

Advice from Bradford Educational Psychology Team during the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) situation:



For staff continuing to work in school and other settings

The Coronavirus outbreak means that schools and teachers are operating in different ways to what we are used to, which means that we are all facing uncertainty and challenge. Children and young people who are continuing to attend school may face additional issues and frustrations. Some of these children, by nature of the government advice, may have additional needs. Some may be the children of keyworkers whose parents are needed and expected to work.

We know it might also be a difficult time for staff who are continuing to work in schools. We hope that this document provides some help and guidance for school staff to in supporting the pupils who are in school, and also reassurance and ideas for members of staff themselves.

Possible difficulties for children and young people:

Some of the issues affecting children and young people still expected to attend school might include:

- Difficulties with accepting that they are expected school to attend when their friends and peers are not.
- Difficulties accepting or adapting to a different routine.
- Having to work with new and unfamiliar members of staff
- Having to work in different groups or classes with peers they may not know or get on with.
- Some children and young people might have increased anxiety whether their family members might get ill, or worse, if they are frontline workers exposed to the coronavirus.
- Those children and young people who are in school because of their complex health or care needs may have heightened emotions and feelings due to this specific situation.

Possible difficulties for members of school staff:

- Being expected to work with children and young people they do not know.
- Having to set up new classes and groupings.
- Working with CYP who have additional educational, health, social and/or care needs.
- Changes to their usual or expected role within school, maybe one that focuses 'childcare' rather than 'educational' provision.
- Feeling anxious about their own children whilst being expected to take care of other people's children
- Feeling anxious about the welfare other family members but still being expected to be in work.
- Feeling pressure that they are expected to provide the usual high-standard level of education in very exceptional circumstances.

Ideas, resources and considerations that might help

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes how a person's basic needs must be met before they are able to move on to have other, more advanced needs met. During these uncertain times, it is important that children's basic needs which many of us usually take for granted, such as physiological (food, water, warmth, rest) and safety needs, are fulfilled. It is also important that their psychological needs are met as far as possible, such as feelings of belongingness and connection, and also feelings of value and self-esteem. Activities which help children to meet these needs would be helpful.

2. Self-determination theory:

It is important that children and young people continue to feel motivated and have a sense of purpose during this time – it would be understandable for some children to think 'what's the point?'. Research suggests that a number of factors have been found to be important enhancing motivation. These include autonomy (feelings of having control over our own lives), perceived competence (a need to feel a sense of achievement) and relatedness (a sense of belonging and connection with others). The following are examples of how we can help children and young people in each of these areas. *The examples also highlight many important factors that will be particularly important to establish within the first few days of this situation:*

Autonomy:

- Encourage children and young people to develop their own ground rules in order to help the group feel safe and secure and to provide an element of control
- Offer children and young people choices where possible in order to provide a sense of control
- Encourage children and young people to help to develop the daily timetable
- Use of daily reflection tasks – what has worked well today? What could be better?
- Ensuring that children and young people have control where they able to may help to reduce feelings of anxiety

Perceived competence:

- Students to set a goal for themselves of something they would like to achieve each day (this does not need to be academic or complex) and to review this at the end of the day.
- Specific feedback to help children and young people reflect on their daily achievements (e.g. 'you have done really well at...')
- Collate a record of activities which children and young people have undertaken during this time (e.g. through photos, scrapbooks). Encourage them to look back on this and reflect on their achievements regularly.

Relatedness:

- Greet each child personally and offer a 'fresh start' at the beginning of each day
- Use of ice breakers (e.g. 'getting to know you' quizzes)
- Encourage members of the group to support one another – the 'we are all in this together' approach
- Identify of strengths of the children and young people you are working with. They could then be assigned special 'jobs' or 'roles' accordingly which helps the students to support one another (it is important that these should not be overly

- challenging or anxiety-provoking, and that children do not experience additional pressures during this time)
- Use of 'buddy systems'
 - Sharing of own experiences and feelings

Environmental considerations:

The following environmental considerations may also be helpful:

- Ensure that clear and consistent routines are provided for students
- Talk through the structure of the day with students
- Highlight any possible changes beforehand where possible
- Try to provide a 'Safe space' area within the classroom (ideally where there is reduced sensory stimulation, such as noise and crowding).
- Try to build in regular sensory and movement breaks into the day
- Provide clear transitions between tasks
- As students are likely to be working with unfamiliar staff members and/or several staff members across the weeks, the use of one page profiles or pupil passports to help to share important information quickly about the students you are working with would be helpful.

3. The PACE Model (Dan Hughes)

The PACE Model is a way of interacting with children and young people which acknowledges their feelings and life experiences, and which helps them to develop resilience and emotional awareness. This is likely to be especially important during these uncertain times. The model consists of four elements:

- Playfulness: an open, calm, relaxed and playful attitude.
- Acceptance: actively communicating to children and young people that you accept their feelings, thoughts, wishes and perceptions can help children to feel secure, safe and valued.
- Curiosity: a desire to understand the child or young person without judgement.
- Empathy: showing compassion towards children and young people and being able to put yourself in their shoes.

Further information about this model can be found here:

<https://ddpnetwork.org/about-ddp/meant-pace/>

4. Normalising feelings and keeping boundaries:

For some of the children you are working with, it is possible that feelings of anxiety around Coronavirus may trigger memories of early trauma. This in turn may manifest in seemingly extreme reactions or behaviours.

During these times, it is important to ensure that clear and consistent boundaries are provided in order to help children and young people feel secure, but also that they understand that whatever they are feeling is 'normal'.

It may help to safely share your own feelings and experiences with students in order to normalise their emotions, but only if you feel safe to do so.

5. Disappointment Ritual (Louise Bomber):

Some children and young people may be experiencing feelings of disappointment or unfairness about having to come into school when their friends are able to stay at home. The following 'disappointment ritual' can help to support students with powerful feelings during this time.

- Acknowledge: Acknowledge the student's possible feelings about the situation.

"Many of you may be feeling disappointed or angry that you are having to come into school at the moment while your friends stay at home, and this is understandable".

- State: Tell the students what is going to happen to the best of your ability.

"At the moment, we will need to keep coming into school. We're not sure how long things will be like this for, but eventually everyone will be coming back into school when they are able to"

- Translate: 'Translate' the possible reasons behind why something has changed)

"You might be thinking that it's really unfair that you have to come into school, but the reason we are asking you to come in is to make sure that we work together to make sure that we are all as safe as we can be and that we can make sure that people are able to do important jobs to help people.

- Positives: Explore the positives about the situation

"This might be a really good chance to get to know other people that you wouldn't usually work with and we'll try and make sure that we get to do lots of fun things which you can tell your parents and friends about when you get home!"

6. Emotion Coaching:

Emotion coaching helps children and young people to understand the different emotions they are experiencing, why they occur and how they can manage them. The 5 steps are:

1. Be aware of the child's emotions
2. Recognise emotion as an opportunity for connection or teaching
3. Help the child to verbally label their emotions
4. Communicate empathy and understanding
5. Set limits and problem-solve

More in-depth examples can be found at <https://www.therapeuticcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Dr-George-Harris-Attachment-classroom-strategies-workshop.pdf>

7. Anxiety reduction strategies:

Many students (and school staff) are likely to be experiencing heightened feelings of anxiety due to the uncertainty around Coronavirus. The following strategies might be helpful:

- Daily mindfulness/meditation sessions (there are many free resources, videos and live webcasts available online)

- Breathing and muscle relaxation exercises
- Talking through steps and measures which you have implemented in school which are helping to keep children and young people physically safe (e.g. hygiene measures, how food is prepared).
- Working to contain the emotions of the children you are working with whilst being honest about your own feelings in order to ensure that students' feelings are acknowledged, validated and normalised.
- Helping children to recognise and understand their own feelings by 'wondering aloud' (e.g. I'm wondering whether you are feeling sad/happy/worried/anxious because...') Helping children to make links between their feelings, thoughts and behaviours may be useful at these times.
- Ensure that children and young people are able to bring in an item from home if this helps them to feel more comfortable (this may be particularly important if they are feeling anxious about their relatives, and lets them know that they are being 'kept in mind').

8. For staff:

- This is likely to be a highly demanding and anxiety-provoking time for yourself and colleagues too, so it is important to look after your own wellbeing. The following strategies may be helpful:
- Opportunities for remote informal supervision or debrief with colleagues (e.g. video messaging, phone calls).
- The students you are working with are likely to be experiencing heightened emotions. It is important to be mindful of factors such as projection (children projecting their feelings on to you) and transference (children transferring their feelings about one person or environment on to another) and the impact that this has on your emotions.
- We can only do the best that we can do. Try not to put unrealistic expectations upon yourself – the main priority is keeping ourselves and the students we are working with safe.