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Tips for Teachers

ADHD

- **Space** - Find a space with the child that helps reduce sensory overload. Ask them what would work for them and create the space together so they feel ownership of it.
- **Movement** - Use whole class movement breaks such as 'Go Noodle' (gonoodle.com) or Joe Wicks 5 minute move videos on youtube so as not to draw attention to one child who needs to move. Agree monitor jobs with all children and ensure your child who may need to move has a job you can initiate when you need to, e.g take a 'message' to a colleague next door with whom you have agreed will have a chat to the child giving him/her some time out. Create a 'brain break' schedule as part of their timetable and have a 'brain break' box with carefully chosen resources that will help to calm and refocus. Ensure ground rules have been agreed.
- **Information chunking** - Use visual timetables, task management boards, now and next boards, charts and timers to break up large pieces of information into manageable chunks to help develop focus and self-regulation.
- **Strengths and targets** - Build meaningful relationships so that you can identify strengths and create targets together with the child. Ask them how they enjoy learning and plan to engage them through a variety of methods.
- **Organisation** - Share your timetable (including the visual timetable) with the family to ensure the child has support in remembering what resources need to be in on what day. This will help reduce anxiety. Make sure the locker/peg is at the end of a line. Have small groups of children use the locker area at one time so that it is not overly stimulating. Online learning platforms will help provide information for families so the child can be supported with their home learning if possible.
- **Notice and praise** - You can support the child in learning how to self-regulate (co-regulate in order to self-regulate) by noticing any triggers or early warning signs and adapting your teaching as necessary, e.g. offering the fidget toy or movement break – see above. Ensure praise is specific and easy to understand, repeat the praise to make sure it is heard and ask if it is understood. This makes it far easier for the child to repeat the desired behaviour. Teach self-regulation by encouraging them to notice and understand their own feelings. They need to recognise the choice they have in their behaviour as a result of those feelings, and that they can make the right choice for their safety and the safety and respect of others. Teachers can support a child by having a pre-agreed signal when they are struggling, e.g a card that they turn over at the front of their table, which indicates they need some time out/space. Use a mindfulness breathing technique such as '5 finger breathing' or 'petal breath', shaking a glitter bottle (sealed plastic bottle made by the child with the teacher full of glitter, oil and water, good to shake and to watch!)

Tips for Teachers

Anxiety

- **Respond in the moment** - It is important to offer support to a child at the time they are feeling anxious. Our response as teachers must be led by the child. Use mindfulness techniques such as breathwork, mindful colouring, meditation if appropriate.
- **Create a 'calming corner' or box** - This area should be created with the child together. Often as adults we assume we know what the child will find calming, and create a space based on our assumptions rather than asking the child. It is good to invite the child to bring in something from home to add to the corner that helps them feel relaxed. This could be a photograph from home, a special cushion. Something that triggers the relaxation response in the child. Create a calming box together with the child and the parent. It is good to have the same thing replicated at home so the child feels supported everywhere and gets used to using it. Familiarity with the process and the things inside is key. The box should be filled with things that are familiar to the child. This process is showing the child that their teacher understands their anxiety and how it makes them feel, and is doing lots to help support them. Both are great activities for bonding and building a relationship with the child.
- **Managing anxiety** - Share the day's timetable (preferably both verbally and visually) at the beginning of the day. This way an anxious child knows what to expect. If any changes happen throughout the day give as much notice of this as you can and go back to the visual timetable and change it - preferably with the child, talking about the reason for the change. This is often enough to support the anxious child. They begin to grow trust in the teacher and learn how to live with change.
Use a check in board: children have a name tag which they can move on a board and this indicates if they are 'fine', 'a little worried but ok to work through it alone', or 'need to talk now'. This should be checked regularly throughout the day by the adults in the classroom and responded to appropriately.
Use 'Worry monsters': these are great for the child to use with a trusted adult as part of the process of easing anxiety. They sit and talk through the worry with the adult and the monster devours it as they come up with their own strategies to help and move forward.
- **Develop self-regulation** - Rather than constantly reassuring a child with anxiety we want to develop them as self-regulating individuals who have the confidence to notice their anxieties and build the tools to manage them. Coaching can help to do this. Try using open questions that help coach the child to notice, reflect, think and act for themselves. Help them to name the feelings and emotions the anxiety is creating by using the feelings wheel (Gottman Institute). Once they can articulate the emotion, and notice where it is in their body that they can feel it, they are more able to begin to regulate those emotions and this will impact positively on their behaviour and actions.

Tips for Teachers

Autistic Spectrum Condition

- **Relationship building is key** - Develop a relationship of trust with the child by taking the time to find out what they like and do not like about the school day or the learning environment. Ask them to share their wishes and feelings and show them that you are taking on board their ideas by making changes they can see. This will help you to begin to be able to predict difficult situations that may lead to crisis moments and therefore you can put in the necessary support that will help prevent them.
- **Clarity in the 'what' and 'how' of learning** - Both the learning objective and success criteria needs to be clear in order to explain the learning journey. This will help the child know if they are on the right track, if they are getting each step right and if the end result will be a success. This will help the child to break down an overall task into achievable steps or milestones. Breaking down instructions and creating smaller achievable tasks reduces anxiety and avoids misunderstandings. It helps the child notice their successes along the way and therefore builds confidence.
- **Create a 'safe space'** - Work together with the child to find a space that they will consider a safe space to go to when things are too much for them to cope with. For some this may be the corner of the classroom, for others the corridor just outside. It could be a tent, a large cardboard box decorated, or simply some cushions and beanbags. Add to the space resources that will help trigger the calming response (the vagus nerve). This could be a set of pictures of a favourite character, animal or person. It could be a toy or cushion. Encourage ownership by creating the space together.
- **Create an individual plan or 'pupil passport'** - This needs to be worked on together with the child and parents, and ground rules agreed and written up. This should include strategies that may help during times of crisis. For example, an agreed signal that the child is beginning to feel overwhelmed and needs some time alone in their 'safe space'. The pupil passport can also be full of things that are important to the child, what interests them, their likes and dislikes, as well as strategies and resources that help them to be effective learners.
- **Communication** - Share all of this information with all of the adults working with the child in order to support them - communication is key. Remember to include those adults that may be covering for a short period of time and may not know the child at all, as well as midday supervisors who may only be with the child during unstructured parts of the day. Make sure plans are in place for the child to access the 'safe space' during these times.

Tips for Teachers

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

- **Emotion coaching** - Emotion coaching is a communication strategy 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. Dysregulation can lead to increased anxiety and increased obsessive behaviours.
Emotion coaching entails these clear steps to work through with a child:
Trigger a calm response - Use something that will begin to calm the child, a favourite toy, picture, adult or place.
Help the child to recognise their feelings - talk to the child and begin to name what you can see.
Validate and label a child's emotions - the feelings wheel will be helpful here.
Set clear limits where appropriate and if needed - share your expectations, make it clear what is appropriate and safe behaviour.
Problem-solve with the child - develop more effective strategies together, decide what could be done differently next time.
(emotioncoachinguk.com)
- **Positive Relationships** - Take time to build a positive, trusting relationship with the child so that you can understand the meaning behind the behaviour that is presenting. Ask what is triggering the behaviour and seek to look beyond it in order to support the child.
Take the time outside of lesson time, e.g. break or lunchtime to just talk so you can ascertain the child's wishes and feelings. Use 'mindful colouring' activities, or a walk outside to create safe spaces and focused times to talk together.
- **Communication with others** - Involve the family in discussions to gain further information and to find out what strategies work at home. To help the child effectively there should be joined up thinking and a consistent approach to the support given. This will help the child feel safer and cared for.



Tips for Teachers

Depressive symptoms/disorders

- **Talking feelings** - Some children, especially younger children, will find it hard to articulate their feelings or to link their feelings to a specific situation. They may know they feel unhappy but not know why. Create the right environment and opportunities to talk, e.g. talking through drawing, mindful colouring or through play with small world resources.
- **Check in, check up, check out** - Use a feelings 'check in' board with the whole class so you can gauge the mood of all children. This is a board that allows the children to move their name tag to different areas, as they come into the classroom, in order to help adults know how they are feeling. They are either 'fine', 'not fine at the moment, but can manage myself', or 'not fine and need to talk'. This needs to be checked by the adults and responded to appropriately in order to help the child that needs support, when they need it.
Check in with the child in the morning, *check up* mid-way through the day and *check out* just before they leave for the day. You may notice a pattern of feelings/emotions that will help you to better support the child.
- **Watch the child** - Remember you will get so much information for helping a child by observing them in the context of the classroom and talking to them about what helps them to feel ready to learn. Find the right space in the classroom by discussing and not assuming: for example sitting at the front might be the last thing they want and sitting at the back may give them comfort, (Think about adults attending training sessions... they always head to the back!)
It is often impossible for the teacher to do this thoroughly when they are teaching 30 pupils, remember to delegate to your TA or Senco if you can. Share any concerns and strategies clearly with the TA/Senco and they can do the observations and add support as appropriate in the moment.
- **Prepare and plan** - Create an individual plan to be in place so that any adult working with the child will be able to offer support, whether they are midday supervisors or supply teachers.
- **Buddy systems** - Use a buddy system to help support the child at break times – choose a child happy to be a buddy and teach them how to show support and empathy; teach ideas of games to play that will offer collaboration and support. Take the time to model this and to talk to the buddy about how things are going. They will need support too.

Tips for Teachers

Conduct Disorder & Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

- **Behaviour Policy** - Ensure your school behaviour policy is short, specific and concise. Share this with the whole class and the adults working with the children so children understand the expectations and adults adhere to the policy consistently. The policy can then act as a road map for the child with conduct disorder to help support them cope with, and understand, the expectations for behaviour. Children showing anti-social behaviours can often feel like they are being bombarded with instructions. Having a clear and concise whole school behaviour policy that is consistently shared with the children, and adhered to by all, will help prevent confusion and anxiety.
- **Words matter** - It is important that we do not think about children in a binary way: good or bad; positive or negative...as we know it is more complicated than that! As such we should avoid using over simplistic terms. Try talking about anti-social and pro-social behaviours to the child and explain that there are certain behaviours that are expected in society in order for that society to work. A classroom is just a micro-society and children can learn how to contribute to it in a collaborative way in order to help make that micro-society work effectively.
- **All behaviour is communication** - Any behaviour a child is showing, whether pro-social or anti-social is communicating something. Notice the behaviour and consider the reasons behind it or the triggers that have led to it. There may be problems in a child's life that go deeper than the behaviour you are seeing. It is important to continue to set high expectations, support them to behave appropriately in line with the school behaviour policy and then seek to understand the cause.
- **Home/school approach** - Liaise with the family often so that the consistent approaches developed in school are replicated at home or vice-versa. Shared support and collaborative approaches will help the child to understand expectations as well as develop a trust in the adults that are helping them.
- **Emotion coaching** - Emotion coaching is a communication strategy about helping children to become more aware of their emotions and to manage their own feelings and behaviours, particularly during instances where a child is not able to self-regulate leading to anti-social behaviours.
See OCD section for more details.

Tips for Teachers

PTSD

- **Respond in the moment** - A swift response to a child in crisis is so important. Breathing techniques such as petal breathing or five finger breathing can help a child come into the moment and can help calm an anxious or panicked mind. Breathwork can bring a child from the fight, flight or freeze response and into the rest and digest response by triggering the parasympathetic nervous system to calm down the brain.
- **Talking and listening** - Often a child with PTSD wants to talk about their experience or worries, however, not all children will be able to articulate how they are feeling or what they are thinking. This is especially the case if they are very young or have another diagnosis. Use tools and strategies to help them to share what they need to, such as talking through drawing or mindfulness colouring. Use 'small world' resources or play dough to help support them in their telling of events.
- **Social Stories** - Social stories present information to a child in a literal or 'concrete' way in order for them to understand a difficult situation or experience unambiguously. Use social stories to visually support a child in understanding a trauma or their emotional response to it. Social stories are also an effective way to let the child know that they are safe and that they have adults in their lives who will support them and continue to keep them safe.
- **Consistency** - Make sure expectations of pro-social behaviour are shared and consistent. Notice any triggers that may make a child with PTSD show anti-social behaviours and work with them to be able to recognise the trigger or the feelings that come before a crisis situation. Create a plan and share this with all adults working with the child. Use Emotion Coaching (see above) (See OCD section for more details) to help a child return to a calm state and create strategies to help in the future.
- **Routines** - Share timetables and routines as much as possible with the child in order to make the day as predictable as possible to reduce anxiety. As teachers we have to deal with so many changes in a day that routines are often unpredictable and the best laid plans to stick to them are gone. Do plan routines, as all children benefit from them, but share any unexpected changes that occur, both verbally and visually (visual timetable) with the child. Explain why a change has happened so they understand the necessity and through this understanding continue to feel safe and in control.
- **Working together** - Plan a meeting with the school SENCo and the parents/carers to discuss your concerns as early as possible. Share ideas and strategies that can be used both at home and in school for consistency. Use a communication book, email or weekly meetings to update each other on the child's progress. Offer the parents/carers support themselves as appropriate, maybe through the school's family support worker. If the trauma is ongoing discuss which outside agencies should be contacted to help support the family and consider if you have any safeguarding concerns and discuss them with your designated safeguarding lead immediately.