



# SHEFFIELD GUIDANCE

## Supporting emotional health and well-being in education during COVID-19 Measures

May 2020

\*For brevity the term 'school' is used throughout this document to reference all educational providers

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## Getting help and support

Where schools need help and support in managing cases and planning they should contact appropriate staff in MAST, CAMHS, Educational Psychology and school staff trained in Healthy Minds.

A resource pack has also been compiled to sit alongside this document that can be printed and used by staff working with pupils.

## Foreword

This document has been created to support the emotional well-being of the school community as more learners return under COVID- 19 measures. It covers key areas that need to be considered and provides useful tools and tips to help schools in managing this.

Whilst the current circumstances are unprecedented, we recognise that schools are skilled in planning and preparing for transitions on a regular basis, though maybe not with such short notice! As a school you know your learners and are well placed to identify and implement support, they may need to manage their transition back to face-to-face education.

Schools should also remember that not all pupils will return to school, whether enabled to by government guidance or not. The excellent work that has taken place to support pupils will need to continue until they return to school.

Headteachers are responsible for the safe management of the school and so will already be working with their management team to put in place national and local authority guidance. Critical to this is clear communication mechanisms to keep staff, parents / carers and pupils informed.

There is growing concern as to the impact on the coronavirus measures on children and young people's mental health as the loss of routine, activities and social contact combined with the pressures on families creates a toxic mix which can eat away at even the most resilient of young people.

Some young people have experienced a reduction in their anxiety levels by having a break from the challenges of school life whilst some have had a stressful experience at home, particularly where families are facing financial concerns, constrained space, family conflict, health concerns and bereavement.

Children and young people can adapt and even thrive in the face of stressful and traumatic events but to do so they **need appropriate levels of protection, comfort and the opportunity to process their experience to develop an appropriate adaptive response.**

It is important for school staff to keep an open and curious mind when supporting the whole school community, to be able to tune in and listen to the information the young person is trying to process. We cannot make assumptions as to which children and young people are struggling at this time; the stresses cut across all social groups.

The key protective factor for children is the quality of interactions and relationships around them. Due to the current context there is an increased risk that the adults in their lives, including parents /carers and school staff, may be struggling with their

own emotional regulation and therefore struggle to be both physically and psychologically available to offer reliable, appropriate and timely support.

It will be important to acknowledge everyone's experiences of lockdown will be different. It will be important to celebrate the progress children and young people have made across a wide variety of experiences. Schools need to be mindful that children may have ongoing worries they are struggling to understand. Staff need the support to be available both physically and psychologically to respond to the need, not react to behaviour.

**We know that schools have always placed a vital role in the development of the whole child and during these challenging times it is critical that schools place emotional well-being at the core of their offer across the school community.**

## School leadership planning to support emotional well-being

As a school you will already be working on the operational and practical elements of managing your school under COVID-19. It is important that emotional well-being and how it is integrated into the curriculum is included within this planning.

You will need to get to grips with the *known knowns* and manage the *known unknowns*. It is critical that decisions are made so staff, pupils and parents / carers are clear and feel as safe and welcome as possible.

Having clear roles and responsibilities at management level including a communications lead who will not only send out key messages but be available to take feedback, queries, concerns and learning will ensure that all areas of planning are co-ordinated and covered.

All staff and parents / carers need to know where they can receive the most up to date information, how they can access it and how they can feedback their concerns. As a management team it's vital that you provide support to your staff so that they can effectively deliver support to the group of children they are caring for. This guide includes tools that staff can use and adapt to do this.

Parents / carers, particularly those of children with additional needs or who already have anxieties about school are your essential partners in preparing learners to return to school. It is vital that you communicate with them on a regular basis about plans and practical implications of returning to school such as who will be teaching their child, what the classroom will look like, what expectations there will be on their child and what to do if their child is worried or not wanting to come to school. We are also providing guidance documents for parents / carers to support in this.

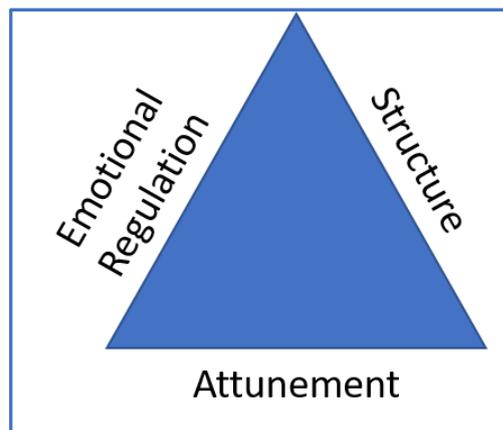
# Key concepts in supporting emotional resilience

## The Healthy Minds Framework

This whole school approach to emotional well-being has been developed in collaboration with Sheffield schools. It recognises that an optimal framework for building and supporting emotional resilience has a balance of the key concepts of **structure**, **attunement (relationship)** and **emotional regulation**. The Healthy Minds Framework provides a sensible approach from which to approach emotional well-being as learners return to school.

These key processes can be used to:

- Develop a whole school emotional well-being offer
- Support staff well-being
- As a communication model with parents and carers
- Build and develop emotional well-being and support mental health in children and young people, whatever the level of distress.



**Structure:** Provides the foundations to create as calm and safe environment as is possible. Clarity for staff, parents / carers and pupils on the key arrangements across school will provide reassurance. Communicate what structures, boundaries, expectations have been agreed. Clear communication is required so staff, pupils and parents / carers understand what to expect. Staff need clarity about their role and the boundaries of this role.

**Attunement (relationship):** The key protective factor for emotional well-being is the quality of relationships / interactions experienced. Schools offer tremendous opportunities for pupils to feel connected to others (staff and peers); have fun; feel heard, understood and learn key life skills to forge and navigate future relationships. For some young people school plays a critical role in providing a safe secure adult relationship in their lives. It is through good experiences of attunement that we process concerns to restore our ability to think rationally.

**Emotional Regulation:** The ability to adjust our internal state – emotions, physical needs and / or health needs to appropriately manage the context we find ourselves

in. It is key that children and young people learn to notice and understand their emotional state in order to make the right adjustments to keep rational and productive, drawing on external and internal resources.

## Key foundations for emotional well-being

### Structure:

To help staff, parents / carers and pupils to feel as safe, protected, calm, rational and confident as possible there needs to be:

1. Clarity about the physical environment
  - a. Once everything is in place take a walk round school and check does it feel welcoming for staff, pupils, parents / carers.
  - b. Make sure staff are fully briefed in the operational planning for meeting COVID-19 measures across school and they have a clear means of raising any immediate queries.
  - c. Structure for the day – timetable, break times
  - d. Use of the building – who can go where and how including use of toilets, playgrounds and the availability of these
  - e. Drop off and pick up arrangements
  - f. Friendly messages around school regarding new strategies in place
  - g. Structures are communicated clearly with parents and young people in advance.
  
2. Clarity about staff role
  - a. Protective bubble can and can't dos
  - b. Expectations re curriculum
  - c. Staff given explicit permission to include a focus on well-being
  - d. Behaviour management system in place
  - e. Staff know how to access help if required
  - f. Systems are in place to report pupil or staff health concerns
  - g. Staff know the individual needs of children they are working with
  - h. Clear mechanisms are in place for staff to feedback, report concerns, seek further clarity, receive help and support, share learning and have time with colleagues for mutual support.

### Attunement:

The key protective factor for emotional well-being is the quality of relationships / interactions experienced. Attunement is about reciprocal interactions – We all need to feel heard, acknowledged, understood.

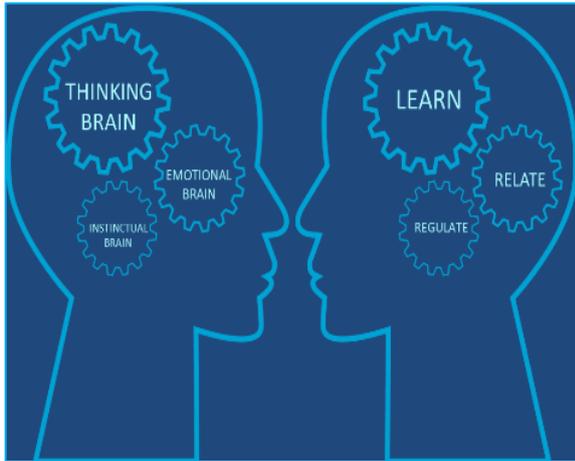


Many of these ideas will support staff emotional resilience as well pupils and parents / carers

1. **Build relationships when not at crisis point.** This will make it so much easier to address any needs as they arise
2. Carefully consider who should be in each 'bubble' in advance to facilitate good peer relationships
3. A good welcome – for all – sets the tone for the rest of the day
4. Think about how staff will communicate social distancing messages in a welcoming friendly manner and a way that all pupils can understand.
5. Give explicit permission for staff to focus on building good relationships between staff and pupils; staff and parents / carers and within peers.
6. From 30,000 Healthy Minds surveys pupils report friendship issues as being one of the most important issues which has affected their emotional well-being.
7. Give opportunities for pupils to experience getting on with others again in face to face relationships through positive fun activities. For some pupils this may need close supervision for it to be a positive experience.
8. Be mindful there may be issues across peers that need resolving which are historic or have sprung up on social media during lockdown.
9. Negotiating and resolving peer relationships give pupils excellent life skills and builds emotional resilience as pupils learn there might be a rupture but there can also be repair – some pupils will need support and supervision to manage this.
10. Make sure staff have enough information to best understand the strengths and needs of the pupils in their group
11. Check in with staff to understand their current concerns, context and give clear mechanisms for them to feed back to their colleagues and leadership team to share celebrations, concerns, learning, queries
12. Provide opportunities at a group and individual level for pupils to talk about any concerns or experiences they want to explore
13. Bring in regular circle time opportunities in primary and secondary for pupils to discuss concerns with their peers.
14. Support staff to develop active listening skills to best help pupils understand their emotions, and what their concern is to then think about strategies to address this.
15. If you notice anyone is in distress, including staff by staff by 'reading' their behaviour, (eg the tone of their voice, a departure from their usual demeanour) – check in, be available and follow the active listening advice

## Emotional Regulation:

To help people get into their 'thinking brain' the lower cogs need to be regulated enough.



### 'Thinking brain'

- Calm, alert
- Can be abstract, creative and rational
- Can think about the world, other people and their needs
- Can think about the future and reflect on the past

### Emotional Brain

- Anger, anxiety, fear
- Responses are reactive
- Can only think about yourself and your needs
- Can only think about the here and now

### Instinctual Brain

- Feel terror
- Responses are automatic
- Focus is on the physical self and environment—hunger, thirst, sleep, noise, heat
- Loss of sense of time

1. When the leadership team address the emotional regulation needs of staff and pupils an emotionally healthy culture can prosper
2. Think about whole school emotional well-being mechanisms such as having worry boxes, Turnaround tables, Zones of Regulation, Circle time (for secondary and primary), a focus on PSHE and opportunities for class debates on specific topics.
3. Many of the ideas and suggestions in this guide can apply to staff and parents / carers as well as pupils – if staff are displaying that they are not coping it will be important to stay open minded and curious and find time for active discussion.
4. It is helpful to recognise that when the instinctual or emotional brain is triggered and is dominating our perspective it is hard to be rational and therefore if you can see someone is dysregulated this will need addressing to enable someone to become rational.
5. Given the current context it is likely that everyone's emotional brain and even their instinctual brains will be more easily triggered as it is already managing many different stresses it will therefore be important to nurture a climate of kindness, support and understanding.
6. It will be helpful if staff are still able to access informal support from colleagues – maybe through video catch up.
7. Protect down time – have an agreed cut off time when staff are not expected to reply to emails or prepare activities.
8. Provide a calming environment – nice hand wash products, staff treats, calm space to relax. Well-being Wednesday. Random Acts of Kindness.
9. See NHS [Every Minds Matters](#) website for valuable information on well-being

## Psychological First Aid (PFA)

When grief and distress happens it is normal to think about where help can be found. Peer support and communication is key and the first line of support to help your staff and students. This should come before any external clinical support.

**Psychological First Aid (PFA) should be used if/when we are supporting people who are distressed. It is providing a supportive and compassionate presence designed to do three things: 1) stabilize (prevent the stress from worsening) 2) mitigate (de-escalate and dampen) acute distress 3) facilitate access to continued supportive care, if necessary.**

PFA aims to provide practical care and support, which does not intrude and involves:

- assessing needs and concerns
- helping people to address basic needs
- listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk
- comforting people and helping them to feel calm
- helping people connect to information, services and social supports
- protecting people from further harm

### Some Dos and Don'ts

1. Do remain calm when speaking to a person in distress. Show concern and be a reassuring presence. The other person will gain confidence from you
2. Don't get caught up in the situation. The antidote for stress is calm and confident.
3. Do listen. Encourage the person to talk about what happened and their reactions. If the person does not want to speak at that time, ask about a time to do this.
4. Don't interrupt, unless the disclosure seems to be escalating the distress.
5. Do try to identify "the worst part" of the situation, if possible. Do this carefully. It can help you identify the core issues at hand if they are not otherwise obvious.
6. Don't rush. If the person is medically stable and safe, the passage of time alone begins to de-escalate situations.
7. Don't be dismissive. Don't minimize their concerns or say, "Well at least..." as an attempt to distract, or help the person feel better.
8. Don't act on what you think the person needs. Ask what they need.
9. Don't hesitate to ask specific questions about the person's ability to support others (significant relationships, childcare, eldercare) or perform their job.
10. Don't hesitate to ask about intention to harm themselves or others. Sometimes you may sense feelings of profound hopelessness, depression, anger, or vindictiveness. In such cases, it's important to inquire and follow up. In the most rare and extreme cases, you may have to help get immediate professional care.
11. Don't make promises you can't keep.
12. Do determine what else if anything is needed after your initial conversation. Don't hesitate to ask for guidance or help from a healthcare professional if you are worried about the person's well-being.
13. Do connect and advocate the person in seeking further assistance, if necessary.
14. Do follow up a day or so later to see how the person is doing.
15. Do ask for help in managing the situation. Schools can contact their Educational Psychologist for advice and guidance.

## Focus on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The tools and techniques within this guidance are appropriate for all children. It is always important that the approach you take in supporting a child is adapted to their individual needs and circumstances. Where a child has Special Educational Needs and/or a disability (SEND), support to manage their emotional health and well-being will need to be adapted to their particular needs and circumstances.

Particular consideration will need to be given to:

- Learning needs – how the child learns and their level of understanding
- Communication and interaction needs – how the child communicates and understands what is being communicated to them and how they manage the environment they are in
- Physical and sensory needs – how the child interacts with the world around them either due to a visual or hearing impairment or due to a physical disability

### Key considerations

- Communication with the family is essential both before a child returns to school and once they are at school. Some families may have seen children regress in how they operate so it will be important to know what has happened in lockdown and any particular anxieties a child has. Consider introducing a Home-School book to communicate.
- Preparing the child to return. Make sure that you discuss with the child and their family plans for returning to school and their experience within the home. Using social stories, videos, pictures and other visual tools are essential. This needs to be personalised for each child.
- Ensure that anyone working with the child knows the details of their SEND. As teachers are changing and social bubbles are formed it's important that SEND needs are known. Use pupil profile to collect views and inform staff.
- As you support a child's emotional well being you will need to differentiate and adapt how you communicate with the child according to their specific needs. Flexibility is key here.
- Provide more structure and space to help the child process what has happened and their new situation particularly where they become upset.
- Make sure that there are regular breaks and space for the child to think and process what has happened. Ensure there are additional outdoor breaks and outdoor learning activities timetabled daily.
- Use visuals to help the child's understanding of new rules and routines. Eg. Flexible whiteboard, Task boards, Visual timetable.
- Don't overload a child with work tasks as this could raise anxiety. Small steps are recommended.
- Ask for help where you need it. Services such as the Educational Psychology service, Autism Education team, Hearing and Vision Support services are available to offer advice and support.

## Transitions

Pupils need to experience successful transitions back to learning in school, recognising that transition is a process and not a single event. A child's experience during this time can have a powerful and long-lasting effect on academic outcomes, as well as impacting on their self-esteem and emotional well-being. Many of the strategies that are needed to support a pupil in moving to a new school environment may be helpful in supporting their transition back to learning.

For many pupils the transition between different settings (nurseries, schools) can be unsettling and stressful. Government guidance on groups returning to school suggests a need to focus on groups who will transition to new provision this September. It is important for school leaders to work together to plan for effective transition in September 2020, recognising that a lack of clarity remains as to what school will look like in the new academic year. The following provides some key points to support effective transition at this time.

### Beginnings – New Starters

Communication and Relationship Building is key. When children start school, receiving adults usually think about flexibility, personalisation, and individualised approach to separation from parents/carers. Staff often organise later drop off/pick up times, consider ways of reducing sensory overload, transitional objects and how children will react to new spaces and routines.

1. From school to school or setting. To ensure that a detailed picture of the children that are coming to the new setting is provided, consider:
  - Online meetings between key staff (verbal information can be much richer than just written information-sharing)
  - Sharing of records and support plans, particularly for those with additional needs
  - Digital stories to support in identifying how the child responds in their current environment [Digital stories](#)
2. From setting to parent/carer. To ensure parents / carers are well-informed and equipped to support their child's transition and that their questions and concerns can be answered, consider:
  - Written and video information such as a virtual tour, introductory video explaining transition and introducing staff and welcome booklet
  - Phone calls with parents to explain how transition will work and discuss any specific needs, including SEN needs and anxieties
  - Online parent forums - opportunities to share worries and ask questions
  - Adding parents of new starters to school-based communication apps before September. A dedicated transition email address or contact person for parents to use

3. From school to the child. Look for ways that will help to start to build relationships, belonging and connection with the school, building and key staff, as well as ways to answer pupils' questions and concerns, for example consider:
  - Video messages or photos of key staff
  - A photo book or virtual tour showing all the areas of the school. Think about the child's view and height level
  - Virtual social meeting to meet new teacher, Head of Year or key staff with opportunities for pupils to ask questions (submitted in advance)
  - Asking pupils to complete a few short activities to help you get to know them
  - Develop a child centred FAQ page (with the help of current students) that can be sent home or included on the school website.
  - What If? ELSA game, focusing on transition from Y6 to Y7 [ELSA Transition worries game](#)
  - Staggered starts or a day or two at the start of the term for just new starters
4. From child to child. Many schools already have peer support in place, consider ways that these could be extended to support with transition whilst maintaining social distance, for example:
  - Buddy systems
  - Letters, postcards or video messages from current pupils

## Endings – Saying goodbye

Focus on accomplishments and growth rather than losses. Celebrate!

- Consider organising a day where young people can go back to their previous school to enable them to have closure and say goodbye
- Encourage pupils to reflect on their time within school, perhaps thinking about their positive memories, learning, achievements and challenges. Ask them to record these memories either by writing, drawing or video so they can be shared with others
- Virtual achievement and leavers assemblies, class newsletters and the school website can be utilised to enable CYP to share and celebrate not only their achievements in school prior to lockdown, but also during lockdown
- Explore ways to create physical memories too, e.g. certificates, year books and class t-shirts will allow CYP to look back on this phase and share with families
- Ensure that you communicate with parents what you intend to include so that they can offer emotional support where needed
- Focus on the specific additional needs of children with SEN and how to adapt you activities to meet their needs

## Links

Further suggestions and information on transitions can be found at:

A Transition guide based on a round table discussion @Edroundtables  
[Transition Round Table](#)

A Guide by the Anna Freud Centre [Managing Unexpected Endings and Transitions](#)

Link to Wakefield Council EPS [here](#), download their guidance : [COVID Advice for schools for transitions and back to school](#)

Useful and relevant material collected by Biborough EPS [here](#)

Leaflet from Bradford EPS supporting transitions [here](#)

Cumbria EPS's materials can be accessed via [this](#) link

[A Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic.](#)  
Written by Barry Carpenter.

### **SEND/Additional support links**

Blog [Reach out ASC Transition blog](#)

Transition Toolkit Primary to Secondary School [Young Minds Transition Toolkit](#)

A collection of social stories, worksheets and resources to support children transitioning to a new class [Reach out ASC resources](#)

Links to over 100 materials to support children with social distancing, wearing face masks, hand-washing and much more [PRACTICALAAC.ORG resources](#)

Some pupils may benefit from a personalised social story/photo book for family members to read with them in the week before the return to class [Example personalised social story](#)

A free course by SchudioTV, preparing autistic and SEND children for going back to school [Free course](#)

Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school [here](#)

What Makes a Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School? (2008)  
[here](#)

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## Resources and guidance

The attached resources document includes a range of developed posters and guides that can be used as stand alone tools to support staff and pupils in addressing concerns during this time. The intention is that a tool can be given directly to a staff member to support them in helping a child.

This section will be developed and updated in the coming weeks to provide further useful resources either directly created to support Sheffield schools as tools that have been identified as particularly useful or through links to other documentation that have been identified nationally that may be of interest.

**All the resources are available to download on the learnsheffield website at:**

**<https://learnsheffield.co.uk/COVID-19>**

### Specific guides

1. Supporting bereavement
2. Separation anxiety
3. Poster for pupils on emotional well-being
4. Emotional regulation
5. Heathy Minds top tips for staff
  - a. Attunement – peer interaction activities
  - b. Emotional regulation
  - c. Structure
6. Active listening skills
7. Emotional regulation and sensory breaks
8. Hand model of the brain
9. Circle time
10. Turnaround Tables
11. Worry boxes
12. Random acts of kindness
13. PHSE emotional health and well-being of CYP
14. Going back to school social story
15. Going back to school social story for younger children
16. Beatheboredomsheff planner
17. Beatheboredomsheff guidance for school
18. Beatheboredomsheff guidance for parents

## BeatTheBoredomSheff planner

The BeatTheBoredomSheff planner has been developed to help pupils structure their day as we know this will protect their well-being

It can be used both for pupils at school and those who are not currently attending

**It will have a much greater impact if pupils can be linked to individual staff mentors who can check in with pupils as to how they are coping and check their progress.**

The staff guide and full planner is included in the resources pack and on the learnsheffield website

<https://learnsheffield.co.uk/COVID-19>

## Advice for parents

Information for parents has been produced to send out. It is available on the learnsheffield website and on the Sheffield Local Offer website:

<https://learnsheffield.co.uk/COVID-19>

<http://www.sheffielddirectory.org.uk/localoffer>

Please ensure that parent advice is made available to all parents as they prepare their child to return to school.

It is essential that schools continue to maintain good communication with parents about the plans for a return to school and to establish what support may need to be put in place to support children as they return.

It's also important to note that many parents will have struggled during this time and may require support themselves around their own emotional well-being.

## Recommended resources and further links

Information on this area will be provided within version 2 of this document, updated before the end of May 2020.

## Footnote

This resource has been produced in partnership in Sheffield to support all Sheffield children. We are grateful for the input of everyone who has contributed to it and for the resources that other local areas have shared so freely over the past few weeks. We hope that others outside of Sheffield may also find it helpful.