

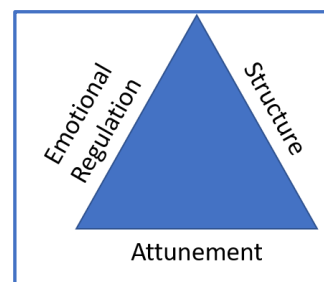
## Supporting pupils' emotional wellbeing during COVID-19 Measures – Return to school

There is a growing concern as to the impact on the coronavirus measures on children and young people's mental health as the loss of routine, activities and social contact combined with the pressures on families creates a toxic mix which can eat away at even the most resilient of young people.

Children and young people can adapt and even thrive in the face of stressful events with appropriate levels of **protection, comfort** and the opportunity **to process and learn from their experience**.

**Building emotional resilience** requires a balance of **structure, attunement (relationship)** and **emotional regulation**

- **Structure:** Provides the foundations to create as calm and safe environment as is possible.
- **Emotional regulation:** The ability to adjust our internal state to appropriately manage external demands.
- **Attunement:** The quality of relationships / interactions experienced.



**Structure:** To help pupils feel settled, safe, and ready to learn

- **Practical arrangements:** Keep up to date with the practical arrangements and know where to go to for further information, and feedback learning / concerns
- **Bring predictability and familiarity:** Try and provide as much familiarity as possible – rooms, timetable, peer groups, staff members, revise, reminisce.
- **Welcome:** Communicate social distancing messages in a welcoming friendly manner and a way that all pupils, parents / carers can understand.
- **Clarity of role:** Be clear about expectations re curriculum delivery and the school's position regarding prioritising wellbeing
- **Visual timetable:** Help pupils know what to expect from the day and be prepared to respond and flex to the groups needs regarding sensory breaks.
- **Consistency is vital:** Firm on expectation but gentle on the child
- **Transition:** Pupils may well need a gradual transition into the new arrangements – think of it as starting a new academic year.
- **Structure of the day:** Build in sensory breaks across the day and recognise that everyone is a little more tired than usual as normal routines have changed.
- **Behaviour Management:** Make sure you know what the current behaviour management systems are across school and who you can contact for support
- **Personalisation:** Make sure you have enough information to best understand the strengths and needs of the pupils in your group
- **Mutual Support:** Find time to get support from colleagues

## Attunement. Quality of interactions / relationships:

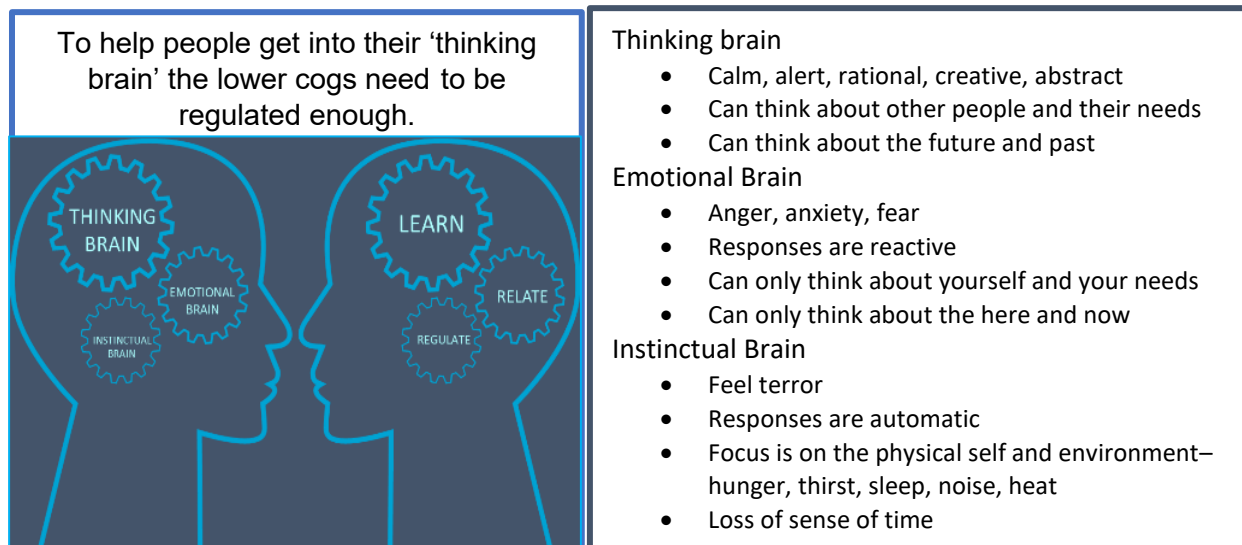


The key protective factor for emotional wellbeing is the quality of relationships / interactions experienced. Attunement is about reciprocal interactions.

We all need to feel heard, acknowledged, understood.

- **Focus on relationships** – with individual pupils, supporting the peer group cohesion, with parents / carers and colleagues. Everything is so much easier if you have good relationships. Some pupils may struggle with this and the school provides them with a fantastic opportunity to develop these skills and *experience* getting on with their peers. By investing time in this across the group so much time will be saved as the group supports each other and pupils are more able to access their thinking brain and attend to learning as they feel safe. Revisit this frequently to reach across the whole group and build stronger networks.
- **Build relationships when not at crisis point.** If you are working with a vulnerable pupil or parent / carer gently build your relationship with them – it will make it so much easier to address any needs as they arise
- Make sure that you give students a **really good welcome** – let them know that you are pleased to see them. This will help recreate a sense of belonging and feelings of trust and safety and sets the tone for the day.
- **Experiential learning:** Give opportunities for pupils to experience getting on with others through positive fun activities. For some pupils this may need close supervision and lots of structure i.e. clear rules, for it to be a positive experience.
- **Diverse experiences:** Let pupils know that it is normal and ok to be feeling lots of different emotions about lockdown and coming back to school. There will be things to celebrate alongside possible worries and struggles. It will be good to spend some time celebrating all the diverse things students have learnt whilst having this time at home – cooking, DIY, games, online? It will be helpful for you to share (appropriately) how you are feeling yourself about being back in school.
- **Circle Time:** Provide regular opportunities for pupils to discuss concerns with their peers. To be most effective it needs to become a routine part of the week.
- **Rupture and repair:** Be mindful there may be issues across peers that need resolving which are historic or have sprung up on social media during lockdown. Negotiating and resolving peer relationships give pupils excellent life skills and builds emotional resilience as pupils learn there might be a rupture but there can also be repair – some pupils will need support and supervision to manage this.
- **Check in:** Provide regular check ins. If you notice anyone is in distress, including colleagues by 'reading' their behaviour, (eg the tone of their voice, a departure from their usual demeanour) – check in, be available. Follow the advice given in the active listening skills resource.

## Emotional Regulation:



- Given the current context it is likely that **everyone's emotional brain and even their instinctual brains will be more easily triggered** as they manage many different stresses, it will therefore be important to nurture a climate of kindness, support and understanding
- **Be aware of where the student is in terms of their emotional arousal** (are they in their alarm system?)
- Remember **behaviour is communication** of an unmet need – try to maintain a strong sense of curiosity as one cannot assume what different stresses the pupil, parent / carer, colleague may be experiencing
- **Stay calm to bring calm:** Children and young people will feed off the emotional regulation of the protective figures around them. It is vital that you reflect on your own emotional regulation needs, acknowledge them, seek support if necessary. There might not be a simple 'fix' in these unprecedented times but by being more conscious of your own emotional regulation needs you will be less likely to be unconsciously transmitting them to others
- Think about **whole school emotional wellbeing mechanisms** such as Worry Boxes, Worry Tree, Turnaround tables, Sensory Purses, Sensory Snacks, Zones of Regulation, Circle time for secondary and primary, PSHE, Class debates.
- **Be proactive rather than reactive:** bring in emotional regulation activities across the school day / week at set times and in response to the needs of the group—notice key times of day / week when the group could do with calming or energising— see Emotional Regulation top tips
- **Staff emotional wellbeing:** Protect down time. Stay connected to colleagues.
- **Provide a calming environment** – nice hand wash products, staff treats, calm space to relax. Wellbeing Wednesday. Random Acts of Kindness.
- **See NHS Every Minds Matters** website for valuable information on wellbeing