

SAME SEA DIFFERENT BOATS **– EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



With the gradual return to school, it is important to look after *everyone's* mental health in order to support our children and young people.

Many young people are experiencing feelings of anxiety and overwhelm that are more commonly seen in a midlife crisis. They are facing feelings of loss, pointlessness, questioning the systems they were a part of for relevance...this is in children as young as eleven. Many in those transition years 6 and 11/13 are feeling it even more acutely, i.e. the loss of the collective transition process marked by rituals and ceremony. Those who have returned to school are getting used to new rules and the physical challenges in the classroom, as everyone tries to figure out how best to handle the situation. There are many children who are really happy to be back at school and having some semblance of normality within the limits of social distancing. There are so many scenarios we are encountering with a diversity of experience.

We know a child does not exist in a vacuum, and as many parents and teachers are going through various levels of stress, we have to support the whole school community's mental health. That is why we feel it is so important to offer re-integration training to all staff and continue support for parents.

At the beginning of Covid-19, we responded to the crisis by offering wellbeing phone calls to parents and all school staff. Those who took up this offer have said they are incredibly grateful for the support. By giving people safe places to talk and share their experiences, they are able to process what may be distressing or overwhelming them and in turn are able to take more care of themselves, which inevitably supports the children around them.

Now with the return to schools we are responding by offering a broader range of initiatives that again focuses on the mental health and wellbeing of the whole community.

We are offering training to teachers so they can implement the therapeutically designed programme 'Same Sea Different Boats' to support with the re-integration process, creating a collective narrative of the diverse experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown period through the arts and storytelling. This is alongside the award-winning 'Life Skills for Mental Health and Wellbeing Whole School Communication System', which centres around simple, regular, consistent self-regulation techniques throughout the day.

A workbook for Year 11/13s is available on the website, which can be downloaded to support these cohorts to work through their feelings and emotions around not doing GCSEs/A Levels or having the normal rituals and rites of passage that occur at this time of year. We are also offering small group work with those young people who want it on zoom and in school settings where appropriate.

We have all been in the 'same sea' in this global pandemic, but our individual experiences have been very varied i.e. 'different boats'. Our interventions provide a safe, structured, creative way for school communities to make sense of this experience.

When we experience difficulties and trauma, science tells us that we need to talk, express, show how it has been for us, what our experience has been, in order to create a cohesive narrative. By doing this we move it from the emotional part of the brain into thinking and then the memory part. This process means we can later remember without the emotions experienced at the time overwhelming us. We also are aware that teaching self regulation techniques is the 2nd most successful way to improve attainment¹, so helping our children through simple meditation or body awareness exercises supports them academically, and this approach underpins all the training offered by Light Education Training.

It is essential for everyone's mental health to allow the space and time to talk, to share and to be creative in those expressions in order to be able to be available and present in the now. Things go awry when we try to forget about things, saying "it wasn't a big deal, get over it, move on". This is like saying it is too hard to handle or if we ignore it, it will go away. But the opposite is actually true... if we try to ignore what has happened

the brain thinks it is still under threat and keeps reminding us to deal with it, or it starts projecting it onto other situations creating more anxiety and stress. Vanessa McHardy, Psychotherapist and founder of Light Education Training, shares: “What is felt and expressed is let go of so you can be free to live fully in the moment...this fosters mental health and wellbeing.”

The ‘Same Sea Different Boats’ Programme addresses this fundamental need, by giving children and young people time to be creative by making their boat, making different boats to acknowledge how the feelings can shift and how the sea can change, by seeing their boat on the sea with everyone else’s boat, so they can see that they have been a part of something collective during an unprecedented moment in history. Going through the process of showing your class sea to the rest of the school in the school assembly space is a symbol of bringing everyone’s experiences together. On return to the classroom, the artwork can remain so that the children and teachers can refer to it and continue to add to the understanding, with lesson plans developed to support this.

“The training for staff was so brilliant, they really appreciated having the time to think and talk, and the teachers have embraced doing the one thing they decided to commit to that would support their body to be regulated. One of our teachers shared how they did the breathing technique and the kids loved it. With the therapeutic art project underway we can identify which children need more support and it’s been really helpful to have such a simple clear activity”.

The website has many resources for teachers to support their wellbeing, including videos and audios with exercises on how to connect to the body which supports with calming anxiety, e.g. walking even for 15mins each day has huge benefits both physically and psychologically.

By having a clear narrative, the brain can place challenging experiences to memory. This allows the body to move on and settle back into being open and present. The website contains videos and audios that have body awareness exercises for adults and children to do, to help the body relax, let go and connect more deeply so the body and mind can settle.

Reference

1 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education>