

Staff Resilience during Covid-19 crisis



Compassion and understanding for staff mental health and resilience

Staff will be responding in different ways and you can help them to maintain a mental state which enables them to be calm, connected and able to work. Encourage help-seeking behaviour – remember it's hard to ask for help when you think everyone else is really busy. You might like the principles expressed in the message below:

Working Remote - COVID 19 Principles

1. You are not "Working From Home", you are "At your home, during a crisis, trying to work".
2. Your personal physical, mental, and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now.
3. You should not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours.
4. You will be kind to yourself and not judge how you are coping based on how you see others coping.
5. You will be kind to others and not judge how they are coping based on how you are coping.
6. Your team's success will not be measured the same way it was when things were normal.

Resilience Framework to support staff resilience

You can promote resilience and positive mental health by holding in mind the key evidence-based components on the [Resilience Framework](#). These are principles to guide your interactions, not a list of things you have to do with every staff member on top of all your other work.

Core Self: Encourage hope, whilst accepting that this is a crisis; help **all staff** consider what they believe they can do for children, families and each other (a sense of [purpose](#) is strongly resilience-building but individuals have to be encouraged to find it themselves – you can't give it to them); help all staff to recognise their unique talents which they can enlist to support children.

Staff are often motivated by their relationships with children- help them find ways to maintain this for instance by teachers sending video clips or voice notes to their class saying what they have been up to or making 'in jokes.' (This is also great for pupil engagement and should follow safeguarding advice).

Basics: Establish explicitly what staff need in order to do their job and consider additional needs including consideration of those with financial concerns or those who need access to telephone support and [counselling](#). Share advice with other schools about where to signpost to help.

Belonging: Check – in with a weekly phone call (see below). Encourage staff to contact each other where relevant (Buddy networks/ create a virtual staffroom) and to think differently e.g. collaboration with support staff to highlight their expertise, knowledge or talents which might be particularly relevant now - ensuring all staff feel connected and valued. Give everyday praise and feedback with regular messages. Involve all staff as much as possible (see below).

Coping: Model or provide opportunities for sharing of different coping techniques between staff e.g. ideas for local walks, writing a [wellbeing plan](#) each morning. Model and encourage having a laugh and doing something you enjoy. Watch out for those energetic staff who may set themselves impossible tasks to 'use lockdown effectively' and then feel self-critical for not achieving these goals. Help staff to recognise there will be days where they feel listless, panicky or overwhelmed and that everyone is finding it hard to concentrate. Clarify what you know to ease speculation about the future. Reassure staff about different priorities and what is possible in the new situation.

Learning: Acknowledge the new skills staff have learned or might need to learn. Learning is resilience-building and reflective conversations are learning opportunities. Staff can choose to [learn new skills](#) purposefully or notice when it has happened because of the circumstances. Encourage sharing of tips.

Noble Truths

Accepting: accept the current difficult situation; accept if you cannot achieve what you would like

Conserving: map the resources and expertise that you have and the good things you are already doing as well as conserving your energy

Commitment: maintain your commitment to your principles and to the most vulnerable children or those who are disadvantaged by their circumstances

Enlisting: There are lots of organisations able to work with schools. Think laterally about using what is already there and link up with other schools, youth workers, EPs etc.

Direct support for staff during school closure

- When staff are at home each senior leader can adopt staff for a regular phone call including *all* staff (listen to [this podcast](#) about supporting home working). Although time consuming it is important for connectedness and prevents problems later. Ensure the call is supportive rather than directive, curious rather than judgemental and focused on what you can do to support them to work. If the first call feels nurturing rather than 'checking up on them' they should feel happy with further calls, but check this– they may not want it. During the call establish when is a good time to contact them in future weeks.
- Find out what anxieties they have and how they are feeling. Streamline and minimise workload which has no impact during this period. Regular emails with information are preferably to sending lists of things for people to do in one go. Encourage use of existing resources such as [BBC Bitesize](#) or [Oak National academy](#) so they can use their time to make personal connections with children.
- Ask what they think are the priorities for their pupils and discuss creative ideas they may have to stimulate engagement with learning. [Autonomy](#) and [creativity](#) are strong resilience-builders. If necessary gently prompt them to consider more vulnerable children. Remember that staff who do not usually teach might also have great ideas but might need encouragement to share them.
- Protect staff from negative emails from parents. Clearly signpost parents to processes for asking questions or giving helpful feedback. Remind staff that stressed parents may behave in unhelpful ways.
- Explain the current processes for supporting vulnerable children, what your expectations are for welfare calls to pupils and who can support staff if they are worried about a family. Give permission for them to reach out to pupils with clear safeguarding advice.
- Make time to celebrate the good things you know staff are doing which you think are sustainable. Share positive stories of pupils and the community.
- Encourage involvement. Use online polls and ask for feedback about what you are doing.

Positive thinking

The current situation represents different degrees of adversity for everyone but also an opportunity to rethink education (at least for the moment) and possibly reset our approach. There is a greater focus on children's welfare (which we know is central to their capacity to learn anyway) and the previous dominance of data and accountability has receded. Try to embrace this.