

Honeybourne Primary Academy



Turning Potential
Into Success

Transition, recovery and learning in a pandemic and in the aftermath - a resource for parents

Disasters and emergencies throw light on the world as it is. Some thinkers who study disasters frame crises not just in terms of what is lost but also what might be gained – seeing glimmers of possibility. Every disaster is different and it's never just one or the other: loss and gain always coexist.

“Human beings reset themselves to something altruistic, communitarian, resourceful and imaginative after a disaster, we revert to something we already know how to do.”



It's a big responsibility, especially when we acknowledge that many adults in our community will also be experiencing a similar range of emotions and reactions as will their children, young people and their families. Experiences of bereavement and loss, caring for someone shielding, living with a frontline NHS worker or carer, coping with additional stressors of home learning and working from home; worry and anxiety will be shared and lived experiences for many.

As always, we can continue to 'top up' resilience in the way we teach, interact with and model positive behaviour. This doesn't mean we pretend that nothing is different or that we

haven't found the pandemic scary, difficult or sad. What it means is we show that people can endure such challenges and are especially able to withstand such hard times when those around them are supportive and caring. It is important to acknowledge that everyone will have their good and bad days and that there are things that we can do that will help us to feel less distressed. Remember:

“Those who live through terrible times will often be able to help others....and some may go on to do something to make the world a better place. Even terrible things can teach some good things – like understanding, caring, courage... and how to be okay during difficult times”⁵

Before we can help others, we need to help ourselves

As parents/carers we need to be seen to be practicing what we are encouraging children and young people to do. Congruence between our actions and our expectations is vital for trusting relationships. During lockdown and in the transition after, you will most likely be exposed to stories and information that are distressing to hear. This can result in stress and distress. Taking time to firstly recognise this and then to adopt strategies that provide psychological resilience and reduce stress is extremely necessary and very important.

Managing your own stress

Try to:

- Take time out to get sufficient sleep, rest, relax and eat regularly and healthily
- Talk to people you trust and allow yourself to be comforted. You don't have to tell everyone everything, but not saying anything to anyone is often unhelpful
- Reduce outside demands and avoid taking on additional responsibilities
- Spend time in a place where you feel safe and calm to go over what's happened over the course of the day/week. Don't force yourself to do this if the feelings are too strong or intense at the time
- Try to reduce your access to the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Try scheduling 'digital power off' times.
- Use relaxation strategies e.g. slow breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, self-talk
- Build in opportunities for recognising hope and positive strength
- Allow yourself experiences of sadness and grief

Try to avoid:

- Bottling up feelings. Consider whether it would be helpful to talk about them with someone you trust
- Feeling embarrassed by your thoughts, feelings or those of others. These are normal reactions to a stressful event and period of time
- Isolating yourself from those you trust and feel safe around



Returning to school

As much as returning to school may feel like a relief, or even feel exciting for some children and young people, it is also likely to be a time when many children and young people feel anxious, particularly those who have underlying health conditions or who live with someone who is shielding. Feeling safe may have come to be associated with 'staying at home', 'social distancing' and frequent handwashing and so we all need to learn new ways to continue to

feel safe whilst connecting with our friends and peers and learning together back in our school setting. Teachers will continue to create classroom environments that provide reassurance, for example, how they are following the latest government and scientific guidelines, and make expectations clear about how we can all look after ourselves and each other. It is important for us to continue to develop new ways of learning together in the aftermath, rather than rushing or putting unnecessary pressure on ourselves or each other to 'feel or get back to normal'.

Look after your own emotional needs

Many of you within the school community could be experiencing a similar range of reactions and feelings in response to the pandemic and lockdown period. This can make it particularly difficult to focus on the needs of the others. As adults, we have a wider range of coping skills than are available to children and young people and know that we can survive adversity. Children and young people often haven't yet learnt through experience that they too have these coping capacities.

Working with children and young people who have had a particularly stressful and frightening experience of the pandemic could be challenging, and it is possible that in hearing their stories you may also experience stress symptoms. It is not uncommon for parents/carers to feel some of the anxiety, helplessness and anger that their children and young people feel.

Build strengths and capacity

Every child and young person has strengths, aspirations, hopes and dreams. Use solution focused conversations to find out about these. (Asking with interest, '*what are you good at? And what else?*' and if possible deepening the conversation '*When you are at your best what are you pleased and proud to notice about yourself? What does this tell you about what you might be capable of?*') Promote opportunities for your child or young person to experience success and help them to work out ways they can put these skills to use in other areas of their learning and life. Sometimes they will need help to make the connections and generalise the skills.



Social scientists tell us that everyone possesses all 24 of the above character strengths in different degrees, and these are universal across cultures and nations. Ask your child to identify their top five strengths (and do the same for yourself!) Discuss other strengths you and they have noticed and build in opportunities to remind them of these. Planning actions and activities to help children and young people to be their best helps to bring a sense of personal control and achievement to the day-to-day life.

Understand the connection between emotion and behaviour



A child or young person that 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 parents/carers/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. Talk to children and young people about how they can support their own sense of well-being by building positive actions into their daily life such as **'Keeping active, connecting with others, taking notice, giving and keeping learning.'**

Be hopeful and optimistic



Some children may experience a loss of trust in the world after a global pandemic; they may believe that because a terrifying thing has happened, they can no longer dare to hope that life can be happy and safe again. Modelling optimism and encouraging them to see the strengths and coping skills they have and encouraging them to notice acts of courage and kindness will help develop a sense of personal efficacy and future. It is not uncommon for children and young people to have a less optimistic view of the future after events such as these. Reminding them of their strengths and providing opportunities for setting goals and achieving them will help them to take a positive view of their lives. Remember optimism can be taught and that it is contagious.

Engagement, social connection and trusting relationships that are built on respect and positive regard

Communities and societies provide resources which are key to facilitating resilience - being part of a social group is protective and can help people overcome adverse events. However, during and after events that are frightening such as a global pandemic and social distancing, communities and school communities can change. School provides a community of care for children and young people and it is through the relationships that they have with friends and teachers that they can begin to recover from and make sense of the events.

Some children and young people (and staff) come to school for normality. They don't want to have to talk or think about sad or frightening things that have happened as a result of the pandemic but would rather have a normal school day of learning and play. Being sad and dealing with the emotions and consequences takes a lot of energy and head space. Not talking about what happened or is happening doesn't mean that the child or young person isn't thinking about it or is being unusually avoidant. It's important to take our cues from the child or young person and for them to know there is no one right reaction. It's okay to ask them quietly what their preference is.

For some children and young people, their teacher is an adult in whom they can confide and ask difficult questions. Many children and young people express the view that they don't want to upset their parents or further stress them by asking questions or saying that they are struggling. This is when a trusted relationship with an adult at school will allow the child or young person to gain the help and support they need.



Activities promoting connectedness and resilience

During disasters and emergencies, alongside the stories of loss and grief, we also hear extraordinary stories of how different individuals, families and communities come together and act with kindness, courage and initiative. We can encourage children and young people to share their stories about ways in which their community helped each other. For example, neighbourhood delivery networks springing up to provide medicines or shopping to people who couldn't get out. We can reflect on what might have changed possibly for the better or what has been brought into sharper focus for us. For example, stories about the impact on the climate such as reduced industrial activity, road traffic and expanded bike lanes leading to air pollution plummeting and birdsong returning to neighbourhoods.

Other resources:

Winstons Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

Supporting children through coronavirus - Information, advice and guidance on supporting bereaved children and young people during the coronavirus outbreak.

[MindEd](#) is a free online educational resource on children and young people's mental health for all adults, which can support parents and carers through these exceptional circumstances.

[Children's Guide to Coronavirus](#), or the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have produced a [storybook developed by and for children around the world affected by coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

[self-care resource](#) for On My Mind has many simple self-care activities which you can do at home. Written by young people to help other young people who are feeling low or anxious. The strategies should also be useful to adults.

