

Supporting children with additional needs to transition back to school


South West London
Clinical Commissioning Group

 **achieving
for children**

 **Are you OK
Kingston?**

 **Are you OK
Richmond?**

Catherine Corio (EWP)
Miranda Wallace (EWP)
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM (MHST)
Emotional Health Service
Achieving for Children
42 York Street
London TW1 3BW

The current context

- Covid-19 pandemic
- Adjusting to school closures
- Finding a new 'normal'
- Transition back to school will involve a novel setup and new rules
- This can be challenging for all children but may be particularly difficult for children with additional needs including emotional, psychological and social communication difficulties.



Offering support

With this in mind it is vital that we offer the best support possible during this time of change.

The remainder of this session will focus on useful strategies and tools that can help to reduce anxiety around returning to school and encourage positive engagement with school.

You may be familiar with many of them and this will help you to feel confident you are supporting your child in the best way possible.

**Preparing
for new
experiences**

**Emotional
toolbox**



Preparing for new experiences

It can be particularly helpful to ensure that children who experience social communication difficulties, struggle with attention or who are extremely anxious; are given plenty of warning about upcoming changes, in addition to what they can expect their day to day to look like.

Increasing this predictability can reduce feelings of anxiety.

In order to communicate this, some children benefit from having information being broken down into manageable chunks and for it to be displayed visually.

This also means its easy for them to refer back to it and reduce the need to seek reassurance as frequently.



Daily routines



If possible –
try to practice
these in
advance!

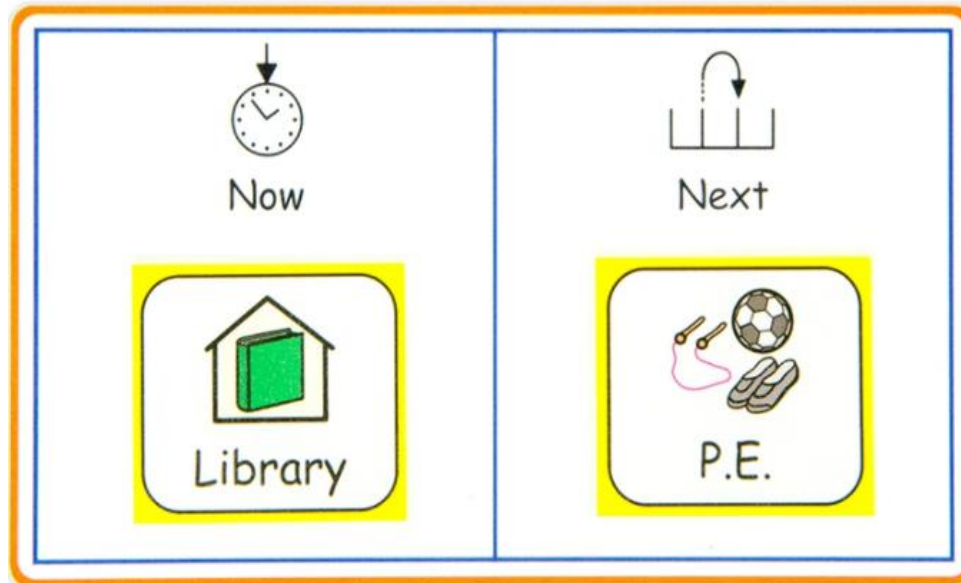


Timetables

| | |
|---|---|
|  <p>Registration</p> |  <p>Lunch</p> |
|  <p>Maths</p> |  <p>Guided reading</p> |
|  <p>Play time</p> |  <p>Science</p> |
|  <p>Literacy</p> |  <p>Hometime</p> |



Moving between activities



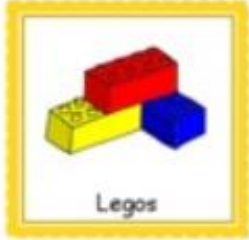
Rules/expectations

| Class Rules | |
|---|----------------------|
|  | Quiet Voice |
|  | Hands to Yourself |
|  | Listen to Teacher |








Motivators

I Am Working For


































Legos

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
|  Work Quietly |  Sit |  Raise Hand |  Focus |  I can do it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Setting a Goal copyright 2012 lessonsplus.com



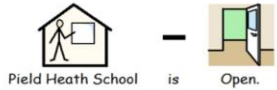
Calendars

| SEPTEMBER 2020 | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  Weekend |  Holidays |  Holidays |  Holidays |  School |  School |  Weekend |
|  Weekend |  School |  School |  School |  School |  School |  Weekend |
|  Weekend |  School |  School |  School |  School |  School |  Weekend |
|  Weekend |  School |  School |  School |  School |  School |  Weekend |
|  Weekend |  School | | | | |  Weekend |

Printable Calendars From 123Calendars.Com



Example of a social story about going back to school:



Field Heath School is Open.

My school has been closed because of Coronavirus.

It's safe to go back to school.

I will go to school on

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday

I will be with my family

Going to school is good for me.

I can be happy about going to school.

If I am sad or worried about going to school I can talk to an

adult.



Emotional toolbox

Transitioning back to school can bring up a range of feelings:

- Excitement about seeing friends
- Sadness about being away from parents
- Anxiety about a new format in their class

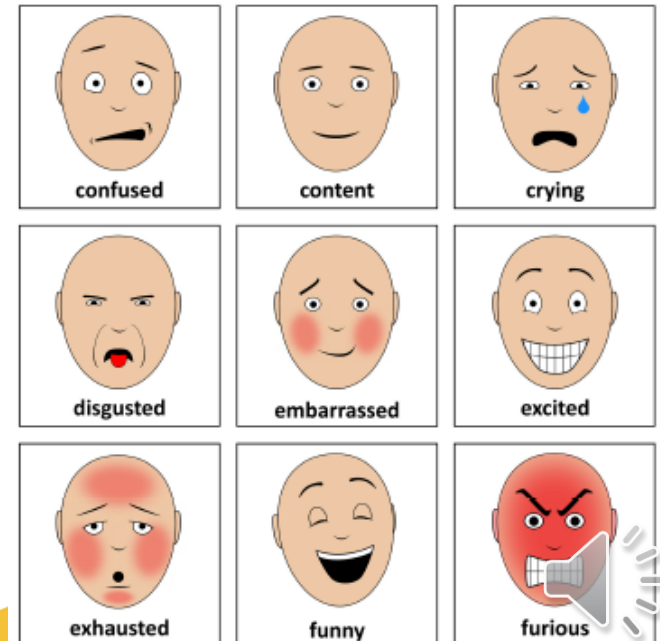
In order to be able to begin to manage and support children with these feelings the first step is to continue to help them to identify their emotions and find ways to communicate them to you.



Identifying and Communicating feelings

Scales, thermometers, and emoticons can all be helpful if children can't find the words. Try to be creative:

- Noticing where they feel it in their body
- Describing or drawing what it feels like.
- Supporting them to label the feeling with appropriate language



Managing feelings

Once feelings have been identified we want to communicate to children that all emotions are ok but we need to manage them appropriately.

Even with timetables and social stories children are still likely to experience some anxiety or stress. Therefore the following strategies can support them to see this can be managed in a range of ways.

There is no one perfect strategy – see what works best for your child!

Relaxation

Problem
solving

Social
support

Special
interests



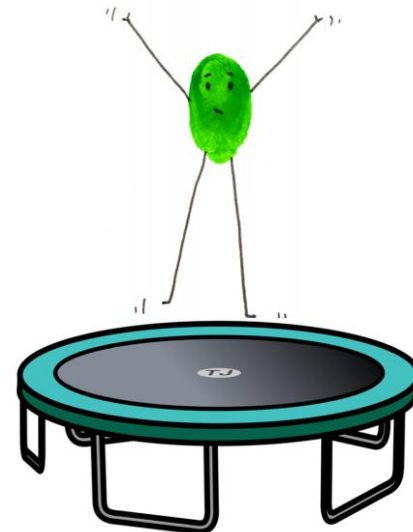
Relaxation:

Calming activities:

- Drawing
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Time alone
- Soothing activities-
rocking, squeezing stress
ball
- Repetitive activities e.g.
ordering things

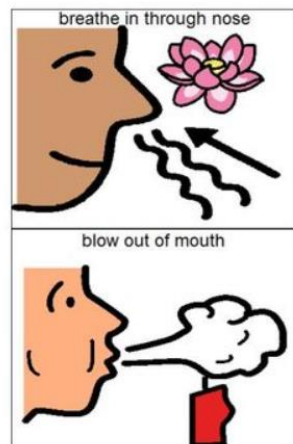
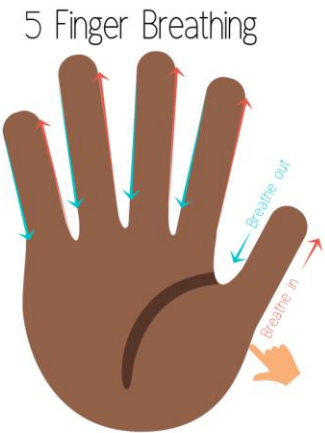
Physical activities:

- Running
- Cycling
- Playing the drums
- Trampolining



Relaxation:

Deep breathing is another excellent way to help re-set our bodies and keep them calm when we are feeling worried. Giving children something concrete to focus on can make this easier.



Remember to remind them to breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth



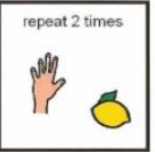
Relaxation:



Progressive muscle relaxation:

When we feel worried or anxious it often lead to our bodies becoming tense. Focusing on alleviating this tension can support our body to send a signal to our brain letting us know we are relaxed and safe. This can help us to think more clearly.

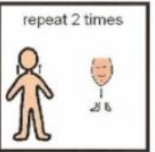
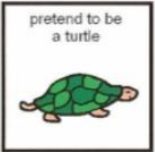
Hands and Arms



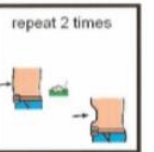
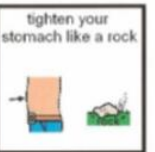
Legs and Feet



Shoulders and Neck



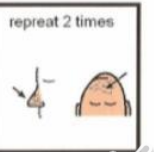
Stomach



Arms and Shoulders



Face and Nose



Problem solving:

Supporting children to recognise that it is possible to work through challenges and problems they encounter can help them feel more in control.

Problem: What if my friend isn't at school.

| Solution | Pros | Cons | Is this plan doable? | Rate how good this plan is: |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Approaching another friend. | Making other connections at school | They might say no. | Yes | 7 |
| Video calling your friend when you get home. | Catch up on missed time. | Still miss them at school. | Yes | 5 |
| | | | | |



Problem solving:

Helping children to outline a step by step plan can help them achieve their goal and problem solve.

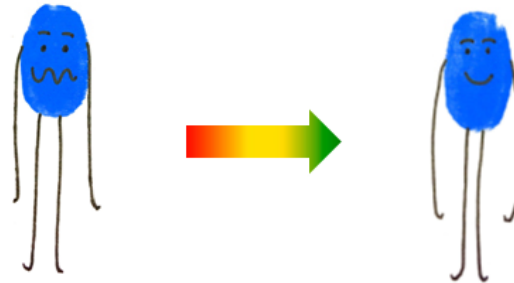
For example:
Going back to school

| Situation | How scared or anxious would I feel? | Reward |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Zoom teacher with any questions or worries | 7 | A family movie night |
| Walk with best friend to school and back (socially distanced) | 6 | Favourite meal for tea |
| Group zoom with 3 friends for 10 minutes | 5 | Bake a favourite cake |
| Zoom best friend for 10 minutes | 4 | Board game night |
| Try on school uniform | 3 | Make a milkshake |



Problem solving:

Once solutions or step by step plans have been established children can benefit from having this recorded on a prompt card. This helps them to be able to have a concrete reminder of how they can manage the challenge.



What If my friend
is not at school?

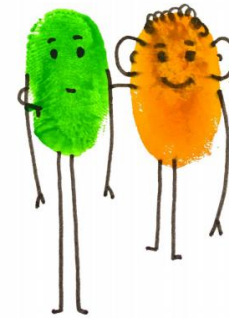
Then I can play
with someone else.



Social support:

Social support can include:

- Being with someone who loves you
- Online video meet with friend/family
- Spending time with a pet
- Helping others



Connecting with others can provide a sense of belonging and build self-worth. This can help children to feel better able to manage the feelings they are experiencing.



Special interests:

It is common for children to have a special interest which helps them feel calm or that they gain a lot of enjoyment from.

Engaging in rituals that they find enjoyable or spending time involved in or thinking about their special interest can be a helpful distraction or a way to regulate their feelings.

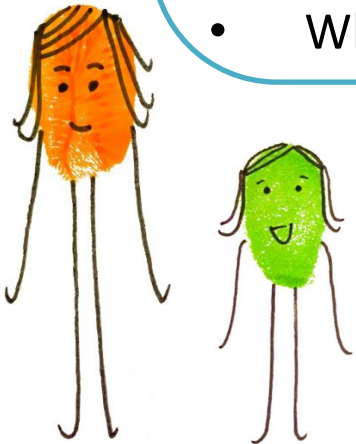
This tends to be most helpful when used within time limits and used sparingly.

This is to ensure that they utilise a wide range of strategies to manage their emotions.



Reflecting on your own responses

- Children are sensitive to how parents feel and take their cues from you
- Children can learn to fear things from watching others, and from others' responses towards them
- Stay calm and try not to express any strong emotional responses, otherwise the child may think the situation is dangerous and that they can't cope.
- Where possible project an air of confidence



Challenging worried thoughts

If you are feeling worried It can help some parents/carers to challenge any anxious expectations that they might have about how their child will cope .

Questions to ask yourself:

What do I think will happen?

What would someone else say about this situation?

What would I tell my friends in this situation?

What's the worst that could happen?

What's the best that could happen?

Can you think of a more balanced thought that might be more accurate?

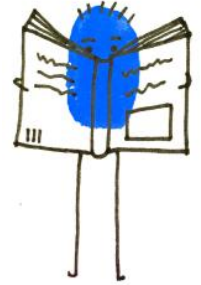


Summary:

- Considering the impact of covid-19 and the transition back to school
- How to support children to prepare for this new change
- Strategies that can form an emotional toolbox for children
- The value of managing our own emotional responses



Resources:



Social stories about coronavirus:

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/pandemic-social-stories-direct-access/>

<https://www.ppmid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator-.pdf>

Breathing exercise videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PcCmxEW5WA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWJtWfSSTi4>

Create visual calendar for holidays and transitioning back to school:

<https://www.123calendars.com/january-calendar.html>

Top tips for pupils moving on to secondary school:

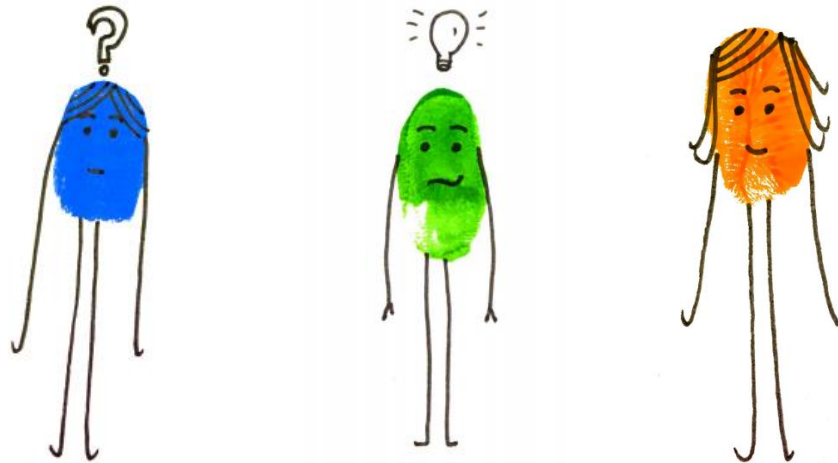
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/moving-on-top-tips-for-pupils.pdf>

Top tips for parents:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/moving-secondary-school-17042013-d2146.pdf>



Questions - Ideas - Feedback



Contact us on:
MHST@achievingforchildren.org.uk



Thank you for listening



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