

Hello Everyone

Birmingham Education Partnership and the Educational Psychology Service have been working together to give you information that we feel can help you right now for the next 24-36 hours.

We want you to know that we will be working to offer wider support over the next weeks, but this information will help you right now.

Anna Robinson from BEP has written something based on her experience as a psychotherapist working with people in huge uncertainty and crisis. Dr Deborah Benjamin from the EPS has worked with her team to give you more resources that are robust and clinically sound. Colleagues across the country are working together to share.

We would strongly urge you to take 10 minutes to glance through this information. It will help reassure you that you are doing the right things and it will provide you with some specific ideas.

Attachments you will find here are:

- Trauma informed advice for a school closure – this will give you further helpful ideas.
- Trauma informed information for:
  - Talking to your pupils
  - For families
- 2 parent resource packs with information on how to keep yourselves well and also with wider links for your children/young people.

Another link you may find helpful right now is here:

<https://www.tinabryson.com/news/coronavirus-talking-points-for-parents-amp-teachers-with-the-whole-brain-child-approach>

**Message from Birmingham Educational Psychology Service:**

We would like to also let you know that the EPS will be providing ongoing support and advice to families throughout the coronavirus outbreak. This will take the form of online resources for families with children and young people who have special needs.

We will be looking at providing virtual drop in support (e.g. video calls, phone calls) in addition to resources for families.

The city council's BESS website:

<http://www.birminghameducationsupportservices.co.uk/Services/4524>, will ensure appropriate signposting to these resources and it will provide you with future council communication.

### **Message from Anna (Birmingham Education Partnership):**

I wanted to put together for you just some thoughts that I have had about how we can help children and young people (and, for that matter, our colleagues and parents) go as well as possible should they not be able to be in school for some time. I have offered some thoughts on phrasing things that I hope might be helpful to you and also a few tips on looking after yourself.

You will all be only too acutely aware of the impact on the escalating pandemic on the most vulnerable. I don't need to say any more.

Ways that you can help yourself (and reasons why you should do this)

1. For yourselves – eat regularly and eat as well as you can. Under stress, we are primed to reach for foods which are not healthy choices. They have an impact on your nervous system by raising and lowering your blood sugar sharply. Sometimes when we are anxious, we find it hard to eat. Eat something. Your nervous system needs the calm that it will bring. If you find you are feeling discombobulated at all, try strong flavours (I like a mint!!!). It helps to connect you to your senses.
2. Lay off the caffeine and alcohol if you can. They will push your anxiety level and leave you jittery.
3. Take at least 2 minutes every day to just stop. BREATHE. Breathing is a) often forgotten and b) hugely underestimated. Try this: breathe in for 4, hold for 6, out for 7.
4. Stop and notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. If you are with other people, make eye contact if you feel able to. It helps with grounding and connection. If you are on your own, get in touch with someone.
5. Think about what you wear – this may sound silly but it helps. There are some clothes that help us feel better and more confident, more in control. Wear them.

Here are my top 4 things that you can do right now to offer containment for pupils

1. Remember that uncertainty can trigger our internal alarm system. Know that some children may not be operating at their chronological age. This is normal. You can help by helping them ground themselves in some of the ways above helps to 'grow them back up a bit'. Keep thinking about what is need for pupils to feel safe, seen, soothed, secure – your skills in relationships are one of the best interventions and I see school staff deploy these skills brilliantly.
2. What is mentioned is manageable – take care if children express an anxiety to you, validate their perspective and empathise. So, for example this would be what I would say – it suits my style and way of being, yours may be different:

“I'm really scared about what's going to happen, am I going to get ill and are people going to die”

“yes, of course you feel scared, I can hear and understand that. You know, I'm really great at lots of things but I've not yet completed the course on predicting the future so I don't know who will or won't be sick. What I do know though is that I think it's quite normal to feel and think lots of different things when things are uncertain and that's ok, all of our feelings are OK. I also know that it helps to think about the things we can do ourselves to help. How can I help you?”

Asking “how can I help” is really useful in a crisis. It is enabling to both the person asking and the person on the receiving end. For pupils, finding a way to be helpful in their own ways right now is a really positive step. For example: Can pupils put together their own tips for one another, can younger pupils find a way to be helpful at home. It gives a sense of agency which can be important because control and certainty are at the core, from an evolutionary standpoint, one of the things that have kept our species alive.

3. Language – When children leave our establishments we don’t know necessarily when we will see them again. People find it awkward to know what to say. Try something along these lines: “Go well/steady/gently and we will be looking forward to when we are together again”. This helps land in pupils mind that there is a next time but it does not set up any disappointment or guarantee. You cannot offer that certainty so this way of talking helps.
4. Transitional objects are really helpful – Where you have children who will be returning to your setting, they reassure children and young people that school will come back together – if children or young people need to take something from a classroom that they will bring back then great (make a note for yourself about what it is – if you have contact while pupils are off you can remind them of it/ask if they still have it) or you can draw something on a pebble that children can take home. Different things for different pupils – some may need to take something like a cushion from any sensory room you have as it gives them something really tactile, others may take a favourite book. Try where you can, to enable children to take something meaningful for them. If you have children who will not be returning to your setting, between now and when they would formally end with you, consider writing to them personally about the things you remember doing with them, that you are sorry you have not been able to be physically with them, that you are holding them in mind and also personal qualities that you have seen and enjoy in them.

Holding you all in mind

Anna

Psychotherapist and Mental Health Lead

Birmingham Education Partnership