

Resources for Reintegrating Students Back to School Post COVID-19

Written by:
CHUMS Family Wellbeing Team
CHUMS Trauma Service



**Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Service
for Children and Young People**

Introduction

COVID-19 has caused unprecedented difficulties for everyone.

These resources can be used by School professionals to support children and young people when they reintegrate back to school post COVID-19. We hope you find these resources helpful for your students.

As ever if you are concerned about a young person's mental health, please make a referral to the relevant mental health service.

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Psychoeducation

When should we be concerned?

- When the anxiety appears excessive and persistent compared to their peers
- When the anxiety interferes with their day to day functioning
- When the anxiety causes the young person significant distress

Other factors to consider are; Any safeguarding issues? Is this behaviour adaptive? Are there underlying causes to the anxiety? Bullying, sensory issues, education difficulties. Is the young person reflecting the feeling at home? Whose problem is it? Is this normal? Or is it totally out of proportion to the actual threat.

What to notice and look out for?

Physical symptoms

- Dizzy or lightheaded
- Heart racing
- Bladder urgency
- Sweaty palms
- Muscles tense
- Feeling sick
- Butterflies
- Dry mouth

Emotions

- Nervous
- Scared
- Anxious
- Sad
- Panicky
- Overwhelmed
- Tired
- Grumpy
- Irritable

Behaviours

- Difficulties Concentrating
- Hypervigilant
- Trouble Sleeping
- Avoidance
- Poor Appetite
- Underestimate ability to cope
- Fidgeting
- Clingy

Fight, Flight, Freeze

The fight, flight and freeze response is the body's automatic, built-in tool which it uses to protect us from danger. For example, you might be out for a morning jog and you see a growling dog coming towards you, so you run in the opposite direction. This is considered a FLIGHT response to a perceived danger. These responses happen without us even thinking and are important for keeping us safe. It is important to remember that anxiety is a normal emotion which can be useful, it keeps us safe and can enhance performance.

When Does Fight, Flight, Freeze Become A Problem?

Let's think about our fight, flight and freeze system being like our in-built alarm system. When we are in real danger we need our alarm system to work. However, sometimes our alarm system can go off but it's only a false alarm. This happens when we think we are in danger when in reality we're not. For example, we would need our in-built alarm system when crossing a busy road, however, when answering a question in class our fight, flight and freeze response is not so helpful!



Our Body's Response

- Breathing fast: Our body tries to get extra oxygen to get more energy to fight or flight.
- Rapid heart beats: To pump blood round the body quicker to give us more energy.
- Needing the toilet: Body wants to be lighter to run away quicker.
- Sweaty Palms: Keeps us cool so we are more efficient.
- Butterflies/Tummy Ache: Our body stops digesting food so our blood can move from our stomach back into our heart.

How To Manage Our Response

There are ways for us to be able to manage our fight, flight and freeze responses when we become anxious. This can be done by using relaxation techniques;

- Deep Breathing
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Visualisation

Helpful Links

<http://chums.uk.com/anxiety/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=161&v=rpolpKTWrp4&feature=emb_title

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M

Shortness of
breath or
heart racing

Worry about
possible future
events

Response to
feeling fearful

Once anxiety
goes so does
the attack

Fight, flight or
freeze reaction

Can last a
longtime depending
on exposure to the
anxiety provoking
situation.

Intense Anxiety

Anxiety Attacks

VS

Panic Attacks

Isn't a reaction
to anything - sudden
unprovoked and
unpredictable

Lots of worry about
having the next one

Usually 5-20
minutes in length
(peak around 10 minutes,
can last up to an hour)
unpredictable

Seized with terror
or fear - perhaps
going to die or lose

Occurs in a
situation that is not
causing anxiety

Questioning vs Reassurance

What Is Reassurance?

'You'll be fine'

'Don't worry about it'

'It will be OK'

'Don't worry about it'

'It does not matter'

'Its not worth worrying about'

This is a **Normal & Natural** response

It helps in the specific moment but it can be **UNHELPFUL!**

'It's OK I'm here'

'You're being silly'

'Nothing is going to happen'

'Forget about it & do something else'

Why do we want to AVOID reassurance?

It can leave a person feeling:

- Un-heard
- Dismissed
- Not important
- Like their worry is silly



They are sharing a worry but we are unintentionally putting it to one side.

Other cons to reassurance:

- Reassurance can cause MORE reassurance seeking - vicious cycle
- Reassurance can cause more worry
- The young person won't be able to learn for themselves that things will actually be ok nor will they be able to face their worries without getting reassurance.
- If a young person is always hearing 'Mummy/Daddy is here' we can't blame them for worrying when they are not there.

Why is QUESTIONING better?

- Helps young people to learn to cope themselves
- Encourages problem solving
- Helps the young people to face their fears
- Assists to break the consistent "what if" scenario
- Validates & normalises their worry



Try this yourself...
Imagine: a big brown bear sitting on your sofa with a jar of honey.
Now: don't think about it.
When you were told not to think about it, did you think about it more? For many people, the answer is yes...so being told not to think / worry about something can make us worry more!



How to Question Effectively

Reassurance to avoid

You'll be fine

It will be OK

Forget about it & do something else

You're being silly

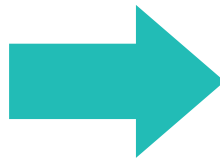
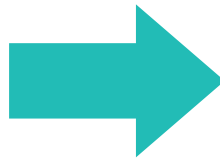
Nothing is going to happen

Don't worry about it

It's OK, Mummy/
Daddy is here

It's not worth worrying about

It does not matter



Questions to use instead

What do you think is going to happen?

What is your worry telling you?

What makes you worried about X?

Has this happened before to you / someone else?

How strong is your worry out of 10?

Could something different happen?

What would you tell someone else?

Do you think your worry will come true?

Could something else cause this situation?

Remember...

- Praise
- Put their worries to the test
- Take their worries seriously
- Make sure you understand
- Avoid drawing conclusions
- Make an action plan (*especially if that worry could come true!*)

Relaxation Apps

Children Apps



Stop, Breathe & Think Kids



Mindful Powers



Children's Sleep Mediation



Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame



Headspace for Kids



Reflectly App

Teenager Apps



Mind



Mind Shift



Headspace



Calm



Stop, Breathe & Think



SAM (Self Help for Anxiety Management)

Student Reintegration To School: A Trauma Aware Perspective

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown is an unprecedented experience of collective trauma, with adults and children alike experiencing increased anxiety related to a genuine threat to life. Children have witnessed increased adult and communal stress at the same time as losing their routines, structures and social networks. During this period of lockdown, families have lived through a range of experiences, some of which may have been relatively positive, others may have experienced bereavement, ill health, elevated stress and anxiety, increased mental health difficulties, domestic and/or other forms of abuse. Although none of us can draw on exact precedents for this situation, we can begin to make predictions about the mental health impact of these experiences based on responses to natural disasters and by information about the mental health impact from other countries. We can begin to consider what needs are arising in children and young people and how to address those to support a return to social and academic learning.

Mental health/psychosocial difficulties we can anticipate for children and young people include:

- An increase in anxiety including separation anxiety
- An increase in depression and low mood
- An increase in hypervigilance, distractibility and concentration difficulties
- A lower tolerance for ambiguity, change or unpredictability
- An increase in obsessive or compulsive behaviours as a means of controlling feelings of being unsafe
- An increase in drug/alcohol misuse.

These symptoms can be understood as a response to frightening experiences – awareness of death, loss of certainty and predictability, disruption to protective relationships. A young person experiencing some or all of these difficulties is likely to struggle socially, emotionally and in accessing learning.

Importance of Education

Education is an extremely important protective factor for children's mental health. Schools provide structure, routine, social support and healthy activities, all of which are significant for a child's emotional wellbeing.

Teachers are important figures for children, as adult role-models who set the emotional and behavioural tone for large amounts of a child's day. Children's sense of safety derives significantly from the messages given by the adults around them, both verbally and non-verbally. Education staff's behaviour influences the emotional climate of the school and guides the students' attitudes and beliefs. It is important to consider how safety, positivity and openness can be communicated both verbally and non-verbally by staff.

Teachers are also able to be the facilitators and organisers of group experiences; they are in a position to help classes achieve a collective understanding of the pandemic and lockdown and guide students towards helpful reflections going forwards.

Considerations for Schools

Preparing for Pupils to Reintegrate

Awareness of Teachers'/staff needs

It is vital that the adults, who are responsible for caring for children, feel well, fully present and are able to manage the children both in terms of their learning tasks and their emotional responses. Schools will need good communication systems with their staff to determine who is ill or has been ill, who has caring responsibilities, who has been bereaved, whose mental health has been affected and what support will different staff members require in order to be and feel safe in the education setting.

Communication with Parents

To find out how families have been coping, which pupils have been affected by bereavement or adversity and identify any concerns parents have about their child's return to school. Parents and children will benefit from clear information regarding transition and the safety measures which the school is implementing; parents' confidence in the safety of the school environment will influence their child's levels of anxiety.

Awareness of Pupils with existing vulnerabilities

Situations of increased stress can trigger or heighten existing difficulties. Students who have been affected by previous experiences of loss or adversity or who have existing mental health conditions, may require additional support.

Differences between Children

Students will be returning with different experiences of home learning, with different memories and emotions associated with lockdown. It will be helpful to encourage open, non-judgemental attitudes towards how different families have coped during this time.

Activities to Consider

Remastering key skills

Students may return having regressed in key skills, not only academically but socially and attentionally. In particular, where adversity, elevated stress or loss have been experienced, children and young people may be in a heightened emotional state. In order to effectively learn, students will need to feel safe and secure and may need to return to some foundational skills, delivered in age-appropriate ways.

Priorities will be to (re)establish:

- relationships with staff, eg rapport-building activities and listening to students' views and interests;
- relationship with peers, eg planned and informal opportunities to play and work together;
- school values and expectations, eg clarifying school aims and how we are expected to behave together;
- formal learning behaviours – eg sitting and listening, turn-taking, sustained concentration, independent learning.

Some students may find a return to education easy and a relief, others may find it more challenging. Early activities which re-establish these key skills for all may help provide a more even grounding. It is important that class teachers are fully supported by the senior leaders of the school to prioritise activities which rebuild relationships and skills, rather than focusing solely on the academic curriculum in the early weeks of return.

Establish and maintain routine, predictability and consistency

Predictable routines will help the students regain a sense of safety and order, as will consistent behaviour management approaches. If there are upcoming events or changes, prepare the students for these with information and reminders.

Monitoring

You should monitor this over a period of time (6 weeks) as research and evidence suggests there is a natural transition and settling in period that takes place for children and this is important to note and observe in the first stages of transitioning into school. If you still have concerns after 6 weeks, refer for further support.

Identifying

Identifying students who are finding the adjustment more challenging and provide increased support. This may be a small nurture group or a weekly mentoring session, or involvement in a project to build on their interests and boost confidence.

Communication

Deliver clear plans to staff, teachers and pupils, even if these have to be updated regularly. Encourage parents to get in touch with information about their family's wellbeing and any concerns about physical or emotional health.

Activities to Consider

Maintain staff wellbeing

Education staff are facing significant challenges: managing changes to working conditions, delivering accessible learning and attending to student wellbeing, in addition to the uncertainties and stresses of the pandemic and lockdown in their personal lives too. Ongoing support structures for staff should not be overlooked and must be actively maintained. These could include 'buddy' support groups, regular individual check-ins/supervisions, planned mindfulness activities and managers to monitor staff wellbeing in their teams. Staff working with children who have experienced high levels of stress are likely to be impacted themselves. If staff notice signs of being physically, mentally, or emotionally worn out, or feeling overwhelmed, they should know who to speak to within the school and which professional support services they can contact.

Set staff and pupils expectations realistically

Much will be different to how things were before. Acknowledge the changes: the school environment, lesson delivery, behaviour and relationships may not be as they were before. Help children prepare for the return to school by sending photos or videos of the school how it is now, including any changes or additions such as new routes into the school, handwash-ing stations or classroom layouts.

Opportunities to talk and reflect

Students are likely to benefit from opportunities to discuss and make sense of their past and present experiences of the pandemic, lockdown and the transition back to school. Provide opportunities to draw on collective experiences, being open to both similarities and differences, and to normalise the feelings they may have experienced. Younger students may find discussions hard and benefit from drawing or creative projects. Be aware of each student's circumstances, as these discussions may be distressing for some: anticipate triggers and plan emotional support for these students, with sensitivity to their and their family's preferences.

Safe places and use of resources

It will be useful to plan how students can be supported to feel safe during the day, if ups and downs occur. Safe, quiet places can be identified for students with a clear understanding of when and how they can be accessed. Some students may also benefit from regular opportunities to use music or games to help them feel calm. The school environment tends to provide much higher levels of sensory stimulation. Some students, even those without identified sensory processing impairments, may benefit from planned 'down' time as they readjust to higher levels of daily stimulation.

References:

National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee. (October 2008). Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

Robyne Le Brocq, Alexandra De Young, Gillian Montague, Steven Pocock, Sonja March, Nikki Triggell, Claire Rabaa and Justin Kenardy, 'Schools and Natural Disaster Recovery: The Unique and Vital Role That Teachers and Education Professionals Play in Ensuring the Mental Health of Students Following Natural Disasters', *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools* 1 Volume 27 | Issue 1 | 2017 | pp. 1-23

Sandro Galea, Raina M. Merchant, Nicole Luri, 'The Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19 and Physi-cal Distancing: The Need for Prevention and Early Intervention', *JAMA Internal Medicine* Published online April 10, 2020

Film by the BBC's Europe Correspondent Jean Mackenzie, produced by Sara Monetta, filmed and edited by Andy Smyth, 24th April 2020, Coronavirus: Lockdown's heavy toll on Italy's mental health

An introduction to sensory processing and 'Sensory Overload'

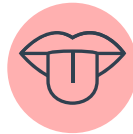
VISION



HEARING



TASTE



SMELL



TOUCH



The 8 Senses

In sensory integration we are focused on all 8 senses. There are 5 that are immediately thought of – seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and the sense of touch. So, what about the other 3...



Proprioception

Often described as 'Knowing where your body is in space'. To explain this further, our muscles and joints have tiny sensory receptors that tell our brain where our body parts are. When you put a fork to your mouth, you don't need to look at the fork to see where it is or feel for your mouth to know where to place the fork; you know where your hand is in relation to your mouth. It is largely your proprioceptive receptors giving you this information. Your brain then uses this information to plan movements so that you can coordinate your body.



Vestibular

Known as 'the movement sense'. Lets explain a little...In our inner ear we have small, fluid filled canals, the fluid in these canals moves every time we move our head. Receptors in these canals pick up the direction of movement and send this information on to our brain. So we know if we are moving forwards, backwards, side to side, tilting our head, turning round or moving up and down.



Interoception

Interoception: this is a fairly new area for discussion in sensory integration; interoception is how our body tells our brain what is going on inside our body, when we are hungry or feel full, when our heart is beating fast or when we have that sensation of butterflies in the stomach.

Reference: <https://www.thecreativeot.co.uk>

This section was specifically designed for this transition pack in consultation with a consultant occupational therapist, sensory integration practitioner. CHUMS do not provide a specific sensory integration service currently but this was identified as an area of need, in terms of transitioning back to school post COVID-19. Please note that some of these therapy techniques are specialised and you should follow guidance from the young person's specialised therapy plan already in place, such as the EHCP recommendations.

Calming and Alerting Activities for Sensory Overload in the classroom

Calming activities for sensory overload (over – reactivity):

- Listen to soft music and/or white noise
- Rocking slowly
- Deep breathing exercises
- Wrapping tightly in blankets (encourage them to bring in their weighted blanket from home if they have one).
- Make a den for those that need some quiet time: cover a table with a long tablecloth and place some cushions on the floor for a retreat area.
- Access to inhaling certain odours such as lavender
- Watching a lava lamp
- The use of ear defenders or earphones – especially in loud situations
- The use of gloves (thin - such as surgical) to avoid touching messy substances during activities that trigger the child's sensory reactivity levels.
- To encourage children with sensory processing dysfunction to wear tight fitting clothing under their uniform such as Under Armour or a weighted vest if they have one prescribed. This type of clothing provides the student with proprioceptive input.

Alerting Activities for sensory under-reactivity:

- Opportunities to walk, run, and jump
- A supply of strongly flavoured mints, sour lemon drops, spicy crisps (Child can bring their own in from home)
- Classroom materials that are brightly coloured
- Writing implements that produce a variety of stimuli (glitter pens, smelly markers, gel pens)
- Stress -reduction toys or 'fidget toys' such as therapy putty, squeeze balls, bluetac or sensory items prescribed from home.
- Strong smells such as citrus
- Less 'sitting' based activities and more movement-based activities
- Sensory circuits and sensory diets (if prescribed by their therapist)
- 'Heavy work activities' to assist with proprioceptive feedback.
- Spinning and swinging activities/ games for vestibular input.

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Sensory Circuits

Sensory circuits involve 3 types of activities; when used in order they can be effective in supporting individuals to improve their levels of attention and focus. They can help to tackle sensory imbalances & support those with lots of energy to enable them to redirect it positively.

Alerting – to provide vestibular stimulation; preparing the brain for learning & for the demands of the school environment e.g. skipping, running, Jumping Jacks.

Organising – sorting and preparing the body and brain, providing situations to increase focus, attention span & performance; activities that require multi-sensory processing & balance e.g. climbing, balancing, throwing into a target, scooting.

Calming – Very important; to ensure they are calm, centred and ready to learn. e.g. press ups, ball squash, deep hand pressure, bear hug while wrapped tightly in a blanket.

Ideas of activities to include in a sensory circuit...

Alert – Trampoline, bouncing on an exercise ball, running or a brisk walk, Jumping Jacks.

Organise – Balance beam, Stepping Stones, crawling through tunnels, balancing on a wobble board, Simon Says, using a scooter, throwing bean bags at a target, posting items, shape sorters.

Calm – Ball squash, steam roller, pressure e.g. weighted blankets, wall press ups, material tunnels, head massages, deep pressure massage.

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Visual Aids

Visual aids can really support a child with their sensory activities or 'sensory diet' if they have one prescribed by their therapist.

When I have to:



go to the lunch room

I can do these activities:

before



heavy work activities

during



listen to quiet music

after



deep breaths

www.YourTherapySource.com

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What to do if a child needs support

If you feel a child requires a mental health intervention and would benefit from a short term piece of evidence based psychological work you could consider a referral to CHUMS. A referral to CHUMS can be made via the GP, school professional or family. Information on how to refer can be found at www.chums.uk.com

Online or Text Services Available



Kooth - Online counselling for Children and young people aged between 11-24 and is available up to 10pm every day.



The Mix - if you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix for free on the phone, by email or on their webchat. freephone: 0808 808 4994 (1pm - 11pm)



Young Minds Crisis Messenger - provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis - just text YM to 85258



Shout - Anxious? Worried? Stressed? Get 24/7 help from our team of Crisis Volunteers
TEXT 85258

Suggested Trauma and Sensory Integration Resources

Trauma Recommended Website & Resources:

Video

Jacob Ham, **Understanding Trauma: Learning Brain vs Survival Brain** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoqaUANGvpA>

Leaflets/Information sheets

- Kenardy, A De Young, R le Brocque, S March, **Childhood Trauma Reactions: A Guide for Teachers from PreSchool to Year 12**, CONROD, University of Queensland, 2011.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee. (October 2008). **Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators**. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/helping-children-cope-with-traumatic-stress.htm

Websites

- **Young Minds**
www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/ptsd/
- **Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families**
www.annafreud.org/

Recommended Website & Resources for those with Sensory Processing Difficulties and/or Neurodevelopmental conditions:

- <https://www.thecreativeot.co.uk>
- <https://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/>
- <https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/>
- <https://www.yourtherapysource.com/>
- <https://thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk/>
- <http://www.snappcf.org.uk/>
- **Out of Sync Child Book** by Carol Stock Kranowitz
- **Building sensory friendly classrooms to support problem behaviours: Implementing data driven strategies** by Rebecca Moyes
- **Raising a sensory smart child: The definitive handbook for helping your child with sensory processing issues** by Lindsey Biel

Useful Books / Resources

Bereavement Resources:

- **'You Just don't understand'** - Winston's Wish
- **'Never too Young to Grieve'** - Winston's Wish
- **'Muddles Puddles and Sunshine'** (Activity Book) - Winston's Wish
- **'Is Daddy Comin Back in A Minute'** - Elke Barber
- **'What Happened to Daddy's body'** - Elke Barber
- **'Always and Forever'** - Debi Giori
- **'No Matter What'** - Debi Giori
- **'When someone Very Special Dies'** (workbook) by Marge Heegaard
- **'Water Bugs and Dragon Flies'** by Doris Stickney
- **'What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?'** by Trevor Romain
- **'Milly's Big Nut'** by Jill Janey
- **'I Miss You: A First Look at Death'** by Pat Thomas
- **'When Dinosaurs Die'** by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown
- **'Badgers Parting Gift'** by Susan Varley
- **'Michael Rosen's Sad Book'** by Michael Rosen
- **'Finding a Way Through When Someone Has Died'** by Pat Mood & Lesley Whittaker

Pre Bereavement Resources:

- **'When Someone has a Very Serious Illness'** (Workbook) by Marge Heegaard
- **'As Big as It Gets'**- Winston's Wish

Useful Books / Resources

Anxiety Resources

- **'Huge Bag of Worries'** by Virginia Ironside
- **'Helping your child with Fears and Worries 2nd Edition: A self help guide for parents'** by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts
- **'Starving the Anxiety Gremlin'** by Kate Collins-Donnelly
- **'What to do When you Worry too much'** by Dawn Huebner
- **Managing Stress - BBC** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnpQrMqDoqE>
- **Fight, Flight Freeze Response** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEHwB1PG_-Q
- **CALM Technique by Jennifer Kolari** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q28lrZq14hk>
- **Anxiety Canada** - <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- **Therapist Aid** - <https://www.therapistaid.com/>
- **Young Minds** - <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/>
- **Anna Freud Self Care Materials** - <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

Anger Resources

- **'Starving the Anger Gremlin'** by Kate Collins-Donnelly
- **Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions?** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bKuoH8CkFc&feature=youtu.be>
- **'The Incredible Years'** by Carolyn Webster-Stratton
- **Upside of Anger TED Talk with Dr Ryan Martin** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfcQaXG_Qhs