

Using Pupil Voice to Support Difficult Questions and Anxiety

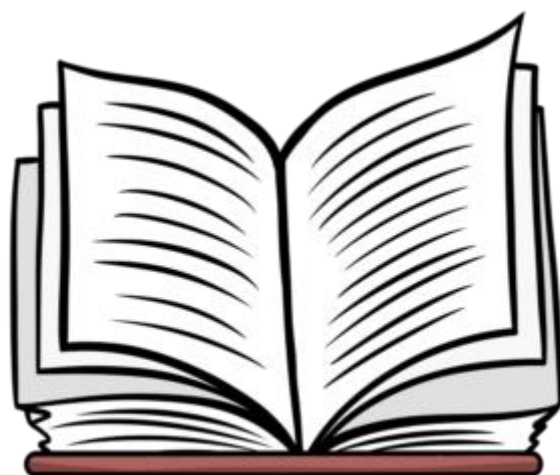
Handy tips and strategies for SENCO's, school staff and parents during times of disruption and uncertainty.

Ashford Specialist Teaching and Learning Service



Through times of uncertainty children and young people respond to different situations in different ways. As adults we can support them through by starting with their questions, thoughts and feelings.

This booklet aims to address how to find out how they are feeling and use some strategies that will support them. Also included are some links to useful resources.



Is your child saying any of the following?

What will have changed at school?

Is anyone going to wear any masks?

Will we be able to touch anyone?

Will we have to do separate break times?

Will I be able to sit at my desk again?

Will things ever get back to 'normal' and how they used to be?

Can I catch Coronavirus from my friends or teachers at school?

Can we play normally with our friends?



Write down any questions / worries they have here



Key things we should and shouldn't do when responding to our children:

SHOULD

Listen

Take their questions seriously

SHOULDN'T

Tell them everything is going to be fine when we don't know as adults if it will

Rescuing
reassuring and
overprotecting

Supporting children with fear and anxiety begins with changing our language.

Here are some examples;

Positive Language Alternatives

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Calm down | → | How can I help? |
| It's not that hard to stay apart | → | I know you can do things that are sometimes hard |
| I explained this yesterday | → | Maybe I should show you again |
| This is so hard | → | This may take some extra time and effort |
| Don't get upset | → | It's ok to feel sad |
| Stop crying | → | I can see this is hard for you. |
| I'm over this | → | I'm here for you |
| You're ok | → | Are you ok? |
| Do you need help? | → | I'm here to help you |
| Be quiet | → | Can you use a softer voice? |
| Don't hit | → | Please be gentle |
| That's enough | → | Do you need a hug? |
| Stop shouting | → | Take a deep breath, then tell me what happened |

Consider adult language we use. Can you change some of your responses into a green response?



When children ask questions and you recognise they are seeking answers avoid saying, 'of course that won't happen,' or 'everything will be fine.'

Instead **empathise**, 'I can see that is really worrying you, I think that might make you feel scared',

Then **validate**, 'I have been feeling like that, It's OK/normal to be worried'

Changing our language and answers can be a powerful way to support children and develop their understanding of their own feelings.

Use the steps in the script below.

Key Point: Use the **word** for the emotion you think they are feeling

Step 1 Recognise the emotion.

- 'I can see that you are **worried** and I think it's because you are finding coming back to school tricky/difficult and **scared** that you might catch the corona virus'

Step 2 Normalise the emotion.

- 'and it is ok to be **worried**, but it is not OK to (list the behaviors) e.g. kick the door
- try to hurt your brother/sister'
- run off

Step 3 Actively Listen to them.

Listen if they tell you how they are feeling, allow them to tell you that you have labeled the incorrect emotions if they feel this is the case.

Step 4 Support in Problem Solving and set boundaries for behaviors.

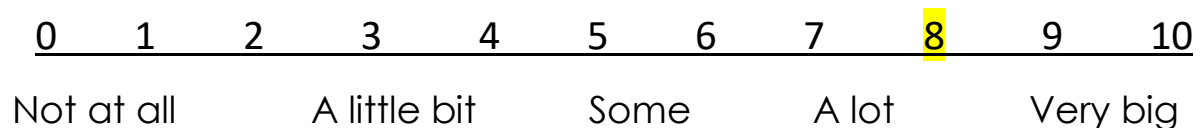
- 'I am going to help you feel a bit calmer and remind you of how we can keep ourselves safe, e.g. hand washing routine, confirm an understanding of social distancing rules.
- (speak slowly so they can understand what you are saying)



Anxiety is a normal emotion.

You can put the worry on a worry scale 1 -10 for the size of each worry.

What am I worried about - '**Will I be able to touch anyone?**'



Then check out and rate the fear – how scary? And how likely?

Check out the fears

What does Tom notice about the different ratings?

| Returning to school | How scary? | How likely? |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Everyone will catch Coronavirus | 8 | 2 |
| Someone will cough on me | 10 | 4 |
| I might have to sit somewhere different | 6 | 9 |

Can you use the 3 c's to change the thought?

Catch the thought – ‘Will things ever get back to ‘normal’ and how they used to be?’

Check It out - We don’t know the full answer to that question. Some things will need to change to keep everyone safe.

Some things are out of our control.

Change – These new ways are keeping everyone safe and they will feel ok after a while. I am going to try these new ways.

1. **Catch** what is the thought?
- 2 **Check** how useful or accurate is that thought
- 3 **Change** what thought would be more helpful



Use these questions to talk through worries in more detail. Help them to consider other points of view. Example questions in black and responses in blue.

| What is Happening? | What is he/ she thinking? | Evidence and Alternatives? | What happened at the end? |
|---|--|---|--|
| | <p>Why are you worried?</p> <p>What do you think will happen?</p> <p>What is it about (this situation) that is making you worried?</p> | <p>What makes you think that (this situation) will happen?</p> <p>Has that ever happened to you before?</p> <p>Have you ever seen that happen to someone else?</p> <p>How likely is it that (this situation) will happen?</p> <p>What would you think was happening if someone else was in the same boat?</p> | <p>What did you think?</p> <p>What did you do?</p> <p>How did you feel?</p> |
| <p>Example; Will I catch the Corona Virus if I go to school?</p> | <p>I worry that I will catch the Corona Virus and get really ill and I might die?</p> | <p>You can help by washing your hands with soap and water.</p> <p>You can help keep you and others safe by following our social distancing rules.</p> <p>Lots of people that have had the virus are getting better already</p> | <p>I feel better about not catching the virus, if I wash my hands properly and follow the rules and know that if I do catch the virus it won't take long to feel better again.</p> |



Making a plan

Some children's anxieties and worries about transitioning might become overwhelming and a further strategy could be tried using a visual planner.

My Worry Planner












| Worry | Positive and Happy | OK | A Bit Uncomfortable and Worried | Anxious or Scared | Overwhelmed and I can't manage | My plan |
|---|--------------------|----|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Am I going to catch the Corona Virus if I come to school? | | | | ☹ | | I can keep safe by following the rules, hand washing and social distancing. I can be reminded of the all the people that have got better after catching the virus. I can talk with adults about my worries. |
| Everything has changed at school. | | | | | ☹ | Lots of things have changed for everyone, so that we can all try and keep safe. It is ok for me to feel worried and not like the changes that aren't so fun. I can talk with adults about the parts I am not enjoying. |
| Will it be like this forever? | | | ☹ | | | The one thing we know about viruses are that they don't last forever. Scientist and doctors are trying to find a vaccine to stop it from spreading. Our school day will start to return to normal in time and I can help by following the rules. |

My Worry Planner

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|-------|--------------------|----|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

For older children try using numbers and emoji's on a scale to help them recognise their feelings.

Transitioning Back to School

| |  Intensity |  How I Feel |
|--|--|---|
|  Virus | | |
|  vaccine | | |
|  social distancing | 5 |  |
|  shops closed | | |
|  Isolated | 3 |  |
|  washing hands | | |
|  coughing | | |

How to nurture a child's mental health



Actively listen before offering your advice



Be patient



Share your feelings and validate theirs



Tell the truth



Model healthy behavior



Surround them with healthy adults



Be consistent and follow through with what you promise



Teach them how to be safe



Believe them and in them



Use open ended questions



Have scheduled family time



Limit electronic time for everyone



Reach out and hug them



Practice relaxation exercises together



Model forgiveness



Respond calmly when their emotions are elevated



View their behavior as a window to their needs and feelings



Make play and exercise a requirement



Recognize positive choices



Be present



Set and respect boundaries



TOP TIPS FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION

A DYSREGULATED
ADULT CAN'T
HELP A CHILD TO
REGULATE
SELF-CARE IS
VITAL!

AVOID
LABELLING
EMOTIONS AS
'GOOD' OR 'BAD'

-
WE NEED TO FEEL
A FULL RANGE OF
EMOTIONS, AND
THEY ARE ALL
OKAY!

USE MODELLING
TO NORMALISE
TALK AROUND
EMOTIONS

-
SHOW YOUR
CHILD THAT IT'S
NORMAL AND
OKAY TO FEEL A
RANGE OF
EMOTIONS

PREPARE
FOR A LOT OF
TRIAL AND
ERROR!

DEVELOP
STRATEGIES
TOGETHER
WITH YOUR
CHILD

TRY OUT NEW
STRATEGIES
WHILE YOUR
CHILD IS
REGULATED
TO FAMILIARISE
BEFORE PUTTING
THEM INTO
PRACTICE



Useful Links and resources



Managing anxiety.

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11459/7waysanxiety.pdf>

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11465/helping-cyp-manage-anxiety-apr2020-v3.pdf>

Social Stories and other resources for anxiety

<https://www.hacw.nhs.uk/sltcovid19>

[If you would like extra help to use this booklet you can phone STLS on 01233623939](tel:01233623939)