

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

A Relational Approach to Supporting the
Re-opening of Schools Post Pandemic Lockdown.



South Ayrshire Educational Psychology Service

Equity,
Excellence &
Empowerment
through
Psychology

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Contents

Part 1: Why

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| 1.1 <i>Legislative Background</i> | <i>Page 3-4</i> |
| 1.2 <i>Whole Establishment Nurture</i> | <i>Pages 4-6</i> |
| 1.3 <i>Attachment and Attunement</i> | <i>Pages 7-11</i> |

Part 2: How

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 2.1 <i>Listening</i> | <i>Pages 13-17</i> |
| 2.2 <i>Practical examples to embed the nurture principles:</i> | <i>Pages 18-36</i> |
| • <i>Summary</i> | |
| • <i>Learning is understood developmentally</i> | |
| • <i>The classroom offers a safe base</i> | |
| • <i>Language is a vital means of communication</i> | |
| • <i>Nurture is important for self esteem</i> | |
| • <i>All behaviour is communication</i> | |
| • <i>Transitions are key points of a child's life</i> | |
| 2.3 <i>Activities to Foster Hope and Resilience</i> | <i>Pages 37-38</i> |
| 2.4 <i>Play-Based Approaches & Outdoor Learning</i> | <i>Pages 39-43</i> |
| • <i>Resources to support outdoor learning</i> | <i>42-43</i> |
| 2.5 <i>Staff Wellbeing</i> | <i>Pages 44-51</i> |
| • <i>Resources to support staff wellbeing</i> | <i>50-51</i> |

Part 3: Further Support

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 3.1 <i>Anxious Children and the 3 R's.</i> | <i>Pages 53-58</i> |
| 3.2 <i>Bereavement</i> | <i>Pages 59-63</i> |
| 3.3 <i>Nurture Rooms</i> | <i>Pages 64-67</i> |

Appendix 1 References

Pages 68-70
Pages 71-76



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

'Promoting physical and mental health in schools creates a virtuous circle reinforcing children's attainment and achievement that in turn improves their wellbeing, enabling children to thrive and achieve their full potential' (Brooks, 2013, p.8).

1.1. Legislative Background

Scottish education has a key focus on wellbeing and relationship-based approaches to support children and young people. An understanding of how early experiences impact on young people's behaviour and the importance of relationships in shaping later outcomes underpins much of the Scottish policy landscape and curriculum. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) places children and young people's wellbeing at the centre of all assessment and planning. It recognises that children and young people will have different experiences in their lives and have the right to expect appropriate support from adults to allow them to grow and develop and reach their full potential. The National Improvement Framework also sets out clear priorities for education establishments to improve, track and monitor young people's health and wellbeing. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Report (Black et al., 2012) highlights whole school initiatives that reinforce a positive ethos with inclusive values as the most successful in terms of promoting positive pupil wellbeing. In this context, approaches that aim to promote positive relations and nurturing support at a whole establishment level can be seen as having the potential to increase positive wellbeing and attainment for pupils (Education Scotland, 2016). In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic this is more salient than ever.

A Government Rapid Review document (Holmes et al., 2020) highlighted that children and adolescents are likely to have experienced high rates of depression and, likely anxiety, during and after social isolation ends – with this rate likely to increase as social isolation continues. Child mental health experts such as Helen Dodd, professor of child psychology at the University of Reading, have urged the government to enable teachers to prioritise children's play and socialising with friends over formal lessons and academic progress when schools reopened. *"Schools should support children's emotional wellbeing as schools reopen and play should be a priority during this time, rather than academic progress...this will be essential to help relieve stress and*

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

anxiety" (Weale, 2020). A panel of experts who represent five universities, caution that whilst ministers will be keen for schools to kick-start academic studies and begin the process of catching up on work missed, this should not be the priority (Weale, 2020).

Sara Alston, a child safeguarding expert and key co-ordinator for Sea Inclusion and Safeguarding (www.seainclusion.co.uk), highlights that each child's experience of the COVID-19 lockdown will be unique and that, "*Key to all of this is going to be re-building relationships. We need to be aware that this will not happen overnight. We need to give ourselves time and be kind.*" (Alston, 2020). This is echoed by Barry Carpenter, Professor of Mental Health in Education at Oxford Brookes University, who states: "*It would be naïve of any Headteacher/Principal to think a child will pick up the Curriculum at exactly the same point at which they left it on the day their school closed. Too much has happened. Listen to what the children are saying. Compassionate Leadership is crucial at this time.*" (Carpenter, 2020).

1.2 Whole Establishment Nurture

It is already evident that the direct and indirect psychological and social effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic are pervasive and could affect mental health now and in the future (Davis, 2020). The pandemic is also occurring against the backdrop of increased prevalence of mental health issues in the UK in recent years. Nationally, there is a recognition that whole-establishment nurture can be viewed within a hierarchy of approaches aimed at helping address the development of children with emotional and wellbeing needs (MacKay, 2015; as adapted and cited in McNicol and Reilly, 2018) (Figure 1).

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

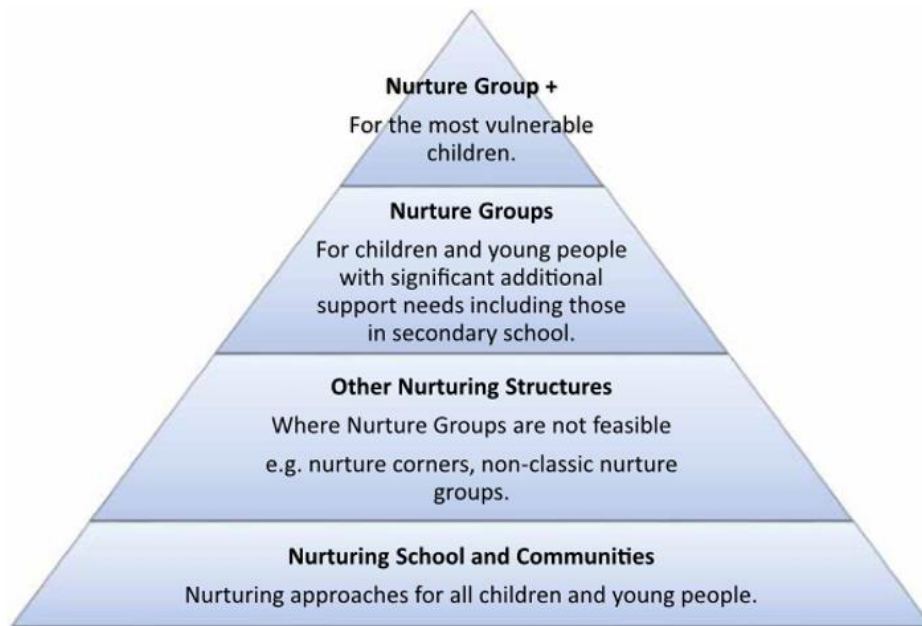


Figure 1: Continuum of Nurturing Approaches (adapted from MacKay, 2015).

A whole establishment nurturing approach recognises: *A focus on the school environment emphasising the balance between care and push which incorporates attunement, warmth and connection alongside structure, high expectations and academic press (Education Scotland, 2016). Within education provision, this often means disseminating the nurture principles, normally seen in smaller settings, at a whole establishment level (McNicol and Reilly, 2018). The six guiding principles of nurture can be seen below (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000). They were originally developed to support children who missed important developmental experiences in their formative years. It is understood however they can also provide a helpful framework for supporting young people to recover from this period of unprecedented change in their routines. In the up and coming weeks, we will be asking children to show resilience in light of new and possible stressful disruption and adapt to a “new normal”.*

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

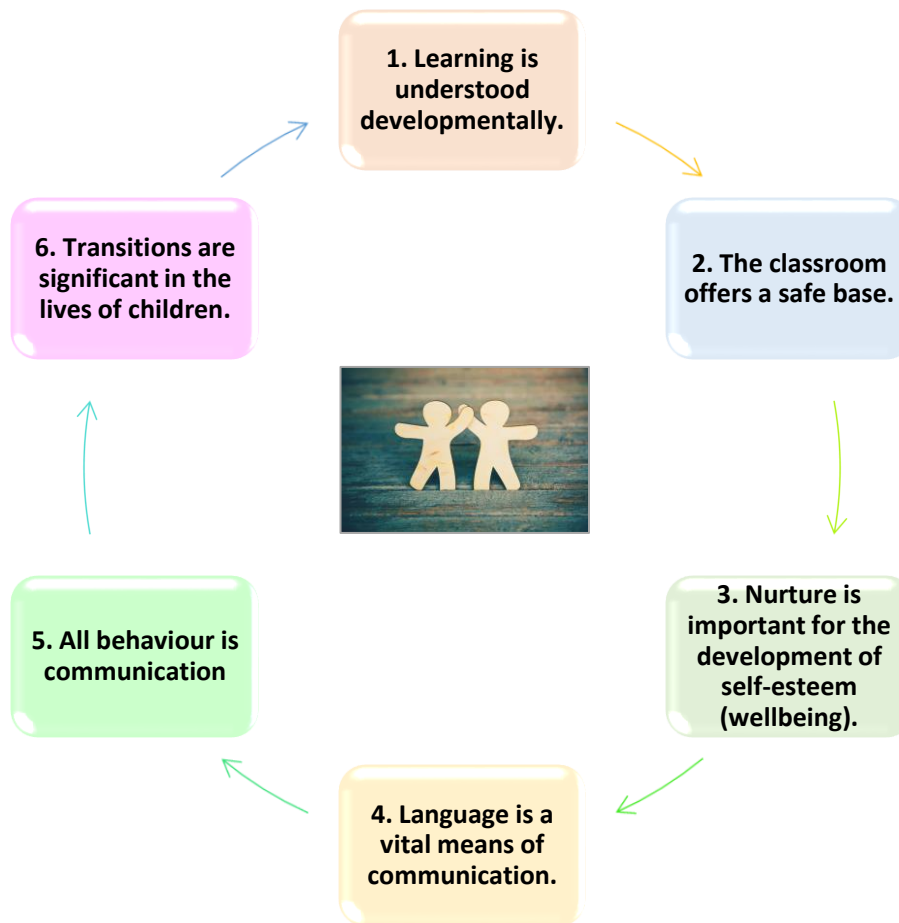


Figure 2: The Six Guiding Principles of Nurture (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000).

An educational based nurturing approach will enable us to focus on aspects which foster healing and resilience when planning the re-opening of schools after the COVID-19 lockdown. Key aspects will include safety, understanding, wellbeing and inclusion (Moore, 2020). A breakdown of the six nurturing principles alongside aspects to consider for school re-opening can be found in *Part 2 section 2*.

1.3 Attachment and Attunement

If a child experiences a secure, loving and consistent relationship with a key adult in their life, an affectionate attachment bond is created (Ainsworth, 1989). Through this

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

positive early childhood bond, the child is provided with an internalised 'safe base' thorough which he/she can then explore other relationships with care, trust and respect. Neuroscience has advanced the notion of secure and insecure attachment. For example, the stress of inadequate early support, sets up biochemical reactions, which if constantly reinforced create changes to the architecture of a child's brain (Gerhardt, 2004). Skilled care and teaching however, has the capacity to positively develop the attachment patterns for such children, with staff acting as secondary attachment figures.

In his online Podcast 'The Recovery Curriculum', Carpenter (2020) explains that children who are securely attached are - better learners, achieve more, are more proficient at problem solving, are socially more cooperative, more empathetic and self-aware and are better able to self-regulate. He poses the question, "*How many children, due to being social isolated, will have lost the ability to be empathic and socially attuned to others?*", and highlights that, "*We will need some time to re-engage these emotions and re-discover the joy of social interaction. Children will need to learn to re-trust their educators again, especially young children who do not understand that they weren't 'purposefully abandoned' by their secondary attachment figures.*"

Carpenter (2020) also explains that some children may have experienced added anxiety from their home contexts during lockdown, whether this be loss, bereavement, trauma etc. Such children may experience a rise in cortisol stress levels which can be triggered again during perceived hardship or difficulty (such as a first day back at school after a pandemic lockdown).

Geddes (2006) provides advice on intervention approaches for children with disrupted attachment. Pupils who are reluctant at first to engage with staff may need tasks which they can work on independently, so they can develop a gradual tolerance of an adult's presence. Conversely, children who are preoccupied with being connected to key adults may require learning tasks to be time-limited, with more regular feedback and reassurance. Teacher attunement can be key during these times regarding re-establishing trusting attachment relationships with pupils.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Attunement is defined as, *being or bringing into harmony; a feeling of being "at one" with another being*. It is vital in terms of sharing experiences, emotions, thoughts and learning with others. When a care giver communicates 'in tune' with their baby, they give time and space (and often return) their child's small turn taking communicative attempts. This may take the form of mirroring the baby's attempts at talk via shared babbling, small moments of eye contact during peek-a-boo or responding with an exaggerated smile to a baby's positive expression. Attuned communication leads to positive attachment and affirmative internal models (see below) for children that in turn enable them to explore their learning environment and engagement successfully in academia.

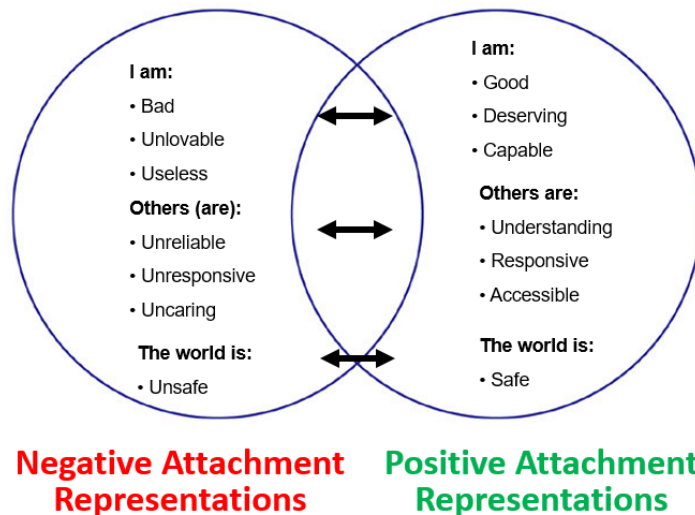


Figure 3: Positive and negative internal working states.

For educators to re-engage with their pupils in forming trusting, positive bonds Bieman's (1990) contact principles of communication (see figure 4 below) provide a useful framework highlighting the building blocks of successful interaction. Re-integration to schools after the pandemic lockdown will require that the softer skills of communication be used by staff to ensure children that school once again offers a safe base. Staff should actively listen to their pupil's experiences and support them to label and name emotions felt so these are better understood and easier to process.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

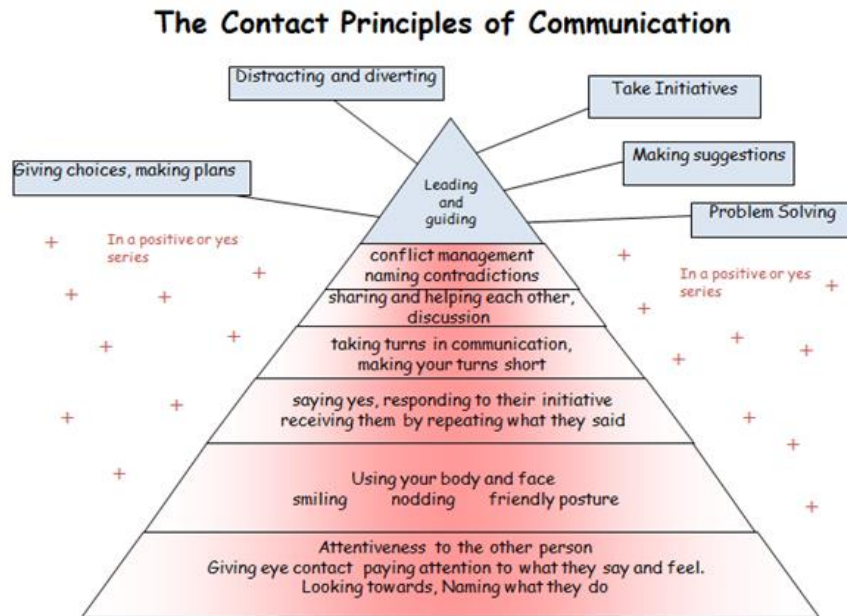


Figure 4 Bieman's (1990) Contact Principles of Communication.

Using the building blocks of attuned communication:



Applying Nurture as a Whole Establishment Approach (Education Scotland, 2016), details that highly effective practice deems that staff, *“Are aware of their communication and language and remain calm, open and patient in their interaction with children and young people”* (p. 36), alongside reiterating the importance of staff as secondary attachment figures, *“Staff able to practice ‘selective attachment’ with children and young people so that they give them support when needed...”* (p.33).

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Carpenter (2020), concludes his Recovery Curriculum Think Piece with the following: *“Teaching is a relationship-based profession. That has been clearly demonstrated in the response of the teaching profession, supporting children through online teaching during the crisis, and also caring for the children of key workers by keeping schools open and offering an activities programme.”* Overall attachment and relationships are viewed as two key components of a whole establishment nurturing approach:

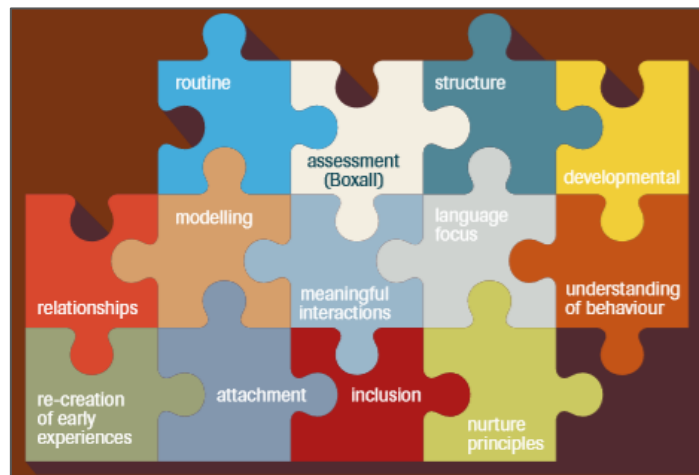


Figure 5: Key Components that underpin a whole school nurturing approach (Education Scotland, 2018 p.14)

Another key component to consider when our children return to school is how we assess, track and monitor their wellbeing progress. A key question staff will be asking during the re-opening of schools is: *“Have our children had the building blocks of their needs met during lockdown (saftey, clothing, food shelter), so that they are now ‘school-ready’ and able to temper their regulation to learn?”* For some children this will unfortunately be a no. Indeed these are the children that may require targeted support above and beyond the additional nurturing measures put in place to support pupils. Maslow (1943) highlighted that without a person’s physiological and safety needs being met, their ability to connect, learn and engage would be low (again strengthening the position for a relational reintegration approach). In Scottish education we commonly use the SHANARRI indicators alongside the My World Triangle (Scottish Government, 2017) (see figure 6 below) to assess a child’s health and wellbeing.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

During lockdown some children's sense of 'belonging' to their school/nursery may have faltered without being a pupil physically located within the building. Other children's sense of feeling 'safe' may have lessened due to listening to news reports on the Coronavirus, or knowing someone who has passed away due to the virus. Children will also not have had face-to-face interactions with their peer groups and close friends, making some young people feel isolated or not as included. These are the areas of the triangle that educational practitioners should aim to positively support with the reopening of schools and nurseries.

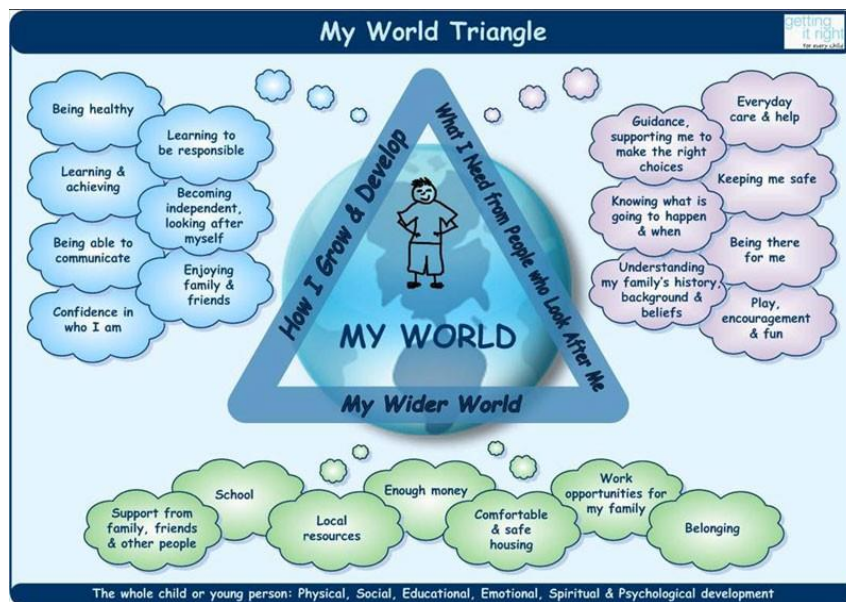


Figure 6: The SHANARRI My World Triangle (Scottish Government, 2017)

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Part 2:

How?



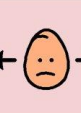
























Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

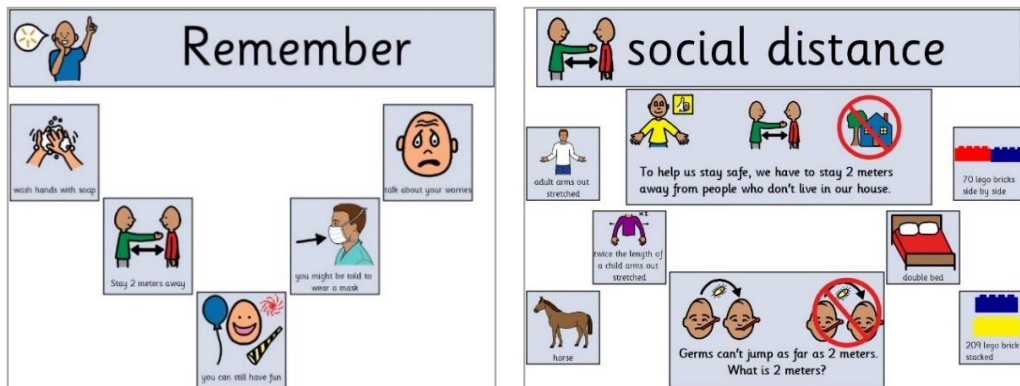
2:1 Listening

Each child will have a differing experience of the pandemic and being in lockdown. Some may have experienced bereavement, trauma or loneliness, whilst others may have enjoyed lockdown and flourished during this time. Each child will have a differing account, hence it is important to listen to their views regarding what they have encountered and how this made them feel. Ultimately this will aid children in helping to process events. In relation, a study conducted by Freeman, Gollop and Nairn in 2016, showed that gaining the voice of children who experienced a natural disaster offered other children, parents, government and agencies valuable insights into how to manage the recovery process in ways that best meet children's needs.

Carpenter (2020) highlights that co-construction and sharing experiences will allow the curriculum to be rooted in the experience of the pupils. For example, asking questions such as: *'What did you hear?'* and *'What did you feel?'* allows staff to establish a child's understandings and what might help moving forward. Follow-on lessons such as, *'Let's talk together about why additional hospitals were created'*, will help pupils to process key events and share any worried thoughts. During these times, staff should draw upon their active listening skills to build trust and a sense of safety with children. During lockdown children may have heard snippets of the news, perhaps even daily death tolls. Focused time should be given for children to recover and make sense of what they have heard. Social stories and picture cues can be invaluable resources during this time, to help scaffold their understanding of differing events and concerns:

 I can wear a mask	 I can	 I cannot	
 At the moment there are some people unwell with a virus called COVID19.			
 The virus can be passed through coughing and sneezing. We can't see these germs.	 smile at someone	 sing with someone	 message someone
 If I need to go out I can stop the spread of germs by wearing a mask.	 say hi	 talk on the phone	 write a letter
 I can try my mask on in the house to help me get used to it.	 wave	 text someone	 draw something for someone
 My mask is made from material. It will cover my nose and mouth.	 shake hands	 high five	 hug
 I will still be able to breathe with my mask on but I might feel warmer because of my breath.	 kiss	 share my snack	 play tic
 It might feel different wearing a mask and other people might look different.	Remember if someone lives in your house, you can still do these things with them!		

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

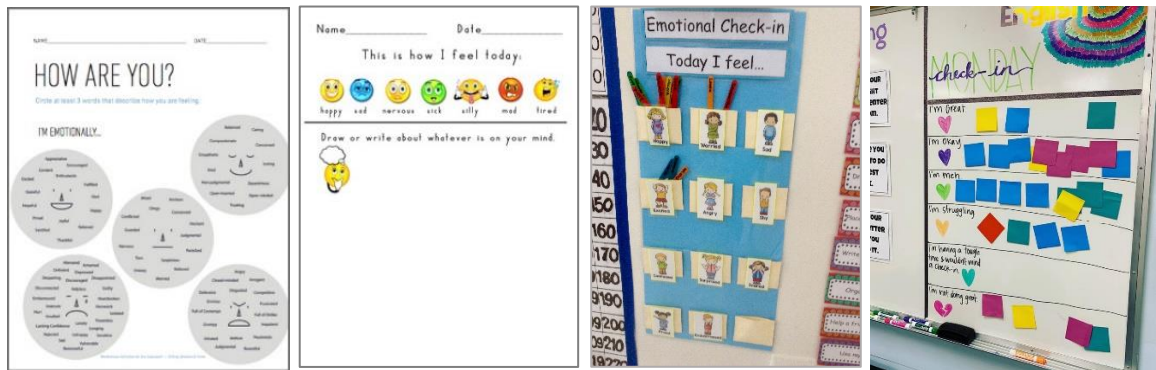


Through the active listening approach, children will learn to re-trust their teacher again and have their needs met via the wellbeing curriculum (Carpenter, 2020). If we consider the definition of a relevant curriculum as the 'daily lived experience' we must plan for experiences that provide the space for recovery.

Emotion check-ins and check-outs can also present an engaging way for children to share their views and feelings. They can take place in class during points of transition e.g. entering class in the morning, leaving class at home time or after break/lunchtime. They are designed to help children slow down, be more aware of their feelings and understand how these might impact. Emotion check-in can take various forms depending on the age and stage of the children. Many educators use tools to further illicit the child's perspective such as visuals, worksheets, emotion books, greeting choices etc:

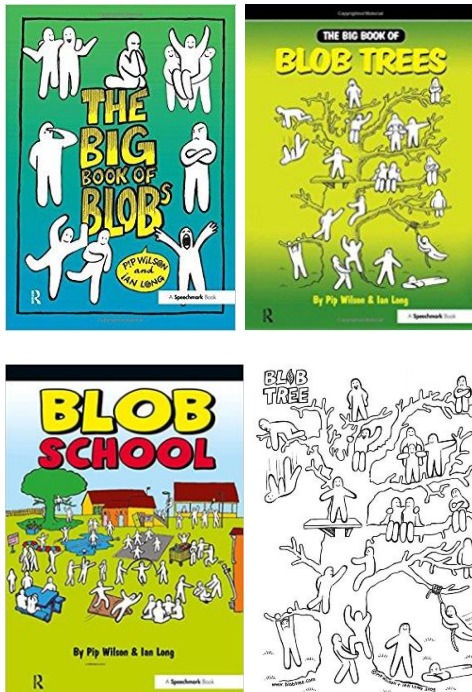


Return to Schools – A Relational Approach



Having a safe space is also important for children to be able to share their views. We will need to ensure that children have comforting areas to talk about their experiences and contain any anxieties during lockdown. Some children may take a long time to reveal concerns. They may communicate this through their behaviour and other indicators, rather than verbally. Staff need to be aware of this and able to respond appropriately and immediately. Some tools commonly used by educators to gain the voice of the child are included below:

The Blobs:



- ✓ The Blobs can be used as prompts to explore feelings, to develop understanding of emotions, empathy and self-awareness.
- ✓ The series of books show templates regarding a variety of different scenarios (e.g. the classroom, playground, hobbies) that can be used as a springboard for conversations with people of any age group.
- ✓ Helps teachers, assistants, school workers, pupils and parents can reflect upon a wide range of contexts and issues which occur throughout the year.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Mood Dudes:



- ✓ Mood Dudes are a set of squeezable, attractive and humorous cartoon faces that depict different emotions.
- ✓ They are a good tool that facilitators, counsellors, teachers and psychologists can use to help young people of a range of ages share and express their feelings.
- ✓ Example of how to use: put the faces in the centre of the sharing circle and ask each child to pick a face that best describes a feeling that they experienced. Each child then shares why they chose the feeling they did.

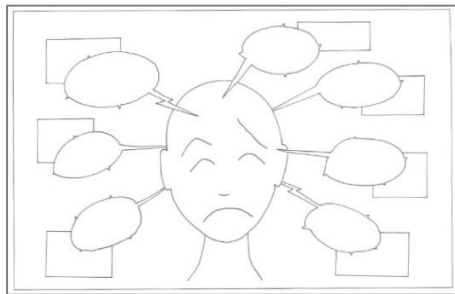
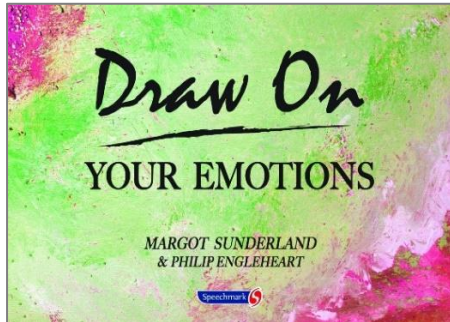
Worry Monster/Box:



- ✓ Worry Monster: to act as a 'waste bin' for children's fears, troubles and woes.
- ✓ These can be used at home or at school to gain the views of young people who may feel more comfortable posting their 'worry' through the mouth of the soft monster. The adult can then check the concern and support the young person to manage their concerns.
- ✓ Worry Box: By using a worry box, children can focus and think about the things that are making them worry, and then contain their worries in the box for someone else to hold on to for safe keeping. They can then come back and talk about their worries again at a specified time.
- ✓ Both the worry monster/worry box can be used whole class or for individuals.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Personal Construct Psychology:
Draw on Your Emotions



- ✓ This manual contains a series of structured, easy to do picture exercises to help people of all ages express, communicate and deal more effectively with their emotions in everyday life.
- ✓ Providing a series of photocopiable exercises and pictures specifically designed to ease the process of talking about feelings.
- ✓ It helps to promote a new clarity of thought as a first step towards positive action and bring seemingly huge, unmanageable and insoluble problems into a new perspective.
- ✓ It also offers opportunities to rehearse other ways of functioning by trying out alternatives safely on paper in exercises that can be adapted for any age range and ability. A helpful non-verbal counselling tool.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.2 Instilling the Nurturing Principles to Support Re-engagement – based on a graphic by Moore (2020)

The Nurture Principles can provide a helpful framework for supporting children to recover from this period of unprecedented change:

NP 6) The importance of transitions.

- ✓ For children transitioning to a new stage (P1, secondary school etc.) the following may help:
 - Undertaking virtual visits to new schools - classrooms, corridors and communal areas will likely look very different under social distancing guidelines, the use of photographs and videos of the new environment could help to show young people what they can expect,
 - having seating plans, timetables and school transition booklets posted out to home addresses,
 - completing transition passports and 'about me' booklets for their staff,
 - *"Inviting children back to have closure, say goodbye and mark the transition" (Alston, 2020)*
- ✓ Supporting children with the transition from home to school by asking them to record in creative ways their feelings and apprehensions (i.e. letters, pictures or little videos of their concerns).
- ✓ Initial modelling of new routines by staff i.e. arriving in school, transitioning through corridors etc.
- ✓ A transitional object can be a comfort to bridge the gap between home and school.
- ✓ Books centring on the key themes of change and transition can be read and discussed with children.
- ✓ Some children may benefit from a soft-start when re-entering class for the first time since lockdown.



NP 5) All behaviour is communication.

- ✓ Dan Hughes highlights the need for connection before correction with his formula of PACE:
 - **Playful** interactions give students a sense of safety and belonging and diffuse potential situations before escalation.
 - **Acceptance** is being non-judgemental and showing the child that we understand i.e. *"It must be tricky to not think of your parents at home. I understand you loved spending time at home with them."*
 - **Curiosity** is when the adult shows an active and genuine interest in the child's experience i.e. *"I've been looking out for you and noticed that you've been quiet. I think you might be worried about something?"*
 - **Empathy** is a genuine desire to "feel with" another person and connect with their emotional perspective.

The Six Principles of Nurture



For Education Phased Return

NP 4) Language is a vital means of communication.

- ✓ Staff to use the language of reassurance and belonging: e.g. *"You are safe here", "I remember you and I've missed you", "I've missed your smile."*
- ✓ Helping children to put their feelings into words is key: 'Name it - to tame it'. Using children's books to help them process their emotions and build coping strategies for anxiety.
- ✓ Methods that support pupils to share their emotions should be available i.e.: visuals, short scripts, emojis, social stories.
- ✓ The South Ayrshire bereavement guide 'When Crisis Calls' can help staff support children who have experienced loss during the pandemic.



NP 1) Learning is understood developmentally

"Having lofty academic expectations too soon will undoubtedly add to children's stress" (Carpenter, 2020).

- ✓ Going over past areas/topics and reminding pupils of their achievements and successes.
- ✓ New learning activities should be introduced via engaging, meaningful and multi-sensory means.
- ✓ Re-establishing relationships via providing positive and fulfilling experiences such as play.
- ✓ Staff should be mindful to use the contact principles of communication to re-establish key attachment bonds with children.



NP 2) The classroom offers a safe base.

- ✓ A sense of emotional and physical safety should be created.
- ✓ Social Stories can be useful to support the transition back for whole school. They can also be adapted for a class or individual children.
- ✓ Information videos can also ease anxieties for parents/children, by presenting information in an accessible, friendly and engaging manner.
- ✓ It may be beneficial for children to start the school year with the same teacher and/or in the same classrooms they had last prior to lockdown.
- ✓ It is important that we create safe, cosy spaces for children who need a sensitive, personal approach to 'talk'.
- ✓ Children feel physically safe when there is routine and predictability.
- ✓ There are also useful, child-centred online videos that could be used to help explain to children complex terms like 'PPE'.
- ✓ *"Making school a secure base will require a pro-active and consistent approach" (Moore, 2020).*



NP 3) The importance of nurture for wellbeing/self-esteem.

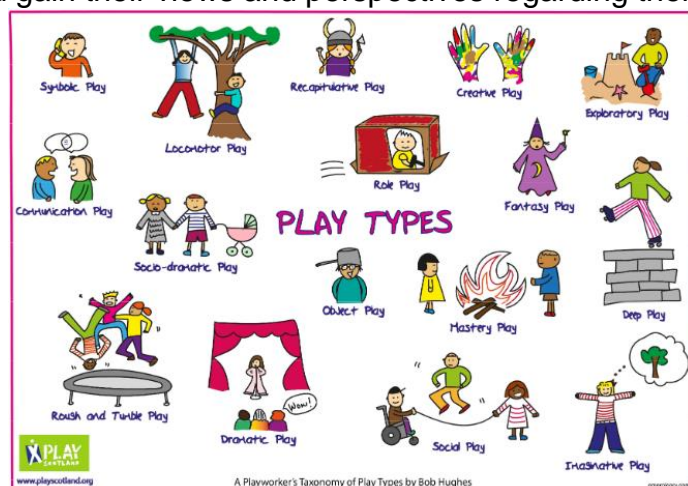
- ✓ Positive strength-based lessons can remind children of their own skills and other's skills, creating a shared sense of achievement.
- ✓ Staff may wish to consider decorating an area of their classroom with photographs of each child (create a sense of belonging) and celebrate children's' home-working achievements e.g. rainbow pictures, lego creations made with carers, dance video with siblings etc.
- ✓ In terms of Growth Mindset, it is important to reward the child's effort undertaking new tasks during this time. Staff may wish to create an 'achievement wall' or send home success-pictures via twitter.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

The following highlights some of the ways the nurture principles can support children's wellbeing development during this time.

2.2.1 Learning is understood developmentally (principle 1): This principle requires staff to think holistically regarding a child's development and not solely focus on the child's chronological age or a narrow focus on attainment. Pupils' are individuals who have differing abilities and competencies, who make progress at their own pace. During lockdown children may have digressed somewhat without their usual routines. Basic security structures such as putting on uniform, sitting in class, engaging with work for a period of time may have become forgotten without regular repetition. Alston (2020), highlights that it will take time to re-establish and re-learn the expectations of school behaviour and learning. We know that much of learning is based on practice and we will all be out of practice with this. Educators can do the following to support:

- ✓ **Going over past areas/topics and reminding pupils of their achievements and successes.** It is useful to consolidate the building blocks of a pupil's learning prior to progressing new area of the curriculum and novel learning experiences.
- ✓ Re-establish relationships via **providing positive and fulfilling experiences** such as **play**. Play provides opportunities to share, listen, laugh and engage in activities that help children to recognise and appreciate their skills and strengths. Re-establishing links in education should be fun – *"having lofty academic expectations too soon will undoubtedly add to children's stress"* (Carpenter, 2020). Play allows us to also listen to our pupils and gain their views and perspectives regarding their situations in a relaxed, child-led manner.



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- ✓ Any **new learning activities** should be introduced **via engaging, meaningful and multi-sensory means**. Children may require tasks to be broken down, with clear process steps and **active modelling from staff**.



- ✓ Staff should be mindful to use the **contact principles of communication** (see section 1 above) to re-establish key attachment bonds with children.

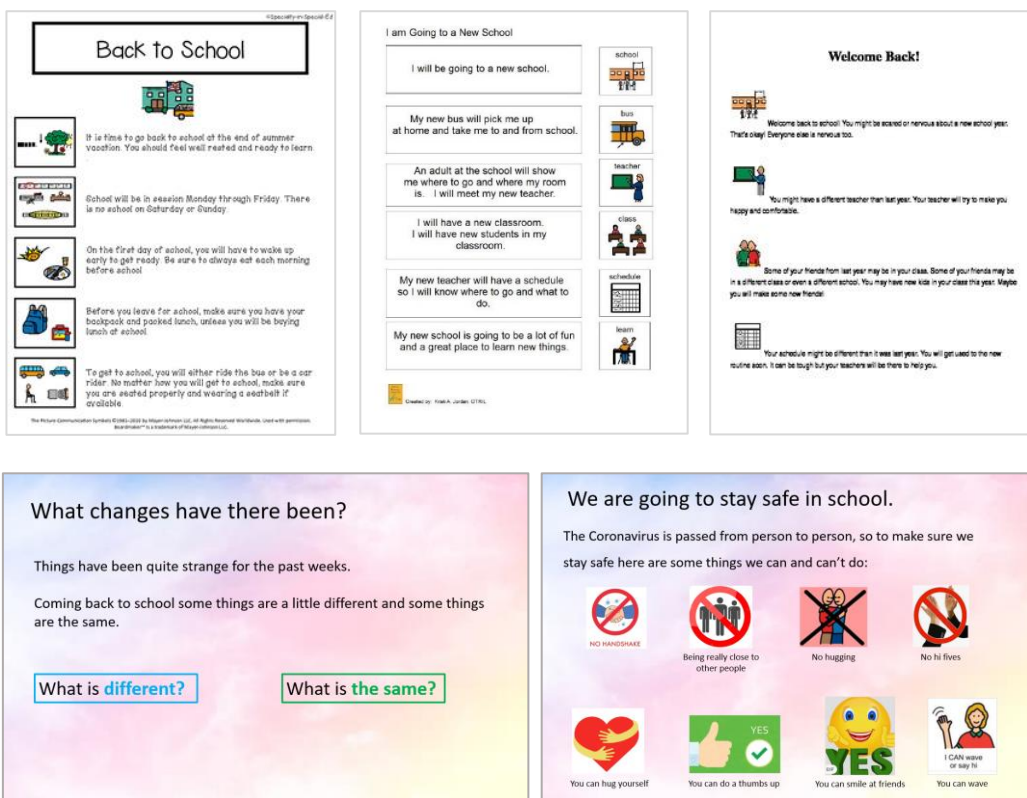
In his online think-piece entitled, 'Supporting post-lockdown education using the 6 principles of Nurture', Chris Moore (2020) explains that, *"To assume children can pick up from where they left off, let alone consider longer or extra classes, is to disregard the impact of toxic stress on children's memory, processing, attention, organisation, emotional regulation and other facets of executive functioning."* (Moore, 2020).

2.2.2. The Classroom offers a Safe Base (principle 2): During lockdown many children lost their regular opportunities for social connection. The experiences these interactions bring is as vital to a child's development as any formal academic lesson. Some children may have found this period of non-engagement and loss of connection with teaching staff and peers particularly difficult. For such children, trusting relationships with staff and fellow pupils needs to be re-established. A sense of emotional and physical safety should be created within class to allow positive and sensitive interactions to take place. With the re-opening of schools in the 'new normal' our learning environment will be significant in terms of containing anxiety and promoting a sense of safety. Educational provisions should consider how they utilise their learning spaces, classrooms, corridors, gym/lunch-halls and playgrounds. These may be used, structured and managed in a very different way than prior to lockdown.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Making educational provision a secure base will require a pro-active and consistent approach (Moore, 2020). The following strategies may be useful:

- ✓ **Social Stories** can be useful to support children whole school or class, or with individual concerns. Social stories present information in a literal, 'concrete' way, which may improve a child's understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity. The presentation and content can be adapted to meet different child's needs. A community 'returning to school' social story could be tweeted out or posted/emailed to parents and caregivers to support both parents and children to better comprehend the process of return.



- ✓ **Information videos** can also ease anxieties for parents/children, by presenting information in an accessible, friendly and engaging manner. These would also likely benefit parents with literacy difficulties. They could be tweeted, or communicated via the school websites. The information could acknowledge how difficult the lockdown have been, welcome the pupils back to school and show the children how things might be different, explaining why.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach



- ✓ It may be beneficial, if we are not back until August, for children [to start the school year with the same teacher](#) and/or in the same classrooms they had last prior to lockdown and then change teachers at the October half term? How could this be managed and how would you support children when their previous teacher was not available? Or, children could meet with their previous teacher for a one-to-one catch up during their first week back, this would help children [to feel secure regarding the positive ending of previous attachment relationships](#).
- ✓ It is important that we [create safe, cosy spaces](#) for children who need a sensitive, personal approach to 'talk'. In order to meet requirements linked with sanitation, these spaces could be created outdoors. Children will have differing experiences and accounts of lockdown and it is vital we allow them space and time to share and make sense of these experiences. We will need to be vigilant regarding young people who have experienced abuse during the lock down. There has been a significant rise [in domestic abuse](#) during this time. We need to be aware of this as a possibility for all our children, not just the ones we had identified as vulnerable. Further, as the lock down has forced more and more of children's social lives to move online, we need to be aware of the increased risk of [online peer on peer abuse](#). Educational provisions should highlight outdoor areas or sanitised areas within the building that can be utilised as areas for relaxation, talking and calming sensory input.
- ✓ Children feel [physically safe when there is routine and predictability](#). This has been particularly difficult over the lockdown period with new guidelines put forward by the government and substantial change to our daily routine with the restrictions put in place. During the re-opening of schools, establishing a sense of structure and

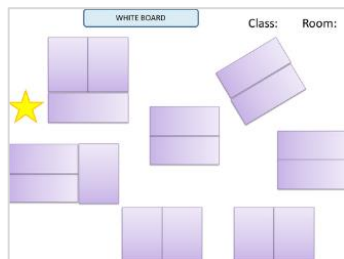
Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

routine will be essential for young people. Sharing timetables and scheduling will be key for children and parents - helping them to comprehend 'what will come next'.

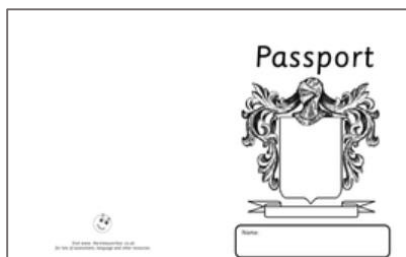
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Year 7	EP, Comp and MFL	Maths	English	Humanities: Creative, DT	Science
Year 8	Humanities: Creative, DT	Science	EP, Comp and MFL	Maths	English
Year 9	English	Drama, EP, Music, DT	Art, Comp, French/Spanish, History/Geography	English	Maths
Year 10	Maths	English	Maths	Science: Chemistry	Al, Co, Cr, Ep, P, G, H, M, PE, S, S&A
	Science: Biology	Science: Biology	Science: Biology	EP, EP, MFL, PE, S, S&A, DT, MFL	English



Those transitioning to high school may benefit from new class timetables, with the corresponding room numbers being shared alongside seating plans. There may be apprehensions from those who have not fully received their 'transition to high school' visits and tours. Could these tours be undertaken virtually? [New seating plan arrangements will take into account](#) social distancing and these should be communicated in advance and illustrated for those who are sensitive to change.



Transition passports can also be useful for a child or group of children transitioning to a new stage e.g. nursery to primary 1 or primary 7 to secondary. The child can complete the passport sharing key information about themselves e.g. *likes, dislikes, future plans, adaptations required etc.* These can be personal and engaging for the child and help them to envisage a plan of support moving forward.

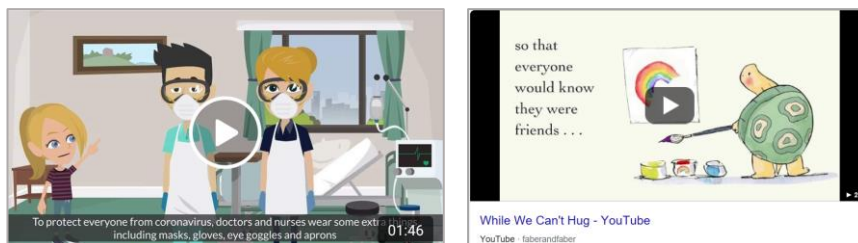


Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Or a communication passport for children with communication needs:



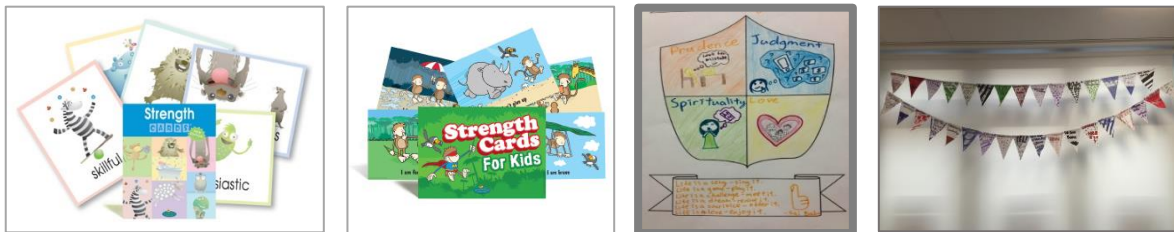
- ✓ There are also useful, [child-centred online videos](#) that could be used to [help explain to children complex terms](#) like 'PPE' that pupils may have heard being discussed in the news but still be uncertain of. Discussing these terms together as a class in an open and objective way will quell anxieties and any misconceptions a child may have. Such a video has been created by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (below). Faber and Faber also have a helpful youtube video called 'While We Can't Hug' which explains illustrate social distancing in a child-friendly manner.



2.2.3 The importance of nurture for wellbeing and self-esteem (principle 3): The principle highlights that young people should be held with [unconditional positive regard](#) and be fully valued for their [individual contribution and skills](#). Supporting children to be aware of their positive qualities can help them think more optimistically about the future, increasing resilience and hope. Sharing positive strengths between peers can create a sense of valuing each other and acceptance of others'. Here are some suggested strategies that can promote self-esteem and wellbeing during this time:

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- ✓ **Positive strength-based lessons** can remind children of their own skills and each other's, creating an overarching sense of achievement. Strength cards (below) could be used to help children identify, name and celebrate their qualities. When children recognise their strengths they can be encouraged to develop them and be better prepared to deal with problems and challenges in an optimistic and constructive way. Children can also create strength shields and strength bunting helping to make salient each other's strengths:



- ✓ Most children will have become use to not wearing a uniform during home working. Children may have grown over the lockdown period and some parents may also struggle to obtain a new uniform for their child due to finances. Schools may need to consider a **relaxation of their uniform codes**. Children should be welcomed back into school, not penalised for not having the right uniform.
- ✓ To create a sense of belonging and re-establishing previous relationships, staff may wish to consider **decorating an area of their classroom with photographs of each child**. This may be particularly useful if a child is acclimatising to a different peer group or different members of staff for the foreseeable future.



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- ✓ A big part of celebrating a child's achievement is **recognising their extra-curricular talents and strengths**. Over lockdown caregivers have been thinking of creative ways to engage their children in learning and fun. Examples of these could be shared their fellow classmates and used to continue transferable skills within class lessons. Such ideas for sharing might include rainbow painting, photographs of cakes/bread made, videos of workout routines with Joe Wicks, recreations of dens and Lego structures made. These could be used to re-engage children in learning and to highlight their creativity.



- ✓ In terms of Growth Mindset, it is important to **reward the child's effort** during this time. Learning new activities or even re-establishing previous 'consolidated' parts of the curriculum may be tricky for children who have been out of practice or not in a formal education setting. **Emphasising the notion of learning through practise and taking small steps is beneficial**. It is important for schools to reward small achievements and effort by children to raise their sense of autonomy and confidence. Providing children with choice and control in a task they excel (with this be an aspect of the curriculum or a special interest) will additionally raise their sense of self-worth and make them feel competent and successful. Staff may wish to celebrate achievements and effort via: **photographs on twitter, an achievement wall, personalised books or boxes filled with evidence of their achievements/effort and tangible feedback from staff**.

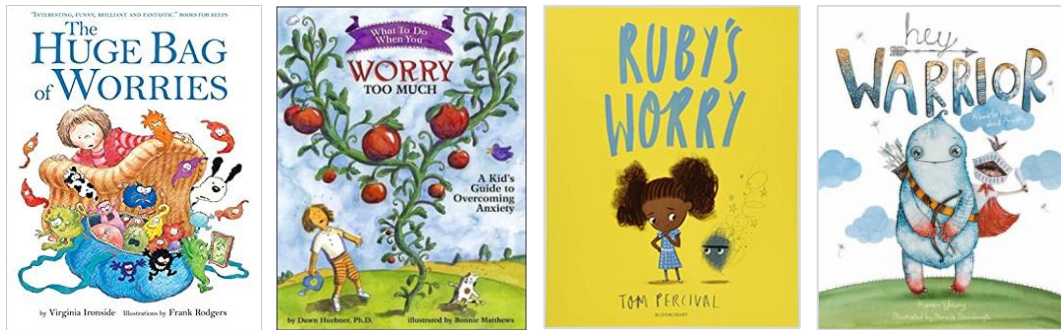


Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

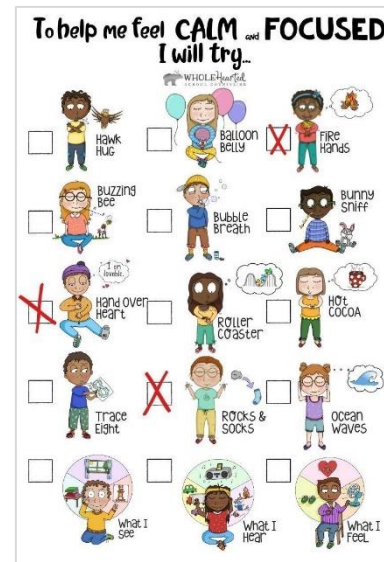
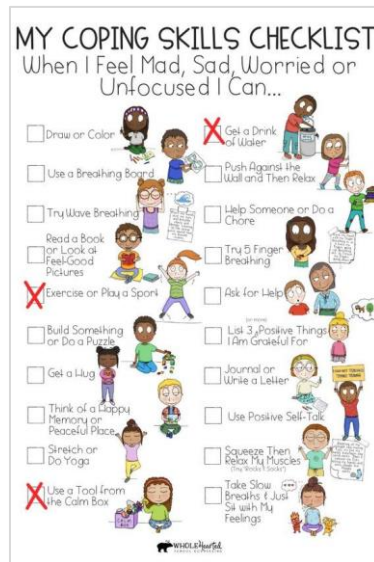
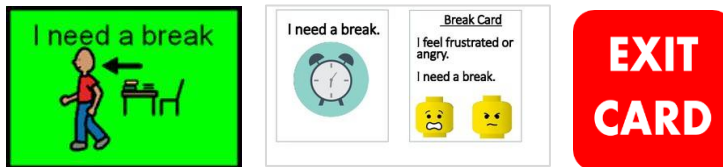
2.2.4 Language is a vital means of Communication (principle 4): For many of us, adults and children, the return to school will be greeted with a huge sigh of relief, however for other children lockdown may have been a difficult time. For example, it may have signified a period of grief (losing a loved one), separation anxiety (living in a differing household from keyworker parents) or trauma (there has been a significant rise of domestic abuse during lockdown). Every child's lived experience is different, hence the importance of **educators connecting with pupils in tailored ways, ascertaining their experience and listening to their stories.**

- ✓ This principle also requires that staff think carefully about their own language and messages that are key for young people who are experiencing a range of powerful emotions. Reassurance and a sense of belonging can be provided through positive messages such as: *"You are safe here", "We remember you and have missed you", "We can talk any time - just let me know when you're ready" and "All of your feelings are ok"*. It is beneficial to remind children that they have been thought of fondly, for example: *"I feel so happy to see you again", "I've missed seeing your smiley face" and "When I saw ____ on TV, it reminded me of you and made me wonder what you were up to at home"*.
- ✓ Helping children to put their **feelings into words** is key. We can use a narrative therapy approach or the **'Name it - to tame it'** Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson (2012) strategy. This strategy involves a practitioner telling the child a story regarding a similar situation to the one the child is experiencing. Through the story the staff member can open up a specific action and label the emotion felt by the character. This helps the child process their own emotions in a way that is non-threatening and not too personal or overwhelming. The story might involve a child who was feeling anxious regarding changes to their classroom (i.e. new teachers, peers, size of class). The staff member can talk through the story, asking the child reflective questions and keeping to their pace. Siegel and Bryson highlight the adult can help the child connect the dots and allow the **fight/flight/freeze response to subside**. There are also books available which may help children to process their emotions and build coping strategies for anxiety. Some examples include:

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach



- ✓ Children should feel safe enough to **share feelings** and ask for help using a range of methods that are tailored to their needs i.e. visuals, short scripts, emojis, social stories or visual checklists (see below). Some children may feel a little shy or prefer more discrete methods such as an 'I need a break' card, a coded phrase that only their teacher recognises or an exit card on their desk which can be flipped over.



- ✓ Staff should refer to the South Ayrshire Bereavement Guidelines, '**Should Crisis Call**' when supporting children who have experienced loss during the pandemic. Staff should be briefed on a **simple, concise and factual statement** to deliver in classrooms if required (Moore, 2020). Young people should be given time and a

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

safe space to explore and discuss their feelings with a trusted adult. They will typically require reassurance regarding their responses being normal/expected and support regarding effective strategies and ways to cope with grief. See part 3, for further information regarding supporting children with grief.

2.2.5. All behaviour is communication (principle 5): The legislative and policy landscape in Scotland places an emphasis on [looking beyond the behaviour](#) a child is exhibiting, considering where this may stem. Key to this is taking a relational approach in build trusting, positive attachments with children and considering their needs in a holistic sense (i.e. are they safe, are they included etc.). With health and wellbeing now being the responsibility of all, it is vital staff are able to consider '[What is the child trying to tell me?](#)' when young people present with disruptive or non-engaging behaviours.

This principle applies even more so in the current context. Some children may find it genuinely difficult to sit in a room with other children in close proximity after months of being told to avoid contact as far as possible with the outside world. The majority of children will also have become accustomed to being with their immediate family for an extended period. There will be children who struggle with this separation and experience anxiety while they are in school. Even for those who are excited to regain their freedom and see their friends, this could be a potential source of anxiety. For many the movement and number of people in school will be difficult to adapt back to. We need to be aware that many will express their sensory issues and anxieties about the proximity of others physically. [Dan Hughes \(2006\)](#) highlights the need for connection before correction with his formula of [PACE](#):

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach



The following can support the reintegration of children back to school using PACE:

- ✓ Staff promoting and supporting **playful interactions** during the reopening of schools will give students **a sense of safety and belonging** and defuse situations before they escalate. This approach focuses on eliciting positive emotions and moments of shared joy during interactions between adult and child and also between children. It can help the child keep difficult thoughts and feelings in perspective, through words, gestures and actions which are light-hearted and spontaneous. When an adult plays with a child it can reduce the authority of an adult's role and convey a sense of connection and optimism. It also **has physiological benefits, it releases dopamine and oxytocin hormones which help children (and adults!) to feel pleasure, suppress pain and reduce the experience of stress and pain**. Such play interactions might involve the following:
 - *Sharing happy experiences and jokes with classmates. Finding moments of silliness: using a sing-song voice, talking to a teddy bear or puppet, being forgetful; making mistakes.*

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- *Nurturing and individualistic greetings in the morning i.e. waving or quoting the child's favourite TV show or film.*
- *Fun multi-sensory activities and learning via outdoors/music/art/body movement. Incorporating rhythmic actions into teaching: clapping, jumping, tapping, dancing and musical chairs.*
- *Playing games which build to a finish: ready-steady-go with bubbles, pop-up pirate etc.*
- *Defusing stressful demands: making a game out of getting organised; practise socialising using fun role-play; using humour to divert from conflict; give the child a fun job during a busy period in class when they are overwhelmed.*



- ✓ **Acceptance** is about being non-judgemental and showing the child that we understand what they are going through. Acceptance is about creating the conditions for unconditional positive regard, by accepting the thoughts, feelings, perceptions and memories which lie underneath the behaviour. Children with a background of abuse, neglect and loss can be prone to toxic shame. They have great difficulty making sense of their thoughts and feelings and expressing these in socially appropriate ways. **Acceptance shows the child that we understand and allow him or her to safely explore and communicate their inner experience.** It's a way of saying *"I get that this is a big deal for you."* It can be hard for adults as we can often be quick to prioritise traditional behaviour management, but the child's trauma-impacted brain is ill-equipped for thinking about consequences. Also we are often quick to try and change behaviour, but the child may have lacked the

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

experience of regulating thoughts and feelings throughout relationships. Some examples of verbal acceptance may include:

- *"I know you're worried and scared about being back in school"* or
- *"It must be hard not to think of your parents at home. You loved spending so much time with them every day and it's sad to leave them".*
- *"I'm disappointed by what you did, but I know you were really upset. It doesn't change how much I care about you."*

✓ **Curiosity** is when the adult shows an active and genuine interest in the child's experience. The adult is non-judgemental and put's aside their own presumptions in order to elicit the child's views. This can be done when the child is calm and able to comprehend and reflect, the adult can wonder alongside them i.e.

- *"I've been looking out for you and noticed you've been quiet since coming back. I think you might be worried about something" or*
- *"I'm wondering if you are finding it difficult being back in class and that is why you are going to the toilet more often?"*



✓ **Empathy** is a genuine desire to “feel with” another person – to step into their shoes and connect with their emotional perspective. This acknowledgement and validation of feelings enables compromise and problem-solving. When children have experienced hardship or inconsistency, they may react with initial mistrust, confusion or anxiety. Empathy is about showing the child “we get it”, for example:

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- *"I know this is really tough for you. The classroom looks so different from the last time you were here" or*
- *"You are so upset that your friend comes to school on a different day. You miss seeing him every day like you used to".*
- *"You were worried when you couldn't see your previous classroom assistant. You were probably thinking 'Where is she?' It was a real shock."*

2.2.6 The importance of transitions (principle 6): We are aware that different children will have had very different experiences during the lockdown. Some will have been in school throughout, though for them school will have been a very different place. The majority of children will have been at home and each of them will have had their own experience. Across schools there will be a huge range in what learning children will have engaged in while not in school. We will need to respond to what children have learnt, not what we expected them to have learnt. We also need to understand what they have forgotten. Preferably we will do this informally, to restart children's schooling with formal testing would impinge upon a focus on rebuilding relationships and exacerbate children's anxieties. We need to be mindful of the key education transition points and be aware that most children will not have experienced the supported and enhanced transition process initially expected. Key transition points being:

- Early years into Primary 1
- Primary 7 into Secondary 1
- Secondary to post-school options

Education Scotland have created online materials providing practitioners with advice, guidance, signposting and practical resources to support children and young people through transitions in the context of COVID-19 (Education Scotland, 2020). These can be accessed via the following link: [Transitions in 2020 | Learning resources | National Improvement Hub](#)

We need to be aware of those children who have never experienced primary school before (who perhaps have not received their supported nursery-primary 1 visits due to lockdown), these children will be attending school for the first time during the phased return. The children going from P.7 to secondary school may be apprehensive

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

regarding receiving their education in a whole new, bigger and more complex system, without their usual peer class grouping and teacher for support. Such children may have missed out on transition visits that allow them to look around their new school and meet their guidance teacher. Schools and nurseries should be proactive regarding the handover of pupil files, ensuring that key support information is shared in a timely manner. Further supports for these children might include:

- ✓ *undertaking virtual visits to their new schools - classrooms, corridors and communal areas will likely look very different under social distancing guidelines, the use of photographs and videos of the new environment could help to show young people what they can expect,*
- ✓ *having seating plans, timetables and school transition booklets posted out to their home addresses in advance,*
- ✓ *completing transition passports and 'about me' booklets for their staff,*
- ✓ *Inviting them back to have closure, say goodbye and mark the transition.*

For children who would have been sitting their SQA exams this year, this has also been a difficult time. Being told a milestone activity (their exams) has been cancelled and replaced with teacher analysis of graded prelims and coursework has, for some, caused worry and concerns. *During the period of exam results dissemination, we may see a rise in the anxiety of such children.* Further ways establishments can support the transition back to school include:

- ✓ Supporting children with the transition *from home to school* by asking them to *record in creative ways their feelings and apprehensions.* Such means could be drawing a picture, writing a letter or even making a little video alongside their caregiver. Some young people may still harbour fear regarding leaving their home and being separated from their caregivers and siblings. Other children may have thoroughly enjoyed their time at home and perhaps find school challenging.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach



- ✓ With social distancing, there will likely be new routines for arriving to nursery/school - **initial modelling of such routines** (as part of the virtual tour outlined above) could be helpful. Transition also includes all those moments during the day when children transition from one activity to another. These will likely be changed to take into account cleaning of resources/work stations and also to ensure children keep distance when moving between stations/parts of the classroom. Supports that may help include **timers, objects of reference, verbal/visual countdowns and rhythm or music to help children know the start and finish of these activity periods.**



- ✓ After spending time with their caregivers, some children may display **separation anxiety** when transitioning back to school. For these children, a **transitional object** bridging the gap between home and school may be a comfort. These objects often serve as a visual reminder to children and make them feel their caregiver or key adult is 'keeping them in mind'. This could be as simple as a photograph, a toy etc., something personal and comforting. There may need to be consideration of how these can be cleaned and stored to prevent handling from others.



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- ✓ Books centring on the key themes of change and transition can be read and discussed with children. This will help children to consider how people can grow from change and to consider useful coping strategies to build resilience. Books focusing on being kind and including others are also useful resources during this time for children who may find it hard re-kindling connections.



- ✓ Some children may benefit from a **soft-start when re-entering class** for the first time since lockdown. For these children they may need a space to calm their anxieties and self-regulate until they are in a better mind-frame to engage in daily activities. Schools should have cosy corners and nooks for children to escape to in order that they self-regulate and sooth. These areas should have soft furnishings and distraction objects for children (e.g. a picture book, a sensory toy, a soft object etc). Consideration should be given to how these areas are cleaned and maintained in light of social distancing.
- ✓ Some children with sensory needs may find transition between activities or to and from school especially difficult. These children may feel overwhelmed and anxious during these periods. **An outdoor movement break or activity with a trusted adult may help some children cope more readily transition.** If transition in the morning is difficult, the movement break will allow the rest of the class to settle prior to the child integrating.



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.3 Activities to Foster Hope and Resilience

The Resilience Alphabet



Resilience Alphabet
Building inner strength and wellbeing for kids

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Resilience Alphabet

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee
Ff	Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj
Kk	Ll	Mm	Nn	Oo
Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx	Yy
Zz				

E is for Exercise

Ee

We know that exercise is important to give us a healthy body both inside and outside. Like plants we need fresh air and sunshine to grow and feel good, so getting outside to exercise is important for us too.

Think: What is your favourite kind of exercise?

Say: "I am exercising every day, so my body and brain are full of energy."

Do:

- How many different kinds of exercise can you do today?
- You can go on a walk, skip, jump, run, climb the stairs, star jumps, box the air
- Try to include someone else and have fun together!

Exercise

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- Created by Education Scotland in liaison with Aberdeen City Council. The Resilience Alphabet has been designed to help children build inner strength and wellbeing as part of the development of personal resilience.
- Each of the letters offers an opportunity for children to explore a word linked to resilience through the use of a Think, Say and Do cycle. There are a range of activities suggested so children can choose the one that works best for them.
- They have mapped these to the Protective Factors - those are the factors that we know can support the emotional health and wellbeing of children.

www.education.gov.scot/media/01pbr34x/resiliencealphabet.pdf

Hope Clouds



Hope Clouds

This edition's activity is about **hope**. This theme fits well with the beginning of the new academic year and is a good way to encourage staff and pupils to think about their aspirations, especially in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

In the Resilient Framework: Instilling a sense of hope features as one elements of helping to build resilience. "Hope helps students hold on to the possibility of change and the anticipation and wish that tomorrow will be better. When hope is present it can make the most difficult challenges feel manageable and survivable. ... encourage students to have aspirations and dreams about what would make school a better place."

Instructions:

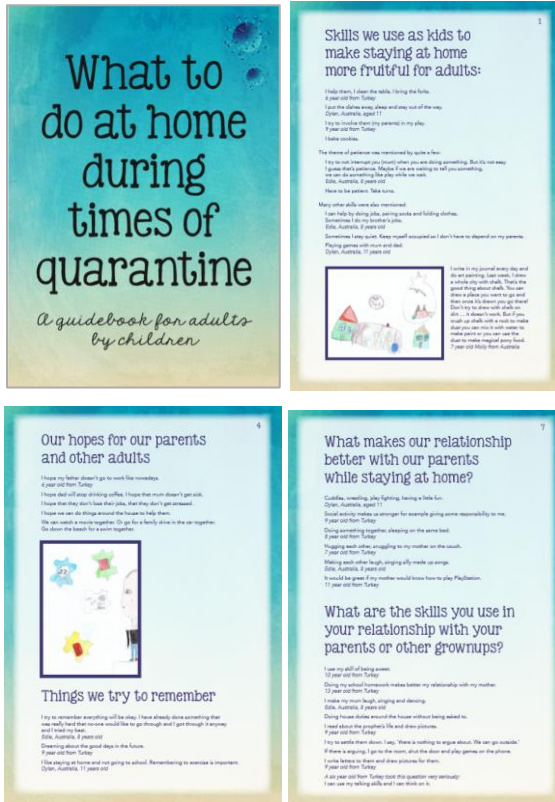
- Using your cloud template, think about your dreams and hopes for the next school year and write them down. They can be big or small, short-term or long-term.
- If you would like to share, tell the group about your dreams and hopes and why you chose them.
- Write one thing on your hope cloud that you will do to get closer to your dream and one person that you could ask for help.

Hope Clouds

- Created by Young Minds 360 Schools. <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/hope-clouds-activity/>
- A staff and pupil activity to instill a sense of hope (a feature of one of the elements to build resilience). *"Hope can make the most difficult challenge feel manageable."*
- The staff and children think about their own hopes and dreams for the next academic year. It might be something that they can change or it might depend on others. Ask the children to write on their 'hope cloud' one thing they will do to get closer to their dream and one person that they could ask for support. Open discussion as a classroom or school team – sharing aspirations and motivation.

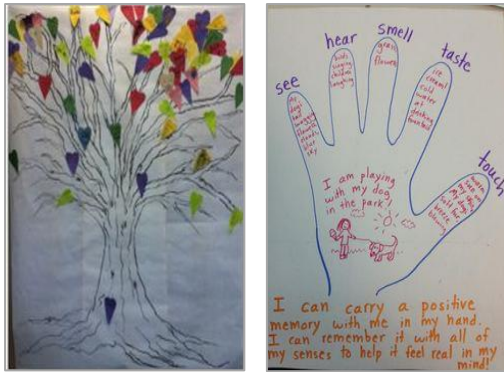
Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Gaining the View of Children regarding the 'New Normal'



- This resource was created by practitioners who consulted with children to make a helpful guide for parents to support their children during Covid19: www.healthsciences.unimelb.edu.au/_data/asset/s/pdf_file/0009/3357099/Quarantine-Guide-for-Adults-by-Children.pdf
- Gaining the views of children during this time is key to ascertaining what works and why.
- The return to school will bring with it a 'new normal' way of educating children that has not been trailed before. During this time it is key we link with pupils to ascertain specifically what the positives of this blend of home and school learning are – so we can capitalise on these and provide the best support for our children.

Hope Tree and Past and Future Hands



- Hope Tree: pupils can add their hopes regarding the future to the tree leaves. These can be shared with each other created overarching sense of shared hope and motivation within the class.
- Good Memory Hand: children can create a prompt of their own special positive memory for times when they are finding things difficult. They can link in the senses by including what they see, hear, smell, taste and touch to creating a visualisation resource.
- Past and Future Hands: To help children process their time during lockdown and build hope for a positive future. Past and future hands can be illustrated with children's key events and motivations for the 'new normal'.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.4 Play Based Approaches and Outdoor Learning

2.4.1: Play-Based Approaches

Children and young people all have the right both to play and to learn. Play-based pedagogies are generally based around the idea that developmentally appropriate play can support children's development (Hesterman & Targowska, 2020). While the evidence for play-based learning is inconsistent, a positive link between play and positive outcomes in early years is indicated (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Play allows children to feel and manage a variety of emotions – this support of health and wellbeing as well as the ability of play to foster relationships will likely be particularly necessary following COVID-19 (British Psychological Society, 2019).

2.4.2: What is outdoor learning?

Outdoor learning refers broadly to any educational experience that occurs outdoors, be that in a school playground, green space, local park, or the countryside. Outdoor learning is already embedded in Scottish schools through the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Learning for Sustainability, the GTCS Professional Standards Framework and How Good is Our School? (HGIOS). Outdoor learning, it is argued, is often underused in British schools – however it can be a beneficial pedagogy which benefits from positive interactions between practitioners and pupils (Humberstone & Stan, 2011).

Figure 7 illustrates some of the potential outcomes and experiences of outdoor learning – while some of the experiences may not be possible given coronavirus, these outcomes illustrate that this method of learning has its strengths.

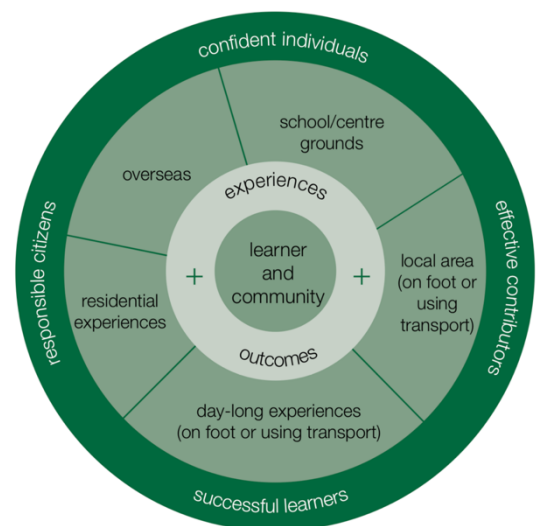


Figure 7. Planning for Outdoor Learning (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2010).

2.4.3: Why it is helpful for the reopening of schools?

As schools prepare to reopen, learning outdoors has the potential to keep pupils & staff safe, maintain social distancing, and increase the number of young people who are able to return to education, according to statements by Maree Todd (Scotland's

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

minister for children and young people), the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education and the Scottish Government's guide to reopening schools (SAPOE, 2020; 2020).

Given the frequent discussion of staying home, social distancing, and avoiding contact during lockdown, children may feel safer learning outside than inside classrooms. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also suggest moving classes outdoors as part of the preparation for reopening schools (2020). Outdoor learning has the potential to be a solution that not only maintains social distancing and public health, but also allows children to safely learn across all curricular areas (Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2010).

2.4.4: How can it support the curriculum?

Learning from the classroom can be applied to the outdoor environment through cross-curricular links, with the experience stimulating and motivating learners (Scottish Government, 2007). The outdoor environment encourages a variety of skills including problem-solving and risk taking, which are important for child development and can be used in a range of ways to enrich the curriculum and make learning fun, relevant and meaningful for learners (Little & Wyver, 2008; Scottish Government, 2010).

In the Early Years and primary education provisions, Forest Schools are already in place, providing an opportunity for skill development as well as contextualised learning experiences (O'Brien, 2009; Maynard & Waters, 2007).

It is possible to incorporate outdoor learning in secondary education establishments, through the Broad General Education (BGE) and senior phases of the CfE, as well as vocational courses such as the John Muir Award. Additionally, the use of technology can add value to outdoor learning through digitally recording activities which can then be used to reinforce and expand on the outdoor experience itself.



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Some argue that outdoor learning is held back by implementation issues and a general lack of guidance for practitioners – while there may naturally be a lack of guidance on the application of outdoor learning to post-COVID-19 schooling, resources such as Education Scotland's "Outdoor Learning – Practical guidance, ideas and support" provide information for those who have not yet received CLPL in this area (2019). In particular, this resource may provide suggestions around the implementation of outdoor learning in secondary classes (see section 2.3.6 for more resources).

2.4.5: How can it support wellbeing?

Increasing time spent outside may also have a positive impact on the wellbeing of both pupils and staff, which will be particularly relevant upon returning to school following COVID-19 related closures. Research suggests that spending time outdoors, particularly in green spaces, may reduce stress (Ulrich et al., 1991; Kondo, Jacoby & South, 2018; Corazon et al., 2019), and promote wellbeing and attainment (Gustaffson et al., 2012; McArdle et al., 2013). McArdle & colleagues' research demonstrates that outdoor learning and a nurturing approach can go hand in hand – both of these approaches stand to support students in their return to school (2013).

A review of the literature has also revealed that gardening can have a positive impact on behaviour in school as well as achievement (Blair, 2009).



The components of resilience are the child, the family, and the environment – given the uncertainty and potential trauma of the environment during

COVID-19, it is argued that outdoor learning's potential to increase resilience through the environment is particularly relevant (McArdle et al., 2013).

2.4.6: Summary

Outdoor learning and play provide an opportunity to support children and young people's education and wellbeing upon the return to school following COVID-19 related closures. Taking learning and play outdoors not only supports public health measures such as physical distancing, but can also benefit children's education.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Research demonstrates the wealth of skills supported by being outdoors that support learning as well as health and wellbeing. Furthermore, spending time outdoors may have a positive impact on the wellbeing of staff.

2.4.7: Outdoor Learning Resources

Learning Through Landscapes

<https://www.ltl.org.uk/>

Muddyfaces

<https://muddyfaces.co.uk/>

Sustainable Learning

<https://www.sustainablelearning.com/>

City Nature Challenge

<https://citynaturechallenge.org/>

Education Scotland

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/hwb24-ol-support.pdf>

John Muir Award

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

Scottish Curriculum through Outdoor Learning 2010

<https://education.gov.scot/Documents/cfe-through-outdoor-learning.pdf>

Growing Up Boulder

<http://www.growingupboulder.org/child-and-teen--friendly-city-maps.html->

Woodland Trust

<http://www.treetoolsforschools.org.uk/categorymenu/?cat=outdoor&name=Outdoor%20learning&col=0F7CB6>

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Outdoor Learning Directory

<http://outdoorlearningdirectory.com/index.php/resources/www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/Practical-guide/public/outdoor-learning>

Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland. <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/hwb24-ol-support.pdf>

Learning through Landscapes

https://www.ltl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/covid-school-grounds-poster_landscapesinschools.pdf

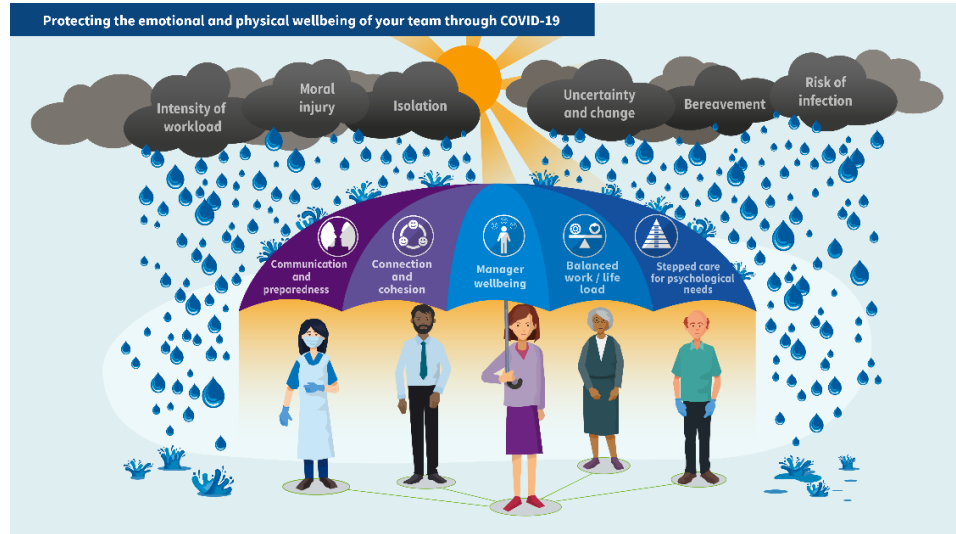
Care Inspectorate

https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3091/My_world_outdoors_-_early_years_good_practice_2016.pdf

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.5 Staff wellbeing considerations

As well as looking at how we support our pupils returning after lockdown, it is vitally important to consider staff wellbeing as well. Much has been said within this document about the importance of relational approaches in containing and supporting children and

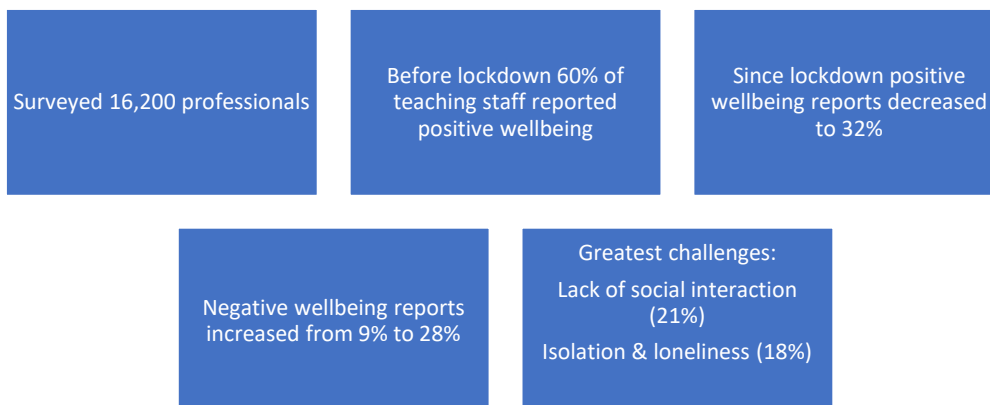


young people. For relational approaches to work well it is important that staff are also in a good place in terms of their wellbeing.

2.5.1 Staff wellbeing- what does the data tell us?

This is particularly pertinent given recent survey reports highlighting declines in teacher wellbeing during the lockdown period. Some of the main findings from the FE News (2020) survey are noted below.

Figure 8: Some findings from FE News survey (2020) of teaching staff



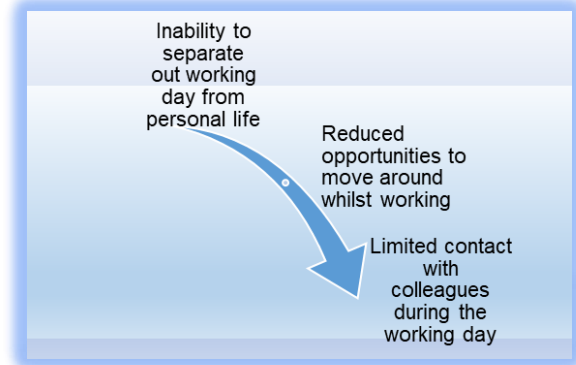
More specifically looking at a Scottish context, the EIS (2020) surveyed members about the COVID school shutdown with 26,128 members responding (response rate of almost 60%). While the survey was wide ranging and looked at other areas, such

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

as Hub supports and remote learning, in terms of the focus on health and wellbeing the following findings are of interest:

It is clear that there are common themes between the two surveys which highlight the importance of social interaction, contact with colleagues and the importance of having the

safety and predictability of the work routine. It is evident that working from home has also been difficult for many in terms of maintaining a work life balance,

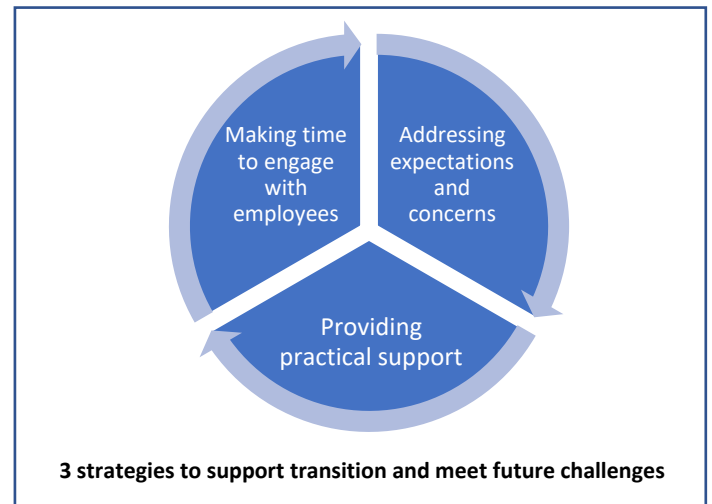


Top 3 difficulties working from home

2.5.2 Returning to work: Staff concerns

With a return to work now being planned for, the survey reveals some results which cast light on anxieties that staff are likely to have and that help us to consider some of the pressures and concerns that colleagues may feel as they are asked to return:

It is worth noting that **three key strategies** to help employers and employees work through this transition and meet future challenges have been identified (British Psychological Society, 2020b).



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.5.3 Returning to work: Promoting staff wellbeing at individual and establishment level

Why is it important?

This graphic indicates that acknowledging that there may be reintegration anxiety in the initial weeks of returning to work is important. There are also suggestions about how to manage this.

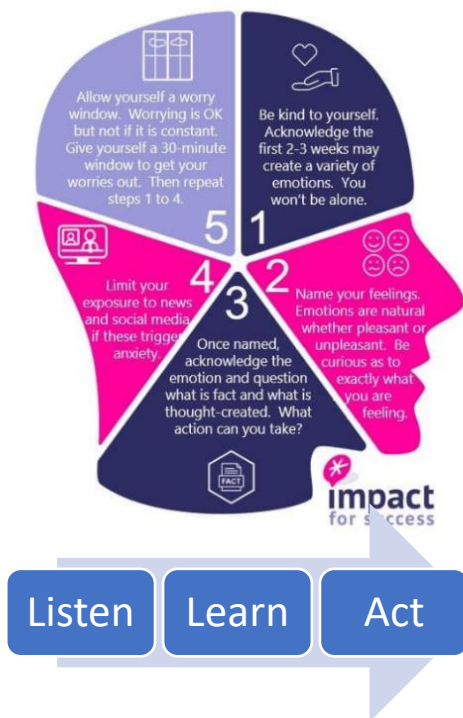
2.5.4 Role of leadership team in promoting staff wellbeing

The British Psychological Society (2020a) have noted research findings which indicate that responding to community crises like COVID 19 with clear, open and decisive leadership are important in building resilient communities. The basic principles of good leadership are: **listen, learn and then act.**

2.5.5 Role of all establishment staff: Reconnect and plan

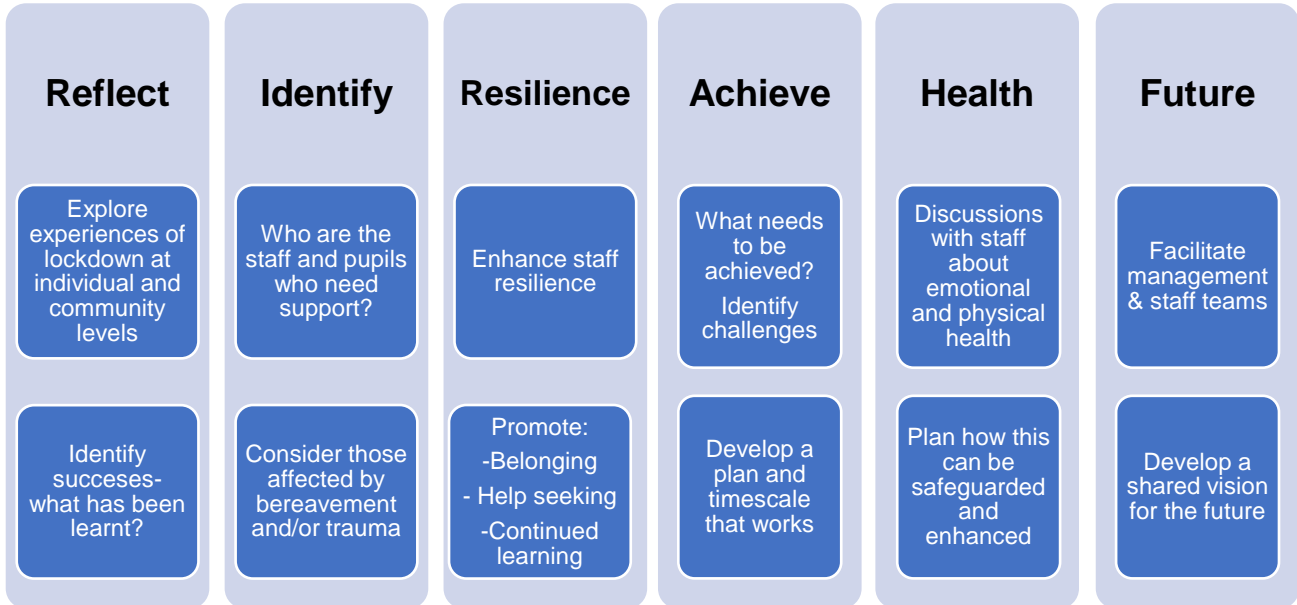
Staff will need time to **reconnect and plan** before /as children return. As we move into this phase within Scottish schools it is important to protect this **time for reflection**. This will require teams to consider the following areas.

Managing Reintegration Anxiety



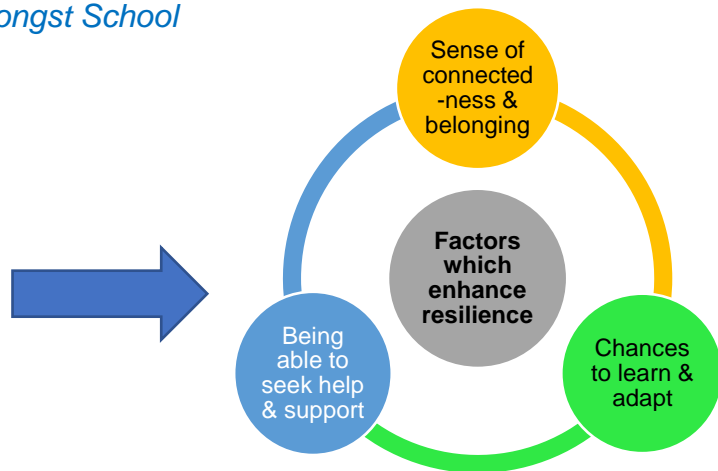
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Adapted from British Psychological Society (2020a)



2.5.6 Promoting Resilience Amongst School Staff During COVID-19

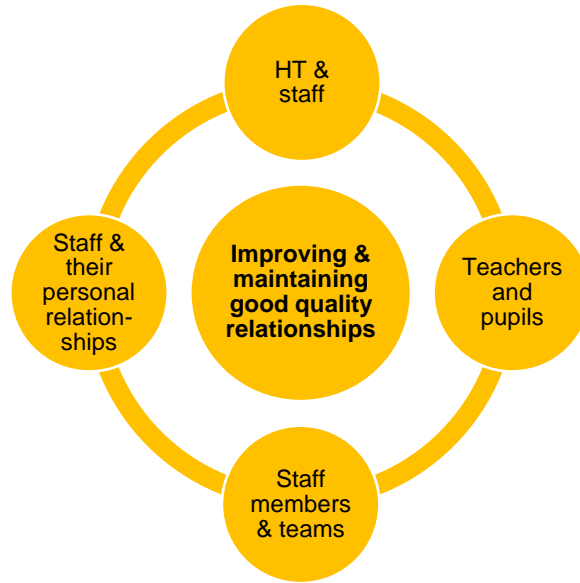
Resilience can be defined as the process of overcoming adversity and being able to adapt and cope in challenging circumstances. It is not an internal trait that you either possess or do not possess; it can be developed (or eroded) and can fluctuate over time dependent on the situation (Duffield and O'Hare, 2020).



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.5.7 Fostering Connectedness and Belonging

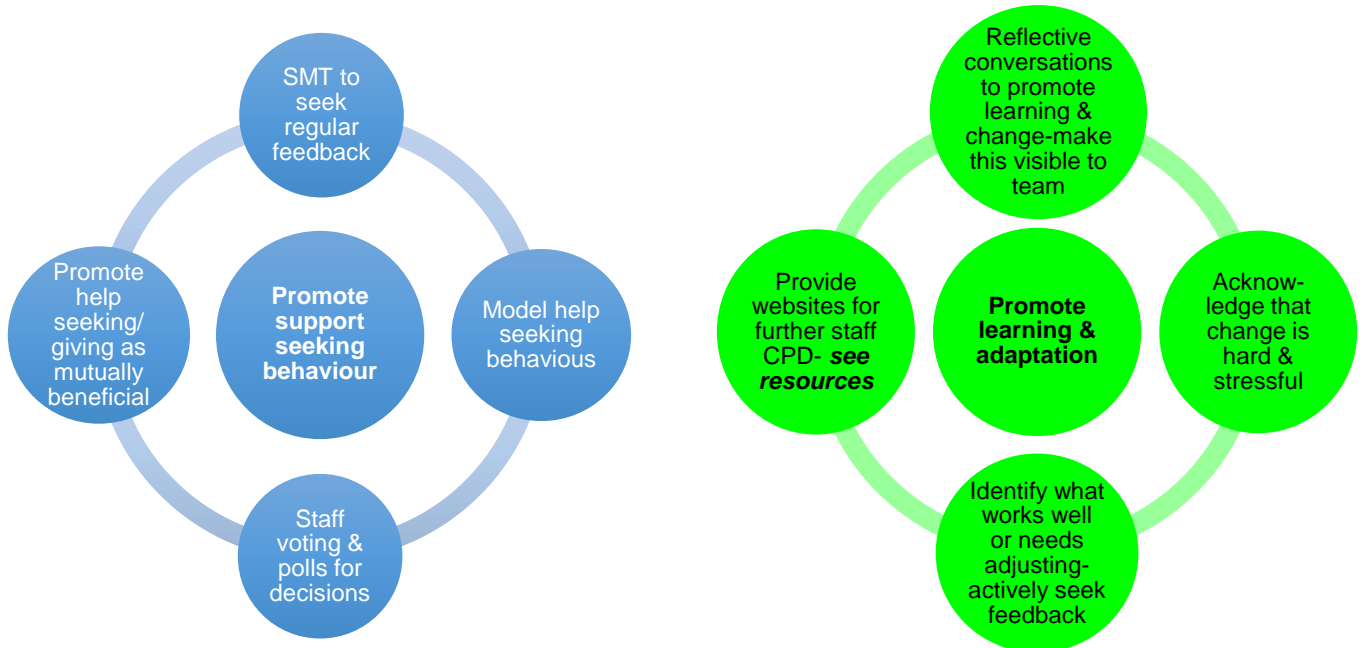
Focus on developing relationships across key domains, both at work and in our personal lives, to build resilience. Positive, supportive and affirming relationships will support our capacity to manage the changes and challenges that will be required to adapt our professional roles and discharge our responsibilities, while also responding to COVID 19.



- **How can we do this?**
- **Important to promote a sense of being 'held in mind'**

Promote a sense of being held in mind	
<p>Senior management team can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with staff little and often through texts, emails and virtual staff meetings. • Explicitly encourage staff to check in with one another. • Continue to give praise and feedback to ensure staff feel valued and efforts are recognised. • Communicate updates with staff regularly. • Plan rotas in school so staff have safe contact with one another. • Use online technology to have a virtual staffroom for staff to chat and check in; discriminate between optional and expected liaison. • Create buddy networks so staff have a small group they can contact when needed. 	<p>For all staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take regular breaks. • Follow a routine or structure. • Go out walking. • Check in with those who live alone. • Limit how often you check work emails. • Do something enjoyable every day.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach



SELF-CARE TREE for ALL STAFF

Managing prolonged stress at work and at home during the COVID-19 pandemic

AT WORK

BREAKS

Don't let those slip. Take a moment to yourself and intentionally seek to briefly disconnect from work. Do remember to eat! It is possible that your mind will be racing or problem-solving and that's ok. Spend a few minutes focusing on something that is not work. Being intentional with it pays back.

SUPERVISION

Make the best of your supervision. It is your time to make sure you're feeling supported in your work. Ask questions, clarify and seek support from your supervisor. No one is perfect - supervision helps to practice safety.

LIMIT SETTING

Set your limits and be clear of your responsibilities. Seek help and ask questions if you feel uncomfortable or out of your depth. Do your best to leave work at work.

STICK TO THE FACTS

Information that you read, hear or watch will affect how you feel. Make sure that you stick to the facts and distance yourself from speculations and exaggerations. It is an emotionally challenging time - inaccurate information can result in unnecessary distress.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Observe a recommended distance when at work. This applies to meetings and other gatherings such as lunch breaks, handovers and MOT meetings. Meet remotely as much as possible.

BASICS

Washing hands and covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing is essential. Remember your basics.

COMMUNICATION

Lack of clarity and uncertainty are one of the major sources of stress in organisations, especially, during the times of crisis or increased demands. Remember to communicate regularly and clearly with your team through handovers, supervision, line management, team briefs, e-mail, posters and team meetings.

SHARE HOW YOU FEEL

We are all in this together. Unexpressed fears tend to grow bringing the anxiety up. Share your feelings and thoughts - your colleagues is a valuable source of support.

AT HOME

ACTIVE DE-STRESSING

Whatever helps and whatever you enjoy - seek to reduce your levels of stress after work and generally. The pandemic is a source of stress too, therefore actively seeking to regularly re-focus on something you enjoy will help. Be proactive - prevention is easier than intervention.

SLEEPING

Sleep is an essential part of good mental health. Get enough of sleep and allow your mind to recoup. We are in for a long haul and pacing yourself, resting and sleeping will help you through this. Revisit your sleep routine.

STAYING CONNECTED

Staying in touch via remote means is crucial. Set up regular video or audio calls with your family and friends. Group calls can be fun - get someone to help you with the remote technology if it is new to you.

HELPING OTHERS

Proceed only if it is safe to do so and you are able to. Keep an eye on your vulnerable neighbours and others that you know. Meaningful input during the time of crisis can not only help others but also provide you with a sense of purpose and belonging.

CONTROL

During the times of crisis a sense of loss of control is likely. No question that it can be frightening to many. Refocusing on what you CAN control is a grounding experience. One of the things that is in your hands is how you look after your mind.

Dr Jürgen Pörschmann, Senior Clinical Psychologist

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

2.5.8 Resources for staff wellbeing and learning

- Hays Education offer a free [Wellbeing First pack](#) to help teachers and support staff through the difficult period of adapting to working with Covid-19 consideration. There are a range of new online courses around the best practice for remote working and wellbeing.

- The NES (2020) **Wellbeing Planning Tool** can also be used to support conversations and planning about staff wellbeing and supports.



- [Looking after our mental wellbeing](#) (NHS Ayrshire and Arran, 2020) document provides lots of information and tools to support our wellbeing.



- A [wakelet](#) with links to various web resources. Provides support and advice in five areas known to positively impact on health and wellbeing.



A series of **virtual events** known as [Education Scotland Big Blethers](#) will aim to support education professionals to connect, share and collaborate.



[Scotland Learns](#) provides a range of ideas and suggestions of activities to help parents, carers and practitioners support learning at home.



The EIS has provided online advice, resources and support including a new ['Working at Home'](#) resource. It currently contains 4 main sections: Looking After Your Health and Wellbeing; Making

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Time for You: Daily Inspiration; Lockdown Learning Ideas; and Continuing Your Professional Learning.



[Webinar sessions](#) on Glow Scotland to support and upskill practitioners in digital learning and teaching (live and on YouTube).

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Part 3

Children who may require additional support.



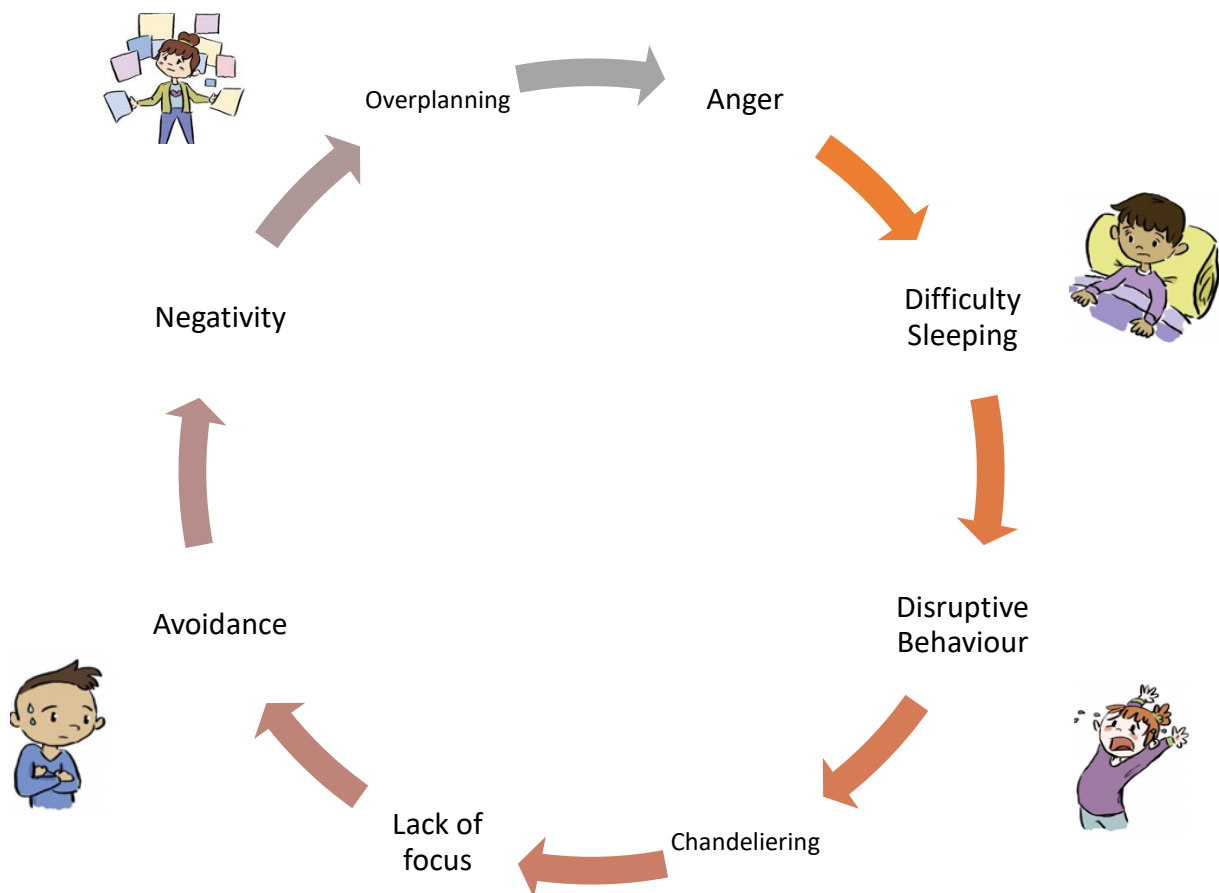
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3.1 Supporting Children with Anxiety: Reaching the Learning Brain

Anxiety is a normal emotion that we all feel from time to time. However, it can affect us all in very different ways with individual experiences varying. Recognising anxiety in our children is not always clear cut. Some children may show outward behaviours that indicate they are experiencing anxiety whilst others may contain their feelings of anxiety inside. Signs for staff to look out for in children include:

- *Difficulty focusing or mind going blank,*
- *Fatigue from sleep disturbance,*
- *Appearing restless or on edge,*
- *Irritability, tantrums or meltdowns,*
- *Difficulty separating from care givers,*
- *Avoiding particular tasks or activities,*
- *Psychosomatic complaints (headaches, stomach-aches, muscle pains, etc.).*

Anger can often masquerade as other types of behaviour:



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

When a child is in a heightened state of emotion, they often have difficulties accessing the rational side of their brain, this is referred to as the Amygdala Hijack. When it happens a rush of stress hormones (e.g. cortisol) floods the body before the prefrontal lobes (the rational part of the brain) can mediate this reaction (see diagram below). The signal enters and travels to the thalamus, which quickly passes it on to the amygdala (the fear responses part of the brain) which asks the muscles to tense for flight/fight. This response lasts 18 minutes, but the body retains fight/flight hormones for 3/4 hours. Practitioners may notice the following in a child:

- *A strong emotional reaction with a sudden onset,*
- *Regret for their actions on reflection (when they are able to rationalise),*

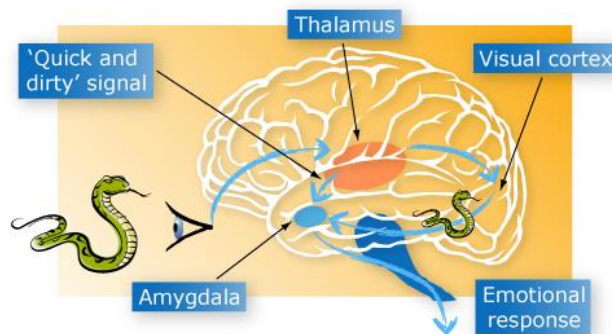


Figure 9: Anxiety provoking amygdala hijack in the brain.

Dr Bruce Perry (2009) highlighted that to help a vulnerable young person to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence as shown below when they are in a heightened state of emotion. This is because heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain will not work well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others. We should regulate the young person's brain from the bottom up using the 3R's of *Regulate, Relate and Reason*. The first stage of which is **ensuring that you are regulated yourself - if safe to do so, get down on their level.**

Regulate:

- Identify the source of the child's trigger, then shift the focus on calming the child,
- Focus on soothing - since the young person is in the lower parts of their brain trying to reason with them won't work. At this stage you're all about making them feel calm, safe and loved.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- Use methods to calm and support the particular child, one size does not fit all.

Relate:

- As they calm down use short sentences e.g. *"I know you're upset right now", "I know this is very hard"*
- You can validate their feelings with your words and tone of voice while also providing them with a hug or even taking their hand.
- Your focus here is connecting with the child.

Reason:

- Once the young person is calm, you can make a plan together about how to move forward, possibly coming up with alternative ideas about how they might respond if something similar happened again.
- You can reassure them that you love them, but the behaviour they exhibited is not okay.

No matter the reason why a dysregulated brain state occurred, it's not useful to discipline the young person's behaviour or label it something that it is not. Until a child is regulated, they are unlikely to relate to you (feel connected). And until a child is related, they are unlikely to have the mental capacity to reason with you.

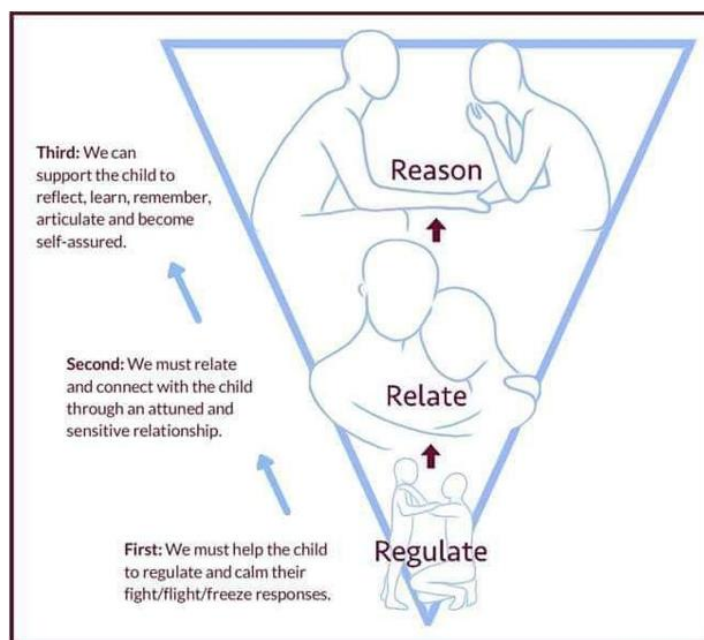
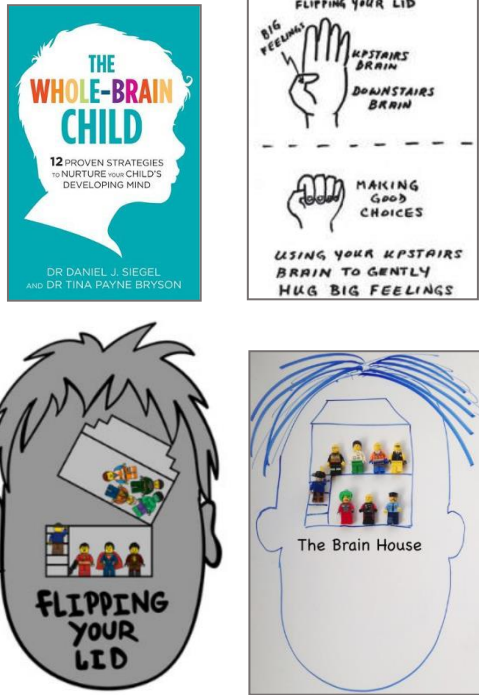


Figure 10: Dr. Bruce Perry's *The Three R's: Reaching the Learning Brain* (2009).

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

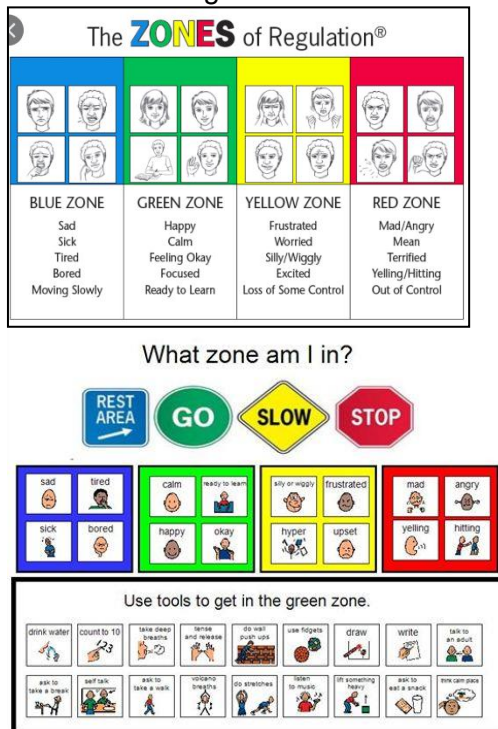
Some activities to support children feeling anxiety are as follows:

The Whole Brain Child:



- ✓ The book contains a number of strategies to support children with managing their emotions. It helps children to have a view regarding their inner processes and learn useful coping strategies.
- ✓ The Flipping your Lid strategy supports young people to share their views regarding what 'losing control' feels like and comprehend what might be happening biologically using simple illustrations and poster-games.
- ✓ This can be undertaken individually, or as a whole class e.g. a whole-class brain poster with pupils designing the downstairs and upstairs characters (i.e. the emotions and thinkers).
- ✓ The pupils can then take it in turns to describe and illustrate a strategy they use to cope when they feel like 'flipping their lid'. These strategies can be collected and used as a class self-regulation tool box.

The Zones of Regulation:



- ✓ The Zones of Regulation is a systematic, cognitive behavioral approach used to gain the views of a child regarding their emotions and teach self-regulation.
- ✓ It does so by helping pupils to categorise the different ways we feel and states of alertness we experience into four concrete colored zones.
- ✓ The framework provides strategies to help students become more aware of and independent in controlling their emotions and impulses, manage their sensory needs, and improve their ability to problem solve conflicts.
- ✓ By addressing underlying deficits in emotional and sensory regulation, executive functioning, and social cognition, the framework is designed to help move students toward independent regulation. Go to www.zonesofregulation.com for further information.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Teaching Physical Sensations in the Body: i.e. 'what does anxiety feel like'



- ✓ Some children can be unaware of emotions and the physical signs and sensations within their body.
- ✓ When children become better at labelling emotions and recognising the physical sensations in their body, they can then become better at linking what is being experienced with a relevant coping strategy.
- ✓ Teaching children the physical sensations of anxiety, anger, sadness, worry, excitement, can help them to understand when they are in a blue or red state (zones of regulation above).
- ✓ This can be taught alongside such strategies as Volcano in my Tummy, Zones of Regulation and the Incredible 5 Point Scale.

Mindfulness



- ✓ Mindfulness is often used to help cope with daily stress or anxiety.
- ✓ Mindfulness practices can also be applied in the classroom. 5 Senses exercise -
 - Notice 5 things you can see, really try and draw your attention to things you mightn't normally acknowledge like a shadow or a gap in the wall
 - Next, notice 4 things you can feel – like the texture of your top, the air moving in the room, the chair you're sitting on etc.
 - Now notice 3 things you can hear – listen for a moment, and focus on three things you can hear, like the fan on the heating, or the rain outside
 - Notice 2 things you can smell – try and notice things you would normally filter out, whether they're good or bad – could be coffee, trees, paper etc.
 - Last notice one thing you can taste right now – you can eat or drink something and try to really notice the flavour or even try to search the air for a flavour.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Emotion Thermometer & Cool Down Strategies:



- Emotional Thermometers are an engaging, visual way for children to become more aware of their feelings, behaviour and linked coping strategies.
- Children can become involved in the creation of the thermometers so that they take more ownership over the strategies to be employed and put them into practice.
- Emotional thermometers can be linked with a child's favourite television series i.e. pokemon – using calm, nervous and angry pokemon characters as visual representations.
- A whole class project may be for the class to come up with their own calm-down strategies that can be employed. This take the onus off the individual and shows them that everyone employs strategies to self-regulate.

Activities for creating a sense of calm for all children including belly breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualisation can be found in *Appendix 1*.

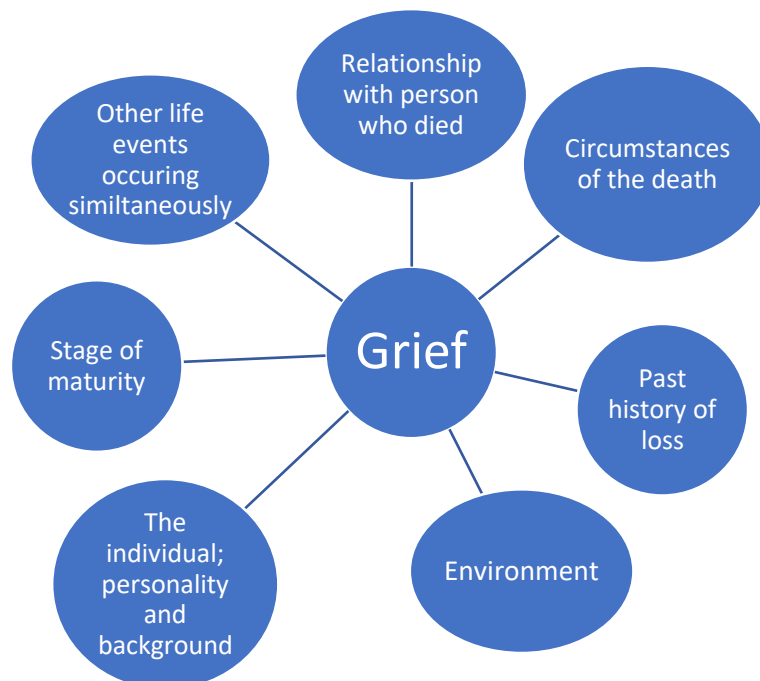
Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

3.2 Supporting our Children and Staff with Bereavement and Loss

Where there has been bereavement & loss all staff should refer to the South Ayrshire Council guidance **Should Crisis Call** available on the intranet. Within this documentation there is a plethora of advice and detailed support for local authority staff including detailed information on the grieving process.

Many schools already have significant experience of managing and supporting young people with bereavement. During the lockdown schools have had to change how they connect with young people and families. It is important to consider that not all families will have informed the school following a bereavement. It is important for schools to think about how they can 'reach out' and offer support therefore encouraging parents to share this information. Previously bereaved pupils may have a stronger response to the coronavirus situation.

3.2.1 Factors affecting grieving process



The diagram above shows that there are many factors that can impact on the grieving process. Aspects of these can be risk or protective factors.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

3.2.2 What can schools do?

It can be difficult to know what to do when there have been bereavements in school. Good communication and support networks within schools are vital. Here are some things to consider:

- Someone from the school contacting the family directly to offer condolences & support.
- A secure forum with staff members and affected pupil?
- Are pupils able to communicate with their friends? Do they want/need support to tell their friends?
- How can you alter what's already in place to support bereaved pupils e.g. seasons for growth support to a group.
- There may be a ripple effect within the network of bereaved pupils – often a ripple effect of anxiety and questions after news of a bereavement.
- Help pupils manage anxieties and respond appropriately to a bereaved friend
- Trying to maintain continuity and security is very important at this time. Schools should consider this in planning for return.
- Pupils who have lost someone to Coronavirus may need additional support to focus on what you can do/control e.g. I CAN wash my hands, do school work, contact my friends etc. To support try to contextualise the numbers (of COVID-19) – most people recover, and ask parents to limit exposure to news/ social media.
- Get child or young person to share what they are worried about. Many children can generalise assumptions that may not be accurate.

3.2.3 Children and Grief

Children's Understanding of Death

Children often have differing understandings and responses to death based on their age and stage of development. Here is a general overview on how age/ stage can impact on understanding (table below).

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Age/ Stage of Development	Common Responses that can be found
0-2 years	Very young children will often react emotionally and physically to the disappearance of a significant person in their life, even if they are unable to express their feelings in words. They will often pick up on parental feelings of grief and changes in their routine and are likely to feel confused and fear separation from close family members. At this age and stage young children do not understand the concept of death.
2-5 years	Young children can understand the concept of death, but do not appreciate its finality and may expect the dead person to re-appear. They can often think in literal and concrete terms and so can be confused by euphemisms of death such as 'lost' or 'gone away' or 'gone to sleep. They may require repeated explanations of what has happened. Young children can be prone to fantasise at this age and if not told what is happening, may dream up something more frightening and far- fetched than reality
5 - 8 years	At five years of age most children realise that dead people are different from live people. By seven years of age the majority of children accept that death is permanent and that it can happen to anyone. They are often more able to express their thoughts and feelings but may conceal them. It is important that they are given the opportunity to ask questions and to be given as much information as possible. Many children at this stage are very interested in the rituals surrounding death.
8-12	At this stage many children's understanding of death matches that of an adult, although it can be difficult to grasp abstract concepts. An important factor can be their deepening realisation of the inevitability of death and an increasing awareness of their own mortality and the fear it can cause.
Adolescence	The struggle for independence and increasing intellectual ability which occur at this age may cause teenagers to challenge the beliefs and explanations given to them by others. They may question the meaning of life if it ends in death. Teenagers may find it easier to discuss their feelings with a sympathetic friend or adult rather than with close family members. They can sometimes have difficulty coming to terms with their own mortality and that of those close to them, and some can cope by refusing to contemplate the possibility of death. Sometimes there can be a regression to younger behaviours.

3.2.4 Families and carers – what might help?

Where a pupil has been bereaved staff from the school should contact the family and ask what the family would like to share, with who and how. Here are some areas to consider:

- Pupil and family might want to tell school community or might want privacy. The school can communicate preferences and options.
- If a pupil or staff member dies, how will people be informed and what support will be offered?
- Parents and carers might have to deliver this news, with guidance and support
- Schools can help model appropriate responses to these losses. How will your school do this?

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- How can school communities offer support/comfort to a grieving family?
- Signpost to support organisations or offer support yourself e.g. www.childbereavementuk.org.

3.2.5 Remembering

If there's a death of a pupil or staff member the school community could collaborate to create a memorial allowing the community to share their grief. Some things to consider are:

- Schools who have been bereaved can share what they've learned with other schools.
- Schools can put in place collaborative projects when you return to school e.g. pupils who've been bereaved can write letters or memories
- Those who haven't been bereaved could write thank you letters to those who have helped them so as to be part of the collaborative activity.

3.2.6 Taking care of yourself

Emotional reactions are normal, it's difficult to support bereaved pupils. Acknowledge and accept your feelings and remember that it is important to take care of yourself. Don't be embarrassed about being tearful in front of pupils, families or staff. It is a sad time and this can communicate your empathy to others. If you are having a strong, difficult reaction, you might not be best placed to support a bereaved pupil. Having a small team of staff to support a pupil is good as the pupil doesn't rely too heavily on one person; it also allows support between staff. Checking in with each other especially important when working from home. Make time for yourself, take time out and try not to let things overwhelm you.

10 ways to support the bereaved

- Be there – don't offer solutions
- Listen in an accepting non-judgemental way
- Show that you are listening and you recognise something of what they are going through
- Encourage them to talk about the deceased

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

- Tolerate silences
- Be familiar with your own feelings about loss and grief
- Offer reassurances about the normality of grief reactions
- Do not take anger personally
- Recognise that your own feelings may reflect how they feel
- Accept that you cannot make them feel better (but you are still doing something useful)

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

3.3 Nurture Groups

Research into nurturing approaches began with the creation of nurture groups in the 1970s (Bennathan, 1998). These groups were established in primary schools in the Inner London Education Authority through the work of Marjorie Boxall (Rae, 2013). Their theoretical basis drew from John Bowlby's Theory of Attachment (1968), with their aim being to understand and help meet children's social/emotional needs in order to maintain pupils within the mainstream context (Boxall, 2002). Today, nurture groups can be found within the following settings: early years, primary schools, secondary schools, additional needs establishments and alternative provisions (Bennathan et al., 2010; Stephen et al., 2014; Powys County Council, 2015).

They exist in over 1500 schools in the United Kingdom (The Nurture Group Network, 2015), offering evidence-based attachment intervention focusing on meeting children's relational needs (Stephen et al., 2014) developed around the six guiding principles of nurture (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000). The groups are small (typically 6 to 12 pupils) and structured for children showing signs of **social or emotional difficulties, particularly those who are experiencing disruption or distress outside school**. Children who attend nurture groups remain an active part of their main class group. They spend a period of time within the group according to their need and typically return to their own full time class within two to four terms (Nurtureuk, 2018).

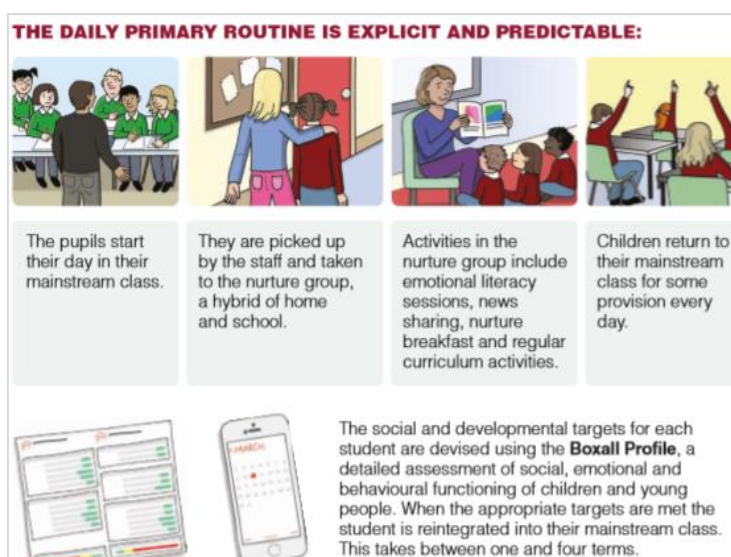


Figure 11: The Daily Routine of a Nurture Group (Nurtureuk 2018).

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Staff use the BOXALL Profile alongside a host of other holistic assessment materials to gauge the learning and social/emotional needs of the children who attend. There is a focus on language development and communication (Nurture Principle 4). Positive role modelling, demonstration, predictability and structure are used to create an atmosphere of support and challenge. The area is laid-out into differing sections with a designated kitchen area (see figure 12 and 13 below). Food is shared at 'breakfast' or 'snack time' with many opportunities for social learning, helping children to attend to the needs of others, with time to listen and be listened to.



Figure 12 and 13: Examples lay-out of a nurture room.

As highlighted above some children may have had a difficult time during lockdown. For example, they may have experienced:

- *grief or bereavement (losing a loved one),*
- *separation anxiety (living in a differing household from keyworker parents, not being able to visit grandparents) or,*
- *trauma (there has been a significant rise of domestic abuse during lockdown).*

Alston (2020) explains that “*Many children will have suffered significant harm during this time. We need to be aware of this as a possibility for all our children, not just the ones we had identified as vulnerable*”. For this reason, nurture groups can be seen as a valuable resource during the phased re-opening of educational provision. Those establishments with a nurture room should look for the signs of social/emotional need

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

for those children re-entering education and consider the types of support available within their provision. Every child's lived experience is different, hence the importance of educators **connecting with pupils in tailored ways, ascertaining their experience and linking regarding the most appropriate support.**

As the children in nurture groups learn academically and socially they develop confidence, become receptive to others, learn self-esteem and take pride in achieving. Although their primary goal is to improve children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, nurture groups have positive outcomes across myriad of areas, both for pupils themselves and for teachers, the school community and beyond (Nurtureuk, 2018). Some of the positive outcomes of nurture groups are included in the organisation Nurtureuk's most recent online booklet (https://www.nurtureuk.org/sites/default/files/nurture_groups_booklet_online.pdf)

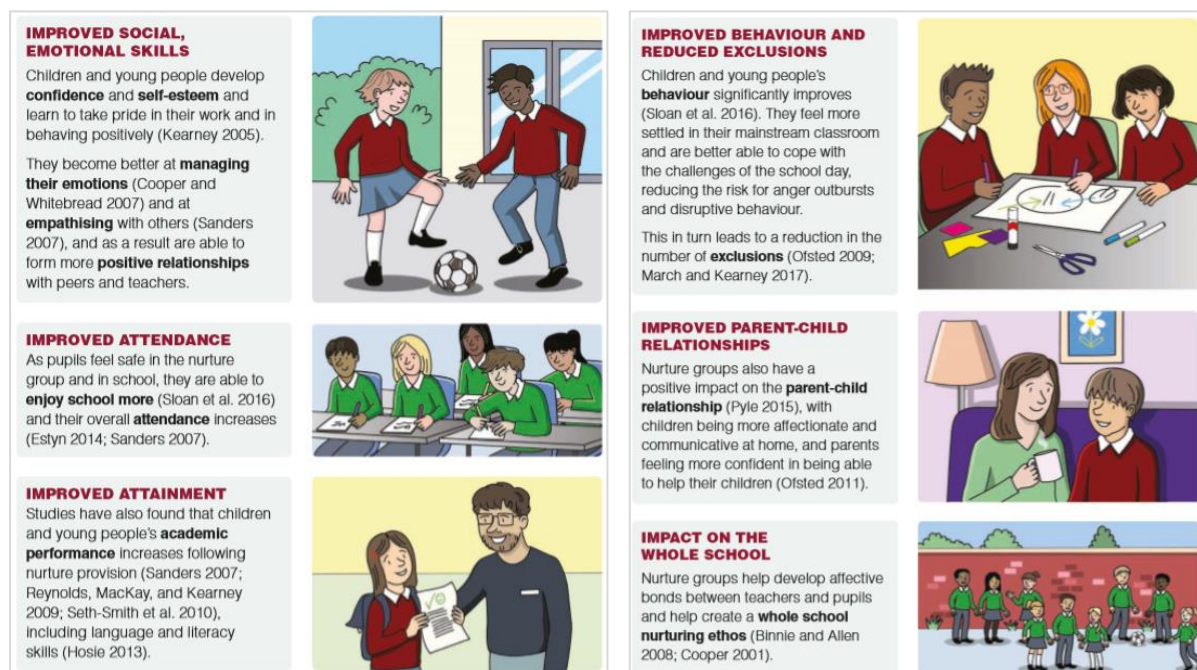


Figure 14: Positive Outcomes of Nurture Groups (Nurtureuk 2018).

Nurture-based interventions such as nurture groups and whole establishment nurturing practices, can have a significant positive impact on all pupils' wellbeing. This is not only true for young people with social/emotional needs but across the whole

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

school population, by making everyone feel safe, listened to and valued. During the phased re-opening of educational provision such interventions will be key in re-establishing the positive and trusting bonds within our educational establishments, allowing children to feel secure and curious enough to achieve in the long-term.

Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Appendix 1: Activities for Creating a Sense of Calm

Belly Breathing is another good strategy to help young people control their breathing and gain a sense of calm.



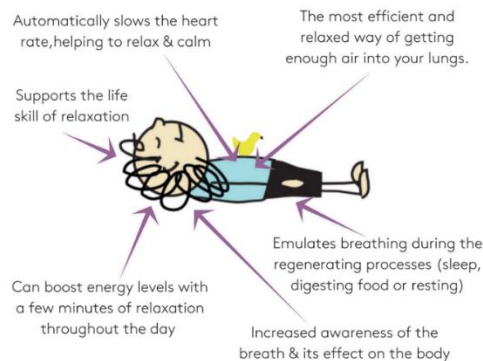
- 1) Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
- 2) Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of four, making sure your belly is expanding and not your chest. Exhale through your mouth for a count of four.
- 3) Continue this breathing cycle for a few minutes. You should feel the stress leave your body while your mind becomes calm.

For younger children, it may be useful to ask them to lay down and to place a small toy on their belly to help them judge if their breathing is coming in and out of their belly (they should feel/see the toy move up and down).



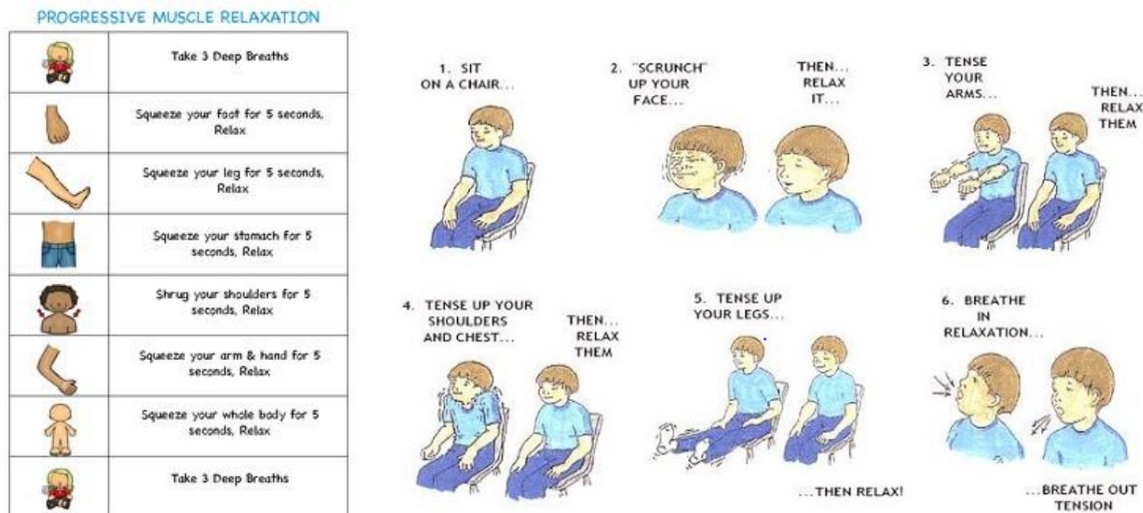
Belly breathing can be beneficial for the body as well as the mind, some of the key benefits include:

Belly breathing



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Progressive muscle relaxation is another method that helps relieve that tension in the body when a child is feeling anxious. In progressive muscle relaxation, you tense a group of muscles as you breathe in, and you relax them as you breathe out. You work on your muscle groups in a certain order. When your body is physically relaxed, you feel much less anxious.



Below is a photo of a group of children trying the spaghetti toes progressive muscle relaxation technique, this includes the following: Present the concept of stress and relaxation by talking about uncooked and cooked spaghetti. When you feel stressed-out your muscles or body often get tense or hard, like stiff, uncooked spaghetti. When you feel relaxed your body feels more like warm, soft, cooked spaghetti. If possible, distribute a piece of uncooked and cooked spaghetti for each child to explore. Ask the children to pretend to be like hard, uncooked spaghetti. Ask them to tense their muscles, their arms, legs and neck, and to keep holding their muscles tight for 10-20 seconds. Then instruct the children to “let go” – to let all their muscles go soft like cooked spaghetti. This is a great way to help children feel the difference between stress and relaxation and to appreciate how good it feels to be relaxed. On a sunny day, could this be done as outside activity with children socially distanced?

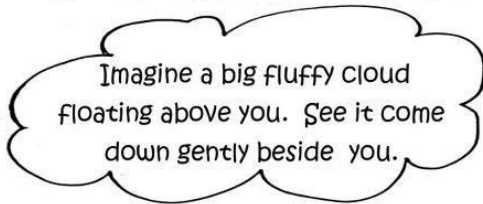


Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

Visualisation is another useful calming technique that involves each of the five senses to ignite positive messages throughout the mind and body. You utilize all of your visual sense to build images in the mind that your body feels are as real as external events. Two visualisation scripts are included below:

FLOATING ON A CLOUD

* Lie on your back & close your eyes.



* Imagine what your cloud looks like. What color is it? Does it have a shape? This is your own special cloud... you are completely safe & happy when you are on your cloud.

* Climb up onto your cloud & it will take you anywhere you want to go.

* What things do you see as you float on your cloud? Where will it take you? Let your cloud fly you to a special place where you can rest quietly & feel peaceful.

RAINBOW MEDITATION SCRIPT

- Get comfortable. Close your eyes and relax.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose, and breathe it out slowly through your mouth.
- Now just breathe normally and relax.

- Imagine a big, beautiful rainbow in front of you. See all of its colors. Feel the colors.

- Imagine the color red is glowing brighter than the rest, and there is red all around you.
- Breathe in the color red. Think to yourself: I am safe. Say to yourself: I feel safe.

- Now, imagine the color orange is glowing brighter, and orange is all around you.
- Breathe in orange. Think to yourself: I feel my feelings stirring in my body. Say to yourself: I feel peaceful.

- Next, imagine the color yellow is glowing and is all around you.
- Breathe in yellow. Think to yourself: I am powerful. Say to yourself: I feel confident.

- Now, imagine the color green is glowing brighter, and there is green all around you.
- Breathe in the color green. Think to yourself: My family and friends love me, and I love them. Say to yourself: I feel loved.

- Imagine the color light blue is getting brighter, and light blue is all around you.
- Breathe in the glowing light blue. Think to yourself: People listen when I talk, and I am a good listener. Say to yourself: I feel heard.

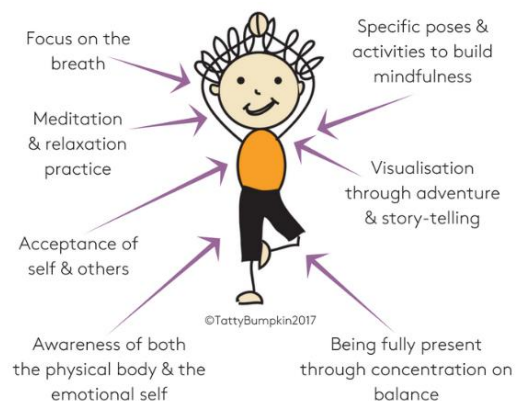
- Now imagine the color dark blue also called indigo is getting brighter, and indigo is all around you.
- Breathe in indigo. Think to yourself: I have a great imagination. Say to yourself: I see great things happening for me.

- Now, imagine the color purple is getting brighter, and the color purple is all around you.
- Breathe in purple. Think to yourself: I am wise. Say to yourself: I am smart.

- Take one last look at your big, bright, beautiful rainbow, and notice if you see anything (pause), feel anything (pause), hear anything (pause), or notice anything else (pause).

- Now take a deep breath, and wiggle your toes.
- Take another deep breath, and wiggle your fingers.
- Take one last deep breath, and open your eyes when you are ready.

Research shows it can reduce fear and anxiety and lessen the frequency of headaches. O'Grady (2017) highlights that visualisation activates positive anticipatory thinking and short-circuits negative anticipatory thinking, creating the mental efficacy necessary to bounce back in the face of stress. Visualisation, belly breathing and progressive muscle relaxation are forms of mindfulness for children.



Return to Schools – A Relational Approach

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