

## The 'New Normal' - meeting the Social and emotional needs of our children

Every child will have had their own individual experience of lockdown. It is important to recognise that for some children, going back to school will be a welcome return. However, for many children this will also be a time of anxiety. All staff, children and families have experienced the impact of COVID 19 on their lives, but not everyone will respond in the same way. It is important to recognise that for some children, going back to their early years setting will be a welcome return. However, for many children this will also be a time of anxiety.

It could well be overwhelming and frightening to be amongst groups of children and adults again given the concentrated time spent in the home environment during lockdown. Children will have become used to being isolated with their parents/carers and immediate family for an extended period. Suddenly separating from this will be a potential source of anxiety for young children.

### Top tips for meeting the social and emotional needs of our children

#### **1. Meet the child and family where they are now and not where you 'think' they need to be**

It will be important to respond to what children have learnt, not what we expect them to have learnt – and also to what they may have forgotten. Be prepared to pare down on routines and activities and revisit certain ways of working within the setting.

Some of the potential impact of the COVID 19 crisis and lockdown on children may include:

**Developmental impact** - Both positive and negative impact will be evident as children will have learnt some new skills to demonstrate, but they may need some support to develop others.

**Social impact of lack of interaction** - Children will have experienced a lack of interaction with a wider network. Some may need time to readjust to working alongside other children, whilst others may need support to deal with separation anxiety as they leave their parents for the first time in a while.

**Changes of routine and environment** - Children and families may have established different routines during the lockdown period so they may have been differing bed times or eating patterns. Increased usage of tablet or electronic devices or more time outside. Think about how these changes may affect the children and how you can support to establish new routines.

A strong focus on the EYFS prime areas would be an advisable allowing you to re-build connections and relationships with the children and their families. Consider how best to gather this information, take time to listen and respond to the need. Useful tool such as wellbeing surveys and Leuven Scales would help to navigate the feelings of your children and families.

Think about how routines and activities can be altered to meet the 'new' needs of the children, what are the priorities for them and how can your setting support them?

#### **2. Build on what's been going well for children and families**

We cannot change what has happened, but with an asset focus, we can help children and families to recognise, share and celebrate what has been going well for the child and what they have achieved;

e.g. Johnny may have not learnt to write his name during the time away from nursery but he can now ride his bike without stabilisers. Using this information and building it into conversations with children and families will help to reconnect. These conversations will also support a strong sense of self-worth and belonging for the child encouraging them to believe that *'what I say here is valued and my teachers are interested in me and I have a place here'*.

Think about how this information could be gathered - Have your families been contributing to an online learning journey? Or sending in photos, emails or messages about what they have been doing? How can you use this to support the children's return to the setting?

### **3. Be reliable and honest in your communications**

It is important to ensure that the information that you are sharing with staff, families and children lets them know what they need to know to stay safe and informed about the guidance and procedures.

Having communication presented in a variety of ways and different resources will help to ensure that your guidance and procedure messages are clear to all. The repetition of the communication in various formats will also help everyone to become familiar with different or altered routines and ways of working.

Think about how different media can be used - Sharing messages via text messaging, emails, short videos, photos. Producing social stories or posters to offer additional visual reminders and cues which can be very helpful for some children with EAL or SEND.

It is also important to have communication to show that you know about the children and that they belong. This personal touch can be easily overlooked when there are lots of restrictions, but as early years practitioners we cannot overlook the power of warmth, compassion and valuing a child centred approach. Children who feel safe, valued and have a strong sense of belonging, will be confident explorers. Our time is worth investing in their emotional development.

Think about how you could use any photos, conversations or shared comments from families to provide opportunities to chat and share.

