

# Body Brain Belonging



## Supporting staff & students after lockdown

Teachers and students have recently resumed school and work during an unprecedented global pandemic. This has changed the way we live and how we will live in the coming weeks, months and years. There has been a sense that life is 'returning to normal' but all of us are still trying to work out what this 'new normal' looks like. Life is not the same as before COVID and even as we do our best to work, learn, teach and engage, our community is different and uncertain. And different can feel scary, as can ongoing uncertainty.

We hope this resource will help guide the work you are doing to support students emotional wellbeing as schools continue on-site learning. Listed below are tips for schools from Child Mental Health experts:

- Children process fears and emotions through play. Prioritise childrens' play and socialising with friends
- Revisit a focus on connection and belonging in the classroom
- Allow students to actively express their experiences of lockdown and fears for the future.
- Model open conversations about lockdown and create a safe space to chat about COVID.
- Validate the range of emotions and feelings students express.
- Play, socialising, a sense of belonging and safety in the classroom enhance learning and help to prevent more serious mental health complexities.

Body

Brain

Belonging



At this time childrens' and adults' emotional health will be suffering due to stress and the uncertainties ahead.



Returning to school after a long period at home will be challenging for lots of students.

Helen Dodd, Professor  
Child Psychology



Schools may be pressured to focus on academics and 'business as usual' but the world has changed and this can feel really overwhelming for all of us.



## Teacher wellbeing

As significant adults in a student's life, teachers' own emotional wellbeing and regulation will impact on the way they teach and interact with students and their ability to form authentic connections with students, colleagues, parents and carers. Without this connection, learning is difficult for students and classroom management becomes more difficult.

Supporting teacher wellbeing is the most effective way to ensure students can access the support they need from their teachers. If teachers feel supported and cared for they will have the emotional resources to connect with and support anxious, distressed and/or dysregulated students.

### Some ideas to access support and support others:

Take a moment to check in with your feelings at the start of the day and whenever you are able to during the day.

For support to talk through feelings contact Parentline, Beyond Blue or other your local links.

Practice being honest with colleagues about how you feel and ask for help and support when needed.

Create a community where it is okay to feel vulnerable and not 'have it all together'.

Model help-seeking and collaboration which are protective factors for your mental health.

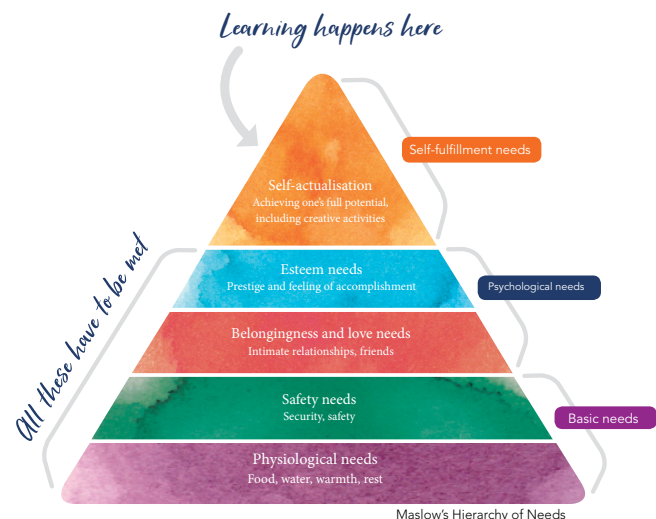
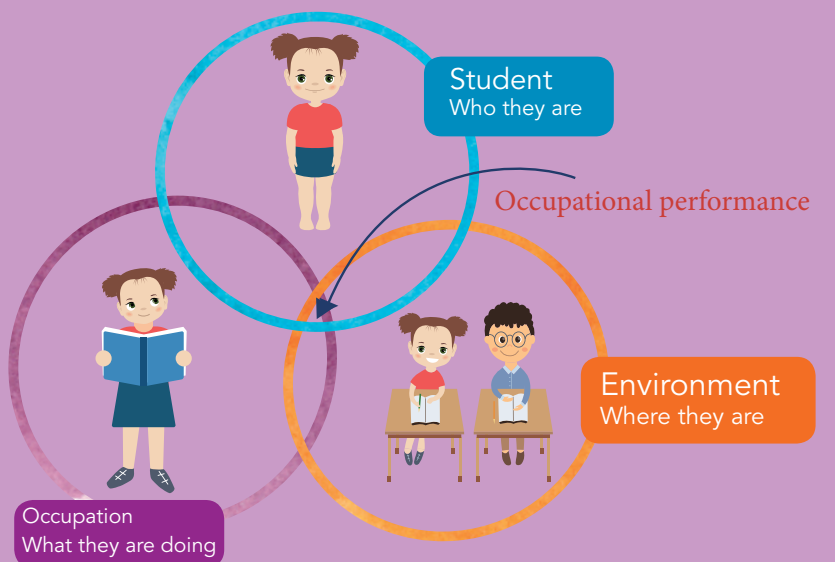
Talk to leadership team about including emotional support & wellbeing as standing agenda item.

First it was bush fires, then it was floods and now a global pandemic

Teachers are going through COVID too.



Occupational performance relates to functioning in daily activities. A child and/or teacher's occupational performance at school is dependent on the match between the person, the environment they are in and the activities they are doing. We need to consider adapting the environment to better support this match



# Outdoors @ School

Outdoor learning environments provide opportunity for students to engage in open-ended, diverse and meaningful learning experiences that are connected to nature, while also being connected to curriculum.

## BENEFITS OF LEARNING OUTDOORS

It is much easier to physically distance outdoors.

There is less sensory overload for students that become easily overstimulated

There is an opportunity for movement and touch while learning for those that need it.

Literacy, numeracy, science and art can all be completed outdoors

Practising social skills and relationship building

Building confidence

Physical development and enhanced wellbeing

Connection and care for the environment

Being outside can be a positive experience for students and teachers.

There are many studies highlighting the benefit of the outdoors including learning outside.



Click on pictures or links below for more information

## More resources



### Learning Outdoors - Benefits & Risks

<https://natureplaysa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NPSA-Learning-Outdoors-Benefits-Risks-opt.pdf>



### Nature Play Australia

[www.natureplay.org.au](http://www.natureplay.org.au)



### Austalia Curriculum - Outdoor

[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/outdoor-learning/](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/outdoor-learning/)



### Outdoor Classroom Play

[outdoorclassroomday.com.au/nsw-curriculum-lesson-plans/](http://outdoorclassroomday.com.au/nsw-curriculum-lesson-plans/)



### Centennial Parklands - Learning Outdoors

[www.centennialparklands.com.au/learn/professional-development/nesa-accredited-training](http://www.centennialparklands.com.au/learn/professional-development/nesa-accredited-training)

Centennial  
Parklands

### Play Australia

[www.playaustralia.org.au](http://www.playaustralia.org.au)



## Balance and Motion

Some children may find going back to sitting all day really tricky. With weeks of working from home, many students may have had more flexibility around sitting and moving.

### Balance and Motion Ideas

Offer movement breaks to whole class  
Offer wobble cushion for individual students that need extra wriggling!  
Add movement into curriculum based activities  
Appoint students, that need to move, as messengers so that they can walk to another space.

## Body Awareness

Students may be a little out of practice in sitting in class and maneuvering their body in space. They may fall off their chair or bump into things or people. Other children may seek extra input to their body eg pushing feet against the wall in their bedroom or crunching on food, humming out loud as they work.

### Body Awareness Ideas

Tie Therabands to legs of chair to allow students to 'push' with legs  
Add coloured strips to edges of tables and chairs to make furniture boundaries more visible  
Ensure movement breaks work the whole body and include activating the voice (e.g. chants/singing).

## Internal Awareness

Extra concentration, needed to get back into the school routine, means that some students may be missing other internal cues eg when need to go the toilet or if they are thirsty.

### Internal Awareness

Allow children to have their drink bottle on their desk  
Allow students to go to the toilet whenever they need to  
Provide extra verbal prompters to children that need this (out of earshot of others where possible)  
Mindful activities with whole class - helps tuning into own body

## See

Some children may find the busyness of the class and playground environment overwhelming after the weeks of being inside the home. Others may find that they need extra visuals to help them stay on task; after so long away from the routine of school they can find it difficult to stay on task.

### Visual Ideas

Use visual routines to help students  
Provide students with a visual timer for a particular activity, this will help keep them on task.  
Remove any visual distractions that don't have to be there  
Consider placement of stuents eg away from busier parts of the room

## Hear

Some children may find that their sense of sound has been heightened. They may jump when they hear the school bell or find the classroom/playground chatter quite loud and either distracting or overwhelming. Other students may have gotten used to being able to make their own noises while they were learning from home, which helps them concentrate.

### Sound ideas

Allow noise cancelling ear phones or ear plugs to muffle excess sound  
Sit children, bothered by excess sound, away from doors and windows  
Provide movement breaks that include making own sound such as singing or kung-fu punctuation

## Smell

Some children may find the various smells at school overwhelming after a long period at home. Other children may be seeking out extra smells, and this may have been something that is easier to have access to in the home environment.

### Smell ideas

Offer scented stickers for children that need extra scent  
Encourage use of scented erasers and pencils in pencil case  
Have odour neutralisers available should strong odours be an issue

## Taste

Some children may now be used to eating at different times at home and are finding it difficult going back to structured breaks. Snacking while learning may also have allowed some students to increase their attention to a task. This is through the resistance provided to muscles around the jaw through 'crunching' and 'chewing'.

### Taste ideas

Ensure fruit and drink breaks continue to occur mid-morning  
Have a fruit basket available for those that need extra input.  
Encourage parents to pack crunchy snacks for students needing resistance



A heightened sense of sound can make focusing hard work



Time to regulate helps students (and teachers) to focus



A reminder about Touch

Ideas for students

For children that love to poke, stroke, pinch and pull having to go back to a regimented school day could be pretty tough. They may be seeking to touch others or furniture throughout the day.

Consider the type of touch they are seeking and try to replace it with something that enhances their focus and can be used while they are working.

### Ideas for students

A textured tape along the edge of their desk that they can run their hands over

A squeazy fidget tool they can manipulate with one hand while working

A small block that they can put in their pocket to touch when needed.