



Welcome Back:
Supporting the Return of
Children and Families
during Covid 19
Promoting Well-being,
Resilience and Positive Mental Health

A Guide for Early Years Settings
and Providers

Forward

The Covid 19 pandemic has created a time of unprecedented change. Disasters and emergencies shine a light on the world as it is, framing crises not just in terms of what is lost, but what might be gained.

“Human beings reset themselves to something altruistic, communitarian, resourceful and imaginative after a disaster, we revert to something we already know how to do.”

Rebecca Solnit 2009 ¹

When planning for the future and thinking about our children returning to their settings, it's important to recognise the impact that the pandemic will have had on many lives and to acknowledge that this will have been felt in different ways. It is also key that we retain a sense of what can be gained and on the possibilities that can be built on.



This document has been developed by:

- ◆ **Wirral Early Childhood Services**
- ◆ **Wirral Educational Psychology Service**

¹ With reference to: A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster Rebecca Solnit 2009

2. Illustration from My Hero is You A book written for children around the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. IASC, 2020.

Contents



- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Planning for return and re-integration**
 - ◆ Practical implications for Early Years setting and providers
- 3. Families, parents and carers**
 - ◆ Re-engaging and planning for the return
 - ◆ Acknowledging loss and managing anxiety
 - ◆ Reinstating a sense of connection and belonging
- 4. Children**
 - ◆ Welcome back, we missed you
 - ◆ Managing change; promoting a sense of security
 - ◆ Building on resilience; a sense of affirmation
 - ◆ Managing big emotions
 - ◆ Supporting those with additional needs
- 5. Early Years Practitioners**
 - ◆ Looking after ourselves and each other
- 6. Resources and sources of support**
 - ◆ Information
 - ◆ Contacts
 - ◆ Links
- 7. APPENDICES**
 - ◆ A. Some Practical Ideas on how to adapt and manage the play environment
 - ◆ B. Children's Well-being Questionnaire
 - ◆ C. Early Years Re-integration Social Stories

1. Introduction

Supporting children and families through reintegration and return to settings after Covid 19

The global Covid 19 pandemic has created a time of unprecedented change and upheaval, affecting many of our lives in ways never before experienced. We know Early Years Settings and Providers have worked hard to stay in touch with their children and families during this time. Great imagination and care has been shown, from providing practical support and caring for the vulnerable to ideas about keeping the children busy, entertained and learning.

Early Years Practitioners have recognised how hard it can be for small children to adapt to change, but tell us how amazed they have been when hearing some of the positive stories. We have been inspired by the idea of 'stay at home superheroes' ¹ and in developing this guide, we have aimed to build on this idea with a view to extending the concept of positivity and purpose as the children re-join their settings.



It's now time to think about welcoming the children back into our care. We know that some children will slot back in as if nothing ever changed and some might need more time to adjust. Other children might have more specific needs and they could be helped by a more individualised plan. Overall, we know that settings will want to work together with families to continue to foster resilience and promote the well-being of the children in their care.



1. 'Stay Home Superheroes' www.sophiestories.co.uk/stay-home-superheroes

This guide is here to help you plan your 'Welcome Back' for the children, for their families and for practitioners. It aims to recognise and acknowledge the period of change we have gone through as well as promote recovery and learning. There will be a focus on maintaining well-being and positive mental health for your children and families by offering some ideas about:

- ◆ **Positive re-integration and return to settings**
- ◆ **Promoting and building on positive mental health, resilience and well-being**
- ◆ **Acknowledging loss and supporting anxiety**

There will also be more specific advice for:

- ◆ **Those children who might have additional needs due to this time of change**
- ◆ **Those children who experience special educational needs.**

There will be further advice around:

- ◆ **Recognising and supporting your own and your colleagues' positive mental health**

We understand the additional demands that have been made on EY Practitioners during this time and recognise there have been significant changes for many. This is also a time to be aware of the importance of maintaining our own well-being . After all, you've all been Superheroes too.



2. Preparing for Return and Reintegration

Some practical ideas on how to adapt and manage the play environment

There will be many practical considerations when welcoming children back to settings in the light of Covid 19. We know that as providers you always have the children's best interests at heart and retaining this focus will help when planning for change.

Guidance is provided from the DfE regarding the implementation of safe practices within settings, '**Planning guide for early years and childcare settings**'¹ with more local advice drawn up by Wirral Childcare Quality Improvement and Training Team. This includes a focus and consideration of maintaining positive approaches, whilst implementing policy. Your setting may look very different as regards the way children can play when you reopen. It may not be possible to have continuous provision and free flow play as we know it. Trying to keep children in small groups will be difficult to manage. Providing those important sensory experiences, whilst ensuring that no cross contamination takes place will also be difficult.

NB The following pages provide an overview of the advice offered to Early Years Providers and settings at this time, however the individual documents should be referred to in order to gain further important and detailed advice in this area

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-early-years-and-childcare-settings-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-early-years-and-childcare-settings>

2. Preparing for Return and Reintegration

Some practical ideas on how to adapt and manage the play environment

Considerations	Ideas for adaptation, retaining well-being and reducing impact
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Small groups	<p><u>Retaining a sense of belonging</u></p> <p>Give each child a labelled tray each, in which to keep their personal resources</p> <p>Give staff a 'goodie' box or backpack, to carry with them as children move between activities, containing all that the children might need, including the labelled bags of play dough, pencil cases etc to allow for more spontaneous play with equipment.</p> <p>Have a daily box with all the individual equipment needed for the planned activities for that day – these can then be wiped down at the end of the day.</p>
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Environment	<p><u>Retaining a sense of security</u></p> <p>You can still have soft furnishings/toys if you have a robust cleaning routine that involves washing these every day in line with PHE guidance.</p> <p>Ensure that you have cleaning stations around the setting in a safe space eg on shelves/out of reach of the children with wipes, spray/ gel etc. Bins should have a lid and rubbish double bagged for removal.</p>
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Care routines	<p><u>Retaining a sense of security</u></p> <p>Intimate care – procedures using gloves and aprons will continue when toileting children or changing nappies, with extra care should be taken when washing hands. Thought should be given to preparing children in advance if new PPE equipment is to be used. Make it a game, use Peek-a-boo with masks, use fun masks.</p> <p>Sleep and rest – consider changing the layout of your sleep/rest area so that cots or sleep mats are at least 2 metres apart. Ensure that the area is well ventilated.</p> <p><u>Retaining relationships and a sense of belonging</u></p> <p>Mealtimes and snack times might need to be staggered., with no sharing cutlery / water jugs and in small groups. This can still be a lovely social time and sharing occasion, whilst doing all you can to ensure children and staff are kept safe.</p>
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2. Preparing for Return and Reintegration

Some practical ideas on how to adapt and manage the play environment

Considerations	Ideas for adaptation and managing change
<p>Indoor play</p> <p><i>The play environment should be scaled back as much as is possible, this will support in managing the routine cleaning of resources. The challenge is to provide an environment that supports infection control, but still enables children to access high quality activities/experiences that meets their needs and interests.</i></p>	<p><u>Retaining a sense of belonging by:</u></p> <p>Playdough – this could be split into individual portions, placed in food bags and labelled with the child’s name.</p> <p><u>Retain developing relationships by:</u></p> <p>Role play – use recycled food containers that can be thrown away at the end of the day.</p> <p>Painting – children could be given individual palettes – alternatives to brushes could be used, such as twigs or leaves from the garden that the children have collected themselves</p> <p>Music and Movement - Dance parties. Making individual instruments (shakers)</p> <p>Drawing pictures of each other to encourage developing relationships – with separate paint pallets of colours /own pencil cases</p> <p>Drama – pretending to various animals for example, support children in expressing feelings through drama</p>
<p>Outdoor Play</p> <p><i>It is advised that the children are outside as much as possible to prevent the spread of the virus. If you only have a small outdoor area and in order to prevent cross contamination a rota should be implemented. Any equipment used will then have to be wiped down before the next group use the area. Consider if it is feasible to use outdoor play equipment, taking note of DfE guidance</i></p>	<p><u>Retaining relationships:</u></p> <p>Treasure/scavenger hunts could be organized for individual groups, colour walks - children have to search out particular colours in their surroundings.</p> <p>Games – simple games such as Simon Says, What's the time Mr. Wolf, musical statues/bumps, hopscotch, hide and seek</p> <p>Transient art - using natural materials found in the garden/ on a walk. Older children could make their own ‘frame’ using sticks and string.</p> <p>Painting - outside on a wall space, children could use natural materials such as large twigs, grasses.</p> <p>Use material/paper on wall/fence and let children use spray bottles with paint to create masterpieces</p>



Refer to Appendix A for further detailed information

3. Families, Parents and Carers



Retaining relationships and providing reassurance

We know settings and providers are very good at forming strong links with their families. Since the response to Covid 19, it will be now even more important to build on these links and re-establish connections where needed. Parent and carers might be experiencing anxiety about their experiences and their children returning to settings and will need reassurance. **If the level of anxiety they are experiencing is causing them some concern, provide advice about sources of support available . Please refer to Section 6 for further information**

Connection

1. Build on the connection you already have with the family
2. Use your setting website to keep families informed and included
3. Arrange for a person already familiar to the family, to make contact by phone
3. Express your care and concern about the child/ren. Show you know them as individuals
4. Enquire about the family, how are they doing? Can any help be offered?
5. Consider using the 'model letter for parents' provided with the DfE document 'Planning Guide for EY settings

Reassurance

1. Think about the information parents will need to know before their children re-join the setting
2. What questions might parents ask?
3. Provide reassurance about what will remain the same
4. Give clear information about any changes that are going to be made
5. Ensure families understand that the safety and security of the children is always at heart
6. Ask parents and carers what would provide them with the reassurance they need

It will be important to think about the additional needs of families with EAL and who might not have the same access to information. Please note: if you require additional support for children and families with EAL, please contact the Early Childhood Services Locality Team who will be able to provide links to the Wirral MEAS service, bi-lingual support, advice and guidance on welcoming this group of children back to the setting

3. Families, Parents and Carers;

Retaining relationships and reaffirming a sense of belonging

We know how important relationships and secure bonds are to young children. They need to have a strong **sense of belonging** and know that they have been kept in mind. This improves their feelings of well-being and security, making reintegration smoother and less stressful.

Before welcoming the children back, build on the links you have sustained whilst the children have been at home and remind the children of how important they are to you.

We've been thinking of you while you've been away.

Think about the ways you've been keeping in touch with the children whilst they've been at home.

Have you used your website or social media?

Have you sent any messages, ideas for activities, photographs of yourselves?

Perhaps you sent 'thinking about you' cards - sending a virtual hug or a high-five

Maybe you made a video call to the family so the child could see you as well as hear you

We missed you whilst you were at home

Acknowledge the messages the children might have sent whilst at home.

Did they send any photographs that you can send a personal message about?

Can you print off any photographs to make a setting Stay-At-Home Superhero' activity book, for the children to look at and talk about when back in the setting?



4. Welcoming the Children Back

Developing a sense of security

What's the best way to ease the children's move back into the setting?

It is important for the adults to remember that children need a sense of safety and security.

We know young children benefit from consistency and predictability in their lives. This helps them to make sense of their world and reduces anxiety and develops a sense of well-being.

Some children might have experienced big changes to their lives recently and this is likely to impact on the way they react as well as affect their usual way of being. This to be expected.

Each child will have their own way of responding to coming back to their setting and in how they adjust to a new routine. Some will adapt quickly and other will take more time. It's important to remember that difference **is** okay.



4. Welcoming the Children Back

TOP TIPS

1. Relationships
2. Security
3. Belonging
4. Affirmation

- ◆ Provide a safe place for my belongings
- ◆ Notice me and include me
- ◆ Provide a group project that all of the children can contribute to e.g. a large display made up of all of the children's photograph/handprints/art work



- ◆ Re-establish relationships
- ◆ Check the children's individual profiles and find out if anything has changed
- ◆ Ensure the children know you know them e.g. provide the things that important to them

- ◆ Where possible keep routines and people the same as before
- ◆ Let the children know what will be happening during the day - use visual approaches
- ◆ Provide reassurance and reminders

- ◆ Provide positive recognition for what the children achieved whilst they were 'stay at home superheroes'.
- ◆ Affirm their achievements; did they learn anything new, were there any acts of kindness to themselves or to others?
- ◆ Think of some new acts of kindness the children could be involved in

4. Welcoming the Children Back

Building on resilience; managing feelings and emotions

Young children will need support to help them identify and express their feelings and emotions. They may need extra support during this time when there might be a lot of change in their lives, creating uncertainty. Their understanding of what they are feeling will depend on their age and their ability to communicate. Young children depend on the adults who know them well, to spot and interpret their emotions as well as respond by offering:

- ◆ **Interpretation of the emotion** - *I can see you're feeling worried*
- ◆ **Affirmation of the emotion** - *It's okay to feel worried*
- ◆ **Response to the emotion** - providing reassurance, comfort, recognition

During times of change it is important for the adults to notice children's needs and adjust to any changes in behaviour.



Young children can be supported to identify emotions by:

- ◆ Keeping it simple - key emotions such as happy, sad, frightened, angry, calm
- ◆ Checking - ask 'What emotion were you feeling when....?'
- ◆ Using on-line resources such as **CBeebies 'How to talk to your child about emotions'** at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/talking-to-your-child-about-emotions-love-monster?collection=parenthood-tips-and-tricks>
- ◆ Games such as 'Guess the Feeling' using photographs or demonstrations of different facial expressions or video such as 'Inside Out Guessing the Feelings' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOkyKyVFns>
- ◆ Introducing a setting wide approach such as 'The Colour Monster' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih0iu80u04Y>

5. Welcoming the Children Back

Creating a Soft Landing



Parents and Carers

- ◆ **Stay in regular contact** with parents and carers, reassuring them that you are looking forward to welcoming the children back and that their safety and security remain paramount
- ◆ **Provide information** about any changes to routines that might be happening due to Covid 19
- ◆ **Explain** what the changes might entail and how the impact to the children will be minimised
- ◆ **Inform** parent and carers can prepare their children for the return to their settings, bearing in mind what is developmentally appropriate for each child

Children

- ◆ Try to ensure the children are returning to the setting layout as it was when they last saw it.
- ◆ Consider recording a video walk around the setting, that can be posted on your website or social media, reminding the children that things are the same, ready and waiting for them
- ◆ Post a short individual video message from the child's key person, reassuring the children that you are ready to welcome them back
- ◆ Plan a 'gentle' first week, with some fun, motivating activities, nothing too out of the ordinary
- ◆ Some children might find re-integration overwhelming to begin with so build in some relaxation or sensory time



4. Welcoming the Children Back

Managing big emotions; ideas for calming activities

Relationship builders - use familiar rhymes such as 'Peek a Boo', 'Row Row the Boat'. Try using motivating games such as 'Pop a Bubble' - watch where the bubbles land, try to catch a bubble, try to pop as many as possible, catch a bubble and ask the child to pop it with different body parts.

How am I feeling? - Teach relaxation techniques. Use calming music, sensory play, provide physical activity; 'stretch it out', a favourite story or breathing exercises. Put together a 'calm down box' including objects important to and individual to the child. Keep language simple; acknowledge feelings but remember to keep questions for later.

Use your mind - try out some Mindfulness activities such as a 'Mindful minute' or Mindfulness challenges' Try a 'calm down meditation'.

Seven techniques for keeping kids calm

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/seven-techniques-for-helping-kids-keep-calm>

Coping with emotions—try using an emotional register, at [https://www.elsa-](https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/emotional-)

REMEMBER

- ◆ Help children understand change
- ◆ Notice and acknowledge emotions
- ◆ Support feelings

Bereavement and Loss

It is important to remember that some children might be experiencing big emotions due to their experience of bereavement and loss. This is to be expected at this time.

- ◆ Liaise closely with parents and carers
- ◆ Acknowledge the loss, show you care
- ◆ Allow children to talk
- ◆ Use strategies that support emotional regulation
- ◆ Provide support appropriate to the child's developmental level
 - ◆ If there are any concerns seek further advice e.g. Early Years SEND Team, Educational Psychology Team, CAMHS

4. Welcoming the Children Back



Supporting children with additional needs:

Emerging social communication difficulties or autism

Preparing for change; promoting psychological safety and security

- ◆ What has changed at home, new skills—how are you going to continue; new favourite activities—can you recreate in your setting; are they using new words/gestures—you need to know what has changed; what don't they like now—can you avoid this?
- ◆ Discussion with parent / carer – update One Page Profile
- ◆ Email photos of environment, staff toys to family prior to start- Encourage parents to talk about nursery and share photos with their child
- ◆ Give them time to re-explore their environment—checking out what is the same, what's different
- ◆ Having their favourite toys out or in their special box or bag
- ◆ Re-establishing routines in the room—good for all children

Settling in; security, relationships and a sense of belonging

- ◆ Allow for plenty of time with key person to re-establish relationship
- ◆ Offer consistent visual cues to support the child's communication and language (objects of reference, gestures, signs, pictures)
- ◆ Introduce visual time tables
- ◆ Use social stories about staff using PPE
- ◆ Try and avoid the activities that cause them stress
- ◆ Is their behaviour a cry for reassurance—how are you going to help: cuddles/tight hold, a tent to hide in, a quiet area
- ◆ Ensure the child has access to a quiet/chill out area
- ◆ Be ready to play lots of “giggle time” games
- ◆ Have some flexibility in terms of start/finish time, if required.
- ◆ Be prepared to offer reassurance to parents – this may be a very anxious time for them
- ◆ Provide feedback / photos of the child's day
- ◆ Re-establish the home/ nursery book to allow for information exchange
- ◆ Continue with observations in your setting ready for when plans need to be re-written

Social Stories

Social stories are a really good way of explaining and preparing children for change. Remember to keep them simple, visual and clear.

See Appendix C for examples of social stories provided by

Wirral Autism Social

Communication (ASC) Team



4. Welcoming the Children Back

Supporting vulnerable children:

You will already be aware that throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, vulnerable children have been identified by the local authority as those in greatest need and as a result have been supported to attend their educational setting. Some of these children may have remained at home so it is important to understand what life has been like for the child, parent and family. Key things to consider:

The child—

What have I had fun doing whilst being at home?

What was challenging for me at home?

What was my routine whilst at home?

What new skills have I learned?

How am I feeling? What makes me

The parent—

How did they manage behaviours and routines?

What did an average day look like? i.e. routines, time for play etc

What went well? Can we build on those successes?

What was challenging?

Have there been any significant events that we need to be aware of?

It is important to understand if there has recently been any additional support from services for the family.

Partner agencies

What do we know about how things have gone whilst at home?

Is there a lead worker supporting the child/family i.e. Social Worker/Early Childhood Family worker?

Who are the key agencies that could support or advise?

Have I had a discussion or exchanged information with key agencies? Do I have permission to speak to other agencies?

Communication with the child, family and partner agencies is key to developing a full picture of the child/family journey, welcoming the child back and thereafter identifying further support outside of the setting that may help.

5. Support for Early Years Practitioners

Looking after yourself

It's very normal to feel anxious and worried during these difficult times and it is important that you look after your own wellbeing too. This is also important for the children you work with, as they can often pick up on anxieties. Here are



Focus on what you can control

We can't control what happens during Covid-19, but we can control our responses and behaviour.

Connect with others

Ensure you keep in contact with friends and family. Talk about how you are doing!

Share your worries

Speak with colleagues throughout the day about your concerns. It is best to do this away from the children, as they can pick up on adults' anxieties.

Look after yourself

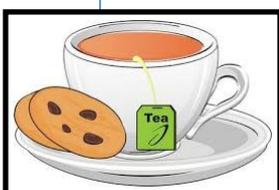
Take time for things that you enjoy and add extra time for stress relief throughout your day. Maintain routine and distract yourself.

Take a break

Working with kids can be tiring, particularly during difficult events. Think about including breaks throughout the day to get some down time.

Limit news coverage

Try to avoid checking the news too often, this can make people feel more anxious.



5. Support for Early Years Practitioners

Looking after others

As well as looking after yourself, it's important to look out for others. You can do this by talking to them about some of the tips on page on the previous page. One way of showing someone you care is through active listening; this is a helpful way to show

Active listening

Active listening is the process of paying attention to a conversation, being conscious of not interrupting, and taking moments to clarify what the speaker is trying to communicate. Key things to do when someone is talking to you about their concerns are:

- Listen with compassion
- Reflect the words of the person (e.g. so you're saying ...)
- Check for clarity (e.g. I think you're saying... is that right?)
- Pay attention
- Show that you're listening (e.g. use of body language)
- Respond appropriately (be open and honest; be careful about how you assert your opinions)



Image by Colleen Tighe © The Balance 2019

(For a more comprehensive guide to Active Listening, please see Section 6 for more information and resources)

Other helpful things to do are:

- Make them a hot drink
- Be aware of support available (if needed)
- Check in following a chat (e.g. How are you now?)
- Suggest some tips from the page about 'looking after yourself)

6. Sources of support



How to talk to children about Corona virus

Young Minds <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>

Story books such as 'Don't Worry Little Bear' at www.earlyyearsstorybox.com

'My Name is Corona Virus' at www.instagram.com/p/B9msq1NpXBA/

'The Stinky, Sticky Virus' at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cUfmXkCYOOikRXSbfGN5LrjMnXYQBx_Z/view

Songs such as the 'Didi and Friends. Fight Corona Virus' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ-YfiRgPc>

'Why we can't hug' video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnnFrPaRgY>

Re-establishing connections and providing affirmation

BBC's CBeebies provides ideas for activities in celebrating 'stay home heroes' at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/joinin/earn-your-stay-at-home-badge-hey-duggee>

Seeking advice about supporting children and families

Wirral Early Childhood Services information can be found on **Wirral Local Offer** at www.localofferwirral.org and **My Child Can** Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/mychildcan/>

Birkenhead Locality 0151 666 3323, Locality Manager – David Bennett

Wallasey Locality 0151 666 3506, Locality Manager – Jo Simpson

South/West Wirral Locality 0151 666 3246, Locality Manager – Lynne Whitty

Information about support available to Wirral and families during residents Covid 19 can be found at <https://www.wirralinfobank.co.uk/>

Seeking advice about children in your setting where there are concerns about their social and emotional development

Early Years Special Educational Needs and Disability Team (SEND); contact Penny Bishop at pennybishop@wirral.gov.uk

Educational Psychology Drop-In Service (currently provided through phone or video call). Contact Tom Clements (Assistant EP) to make an appointment at tomclements@wirral.gov.uk

6. Sources of support



Looking after mental health during Covid 19

Local support and information is available for people of all ages on Wirral through the **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** as <https://www.mymind.org.uk/http://cwpcamhscentre.mymind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Wirral-CAMHS-Resource-and-Information-Pack.pdf>

Other sources of information includes:

Every Mind Matters <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/> also

‘**Mental Well-being While Staying at Home**’ <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>

Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>

Advice on how to help others who might be experiencing anxiety during Covid 19

Every Mind Matters <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/helping-others/>

Active listening resources are produced by **Mind Tools** and can be found at <https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>

Support for those who have experienced loss and bereavement

Child Bereavement UK has put together a web page and a resources to help families support bereaved children through the impact of coronavirus at <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-children>

The Dove Service is a bereavement and loss counselling charity, which offers support to children aged over 4 and their families. Information can be found at <https://www.thedoveservice.org.uk/>

6. Sources of support



Advice about children with additional or special educational needs

Detailed information is available on **Wirral Local Offer** at www.localofferwirral.org and also at **Wirral.gov.uk** <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/early-years-and-childcare>
<https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk/professionals/what-is-early-help/>

Updated guidance on conducting a special educational needs and disability (SEND) risk assessment during the coronavirus outbreak www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance

Early Years Special Educational Needs and Disability Team (SEND); contact Penny Bishop at pennybishop@wirral.gov.uk

Educational Psychology and Autism Social Communication Team Drop-In Service (currently provided through phone or video call). Contact Tom Clements (Assistant EP) to make an appointment at tomclements@wirral.gov.uk

Independent advice for parents and carers is available from **Wirral SEND Partnership WIRED** at <https://wired.me.uk/services/wirral-send-partnership>

Advice is available to parents from Autism Together at www.autismtogether.co.uk

Autism Little Learners Ideas for supporting children with social communication difficulties to help them understand changes due to Covid 19 can be found at <https://www.autismlittlelearners.com/2020/04/putting-mask-on-my-toys-story.html>

The resources contained in this resource offers some ideas for supporting re-integration during Covid 19 and are by no means exhaustive. We would welcome ideas and contributions on any sources of information or interventions you have found useful.



Appendix A

Some Practical Ideas on how to adapt and manage the play environment

Your setting may look very different as regards the way children can play when you reopen. It may not be possible to have continuous provision and free flow play as we know it. Trying to keep children in small groups will be difficult to manage. Providing those important sensory experiences, whilst ensuring that no cross contamination takes place will also be difficult. We have put together this sheet to support you with some ideas on how to manage this difficult situation at this time.

Small Groups

It may be hard to ensure children keep together when moving between activities, if possible, have two members of staff with each group. Support children's PSED by looking at children's individual needs/interests, if possible, put children into groups with friends and familiar adults/children, bearing in mind that the usual groups of children may not be attending, and some staff may also be absent.

The Department for Education has confirmed that it does not expect providers to keep all children two metres away from each other, or to care for children while remaining two metres away, as this is simply not possible. Its guidance states: *"We know that, unlike older children and adults, early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain 2m apart from each other and staff."* It also states *Where settings can keep children and young people in those small groups 2m away from each other, they should do so. While in general groups should be kept apart, brief, transitory, contact such as passing in a corridor is low risk".*

If you operate from one large room this will be especially difficult, the DfE guidance states in this instance: *"Where the physical layout of a setting does not allow small groups of children to be kept at a safe distance apart, we expect practitioners to exercise judgement in ensuring the highest standards of safety are maintained. In some cases, it may be necessary for providers to introduce a temporary cap on numbers to ensure that safety is prioritised."*

Some ways to manage individual resources is to give the children a labelled tray each, in which to keep their personal resources and equipment. Ensure these are cleaned regularly. Some settings are giving staff a 'goodie' box or backpack, to carry with them as children move between activities, containing all that the children might need, including the labelled bags of play dough, pencil cases etc to allow for more spontaneous play. It may be that you have a daily box with all the individual equipment needed for the planned activities for that day – these can then be wiped down at the end of the day.

You may want to think about suspending circle time activities or have fewer children so you can space floor cushions/mats 2m apart.

Environment

The expectation is that initially we will need to organise the children into small fixed groups to minimise contact with other children and adults. Try to have one consistent member of staff. Risk assess the amount of space available to you (both indoors and out) and how this could be divided/split to reduce free flow and allow groups to stay a distance apart. You will need to think about what resources are put into each area. The play environment should be scaled back as much as is possible, this will support in managing the routine cleaning of resources. The challenge is to provide an environment that supports infection control, but still enables children to access high quality activities/experiences that meets their needs and interests.

Rotating activities and cleaning in between rotations to prevent potential spread of infection will also support in keeping children/staff safe.

The DfE guidance suggests *"Removing unnecessary items from the learning environment and minimising the use of soft toys and furnishings as far as possible, as well as toys that are hard to clean"*.

You can still have soft furnishings/toys if you have a robust cleaning routine that involves washing these every day in line with PHE guidance.

Ensure that you have cleaning stations around the setting in a safe space eg on shelves / out of reach of the children. eg Wipes or spray/ Gel/ tissues. Bins should have a lid and rubbish double bagged for removal.

Indoor play

Playdough – this could be split into individual portions, placed in food bags and labelled with the child's name.

Sand – this could be placed in individual bowls or trays and thrown away after use.

Water – this could be placed in individual washing up bowls or trays and thrown away after use.

Set up a bathing station for dolls, bowls of soapy water to bathe dolls outdoors. Children to handwash the dolls clothes and hang on the washing line as part of role play outdoors.

Role play – use recycled food containers that can be thrown away at the end of the day.

Gloop – use small individual trays

Mark making – children could have their own labelled pencil cases or toolkit with a strap that could be carried over the shoulder (a Pringle tube is perfect for this and the children can decorate their own!)

Painting – children could be given individual palettes – alternatives to brushes could be used, such as twigs or leaves from the garden that the children have collected themselves

Bubbles – children to have separate pots

Music and Movement - Dance parties. Making individual instruments (shakers)

Loose parts - Using recycled materials that can be easily discarded at the end of each day. For imaginative play or construction areas – such as large cardboard boxes to make individual play items ie boat, car etc

Drawing pictures of each other to encourage developing relationships – with separate paint pallets of colours /own pencil cases

Drama – pretending to various animals for example, support children in expressing feelings through drama

Outdoor play

It is advised that the children are outside as much as possible to prevent the spread of the virus. If you only have a small outdoor area and in order to prevent cross contamination, a rota should be implemented. Any equipment used will then have to be wiped down before the next group use the area, in line with the DfE guidance mentioned below.

Consider if it is feasible to use outdoor play equipment, taking note that in relation to this DfE guidance states - *“ensuring it is appropriately cleaned between groups of children using it, and that multiple groups do not use it simultaneously”*.

Gardening activities, planting watering plants, vegetable patches

Ideas for small groups activities outdoors:

Treasure/scavenger hunts could be organized for individual groups, colour walks - children have to search out particular colors in their surroundings.

Games – simple games such as Simon sez, What's the time mr wolf, musical statues/bumps, hopscotch, hide and seek

Transient art - using natural materials found in the garden/ on a walk. Older children could make their own 'frame' using sticks and string.

Painting - outside on a wall space, children could use natural materials such as large twigs, grasses.

Use material/paper on wall/fence and let children use spray bottles with paint to create masterpieces

Car wash station outside with soapy bowls of water and encourage children to wash little tike cars etc.

Set up a Garden Centre in the outdoor environment, utilizing the mud kitchen. Make use of pots, children's gardening tools

Other activities – bug/ flower/leave hunts, Potion station (children to have individual pots)

Care Routines

Mealtimes and snack times need to be staggered. No sharing cutlery / water jugs. Stay in small groups. No self-serving. This can still be a lovely social and sharing occasion, whilst doing all you can to ensure children and staff are kept safe.

Intimate care – the usual procedures using gloves and aprons should be followed when toileting children or changing nappies – extra care should be taken when washing hands.

Sleep and rest – consider changing the layout of your sleep/rest area so that cots or sleep mats are at least 2 metres apart. Ensure that the area is well ventilated.

Staff breaks. - these should be staggered. These are especially important at this time; staff may be feeling more stressed and anxious than usual. Think about how staff can take breaks whilst keeping the children in their small groups. Ideally one member of staff would be supernumerary.

Cleaning Routines

You will need to clean surfaces, resources and maintain handwashing routines throughout the sessions - Involve children wherever possible and make it fun!

Have robust systems relating to the cleaning of resources, this should include the team cleaning carpets each day, and daily washing of soft furnishing i.e. cushions, soft books, dressing up clothes etc. There should be a clear, robust cleaning routine between sessions and when groups of children have been using resources. Involve children in helping to wash resources, this will support them in understanding why these cleaning routines are happening and help those children that may be feeling anxious at this time.

Steam cleaning rugs/carpets at the end of each day

Staff are also supported with staggered lunch time breaks to help with social distancing and having enough staff to cover this as well as care for children safely.

Appendix B Children's Well-Being Questionnaire



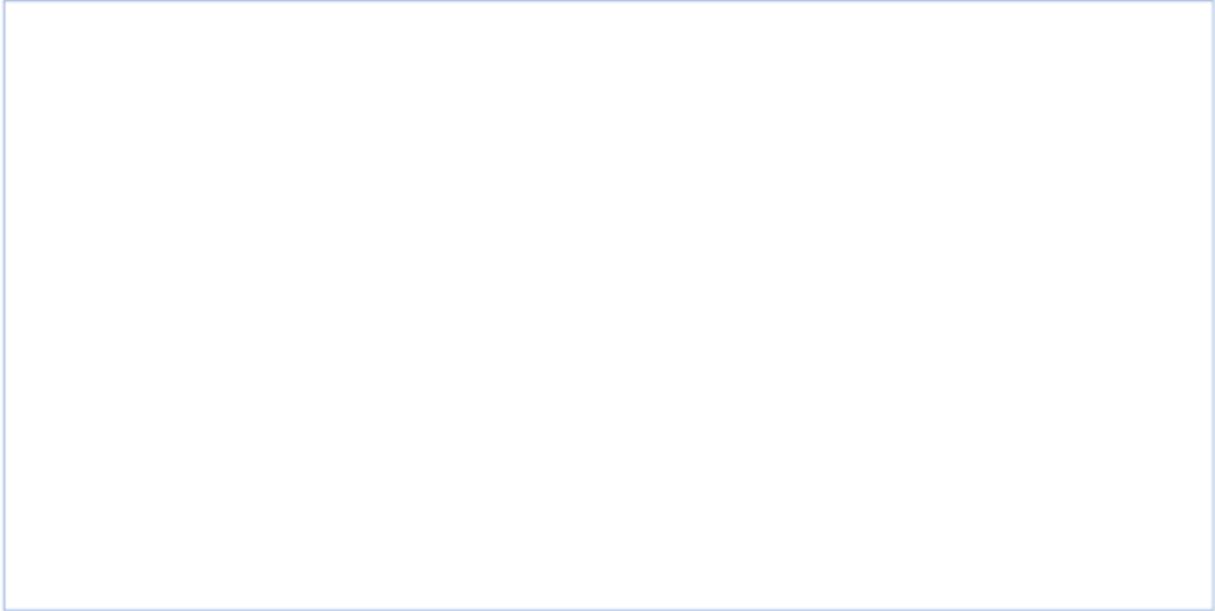
We are looking forward to welcoming you back to...

Option to Insert Photograph here of Key worker / setting logo.

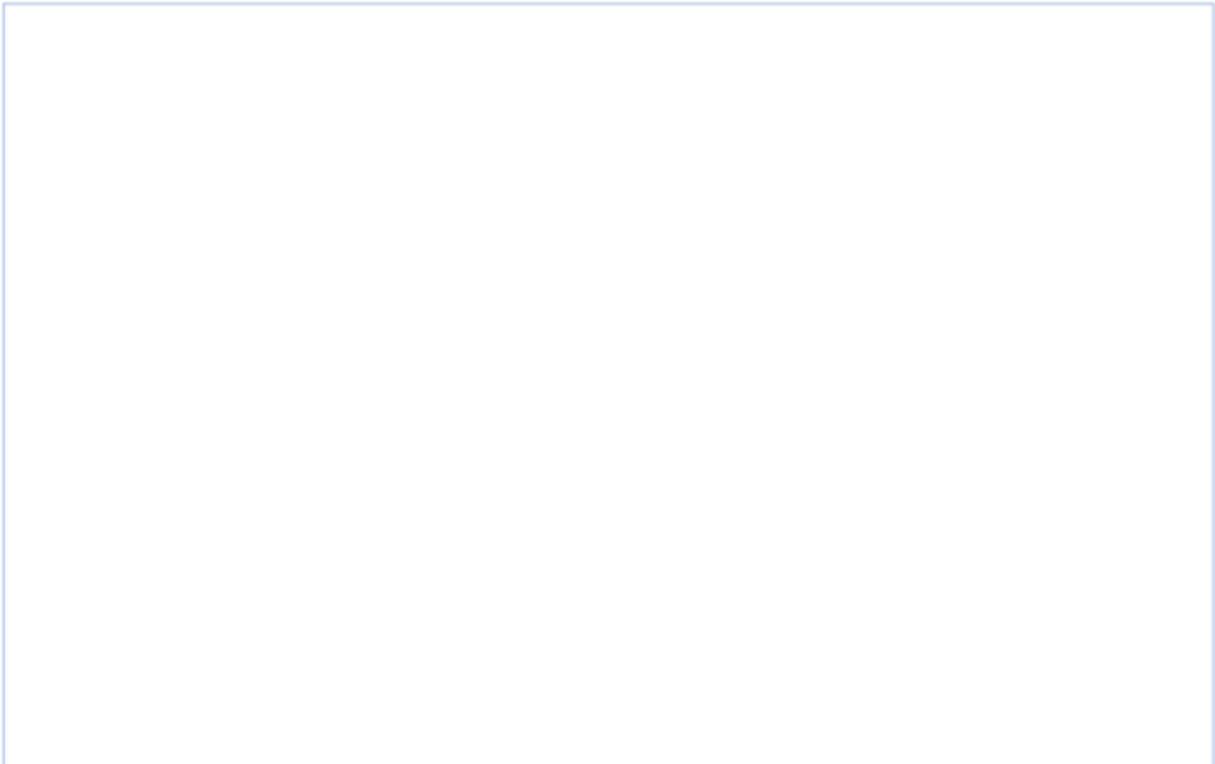
Please complete this questionnaire with your child to help us in supporting them back to the setting. They can draw pictures to show how they are feeling. There is a section for your child to answer and a section for you to fill in too.

Part 1 - For your child to complete.

My favourite thing to do at home has been...

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for a child to write their answer to the question above.

One thing I really missed about coming to nursery was...

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for a child to write their answer to the question above.

This is how I am feeling about coming back...



Happy



Sad



Worried



Unsure

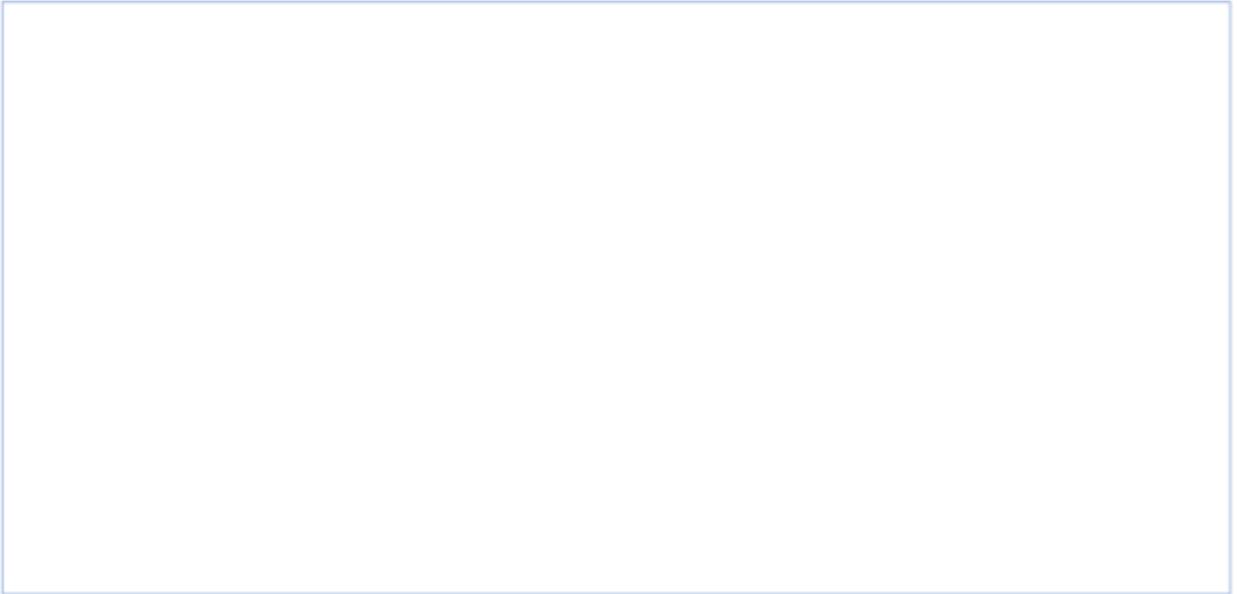


Excited

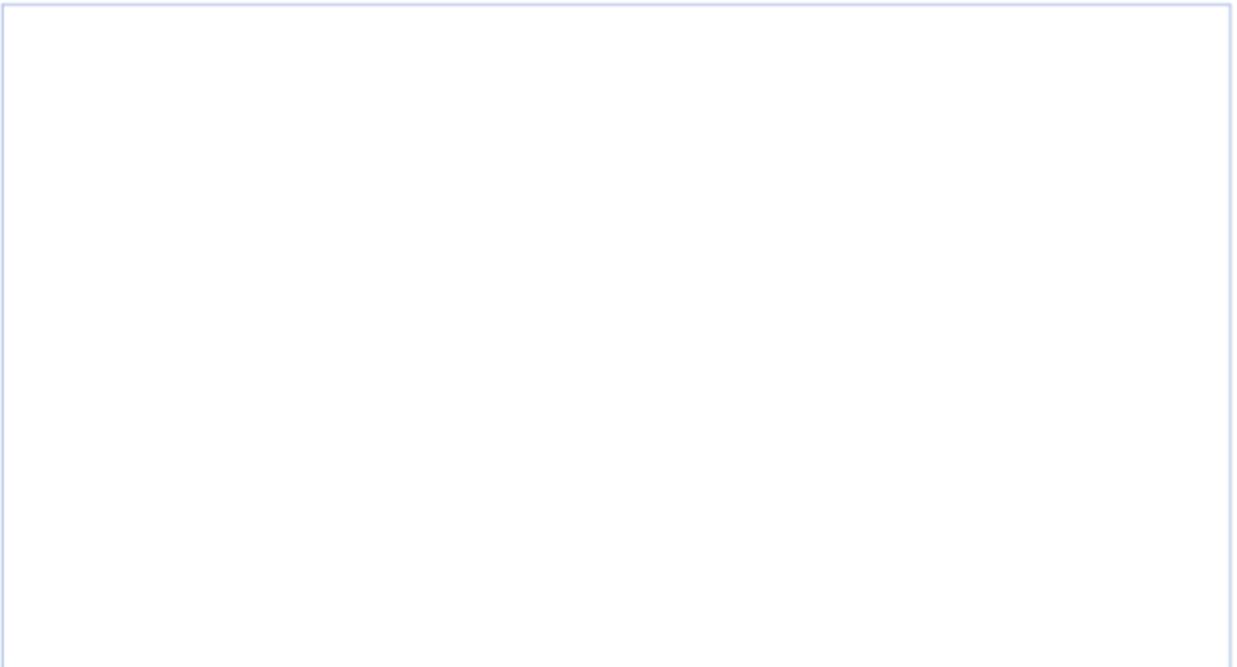
Who has been at home with me?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for writing the names of people who have been at home with the respondent.

I sometimes feel sad because...

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their reasons for feeling sad.

I sometimes feel happy because....

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for the user to write their reasons for feeling happy.

Part 2 - For you to complete

Can you please tell us if your child has been happy and seemed settled during lockdown?

Has your child shown any anxious behaviours at home such as nightmares, not wanting to be separated from you, less able to cope with big emotions etc?

Please can you share with us if you have had any trauma in the family that may affect your child returning to the setting e.g. Bereavement or illness. Please feel free to comment here or talk to us on the phone if you would prefer.

Please share with us any positive effects that lockdown has had on your child/ family. This could include any celebrations you have had as a family or any new skills your child has developed.

Do you have any other comments, concerns - and do you want to share anything with us that you feel will support your child coming back to the setting?

Things to consider prior to the return to school:

1. What has/will stay the same such as routine/learning/staff; school remains a safe and happy place to be

2. What is important to the child such as favourite toys/activities/resources AND learning/lessons

3. Families who
 - are anxious
 - have their own 'rules' re managing COVID-19 such as wearing masks
 - medication – how will this be administered
 - the need to hug or 'high five' (how can this be managed safely)

Some families have been in touch directly with the team and we will/have directed them to speak to you the school

Consider how this will impact the whole family

4. We have labelled small groups as a 'School Bubble'. We felt it important to distinguish from social bubbles which may happen at home and will be made up of family and close friends.

5. Will children be expected to wear uniform; this needs to be clear. Consider if optional how to manage possible responses to this.

Sensory needs/behaviours - you will already be aware of some children in your care who explore in a sensory manner such as through mouthing and licking

Some children may spit and bite; this may be a **new** behaviour, a **response** to the changes and uncertainty.

It is important to prepare children as much as possible so they understand what will happen, what to do, who with, how long for and what will happen next.

If they cannot access what is usual/important to them what will replace this; is this a reasonable alternative which will offer them what they seek.

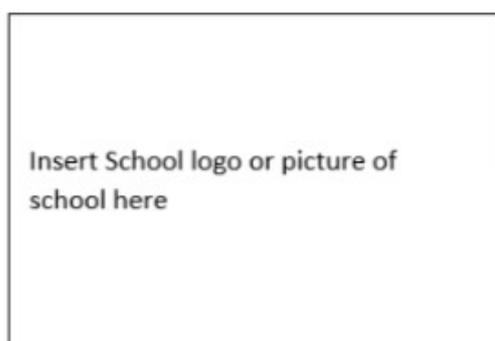
Consider using scripts/social stories and other supports such as coping cards to help children in acknowledging their struggle and managing their response(s) in a way that is appropriate/safe.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the additional challenges and necessary measures for children with SEN and in particular the ASC population at this difficult time.

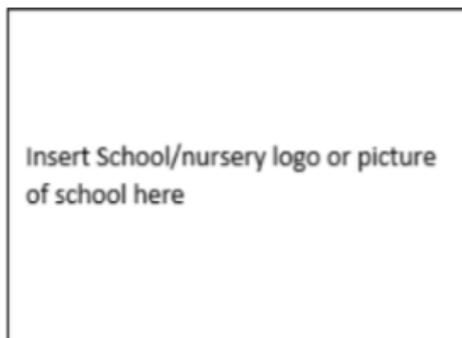


This is a suggested template: Please personalise and differentiate this book to meet the needs of your school and the individual child before printing.

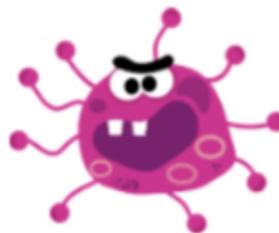
School has been closed for a long time.



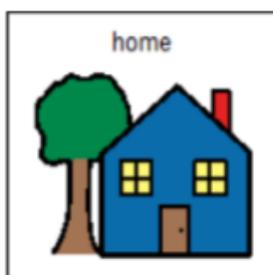
Nursery/School has been closed for a long time.



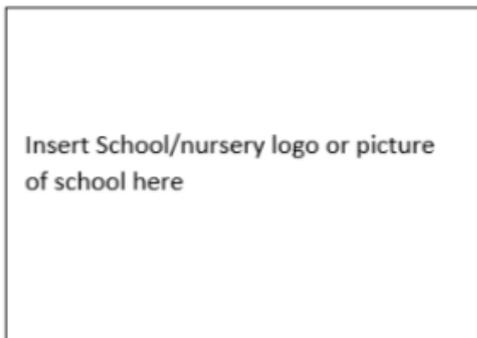
It has been closed because of Coronavirus.



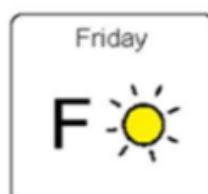
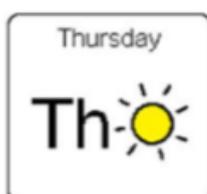
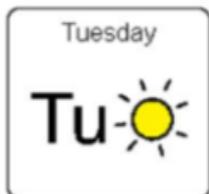
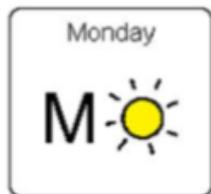
When Nursery/School was closed I stayed at home.



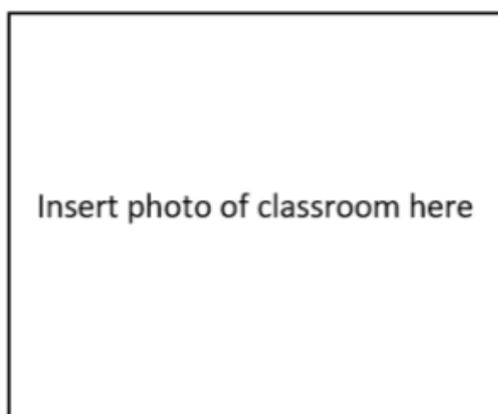
Nursery/School is ready to open again soon.



I will go back to school on (insert or mark day/time as relevant):



My classroom will be _____



I will put my coat and bag here



Insert picture of cloakroom/pegs here

I will play outside here



Insert photo of play area here

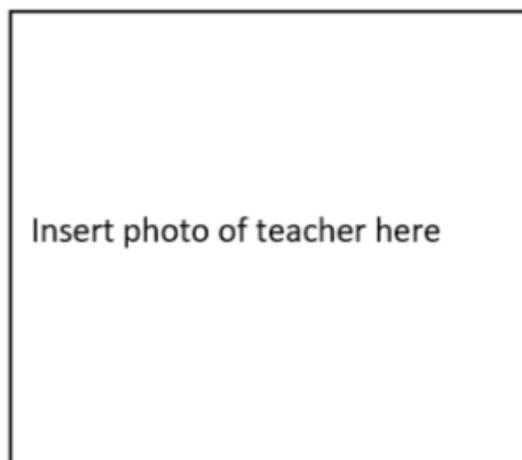
I will eat my lunch/snack here



I will go to the toilet/have my nappy changed here



My teacher will be (insert name of teacher)



Other adults to help me will be (insert names of support staff)



I will be able to play with:

Insert images of favourite activities here

Insert images of favourite activities here

Going back to school will be OK!



Extra ideas...

We can stay safe at school

We will be alert

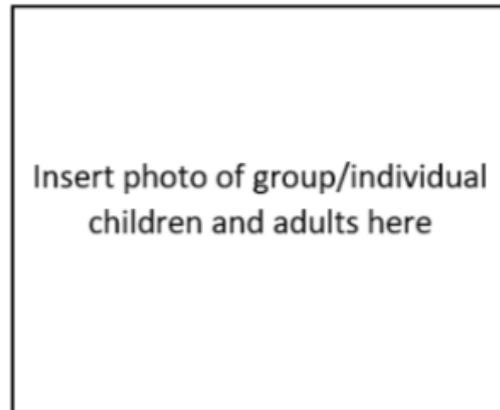


I will have my own equipment

It will go in here

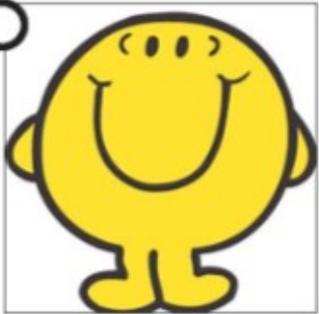


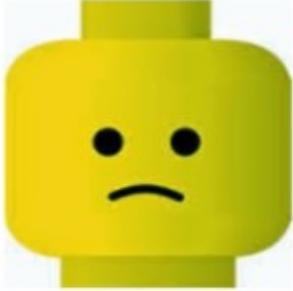
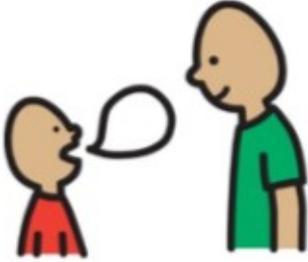
I will be with a small group of friends and adults called a 'social bubble'



Staying with my bubble of friends and adults will keep me safe until the scientists tell us it is ok for our bubbles to get bigger.

Appendix D Hugs in School

 <p>I'm so happy to see you</p>	<p>I want to hug you</p>  <p>but in school we <u>can't</u> give hugs</p>	 <p>I can smile and wave</p>	 <p>I can send you a distance hug</p>
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 <p>I feel sad</p>	<p>I want a hug</p>  <p>but in school (because of the virus) we <u>can't</u> give hugs</p>	 <p>I can talk to my teacher</p>	 <p>I can listen to music (my favourite song)</p>
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 <p>I feel cross</p>	<p>I want a hug</p>  <p>but in school we <u>can't</u> give hugs</p>	 <p>I can take some deep breaths</p>	<p>Time Out</p>  <p>I can ask for time out and do my calm down activity/with my special box</p>
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 <p>I can hug myself I can give myself a big squeeze</p>	 <p>I can draw a picture</p>		
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ALTERNATIVES TO HANDSHAKES, HUGS, HIGH FIVES AND HONGI



This is interactive; please follow link below and Local Offer

[Hugs GIF](#)

This is a lovely story; Hedgehog and Tortoise want to give each other a great big hug, but they're not allowed to touch. A lovely short film to help little ones know that they are loved even if they can't...

(This is also now on Wirral Local Offer)

[while we cant hug ebook](#)

There's also just the book without narration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnnFrPaRgY>