

10 Top Tips for School Leaders on Emotional Wellbeing following the school holidays and lockdown period.

1

Put your own oxygen mask on first!

Make sure you have the support systems you need in place before you start planning for others – when you feel calm and supported your school community will follow.

2

Permission to feel anxious

Acknowledge to your school community that anxiety is likely. It is a normal response to a pandemic. We need to be able to discuss anxiety and concerns to normalise them and support each other effectively.

3

Clarity of message and preparing for what to expect

Clear structure and expectations will make everyone feel secure – we know schools have worked hard on their risk assessments and communicating them clearly to their school communities including preparing SEND children using social stories and online tours, etc.

4

Balance routine and structure with emotional support

A return to some to normality, routine and usual expectations can make everyone feel safe and distract them. A balance between opportunities to talk about concerns/experiences and ‘business as usual’ have been found to have the better outcomes post trauma.

5

Children’s rights to play and have fun

Children are likely to have missed out on play and social skills development due to lack of opportunity. They may be unsure how to play and socialise in a covid safe way so this may need scaffolding, alongside lots of opportunities to socially connect and play. Having a laugh releases feel good chemicals in the brain that are likely to maintain a positive atmosphere and reduce the impact of stress on children and staff. This will help everyone cope better with the changes in place.

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6

Control and autonomy

Nothing helps people (big and small) to feel safer than control. Try to involve the school community in appropriate decision making and ask for feedback on how it is going.

7

Awareness of themes and issues

Peoples behaviour usually makes sense in the context of what they have experienced. We anticipate difficulties with bereavement and loss, emotionally based school avoidance, lack of social skills, exposure to DV, health anxiety and concerns about learning following the lockdown period, to name a few. It would be helpful to delegate areas to staff who can act as leads on these themes and any other themes that appear to develop in your community.

8

Awareness of who can help locally

Familiarise yourselves with resources freely available online and the support available locally. LINKS TO Local Offer and GM mental health resources etc.

9

Take things one step at a time

The situation is still changeable and with local lockdowns in place, measures and guidelines may continue to change regularly so we need to remain flexible.

10

Communicate regularly

With staff, children/young people and parents. You won't always have the answers or be able to predict the future, but people feel reassured when they feel they are being kept updated at times of change.