

## COVID-19: Supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of students returning to school: A brief guide for Calderdale secondary school staff

Since 23 March 2020, nurseries, schools and colleges have been closed except to children of [key workers](#) and [vulnerable children](#). With support from the Local Authority, schools have planned how all students will return to education in September in a measured way that prioritises the safety of everyone.

Some students will be happy to go back to school; however, others may feel worried or uncertain. Our children and young people need to experience successful transitions back to school, recognising that transition is a process and not a single event. We know that an individual's experiences during this time can have a powerful and long-lasting effect on academic outcomes, as well as impacting on their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. Whilst the current circumstances are unprecedented, schools are skilled in planning and preparing for transitions on a regular basis. This is a big responsibility at a time when adults in the school community may have similar worries and concerns, or have been affected during the pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice to secondary school staff on how they can support the emotional health and wellbeing of children in managing this transition. This document and all the links and resources it contains, can be found on [www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk](http://www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk).

### During a period of transition children and young people can experience:

- *A loss of attachment to familiar people, friends, the environment and objects within that environment*
- *Uncertainty about their role and identity in class/the school*
- *Entry into an environment that is less predictable*
- *A perceived loss of control*
- *A feeling of being de-skilled and less valued*
- *Uncertainty about the future*

**In addition, we must acknowledge their ongoing thoughts and worries about safety and health at these times.**

### Effective transitions are supported by:

- *Advance planning and preparation*
- *Clear processes for communication with parent/carers and children and young people*
- *Consideration of relationships*

Things to think about

How can we help?

<sup>1</sup> Support and advice for adults living in Calderdale can be found at: <https://www.calderdaleccg.nhs.uk/looking-after-your-emotional-health-and-wellbeing/>



## Planning and preparation

- Some students will be worried and uncertain about returning to school. Others may be generally happy about returning, particularly if school is a safe place for them.
- Some students may have become used to being with their parents/immediate family for an extended period. Therefore being separated from them may be a potential source of worry.
- There may have been bereavement within the school and community or in the family.
- In contrast, some students and family members may have experienced abuse at home.
- Some students may have post-traumatic stress but this may not be immediate.
- Some students have continued to attend school and may be anxious about other students returning to join them.
- Adapt existing transition materials to share with students and families.
- Some students and staff come to school for normality. They may not want to have to talk or think about what's happened as a result of the pandemic, but would rather have as normal as possible a school day of learning. Being sad and dealing with the emotions and consequences takes a lot of energy and head space. Not talking about what happened doesn't mean that the pupil isn't thinking about it or is being unusually avoidant. It's important to take our cues from the pupil and for them to know there is no one right reaction. It's okay to ask them quietly what their preference is.
- Clearly explain/show what will be the same and what will be different e.g. which classroom they will be in, which tutors they will be with, how lessons, breaks and lunchtimes will work, queues, toilets, personal hygiene, home learning/homework expectations, if there will be new or altered rules or boundaries (be aware that this may cause information overload for some students, use visual aids where appropriate).
- Explain how students will be kept physically and emotionally safe, and how they and their families can get support, and who from e.g. during the day from tutors, pastoral lead, SENCO etc.
- Explain that staff understand students will need time to re-establish and re-learn routines and what is expected of them.
- Identify the students who will need a more enhanced and individualised transition plan.

## Support/resources

- Calderdale **Open Minds** website [www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk](http://www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk)
- Information **Open Minds** (CAMHS): can be found here [www.calderdaleccg.nhs.uk/cyp-ehwd-c19](http://www.calderdaleccg.nhs.uk/cyp-ehwd-c19)
- **Time Out Listening Line for children and young people:** Offers the opportunity to get some simple advice and guidance about how to keep busy and reduce anxiety. The website offers a platform to have your say and get involved in the Time Out project. Age range: 10-19 years. Contact details: 07418311736 (text to book an appointment). [www.healthymindscalderdale.co.uk/time-out.html](http://www.healthymindscalderdale.co.uk/time-out.html)
- **Noah's Ark Centre:** are running a call back service for parents/carers and school staff, providing confidential support, advice and signposting. For a call back about secondary school-age children, email: [sec.sch.cal.support@noahsarkcentre.org.uk](mailto:sec.sch.cal.support@noahsarkcentre.org.uk). Open Mon-Fri, 10am to 4pm.
- **Kooth:** an online mental wellbeing community for young people aged 10 to 25. Open until 10pm every evening [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)
- **C&K Careers Chat:** support, advice and guidance for children and young people in Calderdale and Kirklees aged 13-24 years. Open Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm. Thur 9am-8pm <https://ckcareersonline.org.uk/news/333-chat>
- **Young Minds:** [What to do if you're anxious about coronavirus](#)
- **Healthy Futures Calderdale:** The school nursing team are experienced public health clinicians and can advise families on both physical health and emotional wellbeing concerns relating to COVID-19 and the return to school. Contact the team to discuss your concerns: phone 030 33 309974 or text 07480 635297 (young people) or 07507 332157 (parents/carers).



Things to think about	How can we help?
<b>Clear Communication</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan regular, accessible communications with students and parents/carers.</li><li>• Use your communications to show empathy, acknowledge anxieties and build confidence.</li><li>• Review mechanisms for staff and parents/carers to communicate with each other.</li><li>• Explain how parents/carers can share in confidence whether their child has experienced any distress or difficulties during lockdown.</li><li>• Have clear systems in place for students to share their experiences in confidence with a trusted member of staff.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adapt existing transition communications; focus on kindness, and compassion</li><li>• Create clear and plain English communications plans which provide timely and official guidance information, and generate confidence in transition e.g. the use of emails, newsletters, blogs, FAQs.</li><li>• Provide reassurance that the thoughts, feelings and reactions are a normal part of recovering from the losses associated with the pandemic, even though they may be upsetting, and that they will lessen in intensity over time.</li><li>• Remember that sometimes when students are finding something emotionally difficult, the first signs might be through changes in their behaviour. This can be especially true for students with existing needs or those that were most affected and are finding it difficult to communicate how they are feeling.</li></ul>
<b>Support/resources</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to promote Calderdale <b>Open Minds</b> website resources: <a href="http://www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk">www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk</a></li><li>• <b>Anna Freud Centre</b> resources for schools: <a href="http://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-schools-and-colleges">www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-schools-and-colleges</a></li><li>• <b>Department for Education</b>: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings</a></li><li>• The <b>British Psychological Society</b> – Talking to and supporting young people about illness or Coronavirus: <a href="http://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public">www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public</a></li></ul>	

Things to think about	How can we help?
<b>Relationships</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on re-establishing relationships, connections and belonging between/amongst staff and students.</li><li>• Take in to account any key worker/vulnerable students who have remained in school – their feelings towards others who have not been attending school.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify students who need key workers and plan for how relationships will be (re)established.</li><li>• Consider the social relationships available to individual students i.e. are they with established and known friends. Adults to model appropriate behaviours and talk about experiences when needed.</li></ul>



- Take time within the curriculum to acknowledge that everything has not just 'returned to normal' and that there needs to be an acceptance of things which have changed. Give thought to use of display boards in school to reflect the situation.
- Provide safe spaces or people for students to share experiences.
- Take into account that some students may have experienced death or know someone who has died during the pandemic.
- Give opportunities to commemorate members of the school community who have died, to celebrate the work of the NHS and key workers, acts of kindness offered and received during the pandemic (*NB. in line with family wishes/consent from bereaved families obtained beforehand as this may not be suitable for all students*).
- Balance wellbeing priorities with boundaries in place to keep others safe.
- Plan time for students and staff to re-develop relationships and to get to know each other where possible.
- Provide opportunities to talk about feelings/emotions embedded throughout the curriculum. NB. This may not be appropriate for some students to participate e.g. if they're vulnerable/have suffered a distressing incident during absence from school.
- Adapt existing resources or create new to explain and reinforce routines and structures e.g. visual time tables, checklists etc.
- Share new rules and restrictions as 'do' statements rather than 'don't' e.g. 'do wash your hands'.
- Staff to not directly question students on what work they may or may not have completed at home.
- Continue to use positive praise.

### Support/resources

- Continue to promote the Calderdale **Open Minds** website: [www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk](http://www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk)
- **Calderdale Barnardo's Positive Identities Service** for those who identify as LGBTQ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-young-people/LGBTQ>
- **Barnardo's: See Hear Respond service** is provided across England by Barnardo's and other national and local community-based organisations in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The programme has been created to help children and young people in England who are experiencing harm and increased adversity during this period by providing support to those who are not being seen by social care or other key agencies. See Hear Respond accept referrals from any source either through the Freephone number **0800 151 7015** or via the [online referral hub](#).
- **ChildLine: [Feeling Lonely](#)**
- **ChildLine: [Top tips for making friends](#)**
- **Action for Children: [Tips for Young People](#)**

### Staff wellbeing

#### What individuals can do to look after themselves:

Many members of staff from education settings have continued to work throughout the Coronavirus restrictions. Like the children and young people they care for they too may be experiencing loss, abuse, burn-out or other difficulties. The phased re-opening of settings will likely add to their existing emotional burdens. Senior Leadership Teams must be proactive in ensuring that mental health and emotional wellbeing is a visible priority.

- Reduce outside demands and avoid taking on additional responsibilities.
- Take time out to get sufficient sleep and rest, relax and eat regularly and healthily, staying well hydrated.
- Try to reduce your time spent looking at the news from media outlets and social media. Try scheduling 'digital power off' times, especially before bed.
- Talk to people you trust and allow yourself to be comforted.
- Use relaxation strategies e.g. slow breathing, self-talk or mindfulness.
- Spend time in a place where you feel safe and calm to reflect on what's happened over the course of the day/week. Acknowledge and allow feelings during this reflective time. Create a wellbeing planning tool for yourself, including knowing where to get outside support from if needed (Local Offer websites can inform this).

### Support/resources

- **Mentally Healthy Schools:** [Staff Wellbeing](#)
- **Anna Freud:** [Looking after each other and ourselves](#) and **Anna Freud:** [Supporting staff wellbeing in schools](#)
- **Mind:** [Five ways to wellbeing](#)
- [Education Support](#)
- **MindEd:** [CBT Art Workbook for Managing Stress](#)