

Resilience and Well-Being: KS1

Staffordshire County Council's Recovery Plan has been devised in the context of COVID-19. This plan incorporates a number of projects across SCC services including the Educational Psychology Service to support educational settings in the aftermath of emergency restrictions. The EPS has devised materials in a number of areas with the aim of providing educational settings with support that can be accessed immediately in the new academic year, without the need to refer into the service directly.

AIM: This leaflet aims provide information to help build resilience and promote positive emotional mental wellbeing in KS1 children in the aftermath of COVID-19.

This leaflet is divided into 4 sections:

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1. Promoting resilience after COVID-19

In 2020 the world has been affected by a global pandemic, COVID-19. Young Minds carried out one of the first surveys investigating the psychological impact of COVID-19 on young people. This survey was carried out between Friday 20th March (when schools were closed to pupils with exception of children of keyworkers/ vulnerable children) and Wednesday 25th March (when restrictions were tightened).

Young Minds surveyed 2,111 young people with pre-existing mental health needs. Although this is a snapshot study, it does give an insight to the psychological effects of coronavirus. Findings showed that: -

- 32% agreed their mental health had become much worse.
- 51% agreed their mental health had become a bit worse.
- 9% agreed it made no difference to their mental health.
- 6% agreed their mental health had become a bit better.
- 1% agreed their mental health had become much better.

Given these findings, researchers from Young Minds also asked young people what would be the most helpful during the pandemic to promote positive mental health. Apart from accessing face to face therapeutic support young people reported: -

- Online and digital support (information about online chat services).
- Guides on how to remain calm due to the uncertainty of everything.
- Information and tools on how to manage symptoms of anxiety (techniques, strategies).
- Information, advice, guidance and signposting to additional resources.

In conclusion, Young Minds suggested that young people need to know where to go for help during this time, with clear signposting and access to digital support.

It is also anticipated children who may not have had pre-existing mental health difficulties prior to the pandemic may experience anxiety or trauma due to the five losses of routine, structure, opportunity, friendship and freedom (Carpenter, 2020).

2. Resilience and wellbeing

Resilience can be defined in several ways, with many definitions referring to overcoming adversity (Grotberg, 1997) or being able to adapt to challenging situations (Rae, 2019; Duffield & O'Hare, 2020).

More recently, research exploring resilience has looked at ways it can be promoted over time. Thus, it is argued that resilience is a process rather than an internal trait. Therefore, resilience can change over time depending on the context or situation. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have, it involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. Thus, resilience can be promoted and enhanced; it does not matter how resilient someone is now, they can change their behaviour to become more resilient tomorrow.

Resilience is not a special quality, trait or special power that only some children are born with. It is in fact considered to be a type of '*Ordinary Magic*' (Masten, 2004) and some level of resilience is within reach for everyone.

Taking care of children's wellbeing



During this unusual time, children need help to make sense of what is going on around them. It is important that they have the space to talk about any anxiety and other thoughts or feelings they may be experiencing. Talking about their feelings and their experience will hopefully help to normalise things for them and reduce any feelings of anxiety.

Children need a safe space where they have the opportunity to ask questions and share worries but also where they can play and resume a positive routine. It is important that we talk to children about what is happening and try to provide information in age appropriate language. There are resources at the end of this leaflet that may help.

Children's views about school during Covid-19:



Southend Educational Psychology Service recently surveyed primary aged children to ask them for their views about what they miss about school and what might help when they return. The video can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVdVer1oTs>

Children said that they missed:



Children said what they thought would make going back to school easier:



Interestingly, many of the children's views that feature in the survey responses correspond closely with what key research says is needed to build resilience.

Dr Michael Ungar has written extensively about resilience and refers to key ingredients that are essential in order for children to grow. Each of these ingredients is a protective process that helps children to cope with adversity. Ingredients such as: structure, having lots of strong relationships, access to basic needs, physical and psychological safety, having a sense of control and a sense of belonging and encouraging powerful identities (i.e. having a safe space to express strengths) are all key in influencing children's development and building resilience.

Psychological and physical safety is an essential need for everyone (see Maslow, 1970). To use a sailboat analogy (Scott Barry Kaufman, 2020); all of us need a boat that is safe and secure, otherwise the boat cannot go anywhere. However, the boat cannot set sail on the ocean with just safety alone, the boat has to open up it's sail in

order to move in a purposeful direction. To help children feel secure enough to open up their sails, they will need emotional comfort and support.

It is also important to remember that for KS1 children in particular, social and emotional learning including play-based approaches are vital in supporting: wellbeing, a sense of belonging and their academic outcomes (Outhwaite & Gulliford, 2020).

The remainder of this leaflet will focus on two key areas of research that can be drawn upon to help build resilience and promote wellbeing.

3. Strategies



Key strategy

In considering what children will need upon their return to school it is helpful to consider the five essential principles that support recovery following a disaster, tragedy or loss (Hobfoll et al, 2007):

- 1) **A sense of safety** – It will be natural to worry, and children need to feel safe so that they can cope.
- 2) **Calming** – Children may feel a range of different emotions and some will have absorbed a lot of anxiety around social distancing etc. Children need support that will help to normalise their emotions.
- 3) **A sense of self-and community efficacy** – Children need to feel that they have some control over their lives and that they belong to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes.
- 4) **Connectedness** – Children need to feel that they are genuinely cared about and belong in their school environment.
- 5) **Hope** – hopefulness can be learned (see Martin Seligman). It is important to provide reassurance that the situation will improve in the future.

1) **A sense of safety:**

- Continue with routine activities
 - Ensure a clear structure is in place with clear expectations for everyone
 - Be open and honest about physical safety
 - Ensure that children are involved by giving them a voice and listening to them
 - Provide a safe space to talk or to allow children to be calm
 - Adults should talk about their own feelings to help normalise them and to provide a sense of validation for a range of different feelings
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2) **A sense of calm:**

- Identify which children may need additional support
 - Spend time welcoming children back. Make time for discussions
 - 'Feeling with, rather than dealing with'. Show empathy for whatever a child is feeling and help them to trust and understand their emotions
 - Model emotion regulation by talking about them openly with children and take part in mindfulness exercises
 - Check-in with children regularly to encourage self-reflection
 - Make use of regulation strategies such as calm corners or a space to do relaxing activities
 - Ensure that children know where they can go if they need some time to be calm
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3) Promoting self- and collective efficacy:

- Teach problem-solving skills. Encourage children to think and reflect upon previous times when they have shown courage, determination or resilience. Try to model this to them too by providing examples
 - Listen to what pupils have to say about what they feel will support them
 - Try to involve children in taking ownership or control of certain activities or projects. Encourage a sense of community and belonging within the classroom
 - Encourage reflective activities that help children to think about their own thoughts and feelings. Help them to notice their thoughts and feelings and talk about what they are
 - Provide children with specific jobs or responsibilities
 - Help children to identify their unique character strengths
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4) Promoting social connectedness:

- Use circle time activities
 - Build connections (or re-connections) with key adults. Some children may benefit from being assigned to a specific adult in school
 - Promote out of school/extra curricular activities where possible
 - Use relational approaches for when peer conflict arises. Focus on the underlying emotions and use a restorative approach
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5) Promoting a sense of hope:

- Practice mindfulness
 - Perform acts of kindness and encourage the helping of others
 - Model hope for children. Talk about tricky situations where a solution was found or where a difficult obstacle was overcome.
 - Pay attention to explanatory styles. Pay attention to self-critical language and provide reframes so that explanations of failures or mistakes are temporary, specific and changeable and not permanent and pervasive (Seligman, 1998).
 - Focus on children's strengths and try to make use of them
 - Encourage children to reflect daily on one thing they have done well
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Key strategy

The PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) derives from the area of Positive Psychology. Seligman suggests that our sense of well-being can be promoted by positive actions in five areas:

Positive emotion,
Engagement,
Relationships,
Meaning,
Accomplishment

Positive emotion – *Building positive emotions by spending time experiencing happiness, joy, fun, gratitude, hope etc.*

- *Engage in daily exercise*
- *Model optimism/hope – e.g. talk about something you are looking forward to each day*
- *Look for ideas on the Action for Happiness calendar*
<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/>

- *Gratitude diary/jar – encourage children to name something that they are grateful for*
- *Tell a joke/watch something funny*
- *Engage in calming activities (e.g. yoga or breathing exercises)*
- *Allow additional time and choice to engage in a range of tasks that match children's key interests*
- *Notice and acknowledge children's worries. E.g. draw the worry or imagine the worry was a monster or alien – what would it look like?*
- *Create a 'feelings' tree (see the ACT based story about The Little Sapling in the toolbox section)*

Engagement – *Applying a child's strengths to a particular task and participating in a task that absorbs them. Helping children to find their 'flow'.*

- *Identifying and using **character-based** strengths, e.g. being organised, being kind, being persistent, being curious*
- *Identifying and using **skill-based** strengths e.g. sport, playing an instrument, drawing*

Relationships – *Connecting with others and receiving support from others that promotes feelings of connection and security.*

- *Encourage and promote acts of kindness*
- *Play team games*
- *Jigsaw activity – each child creates a jigsaw piece celebrating their unique strengths and interests*
- *Positive qualities – take it in turns to write your name on a piece of paper and pass around a group to write a positive comment for each child*

Meaning – *Having a clear sense of purpose. Acting in accordance with values or goals.*

- *Finding ways to be helpful*
- *Doing one good deed each day (random acts of kindness)*
- *Encourage partner check-ins*
- *Setting personal, achievable goals*

Accomplishment – *Achieving goals, no matter how small. Managing setbacks.*

- *Creating something using Lego or playdough*
- *Think about learning something new*
- *Reading a story*
- *Set an exercise target*
- *Completing a piece of work*
- *Take on a new responsibility in class or around school*
- *Talk about and share successes*

4. Toolkit



Free mindfulness app and resources – for adults or young people:

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>

Helping babies and children under 5 through coronavirus:

https://www.annafreud.org/media/11732/eyim_covidsupport_v1d2.pdf

Calming, breathing and stretching exercises for children based on yoga:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyvuaL_2avY

A really useful graphic from Surrey EPS on how to help manage feelings and emotions:

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/EZvP5K2WkAEpgZk?format=jpg&name=900x900>

Talking to children about Coronavirus:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Talking%20to%20children%20about%20coronavirus.pdf>

Lots of calming and energising videos: <https://www.cosmickids.com/>

There are some beautiful graphics available here (by Beth Wooldridge) to help children reflect on their feelings:

https://twitter.com/tweets_by_beth/status/1273952435900428289/photo/1

There is a wellbeing curriculum designed by Educational Psychologists based on

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) – free trial available: <https://www.connect-pshe.org/>

A simple and colourful picture book about feelings and worries:

<https://www.calameo.com/read/000777721945cfe5bb9cc?authid=Xu9pcOzU3TQx>

Dave the dog is a lovely picture book explaining coronavirus:

<https://nursedottybooks.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/dave-the-dog-coronavirus-1-1.pdf>

Big emotions about Coronavirus (& therapeutic stories): <http://www.em-edsupport.org.uk/Page/7730>

A story about feelings and thoughts based on ACT (Acceptance and Commitment

Therapy):<https://contextualscience.org/files/The%20Story%20of%20Little%20Saplingf.doc>

While We Can't Hug' - A lovely short video story about social distancing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnnFrPaRgY>





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