

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN YOUR PUPILS

A guide for school staff



In Aberdeen City, the COVID-19 response has led to education being delivered online for a total of 13 weeks, for the majority of learners. Through the period of lockdown and the phased reopening, many of our young people and their families will have endured heightened emotions and will be dealing with stress and financial worries due to the pandemic and resulting economic situation. Individual experiences over this time will vary, and research suggests that for around 80% of our young people, educators and families will have supported learning to stay on track (Hattie, 2020).

Many aspects of lockdown will have had positive impacts on children and young people; families enjoying spending more time together, increased outdoor activity, and individualised approaches to learning developed. However, it is hard to fully gauge how the unprecedented situation has impacted on the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Care should be taken by all staff to support young people on their return to school. The foundation of schools are relationships, and we must use our unique relationships with learners now to promote resilience and provide support.

Key things to consider when engaging with young people in the new school term:

EXPERIENCES:

HOME EXPERIENCES

- An unsettled, chaotic or unpredictable environment at home (domestic violence, parental alcohol or drug misuse, parental mental health).
- Poverty - financial pressures, access to healthy nutritious food, stigma of benefits.
- Young carers with limited relief from duties.
- Looked After Children - changes in support levels and patterns.
- Stress of 24/7 relationship in homes.
- Living with ASN siblings.
- Online activity increased, and more vulnerable to bullying, abuse and exploitation.



BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

- Death of family member or friends.
- Lack of usual mourning process – funerals and opportunity to say goodbye.
- Loss of normal routine and restricted access to family and friends.
- Death of George Floyd and the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement.
- Loss of 'normal' school experience – limited engagement, different experience of education e.g. Hubs.



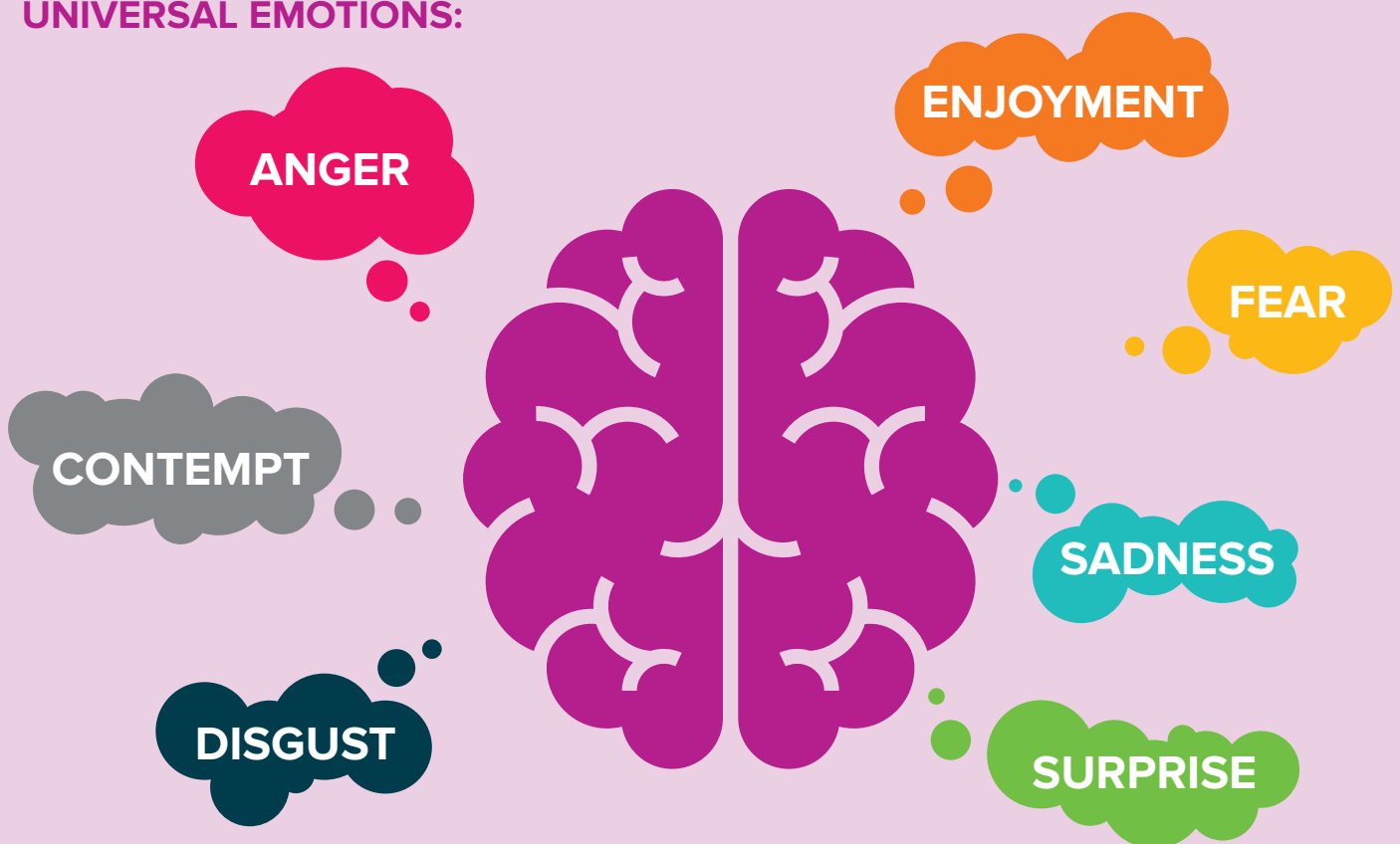
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSITION

- Concern about the school environment being so different and mixing with more people.
- Difficulty adhering to classroom conventions after long break from school setting (focus/attention/not enough sleep).
- Anxiety about returning to school - of being bullied or of leaving family.



All emotional experiences are okay, give children and young people time to explore their own and others' feelings.

UNIVERSAL EMOTIONS:



The lower brain and the limbic system are the areas of the brain where our emotions are received from the world around us and from our feelings and thoughts. These areas process our emotions and send messages to other parts of our brains which impacts on how we respond.

Things to keep in mind (6 Principles of Nurture):

- **Children's learning is understood developmentally**
– respond to individuals as they are, with non-judgemental and accepting attitudes. One size does not fit all.
- **The classroom/school offers a safe base**
– the day is structured by routines, with adults who are predictable and reliable. You are part of a team and a wider community.
- **Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem**
– listen to and respond to your young people. Engage in reciprocal shared activities (playing/talking about events or feelings). Relationships and connecting will take priority over learning initially.
- **Language is understood as a vital means of communication**
– informal opportunities for talking and sharing are just as important as more formal lessons.
- **All behaviour is communication**
– ask yourself what the young person may be trying to tell you with their behaviour. When feelings are understood, difficult situations can be diffused more easily.
- **Transitions are significant in the lives of children**
– changes in routine can be particularly difficult for vulnerable children but can be better managed through preparation and support. Capitalise on the closer communication between parents and school.

This short video highlights key thoughts around re-connecting with learners as they return to school:

<https://nipinthebud.org/information-films/tips-for-returning-to-school/>