



Back to School: Student wellbeing

The *SecEd* and *Headteacher Update* Back to School guides offer advice ahead of September and the wider opening of schools. In this guide, we consider how the lockdown will have affected young people's wellbeing and mental health, what challenges we expect to see as more students return, and how schools must respond...



Spotting the signs: 10 mental health challenges

As schools open further post-lockdown, what kind of wellbeing and mental health issues will students be presenting with and what signs should we be alert for? **Dr Pooky KnightSmith** considers 10 challenges we are likely to see in September – and what we can do to help

There are a whole series of issues that we can expect to see in our pupils in the coming months. To help you spot the signs and take action, I have outlined a range of potential concerns and for each I advise at which point we should worry and suggested next steps.

This article is designed to arm rather than alarm. I hope it gives you some useful pointers. You do not need to know all the answers to be able to significantly help a child.

For further support, *SecEd* and *Headteacher Update* recently published an eight-page Best Practice Focus in which I discussed spotting and responding to the signs of mental health problems, including how to listen when a child is distressed (KnightSmith, 2020).

1, General failure to thrive or feeling stressed

The problem: Everyone is going through a tough time and even the

most resilient pupils are likely to find that their wellbeing takes a hit. Pupils might seem more anxious than usual; they may be more irritable, angry or upset than a few months ago, and in some cases they may seem a little directionless, listless, and just generally “not quite themselves”.

When should I worry? It is important to remember that we are in the middle of a pandemic. Things are hard and we have been through a lot. While many children might exhibit some signs that would normally be a red flag for you, as we go through a community-wide process of healing from trauma, our expectations will need to shift a little. However, if there are individual children who stand out as struggling more than their peers, then it will be worth digging a little deeper and putting additional supports in place.

What should I do? The best approach here is one of community healing. Working with pupils, staff and families to create a safe and nurturing environment where children feel safe and seen and where they can begin to reconnect socially and find a sense of purpose and belonging again will really help. It will help too to revisit the wellbeing basics of diet, sleep and exercise. For many people one or more of these will have slipped significantly during lockdown and supporting a gentle reset now will boost both physical and mental health.

Further support

- ▶ The mentally healthy schools website has some great ideas and resources: www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk
- ▶ Try my book *The Mentally Healthy Schools Workbook* (JKP, 2019), which provides a helpful framework and lots of ideas: <https://bit.ly/3cCwutz>

2, OCD around germs and cleanliness

The problem: We expect to see a big rise in healthy and hygiene-related obsessive compulsive disorder cases, and for many of those who have previously lived with the condition to relapse. Messages about health and cleanliness and the need to keep hands and things we touch clean have been a key focus of public health campaigns. For many, this has resulted in a desired increase in vigilance and handwashing which has helped to curb the spread of the virus. However, for some this gets out of control and resulting OCD behaviours become more harmful than helpful.

When should I worry? Our norms have shifted but we should still be worried about anyone for whom concerns about cleanliness or contamination feel out of kilter. Everyone should be encouraged to

follow public health guidelines, but if you have pupils who are spending far longer carrying out activities like handwashing and cleaning than the norm, who seem very pre-occupied by it, or you find that it is preventing them from engaging in activities, then it is time to seek support.

What should I do? The good news about OCD is that it is highly treatable, especially if we catch it early before habits have time to fully form and embed too far. An internal or external referral to someone who can diagnose and treat the pupil should be made rapidly. The pupil will likely be referred for cognitive behavioural therapy which includes exposure and response prevention (CBT with ERP) and the outcomes are often swift and positive.

Further support

- ▶ OCD UK is a charity run by and for people with OCD offering helpful advice and ideas: www.ocduk.org
- ▶ The young people's workbook and the guide written for therapists by the team at the Institute of Psychiatry – *OCD: Tools to help young people fight back!* (JKP, 2019) – is excellent: <https://bit.ly/3cCyAcV>

3, Bereavement

The problem: Sadly, more young people than usual will experience a bereavement in the current context. Bereavement is something that we will all experience at some time and is not in and of itself a cause for concern. But when someone dies, no matter how healthily we process our grief, we all need a little extra support; this may be especially true if there has not been a chance to say goodbye due to visiting or funeral restrictions.

When should I worry? When someone close to us dies, we work through several stages which, may

be cause for concern if taken out of context but which are a normal part of grieving.

What should I do? Support the child and their family as they work through their grief. Try to provide a safe space for crying (and laughing) and exploring feelings. The regular support of one or two trusted can help the child to heal. If you have several bereaved children, a peer listening and support group can work well.

Further support

- ▶ Advice, ideas, activities and resources are available via Child Bereavement UK and Winston's Wish: www.childbereavementuk.org www.winstonswish.org

4, Separation anxiety

The problem: We are likely to see higher than usual numbers of children and adults who become very distressed at being apart. This is due to a combination of children being poorly socialised during lockdown while spending more time than usual with one or two key care-givers, coupled with the fear and uncertainty associated with the return to school which may feel unsafe to children and their families.

When should I worry? It is normal for some children to show intense distress briefly when parted from a primary care-giver, but this usually passes quite quickly as they engage with the adults and activities around them. If this distress does not pass and is affecting their ability to ready themselves for learning or play, additional support may be needed. For most this can come from the adults at school, but in more extreme cases the child may have developed separation anxiety disorder which should be referred to CAMHS, a GP or your mental health support team.

What should I do? Support families in the run up to the return to school so that everyone knows what to expect. Encourage families to engage with positive conversations about school with their child and to develop a goodbye ritual that can be swiftly executed without fanfare. A child being met by a consistent adult at school and having a similar “soft landing” each day, engaging with activities they enjoy, can help and many children find comfort in having access to a tangible reminder of their parent. I am a big fan of children carrying a laminated kiss with a message from their primary care-giver.

Further support

- ▶ Beacon House has a range of fabulous resources about trauma and attachment: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/resources/>

5, Academic anxiety

The problem: We are likely to see higher than usual levels of academic anxiety as children return to school. There is likely to be great disparity in how much children have accessed and engaged with the curriculum during lockdown and there will be all sorts of difficult feelings mixed up in this, including guilt, shame, fear or worry. Education may feel disjointed and uncertain. More children than usual may be anxious about their school work and this may play-out in shutdowns, meltdowns or a general inability to meaningfully engage.

When should I worry? Most children will be a little uncertain as learning is re-established and everyone attempts to get back up to speed. For a few, this worry will seem more significant and rather than becoming more settled with increasing access to the learning environment, they may become more and more anxious – this may play out through withdrawal, anger or panic.

What should I do? Try to provide reassurance for all children. Be clear in your expectations of the class and of individuals and help children to understand that everyone is in the same boat and that we will all work together to move forwards. Try to build up children's confidence by providing the chance for success in their learning and build in plenty of nurturing and fun activities to

help them settle and re-engage. Clear and consistent communication with families will also help to dispel any myths and ensure a consistency of expectation.

Further support

- ▶ Young Minds offers excellent support around academic resilience: <https://bit.ly/2UFRNe2>

6, Emotionally based school avoidance/refusal

The problem: We expect to see a rise in emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) in the coming months both from children who have struggled with this in the past as well as new cases, perhaps linked with separation anxiety, academic anxiety or social anxiety.

When should I worry? It is time to worry when a child is significantly distressed by attending school and feels unable to engage. This can be accompanied by distressing or challenging behaviour and the child may not be able to articulate the precise reasons for their feelings. It is easily spotted by a change in attendance, punctuality or behaviour.

What should I do? Try to get to the heart of the issue – avoiding school will be meeting a need. Until we can recognise that need, we are unable to support the child to meet it in a more constructive way. There are many potential reasons – bullying, academic, social or health-related anxieties. Work with the family, as where you find a child with EBSA you often find a parent/carer at their wit's end who feels guilty, ashamed and exhausted but who, with your support, is likely to be the best chance you have. Simple things make a big difference. Small goals, providing a warm welcome each time the child attends, and allowing them regular chances to touch in and emotionally regulate with a trusted adult.

Further support

- ▶ The West Sussex EBSA toolkit provides leaflets for children and families as well as guidance for schools: <https://bit.ly/2AEDvg5>

7, Social difficulties and friendship issues

The problem: Friendship issues are part and parcel of school life ▶



and supporting children to navigate their social world is part of the job for many school staff. However, things may be unusually fraught as children return to school and as they learn to engage and interact with their peers in Covid-safe ways.

When should I worry? As well as a rise in general day-to-day friendship issues, I am expecting to see a spike in cases of social anxiety. When a child's anxiety in social situations is stopping them from engaging in regular activities, then it is time to provide additional support. This might present as lack of engagement in class or seeming withdrawn at breaks and lunch. The child might also seem angry, upset or panicky and work hard to avoid certain situations.

What should I do? For all children, it is important to be clear in our guidance about how it is appropriate to interact to remove any uncertainty or worry. It will also be helpful to provide a little support to help children emotionally regulate around break times. Calming activities or a few minutes when worries can be worked through after breaks can help ready pupils for learning. For those who appear to be developing more debilitating social anxiety, individual support will be necessary.

Further support

▶ Young minds has information and support on the different types of anxiety: <https://bit.ly/2A0dHv4>

8, Gaming addiction

The problem: Gaming provides a fun way to escape from a sometimes-tricky reality, an easy way to fill time and our online personas are not subject to the same restrictions as our "IRL" (in real life) versions. For many children, their online lives will have become more real than their offline lives. This is not a new phenomenon – but I expect to see an increase in this post-lockdown.

When should I worry? I am a big fan of gaming as a way for kids to connect, relax and have fun right now, but for some who will have spent a lot of time gaming, the segue into offline life might feel hard. They may struggle more than others to interact; becoming irritable, anxious or emotional as they miss the "hit" that gaming provides – a form of withdrawal. We may also find that their online life is so integral right now that post-lockdown they will forfeit sleep to get their hit. Like with many issues, the point at which the issue begins to affect children's ability to thrive and engage each day – and if it does not abate with time.

What should I do? Helping all children to understand how to manage their online lives healthily is a good starting point. Help them to understand about the importance of regular sleep and thinking about what reasonable limits in terms of gaming are. Having an open conversation

about their gaming and picking apart what it is they love about it and what keeps them hooked will help you to find some ways forward. It is important to involve the family and not to minimise the issue. Saying "no" may make things worse. Be inquisitive, involve the child and take it slowly.

Further support

▶ The Parent Zone has resources about digital life and gaming: <https://parentzone.org.uk>

9, Sleep difficulties

The problem: It is likely that many children will not be getting optimal sleep, either because of the loss of the school routine or because they are too worried. Good sleep is a fundamental underpinning of good mental and physical health. Making small changes to sleep can often make a big difference to how we feel and our ability to cope with things.

When should I worry? It is to be expected that as children settle back into school they will be more tired than usual due to the change of routine and because school requires a lot of us. So a bit of lethargy is not cause for concern. However, we may need to put in place support for children whose tiredness does eventually dissipate or who seem anxious, hopeless or tearful.

What should I do? Revisit the basics of good sleep hygiene with all children. Everyone will benefit – as will you. Consider what a good sleep routine looks like and help children understand the

fundamental importance of sleep for good mental and physical health. Children who are really struggling, or not trying, to return to usual sleep patterns will often benefit from mentoring or supportive listening, as will those who have low mood or anxiety.

Further support

▶ The Sleep Foundation has good advice and ideas: www.sleepfoundation.org

10, Domestic abuse

The problem: We expect more children to have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse during lockdown and that relatively few of these cases will have been picked up (see article opposite).

When should I worry? Look out for signs that a child has experienced or witnessed abuse of any form. Remember that it is almost as damaging for a child to witness abuse as to be the victim and that abuse is not always physical. Some children will also work hard to hide what is going on but we may pick up on signs of withdrawal, aggression, other changes in behaviour or children taking care to keep their body covered.

What should I do? Ensure that safeguarding training is up-to-date for all staff and that everyone is alert to the potential rise in cases. Teach children about abuse too and give them clear pathways to ask for support. Anytime you suspect things are not right for a child, either reach out to them or escalate the concern. An amazing number of cases go undetected because adults do not follow their gut or they assume that someone else is managing the situation. Follow school procedures. Raise any concerns, no matter how small, with your designated safeguarding lead.

Further support

▶ The NSPCC has advice, resources and support: www.nspcc.org.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION

▶ Knightsmith: *Student wellbeing and issues of mental health, SecEd Best Practice Focus*, February 2020: <http://bit.ly/2SdwRT9>

Domestic violence concerns

There has been a stark increase in reports of domestic violence during lockdown. We must expect to see the impact of this as pupils return to school

By the time they start school, at least one child in every class will have been living with domestic abuse since they were born (SafeLives, 2017). By the time they leave, around one in five children will have experienced it (Radford et al, 2011). And the impact of growing up with domestic abuse is devastating. Action for Children sees the evidence of this every day through the dedicated counselling and family support services we run, as will many teachers and school staff.

Domestic abuse as a child

Children who experience domestic abuse may show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder – having nightmares, flashbacks, headaches and physical pains, and becoming jumpy (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2017). Children affected are also at risk of poor educational outcomes. They are less likely to reach their academic potential and more likely to experience specific learning difficulties like ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia (Byrne & Taylor, 2007; Kiesel et al, 2016).

The impact of Covid-19

The Children's Commissioner for England has estimated that more than 800,000 children are living with domestic abuse. There are fears that the Covid-19 crisis and lockdown could have placed families at even greater risk. Already, we know that there has been a 25 per cent increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline – with Refuge reporting a 700 per cent rise in calls in a single day. This may not reflect the true extent of the problem, with concerns that in lockdown many victims may have been unable to reach out for help.

Schools closing to the majority of children has meant that many are simply not being seen by the professionals who would normally raise child protection concerns. Schools, along with the police and health services, are the top three referrers to children's social care (Action for Children, 2018).

In the first week of April, child protection referrals had fallen by more than 50 per cent in some areas (*Headteacher Update*, 2020).

It is very possible that children who have been affected by domestic abuse during lockdown will be returning to their classrooms without having had the opportunity to speak to an adult they trust about what has been happening at home while they have been away.

Identifying the signs

Signs that a child might be experiencing domestic abuse can include (NSPCC, 2020):

- Difficulty learning.
- Withdrawal.
- Seeking attention.
- Regular sickness, such as headaches and mouth ulcers.
- Aggression or bullying.
- Anxiety, depression or insomnia.
- Eating disorders.
- Drug or alcohol use.

It is important to emphasise that children will react in different ways to what they have experienced, and we must look beyond children's behaviour to try to understand what else may be going on in their lives.

Supporting children

If a child discloses an experience of domestic abuse to you, it is important to emphasise that it is not their fault, let them know that they have done the right thing in telling you, and carefully explain both what you will do next and the fact that you cannot keep it confidential. Different circumstances will require different courses of action, but if a child talks to you about their experiences of domestic abuse, or if you have a reason to believe they are at risk, follow your school's safeguarding procedures. People who are worried about a child can also contact the NSPCC (see further information).

What schools can do

One proactive approach schools can take is linking in with Operation Encompass. The scheme's aim is to ensure that whenever police attend a domestic abuse incident and a child is present, the child's school is

notified. This means teachers will be aware of what has happened and how it might affect the child's wellbeing and learning, and children can then receive suitable support. The government has funded a wider roll-out across England. It is hoped this might overcome children's reluctance to talk about things, particularly if they are worried about the impact of disclosure on the wider family.

It is also helpful to build links with specialist domestic abuse services, so schools can help children access the support they need. For example, Action for Children's counselling service – Breaking the Cycle – is connected with a number of schools in the local area and offers weekly one-to-one counselling sessions held in a safe space, often at school.

Specialist support

Support services can really help. Appropriate, targeted support and intervention has a positive effect on children's outcomes. While not all children who experience domestic abuse need intervention, for those who do, access to meaningful support at a time and in a way that is useful to them is important for their long-term recovery (Action for Children, 2019).

But not all children are able to access such support, and not all schools are able to build links with these services because they simply are not there. There is significant variation in the level of provision for young people affected by domestic abuse. Our research shows that children face barriers to accessing support in at least two-thirds of local authorities; in 10 per cent there are no support services available at all (Action for Children, 2019).

It is clear that specialist services have also been hit by Covid: 60 per cent of the service providers in a recent Women's Aid survey said they had needed to reduce or cancel their service provision for children. The government has announced funding to help but this will not be enough.

As I write, the Domestic Abuse Bill is being debated by MPs. It introduces a statutory definition of

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domestic abuse and proposes a new duty on local authorities to provide support to adult and child victims living in accommodation services, like refuges. This is a positive step, but we are urging the government to extend this duty to cover other forms of support in the community, like counselling, advocacy, and helplines. It is crucial that children are seen as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. We have called on the government to secure this recognition by including children in the definition of domestic abuse in the Bill. Sign up to our campaign at <https://bit.ly/3hWz3uj>

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Anyone worried about a child can contact the NSPCC on 0800 800 500: www.nspcc.org.uk
- ▶ Action for Children: *Patchy, piecemeal and precarious: Support for children affected by domestic abuse*, 2019: <https://bit.ly/3h9gTFg>
- ▶ Action for Children: *Revolving Door: Are we failing children at risk of abuse and neglect?* 2018: <https://bit.ly/2Z2wYUV>
- ▶ *Headteacher Update: Safeguarding: During and beyond the crisis*, April 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Y9R14W>
- ▶ NSPCC: *Coronavirus, lockdown and domestic abuse*, 2020: <https://bit.ly/37WiZEh>
- ▶ Operation Encompass: www.operationencompass.org
- ▶ Radford et al: *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*, NSPCC, 2011: <https://bit.ly/3hYP6b6>
- ▶ Royal College of Psychiatrists: *Domestic violence and abuse*, 2017: <https://bit.ly/3dy9s7w>
- ▶ SafeLives: *Children, young people, and the involvement of Children's Services*, 2017: <https://bit.ly/380TsKi>

The psychological impact

What will the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic be for our older students and what kind of issues can we expect to see as schools re-open further?

The disruptions of lockdown created immediate practical challenges for many adolescents, but the far more profound challenge will be existential.

More or less overnight, the bedrock of life was profoundly changed. Many of the assumptions and expectations that shape teenagers' lives were suddenly swept away. The fragility of our civilisation was starkly exposed. Dealing with that is the real, and greatest, challenge for the young.

Of course, the existential challenge is the same for us all, whatever our age. However, teenagers are in a trickier position. They do not yet have an established adult lifestyle to fall back on. Theirs is the age at which we strive to form an individual identity, a life-plan, hopes and expectations; the age at which we first confront the existential issues of life (Grotevant, 1998).

And it is for this generation of teenagers that the existential issues pose some serious challenges. They face a world where old certainties seem to have crumbled. And they have not the life experience or the resources to give perspective to the situation. So, how can we best offer support?

Don't minimise the practical issues

Many returning to school will have anxieties about practical matters, from basic safety to missed school work, exams, social isolation and so forth. These must be addressed.

There is no one-size-fits-all. The experience of lockdown will have been very different for different teenagers, reflecting the specific circumstances of their family lives. Different families will have provided different degrees of support, and fostered different views of how safe it is to be back at school.

Some individuals will have kept up with friends on social media. Some will have been more isolated – or even bullied online. Some will have had quality family time. Some will have been actively abused –

physically, emotionally or sexually.

Understanding and addressing anxieties and needs at this level will need an alert sensitivity to individuals. Limited resources offer a safe place to talk, be ready to provide practical help.

However, there will be some who seem fine who also need extra support – and this is harder to address. Look out for any subtle signs of distress, provide lots of opportunities for talk (and disclosures), and ensure students know that there is somewhere safe to talk.

Mental health: Be alert

Teenage mental health was not in good shape before the pandemic, with around 10 per cent estimated to suffer from mental health problems (SecEd, 2018). The practical stresses and (more so) the existential challenges of Covid-19 can be expected to exacerbate these problems.

Research into the experience of refugees shows that disruption to everyday life even before the family flees from an unsafe home is associated with worsening mental health in the young (Fanz & Stein, 2002). And while our young were not in anything like the situation of a refugee, they have been subjected to a media cycle relentlessly reporting disease and death from a virus that “will never go away” and predicting economic disaster.

Such coverage affects the young badly, generating anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder even in those far away from the actual disaster – as research after 9/11 showed (Whalley & Brewin, 2007).

Mental health services for the young were desperately stretched before the pandemic. Short of a massive injection of resources, it is hard to see how waiting lists will not get longer and longer.

All schools can do is triage: seek urgent referrals for those slipping into major mental illness or suicidal thoughts, and offer such support as we can to the rest. And

that support will have to be both practical and existential...

The existential issues

As tempting as it is to tell the young that all will soon be “back to normal”, you do them no favours by offering false reassurance. The reality is that we have lived for many decades in a bubble of unusual peace and plenty.

That world cannot continue as it was: it is unsustainable for so many reasons. After this virus is defeated, sooner or later there will be another. Science has been expecting this pandemic and is still predicting a “disease X”. New viruses are ever more common, as we rip up environments and come into closer contact with other species. The international travel we take for granted is not exactly necessary and is why Covid-19 spread so very far and fast.

And then there is climate change, already salient to the young through the efforts of Greta Thunberg et al.

Climate change issues are going to affect how we live in very profound ways during the lifetimes of today's teenagers. Climate, health and economic issues look likely to generate political unrest that may seem far away now, but could so easily come closer to home.

Pretending that none of this is real, that we can go back to the past is a damaging exercise in denial. What our young need, as they form their identities and life-plans, is not false reassurance that the band can go on playing (however heroically), but support in exploring how best to deploy the lifeboats.

False reassurance robs them of the chance to look reality in the eye, take responsibility for the future of our planet, and learn to be resilient.

Put today's disaster in perspective

Having said that, the young need help in gaining perspective in this; they need to talk about their experiences and their existential fears.

As ghastly as it was to be stuck at home for a few months, read the

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Diary of Ann Frank. As frightening as the coronavirus is, it is not going to be as horrific as the Black Death. As awful as it was to be cut off from the luxuries of life, we have not had the rationing that dominated the 1940s and 1950s.

History has so many useful lessons here, putting our own woes into perspective – and offering hope for the future. Today's teenagers are far from the first to be mourned as a “lost generation”. History has unfailingly shown that dire prediction to be wrong.

History shows that what came instead may have been change, but it was seldom loss. History is always, always about change. So often, the ingenuity of the young has created something better for the future, and it will again.

For today's teenagers, this is their chance, in a world that needs to change, to make a better world. Let us support them in believing that: yes they can.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Fanz & Stein: *The mental health of refugee children*, Archives Disease in Childhood 87, 2002.
- ▶ Grotevant: *Adolescent development in family contexts*. In *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Vol 3, 1998.
- ▶ SecEd: *One in eight students have a mental health disorder, official NHS figures confirm*, 2018: <http://bit.ly/2QbgUi3>
- ▶ Whalley & Brewin: *Mental health following terrorist attacks*, British Journal of Psychiatry 190, 2007.

Opportunities to talk

How can we cope with change and uncertainty as we emerge into the ‘new normal’ and how best can we support our younger pupils, including the most vulnerable children?

Change, separation and uncertainty can evoke anxiety, fear and even loneliness. Vulnerable children will be particularly at risk. Some understanding of these stresses and of helpful ways to support and alleviate them will make a big difference.

Our capacity to cope and maintain some resilience will vary. Change and separation often unconsciously evoke feelings connected with earlier transitions. It makes a huge difference whether these feelings were eased and adjusted to through supportive conversations with loved ones who could themselves bear the pain – or whether they were avoided.

Coming out of lockdown

As children return to school in various ways, we can alleviate or exacerbate children's fears and reactivity. Children's responses will vary, but caring adults will notice the signs. Some children may come from families where anxieties have tended to be buried rather than talked through. If things cannot be talked through in a child-centred way, fears and anxieties will be exacerbated.

Other families are highly expressive and reactive. Children may have seen doom-laden news, overheard blaming conversations, or even angry outbursts between triggered parents.

Thus a child may feel squeezed out of their carer's mind. Even in normal times this is quite unbearable. Reactive behaviours will follow. Such children can need to “cling” physically or seek attention with words or cries. They will need help and understanding.

In more extreme cases, anxieties and stresses may have been acted out in violent incidents or with adults “drowning their sorrows”. Such children may have already experienced multiple traumatic losses – as family members stormed out or as they were whipped out of a dangerous situation into a strange new setting. Looked-after children may go in and out of care, sometimes with little warning, making them hyper-vigilant to fears.

Their panic and reactive states may be all too easily triggered in these uncertain times, doubling their anxiety and reactivity.

Conversely, secure parents will naturally have their children in mind. If they observe anxieties they will wonder about them and, if necessary, find a way to talk things through with the child. They will support regressive behaviours and play communications with empathy and thoughtfulness.

In school, significant staff can play a similar role, offering understanding and empathic support. A secure base and a trusted relationship within which to learn may need to be rebuilt. Understanding learning regressions and difficulties will be crucial. Some pupils' capacities for concentrating, thinking and making links with past knowledge may be inhibited, as thinking may feel scary. Stopping to concentrate may risk unbearable memories spilling out.

Opportunities to intervene

The good news is that this “back to school” period will offer many opportunities for empathy and thoughtfulness, and for real and manageable conversations. Even not knowing and uncertainty can be talked about. Providing such opportunities will be necessary.

Planning and thinking together around addressing trauma, both whole school and for individual vulnerable pupils is key. Trauma awareness and a relationship-based approach will be helpful and necessary.

Understanding and thoughtful responsiveness to the most traumatised children and their defensive outbursts will bring the most challenge and stress. Training may be needed, especially for those working with vulnerable pupils.

For all our recovering children, it will be important not to avoid acknowledging difficult feelings and regressed behaviours when a child indicates something is “on their mind”. Taking opportunities to make tentative links between the inevitable acting out behaviours of anxious recovering

children, the strange difficult time we have been going through, and the anxieties of the return and reunion will be important.

Even if we are wrong, and even if they do not want to talk about it at that moment, making these links will enable children to feel thought about, as well as planting a seed in their minds that we can think together about difficult things.

What might we observe?

A useful staff discussion is wondering what sort of behaviours might indicate a child is struggling with anxieties relating to the recent (or indeed other and previous) crises, and all the changes surrounding it. Look out for things like:

- Difficulty engaging with staff they have previously got on well with.
 - Bravado: “I don't need this time/you any more. I'm fine.”
 - Finding it hard to ask for or accept help if they are struggling.
 - Anger with school staff.
 - Anxiety about any school changes or transitions – to lunch or playtime or to the next lesson. Even walking down a crowded corridor may feel unsafe.
 - Metaphorical communications through play or stories, for example about being alone or with family in a strange place, about disasters, or things coming apart.
 - Behaviours themselves might be metaphorical – like losing or forgetting things or “freezing up”.
 - More easily triggered outbursts and less tolerance of frustration.
 - Regressed learning or struggles with work, concentration, thinking or memory.
 - A fear of going outside.
- Just being curious about a child or a child's behaviour demonstrates interest and thoughtfulness and can give them an experience of being taken seriously and thought about.
- When responding to difficult behaviours, setting boundaries or communicating expectations, use “ACO”: Acknowledge the feeling. Communicate the limit or expectation. Offer help or offer

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alternatives. For example: “It's time to stop now. I know you want more time, but we do have to ... We can continue with this tomorrow. I will look after it for you.”

Handling difficult feelings

Regressing to an earlier anxious behaviour may be a way of managing anxiety. I noticed my six-year-old grandson regressing to his three-year-old “dinosaur roars” and he would not look at me when I unexpectedly saw him in the street. This experience left me feeling a bit sad and abandoned, but also with an understanding of how difficult this isolating time must be for him, a little six-year-old who likes doing rather than feeling and who needs to defend himself with powerful dinosaur roars perhaps.

The feelings children evoke in us can be such helpful pointers to understanding their inner worlds. Teachers can watch out for similar “transference” feelings evoked in them by children they are close to – and use them as clues for understanding what is felt but hard to talk about. Helpful tentative conversations may arise from this.

It's good to talk

In school, thoughtful one-to-one (and group) conversations will bring many opportunities for growth. Regular circle time conversations will be helpful for everyone, including those who cannot join in, as they hear others expressing things they cannot yet bear to think about. Talking (and playing) things through, especially when they are “hot” and as often as needed, is how we process things. This could be crucial in ensuring and improving the good mental health of our children.

What signs to look-out for

With lockdown seeing a big drop in the number of referrals, experts expect the return to school to bring with it disclosures and safeguarding concerns

In her 2019 report, *Childhood vulnerability*, the children's commissioner for England estimates that 2.3 million children are at risk because of a vulnerable family background.

Hundreds of children and young people already experience domestic violence, substance misuse, abuse and neglect. The lockdown, with additional financial and social pressures, will have exacerbated their situation and put them at increased risk of new threats.

Most children will have been away from school for nearly six months by the time the new school year starts, so it is inevitable that there will be many safeguarding and wellbeing concerns. Schools must reaffirm routines, re-evaluate core values and recognise that every child matters and must be visible.

New expectations

Every child's story will be different and as such, the support needed will be different. One of the first things schools must do is welcome the children back. This reconnection can be started before the children return with a newsletter or welcome wall on the website.

Tell the children and parents what the school environment will look like; think about what extra support will be needed for some children. Consult with staff and let them freely express any concerns or ideas.

Give the children and teachers time to adapt to their new surroundings; this is going to be particularly important for vulnerable pupils. Let the children have time to talk and reconnect with friends.

It is important pupils have the time and opportunity to tell their story and reflect on it, and feel comfortable to talk about fears, hopes and dreams. This might be via class activities or as individuals; verbally or in art and drawings. It should not be forced. Creating an environment where there is time for laughter, fun and expression will help pupils feel safe and ready to learn. Pastoral support should be built into the day. Careful listening and watching is essential.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding duties remain the same and schools must continue to have regard for the statutory safeguarding guidance. The priority is to ensure that the child protection policy and procedures are up-to-date. There is no need to rewrite the current policy, but it is important to ensure all staff understand any coronavirus addendums that have been added, along with any temporary changes to practice. Additions should reflect:

- Any changes in the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy arrangements.
- Arrangements in place to keep children safe who may not physically attend school.
- Any revised information from local safeguarding partners.
- Update of service provision by the local authority regarding Education, Health and Care Plans, social care, reporting mechanisms, thresholds, and Children in Need.
- Any alterations to attendance procedures.

The general principles of safeguarding remain the same: always put the best interests of children first and if anyone has a safeguarding concern, they should follow the school's child protection policy. All staff and volunteers must have access to a trained DSL or deputy on any given day and know who that person is and how to speak to them.

Threats and risks

What schools will have to deal with is an unknown. Throughout lockdown, concerns have been raised about children who already experience or are at risk of abuse or neglect and their inability to escape their abuser/s. Many of these issues would not be known to social care.

During lockdown the number of child protection referrals reduced, so as schools return the number of disclosures is expected to peak.

Schools should expect to see an increase in children and young people who have experienced domestic and family conflict,

domestic violence, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, or exploitation.

Meanwhile, the temptation to go online has increased for us all. Social media has enabled us to keep up with friends and family. Children are mirroring this behaviour, spending more time online to socialise, do their school work and explore. Having more time on their hands and being unsupervised can lead to risk-taking behaviours, putting them in danger of grooming and exploitation.

During lockdown, the Internet Watch Foundation blocked more than 8.8 million attempts by UK internet users to access images and videos of child sexual abuse. There has been an increase in people accessing pornography and gambling sites. Addictive behaviours expected to rise include gambling, pornography and alcohol abuse.

A family's reduced income and family break down will have made it easier for organised crime groups to target and recruit a child or young person. Schools should be aware of why any young person has not returned to school. Children missing education can be an indicator of a child being a victim of exploitation.

Impact on mental health

Many children and adults will be unsettled, while others will experience poor mental health which may require specialist support. Pastoral support will be essential.

Many children have been isolated and living in cramped conditions. Without a support network, self-harming is expected to have increased. Those already struggling with eating disorders and OCD may have had their conditions exacerbated.

Young people will be concerned about their education and futures, the impact on their friendship groups, and how they will cope with returning to structure and normal routines.

The impact will vary but many children will experience: anxiety and depression, a sense of fear and uncertainty, mood swings,

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separation anxiety, loneliness and being more introverted.

During lockdown, the NSPCC carried out around 17,000 counselling sessions over seven weeks with children concerned about their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Support should include any existing provision. Do you have counsellors, mental health first aiders or student welfare officers available? Sometimes a friendly face is all that is needed but on other occasions further services are required and referral to appropriate support should be made.

There are several techniques that can help. Body mapping is an easy and friendly way for children to identify feelings and physical sensations. The blob tree is also a simple tool that helps deal with feelings. Breathing exercises will help a child to regulate their breathing and relax, such as the 4-7-8 technique (see online).

Bereavement and loss

Figures from Child Bereavement UK show that 111 children are bereaved of a parent every day. If we add grandparents, friends and relatives this rises even further.

An increase in the death rate during the pandemic is going to have huge impact on every school. There will be feelings of loss, anger, sadness, and longing.

Everyone deals with death of a loved one differently. Many families will not have been able to say goodbye to loved ones or attend funerals. Children need clear information using age-appropriate language that is not overwhelming.

You do not have to have all the answers, but you should offer acceptance and reassurance. The Winston's Wish charity has a bank of useful resources (see online).

What will school 'feel like'?

What does school need to 'feel like' for pupils and what needs to happen now so that we can support a safe return? The SWAN framework could help your school's planning

In order to support the wider re-opening of schools, I developed the SWAN framework – not to tell you what to do, but rather to provide a scaffold and springboard for your thinking, discussions and preparation as we enter the next phase of the pandemic.

This framework aims to consider what school needs to feel like for children and adults as we return and considers what needs to happen now to enable us to build strong adults of the future as well as enabling us to navigate the coming months safely and sensitively.

The choice of the word swan was very deliberate, as in my training I often tell adults of the need to be the swan who appears to glide effortlessly across the water despite the fact they are frantically paddling beneath the surface.

In difficult moments, children need the adults around them to "be the swan" – they need us to appear cool calm and collected, even if right now there is a whole lot of frantic paddling going on. The framework invites you to consider four elements of your approach: **Safe, Welcome, All together, Nurturing.**

Safe

We think first of safety. Always. Right now this refers heavily to physical safety. The need to ensure that we have appropriate measures in place to keep our children and their families safe is of fundamental importance.

It is also crucial that this is communicated well with families

to give them confidence in sending their children to school. The feeling of physical safety will come long before pupils cross the school's threshold.

As well as physical safety, about which there has been, and will be, much guidance, we also need to create emotional, social and cognitive safety. Children will arrive at school carrying a lot of different feelings with them and we need to create an environment where they are enabled to feel and explore those different feelings without fear of judgement or going unheard.

Social safety matters too and we need to consider what our new norms for communication and interaction should look like and how we convey these to our children in order to help them understand how they need to behave in this strange new world. Uncertainty breeds fear and anxiety, so thinking carefully about simple things like how we will greet one another can help children to feel more secure and safe.

Finally, cognitive safety matters. How do we support learners to feel confident in the classroom? There is likely to be great uncertainty and a lot of variation in how much learning pupils have done during lockdown. What can we do to boost and build learner confidence as we come back together?

Welcome

Next we consider how to ensure that every learner, family member and staff member feels welcome at school. How can we create a warm

and welcoming environment that tells our whole community "we're delighted that you're here, we're so excited to have you back!"?

School can bring a real sense of purpose and belonging, both crucial for our wellbeing and likely cornerstones of recovery for the population at large, so ensuring that our community feels warmly welcome here, in spite of social distancing rules, really matters.

All together

In order to make this work, we need to be in it all together, in particular we will need to work closely with families. Families will have a lot of questions, worries and ideas and it is important that they feel heard as part of the process of wider school re-opening. Working together with families to ensure that the big questions get answered, uncertainties addressed and that children get a consistency of approach and messaging will enhance the chance of success for learners and for families and staff too.

We should also work closely with any other adults or services involved in the welfare of our pupils to ensure a successful return for those with a variety of needs. We need to pay them extra attention, just as we would prepare extra carefully for transitioning children with special or additional needs.

We will need also to consider carefully how best to support those pupils who previously experienced emotionally based school avoidance or who are identified as at risk now. Working with families, non-judgementally as a team around and with the child, is a crucial starting point here.

Nurture

My plea to all educators is to consider how we can adapt our curriculum and approach to look first to provide nurture, laughter, safety and connection for our pupils.

We will continue to experience a lot of challenges and it is unreasonable to expect our pupils and staff simply to pick our pens

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back up and continue with our learning. Learning matters and there may be much ground to make up, but just as it can take a few minutes to settle a class and create readiness for learning after a lunch break, it is going to take a while now too. Maybe weeks, maybe months, maybe years for some.

That does not mean that no learning happens, but it might mean that we change speed or approach a little – thinking less about how we can support pupils to jump through the next testing hoops and asking instead how we can help to rebuild their foundations, which have been thoroughly shaken; how can we create a readiness for learning and for life that will stand them in good stead for the medium and long term.

Conclusion

These concepts are purposefully broad and non-prescriptive but I hope that they will help you think. As you work through the framework, take care to think about it in relation not only to your pupils but their families and your staff too. Everybody matters here and we truly are stronger together.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ If you would like to visit this topic in a little more depth, you can complete Pooky's video-based elearning course focused on using the SWAN framework, which takes less than an hour to complete: <https://bit.ly/3eSEDeX>
- ▶ You can also download a discussion guide to support your reflections: <https://bit.ly/2Y5lwqB>



SEN students and masking

Away from the academic and social pressures of school life, many SEN children have flourished during home education. But what happens when they return to school?



Every child is unique and one size does not fit all – both statements with which we are all too familiar in the world of SEND and which are very relevant to children in lockdown.

Some parents report children who are all too happy to have an extended holiday, motivated after an initial period of resistance to keep up with school work and loving having permission to use more technology to “Zoom” their friends. Also excited to have the opportunity to do more outdoor activities in their daily exercise slot and to explore nature.

Others report confused children, unsettled and craving the routine of the school day, bored and frustrated that they cannot get out to play and see their friends, spending too much time gaming, and reluctant (sometimes aggressively so) to do any school work.

The group of children who have come to our attention are those with a specific learning difficulty whose daily meltdowns at home during the school term have decreased and even, in some cases, stopped. These are the children who mask.

We all mask to try and protect ourselves if we do not feel comfortable in a situation or an environment. In her book *The Billionaire Buddha* (2019), Jane Monica-Jones states: “We put on masks we believe will be more acceptable to the world than the truth of who we are. In doing so we sacrifice the gift of self-acceptance.”

These children manage to develop coping strategies to get through the school day. They hold it together, they don’t act up and often withdraw into themselves to escape notice, or retreat to a place of safety in school. They return home exhausted and very fragile from keeping up a pretence.

At home, they are with the people closest to them and one tiny incident, even a wrongly chosen word, unleashes a monumental meltdown – described in *The Reason I Jump: The inner voice of a 13-year-old boy with autism* (2013) by Naoki Higashida as a “tsunami”.

This can last a significant amount of time and adversely affect the whole family, leaving them tired, disillusioned, and worse, in conflict.

What are the elements of the school day that makes it so hard for these children? Here we need to look at both the academic and the social.

Even before arriving at school, they will have faced challenges including the discomfort some find with the feel of school uniform, personal organisation in order to prepare for the day, the journey to school, being greeted by peers or, worse still, coping with a school bus, on which they may well be isolated.

Academically

Getting organised, understanding and previewing time, processing language, following a sequence of instructions, maintaining attention when they have lost the thread due to unfamiliar vocabulary, completing work in the allotted

time, reading, spelling, handwriting and getting their thoughts onto paper at the risk of revealing, through their mistakes, how much they are struggling...

Anxiety levels heighten as they try to process the information around them and this further exacerbates their ability to think clearly and retrieve information from their long-term memory. Problems can be magnified by the groups in which they are asked to work in order to receive the support they need, especially if they contain more rowdy pupils. They struggle to express themselves and worry about what the others think of them.

Socially

Peer pressure, feeling they do not fit in and getting it wrong in the playground, understanding boundaries, establishing friendships, understanding social rules that make no sense to them, and coping with subtle bullying which often goes unnoticed...

Many of these children and their parents will dread a return to school and the accompanying worries. Not because they do not like their teachers or respect the learning, but because they will have to put on their metaphorical masks and once again pretend all is right with the world.

“Many of these children and their parents will dread a return to school and the accompanying worries”

In lockdown, many will not have had issues with self-acceptance; their family make allowances for their mistakes and have learnt to understand their idiosyncratic take on life. As teachers, we need to be aware of what is going on and make them feel safe so that they can “unmask”. Parents need our support and understanding,

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especially at this time when getting a diagnosis of needs has become such a prolonged procedure.

Supporting transition

- Be proactive – send out a welcoming letter and an outline of any changes, especially if they are going into a new class or starting secondary school. A photo and a short message from their new teacher in their new classroom reduces anxiety,
- Acknowledge their anxieties and how hard it will be for them to return and rejoin their peers. Be alert to any playground and friendship issues, especially the resurgence of any bullying.
- Re-establish routines to lessen the demands on their working memory and make them feel more secure.
- Prepare rather than repair: Understand their needs and put strategies and resources in place such as visual prompts, cue cards and writing frames.
- Consider seating and grouping carefully. Establish a buddying system for all pupils.
- Ensure there are opportunities for the pupil, parent, teacher and teaching assistant to share concerns and resolve difficulties. A debriefing session with the pupil during the day to celebrate successes and talk through any anxieties prior to going home is helpful.
- Recognise that these children will get extra tired and will only be able to concentrate for short periods. Build-in extra learning breaks and gradually extend their periods of concentration. Time out in the classroom with a relaxing activity is restorative. Exercise is vital.

Relationships will be key...

As we begin to think about all pupils returning in September, one school’s approach is to prioritise relationships – both with pupils and their families...

There is an expression: “You never know what goes on behind closed doors.”

This went round and round in my head when we were moving into lockdown. How on earth do you look after children and staff when you are all locked in your homes?

We faced losing control of four essentials: curriculum, relationships, safeguarding and wellbeing. I decided that the best thing was to start from the beginning. I imagined that there had never been a school and that I was setting up a new online school from scratch. This helped us to innovate.

We then planned to address these four core areas. Online learning would be from 8:30am to 3:30pm, all subjects covered, all necessary resources (PE equipment and laptops) sent home for children. Teachers welcome the children every morning and create a routine for them.

We ensured much of the learning would encourage the children to go out for walks and do things (collect items, place items for others to find, science experiments, looking out for neighbours, etc). This meant the children would be out each day and “seen” by neighbours. Then they would video all they do and upload to the classroom allowing the staff to “see” them daily.

Where anyone had concerns about a family I would intervene immediately, offering support (food, money, resources, respite, domestic abuse support, health advice and more).

Weekly online staff meetings meant we could share who we were worried about, who we had not heard from for a day and chat to each other. Teaching assistants were phoning children daily for chats, and the senior leaders were phoning staff for chats and to check in. A WhatsApp Wellbeing Group was a great daily support for staff too.

So why am I sharing this now? Too little, too late you shout! No – it is the principles we must carry forward with us to September.



We must accept that children have had a very different experience over the last few months and that this will probably continue for at least another term.

The constant communication with them means we have a good idea of what they have been “learning”, experiencing, feeling and what concerns they may have about returning.

The emails back and forth to parents on a weekly basis means we have gone from 20 per cent response rates to 100 per cent in a few weeks. We now have clear communication with parents and they are opening up about their experiences, feelings and concerns.

The principle to hold on to here is one of asking questions and listening to the answers – from the children and the parents. We cannot assume that we know how anyone is feeling or what trauma may have been experienced – but we can find out by offering multiple opportunities for them to share with us their experiences.

It took some weeks of emails with parents for some of them to “open up” and to be honest about the difficulties they have been experiencing. This fact must be acknowledged when we return – it may take weeks for real feelings and concerns to be aired. Therefore it is key to provide many opportunities for this to happen.

We must build up those relationships again with children and parents then offer to listen time and time again. Relationships are the key to success in September.

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...is executive headteacher at Crowcombe Primary School (key stage 2) and Stogumber Primary School (Reception, key stage 1) in Somerset

You know your children. Behaviour will tell you if they are anxious or suffering. Poor behaviour, angry outbursts, disengaged and quiet pupils will alert you that something is wrong. When children do not have the emotional intelligence to tell you how they feel is it up to us to scaffold by talking and giving them the language, as well as time to think and time to communicate. Lots of one-to-one chats, circle time, group work and free time to think; activities that allow them to consider their thoughts and feelings; the language offered to allow them to speak; time to listen and reflect on what others say.

“Poor behaviour, angry outbursts, disengaged and quiet pupils will alert you that something is wrong”

We know when working with anyone who has experienced trauma, violence, emotional neglect, bereavement, fear and loss that time is the great healer. Time to think, time to talk, time to see that all will be okay.

Rushing in to the academic curriculum is stripping away the time they need, so allow yourselves some weeks to address the “time” issue and when you feel secure in the knowledge that those signs of trauma are no longer present, only then it is time to “learn” again. Without wellbeing, safety, security, and love, we know the children will not be able to learn anyway.

It's a form of communication

We expect to see challenging behaviours from students as they return to school. The River Tees Multi-Academy Trust is considering a number of approaches

For Sarah Birch, regional standards leader at River Tees Academy Trust alternative provision in Middlesbrough (@SlBirchBirch), behaviour is a form of communication.

As such, any attempt to understand and promote certain behaviour trends needs to understand the importance of communication – particularly as we consider recalibrating behaviours in relation to the post-lockdown learning environment.

River Tees is a MAT in the North East consisting of primary, special and secondary schools. The trust has four alternative provision academies and an extensive Home and Hospital Teaching Service in Middlesbrough.

During a recent virtual workshop at #CelebrateEd – the annual Schools North East celebration of education – Sarah said: “Take a moment to consider how the lockdown has affected your own emotions, your wellbeing, your eating patterns, your social habits and your lifestyle choices. It was probably a rollercoaster of emotions. Some of these will have been positive and enjoyable, others not so. This will be the same for every student who attends your school.”

Fight or flight

During Sarah's workshop, we were reminded of how many of us now feel that our safety has been compromised if someone enters our physical space. And we communicate this perceived threat through our behaviour.

She said: “Physiologically, when we perceive threat, our bodies respond by going into fight, flight or freeze mode. This is the same for the learners we teach.” Sarah advises us to question the motives behind the behaviours within our classrooms. Extend this to parents and carers too.

Pushing your buttons

Consider which behaviours in the classroom trigger your emotional responses – giving you that “how dare you” moment. In his book, *When the Adults Change Everything*

Changes (2017), Paul Dix discusses the significance of emotional triggers and how pupils will press these.

It is important for teachers to understand their own emotional triggers – those motivators and areas of sensitivity which lead us to direct an emotional reaction rather than an informed response.

How will you respond?

Post-lockdown, staff at River Tees have explored how to plan responses to situations that are likely to raise anxiety levels in the classroom and provoke emotionally driven responses.

Sarah and her team presented the example of a year 6 child who is likely to be feeling anxious, stressed and uncared for as they get to gates. They may be running late, not paying attention to safety instructions, or distracted in lessons. How might we frame our responses if pupils miss their staggered start time or forget about handwashing?

- “Good morning. It's nice to see you back. Things are a bit different and we all need to get here for our start time. Can you try and help mum get you here a few minutes earlier tomorrow?”
- “Before going to class you need to wash your hands so we don't spread germs to our friends.”

One area where it may be helpful to prepare our responses and work through these with colleagues will be how to react if and when students use the virus as part of misbehaviour.

For example, pupils who do not fully understand the severity of the virus may deliberately provoke a response from adults or peers by ignoring hygiene rules or invading the space of others. We know, on occasions, that pupils will push emotional triggers by way of distracting adults or teachers.

Consider how you might plan to respond to these situations. Paul Dix, behaviour guru at Pivotal Education, provides a range of resources and tips for de-escalating scenarios whereby pupils push our emotional buttons. Consider the tone of voice, your body language and plan in advance for these moments.

Rebuilding relationships

It is vital we meet the needs of the individual learners before we start with teaching. Top of the list, is rebuilding relationships. Students will not have been in groups or with their peers for months and therefore these relationships will need to be re-established. Making time for talk and plenty of opportunities for “re-socialisation” will be key.

Social bubbles

Many schools will be using the social bubble approach, grouping learners and refusing to allow mixing between groups. Prior to learners coming back, start with some remote activities and interactive learning in your “social bubble”. This will build relationships between the students in the group.

Be creative – remote PE sessions, a simple science experiment, some general quizzes, or some wellbeing or PSHE-style activities. For younger learners, you could start a class story with you reading aloud to them so that they want to return to school to hear what happens next.

When back in school, one of the first activities you might do is create and set-out expectations with an updated set of class rules. Create these together and discuss the language (keep it positive) and the “why” behind the rules.

If students are not complying then it is important to give a reminder with the consequence – if you continue, then “x” will happen. I find it is powerful when you are establishing the rules to discuss what you, as a class, feel would be a fair consequence and then you can remind the students that they chose the consequences.

Quick behaviour tips

Choose your moment: For some minor behaviours, it may not be the time to address them in front of the class. In these cases, it is important that the student and the others in the room understand that it has been noted. A simple instruction of “I am choosing to ignore that behaviour at this moment” sends out this message to all learners.

Sean Harris

...is area director for *Ambition Institute* and a vice-chair of governors in Northumberland. Read his previous articles at <http://bit.ly/2KIDQqc> Follow him @SeanHarris_NE

Praise positive behaviour: If most of the class is compliant, rather than focusing on the one learner not doing the right thing, reward the others with simple praise of their behaviour.

Clear directions: Keep the directions simple. A lot will have changed and the rules of school conduct and behaviour will look very different. The students need time to process the directions you are giving. Simple choices are also key. Ensure the two choices are both possible and things you want to happen: “Jonny, choose to use hand sanitizer or choose to wash your hands at the sink.”

Describe the behaviour: “You have not washed your hands.” “You are not on your marker.” Simply describing the behaviour often removes the confrontation which can occur when telling a child to stop but still communicates the message.

Body language: Body language is a big part of communication so stand tall, shoulders back and be assertive (not aggressive). If the students sense through your body language that you are anxious and scared, it will affect their behaviour. Non-verbal communication is vital too. The majority of a message is perceived through actions rather than words. This is why we model the expectation as well as stating it.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- ▶ Pivotal Education: *Consistent, calm adult behaviour*, Paul Dix: <https://bit.ly/31ppWML>