

Week/commencing 25 January 2021

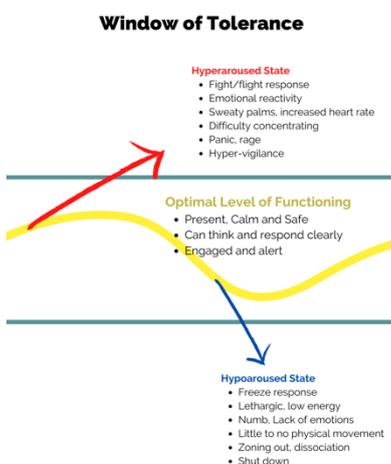
Dear All,

As lockdown continues more and more of us are feeling a complex range of emotions from helplessness and hopelessness to burnout and anger, to name but a few. There is no doubt that this is hard; it is certainly the longest marathon that I've ever run and I'm sure the same applies to most of you too. With this in mind, and without wanting to overload you with too much information or yet more things to think about and do, I just wanted to jot down a couple of thoughts that have been on my mind since the last time I wrote to you, in the hope that they may help you as you continue to deliver the learning and support that has been the hallmark of the outstanding teaching you have delivered over the past year. Whilst the main focus of this newsletter is on supporting you as you work in the classroom/online, please note that these ideas are not exclusive to the classroom; take them and use them at home as well as at school, share them with your parent community or even with your friends and family if you think they may be of use.

1. Start the day the KIPSY way

For those of you who have already been using our Casey/KIPSY caterpillar stories in class, you will know that one of the aspects that we promote through our stories is an understanding of 'calm' and how to access this using our short mindful exercise.

As we explain in our staff inset workshop, the reason to introduce a clear understanding of calm to our children's vocabulary is so that they are able to stay in their 'window of tolerance' and not 'flip their lid' during the course of the day. Almost a year into this pandemic, with all that we have had to juggle during this time, we are all living and operating at the top of our 'window of tolerance', that's to say, we are all operating with chronic stress. Acute stress, the sort of response that enables us to get out of the way of an oncoming car or work all night to get a piece of work finished, is what our stress response is for. Living with heightened cortisol and adrenalin levels for prolonged periods of time – chronic stress - is where mental and emotional (as well as physical) difficulties and struggles start, and it is this that we need to guard against. Here are a few ideas of the sorts of things we can do to help:



- Start the school day with a set window of time – 5/10mins is all it needs - to focus on the Calm Time bit of the Casey/KIPSY story and to allow your class (and yourself) a small window of opportunity to pause and access a calm mental space. The temptation to charge into another full and challenging day of teaching and learning can be strong, but finding a window of time to re-centre the children in your class at the start of every day – and throughout it if necessary – will pay dividends over time, as well as enabling your children to more readily access their 'thinking brain' and thereby access the learning you are offering. We have recorded videos of the Calm Time being read aloud if you would find it



easier to use these – take a look on our website for more details
www.makingme.org.uk.

- Following on from the Stepping Stones suggestion in my last newsletter, pro-actively factor time in your day when you allow *yourself* a short window to ‘breathe’ – literally and metaphorically. Knowing that this window of time is available to you will help you to ‘hold on’ when you know that you are reaching the top of your ‘window’. Rather than feeling you have to make it to the end of the day before you can ‘have a meltdown’, pro-actively factor in one or maybe more ‘stepping stones’ throughout the day when you know that you are going to allow yourself a small window of time to access a calmer head space. Even just recognising this simple act of self-care will help to decrease your stress levels, not to mention the obvious benefits afforded by some time to pause and re-centre.



2. Resilience in action



It seems to me that, as a society, we have so far missed a huge positive throughout this pandemic and that is the opportunity to recognise how much we have all grown in our capacity to be resilient. For many of us, we may not have thought it possible to have faced up to and overcome some of the challenges that are now behind us as we continue to plough forward and do our best to ‘keep going’. And yet resilient we have most certainly been! I believe

that introducing active measures to recognise the extent of our resilience will go a long way in boosting moral and supporting the mental wellbeing of our children, our staff, our parent communities and ourselves.

Our children, have, in my opinion, been outstanding in their efforts to face the challenges of on-line school and compromise some of the core principles of being a child – playing, socialising, learning and growing. I worry about some of the longer-term implications of this, but for now, I think one thing that we *can* do to help counteract this negative, is to find any and every opportunity to recognise and reward their daily attempts to be resilient. As we know, the more we recognise and acknowledge a behaviour, the more likely we are to see it repeated. To that end, I would suggest that we make a concerted effort to openly and clearly use the word ‘resilience’ in our communications with our children, highlighting just how resilient they are being every time they log on and engage



in on-line school as well as the myriad of other opportunities that we will have throughout the school day to notice and applaud their resilience and adaptability.

3. Self-care isn't selfish

I know that you are all working tirelessly to get the children and families in your schools through this (hopefully) last full lockdown. I would again reiterate, however, the need to look after yourselves and not just focus on the people in your care. The age-old adage of needing to fit your own oxygen mask before fitting that of the person next to you, was never more appropriate. So please, if you can, make every effort to find your own place of calm, pause and recognise how resilient *you* have been throughout this pandemic, don't negate the times that you have found things difficult, and thereby prioritise your wellbeing and not just that of the people in your care.



Finally, I just wanted to draw your attention to the growing bank of resources on our 'new' website that we hope will offer you some guidance and support over the next few weeks. We are adding things daily so please keep popping back to see if there is anything that can be of help to your or your families. Included this week is an activity pack with lots of ideas for Children's Mental Health Week, as well as a growing pot of resources for parents. Take a look at www.makingme.org.uk.

As ever, if there is anything specific that you think we might be able to help you with, please do not hesitate to contact us at schools@makingme.org.uk.

With our best wishes in the meantime.

Liz

Liz and the Team
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