

Dear All,

The hustle and bustle of 'back to school' has hopefully calmed down for most of you, and with that, a return to some semblance of normality – whatever 'normal' is these days!

Change and the need to make adjustments is never easy, and after so much upheaval over the past 18 months, there is bound to be some anxiety around being back in school and the expectations that come with that. As we talk about in our staff induction, what lies at the root of wellbeing is, fundamentally, a sense of feeling safe. Given how important this is, particularly in the face of so much additional change this year, I thought it might be useful to re-visit some aspects of what is involved when we talk about 'emotional safety'.



Rebuilding a sense of safety

As we know from our own life experience, lots of change can sometimes bring a sense of feeling unsettled and unsafe – and this is particularly so for little people who have such limited understanding of the 'big picture' of life as well as extremely limited control over what does and does not happen in their world. There are, however, a few things that we can do to help the children (and adults) in our world to rebuild a sense of safety in the face of so much change. Here are a few initial ideas:

1. Practise new routines in advance and keep practising them – remember that it takes time to set up new neural pathways.
2. Go slowly, adding new changes one at a time.
3. Be explicit about your expectations, particularly around behaviour.
4. Set realistic goals and allow children to succeed – many children are worried that they will be behind in class having missed so much in-person teaching; giving them a feeling of achievement will go a long way in boosting their sense of wellbeing and academic engagement.
5. Arrange activities that promote a sense of belonging and connection – rebuilding the links between school and home will be fundamental for some children to feel safe and therefore less anxious about being back in school.

Seeing, Hearing and Holding

The bedrock of our framework at Making Me is that we SEE, HEAR and HOLD the children in our care in order to promote a sense of feeling emotionally safe. As we know, and as you witness every day in your classrooms, without this sense of safety, children will use their behaviour to communicate, in an attempt to draw us into their world. These children are not being bad or naughty, they are scared and overwhelmed, and with a limited ability to communicate this, or with a fear that they will not be properly seen and heard, they are using the only resource they have to get the help they need.



It is also worth remembering that for some children it can take time to feel safe enough to experience difficult emotions. Any attention is better than no attention when you're a drowning man and my guess is that these past few months will have left a lot of children floundering in the deep end. They need us to be the lighthouse in their storm – even if the waters appear perfectly calm to us.

School may also be the only safe place in which some children can demonstrate how difficult the past few months have been for them – these children need time to know, test and be reassured of your ability to be there for them. They will need to test and feel the safety of a school system that is structured enough to provide boundaries but flexible enough to see them, to hear them and to patiently hold them.

I know anecdotally that many of you are doing some amazing things to underpin our framework in your schools, so please let me take this opportunity to give you a virtual pat on the back and congratulate you for doing what you can to keep your pupils safe and prioritise their emotional wellbeing.



None of this is easy, we recognise that, which is why we continue to develop our Programme of resources to help you as you help them. If you would like to find out more about what we have to offer in our Primary Programme, please get in touch; we are happy to come in and repeat the Shield of Resilience workshops that we have done in the past to your pupils in years 3 to 6 and we have added a short assembly that explains the need for us all to look after our emotional health. We are also happy to repeat your staff induction (whether in person or virtually) if you feel that a quick refresher of this might help remind you of the core principles of our Programme.

Please contact us at schools@makingme.org.uk if you are interested in any of these resources and we will arrange a time when we can call you to discuss your needs.

In the meantime, as ever, please remember to take the time to check in on your own emotional wellbeing and do what you can to create ways to see, hear and hold yourself as you give so much of who you are to those in your care.

With very best wishes,

Liz and the Making Me Team

