

A FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING & MENTAL HEALTH

DURING & AFTER LOCKDOWN



A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

Malcolm Goddard
Mark Jennett
Colin Noble

This guidance has been written to help schools think about possible ways forward in terms of the emotional wellbeing and mental health of their pupils and staff over the next few months. It is based on best practice and the research and experiences of the authors.

The main goals that schools should be working towards from a wellbeing perspective are to:

- support individuals, families and wider groups and enable them to ‘move on’ beyond the experiences we have all shared
- maintain or increase the sense of engagement, community and belonging felt by staff, pupils and wider families
- build on the positives and new types of relationships developed
- ensure a continued and proactive approach to staff wellbeing.

1. KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

It is vital that both pupils and staff have a sense of belonging with their school. This can help mitigate against separation, disengagement and disconnection. Many schools will have actively kept in touch with their pupils during lockdown, through activities such as:

- regular phone calls (some schools have managed weekly for all/vulnerable pupils)
- videos and online messages
- virtual assemblies
- doorstep deliveries or visits with a wave
- challenges or team videos (e.g. pass the toilet roll, creating a rainbow)
- anything where the pupil and wider family can see your face and hear you talk
- a short weekly or daily pre-filmed video check-in which can be emailed.



2. REVIEW YOUR WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION IN LIGHT OF THE LOCKDOWN

- How does it support any new or emerging issues of emotional wellbeing and mental health?
- Do any gaps or weaknesses in provision exist?

Consider how all pupils and families could be involved in sharing their priorities and how the school could address some of these concerns.

Consider how the needs of the school community might change (e.g. there may be a need to have swifter and quicker access to bereavement counselling and/or greater awareness training for staff).

There may be a need for assemblies and the curriculum to focus on social skills and other aspects of emotional literacy.



Links with Objective 2:

The school has a clear vision and strategy for promoting and protecting emotional wellbeing and mental health, which is communicated to all involved with the school.

3. PLAN FOR A WELCOMING TRANSITION

Ensuring that everyone feels safe is going to be more important than any new learning.

Clear leadership, through providing information and listening to the concerns of stakeholders, will help prepare and support all involved.

For parents, you can:

- provide a forum to hear their concerns – either in person or remotely
- provide regular updates. Some schools are doing these through a video which parents seem to really appreciate.

For pupils, you can:

- provide lots of (socially distant) opportunities for reconnection
- celebrate the reopening and reforming of a community in classes and possibly as a wider school. Consider how to include the whole school in this (e.g. issues such as siblings who are not at school together as they usually are).
- communicate to those not yet back that you look forward to welcoming them too
- develop a focus on activities which build connection and belonging and support the re-establishing of relationships.



As a school, you can:

- provide a warm welcome for pupils into the classroom and parents on the gate through posters, balloons and bunting if appropriate
- run a ‘welcome back’ week – or a series of them. Involve children and pupils in the planning and execution and don’t forget those who have yet to return for health, family or travel reasons
- encourage senior leaders to visit classrooms to add their welcome and check in with pupils
- celebrate the value of pupils’ work during lockdown, highlighting any achievements or successes
- mark any endings properly and appropriately (e.g. any losses, staff moving on, Year 6 leaving).

An exhibition of home learning might be a great idea. Or you might like to build up a piece of artwork to add to as pupils return, maybe a rainbow on the school gates or a collage in the hall or even a painting around the playground. Be creative but build up something that shows the community reforming visually.

4. COMMUNICATE YOUR STRATEGY FOR COPING WITH WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES TO THE WHOLE-SCHOOL

Consider using pre-filmed videos to communicate with all stakeholders. Written communications, whilst important, may not maintain connection and belonging with pupils and families in the same way.



Make sure you include relevant information prominently on the school website.

For families and other stakeholders who cannot access the internet, make additional provision through text messages, emails, newsletters or in-person meetings.

All information should be regularly refreshed and updated.



Links with Objective 5:

The school prioritises professional learning and staff development on emotional wellbeing and mental health.

5. PROVIDE TRAINING FOR STAFF ON THE EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE LOCKDOWN

Ensure that all staff are confident to help pupils and pupils (including those with SEND) develop the skills and attitudes necessary to keep themselves and others safe both at school and in the wider world. Consider additional staff training (e.g. in trauma-informed practice or emotion coaching) and how this would help to develop relationships and support the pupils.

The nature of the training may vary depending on the characteristics of the school and the role of the staff, but it might include:

- a general awareness of the issues facing the school
- the implications and possible new requirements of staff by role.

For example, if there is a need to increase the amount of distance learning then teachers and TAs need to be trained in specific pedagogical techniques; if there is a need for increased intensity and different chemicals used in a deep clean the cleaners and caretakers will need specific training about that.

6. PROVIDE SIGNPOSTS TO APPROPRIATE ONLINE HELP FOR PUPILS, STAFF AND FAMILIES WITH EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS STEMMING FROM THE LOCKDOWN

You could look to provide a website directory, or a list of trusted online resources used by the school, including any recent and relevant ones addressing the possible impact of the lockdown.

You may not need to change what is already in place on your website or around the school. But there may be a need to make information more prominent (e.g. on the landing page of the website) or increase the number of notices in school. Or there may be a need to include new helplines (e.g. those provided by local or national government or food banks or faith groups).



Links with Objective 6:

The school understands the different types of emotional and mental health needs across the school and has systems in place to respond appropriately.

7. ESTABLISH A NEW 'NORMAL'

Take time to consider how learning related to wellbeing can be enhanced and embedded. For example:

- introduce something like 'atunement' at the beginning of each lesson when everybody sits in silence for a minute preparing themselves mentally and emotionally for the lesson
- ask class teachers to consider things like 'feelings trees' or 'emotion graphs' to be completed by everyone before the start of each half day session



- discuss the issues of lockdown and the pandemic in citizenship lessons (e.g. human rights, our responsibilities to others). This may be particularly important while some lockdown restrictions remain to ensure that all members of the school community have the knowledge they need to keep each other safe.
- discuss and decide if you can strengthen the teaching of emotional literacy in PSHE and other subjects.

8. FOCUS ON STAFF WELLBEING

Make sure you are aware of the possible emotional and mental health issues for all staff stemming from the lockdown. This can be done through discursive meetings or staff having a 1:1 with their line manager/mentor and/or coach to discuss their emotional wellbeing and mental health.

You could survey staff and middle leaders on a regular basis to monitor the extent to which they feel aware and equipped to deal with the emotional and mental health issues associated with the lockdown. Make sure you include staff's own needs as part of the surveys.



Ensure that staff workloads are closely monitored both during and after lockdown. Consider providing more public forums such as open discussions to ensure that all staff have opportunities to share their concerns and ensure that these concerns are acted upon.

Consider whether counselling and other targeted provision needs to be reviewed or enhanced, for example, is bereavement counselling routinely available to staff? Try to ensure that CPD includes relevant support for staff's own wellbeing.

Think about how these other suggestions could help you focus on staff wellbeing, whilst also maintaining connection and a sense of belonging:

- team meetings with a 'wellbeing check in' for the first 5-10 minutes
- regular updates to keep staff informed
- special deliveries to the home of any vulnerable staff by post or in person
- encouraging staff to communicate directly with each other using social media and video conferencing tools, with team leaders sharing best practice
- social activities for all staff online (e.g. quizzes).



Links with Objective 4:

The school actively promotes staff emotional wellbeing and mental health.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MALCOLM GODDARD

Malcolm is an experienced education consultant, having worked as an outstanding primary headteacher, school improvement advisor, consultant headteacher and Local Leader of Education.

Malcolm is an adviser on the Wellbeing Award for Schools.



MARK JENNETT

Mark is a trainer, consultant and writer specializing in work around equality and diversity (in particular gender and sexualities equalities), bullying, behaviour, emotional health and PSHE.

Mark is Lead Adviser for the Wellbeing Award for Schools.



COLIN NOBLE

Colin was a history/PE teacher before becoming a PSHE adviser, coordinator of the National Healthy Schools Programme and senior adviser to the Behaviour and Attendance Programme of the National Strategies.

Colin is an adviser on the Wellbeing Award for Schools.

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This award will ensure that mental health and wellbeing sit at the heart of your school life.

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