COVID – 19: Top Tips for enhancing a resilient climate in school during the crisis through a whole school approach.

Schools and colleges need to create systems which are flexible and responsive to changing guidance and meet the need of everyone in the community. The crisis has demonstrated schools' central role in the community as well as the rich depth of education they provide including and beyond the curriculum.

Children and young people have lost out on learning and the greatest impact is likely to be on the most disadvantaged pupils, potentially widening the attainment gap. Schools and colleges need to consider how to deliver the curriculum but also how to ensure children and young people are ready and able to learn. Evidence from worldwide crises suggests prioritising a sense of safety, mental health and wellbeing enables learning to take place.

Boingboing has a **whole school approach** to resilience. We use evidence that structural inequalities impact on resilience and need to be addressed alongside teaching someone to behave resiliently. This means thinking ahead about how inequality might affect someone and mitigating the risks or protecting good things in their lives. Saturating the school environment with resilience-building opportunities can be done by planning ahead, creatively finding ways to involve and consult pupils, staff and parents and making sure that resilience is everyone's business.

One of the main tools that accompanies our Whole School Approach is the Resilience Framework, we think of it as a resilience building toolkit. Within the kit are five compartments: Basics, Belonging, Learning, Coping and Core Self. Organised across each of these five areas are 42 Resilient Moves; everyday steps that evidence tells us can help build resilience. More details of the Resilience Framework are on our website www.boingboing.org.uk.

Boingboing has been working with teachers, parents and young people and combining their views with evidence on resilience building after a crisis. We have collated some suggestions which may be useful as you adapt to the new situation. Some of the advice comes from UNESCO and experiences of schools following hurricanes in the US. Some comes from a survey of 124 young people in Blackpool.

There are links to useful resources throughout and tips to support staff and parent resilience at the end of the article. There are also a range of excellent free webinars with practical tips for staff at the bottom of the page.

Safety

- Feeling safe reinforces resilience. Although safe behaviour is contested with coronavirus, schools which vocally prioritise the physical safety of both staff and pupils are likely to reassure them and generate calm. Be aware that some young people are fearful about how vulnerability to the virus will be used for bullying.

COVID – 19: Top Tips for enhancing a resilient climate in school

- Aim to create a safe and predictable environment by sharing information and visual representations about changes and transitions ahead of time.
- Acknowledge the crisis but avoid generating fear. Work with staff to provide clear guidelines, boundaries and consequences for unsafe behaviour, whilst recognising that some pupils may take time to adapt.
- Psychological safety is challenged during a crisis when no one is sure about their role. Promote an atmosphere of curiosity in school rather than judgement so staff and pupils feel able to be imperfect, own their mistakes and question new protocols which are not working - *"I wonder why they (we) are reacting like that?" "Can anyone suggest why that didn't work?"*
- Openly discuss a range of possible mental health responses to the global pandemic and clearly signpost where to access help (including through social media), and how help will be provided.
- Survey wellbeing prior to additional pupils returning in order to be ready for their needs and to triage support. Use welfare calls to establish who might need extra help. Or survey what families would like to see happen.
- Create opportunities for pupils, staff and parents to give feedback with solutions to problems.
- Those who remain at home may not have the privacy to share details of any difficulty or danger they may experience at home which they might have shared in school. Explore methods to enable text communication if staff have concerns. Share that they can text CONNECT to 85258 to *speak to shout* if it's an emergency.
- Use this excellent toolkit from Swift to address any concerns about Domestic Abuse.

Providing Basics

- Reach out to community groups e.g., Mosques, Churches, local businesses, community leaders or Mutual Aid groups and create opportunities for them to provide resources or volunteer help.
- Consider crowdfunding for families with no recourse to public funds because of insecure immigration status.
- Plan for provision of uniform and equipment to a larger number of pupils or an amendment to uniform rules.
- Work with local businesses, charities and the government scheme to secure digital equipment for as many pupils as possible. Publicise foodbanks and Mutual Aid groups in a variety of formats, taking care to avoid stigma.
- Create structures for consulting with pupils about ongoing needs.

Belonging and Relationships

- Staff and pupils at home miss out on informal micro-interactions and brief chats. Double down on creating systems of regular contact to reinforce their value and sense of belonging for those who cannot return.
- Work with pupils and staff to create alternative ways of connecting such as virtual 'High Fives'.
- Regularly communicate, tell stories and celebrate instances of people reaching out or noticing when somebody needed support (in school and in home school communication).

COVID – 19: Top Tips for enhancing a resilient climate in school

- Allocate time and activities for pupils to reintegrate, to re-socialise and to have space and permission to explore their feelings before diving straight back into the curriculum.
- Communicate ahead of time how social interaction will be managed safely when pupils return and recognise that social arrangements which dislocate friendships might be very painful.
- Involve pupils as much as possible in decision making. Here is an idea for gathering views about the new RSE curriculum in Secondary Schools.
- Children are naturally altruistic. Encourage activities which motivate altruistic behaviours; this activates reward centres and converts negative emotions.

Coping

- It's hard to admit you are struggling if others seem to be coping. Normalise the difficulties and mixed emotions that everyone is facing in communications with pupils, staff and parents.
- Anxiety has an important job to do during this pandemic. Anxiety reminds us to stay physically distant and wash our hands regularly. However, if anxiety becomes too over-whelming it stops being helpful and can have a severe impact on our daily life. Contact us for Boingboing's Mental Health guide for tips about specific mental health concerns. There are resources on C Zone for working with young people experiencing anxiety and information from Anna Freud.
- Remind pupils, parents and staff that feelings may be communicated in a variety of ways which are sometimes unhelpful. Reinforce language which helps pupils to understand their behaviour/feelings rather than simply imposing sanctions. In this link a young person reflects on anxiety.
- Convey the physical distancing messages calmly and discuss with pupils ways to remain socially connected. Create safe spaces for young people and children with exisiting challenges around social anxiety.
- Provide opportunities for pupils and staff to exercise control in elements of their day to day life to counter anxiety.
- Consider your mobile phone policy and how to support children who may be anxious leaving their vulnerable adults at home.
- Open up spaces for students to respond to the crisis but avoid forcing them to discuss their experiences of lockdown and potentially relive trauma. Here are resources to support children who have experienced bereavement and a webinar about how to support bereaved children.
- Create processes where staff actively record or report any additional needs of pupils with SEND, young carers or those who may have experienced bereavement, distress or trauma experiences in lockdown.
- Learning through play is an effective response to difficult or traumatic experiences. Use resources for pupils in school and at home to create opportunities for this.
- Don't forget to provide inclusive resources for pupils with special needs (such as these on cZone).
- Use arts, media, music and dance to provide deep learning experiences. Music builds a vocabulary of emotions, art can build hope, meaning and connection, stories encourage open debate and critical thinking. Here are some good Social and Emotional Learning resources recommended by UNESCO.

COVID – 19: Top Tips for enhancing a resilient climate in school

- Talk about Covid-19 when appropriate and bust myths.
- Transition: help pupils over the divide – consider ways to allow pupils to say goodbye and to prepare for their new environment. Virtual tours, meeting new classes, creating buddies and seeing/meeting new teachers. Encourage contact over the summer. There are resources on cZone to support transition.

Learning

- Lessons from worldwide crises suggest building social and emotional learning into the curriculum to help everyone address stressful situations with calm, emotionally regulated responses and strengthen critical thinking. Only when the brain is socially connected and emotionally secure can it focus on academic content in learning.
- Recognise that some pupils may have lost enthusiasm for learning and will have been out of learning routines - help parents to ease them back in by having routines at the beginning and end of each day e.g., shared breakfast or evening meal and asking gentle questions about school work.
- Use ready-made resources such as these from Place2Be which provide opportunities to think about self-efficacy and gratitude, hope and connectedness. PSHE lessons are an ideal opportunity to explore mental health and relationship issues arising from the lockdown. The DFE has some practical advice. There are also great lessons on the PSHE association website.
- This webinar looks at effective online learning strategies.
- Recognise, value and build on what children have learned during lockdown.
- Identify gaps in knowledge and misunderstandings acquired during lockdown through low stakes quizzes.
- Work with staff to adjust learning priorities to distil key concepts and content in their subjects needed for progress without creating a panic about 'catching up.'
- Memory is context specific. Reassure pupils who feel at first that they can't remember anything they learned at home.
- Work with all stakeholders to plan how to address learning loss with a range of catch up sessions which do not stigmatise pupils and do ready them for future learning.

Core Self

- Following a life threatening crisis situation it is important to actively harvest message of tolerance, mutual support and to foster compassion.
- Create opportunities to discuss events and behaviours which promote hope.

Staff

- Staff at disproportionate risk of contracting COVID-19 may be particularly concerned about their health; work closely with them to take practical steps to mitigate the risks.
- This resource has more details about systems for staff resilience. This resource can be used by staff to support their own resilience.
- Create a team to consider strategies for the short term and a different team to plan for the future from September onwards looking at curriculum choices, potentially blended learning and imaginative use of the environment. Include diverse voices in each team.

COVID – 19: Top Tips for enhancing a resilient climate in school

- Work with the whole staff group to discuss lessons learned from the crisis, their motivation going forward and their feelings about what education is for.
- Acknowledge that some staff may be feeling drained after caring for pupils and meeting their own wider family responsibilities or may feel grief. Actively promote and model work life balance.
- Encourage staff to reflect on their feelings and to be aware that they may unconsciously convey anxiety to pupils. Consult on whether mental health virtual drop-ins might be useful or a nurture lead to support staff leading bubbles.
- Remind staff about the Education Support Partnership free counselling and support website – available 24/7: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk   UK-wide: 08000 562 561 day or night Txt: 07909 341229 (answered within 24 hours)
- Be prepared for families to direct their fear and anxiety at staff and establish processes for supporting staff if this happens.
- Allocate regular time solely to create connections between different staff members and nominate someone to reach out to in moments when staff may feel overwhelmed.
- Actively promote the process of staff recognising their own coping mechanisms and when these strategies might be helpful or unhelpful.
- Take time in personal feedback to recognise and celebrate the different contributions of all staff.
- Promote continued learning and CPD such as this webinar on memory or this one on motivation. Here is one on staff and pupil wellbeing.

Parents and Carers

- Actively signpost parents/carers to financial help, help with basics and other support they might need. Be mindful that some might be newly vulnerable and may be uncomfortable asking for help.
- Open for Parents offers excellent support for parents in East Sussex, helping with education, wellbeing and parenting.
- Connect parents together so that they can help each other.
- Provide parents/carers with simple factual information in a variety of formats (text, email, videos and visual information) about how to stay healthy, safe and support their child.
- Reassure parents/carers that it is normal to struggle and have difficulties and find it hard to support pupils' learning whilst giving them positive strategies to try.
- Continue to send home tips and materials to promote learning and curiosity at home with physical resources for those without digital access especially if children cannot return to the school building.
- Use Firetext or other SMS software to cheaply send parents personalised text messages supporting them with establishing sleep and study routines and providing them questions they can ask pupils about their learning to promote engagement.
- Suggest ways to motivate children/young people which are Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely (when is a good time to discuss school work which won't result in conflict).
- Maintain personal connection with parents as much as possible, offering positive feedback about their achievements. Invite two-way communication.
- For pupils known to be anxious about returning – work with parents ahead of time to design a plan for their gentle return. There are good resources available for parents/carers whose

children are finding it difficult to return to school. Boingboings mental health guide and help for parents from YoungMinds. Here are tips from BBC Bitesize.

- Encourage parents to share and celebrate any achievements and positive experiences through a variety of communication channels.
- For parents who might be very sensitive to danger as an impact of adversity carefully build relationships without adding pressure and provide anonymous ways for them to give feedback.
- Here is an evidence-based webinar with tips for parental engagement.

Excellent Free Webinars

Motivating pupils when schools reopen, the Ambition Institute

What do you need to know about Memory and Learning, TES, Vodagogy

How to teach effectively online, the Ambition Institute

Supporting student and staff wellbeing, TES, Vodagogy

Lots of useful links for supporting children going back to school from NHS mental Health clinical network:

http://www.yhscn.nhs.uk/media/PDFs/children/Docs%20and%20Links/Guide%20for%20Education%20Settings%20Supporting%20CYP%20MH%20EWB%20-%20COVID-19%20FINAL%20v1.0.pdf