Supporting reluctant pupils with their Online learning

*Developed with permission from Tom Vodden from the Webinar **All Around the Child; Supporting and Understanding Anxious Online Learners***

Schools are increasingly concerned that many of their pupils are seemingly either unable or unmotivated to engage with their online learning offer. Both reasons for this disengagement are totally valid and understandable and could be supported in similar ways. However, what could schools do to support their students, and indeed their families?

Big Worries	
What could this mean for the pupils and their families?	*What could I try?*
What are the big questions/worries that the children may have? These may lie at the heart of the reasons why their lives have been disrupted so much and why they are feeling unmotivated and disengaged. Previously happy and engaged learners are now anxious and avoidant. Children who didn't find learning straight forward beforehand now have added further barriers. Parents may not know how to answer their children's concerns and prefer to avoid them being raised: this can increase the sense of anxiety all round Children may be worried about worrying their parents by expressing anxieties – or worried that their parents will be angry if they perceive they are 'making a fuss'.	Acknowledge that everyone is feeling worried now when talking to children: worry is normal. *Suggestions for families* • Find time and space to allow everyone to air their 'Big Worries' • List, order and discuss. These maybe either ripped up and thrown away, or kept and ticked off as they feel they have been addressed • Try to keep these discussions to agreed times – again consider writing down worries to talk about later, and give a definite time to talk – and an agreed finish time. Try to mark the finish with a complete change of activity e.g. a game of football in the garden • Five a day (see Tips at the end of this information) • Prepare for the return to school and remind them that it won't always be like this. The book 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' and various images by Charlie Mackesy have reassured many already that "….the storm will pass."

Routines	
What could this mean for the pupils and their families?	*What could I try?*
Routines offer a sense of security and a structure in which learning can take place. Although many schools have decided to ensure that their pupils are following a timetable broadly similar to the one that they follow in school, many of the 'other' routines have been removed. The main element that many people are feeling a significant absence is the social routines. These are fundamental to learning and wellbeing.	Try to present 'live lessons' using a familiar structure – give the children an overview of what you and they will be doing and explicitly link it to previous and future learning *Suggestions for families* • Discuss what has changed and what has remained the same since lockdown • What are the pros/cons of home/school learning? • What would you like to remain after returning to school and what are you looking forward to going back to 'normal'? • What routines that used to be in place can also be undertaken now? E.g. leaving the house for a walk/exercise before learning starts and repeating the exercise at the end of the day can help define the start/end of the learning day. For younger children where two adults are

	available, one could 'set up' the learning area while the other takes the child/ren for a walk – repeat at the end of the day – 'work' tidied away when the child/ren return
	• Can the parents be more involved in setting this routine which will allow a day's timetable to be in conjunction with the family's routine? i.e. a primary school may expect much of the work to be completed in the morning, but this could be when the parents have work calls (SEE APPENDIX 1)
	• Try to maintain routines such as bedtime and mealtimes: build in breaks and try to avoid constant snacking!

Environment

What could this mean for the pupils and their families?	What could I try?
Many children see a clear delineation between 'home' and 'school': for some, school may be a stressful place and the ability to 'leave it behind' at the end of the day is very important. Where their 'normal' end of day routine may involve a journey home, chatting with friends and then arrival home, these boundaries are very blurred. We need to make it very clear to both parents and pupils that home is not school: having school work on view and rooms set up as offices can mean that there is no opportunity to 'switch off' but equally, having the TV on and lying on the sofa can make it hard for children (or adults) to focus. Many families will be very limited for space and may not have a 'kitchen table' with upright chairs. However, even where it is necessary to sit on the sofa or the floor it can help to 'get organised' before starting a task and limit distractions.	Make it clear that 'school' time ends and family time is separate: that includes not responding to parental or pupil queries about work tasks outside reasonable working hours *Suggestions for families* • What can be done to manage the home environment to allow a distinction between home as home and home as a learning environment? E.g. pack away at the end of the day; a different tablecloth for learning/family time; an old sheet or duvet cover to throw over the desk in a teenager's bedroom/ corner of a living room at the end of learning time? • Try to assemble everything needed for school work at the start of the day and have it available: pen/ pencil/ rubber/ sharpener/ lined paper/ ruler. Keep it all together in an ice cream tub or similar • Consider timetabling 'quiet' space for all children at home, obviously prioritising exam aged teenagers, but even younger children will need time and space alone • Try to avoid distractions during the day: reward yourself with breaks and things to look forward to at the end of learning time rather than having them competing for your attention while working • What can be done to replicate how the school learning environment helps some learners? E.g. how can they connect with their teachers when they are stuck? How can they 'replace' their social connections – can they be asked to complete any work activities as a group e.g. art/design together, reading group etc.?

Resources

What could this mean for the pupils and their families?	What could I try?
Schools have been directed to ensure that learning continues and the online platforms that many schools have chosen to use, bring their own pressures and challenges for all.	• Ensure that there is a variety of off-screen activities – particularly where there are families that do not have sufficient IT resources

There is often a disparity in expectations and the learning opportunities and approaches different schools 'offer' and sometimes parents may feel that what is not 'on offer' from their child's school is what could be 'wrong'. Schools should ensure that technology is used in a way which considers the vulnerabilities of pupils: For example, if the expectation is for 'cameras on', some children may feel very anxious about this	• Building in screen breaks isn't just important to provide variety in learning but to allow space later in the day for screen time which sustains peer-to-peer relationships • Check that families have access to basic resources e.g. pens, lined paper - these should be made available. Remember to keep asking. • Ensure any requests for additional materials e.g. for craft or Science projects are made in good time to allow parent's time to source these (this includes egg boxes etc. – someone will have just put their recycling out…) • Suggest alternatives to familiar resources e.g. pegs make good Maths manipulatives • Where schools are relying on the majority of activities to be completed using IT, what is the 'plan' when the pupils return to school? I.e. will the children find it difficult to return to handwriting/book work? Will the pupils still have access to the alternatives to writing, especially if this has been a more successful method for them? Suggestions for families: • Make a list of what will be needed • Make use of scrap paper – old envelopes etc. for lists and jotting down ideas – not everything needs to be on a pristine sheet of A4 • Talk to your child about what can be seen on screen: if cameras are on they may be worried that others can 'see into' their house/ bedroom • If cameras are off, remind children that they can't see other children's faces – there will be others who are confused or not sure: only the ones who feel confident will be volunteering answers but this does not mean everyone else has understood first time.

Expectations	
What could this mean for the pupils and their families?	*What could I try?*
First lockdown much school work was 'just do what you can' or revision because it was late in the school year. This time schools are continuing with the curriculum and parents are being expected to deliver 'new learning' quite unlike 'homework' which is usually consolidating previous learning. Some pupils and parents have set themselves some very high expectations which are not always a bad thing, but they need to be realistic and adjusted to the current situation. Without moderating these expectations, motivation can quickly diminish, arguments start and relationships are strained.	• As a school, are the parents/carers clear on what you expect? Most schools are communicating that there is a "just do what you can" message – but is everyone clear what this means? • If parents are struggling to motivate their children to do **any** work, in discussion with school, parents and the pupil, what is the realistic expectation? Could this be watching one BBC Bitesize video and having a discussion? Could this be one written piece of work per day? Could this be having one telephone call with any adult from the school per week? Look for 'easy wins' and build on success.

These expectations should be from the pupil's starting point e.g. if the school/home struggled to get **any** homework from the CYP previously, then this current situation of home learning is going to be difficult. If the school found it difficult to engage with parents, then conversations will be difficult to continue	• Remind both children and families that- in the classroom- children generally work without close supervision of every sentence or calculation: it is OK to make mistakes! *Ideas for families:* • It's a massive juggle to ensure parent's own work commitments, alongside usual household chores are balanced with their children's. Especially so if the children are needing support with IT, completion of tasks or indeed reassurance and encouragement. It is therefore vital that everyone at home understands each other's view points and discuss how best that they can all expect to get what they need done. (Appendix 1 can also help with this) • Talk to your children about your own juggling act: which tasks are you prioritising? If you are working from home, have you talked to your line manager about what is realistic for you to achieve? Help them to understand that currently we may not be able to 'do it all' but equally the things we need to do may not only be our favourite activities.

Roles and Responsibilities

What could this mean for the pupils and their families?	What could I try?
Roles have been blurred: parents are not teachers but many feel under huge pressure, others may be worried about their own ability to deliver learning while others again may be surprised at how much support children need: most cannot tackle new learning without assistance. Parents may feel that they have 'failed' if they are unable to motivate their child to attempt/ complete tasks especially if the child has always been compliant at school. They have, most likely, not chosen to be their child's teacher. Teachers roles have also changed: they have had be more flexible, creative and innovative in the last year that they have, most likely, in their whole careers. They are not able to connect, continue their relationships or identify when their pupils are struggling, or indeed succeeding, as they would normally.	• Ensure that the parents are aware if/when they need to 'take a break' too • What opportunities are there to reach out and support each other? Peer to peer; teacher to teacher; teacher to parent; teacher to child and/or parent to parent • How are you encouraging the pupils to believe that they are not learning in isolation? What opportunities are there for socialising whilst learning (or not!?!)? • Use the language of 'borrowing' Mum and Dad to help explain/ avoid referring to parents as 'teaching' use terms like showing/ helping etc. *Ideas for families:* • Present yourself as a 'problem explorer', learning alongside your child, rather than as a teacher • Try to use positive language- avoid saying 'I never really liked/ understood fractions': if you're not feeling very confident say 'this is something I don't know much about: let's see if we can work it out together.'

	• Avoid criticising the content of tasks or saying 'I didn't learn this at school and it never held me back': - teachers may sometimes feel similarly bit this will not help children's motivation! • I is OK not to understand what is required! Look carefully at examples but if you're not sure what to do ask. If it is not possible to ask now, tackle a different task, don't get stressed. Prioritising and seeking advice are life skills: modelling these to your children is very powerful.

Other strategies that could be considered…..

- Keep talking, exploring worries and concerns…..Give reassurance but also acknowledge and validate their worries too
- Keep a '5 a day' diary: 5 things that went well today – a good way to 'turn off school' and possibly review at the end of the week. Use this to focus on the positives. These could include new information or skills learned but also finishing the agreed number of questions; remembering to unmute before answering a question on line; completing a Joe Wicks workout…!
- Struggles-Solutions-Successes: Another way to close the day. Make sure all adults share theirs too. Can your child help to "co-solve" with you? Highlight the success/es. One is enough and doesn't have to be anything to do with 'school'!!
- Keep challenging unrealistic expectations on yourself and your children!
- The following websites are a good source of information. If you are going to send any of these home for the children to complete, perhaps ask the adults to do it alongside, so they can possibly see how 'tricky' some of them are and for the adult to be a role model?

https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/ This website has lots of resources/activities for Primary and Secondary aged students to support their Mental Health

http://redbridgeserc.org/resources/category/general-wellbeing-resources-covid-specific-resources Various links to external websites

https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/category/free-resources/ Lots of practical resources/activities to send home

https://www.headspace.com/educators Headspace App, which is currently FREE for anyone working within a school currently. You may have to register your school
https://www.kooth.com/ An app for anyone aged 10-25

https://togetherall.com/en-gb/ For young people aged 16-18 in need of Mental Health support

https://www.barnardos.org.uk/see-hear-respond-support-hub A link for parents to source support

https://www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/school-health/counselling-and-emotional-health/   If schools are particularly concerned about a CYP

http://www.fiveacrewood.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EBSA-Final.docx Here is a link to resources/ideas that were compiled by the Maidstone STLS team to support school, families and pupils with EBSA – Emotional Based School Avoidance. The strategies could help support the CYP now, or indeed, if the transition back to school is difficult.

All links/websites above are examples– there are several schools/families can use which may be more appropriate for their needs

APPENDIX 1 (an example that could be shared with parents)

	Our family schedule			
	Today is………………………………………….			
	Parent	Parent	Child	Child
Time				
Time				
Time				
Time				
	I - This is a time to work by myself T – This is a time to work with……………………………………			