

Educational Psychology Service

# Wellbeing and Recovery

## Early Years



June 2020



**Returning to settings/school following Covid-19**



West Berkshire  
COUNCIL

# WELLBEING and RECOVERY

Returning to settings/school following Covid-19

West Berkshire Educational Psychology Service  
June 2020



*Covid-19 has been a unique experience in our history and continues to have an uncertain road map. This guidance endeavours to bring together information and resources that will be helpful as children and young people begin returning to nurseries, schools, and other settings in a host of ways.*

*The ideas and resources within this document have been carefully researched and coordinated by the West Berkshire Educational Psychology Service. Our hope is that these practical suggestions will make it easier for staff to keep a focus on wellbeing during this transition period. As dedicated staff you have reached out to and supported hundreds of children, young people, and their families during the most uncertain of times and for this we will always be grateful.*

*Warm wishes,*



*Dr Michelle Sancho*

*Principal Educational Psychologist and SEMH & Wellbeing Service Manager*

## Key Concepts

### Transition

Each person, adult and child, will have their own unique experiences and emotions related to lock-down and Covid-19. The impact the pandemic has on a school community will be different for every setting and we urge you to keep your individual circumstances in mind as you plan to welcome children and young people back in greater numbers. It will be important to view this time as a **transition** period, which we recognise as a process rather than a single event. Research supports what we already know that an individual's experiences of transition can have a powerful and long-lasting effect on academic outcomes (Alexander, Entwisle and Horsey, 1997; Gutman, Sameroff and Cole, 2003) as well as have an impact upon self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. School staff can help to create classroom and school environments that provide reassurance, for example, how they are following the latest government and scientific guidelines, and make expectations clear about how we can all look after ourselves and each other. This may take time and it is important for us to hold on to the idea of a **transition period** as we develop new ways of learning together in the aftermath, rather than rushing or putting unnecessary pressure on ourselves or each other to 'feel or get back to normal'.

### Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back and cope with all the ups and downs of life. It only develops in the face of adversity.

Rebecca Solnit (2009) used case studies of disasters to argue that emergencies are not just moments when bad things get worse, or when people inevitably become more scared, suspicious and self-centred. Instead she described the ways in which disasters open up human reserves of improvisation, solidarity and resolve, pockets of purpose and joy, even in the midst of loss and pain. Solnit's book was not a call to celebrate disaster – but to pay attention to the possibilities it might contain.

*“Human beings reset themselves to something altruistic, communitarian, resourceful and imaginative after a disaster, we revert to something we already know how to do.”*

### Will our children and young people have experienced trauma?

An event in which a person is exposed to actual or **threatened** death, serious injury, or sexual violence has the potential to be traumatic, hence some children and young people will have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic as traumatic, this will, in part, be linked to how much media they have consumed and how the adults around them have responded to the pandemic, for instance, the children of front line key workers will have had a different experience to those whose parent/s have been working at home. Some children and young people will have experienced some negative, uncomfortable or sad times and there will be others who will have enjoyed many aspects of lock-down. Most children and young people, like the adults around them, will have experienced the pandemic with mixed experiences and emotions – they have not seen their wider family and friends but have perhaps enjoyed a simpler

schedule. The broad phases of trauma recovery can offer a useful framework for most children and young people when thinking about what they may need during this transitional period.

1. **Safety and Stabilisation**
2. **Remembrance and Mourning**
3. **Reconnection and Integration**

**What can settings/schools do to help children and young people return smoothly to school?**

## 1. **Safety and Stabilisation**

*‘The most important thing for a child is to feel safe and secure. If that has been taken away from the child, it is up to the parents and adults to bring them back to being children again’ (Baron, 2004 for Unicef)*

Many children will have mixed feelings about leaving the safety and security of home. They may well have received explicit and/or implicit messages that groups of people and leaving the home are dangerous – attending school/setting involves both. Research from Oxford University found that a fifth of primary aged children have felt scared to leave their home during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Weale, 2020)

We must focus on creating an environment that feels safe and gives children and young people a reason to want to attend:

### **Welcome**

Before, during and after they return. Help children and young people to feel kept in mind, missed and that you’re pleased to see them again.

### **Connect**

Focus on re-connecting and developing relationships.

### **Time and space to listen and share**

Be interested in their point of view and experiences (keep child centred). Ensure they have not got misunderstandings linked to ‘fake news’, ‘misheard news’ or differing viewpoints. Talk about it, **normalise** it, help them manage their emotions and return to a state of calm.

## **Balance the curriculum, the relationships and creative activities**

Ensure there is time in the curriculum for play, recreational activities, physical exercise and creative tasks (art, writing, drama, music, DT, investigations, crafting...)

## **Open and honest communication**

...with children and young people and their parents (many who will naturally be highly protective)

## **Wellbeing and Hope**

Actively focus upon principles of wellbeing, promoting hope including healthy eating, sleep, exercise, gratefulness, relaxation, purposeful activity and fun. ([www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org))

## **2. Remembrance and Mourning**

When children and young people feel safe (to avoid triggering ‘fight or flight’) give them the time and space to remember the experiences they have had – good and bad. Allow them to put emotions into words, colours and actions (etc.). Obviously the whole school community or the individual pupil may have an experience of bereavement and loss which will need to be acknowledged and supported.

## **3. Re-connection and Integration**

The need for relatedness is considered a basic human psychological need (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and adequate social support has been found to moderate the impact of stress on health (Dumont and Provost, 1999). Facilitating a sense of connectedness where children feel they are genuinely cared about, wanted, listened to and supported can positively impact on their engagement, achievement and emotional wellbeing (Keay, Lang and Frederickson, 2015).

The experiences of the pandemic both good and bad will become part of all our stories. Sharing these experiences with people they trust cannot be underestimated. Teachers hold a unique position in the lives of many children, young people and their families; this can feel like a weighty responsibility the impact of which should not be underestimated. We would urge all staff to: take their own wellbeing seriously and to conceptualise their role as walking alongside children and young people rather than being responsible for ‘fixing’ them.

## How are children going to cope with returning to their setting/school?

*'The experience of emotional overwhelm is similar to that of a shaken bottle of soda. Inside the bottle is a tremendous amount of pressure. The safest way to release the pressure is to open and close the cap in a slow, cautious and intentional matter so as to prevent an explosion.'* (Rothschild, 2010)

All children are different. They have different personalities and different experiences of what school and home mean to them. There are a range of factors which will influence how each and every child will cope with the transition, for instance, their interaction with:

- the change of environment.
- the change of expectations and demands.
- their sense of belonging.
- their sense of control and self-efficacy.
- changes to routine and structure.
- a return to academic challenges (*school will prompt a huge range of feelings – competent, clever, stupid, average, failure, slow, quick, valued*).
- a return to a complex social situation.

For some children school has been their place of safety, where they have friends, are treated with positive regard, where they feel successful and happy. For others school represents bullying or feeling like a failure. However, children and young people previously felt about their school/setting most will have experienced more control over the minutia of their lives – going to the toilet without asking, having a snack when hungry and sharing more time with their parents. Most will have had more free time and less academic demands; however, they may have also felt a wider loss of control due to the pandemic guidelines and restrictions. Many will have been party to stresses of the adult world via the news or in the home – bereavement, loss of jobs and income.

Inevitably there will be tensions when children return – should the school focus upon the lost learning time and making up lost ground or focus on wellbeing? Our hope is that schools/settings can do both but will put wellbeing at their heart.

Some groups to be especially aware of are:

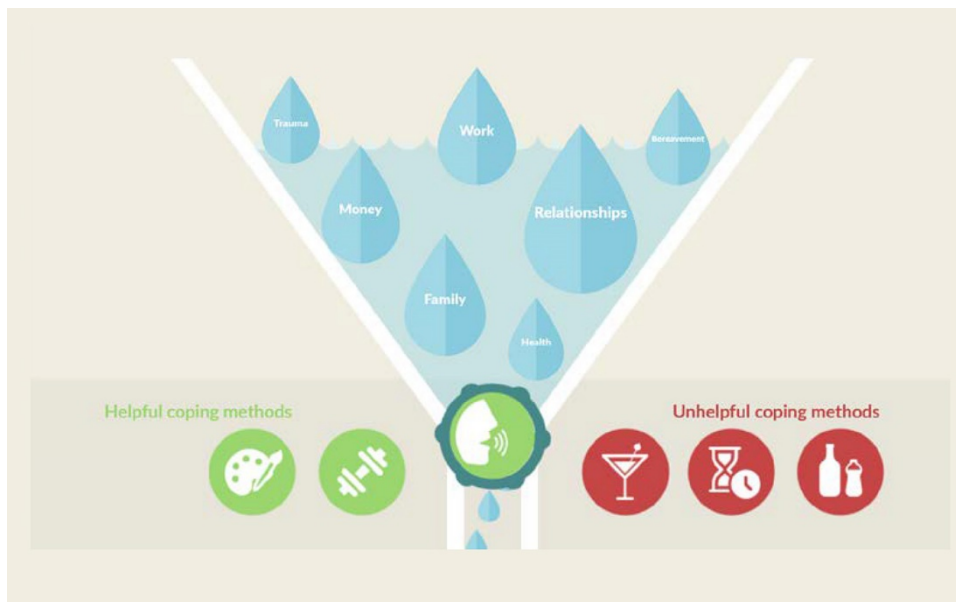
- Children who have experienced significant loss or bereavement.
- Children who have been shielding during the pandemic as a result of underlying health conditions, and siblings of those who have been shielding, whose experience of lockdown will have been even more restricted.
- Children with ASD.
- Children with other known special educational needs or disabilities.
- Children with existing social, emotional and mental health needs (some might have EHCPs that identify this as an area of special educational need that requires intensive support).

- Children who are Looked After, Children in Need or subject to a Child Protection Plan.
- Children who came under Refugee and/or Asylum Seeker status who may have previous experiences of trauma.

## Recovery

Recovery means different things to different people in different contexts. For us it involves **hope, acceptance and engagement, connectedness and self-determination** (selected from Piat et al 2009). Recovery doesn't mean you are exactly the same at the end as at the beginning. All our experiences change us and recovery means we are able to cope with the ups and downs of life and have some enjoyment along the way.

## Look After Yourself



<https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/resources/address-your-stress/stress-container-resource-download.pdf>

## Returning to their setting/school – a practical overview

- Many children and young people, parents and staff are likely to have heightened anxiety about returning to school – help them feel welcome and safe; listen to their concerns, normalise and reassure.
- Welcome them back – give them a reason to want to return.
- Re-establish relationships and routines.
- Keep a broad view of what ‘learning’ means. Take time to understand what they have been learning at home – how to make a cup of tea, be more independent...
- Aim for informal rather than formal assessments – try to keep it light.
- Give everyone the time and space to share and normalise their experiences – be particularly alert to a host of safeguarding issues exacerbated by lock-down.
- If necessary, take time to mark and celebrate the lives of those who died.
- Be clear if staff have changed jobs or children and young people have moved house.
- Routines are reassuring but try to increase the creativity and fun offering space to reconnect and enjoy school life together.
- Be aware that children and young people may need to feel a heightened sense of control over what is happening to them, shine a light on the many choices and control, no matter how small, they have over themselves and their daily lives
- Keep a focus upon wellbeing of staff and children alike.

### References:

Information in this guidance has been influenced by:

[www.trauma-informed.ca](http://www.trauma-informed.ca)

<https://www.seainclusion.co.uk/post/the-many-problems-of-returning-to-school>

The Adopter Hub – School Transitions Webinar – Dr Georgina Hibbert

[https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_23470.html](https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_23470.html)

[www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)

<https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/resources/>

Transition, Recovery and Learning in the aftermath by Bi-Borough EPCS (April 2020)

Promoting Positive Transitions during and after the Covid-19 crisis by Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service (May 2020)



# Promoting Wellbeing and Recovery - Resources

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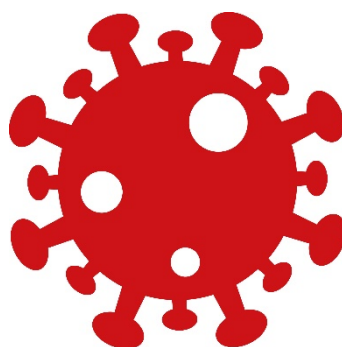
*All these activities should be used in accordance with the current government guidance.  
Please see <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>*

## Key Phrases

### Clear understanding of the Virus

Some people are getting ill with Coronavirus/Covid-19. It doesn't seem to make children ill but it can make adults ill, especially if they are very old. Doctors and nurses are doing everything they can to help people get better.

When some people get Coronavirus their bodies stop working and they die. This can be sad and scary. Most people get well and lots of people do not even have to see the doctor or go to the hospital. We do what we can to keep well, like washing our hands and keeping our distance from people.



### Giving bad news – words and phrases to adapt

I have something important to tell you. B is feeling X. The doctors and nurses are working really hard to help her get better and we are hoping she will get well soon.

I have something very sad and difficult to tell you. B died. She had X. Nurses and doctors worked hard but the illness was too strong and her body could not get better and she died.

Sometimes someone dies before they are old because of an accident or a bad illness and that's what's been happening for some people with Covid-19. Mostly older people have died but some younger people have died too which can be scary. Try to remember people will mostly die once they are very old and that lots of people who get the Coronavirus get better.

Sadly X has died, everyone wishes they had not died and had lived for many more years but their body stopped working and they have died.

We are healthy and we are going to try and stay that way. That is why we are washing our hands, keeping our distance from people and hardly going out to try and stop ourselves and others from getting the Coronavirus.

## Comments that help children feel held in mind

### Remembering and recalling...

- I remember we spoke about that yesterday
- I remember we played that yesterday
- I remember you like.....
- I was thinking about what you did yesterday...
- How was the trip...
- How is your sister/pet....
- Did you remember to water your plant?



### Thoughtful comments...

- I was wondering how you would be today after....
- I think that might be a little hard. Do you want to try first or...
- We've got to tidy up in 10 minutes so I was thinking...
- I'll go with you the first time until you....

### Maintenance, independence, trust

- I'm going to leave you here and go to the climbing frame I'll come back in 5 minutes
- I'm just going to.....I'll come and see how you're getting on when I get back
- I'm just going to help... I'll come and check on you in X minutes

## Staff Wellbeing

1. The **British Psychological Society** (BPS) has outlined the importance of developing staff resilience and this can be achieved by following 3 key principles:

### Encourage a sense of belonging

- Head teachers/Managers to check-in with staff regularly.
- Ensure social support - Use online technology to create a 'virtual staff room' where teachers/support staff can chat and check-in with each other. Keep talking to each other even if it cannot be face to face.
- Be clear about the difference between times when staff should attend the virtual staffroom e.g. whole staff briefings, and times where it is optional.
- Create 'buddy networks' so teachers/support staff have a small network of individuals they can contact when needed and have regular check-ins on wellbeing.

### Promote help-seeking

- Senior management to model help-seeking behaviours.
- Enable staff to have a voice – actively encourage staff to share their views and their stories.
- Give time, space and permission for everyone to seek help when they need it.

### Support learning and development

- Recognise reflective conversations as learning opportunities.
- Engage in initiatives that promote team reflection.
- Provide opportunities to trial solution-focused approaches to focus on what is working well.

## 2. Create a collective culture for well-being

- Recognition events
- Staff "wins for the week" notice board
- Coffee break / drop in time
- Openness and listening
- Wellbeing lead / champions
- Physical time out space for staff in school/pre-school/nursery
- Non work related interactions (utilise skills and contacts 😊)
- Creating space and time for supervision
- Thinking about workload and work-life balance
- Staff wellbeing surveys, give feedback
- Staff wellbeing policy – "Compassion Charter"
- Wellbeing on the agenda! Discuss at governor meetings

3. **Five Ways to Wellbeing** - The following are evidence-based strategies identified to support wellbeing:
- Connect: Find virtual ways to spend time with family, friends and colleagues.
  - Be Active: Plan daily exercise outside or using online videos or other indoor exercise options.
  - Take Notice: Practise being mindful of your own body and the environment around you.
  - Learn: If you have extra time, use this to try something new or focus learning on your role (e.g. new technology, ways of teaching) or wellbeing.
  - Give: This could include practical support as well as offering encouragement, time and expressions of gratitude to others and/or random acts of kindness.



4. **Sensory Strategies** – At times of pressure, think about how you can use your senses to ground yourself in the present moment:
- Sight: looking at something calming (e.g. bubble tube).
  - Sound: calming music or noises.
  - Touch /proprioception: deep pressure can often be calming to people.
  - Smell: e.g. essential oils.
  - Taste: e.g. having a cup of tea/hot chocolate.

#### References:

Support during self-isolation - School planning document to support psychological wellbeing during Covid-19 by Hertfordshire Integrated Learning Services

<https://www.mindkit.org.uk/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

Young minds have produced a PDF document to support teachers' well-being:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/wellbeing-tips-for-school-staff/>

Additional guidance on developing teacher resilience can be found here:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Member%20Networks/Divisions/D/ECP/Teacher%20resilience%20during%20coronavirus%20school%20closures.pdf>

## Child Wellbeing



1. **Tummy buddies** – 1. Choose a soft toy that you can balance on your tummy. 2. Take shoes off and lie down so you're comfortable. 3. Put the toy on your tummy. 4. Breathe in while your teacher counts to 3, breathe in through your nose so your tummy gets big and your toy goes up in the air. 5. Breathe out while your teacher counts to 4, breathe out through your mouth so your tummy sinks and your toy sinks down. 6. Repeat this 10 times, can you rock your tummy buddy to sleep so they feel completely safe, calm and relaxed?
2. **Squish, Squash, Relax** – Take your shoes off and sit or lie down so you are comfortable. Close your eyes. Squish and Squash your toes and feet. Relax. Squish and Squash your leg muscles. Relax. Squish and Squash your bottom muscles. Relax. Squish and Squash your tummy muscles. Relax. Squish and squash your chest muscles. Relax. Squish and squash your hands. Relax. Squish and squash arm muscles. Relax. Squish and squash shoulders. Relax. Squish and squash your face muscles. Relax. Squish and squash your body. Relax.
3. **Spidey Senses** – Go for a whole class walk – What can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you feel? When you've finished your walk, talk as a class about what you experienced.



4. **Find ways to laugh** – Laughter releases tension and eases stress—both for you and children in your classroom. Tell silly, easy-to-understand jokes throughout the day to get your young learners giggling. When a small mishap occurs, reframe it in a funny way to reduce the stress of the situation and ease any worries. At home, encourage playfulness and laughter - watch a favourite show with your child, pull funny faces, tell jokes or tickle each other.



5. **Yoga for children** - Introducing yoga to young children at an early age, through playful activities, is a great way to boost healthy living, helping them to become calmer and better able to concentrate and focus.  
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/YOGA-for-kids-An-EYLF-Resource-Pack-3756043>
6. **Provide positive feedback to children** - Daily doses of upbeat talk and cheerful remarks will give children the positive energy they need to cope with stress. When you model acceptance of unexpected nuisances (spilled juice, a clogged sink), children will see how to handle stressful situations with grace and good humour.
7. **Praise children for helping each other** - Have you noticed children in your classroom playing with a worried or withdrawn peer? Have you seen a child help another through a stressful activity or transition? Be on the lookout for instances of children helping each other during free play and activities. Tell them how proud you are of their positive behaviour—and you'll likely see more of it!

#### **References:**

Inner World Work – Whole Class Happy Pack.

## Sensory Activities

### 1. Deep pressure activities

Self-Squeeze - Fold arms and hug yourself tightly. This can be used almost anywhere, and combined with a Monster Face Squish and a Deep Breath, to help the child regroup after or during an alerting sensory situation. A similar effect can be gained by firmly hugging a soft toy.



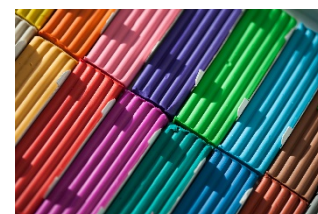
Massage - Massage is very relaxing. In class child can massage their own hands or arms, when needing to refocus. At home they may enjoy head massage, back massage etc. when needing to calm down. Ask the child what they prefer - light or heavy massage and for how long.

Monster Face - Raise shoulders and make a monster face. The child can use their hands to squash their cheeks or scalp. This reduces sensory overload and promotes relaxation. Use it in stressful, tight or busy spaces to gain self-regulation.



Desk push up, chair push up, and wall push off - all help to energise, focus and calm. Use them frequently either as a "get ready strategy" or while waiting. Do them fast to alert and increase focus, or do them slow to calm and steady.

Theraputty or Playdough - Provide the child with something that can be squeezed hard e.g. play dough or stress balls, which offer finger and hand resistance. This provides deep pressure and something for the child to fiddle with when required to sit for long periods.



Heavy weight - Using a weighted item e.g. rucksack, lap pillow or a large bean bag toy can be effective in settling children. The weight increase should be no more than 10% of body weight. Use only when needed, as it may become less effective after approx. 20 mins. Don't impose its use if the child dislikes it.



Squish box and Book and Pillow Corner - Provide a quiet corner that the child can go to and 'self-squish'. This could be by snuggling into a box lined with a blanket, an armchair, corner seat or bean bags. Placing a beanbag, cushion or blanket on top of the child adds to the tactile pressure. Allow the child to do a peaceful activity such as looking at books or listening to calming music.

At home: children may also enjoy bear hugs, head massage, back massage. Some children enjoy being wrapped up in a towel like a sausage after a bath and then cuddled.

Thank you to Dr Plum Hutton, Educational Psychologist

## Transitions

The following activities are suggested to support with the range of transitions that may be experienced by children as restrictions ease. These transitions may include from changes of class, key worker or setting. However, all children will experience a transition, having moved from 'normal' nursery/school to home and back again. With the infection control changes, nursery/school is likely to look and feel different for some time.

It is important to remember that accessing a school environment will bring about social, sensory, physical and educational experiences for children which they will need to re-accustom themselves to. Simply being around a large number of other children and adults outside of their family home will initially take time to get used to again after the restrictions that have been in place. The activities below may be modified accordingly.

### Helping children prepare for going back to nursery/school

#### Create a sense of connection and belonging

- Send a video/audio message/personalised letter or postcard to the child (to be read by the parent) explaining how much they are looking forward to seeing them back at nursery/school.
- Encourage them to send a photo/drawing of themselves or things they have been doing whilst they have been at home. This could form part of a large piece of art for the school hall or playground. For example, children might make individual tiles to contribute to a mosaic or patches as part of a wall hanging
- Share a video/pictures of the nursery/school with the updated safety measures so that children will not be alarmed when they see them for the first time. Send nursery/school a reading list that can be shared with parents so that the child can familiarise themselves with the story and activities before coming back to school. Additional ideas for sharing books at home can be found at <http://www.lovelybooks.co.uk/3-5-years>
- For additional ideas on how to build connections with families, please see 'Encouraging connectedness in early years settings' document



#### Re-establish routines to prepare for going back to nursery/school

- Children are less likely to feel anxious when routines and patterns are predictable. Encourage positive routines by getting up and going to bed at the same time each day, having regular meal times and bedtime routines to encourage calm.
- Acknowledge that children may feel overwhelmed by another change of routine and be flexible.
- Build learning into everyday activities through everyday conversations, make-believe play, games with numbers or letters, reading together and involving

children in household activities and chores. Educational resources and apps from the Department for Education can be found at [Hungry Little Minds](#).

## Helping children prepare for the transition to Reception

As children begin to move on, they will no doubt have questions and concerns about what their new setting or class might be like. Our support for these children to prepare for a new setting after restrictions ease should have many parallels with the support we might provide in 'ordinary' circumstances. Activities might include:

- **Providing practical information and encouraging preparations.**

Whilst restrictions are in place, children can still be encouraged to take preparatory steps, with parental support such as planning and practising their new morning routine or walk/cycle to school. Schools might also, for example, provide information about the new timetable, drop off and pick up times and preparations for hand washing and social distancing.

- **Holding induction and information events creatively.**

Consider how such planned events could be moved online. Children and parents could attend online events such as video conferences for Q&A, virtual meetings with new keyworkers/class teachers and virtual school tours. Warm, interested welcomes are essential.



- **Creating a sense of connection**

- Plan a creative activity whereby children may contribute towards a large piece of art for the school hall or playground. Invite children to create an aspect of the art reflecting the things they liked about nursery or a special memory.
- Children are less likely to feel anxious when routines and patterns are predictable. Use a special greeting each morning to help children ease into the day. Choose a song that tells children when it's time to put away toys or use inside voices. Celebrate special events like birthdays with predictable rituals—for example, make it a tradition to have each child tell the birthday boy or girl something nice.

- **Responding to worries and concerns.**

Ensure that parental/child concerns are captured and addressed appropriately. Reassure parents that safety procedures are being followed and assessments have been conducted to minimise risk.

- Prepare to **establish consistent boundaries and routines**. Whilst children will need flexibility as they adjust to their new setting, it is important to be clear about boundaries and routines from the beginning. This will help children to feel safe and settled. Anticipate that children will take time to adjust to these new routines and use nurturing language to communicate change.
- **Supporting parents** in ensuring their children are ready for school by encouraging games/activities to develop key skills:
  - Turn everyday chores into **colour/shape matching games** e.g. matching socks from the washing basket, sorting which clothes / shoes / hats or scarves belong to which family member. This can lead to a dressing up activity.
  - **Encourage name recognition by hiding** something with your child's name written on it (use a capital for the first letter of **their name** and then lower case letters). Use a stop watch on your phone, cooking or games timer, or see if they can find it before you count to 20.
  - **Play 'Simon Says' to encourage listening and attention skills**. Develop the game by adding new vocabulary and/or swapping roles so that your child has the chance to give the instructions.
  - **Where's the object?** Whilst playing with toy cars, dolls or soft toys with your child, place one object under a chair, table or other piece of furniture and another object on top. Ask your child which object is 'under' and which is 'on top'. Do the same with a box or bag to develop the concept of 'in' and 'out'. Or use a shelf unit for 'high' and 'low'.
  - Play traditional games such as 'Snakes and Ladders' to encourage **turn-taking and mathematical skills**.
  - Support parents to help their child develop self-care (**toileting, washing hands, dressing, cutlery use**). Additional ideas can be found at <https://www.home-start.org.uk/keeping-clean>
  - Read familiar stories about starting school. Talk about going to school and complete the activities together. Recommended books can be found at <http://www.lovelybooks.co.uk/special-days-3>

## Helping vulnerable children

For some children, such as those who experience autism or special educational needs, or who are growing up in care, transitions may be more challenging. Additional support may be needed to support a true understanding and anticipation of the new setting. Activities may include:

- **Visits during the summer holiday periods**. Many schools will be open for at least part of the summer holiday (even if just for maintenance and teacher access), which may provide an opportunity for children to visit the school site, to have a look around, and to meet with key staff (subject to Government guidance). This will provide children with a more concrete understanding of their new school.
- **Social stories or photobooks** can be a useful resource for children who are more vulnerable. Photos and information should be provided alongside a

narrative regarding what is going to happen. This resource should be available to children to access and come back to at their leisure, in order that they may familiarise themselves. See <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

- Even if returning to the same setting, some children will need **additional support to reconnect with adults or to build new relationships**. For these children, for whom relationships with adults are even more important, distance from formerly close adults, or introductions to new adults, will be more keenly felt. Opportunities for regular phone or video conferencing contact should be planned (subject to school policies regarding e-safety). When possible to do so, it is suggested that quality time to engage in activities individually or as part of a small group is planned for.
- **Some children may benefit from having a transitional object from home** with them in school to help manage any anxiety they have about leaving home. This could include a photo of a parent or pet, or a small special item given to them by a family member.
- **Provide visual support and reminders** about new routines, locations, and structures. Ensure these are appropriately differentiated according to the needs of the child (e.g. using the symbol system the child is familiar with).



Whether transitioning to a new school, or supporting a child with additional needs to return to nursery, it will be important to plan for a longer transition period than might

normally be factored in. During this time, provide opportunities for the child to get to know their setting, and to ease themselves back in to routines once more. It will be important that young people feel safe, settled and supported in their school setting before academic expectations can increase. It is recommended that these activities are considered alongside other suggestions, for example, in terms of how to support children with managing anxiety and wellbeing.

#### References and additional resources:

<https://www.home-start.org.uk/bhbf-fun-and-games>

<https://www.home-start.org.uk/Pages/Category/big-hopes-big-future>


<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/collections/starting-primary-school/1>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zrynnrd>

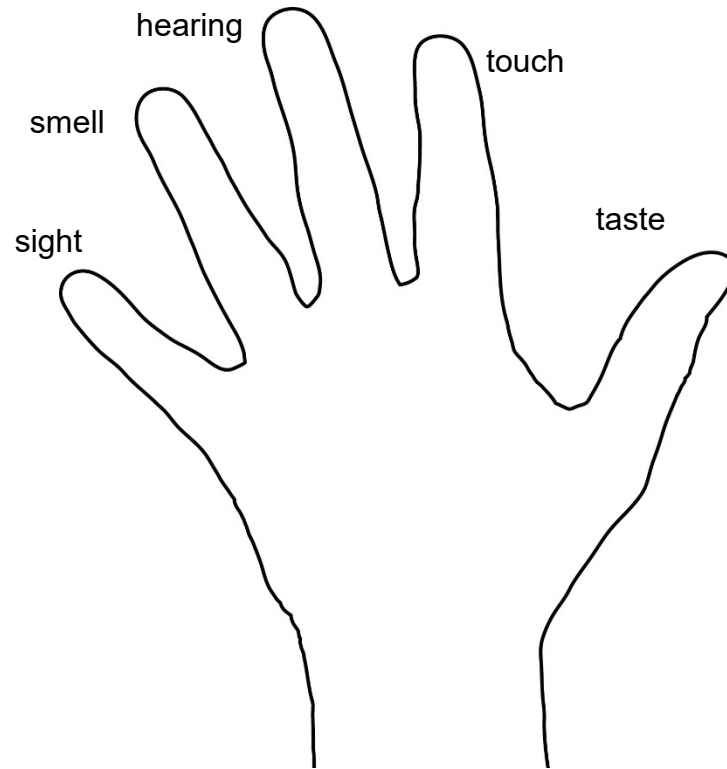
The National Autistic Society – Supporting Young People with Transitions:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/transition/starting-or-switching.aspx>

## Sharing Experiences

1. **Circle time** - It may be difficult for some adults and children to talk about their experiences during the pandemic lockdown. Use circle time as an opportunity to openly ask questions about their time at home. Use props and visuals to encourage dialogue and share your own stories. You should try to remember to **keep things positive and give children hope**. For example, tell children that many people are working to make this situation better and that even though it is serious, everyone is doing their best to help. Reassure them that this will pass, you are there for them, and you will get through this together.
2. **Create collaborative visuals** such as a room/class flag made up of pictures from each of the children in the class. Depending on the age of the children, this could be pictures of themselves, photos or things they have done whilst they have been at home. Alternatively, create a handprint rainbow that highlights that whilst everyone is different you all have shared experiences and are working together.  
What You Need - coloured paints of your choice, large paper or cardboard, trays to put paint on for hand prints.  
What You Do - Ask the children, "Who would like to make a rainbow with their hand print?" Ask the children to choose a colour they want their hand print to be. Ask each child to put their hand out, spreading their fingers. Let the child dip his/her hand into the colour of their choice. Place the child's hand onto the row of their colour choice. Children will see that every hand print is different and they make up their class. Discuss the differences in size and shape of all the children's hand prints  

3. **Use familiar toys to encourage nurture** - Nurturing dolls and stuffed animals are a good way for children to unwind and practise caring behaviour. Set up toy cribs where boys and girls can put their "babies" to bed, and water tables where children can bathe their dolls. Help create caregiving scenarios and praise children for their TLC. (Be sure to provide girl and boy dolls representing different cultural groups.)
4. **Care for plants and animals together** - Tending to bird feeders, classroom pets, and indoor and outdoor gardens can divert children's attention from daily stressors and fill them with wonder. Digging and planting can both energize and calm children as they work together, and caring for animals can boost children's happiness as they learn responsibility.
5. **People who care for me** - Draw around the child's hand and get them to write on each finger the people they can talk to about their thoughts and feelings. Draw their family or friends doing something fun, or something they are looking forward to doing with their family/ friends in the future.

6. **Positive memory in the palm of your hand** - Draw around the child's hand and help the child to write a positive memory for each of the 5 senses (1 per finger) to help them feel safe and calm wherever they are.



**References:**

*Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom* by Adrian Bethune

<https://kinderart.com/art-lessons/multic/handprint-rainbows/>

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus>

## Replacing Physical Touch

Prior to the current pandemic, many schools and educational settings will have routinely used physical comfort and touch to support their pupils. This is particularly the case in early years settings. The absence of physical comfort will be one of the many changes that children will need to adjust to, upon their return to school. The following principles and activities are suggested to support with managing this.

### Promote attuned interactions

Being tuned into, and responsive to emotions displayed, is essential. As well as school staff seeking to attune to children's feelings and the support they might need, children can be taught and encouraged to attune to one another as well. Being attuned involves:

- Being attentive by looking interested and engaged, for example by offering eye contact and by angling one's body towards the other person.
- Give time and space for the child to think, and be curious about how they are feeling.
- Use active listening, which might include affirmative sounds and nods, repeating or reflecting back what the speaker has said, and using pauses and silences to encourage them to build on their thinking. Reciprocate eye contact and offer smiles and warm body language. Use warm and sometimes playful intonation.
- Equal participation in the interaction is important and can be achieved by ensuring both participants take short turns, carry out equal parts of a shared activity, help one another and give each other time to respond.

Please refer to section on Emotion Coaching (which includes details of the PACE Model) for further details on communicating empathy and connecting. Such techniques will create an emotionally supportive environment, enabling children to feel emotionally held, when it is not possible to be held physically.

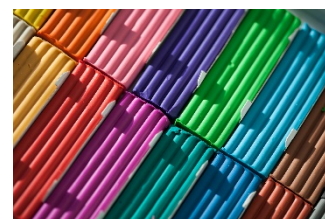
Children may be encouraged to attune with one another through the following activities:

- **Circle Time activities** to promote understanding and interaction skills.
- Carrying out **role play activities** where they take it in turns to rehearse ways of interacting with one another in caring ways. They might, for example, be given animal based characters where one animal is being very caring towards another, whereas an alternative character appears disengaged. Children could feedback on how different interactions feel for them.
- **Develop a small range of signs or signals** that children would like to use with one another and to adults to help them communicate when they need a little bit more support. These signs could be displayed visually in the school environment to help them become a common language.



## Ideas for replacing physical touch where possible/required

- **Give and receive virtual hugs.** When a child indicates (perhaps through an agreed signal) that they need comfort, the teacher (or other child) and child simultaneously hug themselves. The teacher gives eye contact and communicates, “I’m hugging you tightly, this is to help you feel better” (or similar).
- **Give a cuddly toy a squeeze.** Children could bring in a (washable) favourite cuddly toy from home, having access to give it a big cuddle when needed. This could be role modelled by staff.
- **Teach children to use hand massage:**
  - Use the thumb to rub small, gentle circles around the opposite wrist, and then rub small circles between the bones on the top of the hand.
  - Take each finger in turn, using the thumb to rub small circles along the finger from the base to the tip.
  - Gently pull each finger by the tip.
  - Clasp hands together, entwining fingers and move hands and wrists back and forth, left to right and in soft circular motions.
  - Turn the hand over and repeat the same motions focussing on the palm side of the hand this time.
  - Repeat on the other hand.
  - Encourage children to practice with different levels of pressure to find out what they prefer – or perhaps massaging an arm instead.
- Provide soft brushes or textured fabrics which children might use to **give themselves a soothing stroke** on the arm or over their hands. Children might be encouraged to tickle their own arm, perhaps whilst the staff member tickles their own arm, making the same shapes and patterns. Maintaining eye contact can help create a sense of closeness and connection.
- **Mirror games**, where children copy the action of the staff member (e.g. in an action based or teacher led song) can help create a sense of physical connection. Eye contact again is helpful.
- **Children might find Thera putty or playdough – or a stress ball – helpful to squeeze and manipulate.** This can give sensory feedback that is similar to that achieved through some physical contact such as hand holding.
- Children might **draw or paint a hug on a sheet of paper**, giving this to another child they care about. Similar could be done with handprints.
- Set up a “self-squish” corner, where children might access, for example, a box lined with soft blankets or cushions. Sitting in the box, they might find comfort in placing an additional bean bag on top, or simply sitting and experiencing being “squished” in the box.
- Some children, particularly those who may have additional needs relating to their sensory processing, may benefit from **using proprioceptive sacks or**



**weighted blankets** to gain access to deeper pressure. Lap pillows or large bean bags may be used to the same effect.

### **Communicating about the absence of physical contact**

- Clear, consistent messages are essential: **create a common language that is used by all staff.**
- **Frame instructions and language positively** e.g. “remember to keep a safe space between us”. Provide positive feedback to affirm when children are socially distancing appropriately e.g. “Thank you for remembering to keep a safe space between you whilst you were playing, that means you can all carry on playing together”
- **Use visual reminders to set out the new rules around comfort, touch and proximity.** Display these clearly around the school site – perhaps encouraging pupils to help create their own visual reminders as well.
- **Ensure that the classroom is experienced as a calm and caring environment,** perhaps by creating special quiet areas, or using posters or visuals that communicate that “in this class/school we care for and look out for one another”.
- **Use a social story** (which fits with the school wider language around Covid-19) to communicate physical distancing information. Ideally this will be available to pupils before they return to school.

For social stories (and lots of other resources) visit:

<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>. See attached social story which may form a basis for creating a personalised version for your school.

For (temporary) free access to Widgit (symbols for creating visuals):

<https://mailchi.mp/widgit/wo>

## Talking about emotions

1. Meet **Love Monster from Cbeebies** – help your child to understand the link between their thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/shows/love-monster>
2. **1:1 time** - Try to spend some one-on-one time with your child daily, even if it is in short bursts. When you're playing or doing a task together, you can try 'sideways listening' by having a relaxed chat whilst completing another activity such as drawing or building a Lego tower.
3. **Key vocabulary** - Young children need the vocabulary to talk about complex emotions. Teach them words like proud, worried, excited, frustrated, and amazed, and talk about these words during group times. Take opportunities to **talk out loud about feelings** about your own emotions acknowledging both negative and positive feelings, since every emotion shared develops connection and understanding.
4. **Ask open questions** - Try asking your child to describe how they are feeling, and follow up with open questions about what's happened to make them feel this way. For example; 'Tell me about how you are feeling?' or 'What has happened to make you feel like this?' Actively listen to your child by removing distractions, getting down to their level, and making eye contact. Acknowledge what they say.
5. **Label emotions** - Once your child has described how they are feeling help them name the emotion. Are they feeling angry? Worried? Scared? Frustrated? Happy? Doing this will help increase their vocabulary, and make it easier to recognise the emotion the next time they experience it. Encourage children to recognise different feelings. Draw faces that express different emotions or call out different emotions and encourage children to pull a facial expression that depicts that feeling using a mirror.
6. **Bodily sensations** - Talk about what is happening to their body such as smiling, butterflies in tummy, feeling hot etc..You can also help children recognise feelings in characters in the books they are reading or programs they are watching and asking them how they know what the character is feeling, this will develop links to non-verbal cues.
7. **It is OK not to be OK** - Make sure your child knows that it is OK to feel this way, even if it does not feel nice. Everyone experiences these feelings and they are normal. Explain times when you have felt that way and that it is good to talk about how we are feeling.
8. **Expressing emotions** - Create helpful ways for children to share their emotions such as by using a Rainbow mood tracker  
<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/rainbow-mood-tracker/>



When displaying negative emotions:

- **Remember how scary the world often felt** when you were a young child? Take an empathetic approach when a child quakes at thunderstorms or fears being abandoned by a trusted parent or caregiver. Even if the child's fears seem unrealistic or exaggerated to you, approaching him or her with kind understanding will help alleviate stress.
- **Stay with your child during difficult feelings:** Young children often have upset feelings (anger, hurt, sadness, fear) that are too difficult to manage on their own. When your child has an intense feeling, stay with her/him until the feeling has been worked through. Your child will be learning basic trust: "Someone is here with me when I am in difficulty and pain," and "I can count on a good outcome to follow a difficult experience."
- **Remember STOP, THINK, DO** - As adults, we have a wider range of coping skills than are available to children and young people and we know that we can survive adversity. Working with children and young people who have had a particularly stressful and frightening experience of the pandemic could be challenging, and it is possible that in hearing their stories you may also experience stress symptoms. A child or young person that has difficulty regulating emotions may frequently engage in behaviours that appear impulsive and that are challenging to manage. The strategy of 'Stop, Think, Do' is a good mantra to use:
  - Stop and think about what the behaviour might be communicating, were these patterns of behaviour evident previously or could they be a reaction to recent events and a result of painful memories being stirred up?
  - Engage in mindfulness based activities- having strategies you can use in the moment to support you to stop.....clear your mind for a few seconds....focus on your breath....carry on again
  - Do respond calmly and clearly. These children and young people need to be aware that their behaviour has consequences; however, they require patient teaching, reminders and clear boundaries and expectations that are repeatedly explained in different ways and enforced consistently. Respond to the underlying emotions rather than the behaviour.

- **Use puppets and dolls to play out emotionally fuelled situations** that have occurred, encouraging children to reflect on the different feelings the various characters might have, and how these feelings may have been brought about. Act out different solution scenarios and think about what the impact of different actions might be.



**References:**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z7xmmfr>

## Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching (EC) is a whole setting approach to supporting sustainable emotional well-being in children and young people. Drawing upon psychological theory and recent developments in neuroscience, EC should be integrated within the interactions that take place between adults and children (rather than being a discrete intervention). It teaches children to understand their emotions, and to manage these in more effective ways that they can transfer to other contexts.

Given their possible recent experiences of coronavirus, either directly related to the virus itself, or to the subsequent changes to their day to day lives brought about by the ensuing restrictions, it is likely that children may have experienced different and potentially difficult feelings at times. EC is a useful approach that may be employed in supporting children in managing their emotions as they return to educational settings.

The four key steps of EC in practice are:

1. Responding with empathy to the child's feelings
2. Labelling and validating the child's feelings
3. Setting limits, if needed
4. Supporting with problem solving

Summary descriptions of each of the stages are provided below.

### 1. Responding with empathy to the child's feelings

- It is important to truly understand and take on board the child's perspective and feelings. You don't need to agree with their view.
- All emotions should be viewed as normal – and not always a matter of choice.
- Behaviour should be viewed as communication of feelings.
- Physical or verbal clues might help you to identify how the child is feeling.
- Be careful not to confuse empathy with sympathy.

### 2. Labelling and validating the child's feelings

- Having understood the child's perspective, use words to name their feelings and to help them to label these.
- It can be helpful to acknowledge low levels of emotion before they escalate.
- Simple observations may be more helpful than emotion labels; some children might be unsure about their feelings. For example, *"you're frowning and I can see you've clenched your fists"*.
- Soothe and reassure the child or young person by telling them that you understand their situation and don't blame them for their feelings.
- Try using scripts:

*"I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would feel angry if that happened to me. It's normal to feel like that."*

*“I noticed you looking around to see what the others are making. I think that you might be feeling nervous right now about whether yours will turn out okay. Have I got that right?”*

### **3. Setting limits, if needed**

- Be clear in setting positive boundaries with the child about what is/is not acceptable behaviour, both within the situation, and in response to their feelings.
- Seek to retain the child’s dignity at all times.
- The following example scripts may be helpful:

*“You are angry that I’ve taken the puzzle away, but these are the rules that everyone has to follow. You will be able to have a turn again soon.”*

*“These are the rules that we have to follow. Doing that is not okay.”*

*“We can’t behave like that even though you are feeling annoyed because it is not safe.”*

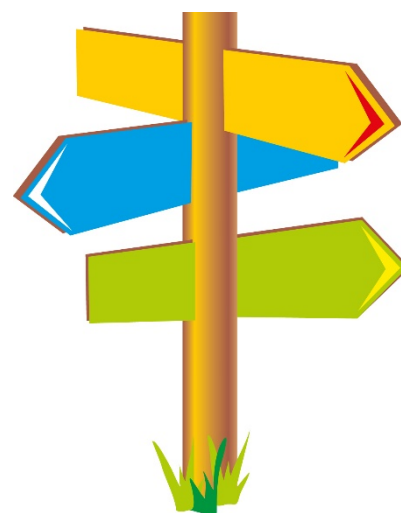
### **4. Supporting with problem solving**

- When the pupil has returned to a calm state, and is ready to rationally talk through the situation, you can support them to begin to explore the feelings that led to a behaviour/problem/incident.
- Support by scaffolding alternative ideas and actions, and by joining the child in thinking about the different outcomes these might have led to.
- Support the child or young person to recognise the strengths and skills they have that would help them to manage a future situation differently.
- Helpful sentence starters might include:

*“What does your body feel like now?”*

*“What feelings are you having?”*

*“Let’s decide what you will do next time you feel like this”*



## Using PACE to support children

Using the PACE approach (Dan Hughes) can also help us in supporting children in understanding and responding to their emotions. It has many parallels to EC. The PACE acronym can be understood and enacted as follows:

***Playfulness***: use a light tone, avoiding sarcasm or anger in your response to a child's behaviour.

***Acceptance***: take time to understand the emotions of the child, and to accept that these are their feelings at this time (whether or not you agree). Unconditional positive regard is essential.

***Curiosity***: genuinely explore the child's feelings with them, asking them open questions to try and understand what led to them taking a certain perspective. This involves accepting that the adult doesn't know what the child is thinking and feeling.

***Empathy***: understand and genuinely accept the child's feelings in response to a situation. Feeling their feelings with them.

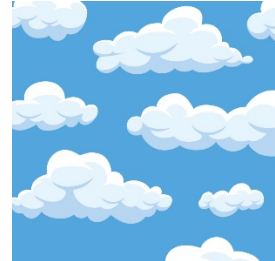
Holding the PACE model in mind can help us in embedding EC in our interactions with children.



## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is noticing what's going on outside—and inside—of us with acceptance and kindness. As mindful parents and keyworkers/teachers, we can be curious and open to understanding what our children are feeling and experiencing. The mindfulness exercises here are designed to help both parent and child experience a sense of calm connection.

1. **Go cloud-spotting** – stay as still as you can and watch the clouds go by. Watch and see if you can spot any shapes in the clouds.
2. **Mindful eating** – Take a small food item ( like a cracker or a raisin) and ask the child to use their senses to experience it – what do they see when they look at it, what does it smell like, what does it feel like in their mouth, what does it taste like and is there any sound when they bite it?
3. **Make a glitter jar** - Glitter jars can be used as a calming activity to support self-regulation.



There are lots of variations (see <https://preschoolinspirations.com/glitter-jars/>)

You will need:

- A jar or plastic bottle
- A jug of warm water
- 50ml glitter glue
- 3 drops of gel food colouring
- 60g-80g glitter



Instructions:

- Add warm water to your jar until it reaches around a third of the way up
- Add the glitter glue and stir until it combines with the water
- Add 3 drops of food colour and stir
- Pour in the glitter. Stir well until combined with the existing mixture
- Top up the jar with the rest of the warm water, until it is almost full

**4. Five senses exercise** - Use all your senses to focus on the present moment. Engaging our senses helps us focus on the present moment. Notice how you and your child are feeling as you begin. Then, together with your child:

- Notice five things that you can see. Look around you. Notice and name five things that you can see.
- Notice four things that you can feel. Tune in to your sense of touch. Notice and describe the texture of four things you can touch.
- Notice three things you can hear. Listen carefully. Notice and name three sounds you hear in your environment.
- Notice two things you can smell. Notice and name two smells you recognise.
- Notice one thing you can taste. Focus and name one thing that you can taste right now. You can take a sip or bite of something, or simply notice the current taste in your mouth. How are you and/or your child feeling now? Do you feel more connected to your surroundings and the present moment?

**References and additional resources:**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/seven-techniques-for-helping-children-keep-calm?collection=parenthood-tips-and-tricks>

<https://www.zerotothree.org/early-development/social-and-emotional-development>

## Guided Imagery

Guided Imagery could be described as a visualisation and relaxation tool. It can be used flexibly since children can be sitting on a chair, laying on the floor, sitting under a tree, anywhere they can feel comfortable and stay still for a few minutes. Their experiences can prompt discussion, art or drama.

Nursery staff who have felt their children were not able to concentrate on the guided imagery below have recommended:

### Relax Children: Aladdin's Magic Carpet by Marneta Viegas

#### Waterfall of Light

Find a comfy spot on the floor and close or lower your eyes. Take some deep breaths, breathe in and out. Breathe in and out. Notice your body feels warm and relaxed. Breathe in feelings of colour and warmth. Breathe out any worries. Your body feels warm and calm. Imagine that a beautiful waterfall of white light is pouring into the top of your head. It feels gentle and warm. It pours through your head and face and neck. It moves to your tummy and your arms. It moves down your arms and out of your fingertips. It takes any worries with it and you feel safe and warm. The beautiful light pours down your legs and your ankles and feet. It washes out of your toes. You feel lovely and safe and warm as the light pours through your body. You lie on the floor and the light washes over you and through you and you feel calm and happy. Enjoy the gentle calm you feel (pause). Now I will count to ten, join in with me when I say six, open your eyes when we get to ten, feeling relaxed and happy. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.



#### An Undersea Adventure

Get into a comfy spot on the floor. Close or lower your eyes. Think about your breathing. You breathe in and out. (Pause) In and out. It is a beautiful, sunny day, and you are walking along the beach. You can hear the sea and feel the sand under your feet. You notice a door hidden in the sand and you open it. There's stairs under the sand and a tunnel. You walk down the stairs and along the tunnel feeling safe and calm. At the end of the tunnel there's a big glass bubble under the sea. You see brightly coloured fish, a turtle and other creatures. There's a soft and comfy chair to sit in if you want to watch or there's a special suit to put on so you can breathe under water if you want



to go on an adventure. You now have a minute of clock time equal to all the time you need to enjoy and explore the sea.

(After a minute) Now it is time to return. (Pause). You walk back along the tunnel to the stairs and up through the door in the sand. You close the door and know that you can return whenever you want. You leave the beach and become aware of sitting here, fully awake and relaxed.

I am going to count to ten. Join in with me at six, opening your eyes at ten, feeling fully awake and alert and able to remember what just happened. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

### **The Bubbles of Power**

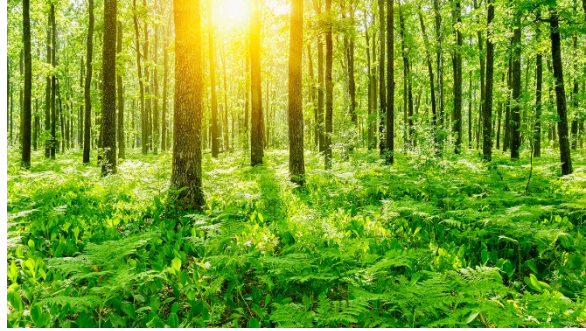
Find a comfy position where you are and close or lower your eyes. Focus on your breathing and notice yourself slowing breathing in and breathing out (pause). Breathing in and breathing out. Start to notice how your feet feel and imagine a bubble coming from your foot, and another one, and another one. The bubbles get bigger and bigger and you notice that you are inside the bubbles and they are all around you keeping your body safe. They are the bubbles of power. You notice some of your worries are on the outside of the bubble and they can't get in. The big bubble bounces them away. You notice some of your worries break into tiny pieces as they fly away. Inside your bubble you feel safe and calm. Now you have a minute of clock time equal to all the time you need to feel



safe in your bubble – your bubble is filled with your favourite things and your worries are outside the bubble being bounced away. Now, in a moment, I will count to ten, join me at the count of six. Open your eyes at the count of ten feeling alert, calm and safe. Remember you can go back to your bubble of power at any time. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

### **Adventures in the Wood**

Get comfy and close or lower your eyes. Now think about your breath, breathe in and breathe out (pause). As you breathe in, you breathe in feelings of calm and as you breathe out, you breathe out any worries. Breathe in and out. (Pause). Now imagine that you are sitting outside on a sunny day, you feel the warmth of the sunshine on your face and body. You can hear the birds, and feel the breeze and can see the flowers, grass and trees. With a soft pop sound you see a little person in front of you, climbing up a twig. This little person turns to you and wants you to follow. You are little too now and can follow if you want to. You have one minute of clock time equal to all the time you need to have an adventure in the wood. You might follow the little person, you might go exploring on your own.



(After one minute) Now it is time to wind up your adventure and say goodbye to any new friends you've made. I will count to ten, join in at the count of six. Open your eyes at ten feeling awake and happy and full of memories of your adventures. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

**Reference:**

Guided Imagery inspired by Maureen Murdock's book 'Spinning Inward'

## Breathing

1. **Balloon Breath** - Imagine a balloon above your head as you fill your lungs with air and slowly let it out. In this practice, use deep breathing and movement together to calm your mind and body. Show how to do it and have your child copy you.

- You can sit or stand up.
- Place both hands on top of your head.
- Begin to breathe in and out slowly. As you inhale, raise your arms above your head, like you are blowing up a balloon. When your lungs are full of air, your arms should look like a big, round balloon on top of your head.
- As you exhale, slowly bring your hands toward your head. Do your best to match the timing of your inhale with raising your arms up and the timing of your exhale with bringing your arms back down.
- Try to deepen your breath with each inhale as you're able.
- Continue with this breath and arm movement 2-4 more times.
- On the last breath, press your lips together and blow the air out, making a silly sound like a horse.

2. **Starfish breathing** - Help them trace their hand as a guide to deep breathing.

- Choose a hand to be your starfish. Extend this hand, palm out, with fingers spread like a starfish.
- Use the index finger from your other hand to trace the starfish as you breathe. Start at your thumb, and as you breathe in, trace up your thumb to the top. Do this carefully, so your movement matches your inhale.
- Now, with your out breath, trace down the inside of your thumb. Again, move slowly paying attention to keeping the breath and movement together.
- Continue breathing up and down each finger, matching your movement with your breath. As you breathe and trace, notice the sensations of movement in your body – your chest and belly moving in and out and your finger moving up and down.
- When you come to the base of your wrist below your little finger, rest for a moment. Check in with yourself. Notice how you are feeling without overthinking or judging.
- Try this again with your other hand.



## References:

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2663-mindfulness-in-early-childhood-settings>

## Physical activities

The NHS advises at least an hour of exercise a day for children between five and 18 years old, and three hours for a child under five. Children with high activity needs can feel stressed if they lack opportunities to let off steam. Find creative ways for high-energy children to move vigorously throughout the day. Provide access to tumbling mats, hobbyhorses, jumping games, and safe climbing equipment that give children an outlet for their natural energy.

1. **Rough 'n' tumble** – In the home environment, play-fighting and tickling are important ways that children not only learn about their bodies but also social and emotional skills.
2. **Walk like an animal** - Can you hop like a frog, walk like a bear, shuffle like a gorilla and jump like a starfish? Put some music on and spend a few minutes seeing who can do the best impression of each animal! Alternatively, complete a 7 minute high intensity interval training (HIIT) workout, spending 15 seconds on each 'walk' followed by a 15 second rest.
3. **Hold a fun sports day** – arrange a range of fun activities for all the family, including a **Humpty Dumpty** egg and spoon race, where the boiled egg could be replaced by a potato or small ball, **Gingerbread Man sprint** and **Doctor Foster** welly wanging; take turns to throw the welly as far as they can etc.. Discuss the changes in their bodies when they run. How do their legs feel when jumping? What do they need to keep healthy and strong?
4. **Create an obstacle course** – Use everyday items to create a fun course. Indoors could include jumping onto cushions, crawling under tables, wriggling through duvet covered tunnels, picking up cotton balls with tweezers, throwing bean bags into a bucket and balancing along a low bench. Whilst outdoors it could include hopscotch, running around cones, cycling from A to B, jumping through a hoop and climbing up a climbing frame. Anything goes as long as it's safe! Ensure to include a range of alerting, organising and calming activities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vLvoEXLApA&feature=youtu.be>

5. Make **skittles** using plastic bottles -They can be left empty or weighted down with pasta, rice or sand. Find a soft ball or make one using a pair of socks or scrunched up paper to roll or throw at the bottles. Stand the bottles up and roll or throw the ball to knock the skittles down. There are many ways to vary this activity, try writing each letter of your child's name onto a separate piece of paper, stick one on to each bottle and stand them up in the right order before knocking them down again.
6. **Dance during circle time** -This is a great way to relax tensions and unwind the body! Try slow skating waltzes or lively, stomping music. Let your young learners twirl dreamily or jump and leap to powerful beats. Watch tension flow out of their bodies as children move to the music.
7. Parachute games - Click here for further details on the games:  
<https://www.backyard.games/outdoor-children-games/parachute-games/>



#### References:

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/things-to-do-with-your-child/>

<https://www.teachearlyyears.com/learning-and-development/view/early-years-topic-sport>



## Creative activities

Group art activities can provide children with a powerful outlet for their feelings. Art can help children process dark emotions—a child worried about his father’s illness might draw an ambulance and cover it with brown scribbles that represent his fears. Art can also be a way to express and amplify joy, as children work with bits of bright paper, glitter, stickers, and gloopy paint in vivid colors. In young children, fine motor skills are developed with actions such as simple art activities like drawing, painting and cutting. Artistic play and music, dance and movement allows a positive way for children to express their feelings and therefore helps promote emotional well-being.



1. **Create a memory jar** – Keep memories safe by collecting treasures in a glass jar. Label the outside (or draw a picture) and collect special objects and put them in the jar for safe-keeping. These could be messages, drawings, pebbles or stones from daily walks, pressed flowers, autumn leaves or even cake toppers from a birthday party. Once the jar is full talk about the special memories and stick them into a memories book, so that the jar is free to be filled again.

2. **Mail a hug** – Create a special message and virtual hug to send to loved ones or those who you do not see often. Children lie on the floor with their arms out-stretched, trace around their head, arms, and upper torso onto the paper. Decorate first with paints, pens, fabrics, bric a brac and then cut out. Print or write out the message below to accompany the hug. Fold it all up, put in an envelope and mail!

For more information, see <https://www.theleangreenbean.com/mail-a-hug/>

Message: *“I miss you when you’re far away. I’d love to see you every day. But since I can’t come over to play, I’m mailing you a hug today. So although it might be quite a sight, wrap my arms around you tight. Repeat daily to keep your smile bright, until we get to reunite!”*

3. **Make a placemat** – Punch out shapes, stick them on sticky back paper, write your name in the middle, stick a piece of card on the back and then cover with another piece of sticky back plastic.

4. **Make a hand puppet** - All you need are some bits of felt and yarn, scissors, googly eyes and glue. There are lots of kits out there that make crafting puppets or you can gather the supplies on your own and let your children use odd socks. Show the children how to ‘put on a show’ using the new characters – create voices and/or movements to tell a story. Enlist others in the class or teddies to act as the audience.

5. **Make a rock monster** - you will need rocks, googly eyes, paint and glue. If the thought of paint makes you nervous, stick to markers instead. You can also provide your children with some bits of wool and other crafty items to glue on their rocks.



**References:**

<https://www.theleangreenbean.com/at-home-activities-for-children/>

<https://theimaginationtree.com/keepsake-memory-jar-tradition/>

<https://kinderart.com/art-lessons/seasons/5-creative-activities-children-can/>

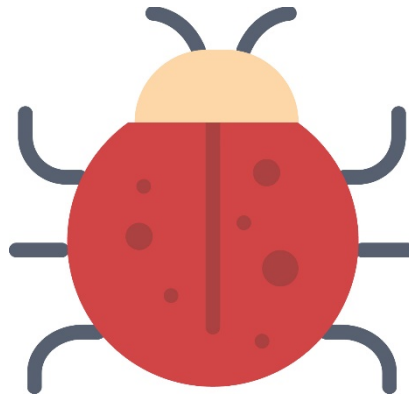
## Nature

At home use daily walks as a great excuse to explore in nature. Everyone feels so much better when they've been outside! By encouraging children to walk outside, this will really benefit their coordination and balancing skills and develop their muscles. Why not use the resources that you find on your walk to either make up a game or to use in a creative activity i.e. leaves, pine cones, stones?

1. **Bug Hunting** - Bugs are amazing creatures. They sting, buzz, fly, leap and even light up. Take some time with children to observe them.

You will need:

- Clear container
- Netting or waxed paper
- Rubber band
- Spoon
- Overripe banana
- Brown sugar
- Magnifying glass



What to do:

1. A good way to attract bugs is to put out something sweet like a banana with brown sugar sprinkled on top.
  2. Let the banana mixture sit outside a while, then spread it onto the bark of a tree.
  3. Check it regularly to see what new bugs you have attracted.
  4. Look through the magnifying glass and draw what you see.
  5. If you want to watch a particular bug, put it in your container with a bottle cap of water, a stick, and some green leaves.
  6. Cover the container with netting or waxed paper (make sure to poke small holes).
  7. Return your bug to the place you found him within twenty-four hours.
2. **Rock Art** - For this activity take the class out on a rock hunt and then turn the rocks into works of art.

You will need:

- Rocks (you can also use sea shells)
- Sturdy box with lid (such as a shoe box)
- Paints/brushes
- Scrap fabric or felt
- Pipe cleaners, eyes, and other decorative items (optional)
- Glue (optional)



WELLBEING and RECOVERY

What to do:

1. Gather up the class and go for a nature walk at the beach, woods, park or even round the playground. Gather up rocks while you walk looking for different shapes and sizes.
2. Once you get back wash and dry your rocks.
3. Be creative and paint your rocks. You can also glue decorative items such as googly eyes onto your rocks.

3. **Nature Hunt** - This nature scavenger hunt challenges children to explore nature and find everything on the list.

You will need:

- One paper bag per player
- One list of natural objects to collect

What to do:

- Give each player a paper bag and a list of natural objects (a bird's feather, a leaf, a smooth rock, a pine cone, a wildflower, and so on) to collect.
  - You can give the same list to all the players or have each player look for a different group of objects.
  - Challenge the players to find all the objects on their lists. Set a time limit: perhaps twenty minutes to find ten objects.
  - The first player to find all the items on his list is the winner
4. **Keep it simple** - Play 'I spy' (keep it simple, "I spy something blue", "I spy something that moves"), collect rocks or leaves, then sort them by size, colour, and shape or dig in the dirt (don't forget buckets, bowls, measuring cups, spoons, gardening tools, whatever you have!) Avoid touching playground equipment. Instead, run, roll down hills, jump like kangaroos, or lie back and look at the clouds. Ensure that hands are washed thoroughly after returning home from any outdoor play
  5. Play **Pooh Sticks**. You need to be on a bridge over flowing water. At the same time as each other, drop sticks into the water at one side of the bridge. Run to the other side and see which twig comes out first. You could read the Winnie the Pooh story about pooh sticks at home before or after playing the game.
  6. **Collect items to use in a collage**, e.g. feathers, leaves, conkers, twigs, pine cones. Stick onto paper or card at home. Use this opportunity to talk about washing hands.

7. Create a **stick sculpture** using sticks, fallen leaves, wildflowers, stones, grass and the odd found object can be combined to make fabulous temporary sculptures on the lawn.

**References:**

<https://www.home-start.org.uk/activities-for-families>

## Separation Anxiety

Children will have spent **a lot of time at home with their parents/carers** due to schools being closed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Feeling safe may have come to be associated with 'staying at home', 'social distancing' and frequent handwashing and so children will need to **learn new ways to continue to feel safe when they return.**

**Parents/carers may be anxious about their child returning to nursery/preschool;** therefore, it is important to work with families to support them to navigate these difficulties and provide reassurances and clarity of information.

**For some children the anxiety will be overwhelming and the thought of leaving their parent/carer may result in difficulties transitioning the child into nursery/preschool.** The following strategies and activities may help support children that are experiencing these difficulties:



- **Create a plan** of what is going to be put in place, ideally this should be produced in collaboration with the parents /carers and the child. Set short- and long-term **targets/weekly goals**. Very important to **celebrate the achievements** and progress – regardless of how small these may be!



- In collaboration with the child's parents/carers, agree a **goodbye ritual/script** (e.g. a hug and two kisses or special wave). Try and avoid prolonged goodbyes which then increases the child's anxiety, create **predictability and consistency** around school drop off.



- Make sure a **key/trusted adult** is able to meet the child at the beginning of the day. Or have a friend meet them at the start of the day to engage in an enjoyable activity together.



- **A transitional object** for the child to keep with them at school: small felt hearts with comforting scent, small photo of parent/carer, bracelet for the child/adult to swap, comforter (teddy/blanket), lunchbox notes to remind them that mummy/daddy love them and will return soon.
- Provide the child with lots of **positive encouragement** following successful separations. Very important for there to be a positive interaction when the child first gets to school.



- Start the day with a **low pressure or soothing activities** (breathing, mindfulness, 'toast club', a meaningful 'special' job. for the child to do when the first come into school. This is so they don't have to go into a situation of high expectation or pressure.
- Graded exposure works by carefully **exposing the child to separation** in small, controlled steps. This increases the child's capacity to manage distance from the parent/carer, helping to reduce their worry over time. This should be collaborative work with the school, child and parent/carer.
- Support the child to **manage their worry/anxiety** (please refer to the anxiety activities resource for idea/activities). It can be helpful to support the child to project the anxiety onto something else (metaphorically). Is the child able to draw the anxiety out? Work with the child where possible to understand push/pull factors.
- This separation may also be **difficult for the parent/carer**, so it is important that they also use a strategy that helps them feel better e.g. have a coffee/phone a friend.
- Books can be used as part of a toolkit to support children experiencing separation anxiety (or loss and grief)
  - o *The Invisible String*
  - o *The Kissing Hand*
  - o *What to Do When You Worry Too Much*
  - o *The Huge Bag of Worries*
  - o *What to Do When you Don't Want to Be Apart*



### **Additional resources**

Where children are experiencing difficulty attending school due to anxiety, additional activities can be found at <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/downloads/separation-anxiety-item-371/>

## Anxiety



1. **Blow your worries away** (Dr Michele Borba) - Teach young children to blow their worries away by pretending to blow up a balloon in their tummy as you slowly count to three and then let it out with an exaggerated “ahhh” sound like they use at the doctors. Place your child’s hands on his stomach for him to feel his breaths. Children can often try to take quick, fast breaths from their chest instead

of their stomach. To help them explain that “taking a slow deep breath is an easy way to let your worries out.” They can practise using a bubble blower until they get the right “feel.” Young children like to pretend that the bubbles are their worries blowing away.

2. **Stress ball** - This exercise releases muscle tension and massages your hands. Make your own stress ball(s) by filling balloons with dry lentils or rice.

- Take the ball(s) in one or both hands and squeeze and release.
- Experiment with squeezing the ball. Find way that is right for you, adjusting the speed, pressure and timing of your squeezes to whatever way you like.



3. **Releasing muscle tension** – there are a number of different ways to do this:

- **Lazy Cat** - Pretend you are a lazy cat that just woke up from a lovely, long nap. • Have a big yawn. • And a meow. • Now stretch out your arms, legs and back – slowly like a cat – and relax.
- **Feather/Statue** - Pretend you are a feather floating through the air for ten seconds. • Suddenly you freeze and transform into a statue. Don’t move! • Then slowly relax as you transform back into the floating feather again. • Repeat, making sure to finish as a floaty feather in a relaxed state.
- **Turtle** - Pretend you are a turtle going for a slow, relaxed turtle walk. • Oh no, it’s started to rain! • Curl up tight under your shell for about ten seconds. • The sun’s out again, so come out of your shell and return to your relaxing walk. • Repeat a few times, making sure to finish with a walk so that your body is relaxed. • Repeat, making sure to finish with a walk.
- **Lemon** - Pretend you have a lemon in your hand. • Reach up to the tree and pick a lemon with each hand. • Squeeze the lemons hard to get all the juice out – squeeze, squeeze and squeeze. • Throw the lemons on the floor and



relax your hands. • Then repeat, until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade! • After your last squeeze and throw, shake out your hands to relax!

4. **Feeling grounded** - To help children feel grounded make an obstacle course that includes alerting, organising and calming activities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vLvoEXLApA&feature=youtube>

5. **Yoga** - To help children keep calm and relax try yoga  
<https://app.cosmicchildren.com>

6. **Story time** - Use story time as an opportunity to share stories about confidence, worries and emotions:

- *Little Boat* by Taro Gomi. A book aimed at the under threes. A little boat must stay calm even when the seas are choppy. A positive message to encourage confidence.
- *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henks. A book aimed at 4-6-year-olds about anxiety and worry.
- *The Colour Monster* by Anna Llenas. A book aimed at 4 to 8-year-olds, which can be used to explore young children's feelings. A pop-up version and a colour monster activity book are also available.
- *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain: Explores feelings and a helpful way to talk about emotions with young children.
- *How are you Peeling? Foods with Moods* by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers: Explores how emotions look through pictures of foods. A good way to talk about emotions with young children.

#### References and additional resources:

<https://micheleborba.com/michele-borba-blog-kid-stress-busters-i-shared-on-today-show-945am/>

A guide to parents about how developing children experience anxiety and fear. <https://www.heysigmund.com/anxiety-in-children-after-world-trauma/> and <https://www.heysigmund.com/age-by-age-guide-to-fears>

## Loss and Bereavement

1. Create a **photo album** of the person who has died; make special borders and frames for the pictures with the person's favourite things on them or decorate them with pictures of what the child liked doing with that person.



2. Create a **memory box**; this could include photos, special objects and, for younger children, could include hand-drawn pictures of the person who has died.

3. Make a **friendship bracelet**; choose 4 or 5 people that the child can talk to and represent them with different coloured threads, plait them together to make the bracelet and tie it around the child's wrist. This can be a visual reminder for the child that they have people who love and care for them and to whom they can talk.



4. Play the '**Matching Game**' (for ages 4-6); the child needs to play this game with an adult. Read the sentence, supplying a feeling word. Read the possible action words. Ask the child to choose actions that match the feeling. Discuss whether, or not, the chosen actions help the child get his or her needs met.

"When I feel \_\_\_\_\_ I can \_\_\_\_\_ to take care of myself."

Feeling words – sad, happy, mad, scared, lonely...

Action words/phrases – laugh, cry, ask for a hug, run really fast, kick a football, hit my pillow, hit my friend, act grumpy, talk to someone who loves me, go to my room, hide under my bed, annoy my best friend, ask to leave my light on at night, play outside, draw a picture, tell somebody, listen to music/dance, play with a friend.

