Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust

For use by School,
Parents, Children and Young people

Post Covid Restrictions return to school - School Refusal Action Plan

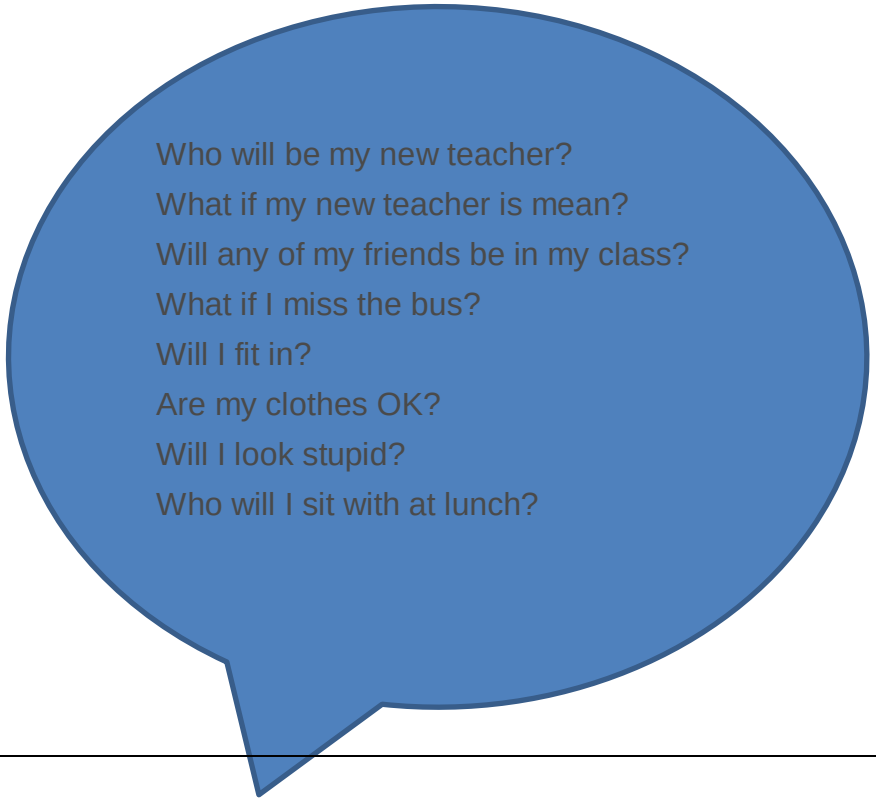
School Refusal is sometimes referred to as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This is when A Child/young person has great difficulty or fear of attending school. This is quite different to truancy. We know that often there are emotional reasons for school refusal, including difficulties with worry and anxiety.

Due to the worldwide pandemic, many have experienced months of school closures. Students have been at home and away from any educational setting for some time. As families prepare for the reopening of schools we may see:

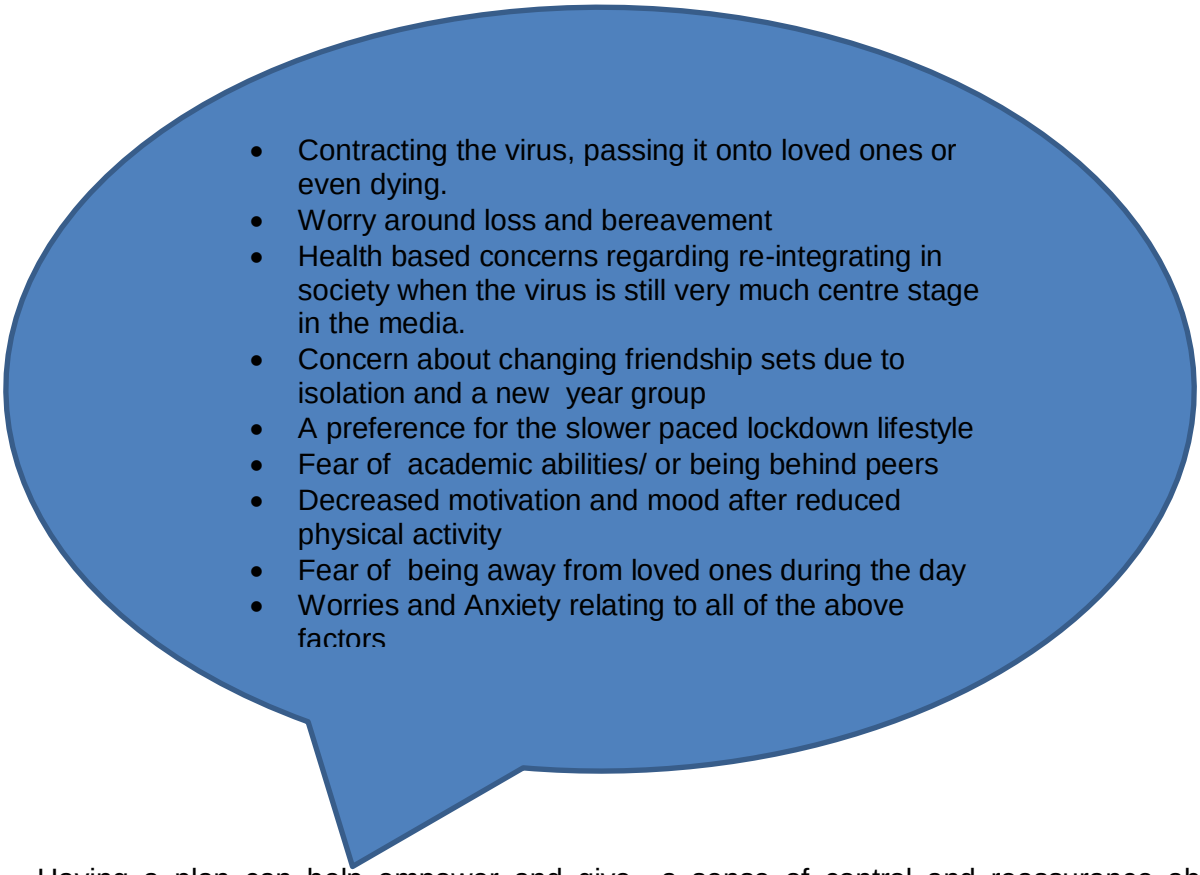
- some reoccurring avoidant behaviours in children who already displayed school refusal in the past
- New avoidant behaviours in children who previously have had no difficulties with attending school.

We do know that avoidance of school will only increase and reinforce your child's fears over the long-term, and make it increasingly more difficult to attend.

<u>Some common worries about returning to school after the summer break:</u>



Possible worries about returning to school post covid restrictions:



Having a plan can help empower and give a sense of control and reassurance about returning to school.

"School refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance" Thambirajah et al, (2008)

If your child is concerned about returning to school having a plan may help:
School Refusal Action Plan Tips:

Action Immediately	**2 weeks before term**	**Back to school**
Identify the positive aspects of school with your child for e.g.: good friends, favourite subjects. We refer to this as the "push" factors. Identify the challenging aspects of school with your child for e.g: worry about work being too challenging, or having no friends, we refer to this as the "pull" factors. This will be really	Agree what a first day back at school will look like with your school. School may have formed their own handout to help with this. Ask for clarification of any measures around covid: and explain how this will impact upon your child's school day and routine	Use your practised morning routine: allow extra time until this is an established routine. Aim for a calm household to help you and your child stay regulated.

helpful information to share with your child's school.		
Action Immediately	**2 weeks before term**	**Back to school**
Make contact with school: request support, inform them of your concerns. Let them know about the push and pull factors. Leave your email address or telephone number with school.	Plan a simplified and predictable routine: For example: waking up, eating breakfast, and going to bed at regular times to begin with. **Refer to routine planner handout: Visual/tick list**	Use a 2 way communication tool: diary or online school platform daily to establish regular contact with your named contact at school. Share concerns and celebrate progression.
Think about sleep routine now, readjusting back to a pre covid sleep pattern. **Refer to website for strategies:** https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-advice/common-sleep-scenarios/sleep-advice-for-children/	Identify a named person in school that your child can contact if they are feeling overwhelmed. For younger children. **Refer to: My back to school workbook**	Try to Redirect your child away from excess worry. The fun aspects may be getting overlooked by worries. Redirection can help when there is a cycle of worry. Attempt to reframe worries.**Refer to website for strategies:** https://learnykids.com/worksheets/reframing-negative-thought
Find out the names of the class teacher, teaching assistant, pastoral care or SENCO (special education needs coordinator) for future reference.	You could practice role play safely using situations your child is concerned about, giving them an opportunity to form a plan and feel more confident. Help them Label their emotions. **Refer to Emotional literacy cheat sheet**	Think about/plan your after school conversation. Rather than focus on what went wrong: Ask your child, "tell me about three things that were great today?".
Practice allocated, supported worry time daily, refer to the worry bucket tool resource. Encourage specified worry time to reduce generalised worry. **Refer to worry bucket handout**	Offer reassurance, be mindful of the need for excessive reassurance, use problem solving skills: **Refer to website for strategies:**https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ProblemSolvingWorksheet	If your child talks about concerns, try not to say "don't worry", Instead problem solve and plan. **Refer to website for strategies:**https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ProblemSolvingWorksheet
Model and Practice coping strategies at calm times, when mastered encourage use when you child is feeling worried/anxious: Use relaxation strategies, breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding techniques and a form calm down kit. **Refer to calm down kit handout and relaxation strategies listed in other resources.**	Consider sending your child to school with a transition object that reminds them of home. A reassuring note or object. Some children who experience worry about separation find this helpful; **Refer to PACE handout**	At drop off, separate from your child confidently and calmly, if they resist, model calm behaviour "I can see that going to school is making you scared, but you still have to go. Tell me what you are worried about, so we can talk about it".

School refusal action plan: Post Covid restrictions return to school)

Action Immediately	**2 weeks before term**	**Back to school**
Consider completing the dimensions tool for helpful strategies for any advice regarding any young person's non urgent mental health difficulties.  	Help your child understand how worry or anxiety can cause physical symptoms in our bodies. Worry can result in a child going home as they believe they are unwell. **Refer to website for helpful strategies:** Https://cwrise.com/anxiety Practise self-care/relaxation strategies to cope with the physical symptoms of worry Breathing exercise: **Refer to websites for relaxation strategies:**https://relaxreleaserenew.co.uk/exercises/breathing-exercises-part-1-blowing-candle/ https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/coronavirus-outbreak/resources/easy-at-home-relaxation-activities-to-help-calm-kids	Praise and reward your child for brave behaviour. This will increase resilience and self-esteem. Celebrate success.
If your child asks covid related questions answer them in an age appropriate manner: **Refer to website for strategies re covid:** https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting	Establish a safety plan with school in case things don't go to plan and your child is asking to go home. This will ensure you are both in agreement with the outcome. If focused on worrying thoughts at school: **Refer to the grounding handout**	Keep practising areas that challenge: Use role play of scenarios, For primary aged children: **Refer to website for strategies:** https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zhtcvk7/articles/znc9vk7
Tune into your own behaviours, how do you respond to news about the pandemic? Or things that worry you? how are your coping skills? Reach out for help around this. **Refer to website for strategies and advice:** https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/self-care-for-anxiety/	Agree strategies with school to ensure successful attendance: Strategies could include: Time to re-focus throughout the day. Talking to a trusted adult. Having a break time buddy. Spending a few minutes with a transition object or calm down kit	Request a review with school if things aren't going to plan. It is helpful to focus on: The Push, The Pull and problem solving.

If you are still have concerns about school refusal and possible mental health difficulties you can self-refer to the Primary Mental Health Team (PMHT) via Rise. We can offer a telephone consultation and provide advice and guidance. If needed we can refer onto more appropriate services within RISE.

For immediate helpful strategies please complete the dimensions tool: https://cwrise.com/dimensions-tool

To book a PMHT consultation call:

If the child or young person lives in Warwickshire call: **07917504682** or email: https://risecommunityoffer@covwarkpt.nhs.uk

If the child or young person lives in Coventry call: **02476 961476**

Helpful Rise Resources to refer to:

- My back to school booklet (early years)
- Routine planner
- Worry/stress bucket
- Emotional literacy cheat sheet
- Calm down kit
- Grounding activity
- Rise CWPT website for an overview of our services/ support and advice: https://cwrise.com/
- Rise have a wide range of online resources for children and young people specifically around covid-19: https://cwrise.com/resources-for-children-and-young-people-covid-19
- Rise video resource re bereavement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nlYkfdb16E
- The Rise dimensions tool, a web based app to support the well-being of children and young people: https://cwrise.com/dimensions-tool

Helpful strategies/advice from other sources:

- Fight/Flight: physical responses to anxiety and perceived threat: https://www.psychologytools.com/resource/fight-or-flight-response/
- Problem solving tools :https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/ProblemSolvingWorksheet
- Candle Breathing exercise: https://relaxreleaserenew.co.uk/exercises/breathing-exercises-part-1-blowing-candle/
- Relaxation strategies, Progressive muscle relaxation: https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/coronavirus-outbreak/resources/easy-at-home-relaxation-activities-to-help-calm-kids
- Advice re mental health, returning to school and coronavirus: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown
- Parent information: https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis

- Parental advice relating to parenting and corona virus: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/healthy-parenting
- Advice for carers concerned about corona virus: https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19

Helpful strategies/advice from other sources:

- Preparing for my first day at school: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zhtcvk7/articles/znc9vk7
- Sleep Hygiene: ://https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/advice-support/sleep-advice/common-sleep-scenarios/sleep-advice-for-children/
- Reframing your thoughts: https://learnykids.com/worksheets/reframing-negative-thoughts
- School refusal advice: https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-school-anxiety-and-refusal/

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RISE

My back to school booklet



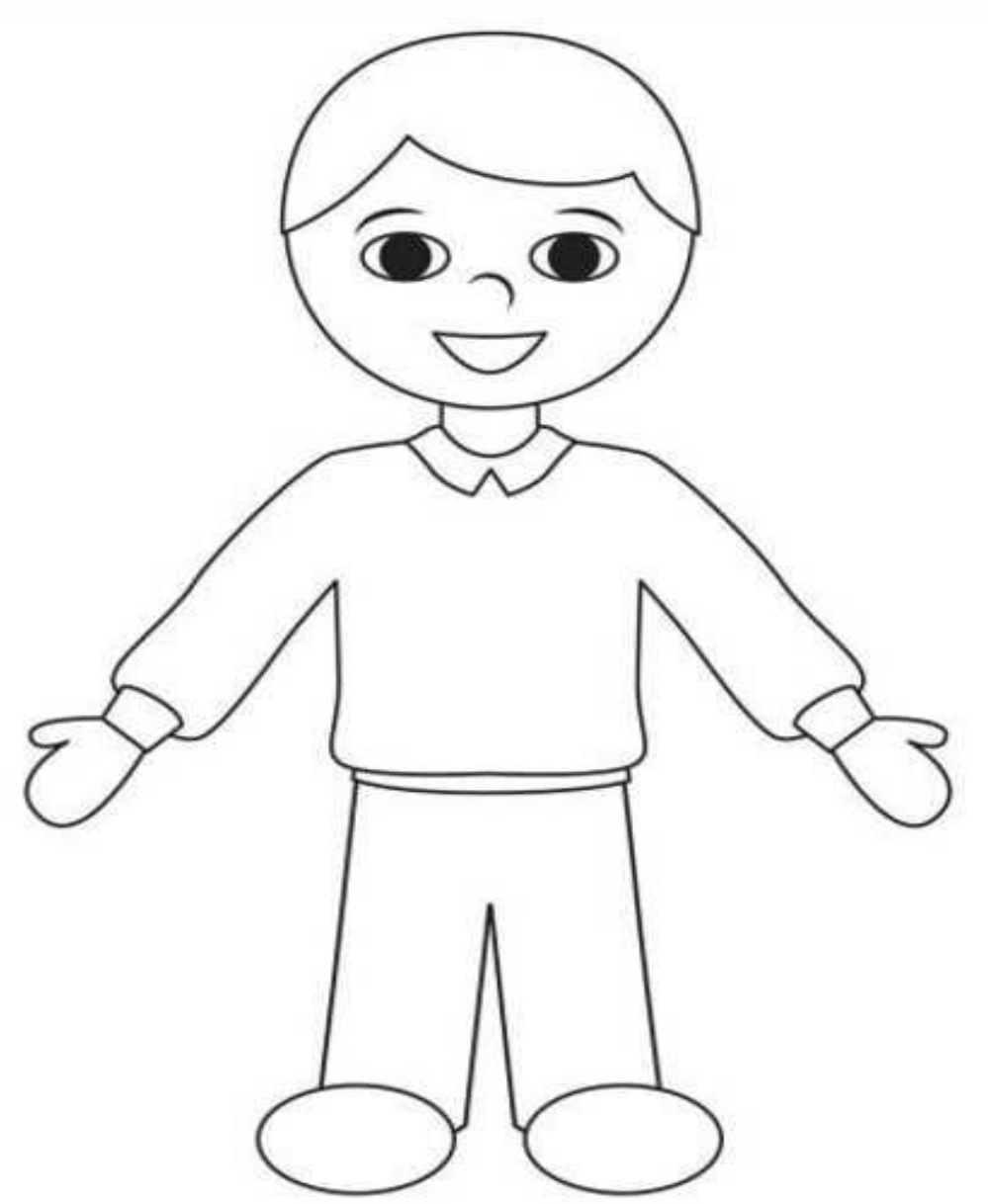
(Draw or print a picture
of your school)



This is a picture of my school

I go to.....

My School uniform looks like this...



(Colour me in to look like your uniform)



When I am at school my favourite things to do are...

-
-
-
-



My friends at school are...

.....

.....

.....

Here is a picture I have drawn of me and my friends

I get to school by...

.....

On my journey to school I see...

(Think of things you always go past on your way to and from school)

-
-
-
-





When I go back to school my teacher will be...

.....

If I feel worried at school I can to talk to...

.....

In the classroom I will sit at the

..... Of the class.

I sit next to...../ I have my own table.

<u>On my table there is...</u>

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(Think of any other children who sit at your table or around your table. What else is normally out on your table? Are there any books, pencils or pictures?)



At the end of the day.....
collects me from school.

I wait in the ..... until I am collected.

When I get back from school I like to...

-
-
-
-
-
-

What helps me to feel calm?...

(Do you already do anything or
have that helps you to feel calm?
Or is there anything you can do to
help you?)

.....

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Before I go to bed I can talk to.....
About my first day back at school.

(Think about what you did, what was your favourite thing, who did you see?)

Before my next day at school I can look back through my booklet to remember what I see on my way to school, my favourite things to do at school, and who I see when I'm there.



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Daily tick list planner Ideas

AM: Wake up at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F
Out of bed					
Make my bed					
Toilet break					
Have my breakfast					
Teeth brush/wash					
Get dressed					
Check my bag					

PM: Go to bed at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F
Give letters to parents					
Eat dinner					
Complete homework					
Bath/shower					
Teeth brush					
Prepare my bag					
Prepare my uniform					
Relax					
Lights out/bed					

Blank daily tick list planner

AM: Wake at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F

PM: Go to bed at:

Action	M	T	W	T	F

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Emotional literacy cheat sheet

You can help your child develop emotional literacy by identifying and labelling their emotions as you see them. A child who has developed emotional language skills will be able to tell you how they feel which encourages emotional regulation.

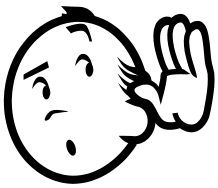
Below is a prompt/cheat to practice with: helping your Child with emotional communication

Feelings/ words to describe Emotions	**Examples: Identify the emotion by labelling it**
worried frustrated calm proud pleased helpful confident patient excited sad happy confident embarrassed interested angry/mad curious caring forgiving jealous	"I wonder if you are **worried"** "you look so **proud** of your finished homework" "you were so **patient** when you tied your show lace, it's tricky, you must feel **pleased** with how **patient** you were" "You looked so **confident** building that huge castle on mine craft" "You looked like you were having so much **fun** in the playground, your friends looked like they were really enjoying spending time with you" " Iam **proud** of you for **sharing**" you are a great friend".
Think of you own words	***Think of your own examples***

Grounding techniques to help take the focus away from worry



What can I see NOW?



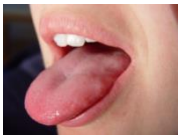
What can I hear NOW?



What can I smell NOW?



What can I touch NOW?



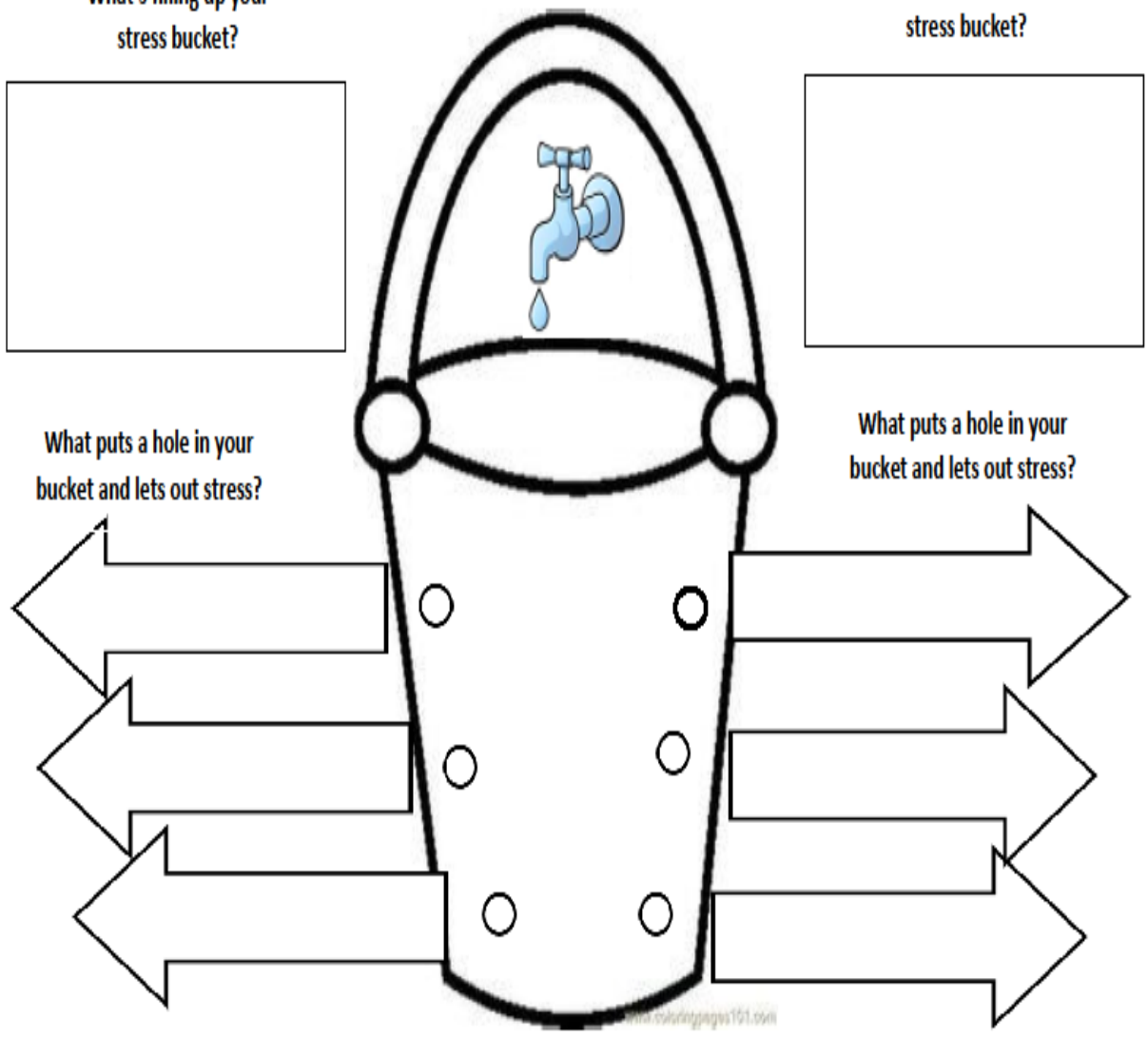
What can I taste NOW?

RISE

What's in your stress bucket?

What's filling up your stress bucket?

What's filling up your stress bucket?



What puts a hole in your bucket and lets out stress?

What puts a hole in your bucket and lets out stress?

Making a Calm Down Box

A Calm Down box is a tool kit that you create to help your child calm down when they are upset, anxious or worried.

In order to get the most benefit from this, you should create this kit together with your child, when they are in a calm state and can engage with the activity

When your child is experiencing anxiety they can pick out a tool from their Calm Down Box to try and eventually they will learn to manage their anxieties and worries independently!



Items in the Calm Down Box should be anything that provides a sense of calm and relaxation to your child! When they use the item, they are distracting themselves from what is making them anxious and telling their bodies they are safe!



The PACE model is an approach developed by Clinical Psychologist Dr Dan Hughes

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe, both physically and emotionally. It is based upon how parents and carers connect with their very young infants.

With PACE, the child can start to reflect on their behaviour and feelings about themselves. It supports them in learning to trust the adults around them and express themselves emotionally.



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P = Playfulness

There are two elements to Playfulness:

- Engaging in effective play
- Developing a playful attitude



KEY POINTS

- Play has a calming effect on the brain – It releases Oxytocin – The antidote to Cortisol— The STRESS hormone
- It helps to build positive relationships– A sense of connection through shared enjoyment of a positive experience
- It can aid communication
- The child can develop their social and emotional skills e.g. taking turns, managing disappointment.

Effective Play in Practice...

Don't get distracted – put that phone on Silent!	Make eye contact, return smiles, show enjoyment	Consider what play activities the child enjoys
Protect this time, ensure it is regular	Get side by side and down to the child's level	Join in – Follow the play, lead when the child is stuck

A Playful Attitude is...

Trying to distract from escalating behaviour...



CHILD: "I Hate You"

ADULT: "Well, I love you. Where's your love gone? Is it behind your ear? Let's take a look!"

Attempting to share fun experiences and laughter together, sending the message to the child that....



We have fun together

Helping the child to experience themselves as fun in relation to others, trying to shift their view of themselves and to improve their self-esteem...



I am fun to be with

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A = Acceptance



Unconditional acceptance is at the core of a person's sense of psychological safety

The adult should **actively communicate** their acceptance of the child's feelings → This means distinguishing the child's behaviour from the feeling → The behaviour *is* criticised, but the child ***is not.*** This reduces the impact of shame

Acceptance in Practice…

- Children will often test us to see how strong we are. Stay calm during these times, don't let the child push you away.
- When there has been an upset or tantrum it is important to put things right again with the relationship and move on. Have cuddles, let the child know they are still loved.

C = Curiosity

- Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it to the adult.
- Children often know that their behaviour was not appropriate. They often do not know why they did it or are reluctant to tell adults why.
- With curiosity the adults are conveying their intention to simply understand *why* and to help the child with understanding. This involves a quiet, accepting tone that conveys a simple desire to understand the child.

TOP TIPS

- The adult's role is to **play detective**
- Children show us how they are feeling in their behaviour. Your job is to work out what's going on
- Make guesses about what you think the child is feeling & name these out loud
- Don't always expect a response
- Sometimes children aren't ready to hear their feelings named. That's OK – Try again when they're feeling calmer
- Alternatively you could talk to a teddy, to yourself, even to a wall - This adds an element of playfulness

Wondering Aloud..

Narrating

Naming Feelings

E = Empathy

Empathy is about letting the child know that if you were in their shoes, you would be feeling just the same.

This is not the same as agreeing with their behaviour.

For EXAMPLE...

"I can see you are feeling really angry about that. I would feel angry too if I really wanted to keep playing and someone asked me to do something I didn't want to do."



This can be difficult at times – You want to make things better as soon as possible. But it's not always about having all the answers, it's about being with the child in that moment and sharing that feeling.

Behaviour Management

When managing difficult behaviour and putting consequences in place, the following strategies may be useful:

PACE

- Consider the **PACE model.** Displaying Empathy before setting a consequence can help calm the child.
- Time In rather than Time Out—Looking for solutions together that promote Acceptance. Short, repetitive tasks can help the child regulate and calm down. Time out may amplify the child's feelings of shame and guilt.

We recognise that Time Out can be a useful tool to help children reflect on their behaviour, and provides brief time away for children to cool down.
However there are important factors to consider in order to make Time Out successful, such as the environment, the length of the time out and how it is approached by the parent / carer. If you require further advice around this, please contact the Primary Mental Health Team.

Positive Positive, Positive...!!

Identifying & offering praise or rewards for positive behaviour, no matter how small. This doesn't always have to include large rewards and can be as simple as:

Giving a high five, offering praise, giving a hug or pat on the back, giving a thumbs-up, clapping and cheering...

Reward Charts



Using reward charts helps to emphasise the positive in a visual way. Try not to put negative marks on the chart or take rewards away that have already been given — This can encourage feelings of shame.

References:

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