



SUPPORTING CHILDREN STARTING SCHOOL IN THE EYFS WITH THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The Early Years Childcare and Inclusion Service recognise there will be groups of children for whom the impact of the coronavirus pandemic has created serious levels of concern. Every child and family will react differently. For some pupils, lockdown will have brought experiences which may have had a positive impact on their mental well-being. For example, some children and young people may have enjoyed having more time and sharing new experiences with family.

However, the pandemic will have affected mental well-being in various negative ways. As well as the short-term impact, there may be long-term consequences for mental health. Possible negative impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the mental well-being of children and young people include:

- Loss: of seeing friends and family; of routines; of goals/milestones; of normal life and activities
- Friendships: lack of socialisation; missing friends; loss of social rewards
- Anxiety, fear and confusion: confusion about new rules; anxiety about illness and hygiene: setting and school closures and irregular attendance
- Disrupted sleep patterns: causing loss of concentration and affecting mood
- Family experiences: abuse; conflict; stress; financial issues; coping with mental health issues of adults
- Bereavement and illness: coping with the illness or death of family, friends and loved ones

As children start school, they will be bringing their experience of coronavirus and lockdown with them but some of their anxieties and concerns may shift to focus on their new circumstances.

As they start school, children may struggle with:

- Fear, anxiety and uncertainty: for family and friends; going to school; spreading or catching the virus; being separated from their families again
- Transition: saying goodbye to their early years setting friends and trusted adults
- Self-regulation, concentration and engagement
- Relationships: changing and maintaining relationships with peers and adults.
- Adapting: to routines and boundaries of school, including school rules.

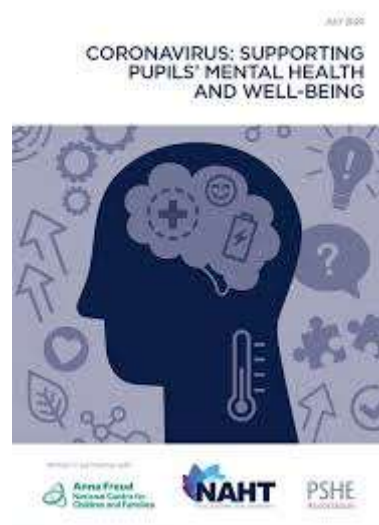
Teachers may notice unusual behaviours in their new EYFS class: children may be jumpy, volatile, hypervigilant or they may find it hard to settle. There will also be children who become withdrawn or who do not want to come to school. Other signs linked to anxiety about managing transitions include irritability, feeling overwhelmed, feelings of agitation or anger, not being able to regulate emotions, becoming easily tearful or a lack of concentration. It is important to remember that some children may have had limited previous experiences of being in a pre-school provision due to the pandemic.

This guidance aims to help school leaders and their staff, support children with their mental health and well-being in light of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, by outlining some universal approaches for all pupils but especially those starting school.

Here are some simple strategies to put into practice across your school:

- Create a sense of safety in school by providing structure, routine and enjoyable activities

- Support friendships and provide time and space for pupils to connect with each other and with school life
- Normalise uncertainty while also recognising and validating emotions
- Set an example of calmness, promoting calming activities through PE, art and music etc where possible
- Ensure academic needs are met but ensure expectations are realistic
- Support teachers and families with their own stresses and anxieties, which will in turn help pupils
- Be flexible and supportive when applying behaviour policies



To read in greater detail: <https://www.annafreud.org/media/12990/naht-coronavirus-wellbeing-proof-4-1.pdf>

The Early Years SEND Inclusion Team is on hand to offer advice, support and direct work with children that are struggling with their Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs. Please see below a slide that was recently shared, with more information about the role of the Inclusion Practitioner in supporting children pre-statutory school age.


Early Years Inclusion Team

- Inclusion Practitioners work with children who present with social, emotional and mental health needs
- This group of children are at a high risk of exclusion from their setting or school because of the extreme behaviours they may display
- Practitioners work with children until they are statutory school age

Focus of work is on:

- Modelling strategies and techniques alongside staff members
- Supporting dual placements
- Supporting transitions

Referrals can made by settings, schools or other professionals




Children and Family Services



If, as a school, there are children that are at risk of exclusion and you feel that additional support is required, please follow the below to access support from the Early Years Inclusion Practitioners:

- Primary Inclusion Forums – organised by Oakfield Short Stay school for unnamed advice and support.
 - oakfield@leics.gov.uk
 - <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools-colleges-and-academies/inclusion-forums>
- Early Years Duty Desk/Advice Line
 - 0116 3057136 (9am-4pm Monday-Friday)
 - EYSENISAdmin@leics.gov.uk
- For more information, please visit our website
 - <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/early-years/early-years-send-inclusion>