

Educational Psychology Service

Parent/Carer Support for Returning to School - a Psychological Approach

We know there will be a lot of uncertainty around the current COVID-19 pandemic, particularly given that the situation is constantly developing towards our new normal of relaxed lockdown measures and the reopening of schools for 'check in, catch up and prepare' sessions.

Although some may have enjoyed lockdown with additional time to spend with immediate family, the past 3 months may have been a stressful time for many experiencing bereavement, financial hardships and adapting to home-schooling. As we are now moving into a blended approach to your child's education, parents/carers are having to make important decisions regarding the education and wellbeing of their child.

Whether you have made the decision for your child to attend school for the catch up sessions in the summer term or return in the autumn, it is important that you feel equipped to talk and support them through their transition back to school.

It is important to acknowledge that although we have all been in the same storm, we have been in different boats and may have experienced lockdown and Covid-19 in very different ways. Some parents may require support with wellbeing, others with home-schooling. Therefore, Wrexham Educational Psychology Service (EPS) have compiled this guide to provide answers to some of the key questions that have been posed to us by parents/carers over the lockdown period.

- How can I support my own wellbeing?
- How can I prepare my child about going back to school safely?
- How can I support my child's emotional wellbeing?
- I'm finding it hard to help my child to learn at home during Covid-19



All the information included in this leaflet is based on psychological models and principles that parents/carers can apply to supporting their family through these unprecedented times.

If you require any further information from the Educational Psychology Service please contact the team on EPSSupport@wrexham.gov.uk

How can I support my own wellbeing?

“ It is okay not to feel okay, especially when we watch and hear the news which at times does sound scary. It is okay to feel overwhelmed and as if things will never change. (It’s helpful to) acknowledge that we don’t have to be strong all the time!” (CareFirst 2020)

Taking time to look after ourselves and our own emotional wellbeing is very important so that we have the capacity to look after our child’s wellbeing. We have included some models below that you may find helpful to support your own wellbeing and enable you to be better equipped to meet the needs of your child.

The FACE COVID Model

This model was proposed by Dr Russ Harris (2020). It is a set of practical steps to help people to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and is based on the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).



Focus on what’s in your control - *what you can do in the ‘here and now’*

Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings - *non judgementally, they are normal*

Come back into your body - *connecting with your senses*

Engage in what you are doing - *focusing fully on the task*

Committed Action – *what can I achieve today?*

Open up - *allow painful thoughts, they are normal, but then be kind to yourself*

Values - *what’s important to me and how do I want to treat myself and others*

Identify resources - *who can I talk to and where can I look for support or information?*

Disinfect and distance - *keep washing your hands and maintain social connections (remotely)*

The PERMA Model

PERMA is a model from Positive Psychology that helps individuals focus on 5 core elements of happiness and general wellbeing. It can be used to set yourself a weekly PERMA action plan to help support your own wellbeing.



Positive Emotions	Spending time doing activities that you enjoy and make you feel more positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a bath listening to your favourite music • Cooking your favourite meal
Engagement	Being fully engaged or ‘lost’ in an activity that makes ‘time fly by’ because you are enjoying it so much	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watching your favourite film/TV show • Hobbies such as exercise, reading, playing an instrument
Relationships	Connecting positively with others - either in reality or virtually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a chat with your neighbour over the fence • Family video call
Meaning	Sense of purpose, Finding meaning in something you do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shopping for a neighbour • Plan and redecorate a room in your house
Accomplishment	Setting yourself an achievable goal for the day/week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a to-do list for house hold jobs • Set yourself an exercise goal

How can I support my child's emotional wellbeing?

Psychological research into trauma has identified five key principles that support how well a person can recover following a serious incident. These principles are relevant to our current situation and will be important to consider when supporting your child as they return to school.



The Five Principles are:

- **A Sense of Safety:** It is important that you and your child feel that they will be safe upon their return to school. Your child's school will have carried out risk assessments and put safety measures in place. Remind your child about practical things they can do to keep safe, like social distancing and hand washing.
- **A Sense of Calm:** Your child may experience a range of emotions including both pleasant and unpleasant ones when they return to school. Encourage your child to understand that these feelings are normal. Support your child by listening to their concerns and talking through them. You can help them to manage their emotions, by acting as a role model and encourage activities that promote relaxation to help them feel less anxious.
- **A Sense of Self- and Collective- Efficacy:** Efficacy is the ability to produce a desired result or effect. You and your child will benefit from feeling that you have some control over what is happening to you and a belief that your actions are likely to lead to generally positive outcomes. Your child will need to feel they belong to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes. This is known as collective efficacy and the group is likely to be their school community.
- **Social Connectedness:** It is important that your child feels that they belong to their school community and has a social network who will support them within the educational setting. Your school will have been putting strategies in place to help all the children achieve this. If you have any concerns, you can raise them with the appropriate member of staff
- **Promoting Hope:** Whilst things may feel difficult at the moment, it is important that your child feels that things will get better and work out in future. They need to be provided with reassurance, and understand that in the long term they will feel positive again, even though things may look a little different.

The PACE Approach

You can help your child to understand and explore their feelings, accept that they are valid, and support them to develop their resilience using PACE. This is an approach, which *'limits shame, promotes compassion and brings a sense of mutual support, strength and resilience'* (Wakefield Educational Psychology Service).

PACE stands for:-

Playfulness - Having an open, ready, calm, relaxed and engaged attitude with your child.

Acceptance - Unconditionally accepting your child's emotions makes them feel secure, safe and loved.

Curiosity - Without judging what they say to you, helping your child become aware of their feelings.

Empathy - Having a sense of compassion for your child and their feelings

How can I prepare my child for going back to school safely?

It is important that your child feels prepared to return to school, it will help develop their awareness, allowing them to feel safe and readily able to engage with the activities once they are in school. This can be done through open conversations with your child, but also with the help of resources.

Many schools have produced information leaflets, photos and videos for parents to share with children/young people about the changes they should expect when returning to school, please contact your child's school if you haven't received these and require further information.

In addition, the Woodlands Centre has created a letter for children and young people to help [explain returning to school after Covid-19](#) and the differences they might come across.

Preparing Your Child For the First Day Back in School

As schools begin to open to more children, parents and children may well be feeling anxious. Here's some ideas of how best to prepare.

Be Calm.

Your child will take their lead from you and be reassured if you are steady and matter of fact.



Be Curious.

These are strange times and their imagination may run away with them. Listen, and try not to dismiss or minimise their fears but validate how they are feeling – "it's completely fine to feel like that at the moment" or "I can really understand why you would feel like that"



Be Positive.

Remind them of all the ways they have learnt to keep themselves safe: washing their hands regularly, sneezing and coughing into their elbow, not hugging others and staying in their own space.



Be Thankful.

Help your child think of things they are looking forward to: being with their friends, seeing their teacher, favourite activities but be mindful some of these may not be available for them



Be Supportive

Younger children particularly may struggle with separation anxiety and may become tearful, clingy or act out. Reassure them that you will miss them too and think of them through out the day. It might be helpful to draw a little heart on their wrist and one on yours too. You can call it the hug button and when they find they are missing you they can press the heart and know that you will be doing the same at home. Sometimes having a little object to remind them of you through the day helps but please check this out with your school first.



Be Prepared.

Support your child to be aware of changes that may have happened to their classroom environment since they were there last and rehearse any new routines that school may have shared. Rehearse and practice your 'goodbye' routine and create a 'hello' greeting for the end of the day for them to look forward to.



I'm finding it hard to help my child to learn at home during Covid-19

As we continue to learn to re-adjust our lives to new ways of being, many of us are still having to work from home and/or help our children learn as well. This can be a stressful experience, particularly if our children are finding learning at home difficult too.

As time goes on it may be becoming more difficult to motivate our children to engage with the school work they have been set, especially as the current blended learning approach may need to extend into the Autumn term. This can cause us to feel concerned that they are falling behind academically.



What if my child is reluctant to do their school work?

It might be helpful to explore why your child may be reluctant to engage with the work set for them. For example:-

- Do they understand the work?
- Are they feeling anxious about something?
- Is this a subject they really don't enjoy anyway?
- Are they missing their friends, teacher or TA?

Resistance to doing schoolwork could be a sign of anxiety

Your child's behaviour is a form of communication and may come out as anger, anxiety, or frustration. This could lead to a confrontational situation in which your child may become even more anxious and more resistant. If your child is experiencing any of these, or other feelings they may not have the capacity to focus on learning. So, it's really important that when your child may become emotionally heightened that you try to stay calm and reassuring. Try and help your child manage their anxiety by providing space for them to talk about their feelings.

How can I help?

- Encourage your child to take part in activities that interest them and/or are fun
- Consider if they have to complete all of the work set by the school or can it be modified in some way? Perhaps a chat with your child's teacher might be helpful?
- Break down school based tasks into smaller steps, praising your child for what they have completed so far
- Encourage your child to take regular breaks away from their work, maybe for exercise or snack
- Praise your child for the effort they are putting into the task as well as the outcome for example 'I like that you found your own pencil and book today', 'I can see you have tried hard to do that colouring', 'Thank you for trying to do those 5 sums by yourself whilst I was busy doing my jobs'
- Use additional tools such as BBC Bitesize as an aide. They provide videos and quizzes to help engage your child
- Ask your child what other ways they learn in class and if they can show you

Remember that school and home are two different environments

Schools are places where children learn to follow rules and routines and learning is carried out in an environment that cannot be easily replicated at home (and shouldn't be).

BUT learning is not just about academic work. Home is a place where your child can feel happy and safe and where social and cultural learning is just as important. So it's OK to enjoy doing other things together with your children and enabling them to do the things that they love to do.

Remember that *you* can create a rich learning environment at home

As we've already seen, learning does not have to only be based on the school work your child is being asked to do.



- Playing board games - develop social skills and turn taking, number and reading skills. Even for older children and young people these skills are still important to develop and practice
- Baking at home - measuring, reading recipes, science, doing something kind for others
- Helping with household chores - learning to be independent, sorting and matching washing, learning what cleaning products do and how to stay safe
- Walks - exploring our environment, talking about plants, flowers and animals we see, taking exercise and why it is important for our body and wellbeing
- Gardening - science what plants need to grow, how they change
- Caring for family/friends - helping in the community and why this is important
- Writing the family shopping list, checking cupboards and planning healthy meals

Additional Resources

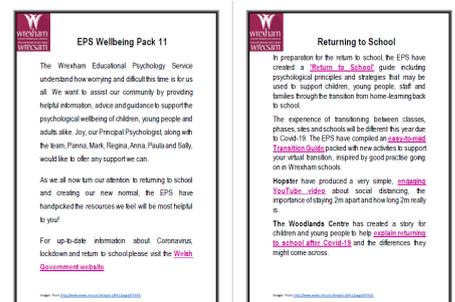
Wrexham Educational Psychology Service has produced several Wellbeing Packs that have been sent out to your school, which you may find helpful.

These packs focus on how to look after ourselves and our families as well as some more ideas on providing that enriching environment.

They include ideas about:

- Creating a Time Capsule with your child
- Different ideas about play activities
- The benefits of exercise
- How to support your family's mental health and wellbeing
- Developing resilience

Please contact your school if you are not sure where to find the packs on their website



And Finally don't forget

“The depth of the love of parents for their children cannot be measured. It is like no other relationship. It exceeds concern for life itself. The love of a parent for a child is continuous and transcends heartbreak and disappointment”. (James E Faust)