**
 - Remember that how we speak about children and young people impacts our own behaviour. For example, if you say the child or young person is attention seeking, it may make us feel frustrated and withhold attention.

- By reframing this behaviour and saying the child or young person is attention needing, it is more likely you will feel more sympathetic and give the child or young person the attention s/he needs. Children and young people's trust in adults is likely to have been shaken by COVID-19 experiences. It is expected that they will be more attention needing as a result.
- **Sequence of engagement- Dr Bruce Perry's 3 Rs: Regulate, Relate & Reason**
 - You need to calm the body's physical reactions, then relate by making connections. Only then can the reasoning happen. Remember to **connect before you correct!**
- **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.
- **Recognise that adults are affected by stress and trauma too** and you may witness adult behaviour related to stress. Try and use some of the strategies above to support one another. (See also: Wellbeing principle).

Find out more:

- Get PsychEd Blog: <https://getpsyched.co.uk/2020/03/17/telling-children-about-covid-19-advice-for-parents-those-working-with-children/>
- Dr Karen Treisman discusses some common survival, protective, and coping tools, skills, and resources: <https://youtu.be/tVw6naHFLKc> -
- Beacon House resource explaining Bruce Perry's 3 R's: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-Three-Rs.pdf>
- Inner World resource 'What survival looks like in the primary school': <http://www.innerworldwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Survival-In-Primary-School-2019.pdf>
- Inner World resource 'What survival looks like in the secondary school': <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Survival-In-Secondary-School.pdf>

Contact your Educational Psychologist for further information about:

- Hidden needs
- Survival responses: fight, flight or freeze
- Shame reactions, stress responses and related strategies
- Reframing behaviour