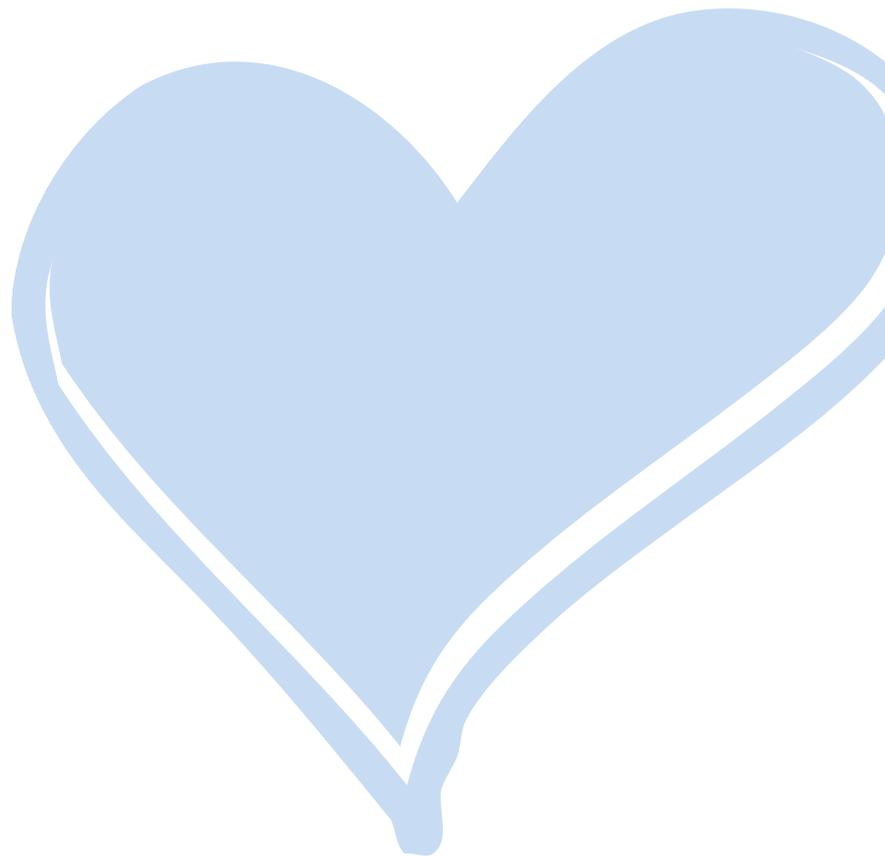




# Guidance for schools in Cornwall

Supporting children's emotions and behaviour  
on return to school.

Date 24/06/2020



**“When I return to school please start with where I am and not where you think I should be. I don’t want to catch up, I want to see my teachers and my friends. I want to feel safe and secure while I try to make sense of the ‘new normal’” (Pupil voice, 2020)**

## Introduction

Schools all over Cornwall are extending their provision for many young people and are committed to finding solutions that meet individual needs.

Recent government guidance has specifically asked school leaders to identify in their amended behaviour policies, reasonable adjustments for students who may be more at risk of exhibiting behaviours that challenge. See ‘Planning guide for primary schools’<sup>1</sup>

Navigating the complexities of inclusive practice, meeting individual needs and maintaining safety for all, in ways that are developmentally and age appropriate for children and young people is recognised as a real and current challenge.

This document provides examples of reasonable adjustments that have been collated to support planning for children who may find it more challenging to adjust to the ‘new normal’.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools>

## A Whole School Approach

The schools children and young people will be returning to will not be the same as the schools they attended before the start of the lockdown. All school arrangements, including routines, will be different and expectations, including school rules, will need to reflect the fact that children and young people will be expected to behave differently when they return to school. Some children will need more support than others in making sense of this.

It is essential that school staff consider how they will proactively teach children about these changes including any new expectations such as socialising with other children or the reasons behind the need to increase the frequency of hand washing.

It is likely that school leaders will wish to consider changes to the school's behaviour policy to reflect these changes in school. For this to be most effective it is important that the reason behind any changes are communicated clearly and are well understood by pupils, parents/carers and staff.

Some pupils may need more support to understand and adapt to these changes and to follow some of these new school rules. It is essential that school staff continue to differentiate their teaching accordingly and make reasonable adjustments to take account of the different learning and developmental needs of the children and young people.

The statutory framework for managing children and young people's behaviour still applies and any decision, for example, to exclude a child from school must be lawful, reasonable and fair. In complying with the Equality Act schools are expected to make reasonable adjustments to policies and practices and they must continue to ensure that their policies and practices do not discriminate unfairly against any vulnerable groups, including those with SEND, by increasing the risk of them being excluded.

*Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England Statutory guidance for those with legal responsibilities in relation to exclusions.*  
DfE 2017<sup>2</sup>

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/641418/20170831\\_Exclusion\\_Stat\\_guidance\\_Web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/641418/20170831_Exclusion_Stat_guidance_Web_version.pdf)

The pandemic has had a significant impact on children, families, staff in schools and our communities. We recognise that everyone has been experiencing a period of uncertainty and that this can impact on how we can react to behaviours that challenge. When thinking about children's behaviour we need to understand the context in which that behaviour is occurring. We are encouraging schools in Cornwall to think about the SWAN acronym which stands for Safe, Welcoming, Altogether, Nurturing (Pooky Knightsmith, 2020) and to consider the needs of children, parents and staff at Universal, Targeted and Specialist levels (Reflective Tool to support Recovery Planning in Schools). The emotional wellbeing of staff and pupils is paramount, and schools/settings will want to promote a safe, positive and happy learning environment where everyone feels valued and motivated in an orderly, relaxed and successful learning environment.

In order for staff to feel able to support children and young people (particularly those who may be most vulnerable and those whose behaviour may challenge) they need to have their well-being needs acknowledged and supported. By ensuring that staff are feeling emotionally healthy and are maintaining their own well-being they will be in a better position to meet the needs of the young people their care.

## Principles

- a. **Behaviour is a form of communication.** Behaviour occurs in a context; we need to work out the underlying emotion, the "triggers", teach new skills and implement proactive measures (PACE, for example)
- b. **Children need a sense of safety:** It is important that adults, children and young people feel safe upon their return to school or setting
- c. **Consider that all children may have some attachment needs:** Children have been experiencing a period of disconnection from school and some may take time to reconnect and re build their relationships with staff and each other
- d. **Children and staff need to feel calm:** Children and young people are likely to experience both comfortable and uncomfortable emotions. It is important that these feelings are normalized, and that support is provided to help them manage their emotions and return to a state of calm. Equally the range of emotions being felt by staff need to be acknowledged and supported.
- e. **Children need a sense of self:** Children need to feel they have some control over what is happening to them, and a belief that their actions are likely to lead to generally positive outcomes
- f. **Children in schools or settings need to feel they are part of a group:** They need to feel they belong to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes; this is known as collective efficacy

## Examples of how schools in Cornwall are making reasonable adjustments

A secondary school has developed a 'Recovery Curriculum' with differentiated responses for young people with additional needs; this outlines what it's going to look like on returning to school and expectations for the community that are based on the SWAN model.

Identifying students who may require reasonable adjustments such as students at the SEN support stage, those with EHC plans and/or those who are supported by social care is crucial; and may also include students not in these categories, but that staff have recognised are emotionally vulnerable. For example, some schools have developed a RAG rating for all pupils – placing them in Red, Amber or Green categories which is then being used to anticipate the level of support that pupils may need to experience a successful return to school.

Co-recruiting parents/carers from the outset in developing a co-regulation plan which considers what works to support the student, open and honest discussion on what the risks might be and an agreed plan to mitigate any identified behaviour risks.

Approaches such as setting up a 'Team around the Student', where key staff are identified as being on the student's 'team' of support. Schools have been carefully considering staff expertise in creating these; for example those who have accessed Trauma Informed Schools and/or Emotional Literacy Support Assistant training; or creating a photo board or key ring with photos of their team so they know who they can access for help and support if they are feeling unsettled.

Organising regular staff check-ins for those working with a student requiring more support. Providing a space where staff can feel safe to share their reflections of what the student's behaviour might be trying to communicate and agreeing positive approaches to support any apparent unmet needs. Some schools are doing these check-ins daily/weekly/fortnightly depending on the level of risk established via the student's risk assessment.

Using creative approaches to communicate the expectation of the ‘new normal’ in school for example:

- Using video to show what is the same and what is different about the school environment
- Using a video social story to show what is expected during aspects of the school day – making this available on a tablet and sharing with the student regularly to remind them of the expectations
- Using social stories to prepare children for the differences in expectations

Some schools have been making available a safe pre-agreed space for identified students as a ‘calm zone’. In these zones they are making resources available that are known to help the child. Plans have been developed with the student about how the safe space can be used along with writing a social story to help them understand this. This has included identifying a pre-agreed signal for the student to communicate when they may want to use this safe space.

Regularly reviewing adjusted provision; recognising that the emotional needs of some may become more apparent when they return to school and that this may not have been anticipated. Continuing to closely monitor pupils, showing sensitivity to the signs that they need to be supported in a different or an enhanced way.

Using a track back approach to help stay curious about behaviour in order to consider what the unmet need might be:

**Unmet Need?**  **Emotion?**  **Observed Behaviour**

## Risks and things to consider

Children with SEN may have a compulsion or inability to behave within the expected boundaries. They may find it hard to control an urge to cough, sneeze or spit.

If a child has poor or low impulse control this needs to be identified straight away and considered in any behaviour policy. Behaviour needs to be determined as a purposeful action rather than an act that the child may not be able to control or does not fully understand. Is a child dysregulated and unable to control their actions or is it purposeful action?

Adults can model expected behaviour and explain actions in an appropriate manner for the child's age and ability. This can be demonstrated through activities. For example, anxiety can be diffused by 5 minute blocks of activity based learning. Modelling behaviour and activities aimed at understanding what the virus is may help to alleviate anxiety and concerns. For example, clay could be used to build a 'virus model'. Clay therapy can then be employed to 'kill' the virus by throwing it against a wall. This can be a fun activity giving a child a sense of control and can promote discussion. Making the clay wet shows that things don't stick to a wet surface and therefore demonstrates the importance of handwashing and hygiene. Additional information about developing appropriate protective measures is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

When responding to a concern about a child's behaviour any discussion related to a child being placed on a reduced timetable or any form of exclusion should focus on a robust risk assessment process.

This risk assessment should consider three areas:

1. The risk the child may present to others
2. The risk the child may present to themselves (self-harm? Risky behaviour?)
3. The risk to the child from other people (the risk of stopping their education? The risk of exploitation? The risk from any child protection factors?)

## Age Appropriateness

When adjusting behaviour management policies, staff should ensure that the policy is flexible enough to be used by children at very different developmental stages. Therefore, it should reflect both the CYP's chronological age and stage of development. This is particularly critical in primary schools where a one size fits all policy will not be appropriate for the youngest nursery and reception children for whom the Early Years Foundation Stage framework still applies. In this age group "behaviours" should be linked to Development Matters<sup>3</sup> and the child's understanding and stage of development. The next steps for these children are likely to be addressed through the curriculum focus on personal, social and emotional development (PSED), using the Development Matters guidance for ideas about how to develop appropriate roles of adults, the environment and the characteristics of effective learning to support children. The needs of summer born children will need careful thought, with staff remembering these children have almost a year's less life experience than autumn born children. This early childhood experience will have been affected even more due to the extended period of lockdown.

## Transition Guidance and Age Appropriate support

As children prepare to return to school either this term or in September there are a range of helpful resources available to be used. Within Cornwall the following transition guides have been published.<sup>4</sup>

For younger children starting or returning to reception classes a number of resources have been gathered and published on the Support In Cornwall 9 Family Information Service) web site:

<https://www.supportincornwall.org.uk/kb5/cornwall/directory/site.page?id=0f1oJCy2Cyo>

In addition to this the BBC have produced a range of excellent materials for primary and secondary age transitions:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/collections/starting-primary-school/1>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/tags/zh4wy9q/starting-secondary-school/1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL-PRINT-AMENDED.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [www.cornwall.gov.uk/transitions covid](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/transitions covid)

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