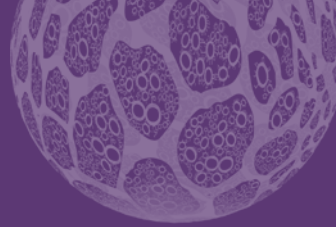




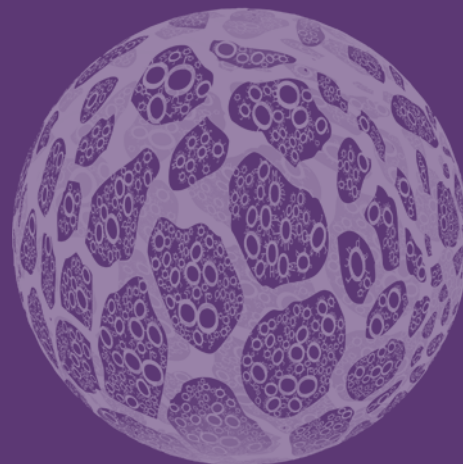
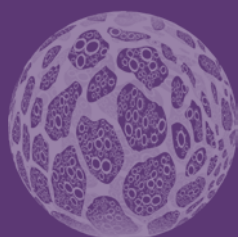
Building resilience within schools and the wider community in the Covid-19 situation.

Rochdale educational psychology service. In collaboration with schools, children and families.
May 2020



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Introduction:

Why do we need to consider resilience in the Covid-19 situation?

We need to assume that every individual will have been impacted by the Covid-19 situation in their own way. Normality, predictability and familiar, daily routines have been lost. Predictability makes us all feel safe, so in the current climate where changes and adjustments are constantly occurring many of us will have lost some sense of safety and security.

Human beings are fundamentally social creatures and we make sense of ourselves, our identity and how we fit into the world around us through observing and interacting with others. For many, loss of contact with friends, family and with key adults in school who are their key components to making them feel good about themselves will have been experienced as a significant loss. Some children will need to adjust to being around other children again.

For some, the feeling of loss of freedom will have been frustrating and even frightening. Where relationships are strained or harmful within a household, restricted movements and freedom is likely to have had a particularly devastating impact. Some will have experienced an overwhelming loss of hope. Our ability to plan ahead and look forward to fun, shared experiences which can give us something to strive for and keep us going when times are difficult, have been reduced.

There will also have been a loss of experiences that are vital to children's physical health and development as well as emotional health, such as a reduction in the range of physical activities and play experiences and also in the range of thinking and learning tasks that enable a feeling of success.

Many are likely to have been exposed to inescapable reporting in the media about the threat to life of the virus, to daily death tolls and may perceive the school environment to be dangerous. Many will also have observed the anxiety of the adults around them who usually do try to protect them from fear. Many will not have left the side of their primary caregivers and will initially struggle with this separation from their safe base.

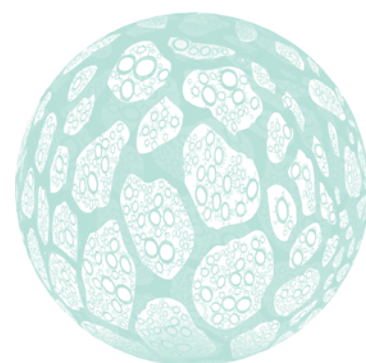
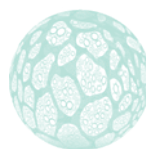
And sadly, some will have experienced loss through bereavement. Usually, when we experience loss, we can often find some comfort from our social networks and the 'normality' that continues around us and also from the sense of belonging and connectedness from being in school and work. Connectedness, normality, safety and belonging have not been available in the same way throughout lockdown and this is likely to have impacted on individuals' recovery from loss.

Therefore, first and foremost we need to assume that all our children (and staff) will return feeling some, but varying degrees of vulnerability and fragility. What we do know, however, is that schools re-connecting with their staff and students (either directly or indirectly), welcoming them back and providing some structure, routine, collaboration and familiarity (albeit likely in a different way) will go a long way to the recovery of all of our children.

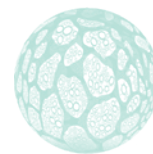
Lastly, when critical incidents occur, they can throw light on the world as it is. Some thinkers who study disasters frame crises not just in terms of what is lost but also what might be gained – seeing glimmers of possibility.

With every disaster, loss and gain always coexist. Schools are in a pivotal position to create opportunities to demonstrate the power of solidarity to build resilience, to reflect on the positives and instil hope, purpose and joy.

We hope that this guidance will give you things to think about and practical ideas for re-creating places of emotional safety, belonging, hope and connectedness.



What is resilience and what do we know about how to increase it?



Resilience in its simplest terms is the ability to bend rather than break when difficult things happen to us. Stressful experiences can shatter beliefs and goals, but resilience is the ability to re-appraise and look beyond a negative event. Resilience is best understood as a dynamic process and not as an individual fixed state or trait. When we feel safe and supported most of us can adapt and adjust to life in creative ways. We are able to move beyond recovery and life can even take on new meaning and focus.

Sources of resilience building in our schools include a positive climate, opportunities to experience regular success, fostering a sense of belonging and a positive relationship with at least one adult.

Staff wellbeing

Before we can help others, we need to help ourselves. Before we can make children feel safe again, we need to feel safe.

Many adults in the school community will also be experiencing a similar range of emotions and reactions as the children and young people. Experiences of bereavement and loss, concerns about family members, financial situations and other additional stressors will be on-going experiences for many.

Staff will first need time within their staffing teams to connect and feel safe again. They need to feel safe and comfortable to be able to share their own experiences, worries and concerns.

Schools have been reporting how they have strived to maintain connectedness with staff and how they are planning ways to come together before the pupils return to connect, listen, support and plan the way ahead together. Some schools have buddied staff up to ensure everyone has someone to open up to if/when they want to.

Schools report that staff feel safe when they know exactly what they are expected to do to minimise risk. As one head teacher shared, it is helpful to reassure staff that 'good enough is good enough' and that as leaders we are expecting staff's resilience to be depleted at the moment or at least to fluctuate at times.

The single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult.

Young Minds website has lots of resources, research and tools to use to develop school staff's understanding and developing the resilience of staff and pupils within school:

The remainder of this guidance gives more ideas about how we can build resilience for our staff and pupils in our school communities. Many of the ideas have come from schools, children and their families. They are set as a general guide but may need to be adjusted to meet the development age and underlying needs of individual children.

A culture where it is safe to say you are struggling will be essential.

As well as seeking out support from one another, we also need to take responsibility for our own wellbeing. We need to be alert to how we are feeling and communicate when we are struggling and make appropriate changes and decisions that are for the benefit of our own mental health. Suggestions for maintaining positive wellbeing:

- **Take time out to get sufficient rest and relaxation; eat regularly and healthily.**
- **Talk to people you trust and allow yourself to be comforted. You don't have to tell everyone everything, but not saying anything to anyone is often unhelpful.**
- **Reduce outside demands and avoid taking on additional responsibilities. Do tell someone when expected demands of work feel too much too soon.**
- **Spend time in a quiet place where you feel safe and calm to go over what's happened over the course of the day/week. Don't force yourself to do this if the feelings are too strong or intense at the time.**

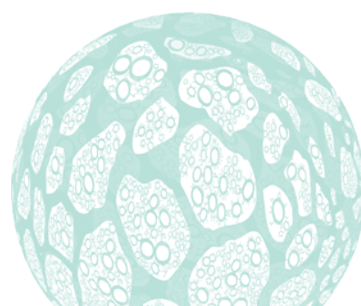
- Build in specific times in the school day to come together with colleagues and share experiences from your day. The staffroom can become a real sanctuary at times when things are feeling difficult, even if you just sit and listen. Listening to others will enable others to feel supported and in turn enable you to feel you have helped. Bringing in snacks and treats to share is an easy and consistent way of promoting connectedness.
- Try to reduce your access to the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Try scheduling 'digital power off' times.
- Use relaxation strategies e.g. slow breathing, exercise in the open air, yoga, mindfulness etc.
- Cultivate gratitude: each day record 3 things that went well, no matter how small e.g. the sun shone, I had a nice chat with my friend, a colleague offered to make me a cup of tea.
- Focus on savouring the smallest of positive experiences e.g. the feel of the sun on your face when you go outside, savouring the aroma and taste of every sip of your coffee.
- Remember you are normal and having normal reactions to a difficult situation. Don't label yourself (or others) crazy, bad, or weak.
- Reoccurring thoughts, dreams, nightmares etc. are normal at times of stress - don't try to fight them. They will decrease over time as your mind comes to terms with your experiences.
- Build in opportunities to plan ahead, even if these are 'tentative' plans at the moment. Having hope and promoting positive thoughts can do wonders for our mood.
- Allow yourself to have feelings of sadness and grief. It is absolutely ok for students to see you express emotions. We do not have to be seen as strong all of the time.

What can staff do to support each other: Psychological First Aid (PFA)

PFA refers to the actions that can be taken by people without formal psychological or counselling training to provide emotional support for people following an emergency or critical incident. PFA is about reducing distress, assisting with the current needs of colleagues and making sure that they are offered the support to allow them to function within their professional setting. It is not about revisiting traumatic experiences. The following may be useful for staff when providing support when a colleague presents with distress:

- **Listen with compassion and acknowledge the difficulty.**
- **Reflect the words of the person. Don't judge the statements a person makes.**
- **Ask simple questions to ascertain what help may be needed.**
- **Emphasise the support available.**
- **Keep the discussion based on what has happened. Help them to move away from thoughts and statements around; "What if..?" or "I should have..." statements. If your colleague takes this line, bring the talk back to real events.**

In some instances staff members may have an intense and lasting response and need professional psychological help. However, feeling listened to, understood and supported can do much to reduce or even remove the need for counselling. Follow-up should be at a level appropriate to the relationship between the person and helper. In some instances it may be as simple as asking "How are you now?"



Promoting a sense of calm

Safety and calm can begin with us welcoming our children back into school and communicating that we have missed them, we are looking forward to them returning and hearing about their experiences and also communicate some positive plans about what school will be like. Our smile, our calm voice and our greetings can go a long way to making children feel safe again.

For children and young people to feel as safe as possible, schools and classroom environments need to be high in both nurture and structure, and to be predictable and organised, with clearly stated, reasonable expectations. New ground rules, routines and boundaries can be discussed and agreed together to provide reassurance and to allow children and young people to negotiate their day with confidence. It would be useful to share some of the obvious changes with children before they return to school to prepare for the classroom and learning activities looking different to how it was before lockdown.

Tips and activities for promoting calmness within the classroom:

- Maintain normality to the usual daily routine. Routine enables predictability and creates a sense of control and safety.
- Reduce learning demands when children first return and build up demands very slowly, taking their lead to ascertain how much challenge to give. Confidence, safety and pleasure come from success. Let everyone succeed at something.
- Allow additional time for consolidation of learning before introducing new concepts.
- Alternate tasks that require higher order thinking and processing with lower demand 'safe' tasks that are more familiar, concrete and repetitive e.g. word searches, handwriting tasks, copying tasks etc.
- Provide calm spaces for children to access if they are struggling to access learning in order to reduce arousal levels. More children may require 'time out' sessions. Assume all challenging behaviour is due to children not being emotionally available for learning.
- Build in more opportunity for movement and the expenditure of energy. Children and young people who seem to be particularly anxious or on edge may find that a game that allows for more movement can be regulating for them.
- Use music to allow feel good hormones to be released and create a calm, positive environment.
- Build in more opportunities for activities being carried out outside. It is well researched that being outside and taking notice of the natural world can reduce arousal levels and promote a sense of calm.
- Some children and young people (and staff) come to school for normality. They don't want to have to talk or think about sad or frightening things that have happened and would rather have a normal school day of learning and play. Being sad and dealing with the emotions and consequences takes a lot of energy and head space. Not talking about what happened is absolutely ok and it is important to take our cues from the child or young person and for them to know there is no one right reaction.

Be prepared to expect to see more children in a dysregulated state: remember the link between emotions and behaviour .

Activity:

Carrying a positive sense of calm in the palm of your hand (kristinamarcelli.wordpress.com)

1. First have the child or young person trace their hand on a sheet of paper.
2. The person then thinks of a positive memory that would help them feel safe and calm to remember even in the midst of stressful and triggering situations.
3. Write each of the five senses (see, hear, taste, touch, smell) on each of the five fingers.
4. The child or adult with them will draw and / or write about the memory in the palm of the hand.
5. Encourage the individual to identify how the memory is experienced using each of the five senses on each finger and write or draw a picture for each.
6. Last but not least talk about how thinking of this memory can help the person feel a sense of safety and inner calmness despite outer life circumstances.

Promoting connectedness and a sense of belonging

Albert (2003) proposed 3 C's to creating a sense of belonging in schools:

- **Connect** - via daily greetings and allowing pupils to connect with others through cooperative learning.
- **Capable** - by providing opportunities that enable success.
- **Contribute** - providing opportunities to contribute to school life by performing duties/ tasks for staff and peers in order to feel valued and useful.

A feature of effective leadership is engaging pupils as active participants in their education and in making a positive contribution to their school and community' (Statutory guidance from the DfE, 2014)

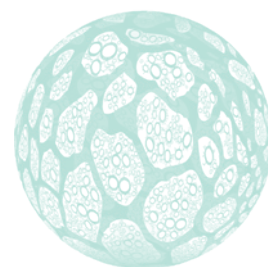
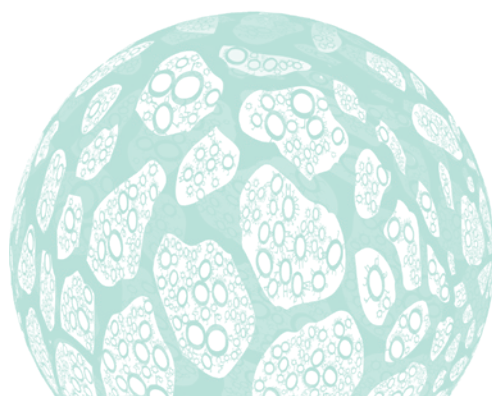
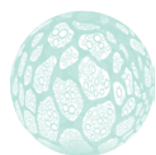
Participation builds resilience through:

- **Developing co-operation.**
- **Developing communication skills.**
- **Encouraging a sense of responsibility.**
- **Contributing to achievement and attainment.**
- **Increasing motivation and engagement with learning.**
- **Increasing confidence and self-respect.**

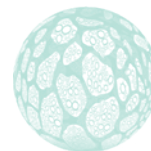
Collaborative art projects can bring out the best in each individual, creating masterpieces that are so much more than the sum of their art. Children will learn how to communicate and work together again, problem-solve, work through disagreements and also contribute to their school community. Art can create a 'safe' and indirect way for children to tell their stories of lockdown and to express their feelings.

Here are some ideas for collaborative art activities for children of any age:

1. Paint a 'river of kindness' using decorated stones/ rocks conveying acts of kindness.
2. Make a class set of wings to depict a certain concept such as peace, freedom, kindness with each student creating a paper feather. This could also be done in remembrance of a bereaved person.
3. Decide on a word that is meaningful to each group at the moment and create a canvas that decorates this word. Start by painting the word onto the canvas and let the children add the colours and patterns.
4. Create a class fish, each student decorates a paper plate as the fish scales.
5. Set up a class weaving station or an outdoor weaving wall.
6. Create a class mural in a street art style.
7. Design an **infographic** – to illustrate the different phases of lockdown and pupils' experiences to illustrate and celebrate connectedness and community (talk about positive symbols–rainbow, NHS logo etc.)
8. Design and make clay jigsaw pieces (representing connectedness) or collaborative jigsaw mural – each piece designed and decorated with photographic images, collage, paint, drawing etc.



Instilling hope and positive thinking



After a crisis situation that has completely felt out of our control, the world can suddenly feel like a frightening and unpredictable place. Some children may experience a loss of trust in the world and in adults; they may believe that because a terrifying thing has happened, they can no longer dare to hope that life can be happy and safe again.

Modelling optimism and encouraging them to see the strengths and coping skills they have and encouraging them to notice acts of courage and kindness will help develop a sense of personal efficacy and future. It is not uncommon for children and young people to have a less optimistic view of the future after events such as these. Reminding them of their strengths and providing opportunities for setting goals and achieving them will help them to take a positive view of their lives.

Remember optimism can be taught and it is contagious.

Participating in school community and wider community projects can give children a sense of purpose, contribution and connectedness which have been shown to increase resilience. Ideas for school and community projects:

- Plant seeds, sell the flowers or plants and donate the proceeds to a local charity.
- Plant produce and donate to a local food bank.
- Create a class video about acts of kindness.
- Make and deliver tasty treats for a local care home.
- Develop and maintain a recycling programme at school.
- Organise a collection of food, clothing and personal care items for the local shelter.
- Write letters to NHS staff or to the local care home.
- Establish a pen pal project for elderly residents in a local care home.

Ideas for activities that can promote positive thinking:

- Create a word art mosaic, a collective mime, class poem or video on the following discussion topics:
 - A challenge I have overcome....*
 - A new skill I have learned....*
 - What I hope for in the future....*
 - Things I have appreciated most about my family/friends....*
 - An act of kindness I have seen....*
- Storytelling – ‘Behind the door / through the window’. Make and decorate either a front door or a window, and record new personal experiences on the other side. Create a hanging installation or interactive wall display from all the doors and windows; talking about new openings and opportunities for the future.
- Make a road sign to display something that you feel is important and what to be discussed, or want people to know about (could be a drawing or words).
- Create a mural to demonstrate how different communities came together through this time. For example, #Viralkindness, COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK, Community Choirs, Clap for Carers, 5k for Heroes.
- ‘What colour is hope?’ Use creative activities to explore internal feelings and making them tangible, visual. What does anger look like? What colour is anxiety? What colour is hope? What does peaceful look like? How would you draw optimism?
- Use nature as a focus for artwork (it has been constant, reliable and strong throughout lockdown) e.g. Make a collaborative mural (or individual pieces) of something symbolic of the time with regards to nature e.g. mountain / waves (turbulence, riding things out) / a globe / map of the UK. Paint/draw pictures to illustrate the positive impact that lockdown has had on the environment / nature / plants / animals.

WORDLES can be helpful in allowing young people to explore the feelings and thoughts they are experiencing - using online tools, children can generate word clouds from the text that they input. The Wordle gives more prominence to words that appear more frequently in the inputted text.

Tree of Life (Adapted from the work of Ncazelo Ncube 2006.)

This narrative therapy exercise originated as a community project for helping children to cope with a difficult and stressful situation and move on with their life. Its aim is to highlight for children their existing strengths, encourage an alternative storyline to a 'problem saturated' narrative and increase a sense of connectedness with family and community.

This exercise can also be particularly useful when exploring issues of culture and diversity.

The exercise involves encouraging pupils to build a picture of their life through the representation of a tree. Encourage the child to build their tree from the ground up, talking along the way about each of the elements that make up their tree. You can use what you know about the child to help them (e.g. you may know that the child's grandmother was a very important person who taught the child how to stick up for themselves). This is normally carried out over several sessions, in groups, so that children can share their story and understand each other's and contribute to creating a tree together. Other children in the group may also be called upon e.g. to help name each other's qualities, skills and knowledge in 'the trunk'.

(The Educational Psychology Service can support with facilitating this therapeutic activity).

Using play to build resilience

A key finding from evidence is that children's play 'provides a primary behaviour for

developing resilience, thereby making a significant contribution to children's wellbeing. This evidence suggests that play contributes to developing resilience through a number of interrelated systems including:

- **Develop a sense of self sufficiency and independence.**
- **Feel that they have a sense of control in their world.**
- **Feel connected to others and their community.**
- **Experience a range of emotions including frustration, determination, achievement, disappointment and confidence, and through practice, can learn how to manage these feelings.**
- **Develop imagination and creativity.**
- **Make sense of and 'work through' difficult and distressing aspects of their lives.**
- **Socialise with their friends and negotiate with others on their own terms.**

Loose parts play creates richer environments for children to play, giving them the resources they need to extend their play. Loose parts aren't prescriptive and offer limitless possibilities including:

- **Natural resources – such as straw, mud, bark and pine cones**
- **Building materials – planks, hammers, buckets, tools, bricks**
- **Scrap materials – old tyres, off-cuts of guttering, tubing, pots**
- **Random found objects.** Many children are drawn to collections of random objects, particularly those that have been unexpectedly found: strings of Christmas beads wriggle beautifully, ribbon can be used for lots of things. Some objects have an archetypal weight that means they keep getting used to recreate fairy stories, ancient or contemporary myths.
- **Dressing Up -** can be adventurous, creative and hilarious and isn't just for small children. It allows children to explore who they are and how they look. Choose clothes and accessories of many different sizes, including grown-up stuff of variable uses. Look for varieties of colour, texture, and style. Find shiny things and dark things, bags and shoes, lengths of luscious fabric.

A recent article in [The Guardian](#) about the importance of play in the lockdown.



Learning from what has happened to build resilience

We are in a position to enable our children to reflect on and learn from what has happened and to teach them that people can endure such difficulties when those around them are supportive and caring. We can provide them with opportunities to feel they are contributing positively again to their school community.

Post traumatic growth

This is positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life event. It can occur in 5 general ways:

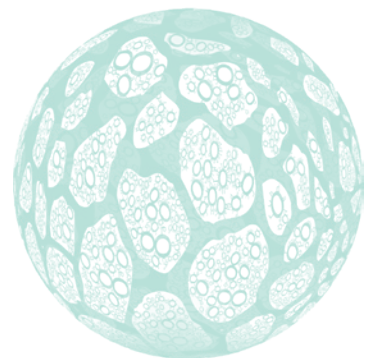
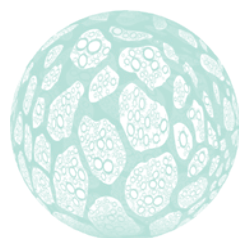
- **New opportunities opened up - Sometimes people who must face major life crises develop a sense that new opportunities have emerged from the struggle, opening up possibilities that were not present before.**
- **A change in relationships- Some people experience closer relationships with some specific people, and they can also experience an increased sense of connection to others who suffer.**
- **Increased sense of own strength**
– “If I lived through that, I can face anything.”
- **Greater appreciation of life.**
- **A deepening of one’s spiritual life - this deepening can also involve a significant change in one’s belief system.**

“Those who live through terrible times will often be able to help others.... and some may go on to do something to make the world a better place. Even terrible things can teach some good things – like understanding, caring, courage...and how to be okay during difficult times.”

(Marge Heegaard (1991) ‘When Something Terrible Happens’ Woodland Press).

Discuss as a class some positive changes that they have observed or experienced themselves.

- **Make a road sign to display something that you feel is important for everyone to know and recognise (could be a drawing or words) and that could be a positive sign rather than a warning sign.**
- **Create a mural to demonstrate how different communities came together through this time. For example, #Viralkindness, COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK, Community Choirs, Clap for Carers, 5k for Heroes.**
- **‘What colour is hope?’ Use creative activities to explore internal feelings and making them tangible, visual. What does anger look like? What colour is anxiety? What colour is hope? What does peaceful look like? How would you draw optimism?**
- **Use nature as a focus for artwork (it has been constant, reliable and strong throughout lockdown) e.g. Make a collaborative mural (or individual pieces) of something symbolic of the time with regards to nature e.g. mountain / waves (turbulence, riding things out) / a globe / map of the UK. Paint/draw pictures to illustrate the positive impact that lockdown has had on the environment / nature / plants / animals.**



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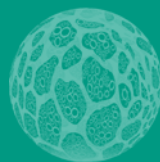
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