Using Pupil Voice to Support Difficult Questions and Anxiety

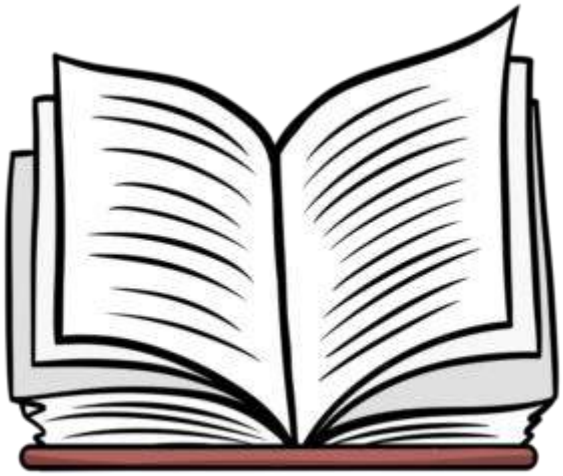
Handy tips and strategies for

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?**'

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all			A little bit		Some		A lot		Very big	

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?
	Why are you worried? What do you think will happen? What is it about (this situation) that is making you worried?	What makes you think that (this situation) will happen? Has that ever happened to you before? Have you ever seen that happen to someone else? How likely is it that (this situation) will happen? What would you think was happening if someone else was in the same boat?	What did you think? What did you do? How did you feel?
Example; **Will I catch the Corona Virus if I go to school?**	I worry that I will catch the Corona Virus and get really ill and I might die?	You can help by washing your hands with soap and water. You can help keep you and others safe by following our social distancing rules. Lots of people that have had the virus are getting better already	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.

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

Worry	Positive and Happy	OK	A bit Uncomfortable and Worried	Anxious or Scared	Overwhelmed and I can't manage	My plan

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		

Created in WidgitOnline.com for Emma Turver

Widgit Symbols © Widgit Software 2002 - 2020

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

Practice relaxation exercises together

Have scheduled family time

Limit electronic time for everyone

Reach out and hug them

Model forgiveness

Recognize positive choices

Respond calmly when their emotions are elevated

View their behavior as a window to their needs and feelings

Make play and exercise a requirement

Be present

Set and respect boundaries

© 2018 Mental Fills Counseling Store

TOP TIPS FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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

USE MODELLING TO NORMALISE TALK AROUND EMOTIONS

-

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

DEVELOP STRATEGIES TOGETHER WITH YOUR CHILD

AVOID LABELLING EMOTIONS AS 'GOOD' OR 'BAD'

-

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

PREPARE FOR A LOT OF TRIAL AND ERROR!

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