

Supporting Vulnerable Young People on Transition Back to School

The document entitled 'Health and Wellbeing – Reconnection and Recovery for schools' is intended to give practical support for all young people as they transition back to school following an extended absence during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This document is additional guidance for those young people who may be particularly vulnerable to feeling overwhelmed and struggling to cope during the return to school, and who may need additional individual support over and above what the majority of pupils will need.

Who is 'vulnerable'?

- ANY child may be more vulnerable after such an extended period of time away from school. We do not know young people's individual experiences during lock-down, or how they have coped during this time. It is therefore vital for staff to monitor the wellbeing of all young people as they return to school, and to identify those who may be struggling to cope.
- Those with identified Additional Support Needs (including, but not exclusively, those on the Child Protection Register, LAC or care experienced, in the MAC system, with a CSP, with identified learning or mental health needs).
- Children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse, and those who are in need of care and protection as a result of lockdown.
- Young people who find change or transitions particularly difficult, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Young people who display obsessional tendencies in terms of their focus on hygiene and handwashing rituals.
- New P1 and S1 pupils and new pupils to a school
- Those with previous difficulty attending school, or those where parents and carers may be concerned about their child returning and consider withholding their child's attendance.

Note: This document is not intended to give guidance for medically vulnerable young people who will need individual arrangements and risk assessments at this time due to COVID-19 risks.

Young people to look out for:

- Those who are struggling to regulate their emotions – who are tearful, angry, anxious or appear overwhelmed in any way
- Those who appear quiet, withdrawn or isolated
- Those who fail to attend school
- Those showing significant behavioural changes

Ways to help

- Schools should ensure that all staff, including catering and cleaning staff, are aware of safeguarding procedures. There may be an increase in child protection disclosures following the lockdown period;
- Using a trauma-informed approach can be very helpful: [Trauma Informed Practice Video](#)

Positive Relationships:

- Nurturing approaches which highlight the importance of relationships are vital for all young people, and especially so for those more vulnerable young people (see 'Health and Wellbeing – Reconnection and Recovery for schools' document)

- Encourage young people to talk about and share their experiences of lockdown and their return to school
- Focus on ways to help young people feel safe
- Provide additional pastoral care for those who require it, either individually or in small groups
- Provide regular check-ins with individuals or small groups throughout the week
- Identify a key adult for individual young people to talk to
- Work closely with parents and carers to help understand the child's circumstances
- Help young people to reconnect with friends or establish new friendships

Coming into School (may be particularly relevant to new P1 pupils):

- Introduce relaxed/staggered starts
- Adopt an individualised approach to separation from caregivers
- Consider outdoor registration for the start of the day, as weather permits, so caregivers can settle their child before leaving
- Encourage use of transitional objects: physical and virtual transition objects may be used such as a kiss or smile to keep in the child's pocket, or a comfort toy such as a teddy
- Consider extending the transition process. A young person may take longer to feel safe and comfortable within the school environment

In the Classroom:

- Help establish predictable routines and consider use of visual timetables. Give consideration to different ways that timetables can be displayed for individuals
- Use social stories or other visual supports
- Focus on ways to help young people feel safe
- Give opportunities for pupils to leave the classroom if they become overwhelmed, and access to an identified key adult who is available if they need to talk
- Provide young people with responsibilities such as specific jobs or tasks
- Create a sense of community within the classroom. Involve pupils in the planning and implementation of activities, and social activities that create a sense of belonging. Use communal language such as 'our school' or 'our project'
- Provide times of sustained play, especially for new P1 pupils

Supporting Emotional Regulation:

- Model emotion regulation and how to stay calm
- Co-regulation will be important in promoting calm in the environment. Help children and young people to regulate their emotions
- Model a sense of positivity, hope and optimism
- Help young people to recall times when they have coped with change in the past. Explore previous coping strategies/self-soothing techniques

Further Support

- Seek additional support from specialist services, such as Social Work, Educational Psychology, Inclusion and Wellbeing Services, or Health Services
- The SBC Staged Intervention process provides a framework for schools to identify, assess and plan to address additional support needs of all young people