

Derby City Educational Psychology Service

COVID-19 Transition Guidance for Education Settings

Summer Term 2020

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Transition Guidance to Schools and Settings Following COVID-19 Closures

Purpose of the guidance

To develop a plan and to support schools with the transition of all students to Early Years' settings and schools when they begin to re-open following an extended period of closure due to COVID-19.

Key Considerations Included

- The psychological impact of transition in general terms and the increased impact (due to the COVID-19 crisis) of sudden unplanned endings and goodbyes; potential loss and bereavement of family members and setting staff; the absence of typical transition arrangements for nursery / reception entrants, Year 2, Year 6, Year 11; disparities of access to learning opportunities during lockdown.
- Advice around the practicalities of implementing a return to settings and schools that acknowledges the impact of the crisis and enables staff, families and children and young people to gradually return to a safe, stable educational routine over time.

The Potential Impact of School Closures on Transition due to COVID-19

There is widely held understanding that transitioning from one stage of life to another and from one educational setting to another can be stressful, anxiety provoking and can have a real and lasting impact on self-esteem, confidence and on relationships and attainment. This is particularly true for those considered to be vulnerable students (Burden, 2005; Evangelou et al., 2008; Shepherd and Roker, 2005; West et al., 2010).

We must also recognise that some individuals and groups are able to manage difficult situations well and may not require as much support as others. This is usually the result of accessing a range of protective factors which can contribute to resilience. Resilience is considered to be a context dependent process rather than an individual static trait that the individual possesses or does not possess. Resilience can be developed, and we must acknowledge that post-traumatic growth can occur across the full range of individuals.

Therefore, the transition support offered should take account of the individual differences of children and young people, and their strengths and needs. School staff and families know their pupils / children best and their knowledge should be shared with newly receiving settings and schools wherever possible, so that support can be personalised. Parents and carers have a considerable contribution to make in preparing their children for the return to education.

Expected Difficulties

Remember that for some children and young people, the period of lockdown has been a time for connecting with family members, playing, learning and having fun. For others, they will have seen or heard traumatising events that will affect them for months and years to come.

Most people will have had an experience somewhere in between these two extremes. On return to school, it will be realistically expected for some pupils to:

- Find it difficult to sit and focus on learning
- Continue to be anxious and agitated, and on 'high alert' - this has been a frightening time and our natural survival response system is switched to 'on' all or most of the time
- Struggle with social interaction and sharing, turn taking etc.
- Have regressed in their skills and attainment, including social and emotional skills
- Be anxious and angry about being back at school
- Be clingy to their parents and carers, especially if they have experienced loss or their caregiver is a keyworker and at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19
- Refuse to come to school on the days they are scheduled to (this issue will need some work to gradually desensitise the child to reintegrating)
- Need at least half a term to again become accustomed to the expectations, routines and demands of school
- Need a lot of additional reassurance and support from key adults in the setting or school
- Need clarity around rules and expectations, and to be gently reminded of these with understanding, when rules are not adhered to / forgotten
- Need additional time to play, relax, develop a sense of feeling safe
- Need to develop a strong sense of belonging in their new group or class before being able to access learning.

It is important not to pathologise normal and expected responses to stress. Most people are resilient and do not need additional intervention to manage their response to stress over time. It is important to empower students and staff through identification of self-help and coping strategies, and provision of psycho-education linked to stress and anxiety.

Taken from Northants EPS document, as shared on EPNET April 2020:

Recent research from Oxford University found a fifth of primary children are afraid to leave their house over Covid-19 (Guardian, April 2020). With this in mind, it is important to focus on what emotional comfort and support is needed by those returning to school. Research has identified five key principles that support recovery following a disaster or serious incident (Hobfoll et al., 2007). These principles will be important to consider when supporting members of staff, children and young people upon their return to school.

<p><i>A sense of safety</i></p>	<p><i>It is important that adults, children and young people feel safe upon their return to school (this will need to include clear guidance about hand-washing, masks, gloves, social distancing etc.)</i></p>
<p><i>A sense of calm</i></p>	<p><i>Children and young people are likely to experience a range of emotions including both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. It is important that these are normalised and they are given support to help them manage their emotions and return to a state of calm.</i></p>

<i>A sense of self- and collective- efficacy</i>	<i>Children need to feel they have some control over what is happening to them, and a belief that their actions are likely to lead to generally positive outcomes (Bandura, 1997). They need to feel they belong to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes. This is known as collective efficacy (Antonovsky, 1979; Benight, 2004).</i>
<i>Social connectedness</i>	<i>It is important that adults, children and young people feel they belong and have a social network who can support them within the educational setting.</i>
<i>Promoting hope</i>	<i>Whilst things may feel difficult at the moment, it is important that adults, children and young people feel things can get better and work out in future. They need to be provided with reassurance, and understand that in the long term they can feel positive again.</i>

General Evidence for Positive Transitions for all Children and Young People (CYP)

In general the following positive and protective experiences support a smooth transition:

- Visiting the school to prepare by (re-)familiarising CYP with the layout, their class base, social areas;
- Having opportunities to practice social and organisational / independence skills during the visits or when in their current setting;
- Getting to know staff- names and roles plus key contacts (form tutor, class teacher, TA, head of year);
- Feeling supported and nurtured;
- Fostering new peer friendships and maintaining old friends (the importance of this is often overlooked);
- Peer mentoring and older peer support;
- Establishing trust;
- Feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness in the class or school (see appendix 1);
- Perceiving the move to a new setting as a fresh start, and a sense of hope and optimism;
- Staff and students highlighting positives and achievements to foster a positive sense of self in the new environment. Also utilising interests and strengths (see below) to support a sense of belonging;
- Information being passed from previous teachers to new teachers related to strengths, needs, other SEND, what works, interests. Use of one page profiles, asking students to share their own views of what works, what to avoid and so on.

The 24 Character Strengths

Using a strengths-based approach can help CYP think about themselves and their recent experiences in a positive way, reframing a very challenging period in their lives.

Ask children and young people to identify their top five strengths (and do the same for staff). Discuss other strengths you and they have noticed in themselves and in others during lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic, and build in opportunities to remind them of these. Planning actions and activities to help children and young people to be their best helps to bring a sense of personal control and achievement to the day-to-day.

See the picture below with all 24 strengths as a visual prompt, with some example questions. Language will need to be adjusted according to the age and stage of development of the CYP.



Can you think of a time when you were.....?

What did you notice in yourself and other people during the lockdown period that surprised you or made you feel pleased?

What new skills or strengths do you feel you have begun to develop? How can you continue to grow this strength in your daily life?

Considerations for Returning to School

For Those Returning to an Established Placement (same setting as before)

School Leaders will need to consider the following and decide which apply to their setting.

- Careful consideration of the pupils who have been attending school throughout lock-down. They may feel overwhelmed by the increase in numbers, noise and interaction. They may also feel a sense of intrusion and of loss of what had become their 'norm'. How will they be prepared for the changes?
- Gradual return to full-time attendance; for some, this would be beneficial.
- Clear information to staff and families about:
 - any social distancing steps being taken, including hand washing, wearing masks; seating arrangements; outdoor play;
 - the routine and structure of the day;
 - who is attending and when- will you have small groups in a family or 'bubble';
 - which room (s) your child will be accessing and how many pupils and staff will be in there with them;
 - how break and lunch times will be managed;
 - how transfer from one space in school to another will be managed to minimise the risk of not maintaining social distancing guidelines;
 - how children will enter and leave the building at the start and end of the session;
 - which key staff are available for anxious or upset children;
 - whether external visitors will be permitted to school or not including support services for SEND, and how this will be managed. For example, visitors may need to hold socially distanced meetings with staff in a room near the school entrance to minimise movement and contact around the school.

- Temporary suspension of full curriculum- focus on promoting communication and fostering interaction and relationships, a sense of feeling safe and secure, through PSHE, the arts, play. Play has been identified through research as an effective way of enabling calm, a sense of safety and children's interest and motivation.
- Temporary suspension of testing- many students will be entering school with a disparate experience of continuing with learning activities while at home, and testing will unfairly disadvantage some. Further advice on this issue is likely to come from DfE.
- Offering online questions and answers sessions for parents / carers and a separate one for students in the run up to schools partially or fully re-opening.
- Checking in with parents / carers to ensure that any incidents/bereavements that occurred over the time children were out of school are communicated to all staff. Some parents / carers might not be aware it is important to inform school.
- Ensuring that fears and worries are addressed and an open communication approach is standard in each class, and for as long as this is needed.
- Observation of pupils' behaviour, interactions and body language, and level of engagement to gauge who is coping well and who is struggling on return.

- Following up on any pupils who are not attending as expected- school refusal and emotionally based school refusal is likely to increase, especially amongst those with some diagnoses or difficulties, such as those with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) or social communication difficulties. There is a separate document with guidance for this group.
- Acknowledging the full range of emotions is to be expected, and normalising this. Modelling and providing opportunities to talk as a class group or individually with pastoral leads. These should be advertised as open to all students at any time as needed
- Opportunities for all school or setting leavers to revisit and say goodbye to old peers and staff (Nursery, Y2, Y6, Y11, Y13, College) and to have a belated prom, leavers' assembly, shirt signing etc. as a rite of passage that they have missed.

For Those Transferring to a New Placement

Key Transitions Points (FS1/ FS2; Y2; Y6; Y11)

For current Year 6 students, the usual established processes for sharing pertinent information between settings has already begun through the portal, via completion of common transfer forms. There is also an exchange link in the portal for primary / junior staff to discuss vulnerable students with secondary school staff / SENCOs.

For current Year 11s, space is being secured for secondary school staff to share key information with Post 16 settings.

Please see the Opportunity Area strategy newsletters for further information.

For all students transferring to a new setting, the table below outlines the evidenced strategies that work well for vulnerable students, and is good practice for all students. This can be carried out in addition to the advice in the section above for all students.

Taken from Doctoral Research by Dr Judith McAlister (2012) - what works in transition for vulnerable students; University of Birmingham

Key aspects of transition	Typical practice	Possible Adaptations due to COVID-19
Practical experiences of school to promote a sense of feeling prepared	Several visits. Direct practical and novel experiences of the school building, practical lessons and the timetable and provide specific visual aids (floor plan, timetables with rooms and subjects included)	Summer Term 2020 Use of remote technology; virtual school tours and skype group chats for vulnerable pupils with form tutors / teachers. See website links on page 15. Parents to support with planning and preparation at home, using visual aids provided by school or setting.
Feeling supported by older peers	Instilling a supportive community ethos, encompassing formal or informal peer mentoring and vertical tutoring	Linking vulnerable students with older peers remotely with parent / carer agreement- online forum discussions etc.
Feeling Nurtured / supported by key consistent adult(s)	Providing students with consistent key person / people to liaise with before, during and after the first term of new school year (e.g. class teacher, TA, Head of Year)	Use of remote technology; letters / texts /emails / skype group chats for vulnerable pupils with form tutors / teachers.
Positioning the return to school as a 'fresh start'	Explicitly providing students with reassurance that they will not be judged on their previous difficulties or that they will be supported to have an improved experience.	Emphasis on the hope and optimism of being reunited with familiar adults and children The chance to put into practice all the hopes and

		dreams they may have had reflected on during lockdown
Peer friendships	Provide opportunities to foster new friendships through groups and group working in class. Maintain existing friendships, by keeping friends together in classes / form groups.	Encourage class / group liaison through remote tasks or a teacher led online forum For younger children, sharing photos of each other with first names, with parent / carer support, prior to the school start Staff sharing class lists (names or names and photo) for junior age children
Adult liaison Staff to staff and staff to parent / carer	Regular liaison between schools and staff and parents and carers to share key information. This enables the receiving school to implement appropriate, personalised support	As before
Sharing information about reward and consequence systems, fosters a sense of agency and informed choices in students	For primary and secondary age: Sharing positive aspects of school expectations- reward systems and trips etc. For secondary age: Sharing information about school rules and consequence systems.	As before

With all the above suggested remote support, there are risks. Some children will not be able to access technology and they risk feeling excluded. Some online interaction could lead to unkind or bullying type communications. Schools will need to carefully consider what is appropriate for their setting and how they will manage the risks of pupil to pupil interaction. Adults taking a lead in any remote video contact may reduce risk. See below for further ideas.

Additional Practical Ideas for Supporting Transition

- The following article has some great ideas and letter templates and booklets for staff to use for all age ranges. <https://www.tes.com/articles/transitions>
- The typical staggered start to FS1/ FS2 entry can be continued; see template letter and booklet from TES article. Also see advice below.
- For current Year 2s and Year 6s, provide the virtual school and class tour with teacher narration about where coats are hung, where toilets are etc. On starting Year 3 or Year 7, the emphasis should be on celebrating the skills they have developed over the lock down, such as learning to make a sandwich, water plants,

play with a little brother or sister. Children will be anxious and will need daily time to share thoughts and feelings, either in groups or individually.

- Welcome letters and cards to all current Year 2s and Year 6s from their receiving schools, with messages of looking forward to meeting and working with them.
- Current Year 2 and Year 6 teachers, staff and SENCo will need to share online / phone / secure email the key strengths and needs of each vulnerable pupil and paperwork will need to be sent as usual.

For Students With SEND

Pupils with the following additional needs are likely to require support in addition to that already outlined. The most important consideration is to appraise each child or young person's situation on a case-by-case basis and personalise support as required:

- Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs
- Autism Spectrum Condition and social communication difficulties

Some pupils will have found the time at home to be less anxiety provoking and challenging than being at school. These pupils may be resistant to the idea of returning to education, and consequently we anticipate an increase in the number of students displaying anxiety related school avoidance or non-attendance.

Linking up with these families early to jointly plan a phased return, if needed, will be key to their successful reintegration. Use of Social Stories and Visual Time Tables for preparatory discussions will be required. Refer to the SIP:

<https://schoolsportal.derby.gov.uk/steps/resources/steps-information-strategies/>

<https://schoolsportal.derby.gov.uk/steps/help-for-covid-19/>

Please also involve your link Educational Psychologist and / or Advisory Teacher, if required.

Also refer to the Emotionally Based School Avoidance draft guidance document in Appendix 2.

- Looked After Children (LAC) see below for Virtual School contact details
- Visual Impairment-contact the involved advisory teacher
- Hearing Impairment-contact the involved advisory teacher
- Physical Impairment-contact the involved advisory teacher

For all the above groups, please implement all the advice outlined in the sections above and liaise with STePS and other relevant professionals for further information about training, equipment, reasonable adjustments, and interventions or for a discussion about the individual.

Key contacts:

Elie Moore (Specialist Teaching Service Manager) eleonor.moore@derby.gov.uk

Richard Lakin (Principal Educational Psychologist) richard.lakin@derby.gov.uk

Or, if you know their name and contact details, please contact your link Educational Psychologist or Advisory Teacher or Early Years Practitioner.

Contact steps.admin@derby.gov.uk for any queries about the above contact details.

For LAC

Please contact the Virtual School Team

<https://www.derby.gov.uk/education-and-learning/derby-virtual-school/>

For Setting Staff

Refer to the article on Derby City School Information Portal 'Promoting Staff Resilience'
<https://schoolportal.derby.gov.uk/media/schoolsinformationportal/contentassets/documents/steps/covid-19/Staff%20Resilience.pdf>

In addition, try to:

- Take time out to get sufficient sleep, rest, relax and eat regularly and healthily
- Talk to people you trust and allow yourself to be comforted. You don't have to tell everyone everything, but not saying anything to anyone is often unhelpful
- Reduce outside demands and avoid taking on additional responsibilities
- Spend time in a place where you feel safe and calm to go over what's happened over the course of the day/week. Don't force yourself to do this if the feelings are too strong or intense at the time
- Try to reduce your access to the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Try scheduling 'digital power off' times.
- Use relaxation strategies e.g. slow breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, self-talk
- Build in opportunities for recognising hope and positive strength
- Allow yourself experiences of sadness and grief

Try to avoid:

- Bottling up feelings. Consider whether it would be helpful to talk about them with someone you trust
- Feeling embarrassed by your thoughts, feelings or those of others. These are normal reactions to a stressful event and period of time
- Isolating yourself from those you trust and feel safe around

For Parents and Carers

For parents / carers, staff please provide reassurance about safety concerns; information about uniform; and dates / days / times their child will be attending once decided.

The first half term should focus on settling and relationship building, rather than on testing attainment or too many focused teaching sessions. Learning through play, story and outside interaction will be therapeutic and provide the pastoral opportunities CYP will need to feel a sense of belonging, trust and security, so that can be ready to learn.

Parents and carers know their children best. Between now and schools re-opening for their children, they can be encouraged to do the following:

- Talk to their children about the plans in good time to prepare practically and emotionally for a return to school
- Reassure their children that staff in schools will have thought about safety and will have put plans in place to keep all children as safe as they can be
- Do a few practice runs to the school building before the children have to return, so that the route and building is familiar
- Read and follow any advice given by the school about the specific plans and what to expect on day 1, during week 1 and so on
- Allow their children to speak openly about their worries or fears, listening actively and providing reassurance that things may feel strange for a while but that they can soon get used to going to school again
- Link up with your child's friends remotely so they can communicate before returning to school if possible
- Watch any videos or read any information on the school website together
- Contact the class teacher or SENCo if you have any concerns about your child's return to school, to discuss what measures and support may need to be put in place
- Inform your child's school if there have been any major changes in the family while schools have been closed, such as bereavements, increased anxiety and so on.

Useful resources and websites 6-9 below, are aimed at parents / carers.

Useful Resources and Websites

1. <https://schoolsportal.derby.gov.uk/steps/help-for-covid-19/>
2. Video for setting staff working with bereaved children and young people; produced by EPS in Wales
<https://youtu.be/op50Fe1qKmQ>
3. Promoting Staff Resilience
<https://schoolsportal.derby.gov.uk/media/schoolsinformationportal/contentassets/documents/steps/covid-19/Staff%20Resilience.pdf>
4. Winston's Wish- Coronavirus related bereavement materials for schools: How schools can support children and young people; How to tell a child or young person that someone has died from coronavirus; How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible
<https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus-schools-support-children-young-people/>
5. Grief Encounter - Support for bereaved children and their families:
<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/> and CRUSE:
<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirusdealing-bereavement-and-grief>
6. Teen Breathe – monthly magazine available from newsagents and supermarkets.
7. BBC videos from secondary aged children on a range of topics around starting secondary school. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/tags/zh4wy9q/starting-secondary-school/1>
8. Year 6 pupils could watch these and then send any further and more specific questions to their Year 6 teachers to be passed on to be answered by secondary staff or pupils (via FAQs, tweets/Facebook posts, video clips etc).
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/teacher-resources-for-students-transitioning-to-secondary-school/zb68y9q>
9. Young Minds has resources for schools including video clips for children moving from Year 6 to Year 7. This clip reassures children that they're not alone in their worries about secondary school, that there are ways to cope with change and that there are people to talk to if things become difficult.
<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/find-your-feet-transitioning-to-secondary-school/>

The website also has 'top tips' for parents when supporting children through significant change, including the Year 6 to Year 7 transition.

Sources of Information

Allen, K.A., Vella-Broderick, D. and Waters, L. (2016) Fostering School Belonging in Secondary Schools Using a Socio-Ecological Framework. In Educational and Developmental Psychologist Vol 33(1)

EPNET forum; joint working MS Teams – Transition

<https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/support-a-safe-successful-return-to-school-using-the-swan-framework/>

<https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/support-children-who-are-anxious-to-attend-school/>

McAlister, J. (2012) <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/3921/>

Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service document Promoting Positive Transitions During the Covid-19 Crisis: Returning to school from a trauma perspective (April 2020)

TES, Transition article, April 2020

Appendix 1

Fostering a Sense of Belonging in Schools; taken from source 1 above

A sense of belonging is fostered through the following:

- Motivation for affiliation / connection with others in the group
- A desire for relatedness
- Self-identity and group identity building
- Positive regard from others
- The perception of good quality social interactions with others in the group

A sense of belonging is particularly important during adolescent development and for identity formation, emotional adjustment, social adjustment and transition to adulthood.

Practical Strategies

- Staff to have enthusiasm and value for what they teach
- High and clear expectations
- Students to set goals for themselves and to achieve mastery
- Strength-based learning, using novel and stimulating content
- Teaching metacognitive strategies explicitly to students (to think about their thinking strategies and approaches to tasks)
- Teaching self-regulation skills and help seeking skills to students
- Identifying individual strengths and talk explicitly about belonging and its importance
- Fostering and modelling a positive mind-set
- Having good communication between parents / carers and staff
- Offering multiple opportunities for students to get to know one another through clubs, sports events etc.
- Provide peer support for homework and learning activities / use peer mentoring and a buddy system
- Teachers to be provided with time to carry out pastoral support activities with students

Whole School

- Include a sense of school belonging in the school vision.
- Provide staff with CPD about school belonging.
- Mentoring for teachers to share strategies and techniques that facilitate belonging / connectedness. This positive collaboration can increase job satisfaction and staff retention.
- Use anti-bullying policies to reinforce the message of belonging, safety, fairness and discipline.
- Focus on staff well-being and sense of connectedness to school.
- Promote mental health for all.

Appendix 2

Anxiety and social emotional needs in the context of COVID-19 – guidance for schools and parents/carers

Anxiety

When schools re-open some children will find the change from being at home to being in school a particularly difficult adaptation and will experience feelings of anxiety. Specific groups of children are more likely to experience high levels of anxiety, for example children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC); those with Social, Emotional and/or Mental Health needs; those who may have experienced bereavement; and Looked After Children. However, it is important to remember that anxiety on the return to school will not just be limited to these groups and could affect any child.

Children have spent several months in their home, which will act as a 'safe space' for many anxious children and they will have developed a new routine. This is likely to make transitioning back into school, particularly difficult for anxious children. Many will still feel anxious about the virus and the ongoing situation around this. It is inevitable that when children do return to school, there will be some social distancing measures in place, which may increase their state of anxiety.

During school closures – guidance for schools

- It would be useful during this time for schools to consider which children they feel may find reintegrating into school challenging. Schools would benefit from keeping in touch with these families to discuss how the child is coping and to support with thinking about reintegration when this occurs.
- Schools would benefit from considering the social and emotional needs of all children when schools reopen, particularly those who are likely to struggle with anxiety, children with a diagnosis of ASC, Looked After Children and those with Social, Emotional and/or Mental Health needs. There are more tips about supporting these needs below.
- For the children who have been attending school during this time, schools need to consider that their school day will change after schools reopen to all children. Schools should prepare these children for this by talking with the children about these changes, considering, alongside the children, what this change might look like and supporting their emotional reactions and concerns related to these changes.

When schools reopen – guidance for schools

The school environment:

- Given the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more crucial than ever to ensure that all children feel as physically and emotionally safe in school as is possible. It will be important to spend more time than usual talking through children's anxieties and this may well need to take precedence over academic work for the initial transition period.
- Create clear and consistent routines for young people with as few changes as is possible. It is important that the child feels in control of their school day as much as possible.

- If social distancing measures are still in place, try to talk to children about these and explain why these are still important measures for us all to take; i.e. to ensure that we are all safe.
- Lots of reassurance and empathy from school staff is important for all children, particularly for those who are anxious.

Welcome the child to the school:

- When an anxious child re-attends school it is important that they feel a sense of belonging. It is crucial that all staff send the message that we are happy that they are back in school and that this is where they belong during the school day.
- Anxious children may be running through all the worst-case scenarios that might occur when they re-attend school. It is important to replace their imagined scenarios with something positive and that this is personalised for the child.
- Think proactively about the child and how they might feel when they first have to re-attend school. There is a need for a 'soft landing' and this can be accomplished through starting the day with fun and enjoyable activities, which can be shown on the visual timetable.
- Having a visual timetable that is consistent and clear will be helpful for all children after schools re-open and this visual timetable should be used and stuck to.

Work with the family:

- Families play a crucial role for children who are anxious about re-attending school. It is vital that schools and families work together and it would be useful for the parents of anxious children to keep in close contact with school staff.
- School staff should provide families with empathy, reassurance and normalise feelings and actions.
- It is more important than ever that the families of children who are anxious are reassured that you are all on the same team; the team of the child.

Regular calming activities:

- Routine calming activities for anxious children are a way of acting proactively, rather than reactively. These activities are those which help to bring arousal levels down and to help an anxious child to feel calm and relaxed.
- This will depend on what works for the child – it might be some mindfulness, a relaxing game or a breathing activity. This can be done with a trusted adult or on their own.
- Having a routine around this is important; ensure that, wherever possible, the calming activities happen at the same time each day. It is also important to monitor this, with the child.
- Many children are likely to have regressed to some previously outgrown behaviours, as a way of coping with the adjustments that have made during the school closures. For anxious children, this may result in more emotional dysregulation than was seen prior to lockdown and schools would benefit from having a whole-school intervention in place to support children's emotional regulation, for example the Zones of Regulation and using PSHE or circle times to share thoughts and feelings, using books and so on.

Signal for feeling overwhelmed:

- If parents and school staff know that a child may struggle with anxiety once schools re-open, it would be helpful to agree on a signal for the child to show that they are feeling overwhelmed. This could be showing a card, or a subtle action.
- It is important that anxious children are aware of and can spot their early signs of anxiety. This might include physical sensations, thoughts or behaviours.
- Agree on the signal for feeling overwhelmed and make sure that all adults involved know the signal and what it means. Agree a response in collaboration with the child. What can the child and adult expect to do in the situation where the child is struggling to cope?

Break and lunchtimes:

- When children who are anxious begin to re-attend school, the parts of the day with less routine may be more challenging times for them; for example break and lunchtimes.
- School staff need to consider, in collaboration with the child, how best to approach unstructured times such as these. It may be helpful if this is a calming time for the child and they are able to engage in some of the activities listed earlier. It is useful to provide the child with structure, routine and activities to do during these times.
- It is important to also consider social activities for anxious children to experience with their peers, so that they are not socially isolated as a result of their anxiety. These may need to be organised and/or supported by a member of staff.

Monday morning routine:

- It is more likely that the rest of the week will go positively if Monday morning is positive for the child. If the child has a negative Monday morning it can reinforce the anxiety – “I knew there would be things to worry about and I’m right!”. This cycle of anxiety can begin to be broken by regular positive Monday morning experiences.

Anxiety - Advice for parents/carers

During school closures

- Try to maintain contact with your child’s friends during school closures, through letters, phone calls or video calls.
- Some children will have been experiencing difficulties prior to school closures in schools, which will make returning to school even more difficult. Encourage the child to talk about their worries and contact your child’s school with any concerns you have so that appropriate support or interventions put in place.
- This time could be used to support building resilience; resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’ from stress, challenge, tragedy, trauma or adversity and is considered to be a process rather than an individual static trait that the individual possesses or does not possess. Resilience can be built by encouraging children to be brave, teaching them to self-soothe and treating each day as a ‘fresh start’.
- It is also important to support children in developing problem-solving skills. Problem-solving skills can be developed by jointly thinking of a pretend or real problem and

thinking about different ways of solving the issue together. Also consider with your child what the likely outcome to each strategy might be.

- Keep in contact with the school with any concerns that you have about your child reintegrating into school – it is best to be as proactive as possible.
- It will be useful in the long run to keep your child's bedtime routine as similar as possible to how it was before school closures. If, (as it has for many parents!) this routine has changed since school-closures, it would be good to begin reintroducing some routine into a child's bedtime.
- Spend some time looking at videos, other documents, and information on the school website to re-familiarise.
- Take a dry run to the school on foot a few times in the build-up to school opening.

When schools reopen

Emotional support:

- Encourage conversations about your child's thoughts and emotions around re-attending school.
- Reward brave behaviours and facing things that might cause the child to experience some level of anxiety.
- Help your child to continue developing their problem-solving skills and their resilience by using the tips above.

Sunday night plan:

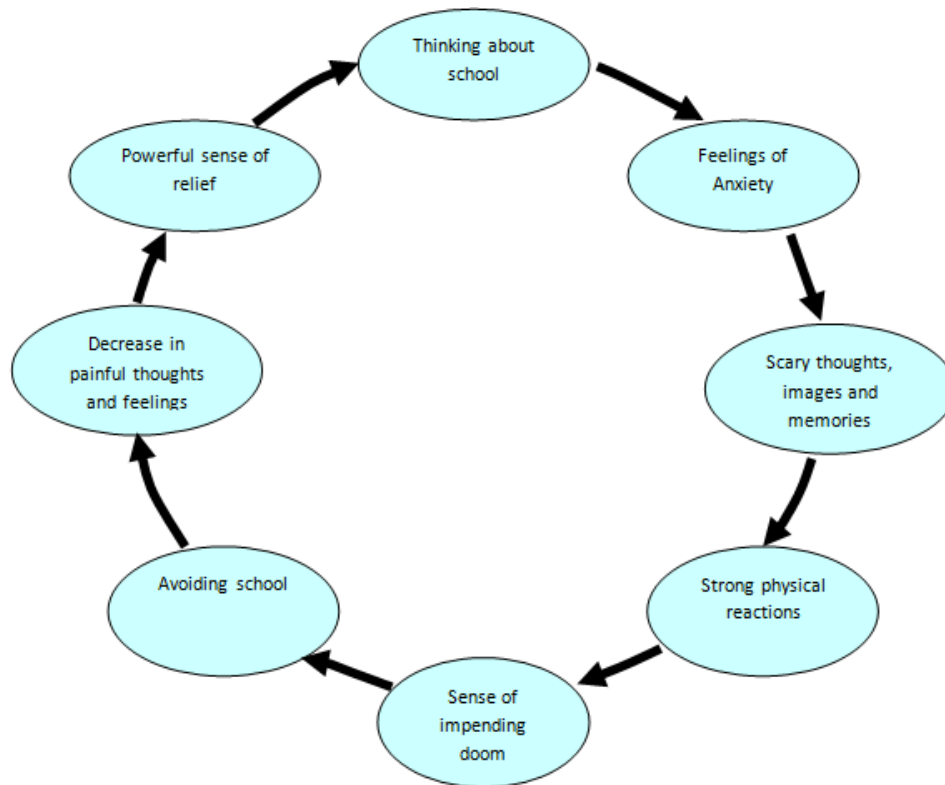
- When schools reopen, it will be useful for families to create a Sunday night plan. Children who are highly anxious about attending school will often begin worrying about attending on Sunday evening, or even earlier.
- This routine should be created collaboratively with the child and should happen consistently. It should be suited to the child's specific needs and might involve some active 'worrying time' and problem-solving with an adult, some relaxation activities, some of the child's most preferred activities and so on.

Morning routine:

- Create a clear morning routine with a visual timetable to map out all the steps of getting ready for school. It may be the case that even children who didn't struggle with a morning routine previously, may now require a visual timetable or checklist to help them get back into their routine.

Emotion-based school avoidance (EBSA)

There is a possibility that for some children, their heightened anxiety could result in a pattern of school avoidance. School avoidance tends to be reinforced through a cycle, as can be seen below:



As can be seen from the diagram, there is a sense of relief that comes from avoiding school and this acts as a powerful reinforcer for the avoidance of anxiety. The relief ‘rewards’ the avoidance behaviour while at the same time undermining the young person’s belief in their ability to handle the situation. This can lead to a further vicious circle with anxiety increasing over time.

The two fundamental components of EBSA are:

1. A pattern of absence from school which may, over time, result in a prolonged period of non-attendance
2. Anxiety or fear which presents as reluctance or refusal to go into school or in some cases to remain in school

Early warning signs

There are several early warning signs that may show in children before schools reopen and just as children begin to re-attend school:

- Negative talk about school before re-attending.
- Anxiety on separation from caregiver.
- Physical signs of anxiety, often presenting on a Sunday night or Monday morning, such as tummy aches, headaches etc. These may get better once a child is allowed to stay at home.
- The child says that they are worried about certain things happening in school.
- Refusal to get ready for school.
- Sleep difficulties.
- Crying and/or pleading.

- Distress (crying, becoming angry) when the topic of school is brought up in conversation.
- Self-harming behaviours.
- Withdrawal e.g. spending increasing amounts of time in their room, avoiding family members, walks or trips outside of the home.

EBSA can be a complex and multifaceted difficulty and is ideally addressed by a **close and supportive partnership between school and parents**. In terms of best practice schools should ensure that they have:

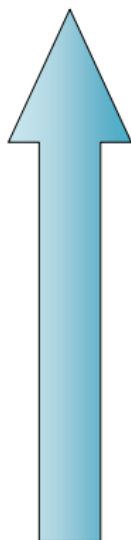
- A warm, welcoming ethos that promotes partnerships with parents and carers
- Systems and resources to promote the attendance of children at all ages
- Clear systems for the early identification of attendance difficulties
- Staff trained in the issue of EBSA, including assessment and intervention
- Written material for parents and carers around the issue of EBSA
- A clear understanding of the role of external agencies and referral routes, e.g. link Educational Psychologist or Advisory Teacher
- Established policies around issues such as: attendance, Special Educational Needs (SEN) behaviour management, bullying and transition
- A strong pastoral system and an identified senior member of staff to coordinate the response for a pupil with EBSA.

Schools need to remember that families may well have been fighting this battle for some time and that families will be doing their best to get their child into school. The COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated the situation to the extent that the child is now attempting to avoid school completely.

The anxiety ladder

- Developing an anxiety or exposure ladder with the child can be helpful. The individual would be asked to identify the situation in school which they are most worried about, for instance going back into a mainstream lesson and then less fearful situations working down the ladder. On the bottom rung of the ladder would be the situation that the pupil feels least fearful or worried about. This would be a useful starting point for any subsequent plan with each step being consolidated before moving on. Once the ladder is explored and drawn up with the child, school staff then need to jointly agree, with the child, a target to work on daily.

Most worried about



Not so worried about

Going into a busy dining room

Going into an empty dining room

Speaking to a peer

Going into a lesson (maths)

Seeing peers around school

Going into an empty classroom

Going into the reception area

Meeting a member of staff in the car park

Putting on uniform in the home

- Each ladder will, of course, reflect the thoughts and feelings of the individual. It is important for each step on the plan to be consolidated before moving on and the plan therefore must be **under constant review** with staff liaising with the young person, parents and other members of staff. The plan will need to be adjusted in relation to practical arrangements, how the pupil appears to be reacting and coping, and feedback from parents.

Further considerations

A guide published by Anxiety UK looking at anxiety in the context of school suggests that the following issues need to be considered as part of the reintegration process:

- Where are they most comfortable sitting in class
- Which teachers and members of staff they feel most comfortable with
- How they find it easiest to enter the room
- Who they have to support them
- Whether or not they can cope with being asked questions in class
- How they get from class to class
- Where they feel comfortable in school if they cannot get into class.

They also suggest that use of, and access to, toilets and eating in front of people in the dining hall can be sources of anxiety and therefore will need to be a consideration for some young people to have reasonable adjustments made in light of these difficulties. Individual schools will need to consider the resources they have available in terms of supporting pupils to manage their levels of anxiety throughout the school day.