# Going back to school

How to support students returning to school after Coronavirus

This leaflet is aimed at teachers of students going back to key stage 2&3

The idea of returning to school post-lockdown may be an anxious thought for students, parents and teachers. All students will have had different experiences during the lockdown, some may have been bereaved, some students may have had direct experiences of the rise in domestic violence recorded over this period, some may have felt the pressure of staying inside in a small flat with no outside space. On the other hand, many positive aspects of the lockdown have been reported, and students may have thrived with more time with their family and a less structured approach to learning.

Teachers have been hugely valued over lockdown period, with parents and communities praising the efforts of online learning, excellent resources and personal phone calls. The return to school life may look different to what we have known, and this leaflet includes some issues to consider as lockdown ends.

Emotional wellbeing
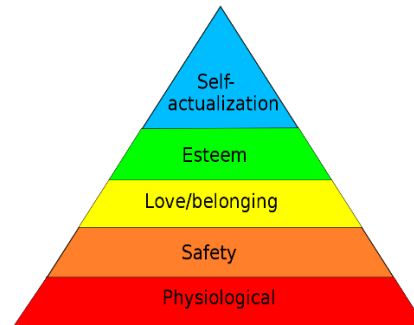
Maslow's (1943) Heirarchy of Needs outlines that we all need our basic needs met, to feel safe, to feel we belong and to feel respected, before we are able to learn. It is useful to keep this in mind when students return to school.

Physiological needs

+ Ensuring that students have opportunities for food and drink is just one way to set up a nurturing return to school. Media reports indicate that a fifth of households with children have been unable to access enough food in the lockdown (as high as 30% of single parent families, and 46% of parents with a disabled child[*]).
+ Similarly, students may have got into a disturbed or unusual sleep pattern while

[*]https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/03/exclusive-fifth-of-uk-homes-children-hungry-lockdown

away from school and it may take them a while to adjust to the routine of the school day.

Safety

Feeling safe at school is something we will all be very aware of post-lockdown.

Anxiety about being close to other people may be high, and we need to be understanding towards students who might not want to work in groups or play closely with others. For a lot of students, particularly those with more chaotic home lives, school has provided a "secure base" which was predictable and safe, and it may take some time for some students to return to these feelings of security at school.

Remember that all behaviour is a communication and it will be important to try to respond sensitively to any emotional or challenging behaviours we see.

Belonging and esteem

As with all new starts, it will be important to re-establish the students' sense of belonging to the class and school community. Students will look to their teachers as role models for how manage the difficult and anxious feelings we all have.

+ give some time to think about what students may have gone through,

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through talking, writing, drawing or moving. Acknowledge tricky feelings.

- Look for signs of resilience and strengths that students have developed.
- Lunchtime clubs, designing art for the classroom, social skills games or activities that are fun and involve communication are good ways to build new bonds or reinforce friendships.

💡 ***Never underestimate the value that a positive comment from a teacher can have***

Learning

There is likely to be a huge variation in the types and amounts of learning that students have experienced over lockdown. Be mindful of the impact that this time away from school has had both psychologically and academically.

- Starting back to school with baseline assessments and tests straight away may add to the students' stress.
- Some students may have regressed in their learning, and it may be necessary to reinforce previously learnt skills. Make sure the basic 'building blocks' are secure, build confidence and **remind the students of their successes!**
- Focus where possible on learning through multi-sensory, active and positive experiences. Students will

engage when they are at ease and having fun.

- Be aware of any SEN needs that arise.

💡 ***Students will be able to learn once they feel comfortable and safe at school.***

Identifying when more help is needed

Students will adapt to the transition back to school in different ways, but some may have experienced trauma and need additional help to cope with this. It will be necessary to 'watchfully wait' to identify these. These may (or may not) include students who are: Bereaved; shielding due to an underlying health need; have existing mental health vulnerabilities; have experienced loss or trauma in the past; refugees; looked after children.
In these cases, it will be necessary to raise these students with the school's SENCo.

Be aware that students may make disclosures to trusted staff about things they have experienced in lockdown. Ensure you are aware with your school safeguarding policy.

Looking after yourself

This is a stressful time for everybody as we live though unprecedented and uncertain times. Take time for yourself to notice how you are feeling. Be kind to yourself!

Are there things you can do to help yourself? Make sure you are taking care of your own hierarchy of needs: eat well, take breaks and have a few breathing exercises to hand if needed, just as you would advise your students. Ask for support from your colleagues when you need it, and remember all the strengths you have built on that have got you this far. Check in with other staff, communicate, share your anxieties… but share positive experiences, cake and jokes too!

💡 ***Looking after your own wellbeing will enable you to support your students better***

Useful Websites
https://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/families/ewmh

https://www.epinsight.com/post/supporting-post-lockdown-education-using-the-6-principles-of-nurture

https://marymered.wordpress.com/2020/04/25/five-ways-to-harness-emotional-contagion-when-schools-reopen-a-reflection-inspired-by-chapter-7-of-boy-who-was-raised-as-a-dog/

Who can I talk to?
Contact your SENCO or Educational Psychologist for advice and support
edpsychology@octavopartnership.org