Supporting the Wellbeing of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure

Wellbeing Toolkit for Primary Schools

National Educational Psychological Service
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An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Wellbeing Toolkit for Primary Schools

Introduction

Introduction

Promoting the wellbeing of our school communities is a fundamental element of the Department of Education's overall plan to support a successful return to school as we continue to manage the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are living through exceptional times and this impacts on the wellbeing of everyone in different ways, at different times. People have been naturally worried about the risk to their physical health and that of their loved ones and have been challenged to varying degrees by the public health measures that were put in place in Ireland to control the spread of the virus, such as staying at home and school closures.

People have an inbuilt capacity to adapt. This is what is at the heart of resilience. Most people are weathering this storm and will emerge stronger and with new skills. As we prepare for the reopening of schools we know that most pupils, and indeed their families and school staff will be looking forward to going back, reconnecting with school, reconnecting with friends and colleagues and settling back into school work. This is a time of change, with new rules and routines to establish and learn, in order to keep everyone safe. Some pupils may feel anxious about the return to school. In times of change some worry or anxiety is a normal response. Most will settle and re-engage with learning after an initial settling in period.

Pupils will have had different experiences of this extended period of school closure. Some children and young people have benefitted from the unprecedented change in their lives which may have provided opportunities for spending more time with family, having a slower pace of life, experiencing a greater sense of community, accessing more outdoor exercise and being exposed to different learning experiences at home. Others, however, will have experienced significant stressors in their lives during this time, such as bereavement, family stress, feeling lonely and isolated or living with others struggling with mental health difficulties or addiction. Reduced access to support systems and services, due to public health restrictions, may have, in some cases, led to increased vulnerability.

Time away from school also means that children and young people have experienced different learning opportunities over the past few months. In some cases, gaps in knowledge may have widened. This, together with the routine summer learning loss (summer slide), means that on return to formal schooling inequities are likely to exist.

The Department of Education has provided guidance for schools on the overall approach recommended to support the wellbeing of school communities at this time Supporting the Wellbeing of School Communities as Schools Reopen: Guidance for Schools. This guidance acknowledges that each school community has its own unique characteristics and will therefore use the guidance to develop their own plan to support the wellbeing of their own school community. The guidance recommends that the wellbeing of school communities at this time of transition will be helped by fostering resilience using five key principles (adapted from Hobfoll et al., 2007)[1]:

- Promoting a **sense of safety**
- Promoting a **sense of calm**
- Promoting a **sense of belonging** and **connectedness**
- Promoting a **sense of self-efficacy** and **community-efficacy**
- Promoting a **sense of hope**

The guidance also recommends the use of a whole-school approach to supporting a successful transition back to school using the Department's Continuum of Support framework for Wellbeing[2]. Each principle, above, applies to all pupils, including those whose needs have emerged as a result of their experiences during the pandemic, as well as others who may have had existing needs prior to COVID-19. For some pupils, such as those with more complex and enduring needs, schools will need to consider an individualised approach to transition planning, taking a developmental perspective, and adapting the five key principles to the individual needs of the pupil. Some pupils will require more targeted intervention and planning to help them reconnect with their school community and re-engage with learning. `

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[1] Hobfoll S.E., Watson P., Bell, C.C., Bryant R.A., Brymer M.J., Friedman M.J., Ursano R.J.(2007). *Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: empirical evidence.* Psychiatry: Interpersonal & Biological Processes, 70(4), 283-315.

[2] Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2019). *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*, Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
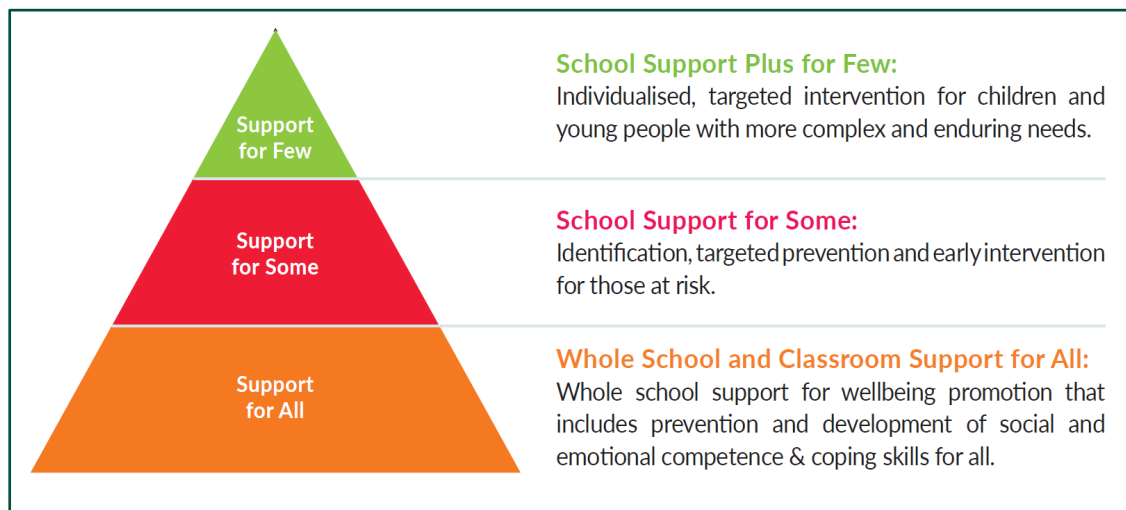
Figure1: The DES Continuum of Support Framework

Schools are advised to take notice of and plan how they can support:

- Pupils who are reluctant to attend school
- Pupils who are absent or ill
- Pupils who have experienced illness, bereavement and loss in their family
- Pupils whose behaviour seems different or out of character, or who don't settle as well as others
- Pupils who themselves, or their families have anxiety about attending in the context of the ongoing pandemic
- Pupils who were previously identified as having special educational or additional needs

These pupils may find the return to school challenging and require additional, personalised support to help them to adjust to changes to the school routine and environment. Actively involving pupils in the planning for their return to

The NEPS webinar *Supporting the Wellbeing of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure* and this accompanying *Wellbeing Toolkit for Primary Schools* provide additional guidance for school communities at this time.

NEPS Wellbeing Toolkit for Primary Schools

This Toolkit has been developed as a companion to the NEPS webinar *Supporting the Wellbeing of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure* and is designed to provide practical information, activities and resources to support the school community in the transition back to school and in the future, and to support school staff in integrating wellbeing promotion into their practice.

The Toolkit comprises a combination of NEPS-developed materials and information collated from other acknowledged sources that promote natural resilience for all and recovery for those with additional educational needs. It is intended as a guide for school staff and is not prescriptive or exhaustive. It recognises that school staff may have already prepared suitable materials that align with the Department's recommended approach.

The Toolkit activities can be adapted according to the age and developmental needs of children and young people in the school community.

The way we interact with children and young people is fundamental to wellbeing promotion, building resilience and recovery. We have therefore included information on psychological theories and models to guide the interaction with children and young people. The Toolkit also references additional resources which will support this work.

Section 2of this Toolkit, ***Staff Wellbeing and Self-care*** focuses on the need for a proactive approach to school staff wellbeing and collective self-care, recognising that all staff members will have had different experiences during the period of school closure and will also need time to adjust to the 'new normal'.

Pupil wellbeing is influenced by the wellbeing of the adults around them, and it is important that adults can model positive ways of coping with change and the return to school.

Section 3, **Preparing for Reopening** focuses on preparing for the reopening of school. It provides further information on the key principles that underpin the recommended approach (the Hobfoll principles). It also gives examples of how to apply these principles in the school setting during this preparatory stage, including ways of capturing the voice of the pupil.

In the following section 4, **Settling Back to School,** you will find some resources to support wellbeing during the 'settling in' stage, including some information on the steps to take when having a first-day welcoming session with your class when the school reopens and some information on approaches that you might find useful to use, to support the wellbeing of the pupils in your class at this time.

This Toolkit is designed as a wellbeing resource at the whole school level to help all children and young people settle back to school and to support all to reach their potential in their learning. The focus at the whole school level is important as we may not know who has been and continues to be negatively impacted by school closure during Covid-19. Promoting wellbeing at the whole school level *(Support for All)* ensures that practices become embedded in the school culture that improve outcomes for all. The fifth section **Supporting the Wellbeing of All Children and Young People in School** provides resources to support the wellbeing of all, and the sixth section includes resources that may be helpful when supporting those who may require more targeted or individualised support during the year ahead, **Additional Support for Some Children and Young People in School.**

Further Support
NEPS has developed a range of further resources and guidance documents in relation to supporting the wellbeing of the school community that are available on the NEPS website here. There are also additional resources and information about a range of supports for school staff, including professional learning opportunities, available on gov.ie/backtoschool. These include supports being made available by the Department of Education's other support services and agencies, and by the support services of other Departments: including the;

- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT)
- Centre for School Leadership (CSL)
- National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT)
- National Council for Special Education Support Service (NCSE)
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

We hope that you find this resource and the accompanying webinar *Supporting the Wellbeing of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure* useful in the coming weeks and months. NEPS psychologists will be linking with schools in the months ahead to provide support for the wellbeing of all during the transition back to school. Over the course of this academic year NEPS will continue to develop and share resources for wellbeing. NEPS will also work with schools to deliver the usual range of supports in new ways which take account of the changed environment in which we will be working for some time to come.

Note this is a working document and will be kept under review and updated

Staff Wellbeing and Self-Care

School Staff Wellbeing & Self-Care on Return to School

Schools are re-opening and school staff are looking forward to welcoming children and young people back and meeting up with colleagues again. This will be a time of change with new rules and routines in school in order to keep everyone safe. While happy to be getting back, some staff may also feel a little anxious or stressed about returning to school. In these times of change some stress or anxiety is a normal response. Not all individuals will respond to stress in the same way and each person will have their own unique coping mechanisms. During this time it is important that school staff pay attention to and take proactive steps to promote their own wellbeing and self-care.

Key Principles

Hobfoll et al (2007) described five essential elements of care that promote resilience and wellbeing during and after traumatic events. These are

- Promoting a sense of safety
- Promoting a sense of calm
- Promoting a sense of connectedness
- Promoting a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy
- Promoting a sense of hope

This guidance will help you to apply these principles in thinking about your own self-care plan

A Sense of Safety

Feeling safe helps to reduce the impact of stress and anxiety. The less stressed we are, the more we are able to think, plan, engage and learn. Think about what you need to ensure that you feel physically safe, as well as psychologically and emotionally safe. The following ideas can help promote a sense of safety:

Physical Safety:

Familiarise yourself with the physical safety measures that will be in place in your school in order to support a safe return to school for all.

Use school support structures to share worries you may have for the year ahead and problem solve ways to collectively address these concerns.

Work together with colleagues, school management and school community to ensure awareness by ALL of the physical safety measures in place.

Psychological Safety:

Routines create a sense of psychological safety by providing predictability. In school, there will be a return to some routines that were there prior to school closures, while there may be many changes to routine also, taking into account public health guidance at the time.

Taking time to establish a new routine with colleagues, children and young people will help in a return to predictability and will contribute to a safe and calm learning environment giving all a sense of security.

Look after yourself – try to ensure that you are eating well, getting enough sleep and getting some form of physical exercise.

Slow Down to Catch Up

It will take time for both staff and students to adjust to being back in the school environment and be ready and available to fully engage with teaching and learning. It is important that staff are given time to 'catch up' with colleagues and students so that everyone can settle into a new routine and feel ready to engage. This should help all of the school community to feel more secure in the days and weeks on return to school and gives everyone time to settle in after a long break. Focusing on wellbeing and giving time for all to settle in so that they are ready for learning will yield positive outcomes in the longer term and will likely reduce stress.

Take time to plan how to support wellbeing

Consider the needs within your school community and how to promote wellbeing. A helpful resource for staff is the NEPS Return to School Webinar

A Sense of Calm

Promoting a sense of calm ensures that we have the ability to become peaceful in mind and body. Being able to relax and stay composed helps us to focus and concentrate on what we need to do. The following can help promote a sense of calm:

Plan to protect time for your own self-care and wellbeing needs. Be aware of how the spread of COVID-19 and subsequent school closures may have impacted on you in terms of your feelings, your thoughts and your behaviour. You may/may not feel strong reactions at different times during this period of adjustment. If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of others, remember everyone responds differently, and that's normal. At times, during this period of adjustment and change, you may notice that you are feeling/experiencing differences in:

- **How you think***: such as an inability to stop thinking about what is happening and trying to make sense of it.
- **How you feel physically:** You may feel extreme tiredness*, or have gastrointestinal problems, headaches and other aches and pains, loss of appetite, and/or difficulty sleeping.
- **How you feel emotionally:** You may feel anxious or worried; irritable, cross or angry; you might sometimes feel numb.
- **What you do:** You may notice that you are withdrawing from contact with loved ones; you may be exercising less or not taking as much care as you might have previously with what you eat; you may drink more alcohol.

Take time to Relax: Try to take time each day to pay attention to your body and what it is telling you. Try to recognise when your body and mind are stressed. If you are feeling stressed or anxious, take a few deep breaths and concentrate on letting go of your worries even for a short time. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel. Further ideas and resources on relaxation can be found the NEPS website here & the HSE website here.

A Sense of Connectedness

Social connectedness involves having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you. Building connections and relationships with colleagues and students provides the basis for engagement, emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn. The following can help promote a sense of social connectedness:

Relationships:
- School staff consistently report that relationships with colleagues are essential to their wellbeing and self-care. Continuing to stay in touch with colleagues and friends is essential to support wellbeing at this time. Similarly the relationships that school staff have with their students have been shown to contribute positively to the wellbeing of both teachers and students (Split, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). It is also important to prioritise relationships outside of school to connect with family and friends.
- Protect time to connect with colleagues.
- Reflect on and share any positives, opportunities or new learning that occurred during Covid-19.
- Share personal and professional goals with colleagues for the year ahead.
- Engage with peer support mechanisms in place in your school.
- Prioritise the development of relationships with children and young people on the return to school.
- Plan how to partner with parents/ carers as it is helpful in ensuring a whole school community aligned response to the reopening of schools.

Develop and maintain a healthy Work/Life balance:
- It is important to have clear boundaries between work and leisure time. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do.

Creativity:
- Do things that challenge your creativity and make you feel productive like gardening, drawing, writing, playing an instrument or building something.
- *Creative Ireland* is an all-of-government culture and wellbeing programme that inspires and transforms people, places and communities through creativity.
- Consider how you might get creative with your students to support your own and their wellbeing at the present time.

A Sense of Self and Community-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that the school community you belong to can do what it needs to do to thrive and take care of its members. As a result of the Covid-19 crisis, some people may feel a lack of control and may doubt their ability to solve problems and handle ordinary day-to-day challenges. The following can help promote a sense of efficacy in self and community:

- Identify what you can and cannot control.
- Focus on the present and use your strengths.
- Acknowledge your own personal achievements.
- Consider adopting a 'slow down to catch up' approach.
- Reflect on and plan how to incorporate Hobfoll's principles in your work in school.
- Participate in team work in your planning, where possible.
- Familiarise yourself with critical incidents documents to support you in your work with members of school community who may have been bereaved.

Personal & Professional Development: Teachers and school staff have had to adapt their suite of teaching methodologies in a very short period of time. This can generate understandable feelings of worry and uncertainty. School communities should recognise these feelings openly and encourage a professional culture which learns from both successes and failures. School staff should be encouraged to ask for help from a colleague when needed and should be supported in developing the new skills necessary to face the challenges of the new normal

A Sense of Hope

A sense of hope is related to fostering resiliency and the expectation that things will work out for the school community. Hope also includes a belief that others will be there to help. The following can help promote a sense of hope:

Emphasise strengths, hope, and positivity:

- Schools can provide opportunities for the community to feel safe, secure, and hopeful about the present and future. Encourage school staff to talk about how they and staff in other schools found creative solutions to overcome challenges during the pandemic which can be healing and reassuring for all.
- Reflect on your hopes for the year ahead.
- Set short and medium term goals.
- Share them with staff members, the students and/or family/friends, as appropriate.
- Express gratitude.

Steps to Promote Wellbeing & Self-Care

In preparation for the return to schools it is suggested that staff will benefit from:

- Staff reorientation and preparation prior to students' return
- Strategies to build staff wellbeing and resilience
- Knowing how and where to get help

- Be kind and understanding of your own needs at this time. In times of stress it is especially important to focus and draw comfort from the people and things around you.

- Support and encourage your colleagues to show compassion and kindness to themselves and others. Everyone will have had different experiences of the pandemic and it will take time to adjust to the 'new normal'. Remind them that not all individuals will respond to stress in the same way and each person will have their own unique coping mechanisms. It is especially important that school staff are proactive and look after their own wellbeing and self-care. Student wellbeing is influenced by the wellbeing of the adults around them.

The *In This Together* campaign was launched by the Government to provide support and resources to help deal with the stress, anxiety and isolation currently experienced by many people. The website provides tips and advice on topics such as **physical activity**, **parenting**, **coping with daily routines**, **supporting the 'cocooned'** and **getting involved in the community solidarity efforts**. Research consistently shows that volunteering or other altruistic activities promotes wellbeing across the community. Consider completing the template in **Appendix 1** as part of your self-care plan.

Accessing support and seeking help:

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective self-care. An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for staff in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of employees, with a strong focus on prevention. The Occupational Health Strategy includes the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) which is provided by Spectrum. Life, who are providing this support under the banner of '*Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile'. (see separate handout next)*

Support for school staff wellbeing will also be provided by the Department's Support Services including the following:

- The **Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)** which has a range of resources to support teacher wellbeing available here.
- The **Centre for School Leadership (CSL)** which has ideas and supports available for school principals and teachers here
- **The HSE's Health Promotion Team**

Useful Resources

- Many of the **Teacher Unions** have guidance and support relating to teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic available on their websites.

References

Duffield, S., & O'Hare, D. (2020). *Teacher resilience during coronavirus school closures.* British Psychological Society: Leicester.

Hobfoll SE, Watson P, Bell CC, Bryant RA, Brymer MJ, Friedman MJ, Ursano RJ. (2007). Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: empirical evidence. Psychiatry: Interpersonal & Biological Processes, 70(4), 283–315.

Spilt, J.L., Koomen, H.M.Y. & Thijs, J. (2011). Teacher Wellbeing: The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships. *Educational Psychology Review, 23*, 457-477.

Appendix 1: Promoting Natural Resilience and Recovery

There are many small solutions or strategies you can use to support self-care in your daily life. One way to support your self-care is to promote your natural resilience and recovery by implementing individualised and achievable tasks in the areas of Safety, Calm, Connectedness, Efficacy and Hope (Hobfoll et al, 2007). Use the template below to reflect on how you are presently managing and caring for your wellbeing and then set some short-term or long-term goals to target each of the five areas to promote your resilience and wellbeing.

Key Principle	Current practice	Future goals
Safety I protect my physical and psychological safety by…		
Calm I can practice strategies to promote calmness so I can use them when needed…		
Connectedness I stay connected to family, to friends, to colleagues by…		
Efficacy I know I have and can cope well with challenges. Things I am proud of are…		
Hope My personal plan/goal for this year is… My professional plan/goal for this year is…		

Three things I am doing well to support my wellbeing
1)
2)
3)

Three things I plan to do that will support my wellbeing
1)
2)
3)

Professional Support for School Staff

Spectrum Life

Spectrum.Life is now providing Employee Assistance Support for school staff. The service is called 'Wellbeing Together: Folláinne le Chéile'. The service provides advice to employees on a range of issues including wellbeing, legal, financial, bereavement, conflict and mediation matters. It also provides advice and support to managers and delivers interventions to help them deal with health and wellbeing issues in the workplace.

Folláine le Chéile
Wellbeing Together

Where appropriate, short-term counselling is available to employees and their family members. A family member includes a spouse, civil partner or dependent, where the family member can be described as a person over the age of 18 and residing at the family home. In addition, online cognitive behavioural therapy is also provided to employees.

A bespoke wellbeing portal and app is available offering a host of online services with access to live chats, videos, podcasts and blogs on topics around mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition.

Spectrum.Life will also be providing a series of webinars and presentations to promote wellbeing in schools during the upcoming school year.

This service provides a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
For further information and to contact Spectrum Life

Website: www.spectrum.life

Email: eap@spectrum.life

Freephone: 1800 411 057

WhatsApp/SMS: text 'hi' to 0873690010

Supports that aim to enhance school staff wellbeing will also be provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team.

Self-Care Tree   for School Staff

Boundaries

Know your **boundaries** – what will keep you safe psychologically, physically, emotionally, etc.

Self-Awareness

How are you feeling? What are your needs at this time? Be realistic about what you expect from yourself and others.

Communication

There needs to be clear and effective lines of **communication** to ensure that everyone knows what is happening, when, how and why.

Relationships

Encourage and develop **supportive relationships** within the school and class setting – this should include peer support and dedicated time for checking in with each other.

Psychological safety

Allow time for reflection - what do you need to ensure that you are emotionally and psychologically safe? How can this be achieved?

Work – Life Balance

Ensure you get rest

Eat healthily and at regular intervals

Get some daily physical activity

Stay in touch with family, friends and community

Adapted from Dorset NHS 2020

50 Ways to Take a Break

- Take a Bath
- Listen to Music
- Take a Nap
- Go to a body of water
- Watch the clouds
- Light a candle
- REST your legs up on a wall
- Let out a sigh
- Fly a Kite
- Watch the stars
- Learn something NEW
- Write a Letter
- Listen to a guided relaxation
- Read a Book
- sit in NATURE
- 2x Move twice as slowly
- Take Deep Belly Breaths
- MEDITATE
- Call a Friend
- Meander around Town
- WRITE in a journal
- Notice your Body
- Buy some Flowers
- Find a relaxing Scent
- Walk Outside
- Go for a run
- Take a bike ride
- Pet a furry creature
- Create your own coffee break
- View some ART
- Shhh! Eat a meal in SILENCE
- Turn off all electronics
- Go to a Park
- read or watch something FUNNY
- Examine an everyday object with Fresh Eyes
- Drive somewhere NEW
- Go to a Farmer's Market
- Forgive Someone
- COLOR with crayons
- Make some MUSIC
- Climb a Tree
- Let go of something
- Engage in small acts of KINDNESS
- Do some gentle stretches
- Paint on a surface other than paper
- Write a quick poem
- Read poetry
- Put on some music and DANCE
- Give Thanks

Preparing for Reopening

Hobfoll's Five Principles of Psychosocial Care: Returning to School
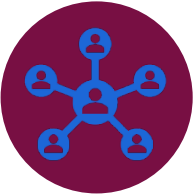
Developing a sense of…	This is…	Why is this Important?
Safety	A belief that your needs and the needs of those you care about will be met now and in the future. A belief that you are protected from harm and that those around you will stay safe.	Essential to reduce the impact of stress and anxiety. Essential for learning and to reconnect with adults and peers. The less stressed we are the more we are able to think, plan, engage and learn.
Calm	Being able to relax and stay composed or grounded (self-regulate), rather than become numb, shut down, agitated or overly excited.	Being able to relax your body and mind allows you to focus and concentrate on what you need to do. The more regulated/calm we are the more we are able to think, plan, engage and learn. It also promotes the ability to engage in higher-order thinking.
Connectedness	Having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you.	The restoration of school communities is central to recovery, providing a connection back to a key social group in the lives of children/young people. Rebuilding connections and relationships with teachers and peers will be critical in providing a basis for readiness to learn. Teachers can provide a secure base to challenge and prevent the development of negative cognitive thought patterns. Connection is much more important than the absence of a threat (Covid-19).
Efficacy	Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that the school community you belong to can do what it needs to do to thrive and take care of its members.	In times of crisis, efficacy beliefs may be challenged and people may feel they have lost their competence to solve problems and handle ordinary day to day challenges (lose hope/agency/motivation). A key enabling factor in building self-and community efficacy following a crisis is the restoration of school communities.
Hope	The expectation that things will work out; a feeling that everything is going to be alright. Hope can include a belief that others will be there to help.	Hope is critical for learning - motivation to achieve goals both in the short and long term. Return to school can re-ignite hope and purpose for many students and their broader community. The media, schools and community can focus on positive goals, building strengths and telling individual stories and re-building connections and hope.

Adapted from Hobfoll et al (2007)

Applying Hobfoll's Five Principles to Support the Successful Return to School:

Sample Strategies and Actions to Guide Planning

	Parents/Carers	Staff	Child/Young Person
Safety	Inform parents/carers of the public health measures that will be in place in your school. Consider making a "Check in" telephone call with families who would benefit from this additional support to talk through the public health measures that will be in place. Acknowledge the efforts and challenges that families have encountered while supporting their children's learning at home. Convey understanding that people will have had varying experiences during school closures.	Familiarise yourself with the public health measures that will be in place in your school. Use school support structures to share worries you may have for the year ahead and problem solve ways to collectively address these concerns. Engage in team planning where possible. Try to ensure you are eating well, getting enough sleep and getting some physical exercise. Slow down to catch up Take time to consider the needs in your school with regards to wellbeing	Thank children and young people for following public health measures during school closures and helping to keep us all safe as possible. Ensure that children and young people are aware of the public health measures that are in place in school to keep them safe. Teach them the systems and routines that will be in place in your class. Spend time revisiting familiar routines. Include children and young people in forming the new class rules where appropriate. Teach, model, prompt and praise the following of new rules and routines.
Calm	Continue to model calmness in communication with parents/carers. Consider developing scripts for communicating key messages. Clarify how parents can raise queries they have, and for information that is not available at present, indicate when and how this is likely to be made available. Encourage parents to support the use of calming activities.	Plan to protect time for your own self-care and wellbeing needs. Be aware of wellbeing and self-care supports available to you. Take time to relax, pay attention to your body and try to recognise when your body & mind are stressed. Focus on your breath and use relaxation techniques. Remain calm and responsive if students are experiencing dysregulation or displaying behaviours of concern.	Plan for the inclusion of self-regulation and calming activities throughout the day. Prepare a designated space where children and young people can self- regulate, when needed. Provide opportunities for children/young people to reflect on their experiences during school closure. Use an informed approach when listening and talking to child/renyoung people in distress Use informed coping strategies to support children and young people in distress.

Connectedness	Gather information on the children and young people that will be in your class which will help you to support their needs in school. Plan to link families, in need of additional support or reassurance, with a designated staff member.	Reflect on and share any positives, opportunities or new learning that occurred during Covid-19. Share personal and professional goals with colleagues for the year ahead. Engage with peer support mechanisms in place in your school. Protect time also to connect with colleagues. Develop a healthy work/life balance.	Plan your opening/welcoming session. Plan to have a connecting conversation with children/young people who additional support. Use games and creative activities to help the children and young people to reconnect with existing friendships and establish new friendship. Devote time to developing the group identity and school spirit. Set up and monitor peer support/buddy systems. Incorporate children's and young people's interests in class lessons.
Efficacy	Support parents to prepare their children for the return to school by encouraging them to re-establish good routines relating to attending school. Be mindful of the varying levels of engagement in remote learning. Offer encouragement and reassurance.	Reflect on and plan how to incorporate Hobfoll's principles in your teaching practice. Participate in team work in your planning, where possible. Identify what you can and cannot control. Focus on the present and use your strengths. Acknowledge your own personal achievements. Consider adopting a 'slow down to catch up' approach. Familiarise yourself with NEPS critical incidents documents for children who may have been bereaved. Engage in personal & professional development – encourage a professional culture of learning and ask for help form colleagues when needed.	Encourage the child/young person to proactively support their own wellbeing. Plan for collaborative learning opportunities. Include activities to highlight their strengths and to reinforce a growth mindset. Create systems to capture the voice of the child/young person. Support the child/young person to reflect on the skills that underpin learning (metacognition). Support the child/young person to reflect on and use effective coping strategies to manage their distress, if required. Acknowledge achievements and display them on an achievement wall.

| Hope | Ask parents to reflect on their hopes for their children in the next academic year. | Reflect on your hopes for the year ahead.

Set short and medium term goals.

Share them with the children/young people, staff members and/or family/friends, as appropriate.

Express gratitude. | Support children and young people in setting goals.

Ask them to identify their hopes and dreams for the year ahead.

Seize opportunities for them to express gratitude for the good things. |

Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure

Self-Reflection Tool

Most children and young people will be looking forward to returning to school but some may be feeling a little uncertain and a few may be feeling worried and anxious, especially if their contact with school has been intermittent during school closure. However, given the length of time schools have been closed all children and young people will need support and time to settle back while those with additional educational needs will require targeted support.

It is intended that this self-reflection tool will help school staff in their planning to support children and young people's wellbeing on the transition journey back to school to re-engage with learning. By reflecting on the statements school staff can identify their own key strengths (✓) and needs (X) at this time. It is acknowledged that needs will be identified and staff can revisit the self-reflection process over the course of the school year to reassess their strengths and needs. There are also activities in the Toolkit that may support school staff to address the identified need.

SAFETY: getting ready for the return to routine	✓	?	X
I have a plan for my welcoming/opening session.			
I am comfortable with supporting children/young people to share their experience of Covid-19 and school closure.			
I am comfortable allowing children/young people to discuss their thoughts and feelings.			
I am comfortable acknowledging the continued uncertainty about Covid-19.			
I have visual reminders of rules relating to Covid-19.			
I recognise the importance of prioritising wellbeing.			
I devote time to supporting my own wellbeing.			
I am aware of the professional supports that are available.			

CALM: planning for a calm and predictable day	✓	?	X
I have considered how my systems for routines and transitions are accessible to all children/young people and are adapted for children/young people with additional needs.			
I plan to include children/young people in developing class rules.			
I have a variety of activities to help children/young people to regulate i.e. activating and calming activities.			
I plan to co-regulate by taking part in regulation activities with children/young people.			
I know how to help children/young people to recognise their own emotional states.			
I can support children/young people to express their emotions in a healthy and prosocial manner.			
I can model self-control, e.g., staying calm when stressed, using a warm tone of voice when frustrated, etc.			
I have plans for how to relax and recharge at the end of the school day.			

CONNECTEDNESS: spending time building the relationship	✓	?	X
I have a plan to check in and connect with parents/carers at the start of the school year.			
I am confident reassuring parents/carers who may be concerned about their child returning to school.			
I recognise that I will need to adjust my expectations to accommodate the different experiences that children/young people had during school closure.			
I have a plan to greet each child/young person individually.			
I am aware of the importance of spending time developing personal connections with the children/young people in my class.			
I am comfortable giving time and space to hear children/young people's personal stories.			

	✓	?	X
I know how to be present, attentive, attuned and responsive when children/young people are talking to me.			
I will plan activities to help children and young people to re-establish connections and make new friendships.			
I have a variety of creative activities to build a sense of connectedness.			
I will take the time to re-establish friendships and to develop connections with colleagues.			
EFFICACY: investing time and energy in recognising potential	✓	?	X
I have identified opportunities to promote the Growth Mindset model with children and young people.			
I can help children/young people to understand the processes involved in their own learning (metacognition).			
I have a list of jobs/activities that will develop children/young people's sense of responsibility.			
I have identified opportunities where I can give children/young people age/developmentally appropriate choices and control.			
I have identified the good decisions, actions and behaviours that I plan to encourage through praise.			
I have identified games and activities to support children/young people to work together as a team.			
I have identified games and activities to support children/young people to engage in problem solving.			
I am aware of the signs of grief and know how to support children/young people who are bereaved.			
I can support a child/young person to use appropriate coping strategies to manage their distress.			
I know how to support children/young people who have become dysregulated.			
I will provide targeted support for children/young people with additional educational needs.			
I will share my daily successes with a colleague, family member or friend.			
HOPE: noticing the positives	✓	?	X
I can facilitate conversations with children/young people to promote a strengths-based and future-focused perspective.			
I can teach children/young people how to develop positive self-talk.			
I can guide children/young people on how to construct a positive narrative of their experiences.			
I am aware of the importance of expressing gratitude in promoting wellbeing.			
I am hopeful that the learning gained during Covid-19 and remote teaching will inform my teaching practice into the future.			

My Strengths	My Needs

My Plan

Connecting with Parents and Carers

Key Messages

- It is time to reconnect children and young people with learning and friends.
- School is a safe and fun place to be.
- Teachers are there to support children and young people.
- Children/young people will need to be reminded about all they have learned.
- We are all in this together.
- We can feel hopeful about the return to school.

While recognising that schools have an array of communication pathways with families, some parents/guardians may benefit from an individual conversation approach. This document can be used to guide that conversation. The purpose of the conversation is to welcome children and young people back to school, to acknowledge the varying experiences during school closure, to reassure parents/carers to give them information about changes in school routines, and to gather any relevant information about their child which may need to be taken into account in supporting their return to school. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the NEPS Wellbeing Webinar and Toolkit 'Supporting the Wellbeing of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure'. It is acknowledged that the school is best placed to decide the most appropriate way to communicate with an individual family.

Introducing self

At the start of the telephone call, assure the parent/carer that there is nothing wrong, that you are just checking in with them prior to the start of the new school year. Check to see if it is a good time for them to talk and let them know that the call will only take a few minutes. Acknowledge that they have been having a busy time with their child/ children at home, so thank them for taking the time to talk.

Acknowledging the situation

Covid-19 and school closures have brought many changes and stresses. Everyone has their own personal experience. Recognise that this may be the first time that their child is mixing with others, so it is understandable that they may be worried. Normalise common thoughts and feelings that they may be having as their child prepares to start at a camp/summer programme.

Providing reassurance and information

Take a few minutes to talk about the return to school. Go through the safety procedures and public health guidelines. Give them some ideas about the daily activities/timetable. Outline the daily practicalities (i.e. importance of being on-time, parents/carers leave/collect children at the school entrance, what the child/young person needs to bring, etc.). Explore the ways that they can support their child to get ready for the return to school. Identify ways to stay in touch.

Gathering information

Ask the parents/carers about how their child is feeling about meeting friends, and returning to school. Try to find out what their child is most looking forward to and any worries that they might have. Ask if there is anything that you should be aware of or anything that you could do to support their child during the return to school. If the child is worried, ask for ideas on what normally helps their child to relax when upset. Invite the parents/carers to ask questions and share their concerns. Try to answer their questions as sensitively and honestly as you can. If you do not know the answer, let them know that you will link in other staff members/school principal and get back to them with the necessary information. Invite them to share something positive about their child and to let you know their child's main interests (e.g., favourite toy/sport/food/reward etc.).

Ending on a positive note

Summarise the main points from the call. End with a positive and hopeful message by letting them know that you are looking forward to having their child back at school in your classroom, that you have lots of fun learning activities planned, and that you are confident that all will make the return successfully . Thank them for taking the call and for helping you get to know their child/young persons needs on return to school.

Creating an ebook

Creating an ebook is an easy and effective way to communicate key messages. An ebook enables the creator to communicate key messages in a visually appealing and engaging manner.

The information can be electronically shared with the target audience in a very accessible and user friendly format.

1. Choose the app

There are many apps available for both Android and Apple devices and some allow you to create ebooks free of charge. Book Creator One is suitable for Apple devices, while Our Story 2 is suitable for both Apple and Android devices. Canva is a software package that is very user-friendly and requires no design experience to create professional-looking ebooks. Most apps have a variety of templates and enable the user to create ebooks using texts, pictures and photos.
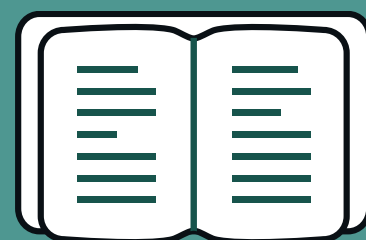
2. Think about the key messages and content

Each page or chapter can communicate a key message. A Return to School ebook could contain information relating to the public health guidelines that will be in place, details about how the school day will be organised, ideas on how to prepare for the return to formal schooling, and ways to share information and stay in touch.

3. Consider the format that will connect best with your target audience:

Some apps create a PDF document with pictures and text, while others contain audio and/or video files.

4. Think about the best way to share the ebook

It can be shared by email, on the school website, or a hard copy can be printed.

A sample return to school ebook can be accessed on the following: Canva PDF

SEPTEMBER 2020

WELCOME BACK

Welcome back to school. We have missed you and we are excited about starting back at school.
We are so proud of you. Thank you for being our stay at home heroes!

WE HAVE BEEN BUSY
GETTING THE SCHOOL
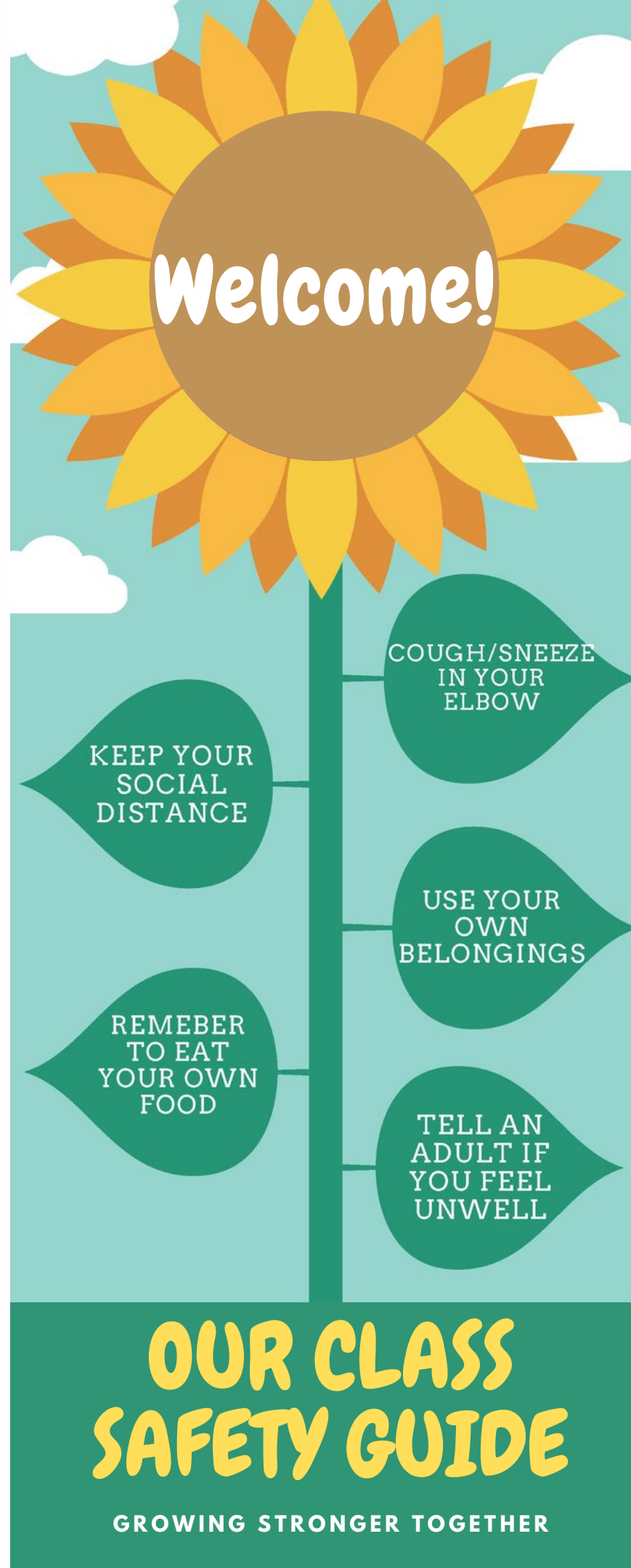READY TO MAKE IT SAFE
FOR YOU TO COME BACK.

02

When you come back to school you
will see that most things look the
same.

EXPLAIN/SHOW ANY CHANGES TO THE
SCHOOL/CLASS LAYOUT AND ANY NEW
PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES

Welcome!

COUGH/SNEEZE IN YOUR ELBOW

KEEP YOUR SOCIAL DISTANCE

USE YOUR OWN BELONGINGS

REMEBER TO EAT YOUR OWN FOOD

TELL AN ADULT IF YOU FEEL UNWELL

OUR CLASS SAFETY GUIDE

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

WE HAVE SOME NEW SCHOOL RULES

Explain/show any new school rules taking in to account public health guidelines.

03

05

SCHOOL WILL START AT 9AM

Your parents will bring you to the school yard and then you can walk with a teacher to your class room

SCHOOL WILL FINISH AT 2:30PM

At the end of the day your teacher will walk you back to the yard where your parents will collect you.

WE WILL HAVE TWO BREAKS.

We will take these breaks in our own section of the school yard/hall.

PLEASE COME ON TIME!!

YOUR CLASS ROOM IS ROOM ...

Your teacher's name is ...

EACH DAY WE WILL BE LEARNING LOTS OF NEW THINGS

You will have a class timetable that will let you know what is happening each day.

WE WILL DO LOTS OF INTERESTING THINGS TOGETHER

including sport, music, drama and art

DON'T FORGET

Each day remember to bring your school books, pencil case, lunch, water bottle, hand sanitizer and tissues.

AND REMEMBER TO BRING A CAN-DO ATTITUDE!!

07

We are looking forward to a great year ahead.

See you soon!!

08

Child's Name: **Date:**

Completed by:

During school closure my child enjoyed ...

During school closure my child has learned ...

During school closure my child faced these challenges ...

These challenges were overcome by ...

When supporting my child in school it is important to know that the following significant events have occurred during school closure ...

I think it would be helpful if you knew ...

My child has the following thoughts about returning to school ...

My hopes for my child this year is ...

Adapted from autism education trust LINK

My Name:

Today's Date:

I like ...

I dislike ...

I learn best when ...

I need support with ...

Adults in school can help me by ...

People like and admire me because ...

I think it would be helpful if you knew ... ...

I hope ...

Adapted from autism education trust LINK

Settling Back to School

OPENING SESSION: THE TIPS

- Carefully consider your seating to ensure adherence to the public health guidelines. Develop a personal script so you are at ease talking through each step.

- Follow a circle time format.

- Know your key messages (*) and use simple language.

- Have sample sentence starters, e.g., The best thing about Covid-19 was …, The hardest thing for me was …, Something new I learned is …, One thing I am grateful for this week is..., This week I hope that...

- Have scripts to respond to comments that might arise when sharing stories, e.g., normalise fears/worries, acknowledge loss/stresses, accept different reaction, refocus the group back on the key messages etc.

- Find creative ways to deliver key messages and ensure that the session is multi-sensory, e.g., set up an achievement wall, gratitude flag/tree, hope cloud, etc.

- If you are concerned about anything that a child or young person shares acknowledge their comment and let them know that you are there to talk to them afterwards if needed. Also be aware of the role of the student support structures within your school and if appropriate refer the child/young person for additional support. Bear in mind that you may also need to make arrangements to share the concern with their parents/carers. However be alert to the possibility that a welfare or protection concern may also arise so you will need to be familiar with the protocols and procedures that need to be followed in these circumstances.

- End the session on a positive note and plan to revisit the discussion with informal check-ins and follow-up circle-time sessions. It is important to remember that acknowledging the impact that Covid-19 has had on the lives of children and young people is not a one-off conversation, but a way of being attuned to them as they adjust to the uncertainty of living through a pandemic.

Sample Key Messages (*)

- Now is the time to reconnect with friends and learning.

- School is a safe and fun place to be.

- Teachers are there to help them.

- They have learned a lot during Covid-19.

- We are all in it together.

- They can feel hopeful about the future.

Connecting with Children and Young People

Key Messages

- It is time to reconnect children and young people with learning and friends. School is a safe and fun place to be.
- Teachers are there to support children and young people.
- Children/young people will need to be reminded about all they have learned.
- We are all in this together.
- We can feel hopeful about the return to school.

At the start of the school year, it will be important to spend some time talking with the children and young people about their experiences of Covid-19. This could be done in a small-group setting or on an individual basis. The aim of this connecting conversation is to allow them to share their stories, to provide them with a chance to express their thoughts and feelings, and to remind them that they are not alone. A connecting conversation has a number of key elements (outlined below), which need to be tailored to the age and developmental level of the child/young person. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the NEPS Webinar and Toolkit 'Supporting the Wellbeing of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure'.

Being Honest

Covid-19 is still around. Some people will continue to become ill from it, which may make us all a little worried. However, we are learning more about how to deal with Covid-19 all the time. We now know more about how to protect ourselves, which means that it is safe to come back to school in a new way. We can all work together to make sure that school is a safe and fun place to be.

Expression of Feelings

People have coped with Covid-19 in many different ways. We have all had varying thoughts and feelings about the situation, and have behaved and reacted in different ways. This is normal and to-be-expected as this has been a difficult time for many people. I know that you may have experienced and may continue to experience different feelings, e.g., happy/unhappy to be at home, lonely/content without friends, worried/unconcerned about the virus, etc. Some of your feelings may have been very strong, e.g., very angry/delighted to be at home. You may have had and may continue to have unfamiliar thoughts, e.g., I will never see my friends again…, I will never catch up in school…, etc. At times you may even have reacted or behaved differently than before, e.g., argued more/less with brothers and sisters, helped out more/less at home, slept more/less, ate more/less, etc. These are normal feelings, thoughts and reactions at this time. Always remember that in time your thoughts and feelings won't be as strong, as feelings come and go, and you will be better able to deal with them. I am here to listen and to help you to find healthy ways to share your thoughts and express your feelings.

Acknowledging Impact

Life in school is going to look a little different than before. There are new rules and new systems, which are there to keep us all safe. We have to wash our hands more, cough and sneeze into our elbows, use only our own belongings, keep our social distance, and tell someone if we are feeling unwell. At first these new rules will seem a little strange but, I know that we will quickly get used to them.

Looking Back

We have all played our part to help our country deal with Covid-19. Every child and young person, including you, has been a stay-at-home hero. This has helped to keep people safe. I know that at times this will have been a difficult thing to do but, you did it! You did what was asked and you have come out of this unusual time as a stronger, kinder and smarter person.

Looking Forward

We know that scientific and medical experts from around the world are working together to find ways to treat and prevent Covid-19. This means that in time school will start to look and feel more familiar and normal. Until then, we know what to do. We will follow our new school rules to keep ourselves and our school community safe. We will look out for each other as we are all in this together. We can do it. We will get through this together.

My COVID-19 Experience
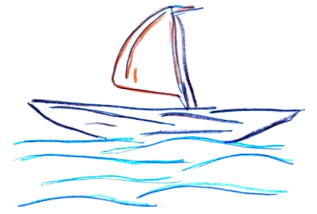
What Covid-19 means to me

How I spent my time at home

Three happy memories from staying at home

1.

2.

3.

What I missed about not being at school

What I have learned about myself …

What I am looking forward to in the year ahead

Any questions or worries I have about being back at school

My Thoughts About Being Back in School

What I like best about being back in school _____

_____

What I missed most about not being able to go to school _____

_____

What I have learned about myself during school closures _____

_____

The things in school that I now find easy are _____

_____

The things in school that I now find hard are _____

_____

Now that I am back at school I need help with _____

_____

I can ask my teacher for help by _____

_____

My class mates can help me by _____

_____

If I have any questions or worries I can talk to _____

_____

My family can help me be successful at school by _____

_____

To help me relax I like to _____

_____

A good day in school would look like _____

_____

A good break time in school would look like _____

_____

When I think about the year ahead I feel _____

_____

My hopes for the year ahead are _____

_____

P A C E

PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy.
It is an approach that was developed by clinical psychologist, Dr. Dan Hughes, as a way to support adults in building connections with children and young people, thereby providing children and young people with a safe space in which to open up and communicate. Children and young people often communicate their emotions through their behaviour and this approach helps them learn to verbalise their emotions.

The PACE model outlines four key principles for adults to use to connect with children and young people. Although these principles are based on how parents connect with young infants, they offer a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that can help all children and young people feel safe. Once children and young people feel heard and understood, they are more likely to be able to see situations from another perspective and work to find more acceptable ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Playfulness involves adults interacting with children and young people in a light-hearted and reassuring manner. In a playful moment, an adult communicates interest in a child/young person and learns more about his/her world. The adult's open, calm and engaged attitude allows the child/young person to relax and become less defensive and more reflective.
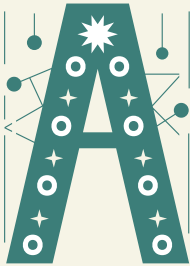
Acceptance refers to adults unconditionally accepting the inner thoughts, feelings and struggles that are behind children and young people's behaviour.
A child/young person is therefore encouraged to express his/her inner world without fear of judgement or evaluation. This unconditional acceptance on the part of the adult is critical in creating a feeling of safety and security for the child/young person. By normalising emotions and providing affirmations, the adult supports the child/young person in being open about his/her inner turmoil. The adult communicates understanding of the motives for behaviour and accepts the child/young person's right to show his/her emotion, but helps him/her understand that certain behaviours are still unacceptable.
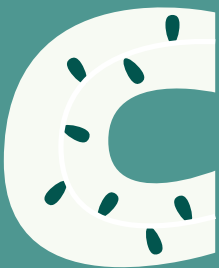
Curiosity involves adults supporting children and young people to become more self-aware by learning to reflect on the reasons underlying their behaviour. When adults are curious, they are interested in understanding what has happened to, rather than what is wrong with, children or young people. When an adult shows genuine curiosity and a real willingness to understand the meaning behind a child/young person's behaviour, it helps the child/young person to open up about personal thoughts and feelings without fear of being judged. The child/young person is then more likely to open up and stay engaged in conversations that support the development of a deeper understanding of how his/her thoughts and feelings influence his/her behaviour.
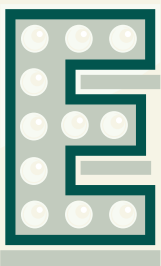
Empathy involves adults showing compassion, communicating that children and young people's inner worlds are important to them, and that they are available if the children or young people are finding things tough. It involves an adult being present in the moment so as to understand and experience things alongside
the child/young person.

You can find further information on the web ddpnetwork.org or danielhughes.org

The Brain & Stress

Dr. Dan Siegel and Dr Tina Payne Bryson created the concept of the upstairs downstairs brain which helps us to understand how the brain reacts in times of stress. Using the analogy of a two storey house, they explain that the downstairs part of the brain is responsible for basic functions and impulses like breathing, strong emotions and survival reactions (fight, flight and freeze). The upstairs part of the brain is responsible for more complex functions such as critical thinking, planning, problem solving and decision making. The staircase allows the two parts of the brain to communicate. When they communicate the upstairs part coordinates and balances the downstairs part which enables the child/young person to remain regulated and ready for learning. This coordination allows a child/young person to slow down and think before they act. It allows them to regulate their emotions, self soothe and consider others' feelings and perspectives, all of which are important for wellbeing and learning.

When a child/young person is under stress the survival part of the brain dominates and the staircase to the upstairs brain becomes blocked. At this time the body gets ready for fight, flight or freeze and higher order thinking is put on hold. The child or young person is now not able to learn, reason, problem solve or engage in conversation about their behaviour.

Ways school staff can support children and young people to unblock the staircase

• Connect by showing attunement, compassion and empathy. Listen to them and reflect back how they are feeling. Use nonverbal cues like empathetic facial expression and a nurturing tone of voice. In doing so the child/young person feels safe and understood and can begin to calm down.

• Acknowledge how they are feeling and help them to recognise and name their emotions (Name it to Tame it). This reduces the intensity of the emotion.

• You may need to use a movement or relaxation activity to help the child/young person calm down and reduce the intensity of their emotion.

• Remember that intense emotional moments are not the time to resolve the issue. Refrain from discussing the inappropriate behaviour and or applying consequences at this time.

• When connection and calmness is established the adult can then redirect the child/ young person (Connect then Redirect) using upstairs brain strategies such as problem solving. Invite them to negotiate with you for a mutually agreeable solution.

Regulate, Relate, Reason

Dr. Bruce Perry has developed a simple method for helping children and young people to learn, think and reflect. He refers to the importance of understanding brain structure when trying to interact especially when they are in a dysregulated state. He contends that heading straight for the reasoning part of the brain, with the expectation that a child or young person will learn, will not work if they are dysregulated and feel disconnected from others. By having an understanding of the hierarchical nature of the brain, adults can follow a set sequence of steps which will facilitate effective interaction. The three phases in this sequence are: regulate, relate and reason.

The model contends that regulating, and then relating, to a child or young person is the most effective way of getting information to the reasoning part of the brain. Once regulated, they are more likely to be receptive to teaching and learning, which then enables any problem-solving discussions to begin. If a child or young person is in a dysregulated state, they are very unlikely to learn or remember what they have heard.

Regulate:
The first phase involves helping them to regulate and calm their stress response. Adults can assist children and young people to regulate by offering comfort and reassurance.

Relate:
The second phase involves having an attuned and sensitive relationship with the child or young person. By empathising with them and validating their feelings, adults can support the development of a connection. When adults relate to and connect with children and young people, they are reminded that they are in a safe and secure environment where adults are interested in understanding them and supporting them to deal with their thoughts and feelings.

Reason:
The third phase involves the calm, connected child or young person being ready to engage with learning. Once regulated and feeling connected, they can start to access the parts of the brain needed for reason. It is at this stage that adults can support them to remember, reflect, articulate, and become self-assured.

You can find further information at Beacon House Click here
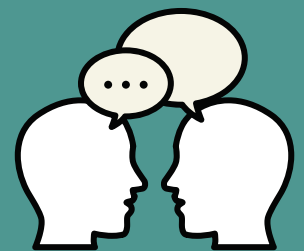
Metacognition

Metacognition refers to our awareness and understanding of the processes involved in our own thinking and learning. In its simplest form, it involves "thinking about our thinking". By exploring metacognition, we can understand and become aware of higher-order thinking skills and the skills and strategies used when planning, monitoring, evaluating learning. This insight can support children and young people to become flexible, creative, self-directed and independent learners. Reflection is a key component of metacognition and children/young people are encouraged to ask questions throughout the process.

- Children and young people are encouraged to think about the learning goal, how best to approach the task and what strategies are needed to complete the task successfully. Key reflective questions might include "What am I being asked to do?", "What strategies will I try?"
- Children and young people then implement the plan and monitor their progress by examining how close they are to achieving their goal. Key questions could include "Is the strategy working?", "Do I need to approach this task in a different way?"
- Then children and young people reflect on the effectiveness of the strategy they used. Questions to ask may be "How did I get on with this task?", "What went well?", "What didn't go so well?", "If I had to complete this task again, how might I approach it differently?", "What learning have I taken from this exercise that I can apply to another learning goal?"

**School Staff can encourage children and young people to engage in metacognition by:**

- Helping them to become aware of the factors that influence their learning, such as goal setting, problem solving, evaluating options, likely outcomes etc.

- Helping them to set clear learning goals

- Assisting them to use cognitive strategies such as concept maps and KWL charts

- Supporting them to plan strategies that will help them to achieve their goals

- Encouraging them to anticipate potential barriers to achieving their goals

- Providing systems and checklists to enable them to monitor progress

- Teaching them mnemonics to assist with quick recall of information

- Encouraging them to keep a learning journal to reflect on their thinking

- Modelling and allowing self-talk

- Encouraging them to review their own performance on a task/assignment

- Asking them to summarise learning

Growth Mindset

Dr. Carol Dweck coined the terms fixed mindset and growth mindset to describe the underlying beliefs people have about learning and intelligence. Research in this area has shown that differences in mindset can lead to achievement gaps in grades, test scores, class behaviour and other student outcomes. Even if children/ young people are unaware of their mindset, research has shown that what they believe about their own intelligence can affect their effort, engagement, motivation, and achievement.

Children and young people with a **FIXED MINDSET** believe that their intelligence and talents are innate traits that don't change. They tend to avoid challenges, give up easily, see efforts as fruitless, get upset by mistakes, perceive feedback as criticism and feel threatened by the success of others. As a result they may plateau early or achieve less than their full potential.
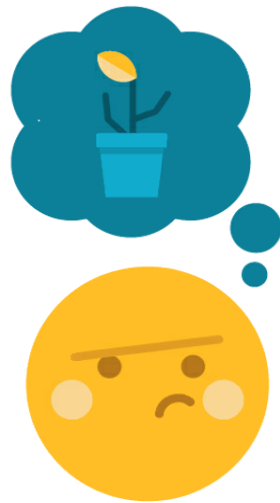
Fixed Mindset
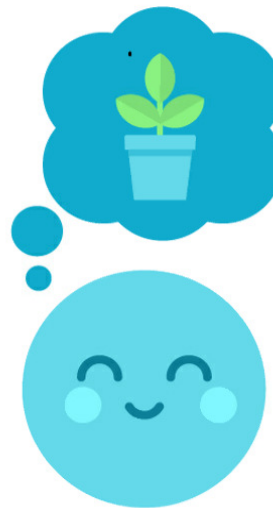
Growth Mindset

Children and young people with a **GROWTH MINDSET** believe that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice. They view ability as something that can be worked at and something than is affected by effort. They have an increased tendency to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, believe in effort, learn from feedback and be inspired by the success of others.

How school staff can support children and young people to develop a growth mindset

- Acknowledge and praise effort by commenting on the process rather than the end product e.g. "You persisted, tell me about the way you approached that task"

- Nurture an environment that promotes problem solving e.g. "Even though you did not know how to solve that problem you thought about it and tried out your solutions to see would it work"

- Encourage and praise perseverance e.g. by displaying work in progress/drafts rather than the finished product to help them to see that work evolves with effort, feedback and revisions

- Reinforce the concept that the brain is a muscle that can grow and develop with effort and exercise when learning, just like every other muscle e.g. "Your brain has worked hard today and is fitter than it was yesterday"

- Encourage peer mentoring as children/young people are receptive to feedback from peers e.g. Writing notes of encouragement, tip sheets, inspirational quotes for each other particularly for those who are struggling, lacking in confidence or have a fixed mindset

- Encourage children and young people to view mistakes as an important and essential part of the learning process e.g. when introducing new topics ask them to share a mistake they made or when reviewing previously covered material ask them to identify something that they had forgotten

- Communicate that you see their potential and have high expectation of them. Encourage them to have high expectation of themselves e.g. when providing oral or written feedback, comment on the positives and gently prompt them to the next step in their learning

Adapted from Growth Mindset Sample Strategies by Transforming Education LINK

Supporting the Wellbeing of all Children and Young People in School

Return to School Checklist

Key questions to consider

Do key adults understand the current needs of children and young people during the transition back to school?
Have they up to date information on the child/young person's strength and needs?
Has a staff member linked in with parents/carers to gain information on their child's experience during school closure?

Are the children/young people familiar with the school/classroom environment?
Have they seen photographs of the layout or have had a virtual tour of the school/class?
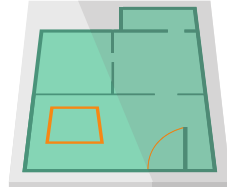
Are the children/young people familiar with the adults that will be teaching/ supporting them?
Have they seen a photograph or a video clip with a welcoming message?

Do the children/young people know what to expect on the first day?
Have they been given instructions/pictures on how to enter the school/class on the first morning?
Do they fully understand new vocabulary e.g. social distance, cough etiquette?
Do they know when and how they can access the toilet?
Do they know where they will be having their breaks and what they will be allowed to do during break time?
Do they know what rooms they will be spending time in and how to enter and exit the room in line with social distance measures?
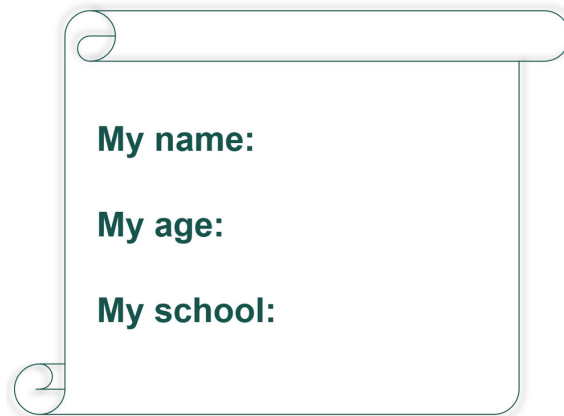Do the children/young people know what their daily timetable will be?

Do the children/young people know what to expect in the first week?
Have they been reassured that they will catch up on work missed during school closures?Do they know that time will be spent reviewing and revising last year's work?
Do they know how to seek help if they are finding it hard to keep up with a lesson?
Do they know what they can do if they are starting to feel overwhelmed e.g., use communication card, request access to the calm space?

Adapted from Autism Education Trust: Return to School Checklist for Staff
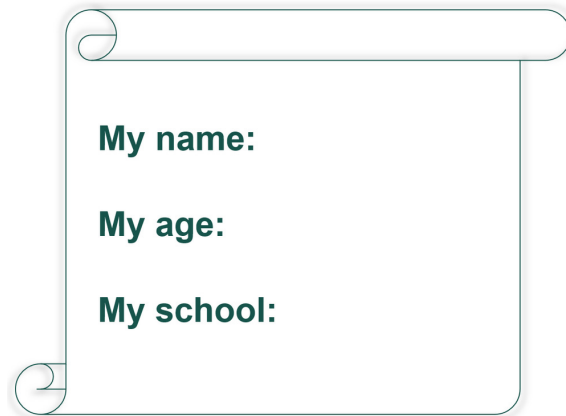
My name:

My age:

My school:

How to use the Pupil Voice Booklet

The aim of this booklet is to include the voice of the child and young person in their learning, supporting them to reach their goals. Learning occurs when a child/young person is learning ready. This is achieved by supporting the needs of the child/young person which allows them to be available to learn. By inviting the voice of the child and young person we are allowed to respond to their uniqueness in terms of their social-emotional development, communication, learning, and relationships to self and others. It also provides valuable information to the teacher about their strengths and needs which is helpful in selecting strategies to support the child/young person.

This booklet is underpinned by Person-centred approaches which are rooted within a humanistic psychological perspective and underpinned by person-centred psychology based on theory by Carl Rogers (1951). The worksheets in the booklet are adapted from Sanderson and Solution Focused Brief Therapy models.

The booklet can be completed over a number of sessions. When using the worksheets within this booklet an individual conversational approach is intended, with the teacher acting as scribe if needed. The child/young person is invited to share their opinions about themselves, their strengths and needs and their insights into how to make their school experience better. This approach also invites children and young people to think about and identify any skills they need to develop in order to improve their school experience.

My name:

My age:

My school:

Worksheets

'What I Like and Admire About Me' and 'What Others Like and Admire About Me' are adapted from the Appreciation tool (Ref: www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk). These worksheets can be used to gather information on what others like and admire about the child/young person and what they like and admire about themselves, including their gifts, talents and interests. This information helps us to think about how an individual can use their strengths to make a positive contribution to the new school year. Some children and young people may struggle to write positive information about themselves. If so the worksheet can be completed over a number of sessions and the teacher can use instances between sessions to prompt the child/young person to recognize their strengths. The 'What others like and admire about me' worksheet can be completed by the teacher over a number of days/week as the teacher notices the gifts, talents, interests of the child/young person.

The 'Good Day' worksheet (adapted from www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk) involves gathering information on what makes a good day for the child/young person. This information can be used to identify what is important to them and how best to support them in school.

The 'If I Had a Magic Wand' worksheet is adapted from the Solution Focused Brief Therapy approach and invites the child/young person to envision a preferred future, which not only promotes a sense of hope but can be used for goal setting.

The 'Supporters' worksheet, also adapted from Solution Focused approaches, can be used to help us to understand who is important in the child/young person's life and how they can support the child/young person to settle back to school and achieve their goals.

The 'Skill Development' worksheet underpinned by both approaches focuses on the child/young person's sense of agency in change.

The 'What If?' worksheet informed by Solution Focused approaches invites the child/young person to explore their strengths, current skill set and resilience in coping with setbacks. By exploring the possibility of setbacks as a normal part of skill development or change, motivation is maintained and the focus remains on the goal and the strengths the child and young person has rather than the setback.
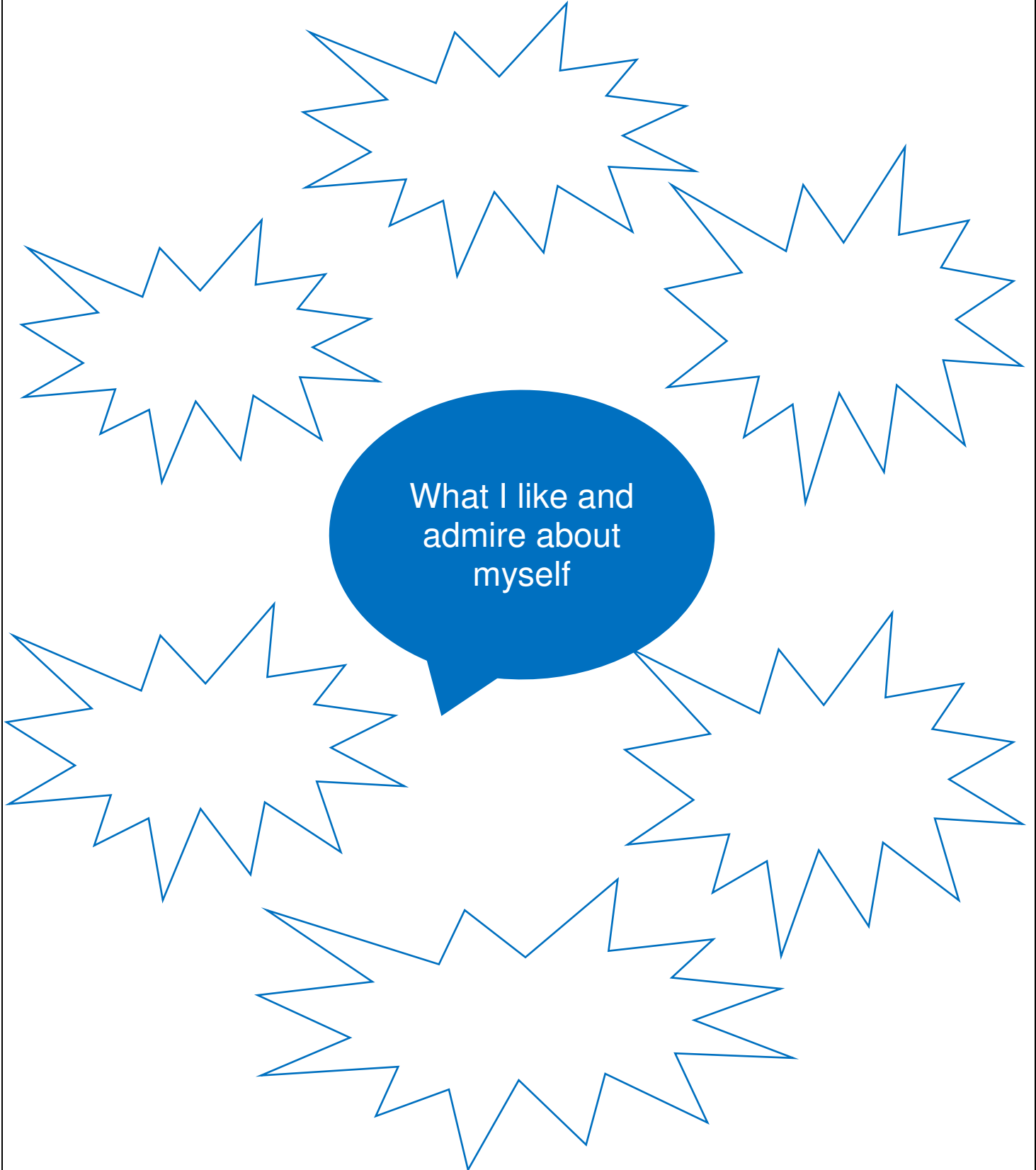
ALL ABOUT ME!

My name:

My age:

My school:

What I like and admire about myself

Fill the spaces with things about yourself. Think about things you like, what you're good at, your achievements or talents and your positive traits.

What I like and admire about myself

What my family and friends admire about me

Ask a family member or your friends to complete this. Ask them to think about things they admire about you!

What others like and admire about me

What is important to me

Fill the spaces with things that you feel are important to you right now. What are the things you like? What makes you feel good?

Connecting with friends

Hobbies

Food

Music

What I really like at school.

What makes a good day for me

Each day can feel different and we all have good and bad days. Draw and write about what makes a good day for you?
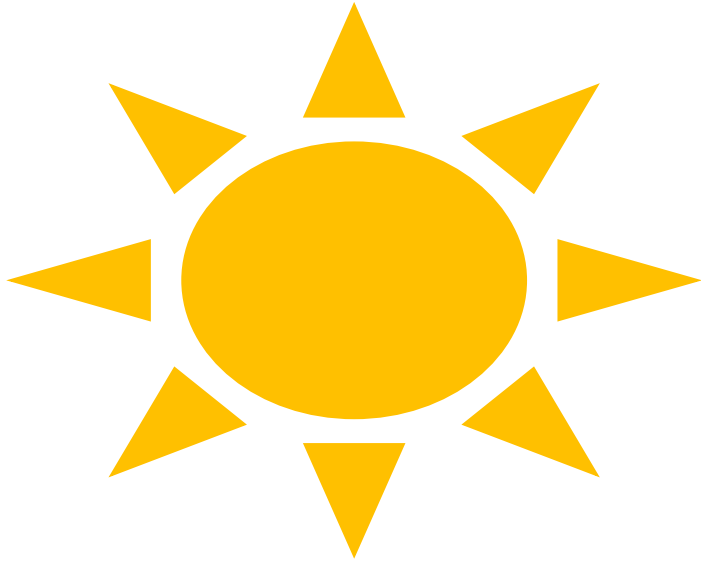
A good day

What I have learned
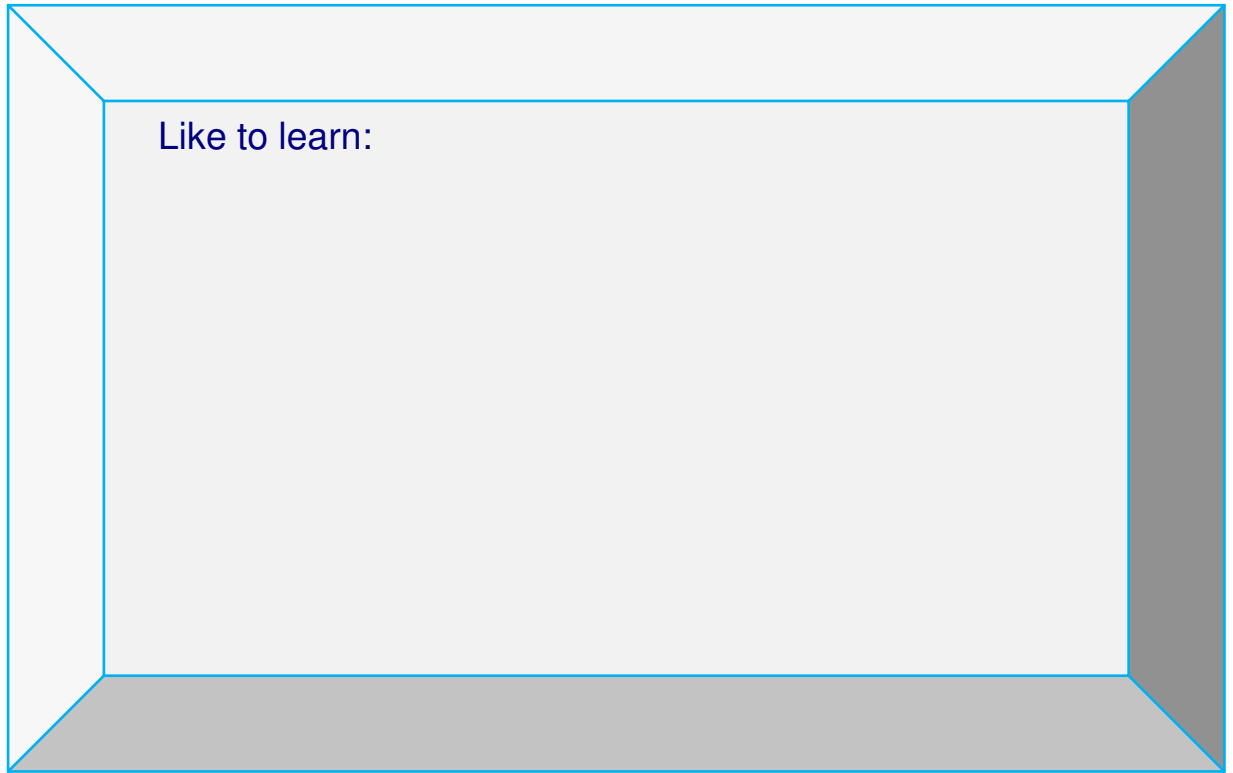
Think about your home schooling and all that you have learned

I have learned …
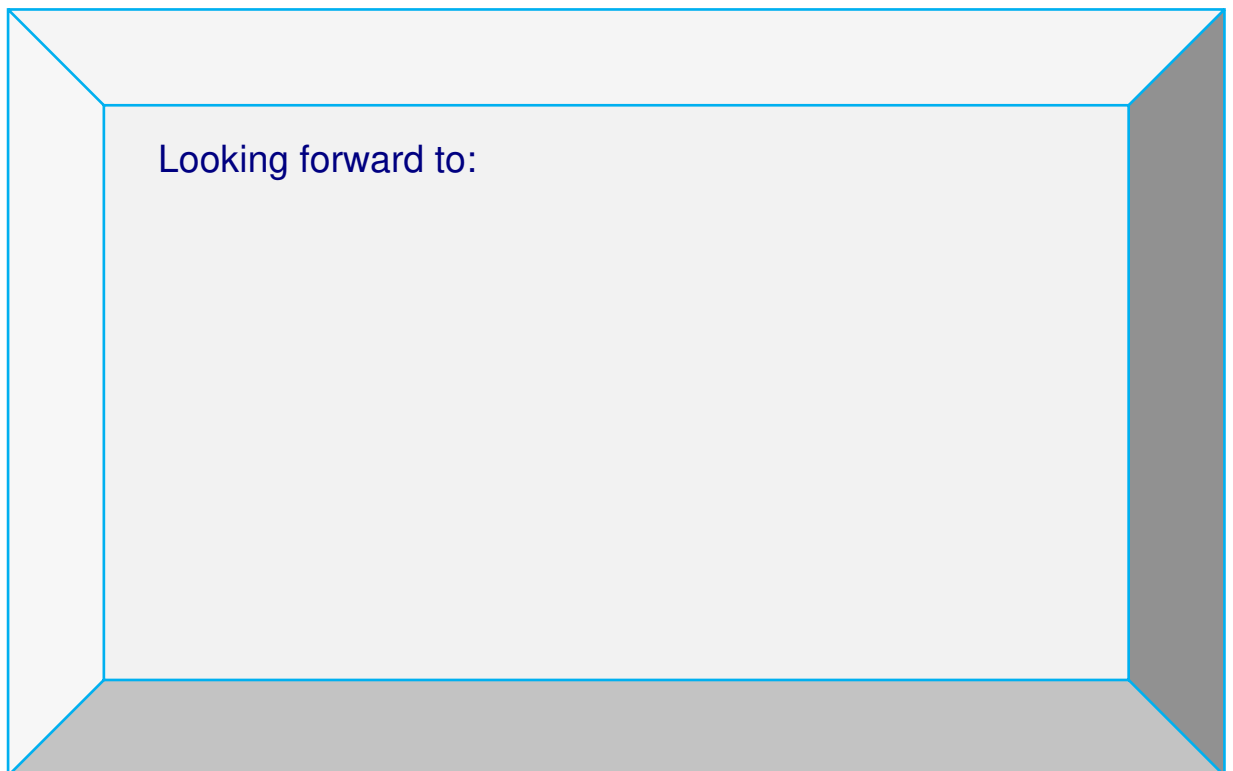
I have enjoyed …

What I would like to learn

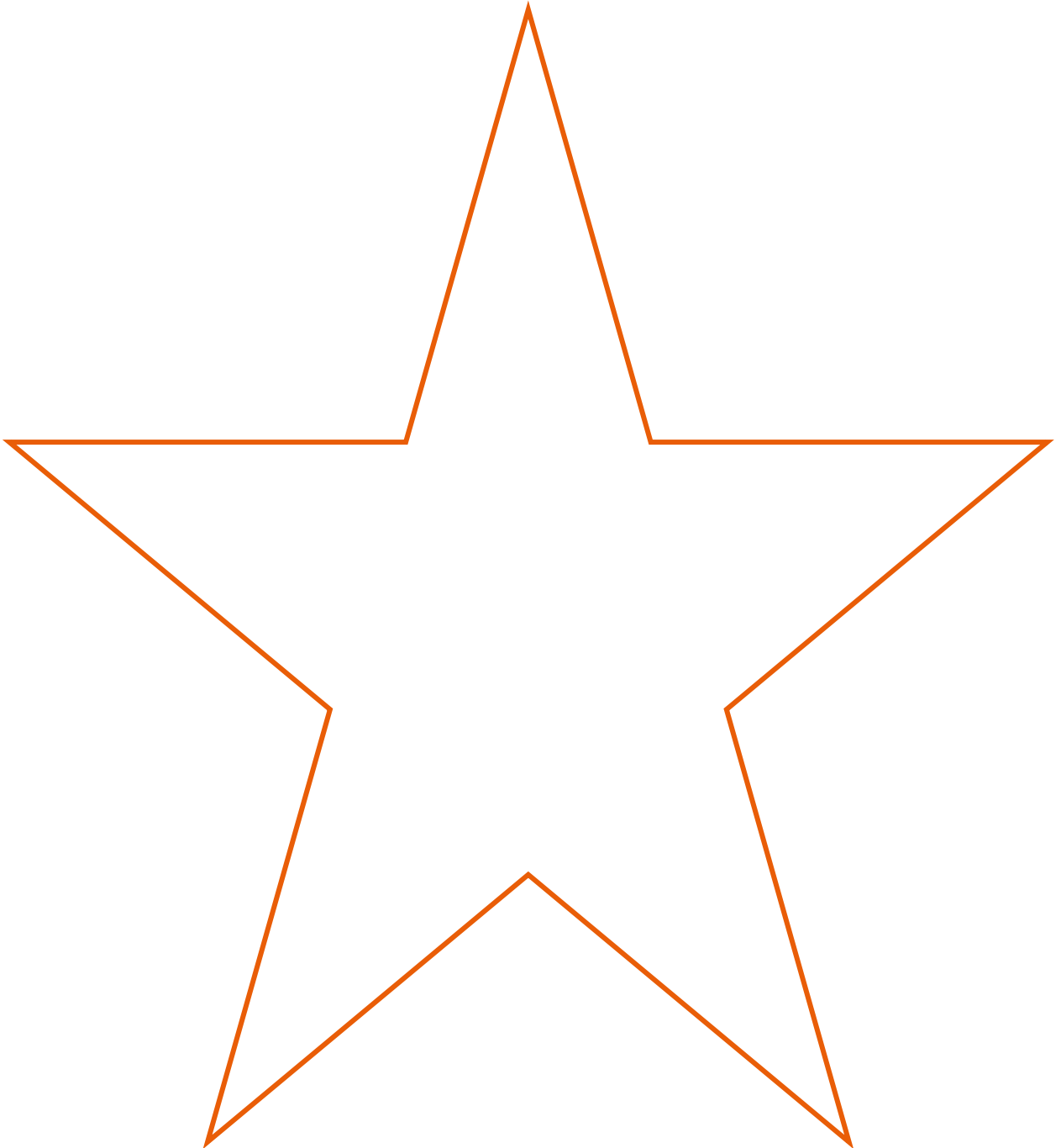Think about the things that you would like to learn in school and what you are most looking forward to

Like to learn:

Looking forward to:

If I had a magic wand

If you had a magic wand think about what one change you would like to make your time in school better

My Supporters

Think about who can help you to develop or practice these skills at home or in school. Think about what they can do to help.
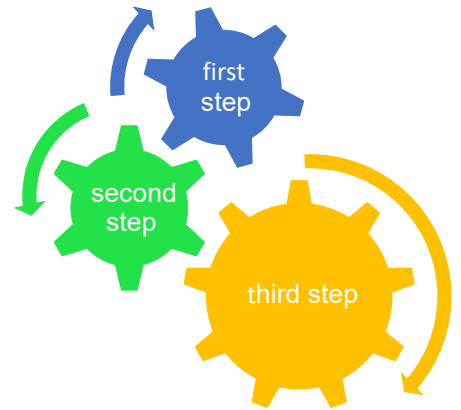
_____

_____

_____

_____

My Plan

If at first you don't succeed think about what you can do or who you can ask for help if you are finding it tough

What might go wrong?

What will you do?

Will that be helpful? How might things change?

Who will you go to for support to get back on track?

Narrative Stories

The stories we tell hold powerful influence over our thoughts, memories, behaviours and even identities, often influencing how we live our lives. Our stories tend to focus on the more extraordinary events in our lives because these are the experiences that we need to make sense of. When we turn moments from our lives into anecdotes we are making sense of these events.

Creating a story can help us create something meaningful out of a puzzling time and help us come to terms with the decisions that we have made. Stories can shape our future with research showing that telling stories of struggles that turn out well can give people the hope they need to live productive lives in the aftermath of major life challenges. They are a powerful source of self-persuasion as evidence that does not fit the story is left behind. Our story is the way we integrate facts and events internally by picking them apart and weaving them back together to make meaning.

This narrative story can become a form of identity. The things, and people we choose to include in the story, and the way we tell it can reflect and shape who we are. A narrative story isn't only about saying what happened, it is our experience of what happened and a way to comment on why it was important.

Narrative stories can allow children and young people to speak about their lives in ways that make them stronger.

The Tree of Life is one approach of narrative story telling where the tree is a visual metaphor of the child or young's person life with each part of the tree representing key aspects of their past, present and future. This Tree of Life model of narrative story telling allows them to reflect on aspects of themselves shaped by the past and cultivate their tree to reflect the kind of person they would like to become. Prior to completing the Tree of Life, explain to the child/young person that the purpose of the activity is to allow them: to share their story from their perspective; to think about where they come from; to think about what they are good at; to think about their hopes, dreams, and wishes and to think about the significant people in their lives. Ask them to draw a tree with roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves, fruit and seeds. Let them know that it can be as elaborate as they want and that the tree will represent their personal and unique story.
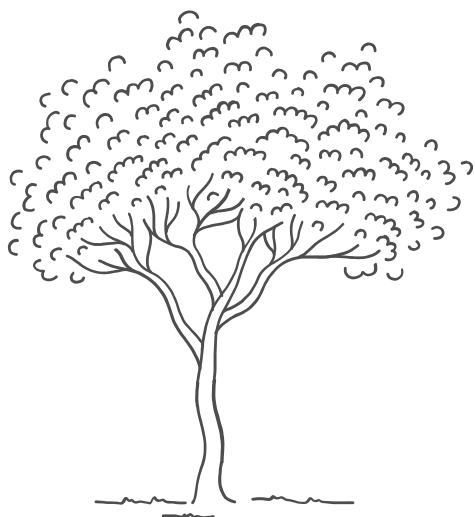
Rain - challenges & difficulties

Seeds - gifts & legacies to give others

Fruit - gifts & legacies I have received **Leaves** - important people in my life

Branches - my hopes & dreams

Trunk - my values, skills, abilities, qualities and characteristics

Ground - my life & my activities

Roots - where I live, people in my life, favourite items and places

My Tree of Life

Rain - challenges & difficulties

Seeds - gifts & legacies to give others

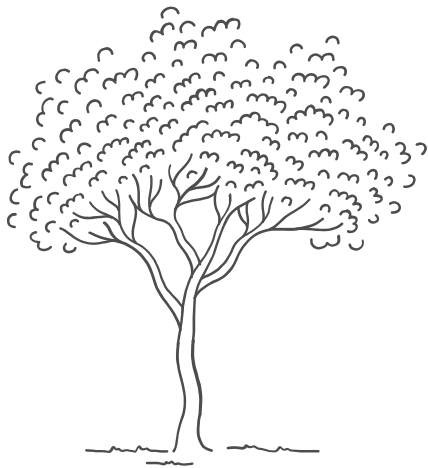Fruit - gifts & legacies I received

Leaves - important people in my life

Branches - my hopes & dreams

Trunk - my values, skills, abilities, qualities & characteristics

Ground - my life & my activities

Roots - where I live, people in my life, favourite items & places

Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviours

What we think affects the way we feel and behave. Understanding this cycle is important in protecting and nurturing wellbeing, because while we cannot be positive or happy all the time our thinking patterns can cause unnecessary distress and lead to behaviours that do not serve us well.

Some thoughts are helpful, these thoughts are based on facts and lead to appropriate feelings and behaviours. For example if a child or young person thinks 'I can't wait to see my friends', it is more likely that they will feel happy going to school and will not fuss when getting ready for school.
However, some thoughts are unhelpful, these thoughts are based on our feelings/emotions (e.g. worry, fear) around the facts and can lead to unnecessary distress and behaviour that does not serve us well. This distress can lead to unpleasant body sensations such as pains, tightness etc. For example if a child/young person thinks 'I have forgotten everything I have learned, I won't be able to keep up in school', it is likely that they will feel worried about going to school and may try to avoid school.

While all children and young people can at times engage in unhelpful thinking if this becomes a pattern it is best to challenge the unhelpful thought cycle. For example, they could say 'Is this really true?', 'Could there be another explanation?'.

Challenging unhelpful thoughts creates a space where a more helpful perspective can be explored. Distress is reduced and a response that serves the child/young person well is made.

The link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours can go unnoticed. Children and young people need help to notice and understand this link and to break unhelpful thinking cycles. School staff can support this process in the following ways:

- Listen to what children/young people say about their thought and their feelings
- Acknowledge and normalise their thoughts and feelings
- Model a helpful thinking style
- Encourage children and young people to notice and challenge unhelpful thoughts
- Encourage them to notice unpleasant body sensations and support them to use relaxation strategies to calm the body
- Consider giving the child/young person a distraction tactic/activity to prevent a them engaging in a behaviour that does not serve them well
- Redirect behaviour resulting from a negative thinking cycle to a behaviour that serves the child/person well
- Acknowledge and praise efforts at every step in the process to reinforce awareness of the link between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours
- Remind them of their strengths
- Admire their persistence and perseverance
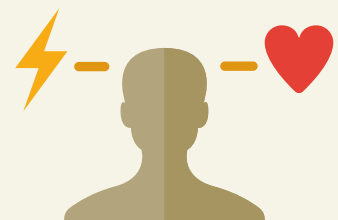
Breathing Exercises

An important part of emotional regulation involves bringing our bodies to a calm or relaxed state. When calm, we manage our emotions more effectively and are better able to focus on cognitive tasks, such as learning. When calm, we are more present in social situations and are more able to engage in social activities in appropriate ways. There are many ways that you can help children and young people to calm their bodies. One of the easiest ways is to teach them how to control their breathing. Four simple, yet effective methods are explained below. The first two methods are suitable for younger children, while the last two may be more appropriate for older children or young people. In all of these exercises encourage them to inhale through their noses and exhale through their mouths.

Butterfly Breathing

Stand or sit comfortably with your arms by your sides. Pretend that you are a butterfly and that your arms are beautiful wings. You are going to raise and lower your arms slowly, imitating how a butterfly opens and closes its wings. Slowly raise your arms while inhaling to the count of 1, 2, 3. Slowly lower your arms back down by your sides while exhaling to the count of 3, 2, 1.

See the You Tube Video, Butterfly Breathing Conscious Discipline
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VXknVjy1T0

Blow Out the Candles

Imagine that a birthday cake with candles is placed in front of your face. You are getting ready to blow out the candles. Inhale deeply and hold for the count of 1, 2, 3, 4. Exhale to blow out the candles to the count of 1, 2, 3, 4. Repeat.

5 Finger Breathing

Stretch out the fingers of your dominant hand like a star fish in front of you. Place the index finger from your other hand at your wrist at the base of the thumb. Inhale to the count of 3 as you trace your finger up along the outer side of the thumb. Hold to the count of 2 while pausing at the tip of your thumb. Exhale to the count of 3 as you trace down the inner side of the thumb. Hold to the count of 2 while pausing at the inner base of the thumb. Continue to inhale, hold and exhale as you trace up and down the other fingers in a similar way.
See the You tube Video, Five Finger breathing a simple guided breathing exercise for kids.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQVZgpyVQ78
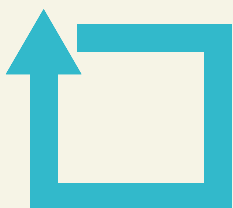
Square Breathing

Visualise a square in front of you. Let your breathing follow the shape of the square. Breathe in 1, 2, 3, 4 as you travel up the left-hand side of the square. Hold for 4 as you travel across the top of the square. Exhale for 4 as you travel down the right-hand side of the square. Hold again for 4 as you go across the bottom of the square.
See the You tube Video, Kids meditation Square Breathing (Focus and Calm) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFdZXwE6fRE

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Children and young people vary in the intensity with which they experience and express their feelings or emotions. They vary in their ability to regulate their emotions.

Emotional regulation refers to our ability to manage emotional reactions effectively so as to cope with the varying demands of everyday life. Like many other skills, most children and young people develop appropriate emotional regulation skills independently however, some require explicit teaching and support to learn and practise these skills.

Teachers can help children and young people to learn and improve emotional regulation skills in four ways:

Teach them to recognise body cues that are the early physiological signs of intense feelings
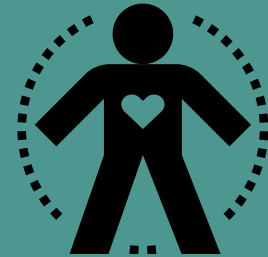
Teach them to identify and label how they are feeling so as to develop their self-awareness and expand their emotional literacy.

Teach them how to rate the intensity of their feelings so as to enable them to develop more self-control.

5. READY TO EXPLODE

4. GETTING STRONGER

3. STARTING TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE

2. FEELING OK

1. CALM AND RELAXED

Empower them by teaching them to identify a range of tools and strategies that they can use to self-regulate and that assist in the healthy expression of emotions.

Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching provides a simple yet effective way to help children and young people to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur and how they can manage them. It is a four-step communication strategy which supports them to self-regulate.

Emotion coaching can support children and young people to experience an intense emotion in a safe and secure way, to understand the reason behind their emotion and to discover ways to express their emotions in a healthy, prosocial manner. Scientific research indicates that labeling feelings leads to changes in the body which help calm the nervous system.

Coaching Involves:
Entering the child/young person's world
Listening attentively
Building on their knowledge with enthusiasm
Using comments rather than questions
Indirectly guiding interactions
Optimising the learning environment

Step 1: Recognise *"I understand how you feel, you are not alone'*
Recognise emotional times as opportunities for connection and learning. Be aware of and recognise the child/young person's emotions and empathise with them. Help the child/young person to verbally label their emotion. This helps sooth the nervous system and promote recovery.

Step 2: Validate *"I think that this is what is happening and this is how you are feeling'*
Observe, listen empathetically and validate the child/young person's emotion. Recognise all emotions as being natural and normal. Understand that they are not always a matter of choice. Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt. Try to understand the child/young person's perspective.

Step 3: Set Limits (if necessary) *''Situations don't always go our way and we cannot always get what we want''*
Sometimes when children/young people are having difficulty self- regulating they can experience a "Fight - Flight - Freeze" response, from which behaviours that are not acceptable can emerge. Separate the child/young person from the behaviour and recognise their behaviour as communication of a need. Be prepared to gently set and maintain limits.

Step 4: Problem Solve ' We *can work together to find a solution'*
Support the child/young person to become calm. Then help them to identify the emotion that was behind the behaviour. Jointly identify appropriate prosocial solutions to the situation. Anticipate the outcomes of each solution. Encourage the child/young person to choose the best solution. Support them to try it out. Reflect on and evaluate the outcome.

Self-Talk

Children and young people often engage in self-talk. This can be either positive self-talk, where they recognise what is positive about themselves and their situation, or negative self-talk, where they are self-critical or focus more on negative aspects of their situation.

If you notice children or young people engaging in negative self-talk, alert them to the importance of becoming aware of their negative self-perceptions. Give them opportunities to practise changing their thinking.

This exercise involves encouraging children or young people to write down the situation that is causing them to engage in negative self-talk, to identify negative self-talk statements, and to practise changing these negative statements into more positive, hopeful and calming self-talk statements. Children and young people may need much encouragement and practice to persist with this work before positive self-talk becomes a habit.

Situation	Negative self-talk	Positive self-talk

Self-Talk

Slituation	Negative Self-Talk	Positive Self-Talk

Thoughts Log

Helpful thoughts are based on facts and lead to appropriate feelings and behaviours. Unhelpful thoughts are based on our emotions (e.g. fear, worry) around the facts, which leads to unnecessary unpleasant feelings (sadness, worry, fear) and behaviours (avoidance, aggression). Unhelpful thoughts have the potential to overshadow helpful thoughts, which often lead to unpleasant feelings and inappropriate behaviour.

If you notice a child or young person engaging in unhelpful thinking, encourage them to challenge these thoughts. Challenging unhelpful thoughts gives a child or young person the necessary space to see a situation differently, leading to a more measured response. This exercise, involving use of a thoughts log, comprises three components:

1. Encouraging children or young people to write down their unhelpful thoughts

2. Supporting them to counter their negative thinking by asking thought challenger questions e.g., Where is the evidence? What would I tell a friend in this situation? How did I cope in the past? Is thinking like this helping me or making me feel worse?

3. Helping them to replace their negative thoughts with more positive and reassuring ones.

Unhelpful Thought	Thought Challenger	Helpful Thought

Where is the evidence?

What would I tell a friend in this situation?

How did I cope in the past?

Is thinking like this helping me, or making me feel worse?

Thoughts Log Activity

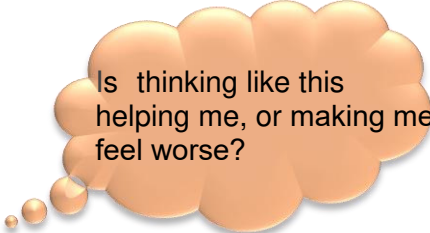| Unhelpful Thought	Thought Challenger	Helpful Thought

Where is the evidence?
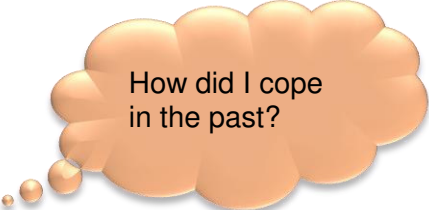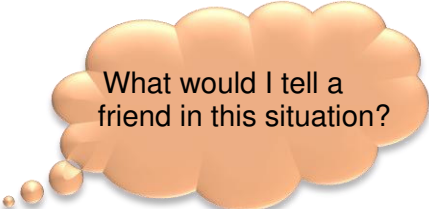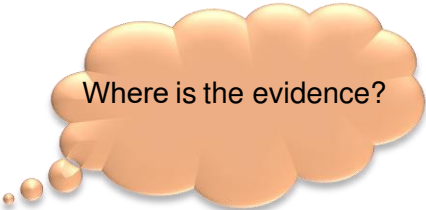
What would I tell a friend in this situation?

How did I cope in the past?

Is thinking like this helping me, or making me feel worse?

Problem-Solving Steps

Children and young people often find it difficult to think about ways to handle challenging situations or deal with conflict. Teaching them the steps involved in effective problem- solving helps them to feel more confident about dealing with everyday problems. Teachers can support children and young people to learn and practise the key steps involved in effective problem- solving. Outlined below is a six-step problem-solving model. The six key steps involve:

1. defining the problem
2. identifying possible solutions to the problem
3. anticipating the outcome of each solution
4. selecting the best solution
5. implementing the solution
6. evaluating the outcome.

1. What's the problem?

2. What could I do? Think of lots of ideas

6. Did it work? Think about what went well and what you could do differently

3. List what might happen for each of these ideas

5. Do it! Put your plan into action!

4. Pick the best solution

Problem Solving Steps

1.   **What is the problem?**

_____

2.   **What could I do?**   **Think of lots of possible different ideas.**

3.   **What might happen for each of these ideas?**   **or**

☐	☐	☐	☐

4.   **Tick the best solution…**

_____

5.   **Do it! Put your plan into action!**

6.   **Did it work? Think about what went well and what you could do differently next time**

or   → →   → →

_____

_____

Compliment Circle

Giving and receiving compliments are two separate skills that are not always easy to learn. Many children and young people need to be taught both skills as these will help them to develop positive self-esteem and build positive relationships. Recognising and naming strengths and positive qualities in themselves and others will help them to develop self-efficacy and extend their friendship group and social supports.

A compliment circle is an activity where each child or young person gets the opportunity to give a compliment to a classmate and receive a compliment from a classmate. A compliment circle therefore supports children and young people in reflecting on their own strengths and those of others which can support the development of a positive classroom atmosphere.

1. Before starting, teachers need to decide on a system for exchanging compliments, i.e. highly-structured/teacher-led to more informal/child-led. The level of structure required varies depending on a number of factors including age, ability-level, and familiarity with the process of giving and receiving compliments.

2. Decide in advance how compliments will be exchanged as this may involve preparation of materials, i.e., the use of concrete or visual supports. Very young children and/or children and young people with special educational needs may need prompting and a more concrete approach, particularly when this activity is being introduced and is new to them. Teachers can structure the content of the compliment circle by giving cue cards containing a picture, word or sentence. These cards can be physically handed over as the compliment is given.

3. When introducing a compliment circle, spend some time explaining the process and expectations.

4. Teachers may need to teach and model how to give and receive a compliment.

5. A golden rule of compliment circles is for compliments to be acknowledged. The person receiving the compliment needs to look and smile at the person giving the compliment and say: Thank-you. The person who has given the compliment needs to respond with: You are welcome. Such acknowledgement ensures that the impact of the compliment is more profoundly felt by all, thereby increasing self- and collective-efficacy.

6. In the beginning, many children and young people may be uncomfortable giving and/or receiving compliments and may make superficial comments. With regular practice, they will become more comfortable with the process and better able to give and receive more meaningful compliments.

7. Provide many opportunities for practice by setting up compliment circles as a regular feature of the class routine.

8. Once children and young people have become used to giving and receiving compliments, they may be encouraged to compliment themselves aloud e.g., I compliment X for ... I compliment myself for ...

Praise

When teachers praise, the relationship between the child/young person and the teacher is nurtured. This forms the basis of trust. When the praise is specific and targeted it can be used as a strategy to shape desired behaviours. This shifts the time spent on disciplining undesired behaviours towards praising the desired behaviour.

Think about the behaviours you wish to encourage. You may include these into the group rules. You may need to model and teach these behaviours. You may also set up scenarios to 'catch' the children/young people demonstrating these desired behaviours. Then you need to praise any child/young person who demonstrates the desired behaviour. Be specific in your praise. Below is a sample of praise statements to choose from. You may also wish to create your own.

You do a super job of …
Good idea for ...
What a wonderful job you've done of …
You have worked so hard …
That's a creative way of ...
You put a lot of effort into that ...
Pat yourself on the back for ...
Give me five for ...
That's correct. That's a cool way to ...
You are a real problem solver for ...
Great thinking ...
Keep at it, you are working really hard and getting it!
You are a real problem solver for ...
Hey, you are really thinking, you …
Wow, you have learned how to ...
You figured it out... Well done!
That was great teamwork.
You are being a good friend/classmate by ...
You are really good at sharing your ideas with the class, that is really helping us all learn.
Thanks for being so patient and waiting while I was ...
You went out of your way to help this morning by ...

It helps us when you ...
What a good way to be a friend by helping her/him with that.
You are making a good choice.
I like the way you remembered to walk quietly to your desk.
I knew you'd remember to get ready for the next activity without any reminders.
Thank you for making a quiet choice during work time. Your classmates appreciate your thoughtfulness. I'd love to hear your answer, but first I need to give someone else a chance.
You took the time to clean up the art materials, that's very thoughtful.

I like the way you ...

It's a pleasure to have a class like this because ...

A Growth Mindset Activity
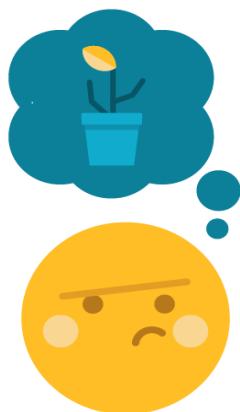
Positive self-talk is really important when we are trying to develop a Growth Mindset. Below are some statements associated with a Fixed Mindset. Have a go at changing these into positive statements that nurture a Growth Mindset.

Fixed Mindset

Growth Mindset

I can't do this

I am just no good at …

I always make mistakes

It is too hard

I will never get it right
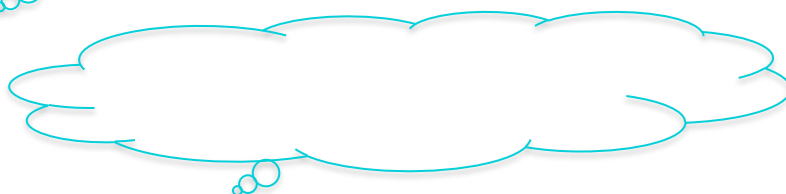
Gratitude

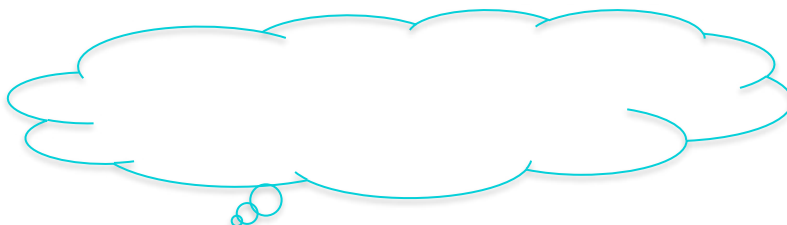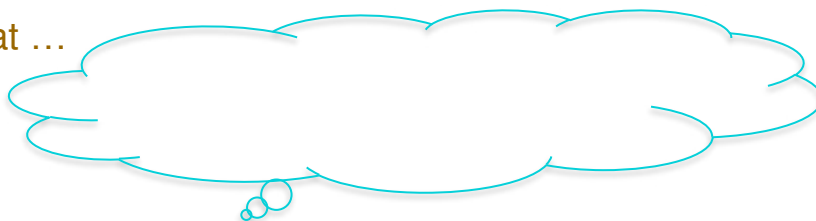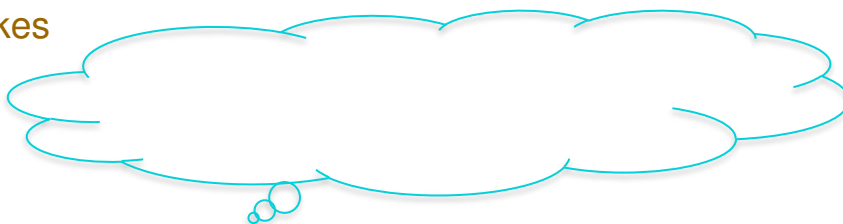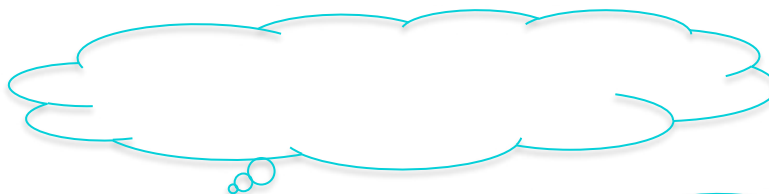Practising gratitude is a simple and effective way to encourage positive emotions, improve self-esteem, build resilience, and protect wellbeing.

Gratitude exercises help children and young people to feel more grateful for or appreciative of the good things in their lives. Gratitude journals work by training them to become more aware of the positive aspects of their daily lives, and may slowly help them to develop a more positive focus in their perceptions of everyday situations.

Books and video clips may be used to introduce gratitude activities. Teachers can support positive reflection by providing key writing prompts. When children and young people are new to this activity, they may find it difficult or may only focus on materialistic things however, their thought processes will develop and their expression will become deeper and more meaningful over time.

These activities may be carried out at any time during the day and/or may be used to provide a positive and predictable end to a school day.

A person I am thankful for

One thing I am grateful for

One new thing I have learned

A happy moment from my day

Hopes and Dreams

Inviting children and young people to consider their hopes and dreams for the future helps them to see that school is a safe and supportive place where their voices and views are valued. By naming their hopes and dreams, they are setting personal goals for the future, which will help them to make personal connections with what they will learn in school and therefore engage more wholeheartedly with learning.

In this activity, children or young people are asked to think about their hopes and dreams for the next school year, and then to draw or write them down in a cloud template. This can be a private self-refection activity, a paired-activity with a partner, or a circle-time activity that is shared with the rest of the class/year group.

Initially, teachers need to engage the children or young people in discussion about their hopes and dreams, i.e., how they may be big/small, short-term/long-term, easy-to-achieve/require effort, etc. Explore how they may be able to achieve some of their hopes and dreams on their own, whereas others may require help and support. Ask them to write/draw one thing that they will do to get closer to their hope or dream, and one person that they could ask for help.

They may need to be given sentence starters, e.g., One hope that I have for this year is …, The first step I will take to make my dream come true is …, The person I will ask to help me is…, They can help me by …. When completed, the clouds may be kept in a private location or displayed as an art activity.

Adapted from https://youngminds.org.uk/media/00/hope-clouds-activity.pdf

My hopes and dreams

My first step

Who can help me?

Postcard Activity

Tuning into the positive nurtures wellbeing. This sentence completion activity allows children and young people to tune into positive, hopeful thoughts about themselves and the future. It could be carried out at an individual, class or whole-school level.

Step 1

Select a theme for the activity, e.g., safety, calm, efficacy, connectedness, hope and gratitude

Step 2

Decide whether the activity will be carried out as an individual, class or whole-school activity.

Step 3

Ask the children or young people to complete the selected cards, either by writing or drawing. Where a child or young person has a difficulty with or is reluctant to write or draw, the card may be used as a prompt for an oral-language activity, with an adult acting as scribe.

Step 4

Once completed, the group is invited to share and talk about their cards if they wish. Some may prefer to keep their cards private.

Step 5

When discussion is completed, the children or young people are given the option of displaying their cards on a noticeboard or as part of a themed visual display, e.g., rainbow of hope, gratitude tree, wall of strengths, etc.

Step 6

The children or young people are given the option of taking their cards home at the end of the week. Older children/young people may like to take a photograph, if this is allowed.

I feel safe when...

I hope...

I work hard at…

I try my best at…

I relax by...

I am good at...

A person I admire…

I am grateful for…

I like to…

Name a person_____.

This person helps me by…

I feel calm when...

I know I am safe when...

I look forward to…
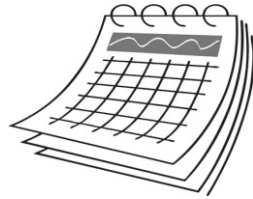
I am improving at…
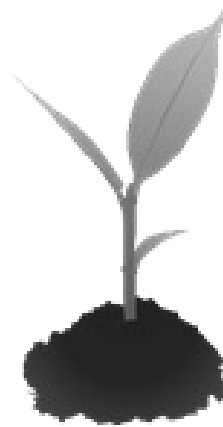
People I am grateful for…

I am proud about…

Letter to Future Self

This activity of writing a letter to your future self is underpinned by Solution Focused approaches.

The aim of this activity is to provide an opportunity for children and young people to reflect on the coping strategies they used during challenging times which promotes self-efficacy.

The activity also focuses on the future, indicating that things will not always remain as they are now which promotes hope which is also good for our wellbeing.

The activity can be completed in writing, or verbally if preferred by the children and young people with the adult acting as scribe.

The adult may select sections of the letter for group discussion if appropriate given the dynamic, needs and experiences of the group members.

The letter does not have to be completed in one session and can be revisited as appropriate.

Dear my future self,

Today's date is _____.

I am _____ years old.

The best bits of school being closed were _____
_____
_____
_____

The hard bits of school being closed were _____
_____
_____
_____

Some of the things that helped me manage the
hard bits were _____
_____
_____
_____

The best bits about being back in school in my new
year are
_____
_____
_____

The hard bits about being back in school in my new year are

_____
_____
_____

If I need help managing the hard bits I will ask for help from

_____
_____
_____

My hopes for this year in school are

_____
_____
_____

I want to remind you of three things that are important to me now

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

From; _____

Time Capsule

A Time Capsule is a container that holds important or everyday items from the present day that are meaningful for the child or young person. These items could include newspapers, wrappers, photos, letters, your favourite keepsake, screenshots and more.

Time capsules are placed in a particular location so that they can be opened at some agreed date in the future.

This activity offers an opportunity for the child or young person to think about what is important to them now so that they can reflect on this stage of their life in the future.

Encourage them to make a list of the items that they might add to their time capsule. They can also complete a worksheet which explains their Time Capsule.

Decide where the Time Capsule will be held and agree the date to open them. When the time comes to open the time capsule enjoy the process of looking back on what was important to them at a given moment in time.

sample Covid-19 time capsule can be downloaded from here

My 2020 Time Capsule

Name: _____ Date: ___/___/_____

School: _____

My friends: _____

Why I have choose these items to put into my Time Capsule

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

My Favourite Things in 2020:

Activity: _____

Song: _____

TV Show: _____

My favourite quote or moto

Pick 3 things:

3 things I'm looking forward to:

_____

_____

2020

Time Capsule Activity

My 2020 Time Capsule

Name: _____   Date: ___/___/_____

School: _____

My friends: _____

I have chosen these items to put into my Time Capsule

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

My Favourite Things in 2020:

Activity: _____

Song: _____

TV Show: _____

My favourite quote or motto

Pick 3 things:

3 things I'm looking forward to:

_____ _____

_____

What Children & Young People Say

Help me to make and keep friends

Get to know me

Be there when I need to talk to someone
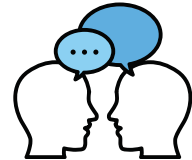
Make sure I can take part in activities

Invite & help my family to take part in school life

Have lots of different sports, activities and clubs

Accept, respect and be kind to everyone

Help me to feel safe at school

Let me learn and take part in groups

Give equipment that helps me learn and play

Think about special or different ways to help me

Additional Support for some Children and Young People in School

Psychological First Aid

Listen, Protect, Connect, Model & Teach is a five-step psychological first aid (PFA) crisis response approach designed to reduce the initial distress of children and young people and to support them in their recovery. It is not intended to be used as a single session but as a guide to continuing conversations with a child/young person on their journey to recovery. This approach protects their wellbeing and paves the way for a successful return to, and continuation of, learning.

PFA supports the child/young person to regulate emotions and behaviours after a crisis or disaster which supports their successful re-engagement in learning.

PFA involves a number of steps that help the child/young person verbalize their experiences and feelings, engages the child/young person in practical problem solving, encourages calm and teaches the child/young person about how traumatic stress affects human behaviour. It also provides a framework for any adult wishing to engage in this approach, acknowledging that every adult can play a role in supporting the children/young people.

LISTEN and pay attention to what the child/young person is saying. Note also what they may be communicating non-verbally. Give reassurance that you are available to listen and/or to help them access other support services if needed. Listen, observe and note any changes in behaviour/mood, school performance/engagement, behaviours at home. In this step, the adult working with the child/young person conveys interest, empathy and availability.

PROTECT by letting them know that school is looking after their wellbeing. Provide comfort and increase their sense of safety. Treat fears, worries and concerns with respect and provide help that is supportive and discreet.

CONNECT by reaching out and helping them to experience social support. Social support is key to an individual's ability to be resilient. Restoring and building connections provides stability and predictability. Help the child/young person to re-establish social relationships and stay connected with others. Providing caring and consistent support will promote their recovery.
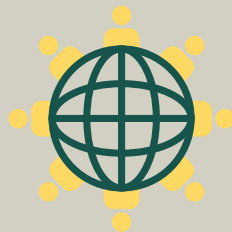
MODEL calmness, optimism, positivity and empowering behaviour when supporting the child/young person. Acknowledge distress experienced and show that constructive actions provide hope for the future.

TEACH by helping the child/young person to understand the range of normal and expected reactions to their experience. Encourage them to identify and use positive coping strategies, to problem-solve ways to experience a successful day and to think about ways they can help others. Remind the child/young person that returning to normal routines is important to recovery.

Reluctant Attenders

Reluctant attenders are children and young people who display a range of difficulties attending school. These can include being reluctant to go to school, finding it difficult remaining in school for parts of the day, avoiding an entire day or refusing to attend at all. Reluctance to attend school can range from mild or transient to severe and persistent difficulties. This reluctance can be expressed either through language or behaviour. The behaviour can be of an externalising or internalising nature. Externalising behaviours are also known as acting out behaviours as they can be easily observed e.g. non-compliance, emotional dysregulation, aggression and panic. Internalising behaviours are also known as acting in behaviours and may be more difficult to observe e.g. worry, anxiety, lethargy, low mood. All expressions of school reluctance need to be monitored in order for appropriate supports to be put in place so that the behaviour does not become severe and persistent. Early intervention increases the liklihood of sucess and reduces the probability of prolonged absences from school

The child/young person, the family context, the school environment and community factors can contribute to reluctance attending school. It is important to consider all of these areas in order to identify which areas play a role in school reluctance behaviour for a particular child/young person. It is also important to identify and understand the function of the child/young person's behaviour i.e. what need is being met by engaging in that behaviour. Understanding the contributing factors and the function of the behaviour is fundamental to developing a tailored plan to support the child/young person to fully reintegrate back to school.

Tips for school staff to develop a tailored response

- Listen to the voice of the child/young person to understand their perspective, reassure them and communicate hope for a positive outcome. This builds trust and connection and also will provide insight into their behaviour.

- Collaborate with parents/carers to explore their perspective and their understanding of possible factors contributing to the behaviour. Support them to develop family strategies to support improved attendance. If appropriate advise them of key supports available in the community.

- Develop a support plan with the child/young person and the parents/carers using the NEPS problem solving framework. This will empower all to make appropriate changes which increases the likelihood of success. Identify the strengths within the child/young person, the family, the school and the community. Building on strengths will help support needs, build efficacy and create a team response. Include strategies to address the underlying causes of the school reluctance behaviour, a timeline with agreed manageable targets and a system to recognise effort and successes. Identify when and how to review, evaluate and adjust, as needed. Assign a key adult to oversee the plan and follow up on any absences.

- Use the NEPS documents to teach the child/young person pro-social ways of getting their needs met and developing skills to manage school attendance. This may include teaching them the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours, helping them to break unhelpful thought cycles, supporting them to develop relaxation techniques, self-regulation skills and ways to manage stress and anxiety.

- School reluctance behaviour can be complex and behaviour change can take time. Expect setbacks and plan to prevent relapse but remain hopeful of a positive outcome by staying focused on the overall goal. However, some children/young people have complex needs and may need to progress through the continuum of support and access mental health services. Work collaboratively with other agencies if they are involved.

Stress & Anxiety

Stress is a part of life, it is a temporary response to feeling under pressure or when faced with change. Anxiety is a response to a vague or unclear sense of danger. Stress and anxiety can affect how we think, feel, and behave. When faced with a real or perceived threat our thoughts tell us we are in danger, and our body gets ready to attack, run away, or freeze.

Helping children and young people learn to manage stress and anxiety is important for their wellbeing. When they are in a stressful or anxiety provoking situation it can be helpful to get them to notice their thoughts, their bodily responses and their behaviour and guide them to find ways to cope.

Noticing thoughts
Encourage children/young people not to try to push away anxious thoughts as this will make them become stronger. Help them to notice and acknowledge their anxious thoughts as a normal response to stressful situations. Let them know we can all learn to manage our thoughts.

Noticing bodily responses
Let them know that we can feel stress and anxiety in our body. Some people feel a pain in the tummy, or feel sick, some feel hot in the face or head, some feel the heart beating faster or feel sweaty. Help them to understand that they may experience a mix of these responses or perhaps different ones. Let them know that the response is their body's way of reminding them that they need to calm down.

Noticing behaviour
Help them to explore their typical response, e.g. do they tend to attack like a shark, use sharp comments like a hedgehog, zoom away like a speeding car or retreat into their shell like a tortoise. Encourage them to notice how they react in certain situations. Remind them that although their reactions are common responses to stress/anxiety they are not always helpful.

Coping with the stress/anxiety
Support them to develop a menu of healthy coping strategies. Encourage them to try out some of the strategies and help them to evaluate how helpful they were in a given situation.

Choose someone you trust and tell them how you feel

Name your feeling to give it less power
Use your breath to calm your body
Practice mindfulness
Do something kind for yourself
Develop problem solving skills

Work out your triggers
Practice positive self-talk
Practice expressing gratitude
Distract yourself
Exercise

| Do I attack like a shark ? | Do I make sharp comments? | Do I zoom away like a speeding car | Do I retreat into my own shell? |

Adapted from Karen Treisman (2019).

Panic Attacks

Panic attacks are sudden feelings of intense fear or anxiety and they can happen with or without a known trigger. When having a panic attack thoughts, feelings and behaviours become more intense. They can be frightening for a child/young person and they will need support to learn to control them. The key is to help the child/young person to stay calm, to breathe and to understand that it will pass.

A Panic attack Develops as follows:

Internal or external trigger (an event or a unhelpful thought)
Slight increase in body symptoms (palpitations, sweating, shortness of breath)
Focus on symptoms (heart beating faster, difficulty breathing)
Catastrophic interpretation ("I can't breathe", "I am having a heart attack")

Helping to prevent a panic attack

Try to understand the causes of their panic attacks and identify out any triggers.

Encourage them to pay attention to what they are thinking when they are beginning to feel anxious.

Try to identify and challenge their unhelpful thoughts.

Teach them general stress and anxiety coping strategies

Practice relaxation strategies and explore what works well for them.

Work out what helps them during a panic attack e.g. "a hand on my shoulder lets me know that there are people with me" or "I do not like if someone touches me".
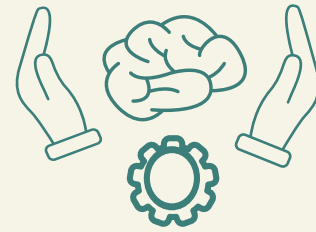
Helping during a panic attack

Encourage them to stay, not to try and escape the situation.

Communicate that you are there to help them. Help them to regulate their breathing by using a familiar technique.

Reassure them and name what is happening "You are having a panic attack, it will pass".

Repeat calming and supportive statements "This will pass", "You will be ok".

Remind them of Thought Stopping techniques.

Use distraction techniques.

Encourage positive visualisation

Remind them that learning to control their anxiety will take practice.
Encourage them to stick with it.
Support them to take the time to practice when they are not feeling anxious.

Supporting Bereaved Students and Staff

Some members of the school community will have experienced the death of family or friends during the school closure period (both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related loss). Things you can do to support bereaved students and colleagues on return to school are as follows.

Staff self-care & wellbeing
Take proactive steps to promote your own wellbeing and self-care while looking after the wellbeing of others.

Advance Preparation
- Convene a meeting of the school's Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) in advance of their return in order to identify and plan for responding to students and staff who were bereaved.
- It can help for a member of school staff to speak to the bereaved student and/or their family prior to their return to school. See *R11 Reintegration of the Bereaved Student*
- *For other useful resources* see *Responding to Critical Incidents-NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools*

The First Few Days
- During the first few days back to school focus on the **reintegration of the bereaved student**
- When the student returns, empathise with the bereaved student and acknowledge their loss.
- Consider holding a **commemoration ceremony** or ritual to acknowledge individual or collective losses experienced during COVID-19 restrictions.

As Time Goes On: Showing Compassion and Understanding
- **Understand that bereavement is a process.** Acknowledge, validate and normalise grief reactions. Reassure that strong feelings are a normal part of grieving.
- **The importance of communication.** Make sure the bereaved child/young person knows that they can talk to you. See NEPS resource *R13: A general interview guide for guidance counsellors, chaplains or other designated staff*).
- Allow students **time and space to grieve.** This is particularly relevant in the context of COVID-19 where usual funeral rituals and families coming together were restricted

Additional supports and resources
Some children and young people require additional support to normalise their grieving. See *R14: Checklist - Students At Risk*.

Supporting Bereaved Staff Returning to School
- **Supporting bereaved colleagues -**the death of a loved one can be one of life's most difficult experiences. Acknowledge a colleague's loss when they return to work and, show kindness, empathy and make time to listen.
- **Supporting school staff as a principal/manager –** compassionate communication and support to a bereaved employee is important.

For further information please refer to the following NEPS resource entitled '**Supporting Bereaved Students and Staff returning to school following COVID-19 and Public Health Restrictions**' available here.

Strategies and resources to support students with complex needs are being collated by NEPS and will be shared with schools to support students' return to school.

Further Reading

Additional Resources

Wellbeing

1. The NEPS resources for responding to critical incidents can be accessed here
   [NEPS Critical Incidents](#)

2. https://www.gov.ie/backtoschool is a dedicated website with resources and
   guidance document for the reopening of schools.

3. PDST.ie has a number of excellent resources.
   Information on mindfulness in schools can be found here   [PDST Mindfulness in
   Schools](#).

   Resources for self-regulation and guided visualisations in English and Irish can
   be found here [PDST Breathe and Visualisations](#)
   Meditations for teachers which could also be used with Senior Cycle pupils can
   be found at the bottom of this webpage [PDST Meditations](#)

   Introduction to Teacher Wellbeing is a practical resource booklet that will support
   teachers to develop self-care activities and protect their own wellbeing and is
   linked here [PDST Teacher Wellbeing Workbook.](#)

4. The NCCA (NCCA.ie) work with learners, teachers, practitioners and parents to
   develop research-based curriculum and assessment. They have recently
   published high quality SPHE resources :

   SPHE resources to support 1st year students as they return to school (2020)
   which can be accessed here https://ncca.ie/SPHE1styears

   SPHE resources to support 2nd and 3rd year students as they return to school
   (2020) which can be accessed here https://ncca.ie/SPHE2nd3rdyears

   SPHE resources to support 5th and 6th year students as they return to school
   (2020) which can be accessed here https://ncca.ie/SPHE5th6thyears

   Considerations in planning for wellbeing 2020-2021 which can be accessed here
   https://ncca.ie/Planningforwellbing20/21

Transitions

1. Guidance for children moving from pre-school to primary school is contained in on the web page below : Transitioning from Pre-school to Primary School https://www.education.ie/covid19/wellbeing/

2. The NCSE are currently developing resources to support children transitioning back to school and they will be available on the NCSE website at https://ncse.ie/online-resources.

3. Transition guidelines and support materials for children and young people are available at the Tusla Education Support Services website at www.tusla.ie/tess.

Autism

1. The Middletown Centre for Autism has a range of resources under the Covid 19 banner such as Social Stories, Video resources on the new normal, Bereavement resources, Grounding Exercises and a number of podcasts. See www.middletownautism.com.

2. The AsIAm team have developed a campaign and resources aimed at educating other young people and educators about the experience of autistic people at this time. See www.asiam.ie

3. The Autism Education Trust has a number of resources suitable for this time. See https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/covid-19-information-centre

Metacognition

1. The NCSE have a helpful resource entitled Metacognition for the classroom and beyond:
   Differentiation and support for learners which can be found at https://www.sess.ie/Metacognition

2. NEPS guidance documents on areas such as increasing motivation, thinking skills and perceptual skills can be found at https://www.education.ie/en/Cognitive-Skills.

3. Cambridge Assessment International Education have a document called Getting Started with Metacognition which provides a comprehensive description of metacognition. It can be found here Metacognition

4. More information on growth mindset can be found here Transforming Education website.

Social Distancing Games

1. The Asphalt green website has a list of activities that incorporate social distancing rules. It can be accessed at this link **Social distance games**

Youtube clips for activities

Below is a selection of additional video clips that can be used with some of the suggested activities. Teachers can review these and select those which they think are suitable for the development level and age of the pupils and students with whom they are working.

Explaining mindfulness to children: according to Kong Fu Panda
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k082dEqWj7A.

Kids meditation square breathing (Focus and Calm)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFdZXwE6fRE

Kids butterfly breathing   Butterfly Breathing

Five finger breathing   Five finger breathing

One moment meditation: how to meditate in a moment One moment meditation

Mission possible: positive self-talk (Ginther Elementary School)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AQQqJEwkjw

Joanne O Riordáin http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9u3gXyXUJk8

Be that one good adult: Jigsaw YMH https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUNliI7YqPM

What is your hope? http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlcU5uHMdTMdTM

Practicing gratitude: Jigsaw YMH https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5kShx67kas

Growth mindset for post primary children Growth mindset for older primary/postprimary children

Growth Mindset for younger children Primary Growth Mindset Young Children

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