



Children may naturally feel anxious and unsure about returning to face to face teaching and learning following the extended period of remote learning or being part of a small face to face bubbles at school.

Children may well be experiencing mental health challenges and staff are aware of the some of these challenges that children might face when they return to school such as:

- Anxiety
- health anxiety (either for themselves or a family member)
- Separation anxiety (after spending a lot of time at home with family)
- Bereavement or children may also experience general trauma from the lockdown.

Staff are aware of how anxiety might impact children.



- Not a problem
- Potentially becoming a problem
- is a problem

Minor and occasional worries are normal, especially during this unusual time. However, if children are often thinking about their worries, and where this appears to be causing them distress and affecting their everyday life, then they may be suffering from anxiety and need more support.

School will identify where children are, emotionally, we will, as far as we can, keep track of family circumstances using CPOM s to record information. We already have information via the weekly phone calls to parents that were occurring throughout lockdown 3.

Circumstances which might've impacted their child's mental health may include:

- Financial hardship (like parents being made redundant or furloughed, 1 in three workers in Hounslow)
- If anyone in the family is a critical worker (like NHS staff)
- If there have been any deaths or serious illness in their community
- Bereavement

Once school has an idea of the mental health challenges the children might be facing, we can work out how to best approach them and support children in school, collectively and individually.

Approaches to support all children with the return to school.

While some children will be affected by lockdown more than others, all children who haven't been at school will have missed the routine, seeing friends and the support from school staff.

Some support might include:

- Time for them to talk about their experience in lockdown

- One-to-one, supportive conversations with staff
- Lessons and activities focused on mental wellbeing and staying safe
- Positive opportunities to renew and develop friendships and peer groups
- Use of positive language to reassure and support children's confidence – see words of optimism saved on staff shared in Spring Term 2021.

The DfE's operational guidance for full reopening on 8 March includes advice on helping children adjust back to life in school (see page 61). This includes using pastoral support to:

- Help children rebuild their friendships - lots of talk and collaborative activities
- Help children improve their physical and mental wellbeing, lots of PE and sports activities
- Opportunities to talk to an adult, ELSA or pastoral staff.
- Identify health and wellbeing needs
- Provide support for children facing anxiety, sleep issues and bereavement issues

APS has strengthened our approach to coronavirus-related wellbeing issues – see our Wellbeing Support Handbook March 21, part of our continue Whole, Happy Healthy strategy and as a result we will be looking to identify warning signs in children. School will tackle pupil anxiety by answering questions and giving age appropriate explanations.

Children might have heard a lot of conflicting information about the virus during lockdown. For all age groups, school will give children the opportunity to ask questions about anything related to COVID-19, lockdown, or schools reopening. This might include:

- What the virus is and how it spreads
- How testing works, including how lateral flow device (LFD) coronavirus testing helps to control the spread
- How vaccines work and how the UK is currently phasing the vaccine rollout
- What's happening in the news (giving them age-appropriate information), take a look at BBC Newsround, which is regularly updated with information and advice
- What makes a news source reliable, and how some stories on social media for example might be based on inaccurate information
- Taking a break from listening to or reading the news - overexposure can be overwhelming and isn't helpful
- Awareness of our body's immune system and the benefits of healthy eating, sleep, and exercise - all of which help fight germs.

It's fine not to have all the answers, as long as we are honest but reassuring with our children. School will provide children with age-appropriate resources. Some resources can be found here:

- YoungMinds: practical steps to take if you're anxious about coronavirus
- Mind: how to take care of your wellbeing during COVID-19
- Mythbusters from the World Health Organization
- Data visualisation pack from Information is Beautiful

The following organisations offer information and support on mental health and wellbeing:

- Place2Be
- MindEd
- Every Mind Matters
- Public Health England
- Child Bereavement UK and the Childhood Bereavement Network
- Youth Sport Trust and Sport England
- Young Minds

- Think Ninja
- Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond Support Hub

School will prioritise non-academic activities at first to support children to settle back into the classroom and routines. Most of our children will be re-adjusting from a lengthy time at home, and may need to re-build emotional resilience in the classroom.

Here are some subjects which lend themselves to helping children re-settle along with some practical advice:

- Music and art - sing with children and encourage them to be creative, and to talk about their creations
- PE - for example, walking can help reduce anxiety, while stretching and balancing can help to give children a sense of control
- Break up the day with these activities, but make it fairly predictable to give children stability.
- Make links between your curriculum and children's experiences in lockdown
- Try to cover topics like anxiety, grief, the unknown and building trust in your curriculum.
- Make sure that this is age-appropriate. For example, First World War poetry might help older children explore grief.
- Make 'happiness boxes' with younger children on their first day back to comfort them. This is a particularly good thing to do with children who are suffering from separation anxiety, but it can be useful in helping all younger children to self-regulate their emotions.
- Ask parents and staff if they have any shoeboxes (or similarly-sized cardboard boxes) they can bring into school when it reopens fully
- Give each pupil a box on their first day back, that they can decorate how they like
- They should also fill their happiness box with anything that will comfort them, like a toy or fabric to stroke (children shouldn't share the contents of their boxes, to limit the spread of germs)
- Once they've made their boxes, teachers should regularly encourage children to spend time with their happiness box
- Teachers to give children time with their box if they're anxious or distressed
- Teachers should also encourage children to go to their box whenever they need to, so they can self-regulate their emotions
- Remind children of home if they're experiencing separation anxiety
- Ask parents to find something that will remind their child of home and comfort them if they're experiencing separation anxiety. This might include:
 - A toy or keepsake
 - Family photos
 - A keyring

It might be worth reminding parents that their child will be responsible for looking after this item at school, and to make sure that any family photos are duplicates.

We will need to make sure any item brought into school from a pupil's home is appropriately cleaned when it first comes in to school, and it should be kept in school while it's being used by that child.

- Encourage parents to send their child a note
- If a child has separation anxiety, suggest to their parents that they put a note for them in their bag or lunch box.
- Let children know that you're in regular contact with their parents. This can help reassure children and make them feel more connected with their parents while they're in school.