Educational Psychology Service
The Return to School

Advice for schools to support children and young people's social, emotional mental health and wellbeing after lockdown

Plymouth Educational Psychology Service

Contents

Introduction

Research suggests that many children and young people can find the transition between schools unsettling and stressful. Following the current Public Health Crisis (Covid-19), it is likely that many children and young people will experience similar feelings when they return to school once social isolation ends. This is especially the case for those who are vulnerable, have special educational needs, or are moving to a new school. The purpose of this guidance is, therefore, to provide advice on how schools can support their children and young people in managing this transition. However, it is important to acknowledge that – at the time of writing – the current phased return planning is for certain groups. The psychological approaches and key principles presented in this document can be flexibly applied by schools when needed.

Why is Transition Important?

It is important that we support our children and young people to experience successful transitions back to school, recognising that transition is a process and not a single event. We know that an individual's experiences during this time can have a powerful and long-lasting effect on academic outcomes, as well as impacting on their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

During a period of transition children and young people can experience:
- A loss of attachment to familiar people, friends, the environment and objects within that environment
- Role and identity uncertainty
- Entry into an environment that is less predictable
- A perceived loss of control
- A feeling of being de-skilled and less valued
- Uncertainty about the future

In addition, we must acknowledge the ongoing thoughts and worries about safety and health at these times.

Key Principles of a 'Good' Transition

Whilst the current circumstances are unprecedented, schools are skilled in planning and preparing for transitions on a regular basis. The principles key to a successful transition also apply to the present situation. This applies for children returning to the same class or setting before the end of the academic year, as well as for those entering into a new class or setting. The means of executing transition processes may, however, need to look different.

It is also worth noting that schools should not focus exclusively on those children and young people who are transitioning to a new environment, but should instead consider every pupil as a new pupil due to the amount of time that they have been absent.

Effective transitions are supported by:

- *Advance planning and preparation*
- *Clear processes for communication*
- *Consideration of relationships*

(The practices to support these principles are further detailed in the later sections on parents/carers and the specific provisions to enable transition)

Planning and Preparation
- Identify information to be shared with pupils and families – what class the young people are going to, which staff they will be with, which pupils they will be with, what the routines will be etc.
- Plan activities / projects that can support the transition process. Ensure these are accessible to all pupils.
- Work with parents / carers to enable them to support their child(ren) and prepare them for a successful return to school.
- Identify the pupils who will need a more enhanced and individualised transition plan.

Clear Communication
- Ensure regular communication with parents / carers. This will help to ensure that the right information is being shared at the right time, and will help parents/carers to feel confident in the process.
- Communicate with the pupils in an age-appropriate manner i.e. use of video messages from staff, emails, newsletters.
- Communicate regularly with all staff to make them aware of plans and any changes from the 'normal' ways of working.
- Communicate with feeder / receiving schools and ensure processes in place for the transfer for all necessary information for those children who may be entering a new setting.
- Plan 'check-in' processes to review the settling in process and two-way feedback process with parents / carers.

Consideration of Relationships
- Plan time for pupils and staff to develop relationships and to get to know each other.
- Identify pupils who need key workers. Review who these key workers will be, plan for how this relationship will be established / re-established.
- Consider the social relationships available to individual pupils i.e. are they with established and known friends?

Examples of good transition practices could be:

- Communication between staff and settings to find out about the pupils. This should not solely be for the purpose of sharing academic attainment but also involve personal information that is needed – such as whether the young person is good at sports, lost a parent/carer, has a particular interest in dinosaurs etc.
- Communication about specific experiences linked to the COVID-19 outbreak, such as the loss or serious illness of close family members or friends, time spent in hospital, etc.
- Children and young people to be involved as much as possible so they too can share their likes and dislikes. Examples could include completion of 'All about me' activities.
- Communication with parents/ carers, not only to find out additional information but also to allow parents/ carers to raise any specific concerns about recent events or ask questions.
- Schools to think how they can use technology to aid transition if it is not possible for children and young people to directly access settings. This could be in the form of virtual tours, question and answer sessions etc.
- Visual resources to be produced that can be accessed online such as examples of dinner menus, what the uniform looks like, typical timetable etc.

For further advice around supporting pupils at key transition points please see

https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/media/2390/Covid-19-Enhanced-Transitions-Planning-for-Year-6-To-Year-7-for-September-2020/pdf/2020_04_27_Enhanced_Transitions_Planning_for_Year_6_to_7_for_September_2020.pdf?m=637250523231370000

https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/plymouthlocaloffer/enhancedtransition

What Can We Do to Support Children Upon Their Return to School?

It is important to recognise that, for many children, going back to school will be a welcome return. However, for many others, it will be a time of anxiety. It is important to remember that each child will have had their own, unique, experience. Whilst there has been discussion in educational and psychological circles about the need for 'trauma informed practices,' it is also essential to highlight that <u>trauma is a response not an event.</u> Indeed, while all staff, children and families will have had COVID 19 impact on their lives; not everyone will present with trauma. A wide spectrum of emotional needs and responses should be expected.

It will take time for children to re-establish and re-learn routines and expectations in schools. It will be important to respond to what children have learnt and what they have forgotten. We should not respond to what we expect them to have learnt.

This may also be an overwhelming and frightening time to be in close contact with groups of children and adults, especially given the span of time spent in the home environment due to 'lockdown'. Children will have become used to being with their parents/carers and immediate family for an extended period. This may also be a potential source of anxiety for young children.

Evidence suggests that transition is a process and not an event. Recent research from The Sutton Trust (April 2020) reported that only 45% of students had communicated with their teachers over the course of a week during lockdown. Further research from Oxford University (The Guardian, April 2020) stated that a fifth of primary aged school children are afraid to leave the house. Older children, on the other hand, are more concerned with their health and with the health of their families. In fact, two fifths of young people are worried that their friends or family will catch the virus, with one fifth worried about catching it themselves.

Teachers and other adults who listen with empathy perform an important therapeutic function, without being therapists. Some children may be carrying a large emotional burden and school might be their only place to talk about this.

Therefore a number of key principles can be applied when thinking about how to support all pupils upon their return to school.

Psychosocial Care

Research has identified five key principles that support recovery following a disaster or serious incident. These principles will be important to consider when supporting members of staff, children and young people upon their return to school.

The five principles are:

- A sense of safety: It is important that adults, children, and young people feel safe upon their return to school

- A sense of calm: Children and young people are likely to experience a range of emotions including both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. It is important that these emotions are normalised, and that young people are given support to help manage their emotions and return to a state of calm.

- A sense of self- and collective- efficacy: Children need to feel that they have some control over what is happening to them, and a belief that their actions are likely to lead to generally positive outcomes. They need to feel they belong to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes. This is known as collective efficacy.

- Social connectedness: It is important that adults, children, and young people feel they belong and have a social network which can support them within the educational setting. Social distancing will mean that physical gestures and facial expressions must convey what previously may have been shared through touch.

- Promoting hope: Whilst things may feel difficult at the moment, it is important that adults, children, and young people feel things will get better and work out in future. They need to be provided with reassurance and understand that – in the long-term – they will feel positive again.

# Psychological Theories and Principles Underpinning Guidance

This document includes advice aimed at supporting you while you welcome your children and young people back to their schools and settings. In this section we have outlined the psychological theories underpinning that advice.

Attachment

The principles of attachment (relationships with others) are key in thinking about and supporting transition. Some children and young people have healthy and secure attachments with their parents/caregivers. These children may have few issues separating from their parents/carers and returning to school, despite being in their parents/carers' care for an extended period. However, we know that transition can be a difficult time, even for children with secure and stable 'backgrounds.' Attachment informed principles should, therefore, apply to all students.

Additionally, the uncertainly of the coronavirus may have 'disrupted' some children's attachments. For example, routines may have been disrupted, and family members may have become ill, which could cause anxiety for children upon their return to school. An attachment (emotional/relational) informed approach will also ensure that provision is appropriate for those children whose attachments may have been disrupted, and so are less secure.

It is important that relationships with staff are re-established for all children. The school setting, as well as the adults that care for children and young people, need to be safe and secure bases so that children feel emotionally able and ready to learn. The following diagram demonstrates the importance of schools being a safe base and how this can be achieved:
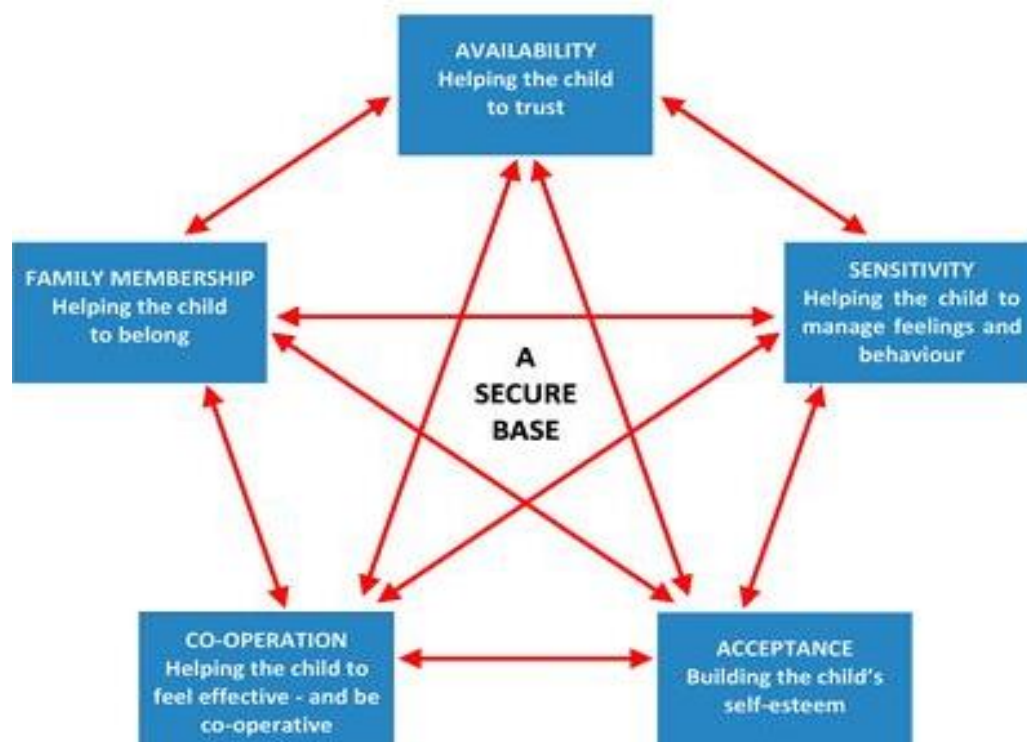
Children need to experience the feeling of being calm; of believing that they are lovable and are loved; and feeling that others want to connect and interact with them. Children should also feel that others are interested in them, as well as in their thoughts and ideas. They should feel safe enough to be curious and make mistakes and fell that they can trust others to meet their needs.

There are key principles derived from the attachment literature. These principles are aimed at promoting positive attachments (relationships). They will need to be expressed through supportive gestures, actions and expressions that take social distancing into account. They include (but are not limited to):

- Staff being present to welcome and reassure children. This ensures and sustains connections with them.

- 'Tuning in' to children and their feelings. Acknowledging behaviours as a form of communication, and 'wondering aloud' to translate behaviours into an understanding of a child's emotional need.

- Communicate empathy with young people. Acknowledge that, for some children, the impact of the coronavirus has been difficult (as it likely has been for staff).

- Differentiating how we interact with children. Be explicit about what they need to do so that boundaries and expectations can be re-established.

- Ensure that young people are aware of what is happening, and how the environments that they knew and were familiar with have changed. For example, it should be made clear how the environment has been changed to remain compliant with social distancing measures (Bomber, M.L; 2007).

For children where there are known social care needs, or for whom staff have concerns about relationships with family members or staff, specific planning may appropriate with regards to provision. This might include identification of a key adult to provide wraparound care during transition. ELSA involvement may also be helpful.

The PACE Model is also an effective approach in promoting attachments (see below).

PACE Model
PACE can be used by an adult to validate, explore, and understand children's feelings. It is an approach which limits shame and promotes compassion. It brings a sense of mutual support, strength, and resilience. When an adult spends time with a child and demonstrates an interest in their inner life, they contain and regulate the child's emotions. This should, eventually, help a child learn how to do contain and regulate their own emotions.

PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy.

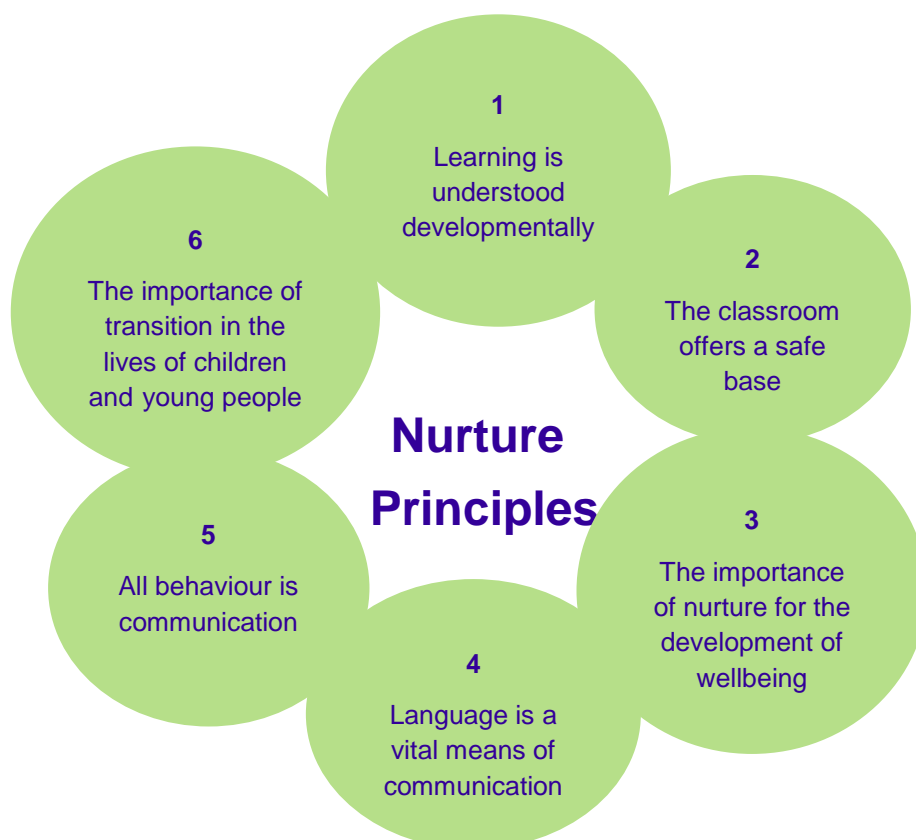| **Playfulness**	**Acceptance**	**Curiosity**	**Empathy**
An open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude	Unconditionally accepting a child makes them feel secure, safe, and loved	Without judgement, children become aware of their inner life	A sense of compassion for the child and their feelings

More information can be found at https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/

Nurture Approach Principles

Nurture Approach principles derive from Marjorie Boxall's (1969) work on Nurture Groups. Nurture Groups can be defined as: "in-school, teacher-led psychosocial intervention groups consisting of less than 12 students. These groups effectively replace missing or distorted early nurturing experiences for both children and young adults; achieving this by immersing students in an accepting and warm environment which helps develop positive relationships with both teachers and peers" (Nurture Group Network, 2017). The underlying features of Nurture Groups are derived from 6 core principles:

1 Learning is understood developmentally

2 The classroom offers a safe base

3 The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing

4 Language is a vital means of communication

5 All behaviour is communication

6 The importance of transition in the lives of children and young people

Nurture Principles

(Colley, 2009)

Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

Increase Prosocial Bonding

Set and Communicate High Expectations

Set Clear, Consistent Boundries

Provide Caring & Support

Teach "Life Skills"

Adapted from the book *Resiliency in Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators* by Nan Henderson and Mike Milstein, published by Corvin Press, Thoussand Oaks, CA (1996)

The principles of Boxall's Nurturing Approach can also be implemented within the classroom. This is achieved by providing children with a feeling of safety and security. Another way of adopting the Nurture Approach is to remember that the transition back to school may be difficult for some children. Providing these children with a range of activities to meet their emotional and social interaction needs should help ensure that they are ready to learn when the focus moves to a more formal curriculum.

However, first and foremost, nurturing principles focus on having the child or young person form attachments to loving and caring adults at school. These adults can then provide support, as well as offer clear structures and boundaries, thereby responding to each child's need. It should be noted that a whole school Nurturing Approach is more likely to have a positive and lasting impact on both staff and pupils. The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) can provide further training for staff if requested.

Resilience

Resilience can be described as "a person's capacity to handle environmental difficulties, demands and high pressure, without experiencing negative effects" (Kinman and Grant, 2011). Resilience is not, however, a trait. Instead, resilience is a capacity that involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions. As such, resilience can be learned and developed by anyone. Being resilient simply involves tapping into your resources, such as your personal strengths, as well the network of others supporting you.

Luthar & Cicchetti (2000) agree, stating that resilience is a dynamic process that involves interactions between individuals and their environment. Again, it is not something that represents a personal characteristic. For them, resilience is both learnable and teachable. Furthermore, as an individual learns, they increase the range of strategies available to them during difficult times.

One way of promoting resilience in school is to use the 'Resiliency Wheel'. The Wheel identifies six major approaches to promoting resilience, along with specific strategies. Research shows that these six factors are critical factors in fostering resiliency. The Wheel can be used in building resilience in individuals and groups, or as part of a whole school approach.

The Wheel also emphasises the importance of establishing positive relationships because they help us to feel safe and connected. The reason why the 'provide caring and support' part of the wheel is highlighted is because it is the most critical element for fostering resilience. It might even be argued that it is impossible to overcome adversity without the presence of a caring person. This person does not have to be a family member. Simply having a caring person in your life is critical for support, and therefore also for academic success.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is not an abstract body of knowledge, like physics or history. It is more like a practical skill, like being able to ride a bike or play the piano. Mindfulness is the human ability to be fully present in the moment i.e. aware of where we are and what we are doing, as opposed to being reactive or overwhelmed by the events going on around us. It can be difficult to be fully present, because other thoughts and distractions come to mind, especially if we are worried about something. Nevertheless, mindfulness practice has been shown to help children and young people to regulate their emotions and focus their attention, as well as to

develop their resilience (Harris, 2013). Furthermore, it can open a channel of discussion with adults on discussing any thoughts worries and concerns.

Emotion Coaching

Emotion Coaching is an evidence-based strategy based upon the work of John Gottman. Emotion Coaching uses moments of heightened emotion and resulting behaviour to guide and teach the child and young person about more effective responses. Through empathetic engagement, the child's emotional state is verbally acknowledged and validated, promoting a sense of security and feeling 'felt'. This activates changes in the child's neurological system and allows the child to calm down, physiologically and psychologically. Challenging behavioural responses are not condoned in Emotion Coaching. When the child is calmer, incidents are discussed in a more rational and productive manner. Moves are made to problem-solve and engage in solution-focused strategies. As a result, Emotion Coached children are better able to:

- control their impulses
- delay gratification
- self soothe when upset
- pay attention

The impact of emotion coaching means that children and young people:
- Achieve more academically in school
- Are more popular
- Have fewer behavioural problems
- Have fewer infectious illnesses
- Are more emotionally stable
- Are more resilient   (Gottman, J; 1997)

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) can provide training for staff. This training covers the psychology and psychobiology underpinning the Emotion Coaching approach, outline the principles, sharing the four key stages and providing an opportunity to practice putting these into practice. Please contact your link EP to arrange this training.

Growth Mindset

A Growth Mindset refers to the belief that abilities and knowledge are not fixed. Instead, with effort, experience and support, we can achieve growth. Those who have a fixed mindset are of the view that their qualities are "carved in stone" and are unchangeable.

Research has shown that when children have a Growth Mindset they more willing to take on challenging

tasks, focus on learning goals and, rebound more successfully from failures.

It may be useful for staff to encourage a Growth Mindset when children return to school. It is highly likely that they will feel overwhelmed with academic work, following the unexpected break from school. A Growth Mindset may reassure and support young people, inspiring them to believe that our current challenges can be overcome. The power of the word 'yet' is a quick and easy way to promote a Growth Mindset. For example, "you cannot do that maths question *yet,* but you will get there."

The Growth Mindset complements and promotes resilience. It also promotes trusting relationships with staff. As such, the Growth Mindset can be used as part of a holistic approach to transitioning and supporting children back to school.

(Dweck, C. S; 2006)

Identification of Specific Cohorts and Groups to be Considered

In addition to considering the processes in place to support all children and young people returning to school, there are some specific groups that may require additional planning. These children and young people include (but are not limited to):

a) Those who will be transitioning to a new school.
b) Those moving into Reception, Year 3, transitioning from Year 6 to Year 7, Year 10 and Year12
c) Vulnerable children i.e. those with an identified SEND (with or without an EHCP), children in care, young carers and those who are on child protection plans.

The information below is intended to be a guide to some of strategies that may support groups where specific plans for transition are required. We have also included some guidance about how to identify vulnerable children.

a) Transition to a New School

- Create a virtual tour of the school which can be posted on the school's website. This could even be done by children who are attending school (with parental permission).

- A visual resource with photos of key people/places in school. This can be sent directly to children who are have SEND or who are considered vulnerable. Again, this might be posted on the school's website for all to access.

- Provide other visual resources regarding the rules and routines of the day, such as pictures of the uniform, how many lessons a day, timing of lunch time etc.

- If class teacher/ form tutor is identified, have them give parents/carers a ring and – dependent upon age – speak to child/young person.

- Consider whether the class teacher/ form tutor might send the child/ young person a letter to let them know they are thinking about them.

- School to provide a Q&A sheet for parents/carers with key questions and answers that often are asked.

- Schools to try and gain as much information as they can about the child/young person from parents/carers, the child, the previous school or any agencies that are currently involved with the child (link EP, CIT, Early Years SEND, Virtual School, Social Care, MAST, Quay partnership, CAMHs and other health providers).

- Consider sending home some activities that children can complete about themselves (age dependent) that might give adults the opportunity to find out their thoughts. This could be things such as 'All about me' sheets containing photos of the child.

b) Transition of Children from Nursery into School

The transition from nursery to full-time school can be a particularly anxious time for both parents/carers and carers, as well as their children. Due to the current pandemic, typical events may not have taken place which would normally support transition. It is especially important to think about transition as a process rather than an event at this time because it may take time for both children and parents/ carers to settle into the new structure. However, some possible ideas that could be helpful are outlined below:

- Place an even stronger emphasis on consulting with parents/carers. This will help to reduce their stress which can otherwise transmit to their child.
- Share information and ask additional questions. Questions to consider when completing/discussing your transition documentation might include: do they sleep? What comforts the child? How do they show distress? etc.
- Having friends in the same class helps children adjust to the demands of the new setting. Ask parents/carers, as well as staff from previous settings, whether there are friends that could be kept together.
- Help the child to become familiar with your setting. Under the current circumstances, this could be achieved by providing virtual photo books and/or video tours of key features of the school/classroom e.g. entrance, toilets, pegs, break out area, playground, a selection of toys/equipment available. These might be provided on the website.
- Relaxed/staggered starts may be especially important to allow the child and their parent/carer to take their time separating. This may also allow the child to choose what activity to engage in. However, it should be remembered that parental agreement should be sought beforehand, given parents/carers and their needs, such as returning to work or other commitments.
- Adopt an individualised approach to separation. Be watchful and flexible, responding to the varying needs of individual children and families. These needs may be accentuated following the pandemic.
- Observe attachment behaviours. Young children who are securely attached need to continue to experience an optimum level of support and nurturing care with their key adults. Children demonstrating behaviours consistent with insecure or avoidant attachment may need additional help building relationships.
- Use transitional objects. Understanding and appreciating how important comforters are can help staff respond more effectively and sensitively.
- Hellos and goodbyes are terrific opportunities for staff. These are the times when parents/carers will need to feel most connected with and supported by practitioners. What parents/carers and children will need at handover transition times is the soothing presence of a sensitive practitioner who understands and empathises with them.
- Predictability and routines will also be important, especially during the settling in phase. There should be fewer interruptions to sustained play during this period. This means fewer breaks for adult-driven tasks, such as snack times, assemblies, and whole-class discussions.
- Listening to children. Children should be asked gentle questions. They should also be provided with an opportunity to voice their concerns. It may also be helpful to incorporate ideas and feelings about change and transition into their play. This could be through story and drama, role-play, and through 'small world' play.

c) Vulnerable Children (SEND, LAC, CP etc.)

There are specific groups of pupils that settings should be thinking carefully about when planning the return to school. These include pupils who are likely to have found the changes in routine or disruption to relationships extremely challenging, such as those with social communication needs and / social emotional and mental health needs.

These groups of students may benefit from specific plans which outline the support and teaching approaches that have proved effective in the past.

To enable a successful return to school, some children will require an enhanced level of planned emotional support and nurture provision, principally through caring relationships at school. These children include those who have experienced – or who continue to experience – significant disruptions in their home life.

In the case of those who have experienced events which have impacted on their well-being, such as those in the care system or who have Child in Need and Child Protection plans, settings should consider developing plans jointly in liaison with services known to the young person / family. Settings will need to ensure regular and effective planning with families to enable a holistic and family centred approach to working.

d) Identification of Vulnerable Individuals

Identifying and supporting vulnerable children will be important, and settings should not assume that it is only those children with previously identified needs that are vulnerable.

A simple emotional well-being rating could be completed for all pupils. This should be based on previously identified needs, as well as information shared with the setting while communicating with parents/parents. This communication would allow for any recent events, experiences of loss, and identified worries relating to the child's return to school, to be taken into consideration. Settings may wish to use a risk assessment document to identify the level of support that may be needed to facilitate a successful return to school. Please see suggested Vulnerability Scale on the PCC Educational Psychology Service SEND Local Offer page. See Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 for vulnerability assessment scales for school age and early years.

The emotional needs of some children may become more apparent once they have returned to the school setting. It is therefore important that staff continue to monitor pupils, being alert for signs that they need additional or enhanced support. It may even be helpful to continue to use the vulnerability scale rating system for the entire term following the return to school, adjusting the level of emotional and social support as required.

It is also important that settings consider young people who are not yet returning to school. It is possible that on-going shielding and social distancing measures may prevent some pupils from returning immediately. Settings should also consider how to stay connected with young people who are currently placed at alternative provisions, with a particular focus on the emotional and relationships needs of these pupils.

Advice for Parents/Carers

The return to school will also be a time of significant change for many parents and carers. For most, they have been at home with their children for an extended period, and the parents/carers themselves may have worries about the return to school.

They may have concerns about:

- Their child settling into a new class or school
- Any enduring emotional impact of recent events, including experiences of loss and bereavement
- Any lasting impact of the disruption to their child's learning
- Their child being able to re-establish friendships and relationships in school
- Their child's safety, particularly if they have any existing health concerns

It is important that schools and professionals appreciate the thoughts and worries of parents and carers, and pro-actively seek to reduce anxieties which may be transferred to their children. We should reassure parents/carers that any feelings of worry are understandable and normal in the current circumstances.

www.plymouth.gov.uk/returningtoschool

For All Parents / Carers

- Ensure that there is effective and enhanced communication in place in the lead up to any return to school. This should include contact from the pupil's new class teacher (if this has changed) and key workers (if relevant). This will enable the sharing of information on both sides, and offer parents/carers an opportunity to share information that may impact on the pupil's return to school (for example, have they experienced bereavement and loss as a result of Covid-19? Have there been any changes within the family? Are parents/carers key workers? etc.).
- Make parents/carers aware of all plans that are being implemented for transitions, as well as the enhanced arrangements on offer. Explain what is different about the process of transition this year.
- If social distancing and safety measures remain in place at the point of the return to school, make sure that parents/carers know how these are being implemented in school and how children can be emotionally supported whilst maintaining safe practice.

- Parents/carers may appreciate information being shared with them about changes that they can prepare their son or daughter for: new staff, classroom, routines, any changes that have occurred in school.
- Offer a key point of contact for questions and concerns. Parents/carers may have more queries than would typically be expected during transition.
- Once children return to school, parents/carers may continue to need an enhanced level of contact. Settings may benefit from arranging more spaces and opportunities for parents/carers who wish to talk with staff about the settling in process more frequently than might typically be expected.
- Share information with parents/carers about the emotional support and provisions that will be in place for all children in the weeks and months following the return to school.
- Make parents/carers aware of how any impact on learning will be addressed over the coming months.
- Make sure parents/carers are aware of the offer for support currently available from the PIAS team.

http://www.plymouthias.org.uk/

http://www.plymouthias.org.uk/parenting-programmes/family-phone-support

Parents/Carers of Children Entering Reception / Year 1

For the parents/carers of children formally entering school for the first time, the current situation may result in increased worries and the possibility of separation anxiety occurring.

- Schools may consider replacing the typical 'home visits' that support transition, with virtual meetings and video calls where this is possible.
- Parents/carers are likely to find the use of virtual video tours of the setting, including points of entrance, cloakrooms etc. very useful.
- Schools may consider how they can enhance home-school communication in the initial weeks.
- Parents/carers may need greater sensitivity and flexibility in how they separate from their child at the start of the day. Work with parents/carers to make this an emotionally supportive process for them, as well as their child.
- Staff should ensure they are available to talk to parents/carers at the start and end of day. Parents/carers may need more contact, and over a longer period of time, than is typically expected. This may mean that an extra member of staff is required to support classroom routines at that time so that key staff can be made available.
- Use strategies and resources to help parents/carers to feel connected to their son or daughter when they are separated.

Parents/carers of Pupils Leaving the Setting (Year 6, or moving to a different setting)

- Consider how they can say 'goodbye' to parents/carers, as well as the pupils, even if this is done retrospectively.
- Let parents/carers know what information has been shared with the new school, so that they feel assured that information has been effectively shared.

Parents/carers of Children Moving from Primary to Secondary Education (or changing settings)

- Ensure that parents/carers are given adequate and enhanced opportunity to share their views and information about their child in advance of transition.
- Personal contact (by telephone call or email) from the form tutor / head of year will likely be appreciated by most parents/carers.
- Make sure parents/carers are aware of the contact that there has been with the primary school (or previous school) so that they feel assured that information has been effectively shared.
- Share information about routines and what the first few weeks will look like.
- Make sure that parents/carers know who the key points of contact are and assure them of the setting's readiness and availability to answer questions and talk to them.
- All of the above points may need to be offered at an enhanced level for those children with identified needs and known vulnerabilities. It is especially important that these parents/carers understand and know about the support and provisions that are being put in place (as appropriate).

Guidance for Schools

The following guidance is provided as a means of supporting settings to aid the transition of all children and young people back to school. As discussed, this advice is underpinned by the psychological approaches previously presented, all of which have a common theme: 'relationships.'

The guidance takes the form of a cyclical diagram, which outlines what can be done universally, for all pupils, and gradually works towards targeted and bespoke planning, where necessary. This diagram is accompanied by a table highlighting relevant provision that we feel is important, at each stage. Additionally, further considerations and practical advice can be found in the table included within the appendices (Appendix 4).

Graduated approach to transition back to Schools

3 levels of provision within this approach, using the Asses, Plan, Do, Review cycle to graduated response found:

https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/plymouthlocaloffer/sencoguide

Universal response to transition with key focus on re-connecting with children, implementing routines, re-estabilshing school as being a safe and secure base. Use of strategies/approaches and resources included in the guidance. Careful monitoring of children's emotional reactions and 'bouncebackability' to adjust back to school life and the school community

Request direct agency involvement such as Social Care, EPS, CIT, Early Years SEND, CAMHs etc

Graduated approach to transition back to schools

Group support. Use of pastoral support staff or ELSAs in order to establish the level of support required. Communication with parents/carers. Information gathering and implementation of time limited group interventions.

Targetted and Specialist Individual approach based on knowledge and understanding of child's indidivudal, social care and/or special educational needs. Use of resources from appropraite agencies (signposted in the provision table). Consultation with agencies

Table of Provision

Level of Response	Teaching and Learning Strategies	Provision	Support
Universal Response	Building Relationships Resilience Nurturing Principles Mindfulness Emotion Coaching Trauma Informed approach PACE model Growth Mindset – Carol Dweck	• Acknowledge that for some children and young people, they will be frustrated by the situation and want to be back in school. • Acknowledgement that some children and young people will have experienced safeguarding issues being at home. • Priority to be given to the re-affirming of relationships between both staff and children/young people. Although there will be some learning lost, do not get straight into formal assessment. • Flexibility – a way of demonstrating that wellbeing is the first priority. • Awareness of any Key Worker children, if they have remained in school and their feelings towards others who have not been attending school. • Consideration of the day especially in the first instance to think about activities that build on relationships, feeling safe, repetition of routines and structures. This can involve Circle Time, games, welcome back assembly (re-establishing school community) to celebrate any missed	Websites https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/plymouthlocaloffer/sencoguide/graduatedapproach https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/plymouthlocaloffer/sencoguide/personcentredplanning https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/ www.boingboing.org.uk www.nurtureuk.org

| | | birthdays, show appreciation for key workers, reinforce everyone safe and back together.
• Time within the curriculum to acknowledge that everything has not just 'returned to normal'
• Thought around displays in school to reflect the situation, for example things that we are sad about and things we should be happy about.
• Adults to model appropriate behaviours and talk about experiences when needed
• The use of visual resources to explain and reinforce routines and structures of the day. This could be via visual timetables, checklists etc.
• Clear and consistent rules and routines expressed – re-teach these.
• Use of social stories.
• Repetition and reminders that are supportive rather than assertive.
• The use of positive labelled praise at all levels.
• Staff to not directly question children on what work they may or may not have completed at home.
• Children who have completed home working to be praised privately.
• Parents/carers to be included in plans of the school with opportunities to share if their child has experienced any difficulties during the lockdown (e.g. emotional, bereavement, illness).
• Safe spaces for children to talk about experiences.
• Ensure pastoral support is available throughout the day and is not by timetable/appointment only. | www.emotioncoachinguk.com

https://www.annafreud.org/

https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/coronavirus

Books

Attachment in the Classroom – Louise Bomber

Inside I'm Hurting – Louise Bomber

Everybody worries – a picture book for children (https://www.calameo.com/read/000777721945cfe5bb9cc?authid=Xu9pcOzU3TQx)

Activities

Hope Cloud Activity (from Young Minds website)

All About Me |

		- Clear communication regarding the whereabouts of members of the school community. - Opportunities to celebrate members of the school community who have died, this could be in the form of a remembrance assembly where names could be read of family members of children, as well as celebrating the work of the NHS and key workers (in line with parental / family wishes and only when consent from bereaved families has been sought to do this). - Opportunities to talk about feelings/emotions embedded throughout the curriculum. - Careful balance of prioritising wellbeing and also ensuring boundaries are in place, as these are safe, i.e. (it's OK to feel scared about being at school but it's not OK to hit staff). - Expect 'behaviours' – plans in place for these. - Gradual approach to reintroducing academic demands. Children and young people have to be emotionally ready before they can learn. - Staff wellbeing also a priority – "need to feel nurtured to nurture". - New rules and restrictions articulated as 'do' statements rather than 'don't' – such as 'do wash your hands'. - Use of therapeutic stories for the whole class. - Peer mentoring schemes. - The use of transitional objects to be used with younger children. - DSL to be in contact with Virtual School if support needed.	Therapeutic Story – The Little Elf Growth Mindset – Big Life Journal Well-being rating scales/Daily emotion 'check ins' (i.e. placing name on chart to show how children are feeling).

Targeted School Response	Building Relationships Resilience Nurturing Principles Mindfulness Emotion Coaching ELSA	All of the above and; • A number of adults being 'available' to support children if and when needed. • Ensure that key members of staff such as SENCo and DSL have additional time to attend to any matters that have arisen. • Small group work, specifically targeting area of need, such as specific work around emotions, emotional regulation, bereavement… • Examples of support: ELSA, Zones of Regulation, FRIENDS, Lego Therapy, Talking Partners.	Websites www.elsanetwork.org https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/ Books The Zones of Regulation: A curriculum designed to foster self-regulation and emotional control. Advice and guidance from other services, EY SEND practitioners, Link EP, CIT, Virtual School, SALT, CAMHS, School Nurses, Purchased services, MAST workers, Quay Partnership etc. SENCo briefings and practice groups.
Individual Targeted and Specialist Response	Building Relationships Resilience Nurturing Principles Mindfulness Emotion Coaching ELSA	All of the above and; • Provide a consistent adult that a child can develop a positive and trusting relationship with. • Specific targeted work with a familiar adult trained in delivering the programme.	Websites http://www.em-edsupport.org.uk/coronavirus-eps https://www.winstonswish.org https://www.cruse.org.uk https://www.samaritans.org

| Anxiety

CBT approaches

Loss and Bereavement work | • Information gathering and action plan set out to meet needs.

• Personalised timetable in the short term.

• Allocated a member of staff/key worker, in the short term to help re-adjust.

• The use of both social and therapeutic stories with individuals if needed.

• Some specific children may experience separation anxiety from parents/carers – individual support may be needed to offer reassurance.

• Some children may experience specific anxiety. Looking at individual ways that they can be supported to offer reassurance, such as the use of CBT approaches.

• Some children may have experienced loss and bereavement and will need some additional adult support, such as an ELSA or other suitably trained adult.

• Use of Plan, Do and Review Cycle as part of a graduated approach to inclusion.

• Planning and consultation meetings with the supporting documentation.

• Use of multi-agency consultations. | https://youngminds.org.uk

Books

The Invisible String – Patrice Karst

Think Good, Feel Good – Paul Stallard

Therapeutic Stories – Margot Sunderland

Starving the Anxiety Gremlin – Kate Collins-Donnelly (primary and secondary editions).

Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside

Conversations that Matter – Margot Sunderland

What to Do When You Worry Too Much? A Kid's Guide to Anxiety - Dawn Huebner

The Mindfulness Journal for Teens – Jennie Marie Battistin.

Activities

The use of Therapeutic Stories – The little Elf (http://www.em-edsupport.org.uk/coronavirus-eps)

Creation of a five point scale, for any emotion, including anxiety (Dunn Baron and Curtis).

Hierarchy of Support |

		• Individual outcomes based planning at targeted and specialist levels	RAG rating timetables

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Kinman, G. & Grant, L. (2011) Exploring stress resiliency in trainee social workers: The role of emotional and social competencies. *British Journal of Social Work,* 41, 261-275.

Luthar, S. & Cicchetti, D. (2000) The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies. *Development and Psychopathology* 12, (4), 857-885.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Websites

Below are a list of websites that may offer further advice and guidance. If you would like to discuss any of the content in this information pack, then please speak to your link Educational Psychologist (EP) who will be able to help.

https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com/covid19/send

https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/transition-tips-for-pupils-with-send/

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

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/NEPS-Guides/Transfer-from-Primary-to-Post-primary/

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/our-work/employment-education/moving-on-to-secondary-school/

https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/transitioning-to-secondary-school/zkc9pg8

https://childrensmentalhealthcampaign.org/resources/covid-19-resources

https://www.early-education.org.uk/attachment-and-trauma-awar

Appendix 2: Vulnerability Assessment Scale for School Age
VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT SCALE

Please complete the following scale to help us assess a child or young person's (CYP's) vulnerability, or risk of additional challenges, when we transition from lockdown arrangements to normal attendance.

The factors to consider are examples and not intended to represent an exhaustive list. They are based on a review of key research papers identifying factors that support or hinder successful transitions. All the scores (with the exception of health factors) should be based on an aggregation across those that know the child/young person well in the different environments they participate in. Ideally, the score should represent an agreement between the different people that contribute to it. Score on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no concerns and 5 is extreme concerns. That way a higher total score indicates a higher estimate of risk in transition.

Name of CYP		DOB	
Current setting		Year	
Next setting (if appropriate)			

Item	Factors to consider	Comments	Score
Stability at home	Compliance with lockdown, relationships with others at home		
Relationships with school staff	Stability, sense of security, nature and frequency of contact		
Relationships with other CYP	Stability of friendships, closeness, nature and frequency of contact, breadth and depth, in- or out- school friends		
Completion of work	Evidence that prior skills maintained, writing/reading/maths completed		
Experience of school prior to lockdown	Attendance, relationships, enjoyment, sense of belonging, work, belief in self as a learner		
Awareness and self-regulation	Ability to identify and manage emotions, can positively resolve conflict, confidence, social skills to develop relationships		
Relevant events during lockdown	Family members illness/death, financial difficulties, change in circumstances, experience of abuse		
Parent/carer concerns about CYP returning to setting	Concern about coronavirus & exposure (real or imagined), separation anxiety child and/or parent/carer, adjusting to change, adjusting to new environments, concerns with preparation for SEND.		
Health concerns	Health anxiety, personal or family vulnerability, increase in the use of substances		
		TOTAL	

Date of completion:	
Completed by:	
In discussion with:	

Appendix 3: Vulnerability Assessment Scale for Early Years

EARLY YEARS RETURN TO NURSERY OR TRANSITION TO SCHOOL VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT SCALE

Please complete the following scale to help us assess a child's vulnerability, or risk of additional challenges, when we transition from lockdown arrangements to normal attendance.
The factors to consider are examples and not intended to represent an exhaustive list. They are based on a review of key research papers identifying factors that support or hinder successful transitions. All the scores (with the exception of health factors) should be based on an aggregation across those that know the child well in the different environments they participate in. Ideally, the score should represent an agreement between the different people that contribute to it.
Score on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no concerns and 5 is extreme concerns. That way a higher total score indicates a higher estimate of risk in transition.

Name		DOB	
Current EY setting		Year	
Next setting /school			

Item	Factors to consider	Comments	Score
Stability at home	Relationships with others at home during lockdown, movement between parent/carers homes, access to extended family via phone, face time.		
Relationships with EY staff	Stability, sense of security, nature and frequency of contact (if no contact record as N/A)		
Maintenance of routines and skills	Sleep, dressing, eating, toileting. Evidence of skill regression or dependency.		
Engagement with EY home learning	Access to play and educational fun at home, pre-school skills prior to lockdown maintained, access to physical activity.		
Experience of EY setting prior to lockdown	Secure/consistent relationships, attendance, enjoyment, sense of belonging, play and social skills.		
Managing emotions and self-regulation	Understanding feelings and emotions, can accept support to calm down, regulate own behaviour, can positively resolve conflict, confidence, ability to manage exposure to sensory environment after lockdown (following long periods indoors)		
Relevant events during lockdown	Family members illness/death, financial difficulties, change in circumstances, new baby.		
Communication and Interaction Needs	Difficulties with expressive and/or receptive language skills. Social communication needs. Access to specialist support e.g. CITEY, SaLT, EP during lockdown.		

Exposure to ACE's; physical or medical health concerns	Family vulnerability e.g. domestic abuse, increase in the use of substances, crime. Have child's physical and medical needs been attended to.		
Parent concerns about child or young person returning to educational setting	Concern about coronavirus risks and exposure (real/imagined), separation anxiety child and/or parent, adjustments to change, adjustments to new environments, concerns with preparation for SEND provision.		
	TOTAL		

Date of completion:	
Completed by:	
In discussion with:	

Appendix 4: Additional Considerations

Issues to be Aware of …	Possible Impact	Practical Activities
Everything is NOT normal	Expectations of normality amongst pupils, staff and parents/carers will be high	- Schools to manage expectations and uncertainty in their communication to all stakeholders. Time must be available to do this. - The ways in which school is likely to be different is considered and communicated to all prior to the return to school. - There may need to be activities and displays in school which reflect upon this time. Things that we are sad about / things that we are glad about. - Time provided within the curriculum to consider this.
Ongoing Social Distancing / Hygiene Considerations	Impact on attendance and distribution of classes within the school, as well as routines and practices. Understanding how social distancing measures might affect emotional wellbeing.	- Part time attendance, spacing in the classroom, time for hygiene - Plan, communicate in advance, reinforce expectations consistently - Communicate with families what measures are in place before children return so they know what to expect. - Film the classrooms and make available online so children and young people can see the environmental changes before they return. - Reinforce and explain that the measures are in place to keep everyone safe.
Routines have Changed	Not just for children but for whole families. There may need to be some sympathy and understanding around this.	- Plan clear routines, share these in advance, including any phased returns. - Consider the impact of these new routines on attendance. How can families be supported/encouraged to prepare themselves for going back to school? - Communicate with them to proactively plan for those who might need additional support.
Relationships	These need to be re-established and this may be an opportunity for renewal	**PRIORTISE** Staff to focus on creating relationships with children and young people, such as, greetings, individual conversations, 'checking in', modelling and expressing calmness and warmth, emotion coaching approaches and PACE approaches. Treat all children as having attachment needs.
Gaps in Learning	Huge variation in the experiences and opportunities available to young people.	Do not begin with formal assessment, assess knowledge more informally. Start curriculum with what children know … not what you think has been taught.

		• Topics may be revision for some…this will not harm them. Plan additional tasks / topics for those who have covered more to enable those who haven't to catch up. Give children the opportunity to share what they have learned (even if it is having watched films or played Minecraft). • Catch up intervention for those who need it.
Some Children have Remained on Site.	Possible stigmatization, potential feelings that safe space is being intruded upon when all children return.	• Preparation of those children who have remained on site for the arrival of others. Perhaps plan a welcome back event or ask them to help with the planning and decision making about how they can welcome other children back to school.
Trauma and Bereavement	Many children / staff will have experienced trauma and bereavement	• Provide opportunities and encourage communication from parents / carers around child experiences. Plan information sharing. • Staff to be vigilant (update awareness training prior to schools opening). • Provide safe spaces for children to talk about experiences. • Clear communication regarding the whereabouts of members of the school community. • Opportunities to celebrate members of the school community who have died.
Safeguarding	There is likely increase in safeguarding issues including those related to poverty, Domestic Violence, parental mental health, substance abuse etc.	• Ensure that training is refreshed and up to date so that staff are aware • Provide opportunity for young people to share experiences if needed. • Extra time and support for DSL upon re-opening to work with relevant agencies to safeguard children.
Ongoing Illness Anxiety	Concerns about illness are heightened and are likely to be continually reinforced.	• Balance between acknowledging the issue and managing anxiety. • Use of Social Stories. • Opportunity to teach coping skills. • Implementation of nurture and attachment principles to reassure and re-establish trusting and safe relationships.
Separation Anxiety	Children (and staff) are used to being home with their families. This is particularly	• Clarify communication lines so that children and young people are confident that contact could be made with them at school, in case of emergency (phones as transitional objects).

	comforting when the world feels so unsafe. This may particularly impact where there are key workers or vulnerable people in the family.	• Again, acknowledge feelings (emotion coaching / PACE) and teach coping skills.
Additional needs, especially children with ASD	Any time of change can be challenging …	• Additional preparation will be required, such as videos of any changes to the school; new routines and expectations shared in advance; additional adult support available to check in, explain, answer questions and reassure, as well as use of social stories/comic strip conversations to prepare for going back to school.
Sensory Needs	Potentially overwhelming environment for staff and Children and young people. A development of fear of being around people – unused to people in their personal space.	• Consider a phased return, staggered starts and/or part time timetables. • Availability of calm spaces, ear defenders, ability to protect personal space and choose who accesses it. • Use of markers on the floor may be necessary.
Placement Transitions	Loss of 'ending' activities Loss of transition activities during the previous term.	• Online transition activities, such as virtual school tours, sharing of videos the school has (sports / concerts) photos of classrooms and teachers. Virtual meeting with class teacher if possible. • Phased starts. • Real opportunities to meet the class teacher in home environment in September. • Walks past the school. • Acquisition of uniform when this is possible.
Uniform Issues	Outgrown, not replaceable at current time, financial issues	• Not the time for strict adherence. Show flexibility and aim to return to uniform at a later date. Consider how to organise uniform swops (may need to consider washing and handling of clothes at this time).
Staff Issues	Burnout, lack of downtime, bereavement, illness, stress and anxiety, childcare issues, financial issues	• Consider how staff wellbeing has been monitored. What have their experiences been and have they been bereaved of family members/friends?

		- What are their current circumstances and family pressures? Are their children back at school? How can they be supported to balance work and home life? - What information do you know to help create flexibility and support for them upon their return? - Have staff had sufficient time and information to prepare for their return to work? Are expectations and plans to transition children back in to school clear? - Initially, limit demands made of them, such as reducing pressures outside of the classroom (paperwork, unnecessary meetings and observations). The focus should be on relationships and supporting one another to re-adjust, rather than performance. - Ensure that they have space and time to talk not only to each other but the children and young people.
Frustration for some students	Some students may feel frustrated that they want school to just get back to normal and feeling they have coped well with the crisis and schools being shut. Some students will have developed resilience through various coping strategies and approaches.	- Acknowledgement that students will respond to the situation in lots of different ways, some better than others and that this is fine. There is no shame in not coping. - Celebration of the ways in which students coped and managed to keep going and feeling positive or hopeful. - Recognise and celebrate the resilience and coping seen amongst our schools, settings and families and in so doing, consider ways to connect people to share how they have coped with these times, what sources of strength and even joy they have discovered, what reserves within themselves and their communities have taken them by surprise.

With thanks to the Microsoft Teams national working party of Educational Psychologists/Education Professionals. This document has been adapted from that shared within the team.