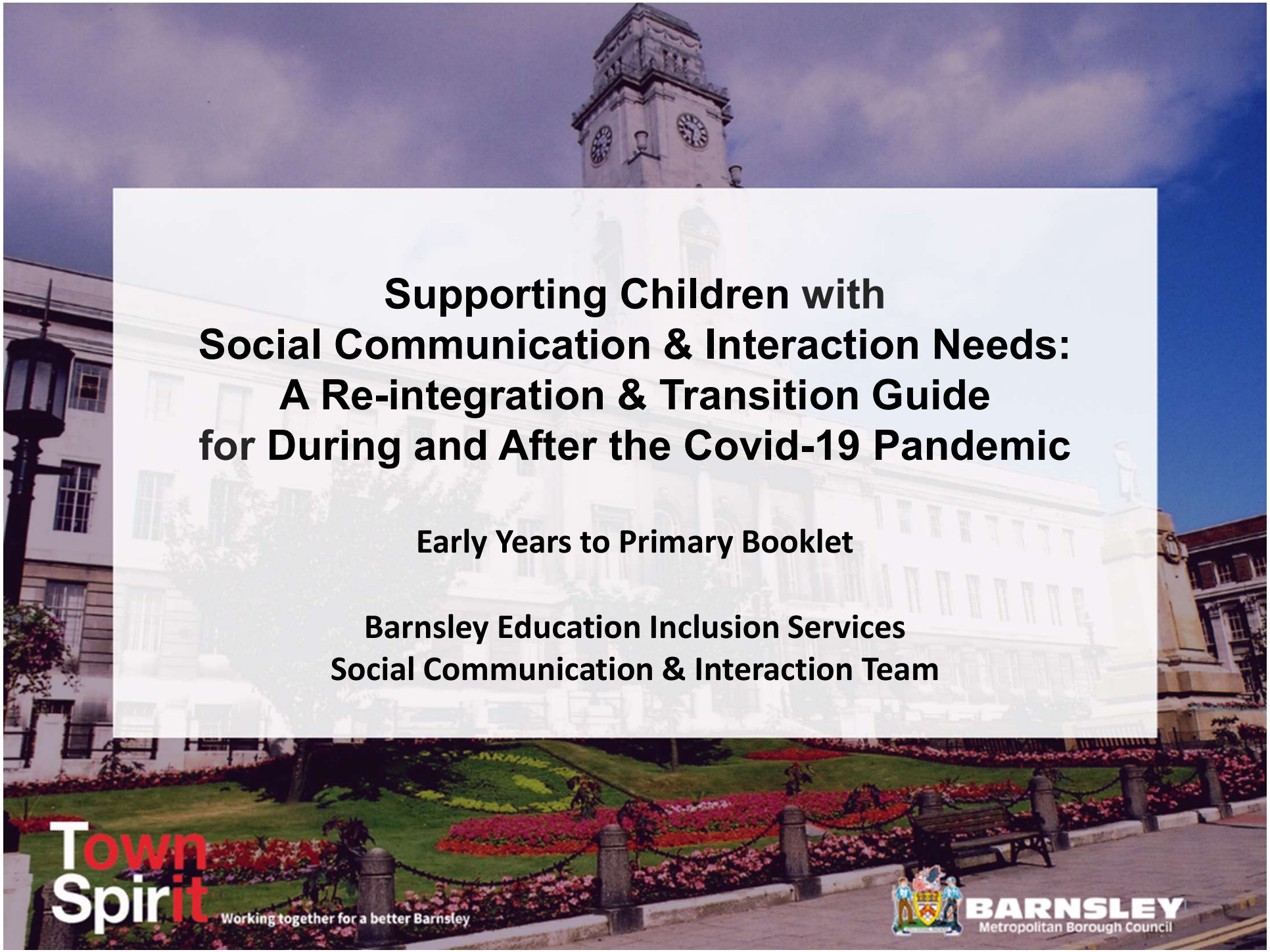

Supporting Children with Social Communication & Interaction Needs: A Re-integration & Transition Guide for During and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

Early Years to Primary Booklet

Barnsley Education Inclusion Services
Social Communication & Interaction Team

Town Spirit
Working together for a better Barnsley

BARNSLEY
Metropolitan Borough Council

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Introduction

Transition

Covid19 has brought significant change for all children and families. In life there are lots of changes that happen. 'Change' for most children is difficult and even more so when it is unexpected. Transition is the process of changing from one place or activity to another. Change can produce feelings of anxiety, confusion, uncertainty and possibly even fear, and for a child with social communication and interaction needs, these feelings may be heightened.

Why is change difficult for a child with Social Communication and Interaction Needs?

- Anxiety linked to the unknown – When can I visit family? When will I return to school?
- Desire for sameness – Preference for the familiar and routine
- Difficulties in predicting what might happen in a new setting, so may preference sticking with what is known and familiar
- Difficulties in social understanding – The child may take longer to understand the social rules of a new environment (setting/school) knowing how to respond or how to adapt their behaviour in a new social situation, e.g. assembly

Transitioning or *re integrating to school* will involve many types of change. Changes to:

- The school.
- Classrooms.
- The route to school.
- Times and routines.
- People – staff and peers.
- School uniform.
- Language/vocabulary used.

Introduction

The transition into a new setting from home to early years, or from an early years setting to full time school, and re integrating back into a setting/school, are big changes. However, transition is not just about major changes that occur in life, some transitions occur on a daily basis, for example: moving from one task to another (carpet to table) and from playtime back into the classroom.

How to help children with Social Communication and Interaction Needs?

Preparation is key to supporting children with social communication and interaction needs through changes. We can support children and try to reduce anxiety by implementing change gradually and by supporting their understanding through the use of visual supports and working alongside parents/carers. Please remember, it can take time for a child with social communication and interaction needs to adapt to change.

This booklet provides a summary of the impact of closures on settings and schools for children with social communication and interaction needs, alongside some practical strategies intended to reduce anxiety and help make the transition to a new setting/school or re integration into setting/school as smooth as possible.

Government Guidance

Please see the link below for recent Government guidance for schools and settings for implementing protective measures and planning:

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

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

Changes to familiar activities, places or people can make us all feel anxious. However, pupils with social communication and interaction needs, might find these changes more stressful. Barnsley's Education Inclusion Services, Social Communication and Interaction Team, have considered the impact of setting/school closures on a child with social communication and interaction needs and considered how parents/carers may have helped their children with this new situation.

Impact

<u>Impact to routine/structure</u>

Setting/School closures may have had a significant impact on a child's need for routine and structure. The unexpected change may have increased anxieties surrounding the loss of structure and routine.

Parent/Carers may have:

- tried to introduce a routine that aims to mirror their child's routine in setting/school, e.g. keeping the same wake up time, lunchtime etc.
- developed a daily visual timetable to help their child understand what will be happening each day

<u>Impact on social isolation</u>

Settings/schools provide lots of 'social' opportunities. Setting/School closure for an extended period of time, may mean a child's social contact has been limited.

Parent/Carers may have:

- considered the use of technology to help their child keep in touch with family members and friends
- made items for and/or posted letters to them

Impact

Anxiety

Setting/school closures may have lead to heightened anxiety for a child. They may be anxious about understanding why their setting/school is closed and not knowing when their setting/school will re open, as well as not seeing their peers on a daily basis.

Parent/Carers may have:

- shared 'Social Stories' with their child to help them understand why measures are being put in place e.g. regarding setting/school closures, handwashing
- used structure and routine to help to reduce any anxiety until the child becomes familiar with what activities are coming up e.g. through the use of timetables and keeping a routine

Impact on family members

The closure of settings/schools not only has an impact on a child's needs but also has a wider impact on the family. There may be changes to a parent's/carer's work, which could impact upon the family's income. Some parents may be working from home, which may be difficult if their children are at home.

Parent/Carers may have:

- developed a routine and a timetable to show when they are working and added in some flexibility e.g. working in chunks of time, or starting work at an earlier or later time

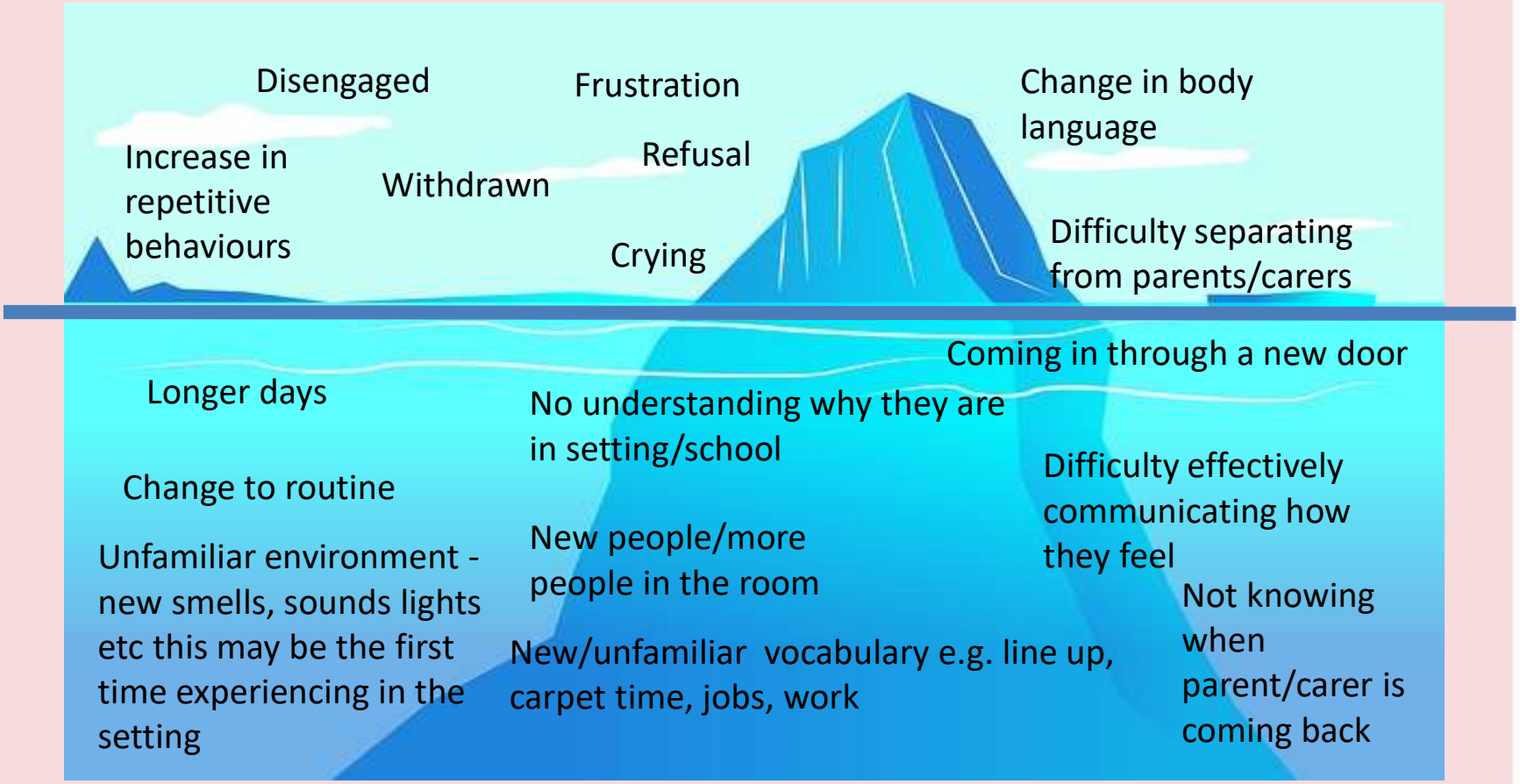
Impact

Analysing Behaviour Associated with Transition

- We know that if we plan well for transitions and change for children with social communication and interaction needs, we will see positive behaviours. However, if we don't plan, and there is a lack of consistency, children may struggle, and we may see behaviours which would suggest that the situation that they are in, is causing anxiety.
- When trying to understand and manage behaviour, it is important to look at the function of the behaviour, or you might say, 'What's in it for the child?'
- All behaviours have a function, or a reason for happening and positive or negative results may follow. For example, a kick to your leg, gets your attention without fail, and can often result in a child getting something that they want. However, if this way of gaining your attention appears to be the child's only way of communicating, this learned behaviour needs to be changed, so that the child can gain attention in a more positive and acceptable way.
- One well known method of understanding and managing behaviour comes from Division TEACCH and is called the Iceberg Metaphor.
- This method allows us to look at the behaviour as a whole, e.g. not just the behaviour that we can see (at the top of the iceberg), as when trying to understand behaviour, we always need to consider the underlying factors (what is happening below the water and what cannot always be seen).
- The following pages consider the behaviours that might be seen and help us to understand the possible reasons why the child may be presenting in this way.

Impact
Analysing Behaviour Associated with Transition

Some behaviours we MIGHT see when starting/returning to setting/school using the TEACCH Iceberg Metaphor:



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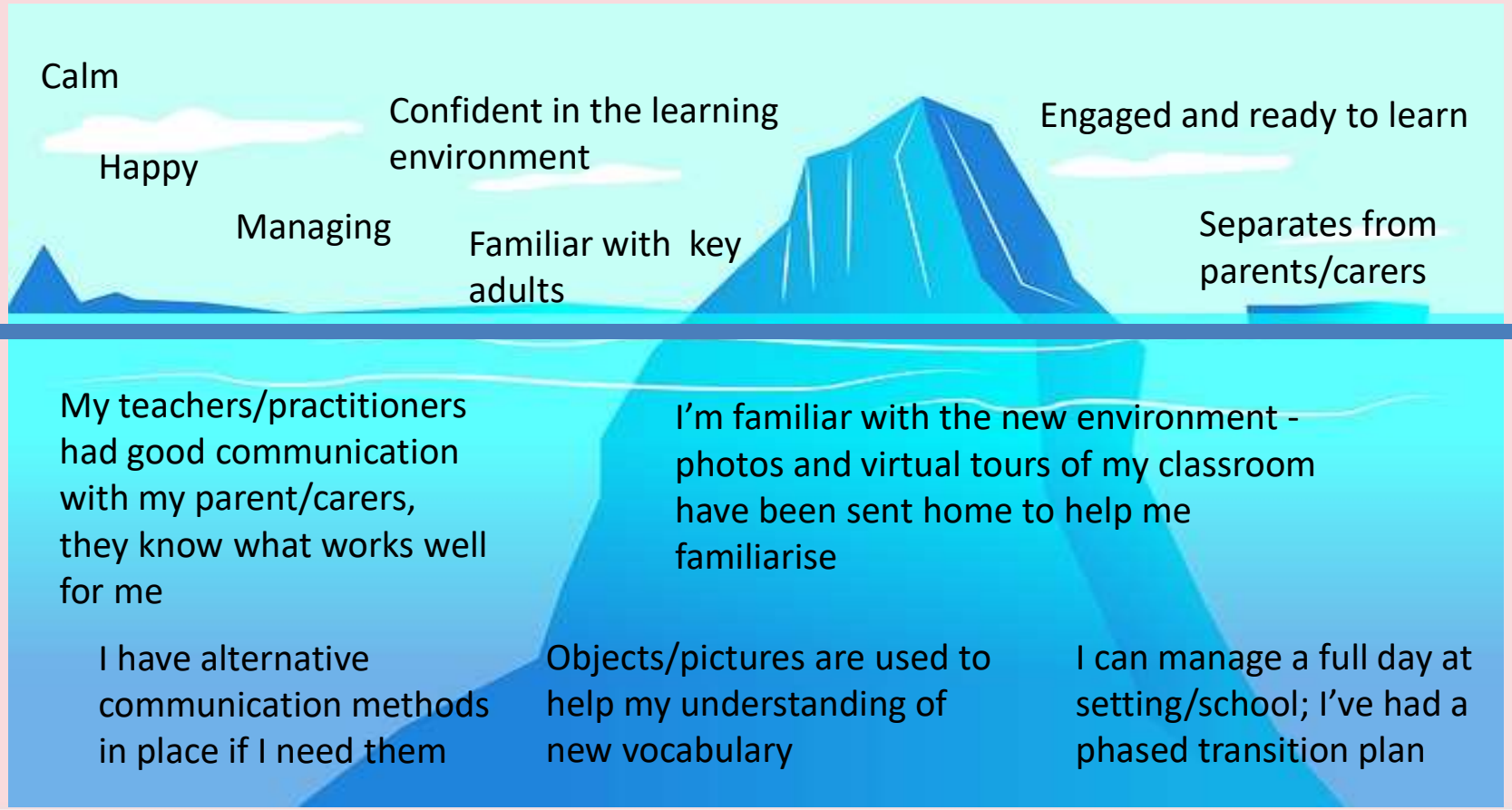
Impact
Analysing Behaviour Associated with Transition

Some behaviours we WANT to see when starting/returning to setting/school using the TEACCH Iceberg Metaphor:



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What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Classroom?

- We need to spend time thinking about the environment that children are transitioning/reintegrating into.
- It is important to consider the views of parents and how this needs to be reflected co-productively in planning to support a child in their transition/ reintegration.
- We need to ensure that we have looked at the holistic needs of the child, and reflected upon these within the environment.
- The following information aims to provide you with an easy to reference checklist and ideas as to how you can support a child within your classroom at this most challenging of times.

Key points to consider:

- Environment
- Provision from the School Focused Plan/ EHCP
- Child centred approach – planning is child focused and reflects the needs of the child
- Visual supports and structures
- Rewards and motivators
- Please see the Barnsley Autism Friendly School Standards Checklist (pages 12 -14)

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Classroom?

Have you considered? **Key information including transitional information is shared with relevant adults including parents and carers, at the right time:**	What does this look like in practice? **Session/school day start times, photographs, Transition Books, video walks:**
• Individual pupil sensitivities are taken into account and their voice is heard and reflected in provision	• Providing a sensory box/fiddle box and access to sensory activities, e.g. playdough/gloop/water/sand • Sensory circuits are timetabled into daily provision, if required • Ear defenders are available, if required • Movement/brain breaks are factored into timetable
• Access to sensory resources and/or activities	• Increase the number of opportunities for calming activities – be child-led
• All staff working with the pupil have a consistent approach to supporting the pupil and are aware of the content of the one page profile. One page profile with clear pupil input	• Where can this be found? • Have all staff signed and read this? • Is this updated regularly alongside parents/carers and the child?
• Pupils have an identified key worker/named person to go to in times of need	• Time is spent establishing the relationship

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Classroom?

Have you considered? **Key information including transitional information is shared with relevant adults including parents and carers, at the right time:**	What does this look like in practice? **Session/ school day start times photographs, Transition Books, video walks:**
• Involving pupils within decision making about free time/choice boards	• Do you have a choice board ready?
• Timetable of structured/supported play opportunities	• Is this individualised for the child? How will you keep this updated?
• Visual supports, e.g. First & Then boards, visual timetables, task strips, JIGS (checklists), 'working for boards'	• Are they at child height and accessible? How are you going to ensure they are kept up to date? Do they reflect the child's needs?
• Tasks are broken down into manageable chunks	• Do you have a First and Then board in place? Are you providing rewards, motivators and timers?
• Pupils have time to process and respond to information and instructions	• Allow the child time and space to process information and instructions

What is a Social Communication & Interaction Friendly Classroom?

Have you considered? **Key information including transitional information is shared with relevant adults including parents and carers, at the right time:**	What does this look like in practice? **Session/school day start times photographs, Transition Books, video walks:**
• Adaptations to group sizes and activities	• Build group sizes gradually
• Interventions e.g. social skills groups	• When doing interventions, consider social distancing, e.g. use of visuals to support understanding
• Clearly defined and well organised spaces and areas	• How are you implementing social distancing?
• Staff have a calm approach with pupils	• If we are calm in these uncertain times, our children will feel supported – think about adult discussions and little ears that may not understand
• Inclusion group or similar for unstructured times	• What will you offer? Music Interaction? Turn taking activities?
• Scaffolding is in place for structuring social interactions, e.g. peer buddy system/inclusion groups etc.	• Has the child got access to photographs of peers to support the choosing of partners/buddies to build self-esteem and confidence in this new way of working?

Good Practice for Re-Integration & Transition

Preparing for Change

The transition to a setting or school is a change that happens for all children. For children with social communication and interaction needs, who may have rigid thought processes, the need for routine and familiarity may lead to high levels of anxiety.

The following section will look at a number of factors to consider when planning and preparing transition and re-integration into a setting or school:

- Planning
- Involving Parents
- Reducing anxiety within setting/school through:
  - Provision
  - Visual structure
  - Social Stories
  - Calming/self-regulation strategies

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Planning

Before re-integration/transition:
The following information includes ideas to consider before a child is due to re-integrate back into setting/school, transitioning into a new setting/school or from one year group to another;

- ✓ Virtual opportunities for the SENCO to meet with the parent/carer, current setting (or current and receiving class teacher and any other relevant professionals, to discuss a transition plan
- ✓ Discuss needs that are set out in the child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or One Page Profile and School Focused Plan
- ✓ Education Health and Care Plan – if the Annual Review of the ECHP has had to be postponed due to Covid-19, ensure a new date is agreed with parents/carers and professionals
- ✓ Liaise with the SENCO, current staff member and receiving class teacher, to consider the outcomes on the child's School Focused Plan, including next steps and strategies that will help the child to achieve the outcomes
- ✓ Ensure the child's One Page Profile is updated; this should be a working document and be updated according to the child's present needs
- ✓ Arrange the process for transferring documents securely, e.g. via Egress
- ✓ Consider introductions to both the child and parent/carer, e.g. a virtual meeting or telephone call; discuss what would usually be covered in a face-to-face introduction meeting, plus information about their situation during the lockdown period, e.g. how has their child coped during lockdown, what their concerns might be and the future priorities
- ✓ Ensure any supportive tools that were used with the child in the previous/current setting/school are transferred, e.g. PECS Communication Book, First and Then board, symbols etc.
- ✓ Liaise with previous/current setting/school and parents/carers to discuss how the child manages with change. How did they transition into the current setting/school? This will enable a tailored programme, that suits the individual, to be implemented. Some children need a longer transition where as for others, it may be shorter. Remember no one size fits all

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Planning

Whilst the child is returning to their setting/school, consider the following information/ideas:

- ✓ The child may require a phased entry, e.g. gradually building up the time spent in the setting or school over a number of weeks; this should form part of an agreed plan with the setting/school and parents
- ✓ Visits to the new or current setting/school may need adapting during the Covid-19 Pandemic, e.g. when visits to the setting/school may take place, or children may start later to enable a well planned transition
- ✓ When a transition plan is in place, make sure there is an agreed date to review the plan; this should be reviewed with all staff involved, and include parents/carers, to celebrate the child's successes and plan further support if required
- ✓ Ensure known strategies are in place and staff have accessed training, if required
- ✓ Allow the child time to familiarise with the environment and build relationships with key staff
- ✓ Assess the child's current strengths and needs to be informed for next steps planning
- ✓ If the child is currently in school, e.g. the parent is a key worker or the child has an EHCP, consider the classroom they are currently accessing when in school; could they begin to access their new classroom in order to help them to become familiar with their new environment?
- ✓ Ensure receiving staff have time to read any relevant documentation, e.g. One Page Profile, School Focused Plan, reports from other professionals, such as; Educational Psychology Service, Speech and Language, Social Communication and Interaction Team, Occupational Therapy etc.

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Parents/Carers – involving parents/carers in transitions during Covid-19

Engaging parents during transition: (Also refer to 'A Parents/Carers Guide to Supporting Your Child's Social Communication and Interaction Needs Through the Covid-19 Pandemic)

The role of the SENCo:

- A welcome letter to families
- Introduce yourself to parents e.g. record your headteacher's introduction for new parents and upload it to the school website
- Question and answer session for parents, e.g. allow parents to ask questions beforehand and answer these via live stream, such as: a video conference or over Twitter.
- Write a FAQ-style page on your website

The role of the Parent/Carer:

- Help to create a Communication Passport by providing the school with important information about your child, e.g. a 'pen portrait' to share their likes/dislikes and what they are able to do; consider a transition object, e.g. letting your child take in a small familiar object (nothing valuable or precious though) with them as a comforter
- Practice the journey to school, e.g. taking the child for a drive or walk to show them the route to school
- Looking at the setting/school website/social media page
- Use of a calendar to indicate the run up to attending setting/school and when they will start the setting or school – this could be monthly or weekly
- Clothing – if possible introduce the school uniform in advance:
  - you could wash the uniform, so that it feels and smells like their other clothes
  - you may also want to encourage your child to practise wearing it, so it becomes familiar
  - supporting your child to put on and take off their uniform will also help them to practise their dressing skills, which will be important for if they need to get changed for PE at school
  - ensure your child's name is on all of their items of clothing

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school provision

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Before transition:

- Introduce key staff, and begin to familiarise the child with the environment through photo books and virtual tours
- You could give comments and provide short examples of how the areas are used, e.g. hang your coat here
- New uniform can be incorporated into role play areas if the pupil is in setting
- Include stories and rhymes around starting school
- Introduce games to familiarise new vocabulary, e.g. lotto games, matching, lining up, playtime, assembly etc.
- Allow the child to have time in the new setting to help them to familiarise with the environment

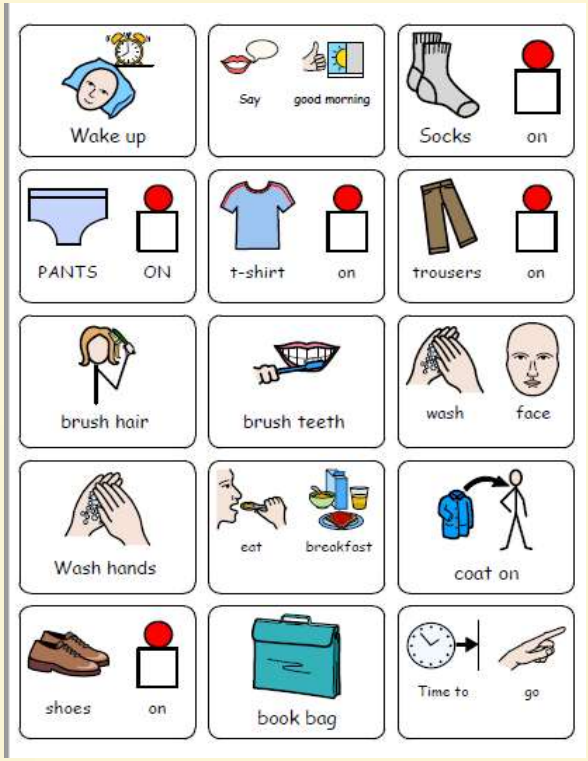
Starting/returning:

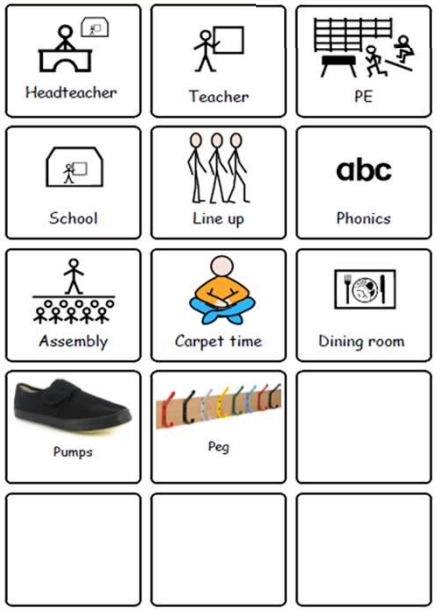
- Encourage the child to bring in things they have made or done during the lockdown period
- Bring photos of key people in their life to help them feel secure and provide conversation starters
- Continue to allow the child to have time to familiarise with the new environment and build relationships with key adults
- Asses: what the child can do at this point in time?
- Plan: What are their next steps?
- Do: Implement your plan
- Review: Did it work?

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – visual structure for parents/carers

Parents/Carers-could support their child and enable them to become independent by introducing a visual schedule for dressing/undressing. This will help them to know what they need to do at each step, e.g. provide them with a sequence for the dressing and undressing of their school uniform.





Parents/Carers- encourage your child to begin exploring new vocabulary associated with setting/school. This could be games, e.g. make this into a matching game

Parents/Carers – a calendar can be used at home to count down the days to starting setting/school.

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Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – using visuals to support safety measures

Some children may be reluctant to wash their hands, or have a particular interest with water, and may have difficulty transitioning away from the water, therefore a first and then board may help.

First	Then

For some children, consider a session discussing what is the same and what is different about particular aspects of school, e.g. dinner time. This may help to explore their feelings around the changes and support their understanding.

If there are changes to staffing, consider the use of photographs on the top of the board, classroom doors and within the daily timetable, to support the child to understand who is teaching today.

Insert

photo

Is teaching today

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – using visuals to support safety measures

A child's routine in school may be very different, therefore consider using a visual timetable (photo/symbol/written), to help them to familiarise with the new structure.

Use a visual sequencing strip to show a sequence of handwashing (display vertically).

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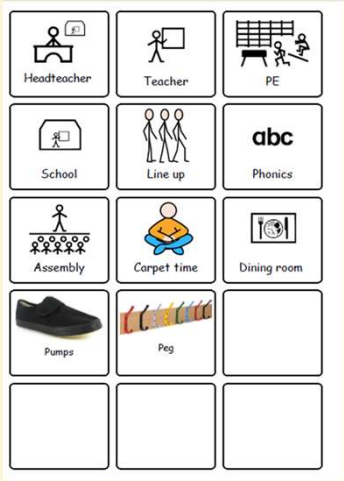

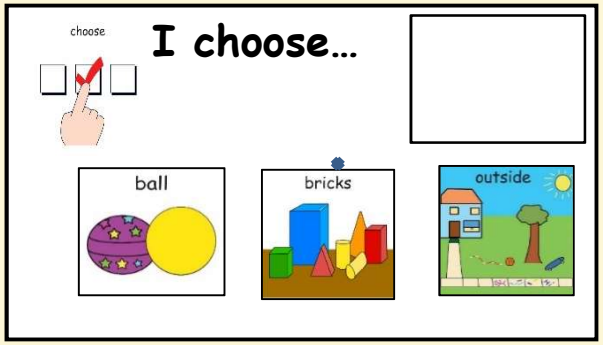

The classroom provision in EYFS and the classroom layout in school, may look very different. A choice board could help show a child what is not visible or readily available.

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – using visuals to support safety measures

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Consider a timer/song to support children to understand how long they are expected to wash their hands for.

YouTube have a number of children's count downs.

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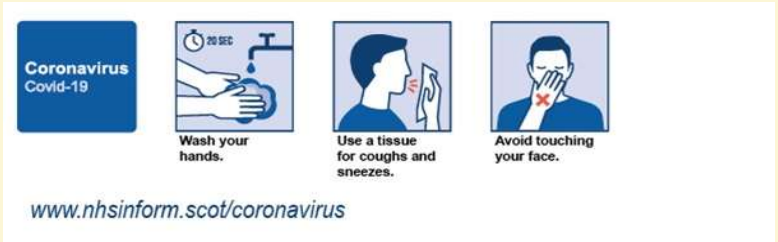

Display Government and NHS visuals to support understanding.

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition-

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – using Social Stories

'Social Stories © are a social learning tool that support the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals, and people with autism of all ages' *(Carol Gray)*

Social Story for return to school following closures:
https://www.lgfl.net/covid19socialstorie

The following links are for Social Stories about the virus and supporting understanding for hygiene measures e.g. hand washing:
https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus-1.pdf

https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-I-Can-Help-1.pdf

https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Washing-hands-carefully-with-reprint-permission.pdf

Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – using self regulation

During re-integration and transition, we recognise that children will be experiencing a range of emotions. For some children these could be difficult to express, and will often be presented in a range of different behaviours (see Iceberg example on pages 9 &10). Some points to consider for self-regulation could be:

Before re-integration/transition:

- ✓ Class teachers could provide a virtual worry box to allow children to submit their questions/concerns (written/pictorial)
- ✓ Send out plans so children can anticipate what they will be doing, and how changes such as social distancing will be implemented/look like in their classroom
- ✓ Ask children and or parents/carers to complete a piece of work on what helps when 'I'm feeling worried' etc; this can then inform provision available in the classroom
- ✓ Ask parents/carers to begin to explore vocabulary around feelings and emotions through books, lotto games, feelings dice etc.

Transition into a new classroom:

- ✓ Explore vocabulary and teach the corresponding visual, label emotions as they are displayed to begin to support the child to recognise their own feelings, e.g. "I can see you look…", "I wonder if it's because…"
- ✓ Tools such as the 'Incredible 5 Point Scale', by Kari Dunn Baron & Mitzi Curtis, can provide a visual means to help children express how they are feeling and explore the strategies that work for them during these times
- ✓ Other visuals such as: feelings fans, flash cards and choice boards can also support the child to effectively express their feelings

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Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – self regulation

Further examples for self-regulation in the classroom could also include:

It is important to support children to recognise when they need a break before they fully disengage or become distressed. Provide a break card at the start of work tasks and encourage the child to do an agreed action, e.g. hold it up when they are feeling upset. This will require modelling and prompting initially, but gradually the child will start to use this independently.

Consider having quiet/calm spaces available for children to retreat to for a break that provides reduced distractions. These spaces could also have individualised provision within them, e.g. known strategies/resources to calm and regulate the child.

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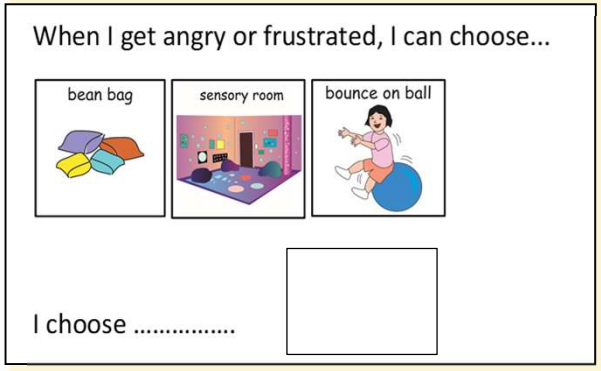
Good Practice for Re-integration & Transition

Reducing anxiety in setting/school – self regulation

Further examples for self-regulation in the classroom could also include:

Brain breaks/movement breaks–this strategy can be simply providing the child with a 'job', or a more personalised sensory circuit that needs timetabling into their daily provision.

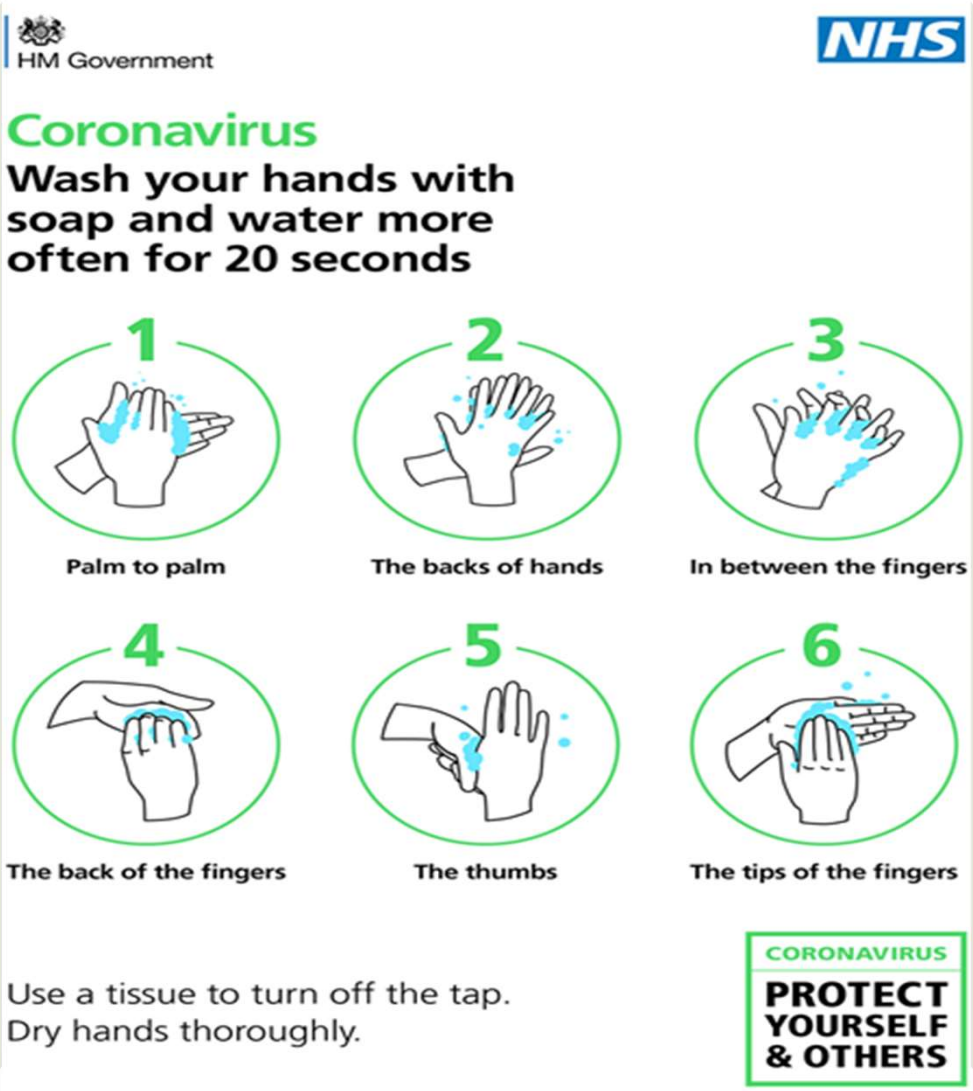


I need to get calm steps:

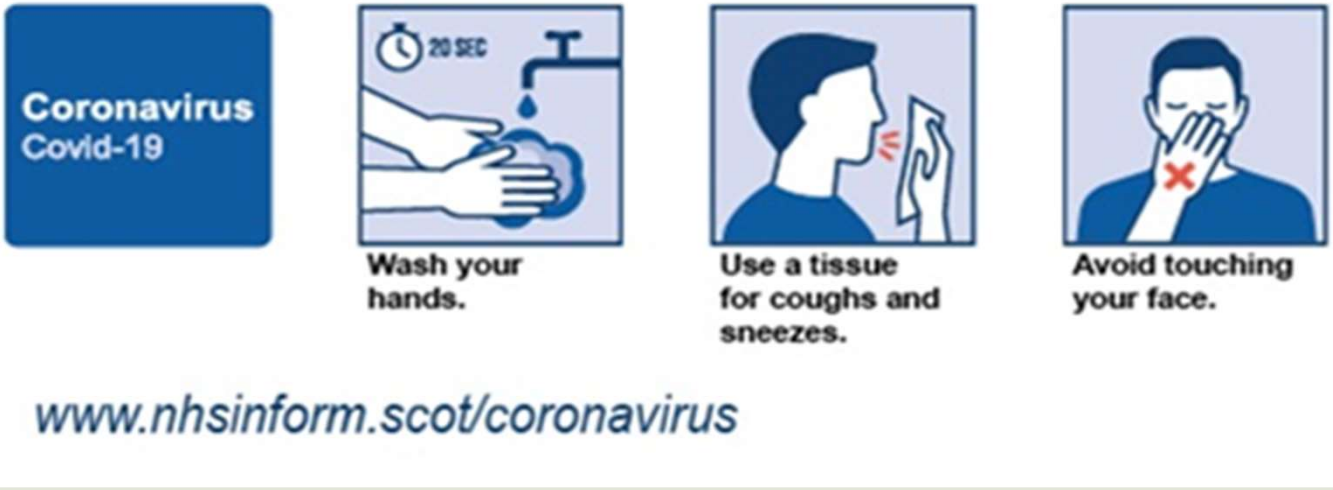
1. Go to calm down corner
2. Choose calm down tool
3. Set timer
4. Back to work

Visuals such as choice: boards or lists, with clear direct instructions, options and expectations, can break down information and support the child's understanding further.

Useful Resources/Links



Useful Resources/Links

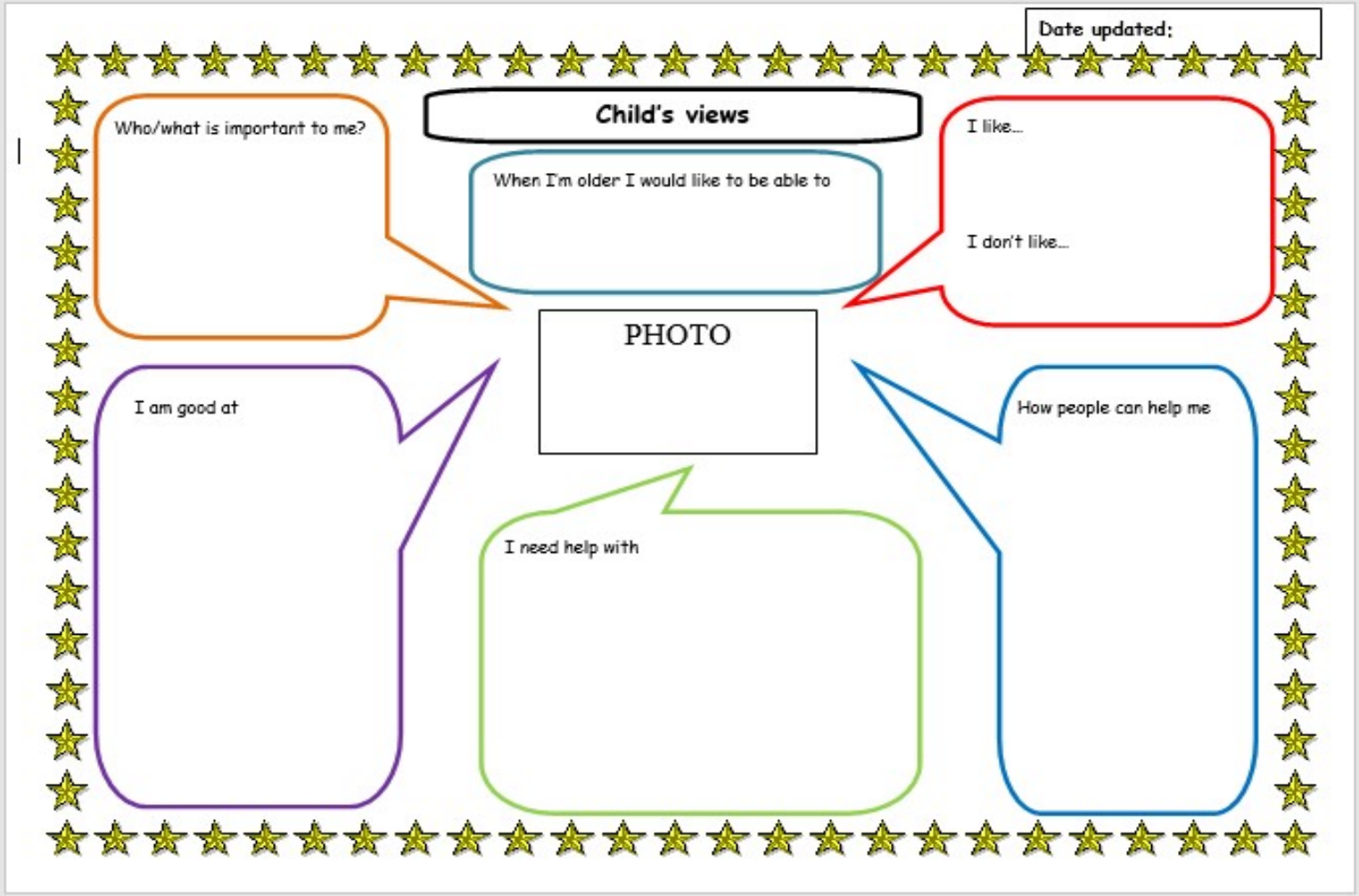


www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

Useful Resources/Links

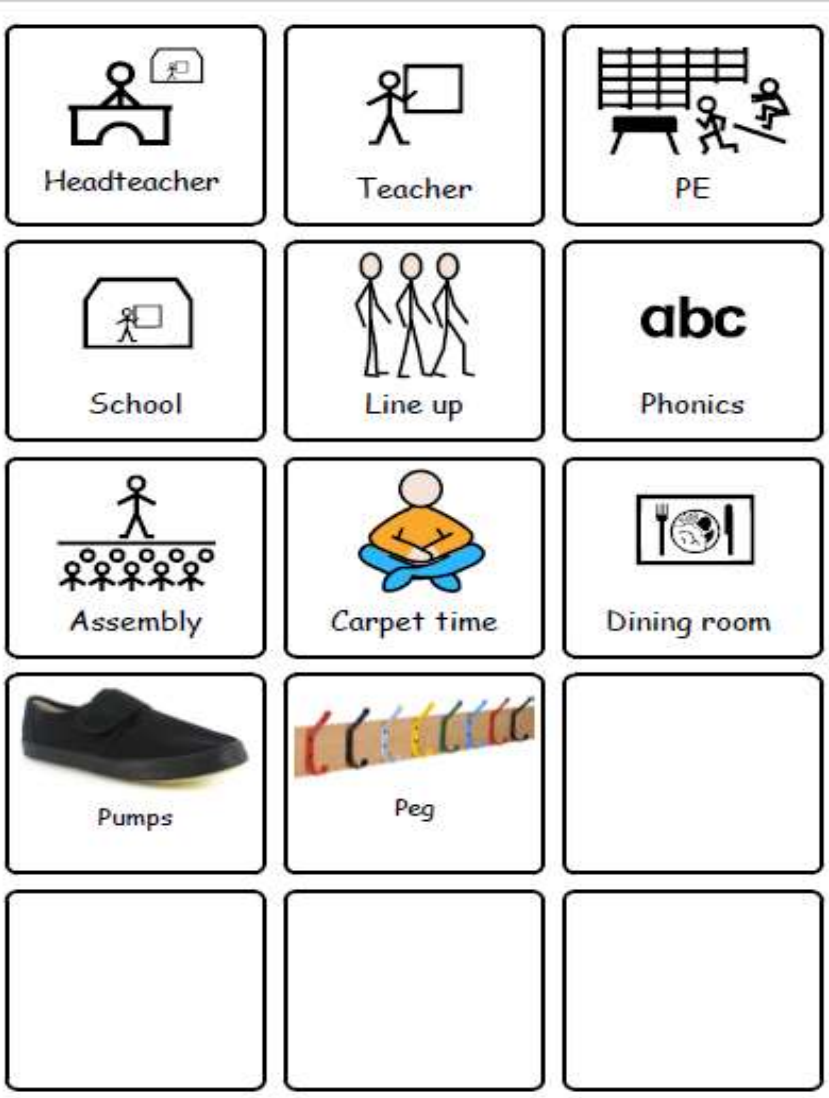
First	Then

Useful Resources/Links



Useful Resources/Links

Visuals for class timetable/First and Then board/teaching new vocabulary



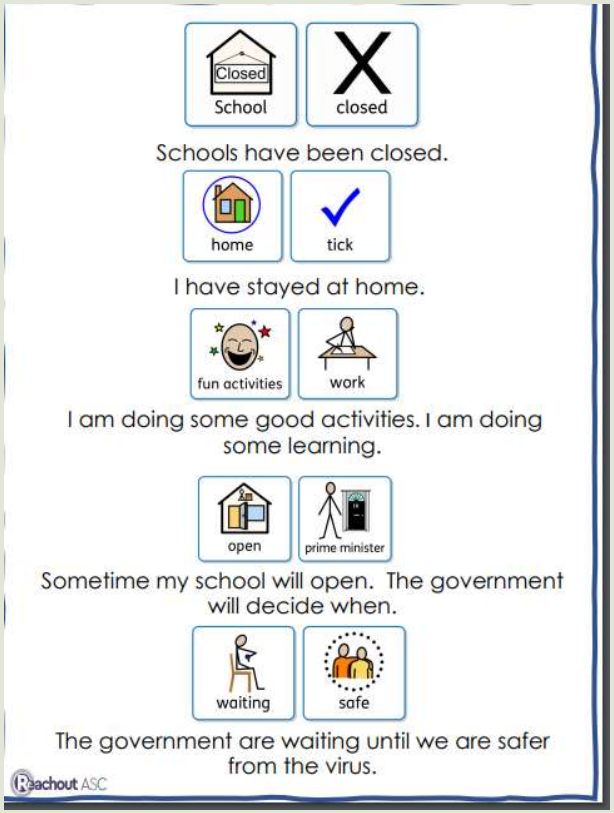
This could be sent home to parents/carers to begin teaching new vocabulary to the child.

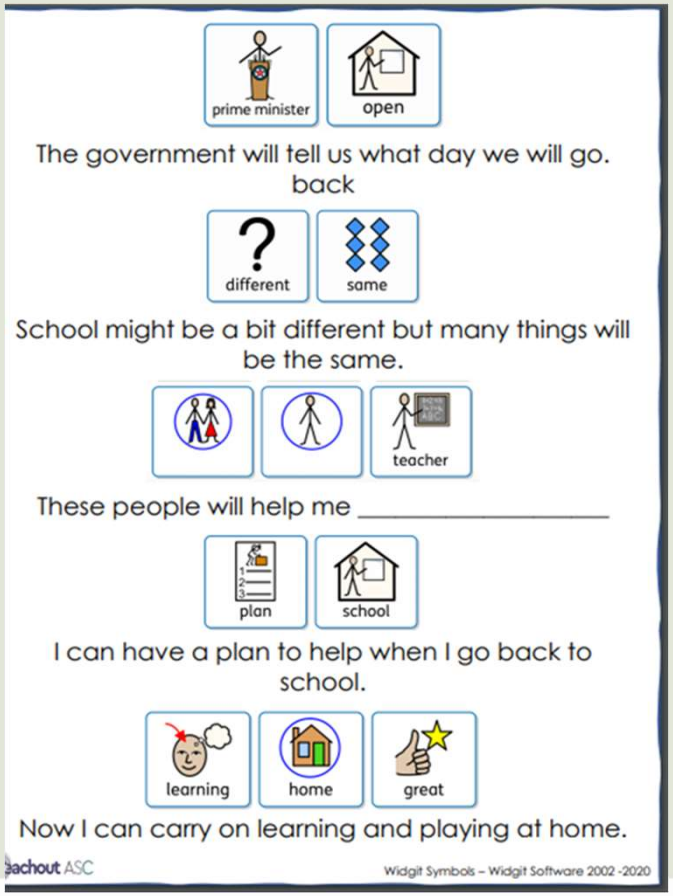
Useful Resources/Links

You may find the following resource useful to create some of the visual support tools in this guide, e.g. First and Then Board.

Useful Resources/Links

Free resources and online training for parents/carers and staff supporting children with social communication and interaction needs to transition and re-integrate into setting/school: https://www.schudio.tv/courses/preparing-autistic-send-children-for-going-back-to-school





Useful Resources/Links

Hygiene Bingo game: https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/downloads/good-hygiene-bingo-game-item-374

NHS Hand Washing song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VjeIWLnEg

CAHMS Resources: www.camhs-resources.co.uk

Supporting transition from Y6 to Y7: https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/covid-19/safeguard-and-support-pupils/pupil-wellbeing-and-mental-health/coronavirus-supporting-pupil-transition-to-secondary/

Early Years Transition booklet: http://services2schools.org.uk/Services/4698

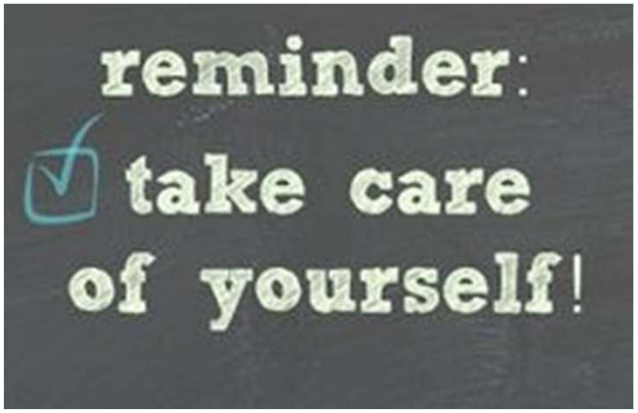
Transition Activity Packs: https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/downloads/transition-lapbook-item-125/

Arfur-Moe Transition Booklet: https://www.pdffiller.com/90820506--arfur-moe-form

Examples of sounds within different areas of school: http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/misc/866/soundwalk/

Black Sheep Press -
Talking about secondary school app (find in app store)

Support with bereavement: http://services2schools.org.uk/Services/4698



Staff Wellbeing

The work of staff must be acknowledged in planning how to re-integrate and transition new and existing children back into setting. It is equally important that you have some time to think about how you can help yourself.

You could consider:

- Talk, Talk and Talk –use the staffroom to come together to talk and support one another (and enjoy some treats)
- Operating a buddy system in school – another member of staff you can check in with throughout the day
- Be aware, label and acknowledge your own feelings –this is important to then be able to support the children in regulating their own emotions and feelings
- Consider some mindfulness based activities – have some strategies on hand that you can use, for example deep breathing
- At the end of the school day take some 'me time' – plan to do something you enjoy ☺

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References

https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it

- Retrieved on 23/4/2020

https://do2learn.com/picturecards/howtouse/first_then.htm

- Retrieved on 02/04/2020

Northamptonshire Education Psychology Service 'Promoting Positive School Transitions Following the COVID-19 Crisis' (V1 4th May 2020)

https://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/teachers/transition-tips.aspx

- Retrieved on 11/05/2020

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

- Retrieved 12/05/2020

- NAS EarlyBird Plus – Jane Shields 2004
- Teaching young Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders to learn – Liz Hannah 2001
- Barnsley Autism Friendly Schools Standards

Contact the Team

For further support, please do not hesitate to contact the team through the email link below: educationinclusionservices@barnsley.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can visit the below website and submit a query:
www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/schools-and-learning/education-inclusion-services/

Please include: pupil name and the name of the member of staff supporting them (if you know it):

- Dr Naomi Robinson – Principal Educational Psychologist / SCI Team Manager
- Toni Harvey – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Andrea Eaton – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Louise Stringer – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Lora Moore – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Melanie Booth – Specialist Support Worker
- Lucy Shea – Specialist Support Worker
- Gemma Whitfield – Specialist Support Worker

**Please note that some team members work part time, however we aim to respond to you within 7 days during term time.*