

OPEN RATIONALE

Open up avenues of communication and be open with each other

There will be times when everyone will probably find it hard. Sharing this can be powerful and enabling for others. Letting pupils know that adults sometimes feels worried too can help to normalise their emotions

Be open in responses to questions – be honest with children and young people, try to answer their questions as factually as possible



TIPS

1. Being open and available
Demonstrate that you are available to talk but without forcing the conversation at a particular time. Children and young people may be experiencing fear and anxiety from a range of sources. They may be worried about a grandparent, or catching the virus themselves, and they may express this in a variety of ways. Talking about what is happening in a child-friendly and age appropriate way, and helping children to find positive ways of expressing their fears (e.g. A creative activity) can help reduce fears in younger children, as in, for example, Coronavirus – a book for children. Avoiding talking about the current situation can add to their fears. (Anna Freud booklet “Helping children and young people to manage anxiety)
2. Communication about physical safety
Communication within the school community to ensure all have the knowledge and understanding to best cope with the crisis and the transition back to school, to be reassured that the school have taken safety measures and exactly what they are and what staff, children and young people can expect to face and how they will function as they go back to school. This is no mean feat as schools have received extremely high levels of guidance from government and that guidance has changed on a daily basis. For staff, parents and pupils alike good communication can make a significant difference to stress levels in managing the unusual circumstances they face, enabling them to experience a greater sense of control. Hobfoll et al’s academic study (2007) identified 5 principles effective following a disaster. One of those 5 principles is experience of a sense of safety.
3. Communication to promote emotional safety
Recent research from Oxford University found that a fifth of primary aged children have felt scared to leave their home during the COVID-19 situation (Weale, 2020).

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Good communication can also serve to reassure the school community that the risks they feel of returning to school will be minimised and the warm welcome, emotional support and positive experience of returning to school will help to alleviate the anxiety for pupils and staff alike. As some pupils and staff return to school and some remain at home, mechanisms will be required for the anxieties of some pupils, parents and staff from both groups to be communicated and addressed.

Communication to normalise feelings of anxiety, frustration, sadness about the pandemic is identified by Hobfoll et al's research as contributing to a sense of safety.

Psychological First Aid is the most widely adopted model, nationally and internationally, for responding to disasters and emergencies, which can be carried out for pupils by teachers. One of the main themes of this model is providing information for pupils and parents on coping with emotional reactions. However, research with schools suggests that many teachers struggle with this aspect of psychoeducation. Therefore, consider the guidance available (signposted below) and whether it would be helpful to consult with professional such as EPs to support schools work in these areas.

4. Communication around loss and bereavement

When schools experience critical incidents and tragic events, one of the key principles of managing the aftermath is clear, open and timely communication, in an age appropriate way, to ensure all receive news in a manner when they are able to receive appropriate support, to support emotional containment and to ensure misinformation and speculation is avoided. This will continue to be important as loss and bereavement occurs throughout this pandemic.

5. Communication to collate information about pupil's varied experience of the pandemic

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Collecting information about pupils' experience of family health, lockdown and home schooling and any family loss or bereavement they may have experienced. We are aware that this pandemic has affected individuals and families very differently, at the extremes with some experiencing many benefits of family togetherness while others experience the very opposite, domestic abuse and/or abuse towards children. In some families incomes are unaffected, in others parents have lost their jobs and families their homes. Similarly, in some families there has been capacity to provide a high quality and high level of home teaching, even throughout the Easter holidays, while in others there has been little capacity or motivation to address education when other more pressing concerns of safety, adequate food or housing are primary concerns; between these two extremes we are aware of great variety of children's experience. With the knowledge of family's experience, schools can better plan to address the pastoral and learning needs of children.

6. Communication to promote self-efficacy
Schools seeking the views of their staff, parents and pupils to help plan their ways forward, taking their community with them, will contribute to feelings of self-efficacy in the community, that they are able to contribute.
7. Communicate to promote belonging
Communication using video conferencing and other tools as part of school's tool box to best communicate with those staff and pupils who do not access school for even more prolonged periods, finding ways to include them and maintain their sense of belonging to the school community. Additionally, embracing a range of communication tools may be an ongoing part of teaching as *blended learning* may well be part of the future of

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education for much longer than this first period of lockdown.

8. Understand that behaviour can communicate emotions

Many of us, especially children and young people, are experiencing strong and sometimes confusing emotions in response to our uncertain circumstances. For many it is difficult even to recognise the emotions and what they mean, and even more difficult to communicate effectively. So parents and teachers need to be emotion detectives, working out what behaviours might mean, both withdrawn and externalising behaviours.

“A child or young person who has difficulty regulating emotions may frequently engage in behaviours that appear impulsive and that are challenging to manage. The strategy of ‘Stop, Think, Do’ is a good mantra for teachers. Stop and think about what the behaviour might be communicating, were these patterns of behaviour evident previously or could they be a reaction to recent events and a result of painful memories being stirred up? Respond calmly and clearly. These children and young people need to be aware that their behaviour has consequences however they require patient teaching, reminders and clear boundaries and expectations that are repeatedly explained in different ways and enforced consistently. Respond to the underlying emotions rather than the behaviour”.

(from Biborough Educational Psychology Consultation Service Guidance “Transition, recovery and learning in the aftermath of a pandemic”).

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