Growing Together with our Buddies

Our journey of growing together again with faith, hope and love
Following the 2019-2020 successful pilot from Alfreton Nursery Teaching School Alliance and Derbyshire County Council Early Years. 'The Teddy Bear Project', Bolsover Church of England Junior school has launched Growing Together again with our Buddies.

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide. It is no obvious statement that school closures impact not only pupils but all school staff and families as well as having economic and societal consequences.

School closures, in response to the pandemic, have shed light on various social and economical issues, including homelessness, food insecurity, digital learning, housing, internet, childcare, plus many more issues. Many families have suffered in some way because of the impact. The impact has been even more severe for disadvantaged children and their families causing interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems and economic consequences for those families who have not been able to work.

Research shows that the common thread that runs through the current lived experience of our children is loss. From loss emanates three significant dynamics that will impact majorly on the mental health of our children: anxiety, trauma and bereavement. The appearance of this, all at once, is significant for any developing child. In some way, the children of Bolsover have lost friendships, social interaction, structure, routine, the loss of positivity, the loss of a trusted adult, the loss of another home- another family. They have lost their freedom and opportunities.

The children of Bolsover have also perhaps lost that feeling, in some way, of security. Surrounding them every day, are reports of the impact of the pandemic, reminders of the pandemic and measures which should be taken.
The losses experienced can trigger anxiety, trauma and bereavement in a child.

In a think piece called A Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic Barry Carpenter, CBE, Professor of Mental Health in Education, Oxford Brookes University suggested the Recovery Curriculum is what schools should be planning to support children in the loss and mental health struggles they will have experienced. It is suggested that the recovery curriculum should be built on the 5 Levers, as a systematic, relationships-based approach to reigniting the flame of learning in each child. Many children will return to school disengaged. School may seem irrelevant after a long period of isolation, living with a background of silent fear, always wondering if the day will come when the silence speaks and life is changed forever. Our quest, our mission as educators, should be to journey with that child through a process of re-engagement, which leads the children back to their rightful status as a fully engaged, authentic learner.

The levers are as follows:

Lever 1: Relationships - we cannot expect our students to return joyfully, and many of the relationships that were thriving, may need to be invested in and restored. We need to plan for this to happen, not assume that it will. Reach out to greet them, use the relationships we build to cushion the discomfort of returning.

Lever 2: Community - we must recognise that curriculum will have been based in the community for a long period. We need to listen to what has happened in this time, understand the needs of our community and engage them in the transitioning of learning back into school.

Lever 3: Transparent Curriculum - all of our students will feel like they have lost time in learning and we must show them how we are addressing these gaps, consulting and co-constructing with our students to heal this sense of loss.

Lever 4: Metacognition - in different environments, students will have been learning in different ways. It is vital that we make the skills for learning in a school environment explicit to our students to reskill and rebuild their confidence as learners.

Lever 5: Space - to be, to rediscover self, and to find their voice on learning in this issue. It is only natural that we all work at an incredible pace to make sure this group of learners are not disadvantaged against their peers, providing opportunity and exploration alongside the intensity of our expectations.

Loss and Recovery Think Piece:

As a school, we have seen the impact of the pandemic on our community- on the mental health, the well-being, the day-to-day lives of our children and their families. Many different stakeholders were and still are witnessing first and second hand a whole host of emotions brought on by this pandemic and, for some, these have been difficult to manage and on some days, they have been over-whelming.

Bolsover continued to stay open throughout lockdown and responded to the growing concerns for those children who were in school as well as those who were at home. Reflecting on all of this has meant we have had to carefully consider our approach to growing together again.
Following much research, we decided to plan a systematic, relationships-based approach which centred around the five levers Barry Carpenter suggests for a recovery curriculum in order to re-engage the children of Bolsover back, as stated earlier, to their rightful status as fully engaged, authentic leaners.

**Mental Health and Well-being**

The Coronavirus outbreak has meant that communities have / are facing uncertainty and this can have an impact on children and young people’s mental health.

We know schools are on the front line and are playing a hugely important role in keeping communities going in these challenging times. This has often been by supporting children and family learning, as well as supporting them with their mental health. The worry around the virus itself, issues around lockdown, finances, family worries and living with such uncertainty have all played a part in impacting on our children’s, families and teachers mental health. We have all seen a huge impact on people’s well-being, the loss of routine, contact with others, the lack of structure and friendship will all have had an adverse impact on people’s physical health, but also their mental capacity. Even the most positive of people will have experienced a range of emotions and found it difficult to stay positive and grounded in such a hugely life effecting experience.

For many children this has manifested in huge shifts in their emotions from anger to over excitement, from upset to anxiety. Our children have experienced a difficult childhood experience, one that no one yet will be able to predict fully the impact. Experiences will have varied, many will have been sheltered safe at home in a bubble of family life, with its usual difficulties and family fallouts, but they will have been cocooned from the turmoil happening in the world. For other children, the period of lockdown may not have been so idyllic. Their usual safe place of school unattainable for the many, some children abandoned to a dearth of undesirable experiences, experience that will have repercussions later in life, and some will most definitely have experiences they will share when, with trusted adults, when they return to school.

Even for the least effected children there will be some level of apprehension and anxiety in either returning to school at which ever point, leaving home or having to return to the usual day to day pressures of life. However, we also must be mindful that, for some children, there may have been little visible impact. For some children, mental health will not be an issue as they return to school after this global pandemic.

For school staff and parents we also need to be mindful this has been a hugely stressful time. Every person will have had their own experience of the pandemic period, for some they may have been lockdown at home for at least 12 weeks with little contact from the outside world, for others this period has been a hugely stressful time and workloads have been demanding. For school staff they have seen their workloads change, while schools grapple firstly with the re-invention of schools from school buildings to people’s homes, through partial closure, and all of the issues that have come about as a result, to the partial re-opening of the building for children to return. For parents, the growing issues of workloads, careers, home-schooling, finances, managing household tasks and all of the loss people have experienced, will be an issue, which will affect their very well-being.
Listed below are some of the outcomes we have been aware of as a result of the pandemic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Children</strong></th>
<th><strong>Parents</strong></th>
<th><strong>Staff</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing connections with staff and children / relationships</td>
<td>Struggling with own emotional regulation</td>
<td>Dealing with things at a distance – lack of contact with children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Not sure what to do for their child</td>
<td>Own anxieties about returning, safety, their own children, families and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In active (physically)</td>
<td>Don’t understand how children are feeling</td>
<td>Change of cultures in school (new ways of communicating, expectations etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Dealing with their own issues – worries / finance etc</td>
<td>CPD needs – appropriate training to deal with this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety – Separation / illness / COVID-19 (understanding it)</td>
<td>Don’t have the tools</td>
<td>Teachers mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand what is happening</td>
<td>Anxiety about returning to society / school</td>
<td>Managing workloads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already had issues with emotional understanding and regulation prior, which has increased during lockdown.</td>
<td>Working from home</td>
<td>Difficulty in understanding management steer – lack of contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in a world which is very busy normally and are struggling with the change</td>
<td>Managing childcare</td>
<td>Changing times, tools and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on screens / online – TV, laptops, phones, devices etc has increased</td>
<td>Bereavement</td>
<td>Anxiety about returning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding their experience – everyone’s will have been different (seeing other families doing nice things etc)</td>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>Secondary trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bereavement – Both COVID related or not (issues around grief)</td>
<td>Miss understanding around children’s behaviours – thinking there is something wrong with their child</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress – toxic stress</td>
<td>Collective trauma</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective trauma</td>
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**Children**

During this pandemic, children have suddenly experienced change to their lives and their routines- they have lived with lots of uncertainty about the future (the upcoming weeks and months).

The following documents/websites have been useful in shaping our work:

https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/coronavirus-information-and-support?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIiuyflfyf1IVCLDTCh3sKQgOEAYASACEgLI_fD_BwE

Promoting Positive Transitions COVID-1

**Mental wellbeing**

https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-schools-make-it-count
Staff

It is important to look after your own mental health.

Click on the links below to explore more.

Anxiety

Low mood

Stress

Sleep

Urgent support

Helping others

Possible causes

Education Support is the only UK based charity that are available for confidential emotional support for teachers, support staff, senior leaders, higher education and further education staff. Click here to watch a short clip about Education Support.

Having good mental health helps us relax more, achieve more and enjoy our lives more.

https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/
Parents

It is clear that many parents are struggling to balance work, childcare and self-care while keeping worries, both their children’s and their own, under control. The guidance below is for parents and carers on supporting children and young people mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19.


Throughout this pandemic, our parents have been provided with, in a variety of ways, information, guidance and support documents related to mental health and wellbeing.

For adults there is a wealth of advice online. Many of these online resources talk about how important is it to ensure you, as the adult have positive mental health, as this will in turn support your child. The links below are just two of many sites and resources shared with parents and carers:


The recovery curriculum at Bolsover is filled with content which we believe is best for our children and school community, informed by our own understanding of the children, families and the wider school community as well as the information shared above. The recovery work in school considers the wellbeing principles as well as the principles of EYFS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-being principles</th>
<th>EYFS principles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conditions to learn and develop</td>
<td>Unique child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough of what matters</td>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with family and friends</td>
<td>Enabling environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and suitable home environment and local area</td>
<td>Learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive views of themselves and an identity that is respected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We use our vision and our values to guide our work. *Growing Together with our Buddies* aims for all of the children of Bolsover to grow together again to restore relationships, improve transition of both emotions and learning so that we can restore the mental wealth of our children meaning that one day their dreams for their future can be become, one day, a reality.
The project aims for children to:

- Restore relationships
- Restore and re-engage the love of learning
- Develop a good understanding of themselves
- Strengthen the community

Our approach is adaptable and responsive to the needs of the children and which reflects the uniqueness of our community.

After speaking with a sample of parents and children (ranging from Year 3-Year 6), it was decided that the recovery curriculum approach would be centred around the children’s very own soft, cuddly toy and this would be used as a means to explore emotions, thoughts, feelings as well as behaviour and understanding of what is happening in the world.

Soft, stuffed-toys are amongst the most played-with toys of children. It also seems that the relationship we develop as a young child with our favourite soft toys can be beneficial even into adult life. Research shows that there are many benefits to having a soft toy:

- It provides comfort in unfamiliar environments and times
- Helps to release the hormone **Oxytocin** which leaves us feeling calm and soothed
- Holds great sentimental value
- Encourages nurture
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Provide a sense of security and protection

**Floor Books**

Throughout school, floorbooks will be used as a means of the children sharing their thinking and recalling ideas/learning. Floorbooks are blank books where we can record children's voices and their ideas to use in our planning and assessment of where children are at with their thinking. Group writing in a Floorbook allows shared thinking as children recall each other's ideas and record them through writing, diagrams and photographs. This child centred approach records the evidence of the process of play and the learning that comes from it.

The floorbooks will be used to track and assess the learning and discussions which are taking place. Furthermore, they will be used to assess the stage at which children are with their discussions and allow for the next set of sessions to be planned to meet the needs of the children and develop their understanding and skills.

Insert pictures of examples of the floorbooks being created in school.
Growing Together with our Buddies

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Your child will be able to bring into school a soft cuddly buddy (a cuddly toy). This buddy will help your child explore their thoughts and feelings and support with transition into their next phase of learning, whether that be back to school or continued home learning.

The school’s Growing Together with our Buddies work aims for our children to:

- Restore relationships
- Restore and re-engage the love of learning
- Develop a good understanding of themselves
- Strengthen the community

Growing Together

Through this work, we aim for our school community to grow together again in order for children to explore emotions and be equipped with the strategies to regulate them. We need our children to be resilient (both emotionally and physically) in this challenging yet exciting world in which we live and we want to grow together in the different levers of recovery: relationships, community, metacognition, transparent curriculum and space.

Over the coming weeks, we are going to explore with your child different situations they have experienced and the emotions which come with these. We will, through lots of quality discussion and activities, grow together in confidence and ability.

Our video launch for this work, as well as the information sheet, will explain how this work is intended to run. Whether your child is in school or not, you will receive a video and sessions each week to work through with your child at your own leisure. We will also provide a top tip sheet to support the discussions you may have.

Our video launch will be shared on Friday with you all via Class Dojo.
Growing Together with our Buddies

Add in here how the projects will ensure tailored for KS2.

Include through this project:

Reading - a variety of short texts to launch the sessions or to end a session with

Writing - sentence structure, development

Number - money, place value, shape, space, measure, time

- Each child brings into school their own cuddly toy
- They will design and make an outfit for their buddy
- Talk about and explore their own thoughts and feelings
- Explore their own identity
- Design and create a safe space (a home)
- Create a worry monster for the buddy
- Write and tell stories
- Plan a holiday for themselves and their buddy
- Design a picnic for themselves and their buddy
- Design a 3 course meal for themselves and their buddy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Discussion around the theme</th>
<th>Links to home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Click on the picture to read/watch the text* | Anxiety | • Introduce the book:  
• The character in the book needs somebody to help him stop feeling nervous, anxious. Maybe we need to consider ourselves, do we have somebody to help us when we feel anxious?  
• Read the book.  
• After the book- recap how anxiety can make us feel and where the physical symptoms come from. | • Create a self-help manual for themselves or their buddy to use when they could be feeling anxious. |