

## **Activities and resources to support children's health and well-being as they return to school**

The world at the moment is a crazy place and most of us have never experienced anything like this and our children certainly have not. As the schools have been shut children will have had a myriad of experiences some positive and some negative. Some children will be desperate to come back to school, others not. Many will be worried about Coronavirus and catching up on work, while others will be desperate to see their teachers and their friends. Alongside this schools will not be operating as normal and this may well be unsettling for children. Therefore it's more important than ever that children's emotional health and well-being needs are supported as they return to school.

We are sure that most of our schools will be thinking along the same lines and will be preparing activities and lessons that will support the children as they return. However we thought it might be useful if we produced a document that detailed activities, games, lessons etc that you could use alongside what you are already preparing. Rather than just list websites etc and then expect you go digging we have listed and detailed the actual activities. Therefore it's somewhat of a pick and mix that you can dip in and dip out of as you see fit with what you are already delivering in school.

We very much see this as a live document that will be updated as time goes by and therefore hopefully it will be a useful resource for the foreseeable future.

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## Activities to do as children return/start school

Returning may feel strange for some children, especially with new social distancing rules to follow. It's important to give them time to reconnect with each other and with school.

### **Team/Class Flag**

This involves creating a team flag made up of smaller flags. Each one should share a value that pupils feel is important. This will remind each class member that they are part of something bigger than themselves and that they belong. Discussing what pupils feel as important will help feel listened to and valued as well as helping pupils reconnect with one another and as a class as a whole. Here is an example below.



### **Alphabet of Awesome**

A simple activity to do as children return to school/start a new class to raise self-esteem and positivity. Pupils write a word or a sentence in the sheet in the link below (basically a table with each letter of the alphabet) that makes them feel proud, happy, safe or loved. It can be anything, chocolate, sunshine, riding my bike, grandma, x-box, hugs whatever that comes to their mind. A circle time discussion could take place afterwards (also I wouldn't get children to fill in all the letters X and Z are a bit tough).

<https://smscideas.co.uk/primaryResources/alphabetOfAwesome.pdf>

## **Monday Morning Manifesto**

This is a really good activity as your children return or can be done as an ongoing activity every Monday or start of each half term etc so they can begin to think positively about the week ahead. The link below takes you to a PDF of a sheet that asks children to answer various questions such as: Something I will do this week to help my friends, this week I am determined to, this week I am not looking forward to, but I will try to.

<https://smscideas.co.uk/primaryResources/mondayMorningManifestoPrimary.pdf>

## **Well-Being Bingo**

Wellbeing Bingo is a great activity to get pupils talking and thinking about what they've done in the last week to look after themselves. It could be reading a good book, spending time with a friend or visiting somewhere new.

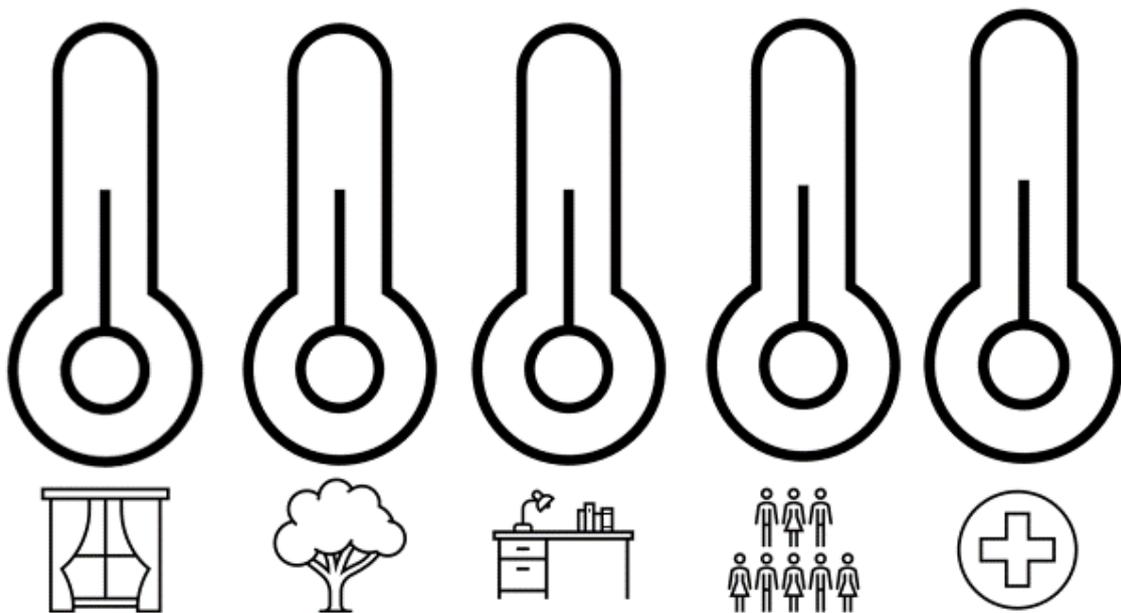
This could be used in class with your pupils, and it may be especially useful as pupils return to school when you're encouraging pupils to talk to each other and reconnect with friends. Most of the activities within the bingo sheet children could have been done even with the restrictions of lockdown.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/2913/wellbeing-bingo.pdf>

## Coronavirus specific activities

### Coronavirus Discussions

Use the illustrations below (they can be copied and pasted into another word document for printing) and ask the children to colour the thermometers in red to the level of how stressed/bad/sad the situations made them feel. Icons are: staying at home, only allowed out once a day, home schooling, not seeing friends and family, coronavirus in general. Once completed they can be discussed in friendship groups or circle time. It may be useful for the teacher to express how they felt during lockdown. Ground rules that no one has to talk about anything that they find uncomfortable and there are teachers and other staff members available if want to discuss anything that is upsetting them or just want a chat.



### Covid Conversations

Useful conversation cards about Coronavirus, being in lockdown and not being in normal schooling. To be used with older children, year 6 in the first instance. Could be done as a small group activity or circle time. Ground rules that no one has to talk about anything that they find uncomfortable and there are teachers and other staff members available if want to discuss anything that is upsetting them or just want a chat.

<https://smcideas.co.uk/secondaryResources/covidConversations.pdf>

## **Take Away Bag**

A simple activity where children write or draw in the case worksheet in the link below about their best memories of spending time with their family during lockdown.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/takeaway-bag/>

## **Lockdown Reflections**

Similar to the activity above this asks the children to reflect upon their time in lockdown but explores other themes than just happiest memories. This could be a good activity to complete when children first come back to school.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/2020-lockdown-reflections/>

## **Ongoing initiatives/activities**

### **Fill my Plate**

Nice warm food nourishes our body, nice warm words nourishes our self-esteem. Get some paper plates or circular pieces of paper or card and ask the children to put their name in the middle. Ask the children to walk around the classroom and write down positive words or messages to fill the plates, ahh lovely.

### **Finding your Balance**

A nice activity to get your children to refocus between lessons to feel calm and be in the moment. It's an exercise in balance and focussing on their body and mind. It should be done as calmly and slowly as possible, allowing children time to breathe, relax, wobble and possibly giggle! Full details in the link below.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/2908/finding-your-balance.pdf>

### **How Many Positives**

To encourage pupils to think positively. Regular negative thoughts can become a habit and can affect our overall mood and levels of happiness. This simple activity sheet will help pupils to visualise and recognise positive features in themselves. You could revisit this activity over time by asking the children to add to the list of assets. You can download the worksheet below.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3554/how-many-positives-360-activity.pdf>

## **Random Acts of Kindness**

Discuss with your class what acts of kindness are: such as opening a door for someone, saying hello, complimenting someone, helping with chores at home, offering to play with someone who looks lonely etc etc. Try and come up with as many as there are in the class. Pop them on pieces of paper, fold them and pop them in a bowl. Each child takes one and doesn't tell and within a given time frame they have to try and do it. After the given time frame discuss the random acts of kindness and how it made them feel and how they think it made the other person feel.

100 Ideas for Primary Teachers: Mindfulness in the Classroom by Tammie Prince

## **Happy Thoughts for Home**

In the last 20 minutes of the school day have a discussion with the children all the good things that happened that day. Also explain that parents and carers love to hear what went well at school that day. In the last few minutes ask the children to engage in some mindful breathing and get them to think of one good thing that happened that day. You can ask a few children to verbalise them if you wish. Tell the children to express their good thing soon as they meet their parents/carers. This is a great way to encourage children to talk positively and encourage better home/school life situations.

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## **Movement Breaks (Indoors)**

Regular brain breaks in between lessons, or during them, as needed is a great way to get some exercise have a bit of fun and generally get in a good mood. This could be as simple as a some exercises at your desk like lunges, star jumps etc or for a bit of fun use some of the resources below:

Go Noodle, lots of fun interactive movement and dance videos

<https://www.youtube.com/user/GoNoodleGames>

Cosmic Yoga, lots of fun, child friendly yoga moves with a background of popular children's characters.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

Boogie Babies, BBC produced dance to music videos for younger children

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006mvsc/clips>

Super Movers, BBC produced movement videos, to learn while you move

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/supermovers>

## Movement Breaks (Outdoors)

As space will be a premium inside, get outside for some movement breaks. Open the embedded files to find out lots of fun games and activities that can be played outside. Some of these games and activities are more socially distant than others, use your own judgment on what you would feel comfortable in playing.



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## 5 Day Kindness to Yourself Challenge

This is a really good activity to do any week, but during a health week could be a good idea, or during times of stress or pressure such as building up to exams. Essentially there is a task every day such as complimenting yourself, learning from a mistake, what went well today. Download the worksheets below.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/good-mental-health-awareness-week-kindness-to-yourself/>

## Label Feelings

Get children to produce a picture with a feeling attached as shown in the photograph below. This can originate from a discussion to the various emotions we have and why we have them. This display can then be used with children to label their feelings and describe why they feel that way. As psychologist Suzy Reading states: "People who could label their feelings using rich vocabulary were found to be 40 per cent less verbally and physically aggressive than those who had a tough time working out how they felt."



## **The Starfish Story and Activity**

A nice story about how even small acts of kindness can make a difference. There is also an acts of kindness chart to complete as well as a starfish to colour in (the story is about a starfish).

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/the-starfish-story-and-activity/>

## **Outdoor Learning**

The outdoor classroom is very much going to have to be part of your daily strategy to teach children during these difficult times as indoor space is at a premium. Also using the outdoor space is a great way for your children to reconnect with nature and is proven to improve your mental well-being

## **Making Faces**

A nice simple outdoor activity, collect materials to make a face, it could have an expression to mirror your mood, or how you feel being back at school, etc etc. Check out the example in the pdf below.

<http://www.fieldsintrust.org/Upload/file/bpty2020/Making-Faces.pdf>

## **Micro Journey**

I love this activity. It's about getting up and close with nature and using your imagination as you imagine a journey as an ant. The picture explains it better than I can, download the activity at the link below.



<https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Lesson-Activity-Micro-Journey.pdf>

## **Cloud Gazing**

A simple activity we have probably done before but is fun and relaxing. Get the children to lie down in your school grounds and just give them time to stare up at the clouds. What shapes do they see, can you see a face, a dog, can they make up stories with what they see. Also ask them to engage with their other senses, close their eyes what can they hear, where is it coming from.

## **Tipi for Teddy**

How about making a simple shelter for a favourite teddy or cuddly toy. Make a simple tripod frame out of three sticks and cover it in natural materials or blankets. Add to your safe and secure home and use your imagination, a pretend fire to cook food or a garden of collected grasses and flowers.

<https://www.ltl.org.uk/resources/tipi-for-teddy/>

## **Mindfulness Activities**

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present in the moment and can have many benefits for children such as calmness, relaxation and positive mood. Try and integrate some of these mindfulness activities through your school day.

### **5 Minute Mindfulness Activities**

#### **Breathing Hands (2 minutes)**

- Spread one hand out like a star.
- Use the index finger on your other hand to trace the outline of your star hand.
- Take a deep breath in as you move to the top of your thumb.
- Breathe out as you move down between your thumb and first finger.
- Take another breath in as you move to the top of your first finger.
- Breathe out as you move down between your first and second finger.
- Repeat until you have taken five slow, deep breaths.

### **Spidey Senses (5 minutes)**

- Ask students to switch their senses up to a superpower level, just like Spiderman.
- In this moment,
  - What can they hear?
  - What can they see?
  - What can they taste?
  - What can they smell?
  - What can they feel?
- Guide students as they stay in this Spidey state for 2-3 minutes

### **Add a Touchy Feely Focus (5 minutes)**

Provide students with a prop to hold, touch, balance or focus their eyes on during one of the above activities.

- small soft toys
- small bean bags or beany pillows
- stress balls
- pieces of furry fabric

### **Mindful Breathing (5 minutes)**

- Students can stand or sit for this activity.
- Ask students to put both hands on their belly.
- Students should close their eyes, or look down to their hands.
- Guide students in taking three slow deep breaths in and out to see if they can feel their hands being moved.
- You may like to count “1, 2, 3” for each breath in and “1, 2, 3” for each breath out, pausing slightly at the end of each exhale.
- Encourage students to think about how the breath feels, answering the following questions silently, in their mind.
  - What is moving your hands? Is it the air filling your lungs?
  - Can you feel the air moving in through your nose?
  - Can you feel it moving out through your nose?
  - Does the air feel a little colder on the way in and warmer on the way out?
  - Can you hear your breath?
  - What does it sound like?

## **Mindful Eats (5 minutes)**

This is a great activity to bring attention to how mindlessly we sometimes eat! Whether sitting in front of the tv, chatting to friends at lunch, or scrolling through something on the internet or social media, we often “switch off” when eating because it is such a familiar action.

Mindful eating can combat over-eating, it helps bring our attention to the flavours and tastes of different foods and helps us to realise what effects different foods have on how our bodies feel.

Students need something small to eat for this activity. Often a square of chocolate is a fun “challenge”, although you could provide a piece of fruit or any food item that you feel will work with your class. Be sure to take any allergies into consideration!

- Begin this practice with three deep breaths.
- Direct students to take small nibbles or bites of the food.
- Bring awareness to the sensations of eating.
  - What is the taste like? Is it sweet or savoury?
  - What does the food feel like on your tongue?
  - Do you need to crunch it between your teeth, or can you slowly dissolve it in your mouth?
  - Try taking a slightly smaller or slightly larger bite.
  - How does this change the way eating this food feels?
  - Notice which muscles in your mouth, neck and body move as you swallow the food.
  - Pause between each bite and notice any changing sensations in your mouth or body.

## **Body Scan (10 minutes)**

- Students lay on the floor, with their eyes closed if they are comfortable (or they may prefer to look at the ceiling).
- Encourage students to pay attention to their feet for 5 or 10 seconds.
- **Questions to ask during a body scan:**
  - How does this body part feel?
  - Is it cold or warm?
  - Does it feel tight or relaxed?
  - Is all or part of that body part touching the floor?
  - Or clothing?
  - What does that feel like?
- Move on to their toes, then ankles, then calves and knees. Continue body part by body part until you reach the head.
- Question how each part of the body feels to bring students’ awareness to their body in the moment.
- If there is tightness or stress, imagine breathing the stress out of that part of the body with each exhale.

## **Gratitude Practice (5-10 minutes)**

- Students use a notebook or a folder and paper to make a Gratitude Journal.
- Practise gratitude journaling at a regular time each day, perhaps first thing in the morning, after lunch or just before the end of the day.
- Take five minutes to think of something that you feel grateful for today. Here are some topics or ideas you can use to guide your students:
  - Something that someone else did for you that day.
  - A person in your life that you appreciate.
  - An activity or hobby you are grateful to be able to do.
  - A positive quality of someone that can sometimes be hard to get along with.
  - A skill or ability you have.
  - A part of your body you are grateful for and why.
  - An item that you love.
  - Something that made you laugh.
  - What you have learned from something that was hard.

Further activities and resources available at

<https://www.teachstarter.com/gb/blog/classroom-mindfulness-activities-for-children-gb/>

### **Positive Post it Day**

Another activity looking at gratitude not just with children but parents too. Pick a day to be Positive Post it Day share this with the school including the parents. On the day the children write at least two positive notes, one for themselves one to someone else. Allow the children to put them anywhere in school. Ask the parents to do this too either at home or in the school as well. At the end of the day ask the kids how being positive affected them. Take lots of pictures and pop them on your website, social media etc.

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### **Transition**

Follow the link below for two activities on transition from year 6 to 7 and working through children's hopes and fears. This will be a particularly important exercise as the year 6 will have missed a great deal of school, not taken their SAT's etc.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/2882/ym-fyf-teacher-resource-year-6.pdf>

## **Useful Websites Section**

### **Resources:**

#### **Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families**

Anna Freud the mental health charity for children and families has loads of resources for schools, children and parents. The links below take you to their schools and early years resource sections. There are lots of publications to help you support children and young people, work with parents, support each other etc.

<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/>

#### **Mentally Healthy Schools**

Is an excellent website produced by Anna Freud. It's a free website for primary schools offering school staff information, advice and practical resources to better understand and promote pupils' mental health and wellbeing. There is a particularly excellent resource section.

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/>

#### **Young Minds**

Young Minds the mental health charity for children and young people has lots of free school resources to support pupils and staff mental well-being.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/>

#### **ELSA Support**

The ELSA support website is the go to place to get free downloadable resources to support children and young people with their emotional literacy. Highly recommended.

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/>

#### **SMSC ideas**

Lots of really good resources on SMSC and fundamental British values for primary and secondary, well worth a look.

<https://smscideas.co.uk/>

#### **Learning Through Landscapes**

Is the UK charity dedicated to enhancing the opportunities for children to experience outdoor learning and play, they have a great free resources section.

<https://www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources/>

## **Mental Health Support:**

### **WF-I CAN**

Is a website that collates support and advice for children and young in the Wakefield District on their health and well-being. This is a portal for children and young people to explore themselves.

<https://wf-i-can.co.uk/>

### **The Mix**

A mental health support charity for young people up to the age of 25 (not really for primary aged children). Lots of support and advice available for young people including apps, tools and 1-2-1 live chat.

[www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

### **Mind**

Mental health charity for adults and young people, specific information and support available relating to corona virus.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

### **ESCAYP**

Offer counselling and therapeutic play to children and young people in west Yorkshire including Wakefield.

<https://www.escayp.org.uk/>

### **Action for Children**

lots of links to agencies dealing with a range of health and wellbeing as well as apps to support good mental health & mindfulness for both adults and children.

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/children-s-mental-health/how-can-you-help-with-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health/mental-health-resources-and-information/>

### **Time to Change**

A wealth of resources for teachers, students and school leaders in starting conversations around mental health. Specific tips to support someone through the corona virus. Has personal stories from young people covering the importance of good mental health.

<https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/schools>

**Place2be**

Place2be is a mental health charity that supports schools and offers a range of support services. They have numerous resources including activities and toolkits to help children understand and promote good mental health. Specific support around corona virus.

<https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-for-schools/mental-health-resources-for-schools/>