

SCHOOLS REOPENING

How can school leaders manage the transition of schools reopening post lockdown?

September 2020

We are all acutely aware of two questions at the moment as we are in the midst of the transition having reopened our schools to the whole school community:

1. How can we manage to meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of our children, young people and families?
2. How do we plan to recover the lost learning that may have been a result of the months of lockdown?



Act as if what you do makes a difference... it does!

Start by asking why....

Why do we need to think differently?

- To acknowledge and accept the changes that have happened since March
- To begin to observe and assess the changes that have happened and plan a 'recovery' curriculum
- To consider how to notice SEMH (social, emotional and mental health) need
- To consider how to support the needs of all

Acknowledge and accept change

We need to acknowledge that change has happened and that this will look different for every individual. We cannot assume that we have all had the same experiences during lockdown. Some children would have dealt with bereavement, others the feeling of isolation, some fear, others boredom. Some may have been witness to domestic violence, others to watching as parents lose their jobs and all the associated fears and complications that come with that. Some would have had a great time at home with parents supporting them with their home learning, spending time and building relationships with siblings that are deeper than they ever had before. Some would have benefited from being at home, slowing down, taking time to just be. They may grieve the loss of this lovely situation as they come back to school, especially to a school that looks and runs differently as it fulfills the new government guidelines to help keep the school community safe. As educators we need to acknowledge and accept that change has happened, that it will be profound for some and less for others, that it will have affected the children as well as ourselves and our colleagues. The impact of this change will not always be obvious.

How can we begin to assess the impact of change and move forward?

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As educators we need to spend time noticing the children in our class and building relationships that allow the child to feel safe and empower them to reveal their needs to us so that we can better support them. Creating a curriculum that allows time for us to step back and observe, much like the early years curriculum, is crucial in the early stages when we return to school this September.

Open ended investigations, independent activities and child-led learning opportunities are all key to helping us ascertain the tone of our new class. Planning for these types of learning opportunities will enable the teachers and teaching assistants to assess not only the mental, social and emotional needs but also the academic.

Assessment for learning can be done in this low stakes, supportive environment and can inform planning so that it is targeted, individualised and highly effective.

So what can a 'recovery curriculum' look like in our schools?

We must begin, in the first instance, by organising learning that does not raise anxiety in our children, but instead reminds the child exactly how much they already know, how much they have remembered.

Using this simple technique as a starting point will help to build a child's self-confidence and self-esteem. Once the children have been given the time and space to settle, and once the teacher has a clearer picture of where they are with their learning, progress can be obtained through planning for teaching and learning that gently builds on and stretches the child's skills and knowledge.

Next steps can be gleaned and shared with the child who is able to work at their own pace, developing new skills and building knowledge.

How can we notice SEMH needs?

We can build a picture of the needs of a child in 2 ways:

- Through cognitive processes: thinking, knowing, remembering and problem solving.
- Through body language and behaviours.

In order to give children the opportunity to reflect on the way they are feeling, to think about their emotions and thoughts and to consider the impact of all of this on their behaviours we need to encourage them to **slow down** and **reflect**.

We have created a Let's go S.L.O.W approach:

S- Stop
L- Listen
O- Open Up
W- Work together

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Stop - Build time into the day to allow for some mindfulness activities. Consider the moment, ask ourselves how we feel now? Consider what has led to you feeling like you are in this moment. Reflect.

Listen - Listen to ourselves, listen to others around us. What can we hear when we look inwards and how does this make us feel? What are the experiences of others around us? Can we relate to their experiences, can we empathise? How does this help us to better understand our own experience?

Open-up - Share our thoughts and feelings with those around us to help us to understand ourselves better. By finding words to express how we feel we can begin the understanding and maybe even the healing process if that is what is needed.

Work together - Working with others, either in a pair or in groups can help us to be stronger, to better understand the changes that have happened and the experiences that we have had, but also to consider ways forward to learn from and build upon them.

Signs to look for - speaking bodies not talking mouths

It is important to remember that some children will not be able to work through their emotions cognitively. We will need to try to look for signs in their body language and behaviours that may suggest they need support.

Signs to look out for include:

Tight jaw, sickness, tension headache, raised shoulders, no eye contact, excessive eye contact, change of behaviours, overly chatty, overly energetic, lethargy

There are lots of signs to say that children are feeling unsafe, unhappy, anxious. We need to help children to recognise these signs in their bodies, but also use our observation skills to read body language to help us identify when a child may need extra support.

How can we support our children to talk about feelings?

Feelings Wheel
(feelingswheel.com)



The Feelings Wheel is a great tool for encouraging to articulate their feelings and provides new words to help unpick how a child is feeling. The center of the wheel provides the most basic example of how a child may try to describe their feelings. As you move out to each layer new vocabulary is offered to help support a child in unpicking their feelings and reflecting on them more deeply.



How can school leaders prepare for the full opening of schools post lockdown?


Emotion Coaching (The Gottman Institute)

Emotion coaching was first introduced by John Gottman and his colleagues in the USA.

Emotion coaching is about helping children to become more aware of their emotions and to manage their own feelings particularly during instances where a child is not able to self-regulate leading to anti-social behaviours. We need to remember that all behaviour is communication and we need to consider what is being communicated behind the behaviours. Emotion coaching entails these steps: Recognising feelings - Talk to the child and begin to name what you can see. Validating and labelling children's emotions - the feelings wheel will be helpful here. Setting limits where appropriate and if needed - Share your expectations, make it clear what is appropriate, safe behaviour. Problem-solve with the child - develop more effective behavioural strategies together.

For more information go to: <https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/>

Protective Behaviours (familiesfeelingssafe.co.uk)



Children need to know that they have a right to feel safe all of the time. Co-regulate to self-regulate. Teach the child behaviours that will help them to self-regulate. It is important to think about what may lead to increasing anxiety in a child. If we can predict it we can begin to put things in place that may prevent it, or at least give children tools to manage anxiety. Give the child the voice to create a plan together that will support them during difficult times.

- Ask the child to identify any triggers or triggering feelings. Ask the child to identify a safe adult or safe adults
- Ask the child to identify a safe place.
- Remind the children they can talk to someone even if it's awful or small
- Remind the children to stop-feel-think-do once they have ownership of their safety plan.

Once we have considered how to support our children in their transition back into school, and make a 'recovery curriculum' that incorporates both the academic as well as the mental health and wellbeing needs of our children, we can begin the new academic year more equipped to face the unknown that we may be required to face.

For more information and resources visit families feeling safe:
[www.familiesfeelingssafe.co.uk](https://familiesfeelingssafe.co.uk)
<https://familiesfeelingssafe.co.uk/resources/free-downloads-2/>

