# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING - WHEN PUPILS RETURN SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

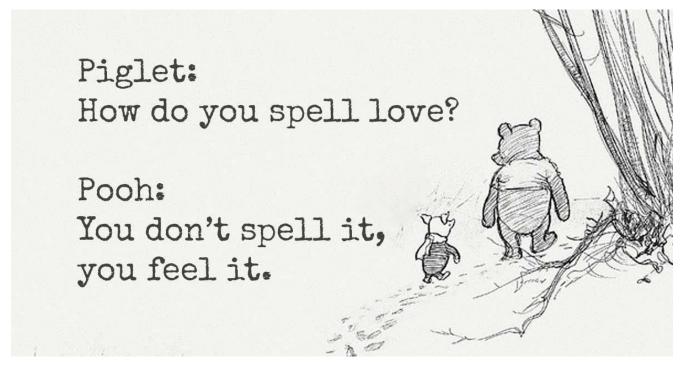
States of Guernsey Educational Psychology Service

This document was first produced by the Guernsey Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in May 2020 when schools and early years (EY) settings were planning to welcome back many pupils following the first lockdown in Guernsey. The document provides schools and EY providers with practical information to help meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of pupils and staff when shaping their plans for pupils returning to school/ EY Provision.

One of the most helpful approaches in uncertain times is to focus on what CAN be controlled at any one time. This will include considering different possible scenarios, in particular in order to adhere to any requirements made by the Public Health Team.

It may be tempting for early years and school leaders to focus primarily on the learning that children have missed and to feel worried about helping them to 'catch up'. However, to focus on the recovery of knowledge does not recognise the primary need for many pupils – that of the recovery from loss (of structure, routine, social interactions, freedom, opportunity, and possibly friendships and loved ones). With this loss may come associated anxiety, grief and trauma. This is not to pathologise the situation, nor to encourage EY providers and schools to believe that ALL children have suffered. Children will need schools and settings to check on their wellbeing (and that of staff) and have plans in place to meet these needs.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Leads in each school are familiar with using the 3Rs of **Relationships**, **Routines** and **Responses** to promote wellbeing within their school community. This document frames continued support around these 3Rs. Some may also find it helpful to use the 5 ways to wellbeing framework (CLANG) alongside the 3Rs. EY Providers should ensure effective supervisions are in place and remember the information around positive attachment and <u>Growth Mindset</u>.



# 1. RELATIONSHIPS

Investing in relationships will be one of the most therapeutic interventions a school can provide.

Some children and adults will return to school or settings having been affected by changes in relationships and a loss of connectedness. Some of the relationships that were previously thriving may require investment and restoration. Plans need to be made to make sure this happens, rather than assuming they will be restored naturally (although many will).

## A trauma informed approach

Taking an approach based on trauma informed frameworks and information related to how to support people who have experienced loss of some sort is going to be helpful. As a result of the pandemic, pupils (and adults) may have experienced loss which can result in people feeling more anxious and being affected much like they would after experiencing trauma or bereavement. It is important to acknowledge that these feelings are normal human responses to the situation. The positive relationships in school are themselves therapeutic so effort and energy spent in developing and maintaining positive relationships (staff, pupils, and parents/carers) will support the recovery. Use language to build connection and warmth such as, 'I missed how you make your friends laugh', 'When I saw this on television, I thought of you'.

See the resources/references section for infographics and further information on trauma informed approaches. The PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) model may also be of help.

#### 1.RELATIONSHIPS - KEY POINTS

- 1. Staff will need excellent **listening skills** in order for pupils, colleagues and families to feel heard and understood.
- 2. Pupils will need to feel that they can **trust** schools again as this is a key component of positive relationships.
- 3. Support the wellbeing of staff as well as pupils.
- 4. Re-stablish the relationship with parents/carers.
- 5. Monitor how children are feeling and have plans to respond appropriately.

### **Listening skills**

People will need to listen with empathy and show compassion — 'I know this is tough right now as so many things in school seem different'. A few years ago, all schools were given a copy of Nick Luxmoore's book 'Essential Listening Skills for Busy School Staff', an excellent resource for understanding why listening is so important and how best to do this in the school environment. Good listening is not about how much time you have. What matters is the quality of the time you give. This should already be at the heart of the approach and ethos for EY practitioners and strengthened in their curriculum and the role of the adult.

## **Trust**

Trust will need to be built again. Pupils may feel that they cannot trust that staff will be there in the future, that schools will always be there and they will not be asked to stay at home again. Somehow schools and EY providers need to demonstrate again that they are trustworthy.

Consider using stories from teachers about how they stayed connected to pupils, school, each other and how they continued to work, especially when much has not been visible to pupils. Teachers and pupils could share examples when they return, or even beforehand.

If staff can re-visit the aims and values of the school and make these explicit to the children through examples then they are more likely to trust that school is the place they remember and in which they felt safe before.

# **Staff Wellbeing**

Some staff may have found this time particularly difficult and may be quite anxious about returning. Their mental health may have suffered a lot more than under more 'normal' circumstances. Strong leadership will be required to address how best to approach this area of need.

Some things to consider: Are head teachers/ Leaders/ Managers aware of who the most vulnerable members of staff are/may be? Does an anonymous questionnaire (short and simple) need to be provided?

From the British Psychological Society's (BPS) guidance about supporting NHS staff the following may also need to be considered in schools/settings:

- How is everyone feeling BUT more than that...
- Have they had a chance to reflect on their jobs / roles?
- Do they want to do something different?
- Did they think about leaving teaching?
- Have they got ideas about how they might want their job / school to be better?

<u>Wellness Action Plans</u> for staff may be helpful and details of these are given in the resources section. Also included is a simple wellbeing check-up infographic from Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England. For EY Leaders/Managers you may want to consider back to work supervision to ensure you connect and are able to ascertain their needs and how you can best support them.

### **How are children feeling?**

Schools will need to know how children are feeling in order to inform the nature of relationship building and to plan appropriate responses. Use simple wellbeing questionnaires or a 'keeping well diary' (see resources). Adding the request, 'Name an adult in school who you trust and would talk to' is likely to be of benefit as well.

If schools do not already have them, then morning 'check ins' for vulnerable pupils as part of a daily routine, drop-ins and other wellbeing strategies for pupils (and families) are worth introducing. The virtual check-ins that have been established during lockdown should be maintained for any children not returning. Be creative in how to monitor how children are feeling, for example have a jar in the class and as children walk in they can indicate their mood using a particular coloured feather or other object to put into the jar. Alternatively pieces of paper could be provided for pupils to write their concerns on and a container (worry box) provided in which they can be collected. Make provision for children to be able to talk to trusted adults, within safe places.

Further work on feelings can be done through the curriculum, for example using current PSHE resources (this is expanded on in the section on responses). In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) the Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Characteristics of Effective Learning offer significant opportunities to support children. For young children, ensure you consider those times when children need to hold on to an object for comfort and support. Where possible agree with parents that this is an object that can be wiped. Ensure there is no time limit as to how long they need it and do not take it away.

As well as children who have been at home, be mindful of the children who have been attending school during lockdown. They may be wary of other children coming back to school for lots of reasons. For example, concerns about whether it safe to have them back, needing to readjust to having more children in the building, sharing the adults' attention between more pupils, and reconnecting with other children they may not have seen for some time.

# **Vulnerable pupils**

Many pupils who have been at particular risk will already have been identified by the school. Teachers have been in regular contact with these families and some pupils have been in school. However, schools and parents could still be supported to look out for more extreme reactions in children who may have been missed. Some children may have risk factors for more intense reactions that schools may not know about, including severe anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviors. Risk factors such as; SEND, pre-existing mental health problem, prior traumatic experience or abuse, family history of instability, or the loss of a loved one may make children more likely to need greater support and more investment dedicated to relationships within school. Some of our vulnerable children have moved EY Provision during the lockdown and may face a move back to their usual provider, with a further transition ahead as they move on to school in September. Schools, settings or parents/carers should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behaviour. Make staff and parents/carers aware of the following symptoms, and if they are present for more than 2 weeks advise them to contact a professional for help/advice.

Preschoolers—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behaviour, and withdrawal.

Primary school children—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.

Adolescents—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

## **Adults' anxieties**

It may be hard for some members of staff (and parents/carers) to conceal their own anxieties from children. These could be around concern for their own health or that of loved ones, concern about the learning that has not happened in school, worry about how far 'behind' children might be, financial worries etc. Children could unwittingly be absorbing the anxieties of adults. A high level of adult self-awareness is needed to help protect children from anxiety transmission. Open discussion amongst staff would be helpful so that they can help each other to see if this may be happening. Likewise, parent information, or a session for parents/carers (if possible) to cover some of the issues around this could be helpful.

# Parents/carers

Many adults at home may have struggled with the distance learning experience. Parents/carers are likely to value the re-establishing of the relationship between them and school that does not involve them being the 'teacher'. Get creative in thinking of ways to make them feel valued and connected to school again. Schools know their parent/carer community and will be best placed to judge how to approach this topic. It may be helpful to start this process before more pupils return, for example asking them to provide (in discussion with their child) pictures or comments about something positive that has happened for their child during their absence from school. These can then be collated on a display in school. Perhaps ask what they think will be most helpful for their child when they do return.

## **Mental Health First Aid**

Most schools have at least one member of staff trained in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). Ensure that all adults in school (and older pupils) are aware of who has had the MHFA training.

For EY Providers additional support from the States Early Years Team (SEYT) and partners such as Guernsey MIND can provide advice and support as needed.

# 2. ROUTINES

Re-establish routines in school to help everyone regain a sense of safety and to make it easier to learn and achieve

Parents/carers are encouraged to support their children in having some kind of routine whilst they are at home. Children feel safer when things are more predictable and a routine helps them to be calm and to attend to what is important. As Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence therefore is not an act, but a habit".

#### 2. ROUTINES - KEY POINTS

- 1. Identify the 'normal' routines that have been disrupted and which of these may cause greatest concern for pupils.
- 2. Identify which **new routines** will (or may) need to be established.
- 3. **Communicate clearly** what routines will be different and why (for example using social stories, scripts, visuals or send a video home).
- 4. Think carefully about transitions (eg for Pre-schoolers, Year 6s, Year 11s, Year 13s).
- 5. Support **personal routines** for staff and pupils such as aspects of self-care.

# Identify which 'normal' routines have been disrupted

Schools and EY Providers contribute a significant amount of routine and structure for young people. Not only in the day to day routines of classroom rules, timetables, assemblies and playtimes but also in many annual events and routines.

As well as the routine of attending a school/setting having been taken away, many of the familiar routines within schools/settings will have gone when pupils do return. For example, public exams being cancelled.

Identifying which routines will be different will help to plan what may de-rail pupils as they return.

Communicate what familiar routines **WILL** still be in place. Keep as many familiar routines as possible. Think carefully about this. For example, assuming that school uniform will continue as something familiar to pupils may not be the case for those who have grown out of their uniform or shoes and have not been able to replace it due to finances or opportunity. Will you need to review your uniform policy? Communicate to the whole school/setting/community what familiar routines will no longer be in place. Try do this before pupils return to allow for a period of adjustment to start as soon as possible. Consider sending home a video of any new classroom, entrance door or school/setting layouts so that they can 'rehearse' what it may look like when they arrive.

### **Create new routines**

An important part of planning will be around how to create new routines and how to make these familiar and predictable (as much as is possible). There may be new hygiene rules, 'bubble' rules, staggered playtimes, different ways to interact with teachers, etc. Helping pupils to understand WHY the rules have changed and that they may change again is worth the investment.

New rules and routines should be stated in a positive ('do') way, rather than negatively ('don't'). Use simple language, scripts or pictures. Social stories may be helpful for some pupils or even for the whole school/setting on a variety of topics. Keep them limited in number if possible. Staff need to ensure that they are consistent in their **responses** regarding new routines so as not to confuse pupils i.e. make sure everyone is sending and modelling the same message. If done well, new routines can help pupils to feel safe again, to trust the school/setting and to reduce hyper-vigilance in any particularly traumatised pupils. Think of using music, rhythm and visuals to establish the routines. You may need seating plans – make them visual. Make new things fun and memorable (remember the 'happy birthday' song when hand washing!). If possible offer choice to the pupils about a new task so as to provide some control and autonomy. In EY provision ensure there are opportunities for child led play to allow younger pupils to have control over activities. Try to keep toys as familiar as possible within the hygiene rules.

At some point it may be helpful to reassure pupils that it will be much easier than this time because they have practised the new routines during previous lockdown and will know what to expect.

### **Transitions**

Some pupils will be leaving at the end of this academic year. Some children will be arriving. In particular the new Reception children, Year 6s, Year 11s and Year 13s. Consideration of the transition opportunities for these pupils needs careful attention. Mark the transitions, including inviting leavers back to say goodbye in possible. Pre-schools and schools have already been given transition guidance by the Early Years Team.

Think about what you would normally do and decide what can still be done in the same way, what can be done differently and what cannot be done at all. Put your energies into what you CAN do, for example prepare and send information about pupils to receiving schools (especially for vulnerable pupils) and pupils could write 'All about me' information. Think of ideas to address how pupils can start to build relationships with their new schools and how parents can be involved in this transition phase. Perhaps a video tour of the new school could be provided with heads of year or form tutors introducing themselves.

Also consider how to support changes in other transitions such as staff leaving, staggered starts to help children adjust to new ways and other transitions that happen within a school/setting such as moving between classrooms, between different teachers and entering / exiting the building.

## Personal routines

Pupils and staff could consider how to (re-) establish healthy life habits. Addressing areas of self-care such as sleep, exercise, drinking water, eating well, doing something for yourself and meditation will be helpful. Establish routines that enable people to attend to positive relationships, discussing concerns and seeking help. The 5 ways to wellbeing (CLANG) framework has been shared extensively whilst schools have not been fully open. This can continue to be used in helping to establish healthy daily routines and habits for staff and pupils.

The EPS can provide further information on all of these if required.

Aim for clarity and consistency in your responses to welcoming pupils back into school.

# 3. RESPONSES

# Clear and consistent responses foster trust and feelings of safety

#### 3. RESPONSES - KEY POINTS

- 1. Find out about the **different kinds of learning** that have happened since schools/ EY Providers closed to most pupils and plan how to respond to what you may find.
- 2. Ascertain **how pupils have understood** the lockdown situation and respond to this sensitively, correcting any misconceptions.
- 3. **Be flexible** in the delivery of the curriculum ensuring enough time for **play.**
- 4. A change of routines may require a **change in responses**, for example using an alternative to whole school assemblies for communicating whole school/setting messages.
- 5. Give careful consideration to **attendance** issues and how to respond to pupils who struggle to return.

## Learning has been different

Schools/settings may find it helpful to respond to the fact that much learning has taken place in the community, in homes and over distance learning for a significant period of time. Think of ways to find out and listen to what has happened whilst pupils have been away from a school/setting. If possible, find this out from pupils and parents/carers before they return. Ask questions such as:

In what different ways have children learned? What has been positive for them? What has been the greatest challenge? What did they enjoy most? What new things did they learn while they were away? Celebrate children's efforts as well as achievements. It may also be helpful to ascertain from pupils what they may be feeling about returning to school/setting in order to aid the development of any other helpful responses.

Once back in a school/setting, explore this in more depth to help tailor any additional responses that may be required. For example, what did lockdown mean to them? Suggest they think about things other than learning, such as what big changes happened in their lives while they were away (eg new baby, someone came home from being far away, new pet etc). What did they miss most? Which people they missed most and why and what different ways did they find to keep in touch with people while they were away? They could show their thoughts and answers in any way they want, for example draw a picture, write a postcard to someone explaining this, write a story, produce a video or a blog, use lego or other construction materials. Care needs to be taken if pupils disclose very sensitive information or things of which staff are not already aware. Reference should be made to relevant guidance and policies such as those around safeguarding or bereavement and loss.

# <u>Play</u>

Children will need more time to play. For many children access to this vital contributor to development and wellbeing will have been much reduced during lockdown. The importance of play, exercise and fun in outdoor learning as a means of promoting the mental health and wellbeing of our children, young people, parents and staff cannot be overestimated. Opportunities to have joyful experiences and to

gain control over something through play without worrying or talking about the coronavirus or what has happened is hugely important. Further information is given in the resources section.

### Curriculum

Many pupils will feel that they have lost time in learning. Some (staff and parents as well) may worry about this. Give reassurance that it is the job of the teacher to address any gaps and that there is no need to worry. Schools will need to work out how to ensure that those most disadvantaged are given the help they need. Avoid the pressure of implementing formal testing or assessments as pupils will need time to adjust to being back in school and new routines. Children cannot learn effectively when they are struggling emotionally so focus on wellbeing first and foremost.

Distance learning may also have resulted in a sense of loss which needs to be healed. Communicate to parents how school are addressing certain issues, for example those in Key Stages 4 and 5 who are in the middle of examination courses.

The PSHE Association have produced lessons for teaching about MHWB for pupils of all ages in school and these were circulated to all PSHE leads by Amanda Evans in May 2020. These may be useful for an explicit focus on MHWB. Alternatively, aspects of the schools' own SEAL or PSHE curriculum that focus on wellbeing and emotions in particular could be used when pupils return. Part of keeping a familiar routine may be to keep timetables as they were. However, what you deliver in certain lessons could be tailored more at meeting the MHWB needs of pupils, for example covering discussion about feelings in literacy/English work. Get creative and respond flexibly. The timetable may actually need to look very different in order to meet the needs of play and wellbeing. The EYFS supports this approach in focusing on the Prime areas and Characteristic of Effective Learning. Further information about this from Professor Dr Ferre Laevers can be found here.

# **Attendance**

Some year groups or groups of pupils may not be allowed to return immediately and schools need to be prepared for some children, parents and staff being too anxious to accept a return to school. Some people may be shielding and some may be experiencing considerable mental health issues which may impact on their attendance. Consider carefully the response to these individuals and follow any SoG (such as HR, or Education Services) guidance. The School Attendance Service (SAS) can also offer advice and support. EY Providers will continue to work with the SEYT for support and guidance.

## Check pupils' understanding

Check pupils' understanding of what has happened, eg why they have not been able to see their friends or extended family and correct any misconceptions. There are many resources available regarding how to talk to children about the coronavirus. These can be provided if necessary.

Children may be confused about being told it is now safe to return to school/settings when previously it was not. New explanations will be required and reassurance given.

You may find the following ideas helpful:

- Show pictures of the people who have been in charge of the island and telling everyone how to make good choices during the pandemic.
- Recap on what the island's Leaders told us to do and the reasons for their giving the advice which they gave (slowing of transmission protection of self and others).

- Explain that some people are at greater risk of becoming very sick with the virus than others –
  and so had to take special precautions (give examples of people known to the pupils who had
  to do this).
- Acknowledge that it is a very sad time for some people because some people became very sick and died (eg Captain Sir Tom Moore).
- Other famous people also developed COVID-19 Greta Thunberg, Prince Charles, Boris Johnson, Tom Hanks, Pink.
- Share stories of pupils or their family members/friends who have done amazing things to help other people during the time away from school/setting.
- Friends and fellow islanders in Herm, Alderney and Sark have not recorded any cases but have been in lockdown to ensure they stayed safe too.
- EY Leaders/managers and their teams know their children well and can judge the level of support and detail to share that will support them in their understanding and recovery. Some suggestions above will certainly support their staff teams.

Explain what is different as we come out of lockdown, the changes Public Health have allowed and why it becomes safe to do more things.

There may be questions about why only some children are allowed back and why there are new routines etc. They may wonder whether these will change again. Be honest and age appropriate in explanations.

## **Assemblies**

In schools, assemblies are often used to communicate responses and explain routines to children. However, it may not be possible to hold whole school or year group assemblies due to 'bubble' restrictions. Be creative in sharing and communicating with the whole school. Perhaps pupils and staff can use videos to share information, experiences and ideas.

# **Resources/References**

In some instances it may be appropriate for the **Educational Psychologist** to provide some additional MHWB intervention for individuals or small groups. This should be discussed with the school's link EP. Your link EP can also provide further information and support around any of the points in this document. For EY Providers please contact SEYT or Ali Ring.

Some pupils and staff may require a more **specialist level of support** and in these instances the appropriate referrals should be made, such as to GPs, school nurses or CAMHS.

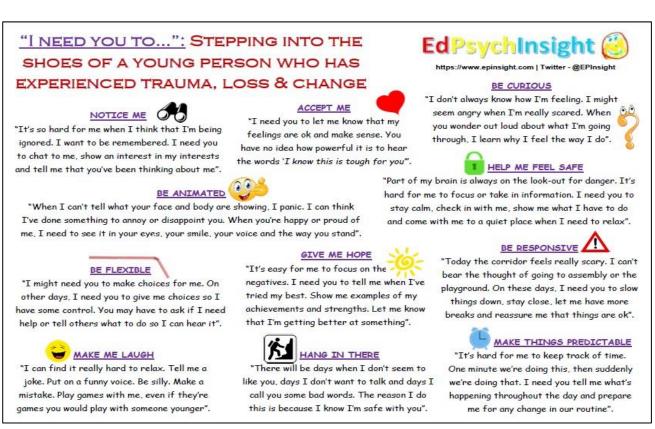
**The British Psychological Society** has released some guidance on supporting schools https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources

Book by **Nick Luxmoore** – <u>Essential Listening Skills for Busy School Staff</u> (5 short chapters. Perhaps spilt the chapters amongst staff and share their findings in a staff meeting)

Play (you may need to copy and paste link into your browser)

https://www.sussex.ac.uk/about/documents/play-first--supporting-childrens-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-during-and-after-lockdown.pdf

A trauma informed approach (share with staff and display prominently in the staffroom)



**Social stories** – <a href="https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2017/03/how-to-write-social-stories.html">https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2017/03/how-to-write-social-stories.html</a> <a href="https://www.ndcbrain.com/articles/SocialStories.pdf">https://www.ndcbrain.com/articles/SocialStories.pdf</a>

Please contact the EPS for further guidance on writing social stories or scripts should you need.

Schools/settings have had training on **Growth Mindset**. Further information can be provided by contacting the EPS.

5 ways to wellbeing (CLANG) https://www.gov.gg/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=103297&p=0

## Wellbeing check-up for staff

https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/campaigns/mhaw2018/Weekly%20Wellbeing%20Checkup.pdf



**Wellness Action Plans (WAPs) by MIND** for staff. These will need to be considered on an individual basis. This link takes you to the MIND page where you can get WAP guidelines for both managers and employees:

https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/

## Measuring children's wellbeing

Early Excellence – Leuven scales

Prof Dr Ferre Laevers - wellbeing and involvement links to learning

Research Centre for Experiential Education Leuven University (includes a wellbeing scale that some schools have already found useful)

Leuven Scale SIC manual

Stirling children's wellbeing scale 8-15 years

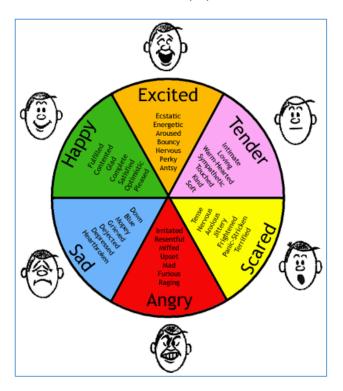
Warwick-Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale for ages 13 and over – need a license

**Keeping well diary** (for staff and pupils). For pupils add – 'Name an adult in school who you trust and would talk to?'

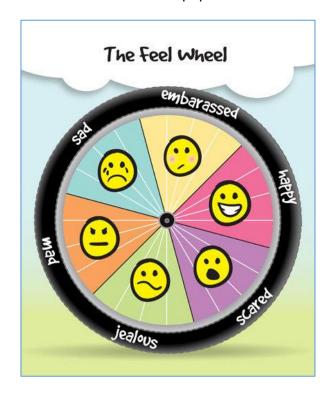
My Keeping Well Diary				
I am	No	A Little	Sometimes	Most of the time
Calm				
Нарру				
OK being away from Parent/Carer				
Sleeping peacefully				
Happy to come to school				
Able to think clearly				
Meeting my friends				
Doing the things I normally like to do				
Eating my breakfast, lunch and tea				
Trying to do 1 hour of exercise each day				

# **Feelings Wheels**

For Junior pupils



For Infant pupils



# **Helpful Articles**

Five ways to help children heal when schools re-open

Recovery Curriculum (Trauma informed)

School recovery through PACE

Ideas relating to the 3Rs

#### Wider Education Guidance and Policies

Guernsey Education's Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

http://bridge/teamsite/education/policies/Mental%20Health%20%20Wellbeing/2019.05.03%20v1.0 %20Positive%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Wellbeing.pdf

Handbook for Schools on Bereavement and Loss (Guernsey Education Services)

http://bridge/ layouts/OSSSearchResults.aspx?k=bereavement%20and%20loss&cs=This%20Site&u=http%3A%2F%2Fbridge

Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing; A whole school and college approach by Public Health England

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file /414908/Final\_EHWB\_draft\_20\_03\_15.pdf

Developing an Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policy (Guidance for Brighton and Hove School September 2018)

https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-

hove.gov.uk/files/Behaviour%20Regulation%20Policy%20Guidance%20-%20Sep%2018 1.pdf