



Support a Safe & Successful Return to School using the SWAN framework

S - safe
W - welcoming
A - all together
N - nurturing



During lockdown, staff have been busy undertaking a wide range of training including a course on the SWAN Framework. The framework is a springboard for thinking about the return to school for both children and adults.

The swan looks like it is effortlessly & gracefully gliding across the surface, whilst in reality it can be frantically paddling beneath the water. The use of the swan imagery within the training reminds adults that right now our children need us more than ever to be the swan.

Safe and secure

Warm and welcoming

Accepting and attuning

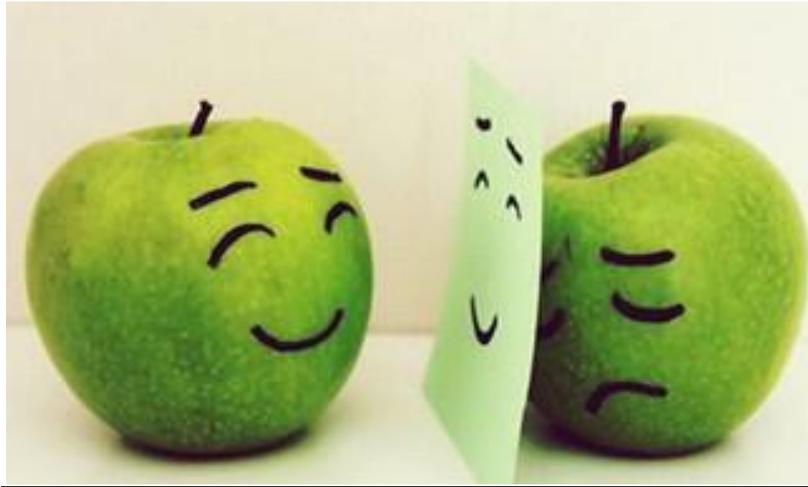
Nurturing and noticing

Please be assured that as & when your children are ready and able to return to school, we are able to support them socially and emotionally as well as academically. We will ensure that mental health and wellbeing is our number one priority for as long as necessary.

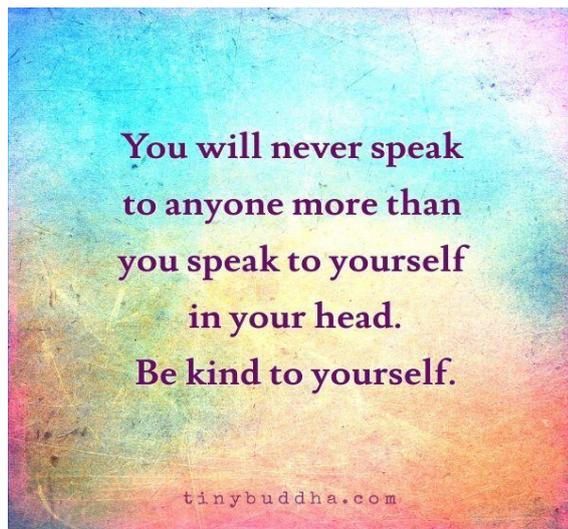
The information within this SWAN booklet is underpinned by our work as a TIS school (Trauma-Informed School). The TIS approach champions the belief that schools should be mentally healthy places as well as high-quality learning environments.

Archbishop Benson Parents and Carers Wellbeing Letter

How are you feeling?



Our emotional and physical health can be severely compromised during unsettling and worrying times. It is important to look after ourselves and not put ourselves under any unnecessary pressure. Everyone will have different circumstances, worries, responsibilities and constraints. We should resist the temptation to compare ourselves to others as our 'best' is enough.



As we continue to take care of ourselves and our families through the following weeks and months, maintaining our own health and wellbeing will help us to be resilient and able to reassure our children. Like us, they will have worries and fears and will need these alleviated in a calm and informed manner.

With this in mind, as we move towards our school re-opening, we wanted to share some of the measures and thought processes we are going through in order to make this transition as smooth and reassuring as possible for children, parents and staff.

Backed up by training and advice from Dr Pooky Knightsmith (Creative Education), we are adopting a SWAN approach which focuses on the emotional wellbeing of everyone involved. Coming back into school will involve a whole host of emotions and worries for everyone. We want to reassure you that we are doing everything we possibly can to make this as positive as it can be.

Be the SWAN

Safe
Welcoming
All together
Nurturing



With thanks and credit to Dr Pooky Knightsmith from Creative Education.

Safe

We want you and your child to feel safe and re-assured and this has to be a collaborative effort between us all.

Children and staff will have their safety and physical needs met through a strict set of rules and routines. Children respond well to rules and boundaries and they will be encouraged to get involved in the process of setting, publicising and maintaining these.

Child friendly signs will be displayed as a reminder for social distancing, hand washing and general hygiene. Children will be encouraged to help each other remember these rules and will be praised for following them. Staff will act as role models and support the children to maintain the necessary levels of safety.

Each child's emotional safety will be paramount and all staff will be focusing on the nurture and wellbeing elements of the curriculum.

Welcoming

When the children return, we want them to feel excited and happy coming into school and we want them to know that we are genuinely delighted to have them back and able to see them again. They will have a whole range of emotions and we need to ensure that they are able to communicate these in whatever way is best for them.

We want to create a 'soft landing' which means that their home to school transition is as smooth as it can be. This will be very difficult for some children after such a long time out of school and we will be doing everything we can to ease this process.

All Togetherness

Without the ability to touch and be physically close to each other, it is even more important to create an environment build on mutual respect and compassion. The children need to know that they can rely on the adults to keep them safe both physically and emotionally.

Activities will be centred around building the team and forming strong social and emotional relationships.

Nurturing

Our children will be on high alert and may not be in the best place to learn initially. We will not jump in with formal learning but will ensure all the necessary work is done in order for them to thrive and flourish. Foundations will need to be laid so that they are able to learn positively in the future.

It will not be about filling gaps and catching up but providing positive experiences to help rebuild and repair.

Talking to your child

Before returning to school, try to find out what concerns your child may have. Often it is during a play activity, bedtime or during a walk when they will be happy to talk. Write any concerns down and ask your child if they would like you to share these with staff.

Staff are always happy to discuss any concerns however big or small.

We have been exploring a variety of practical ways to support all our returning pupils including any anxious pupils (and families) and those feeling reluctant to come to school. We want to share some of these with you so you can reassure your child and so that you can possibly utilise these ideas in some way with your children at home.

Soft Landings

Who will meet them? What will make them want to come into school even if they are feeling anxious?

The start of the day is so important for children and parents and a good start can allay fears before they escalate. Parents need to leave feeling confident that their concerns are taken seriously. Welcome the children and parents. Show delight that they are here and make them feel they belong. The first interaction is so important - "It's always makes me smile when I see you in the morning. You really cheer me up with your lovely eyes".

The home/school transition needs to be as smooth and safe as possible especially on a Monday. The child and parents may have had a difficult Sunday worrying about what is ahead so Mondays in particular need careful thought.

Consider the role of the family, child and school staff when planning Mondays in particular. A child's fears about school which can build over the weekend can be realised if Monday is not successful.

Sunday evening: parents could talk to the child about all the things to look forward to during the week or write some thoughts on paper for the child to bring in the next day. Work with the parents on what would help everyone start the week in a positive way.

Share it, shelf it or shout it?

The child needs to know that the adult is taking their anxiety seriously. We need to attune and validate their feelings in order for them to be ready to learn.

All the TIS language is crucial e.g. "I know it's really hard for you to come into school on Mondays when you have had a weekend at home with Mum. It makes you feel sad and worried".

"Shall we share, shelf or shout it?"

If we share, we can talk about the worry, write or draw it in a journal or describe it with toys. Catch and name the worry.

If we shelf it, we should say "You have a real worry or a lot of different worries. We will talk about these but need more time so we'll put them on the shelf and talk later" You **must** talk later so that they trust you to do this next time they agree to shelf a worry.

If we shout it, we can draw a worry and then scribble over it or rip it up. We can use an angry monster we have made and shout at it. We can squeeze a pillow or pop bubble wrap. Jumping may help. At this point, the child may be in fight or flight mode so need to expel energy in a positive way.

Regular Resets

Take moments during the day when the child can proactively calm and regulate emotions. Plan this so that it does not become something that is done in response to negative behaviour. Bring arousal down, relax using mindfulness, music, the outdoors etc.

Signals for help

Work out with a child how they can signal for help without having to ask.

Cards, signs, symbols.

The child needs to learn to recognise the signs that they are becoming overwhelmed. Agree on the sign together and ensure all adults recognise it. Agree also what will happen when the child uses this sign. Adults can intervene early to reduce the risk of escalation in behaviour.

Break Times

This is often a very difficult time for children who are anxious due to it having less structure and routine. This should be a time to reset and regulate but often becomes a time when they build on their anxiety. Consider how these times can be managed to allow for relaxation without challenge.

Hunt out the Good:

It is important for everyone to find as many positive things to reflect on as possible. Every day, choose things which have gone well to share with staff, the child and the parents. Ring parents with good news. As well as for the children, this anxiety around school will be very stressful for parents and it is crucial that everyone works together to mutually support each other. Parents will be trying their best whilst often suffering anxieties of their own so empathy and patience will ease this and lead to a better outcome in the long term.

Socially distanced engagement: Taken from a TIS webinar on returning to school after lockdown

Our whole school approach will be to acknowledge and respond age-appropriately to what has been a traumatic experience for everyone. We will up the safety cues we use for children showing that we care by using our faces, eyes and playfulness.

We will validate fears. "I know you are worried about being safe but we are going to wash our hands and keep tables apart do that we are all keeping safe". We won't just say "You'll be fine". We will say "It is worrying when there is something that we can't see and that makes some people feel unwell but we can keep safe in school but doing...".

Mirror action e.g. give a hug using your own body and they mirror. Say "that's for you, can you feel my hug?"

Hug a cushion and ask them to hug one too. "Give it a squeeze as that's what I'm doing for you".

Fill a glove with rice and ask them to put it on their shoulder. "Can you feel my hand on your shoulder?"

Be Kind

Regularly remind parents to be kind to themselves. It has become clear during lockdown just how many parents are being un-necessarily hard on themselves about trying to deliver unrealistic expectations at home for their children. It can drive parents unfairly to making them question their own parenting skills, leaving them feeling frustrated and down. As staff, we are in the unique position to be able to reassure parents as to what a great job they are doing within the context of their own family situation.

We think **all** of our parents are doing an amazing job and that we all need to just be a little kinder to ourselves, so here is a message from us that we hope will make our parents feel lighter and brighter.

Times are tough

We are parents; we are partners;
We are carers and sharers,
We are home-makers and home-workers;
Even key workers.
We are home-educators,
Some loving it, others isolated, imprisoned.

Our children may have complex needs; our family may be just you and me;
My bills may need paying; my kitchen cupboards may be bare.
And in the still of the night, I may well despair.
For wherever I look, I can't help but compare,
Be it Facebook or Dojo, Whatsapp or elsewhere,
Other families seem to be coping without so much as a care.

Where have I gone wrong and why have I failed?
Is it just me, who can't help my child?
And in the still of the night, I torment myself more,
So much 'success' behind others' closed doors.

Yet their families are not mine,
And my challenges not theirs,
Perhaps if they were, they'd share my cares.
So, what is 'success' when times are tough?
Success is doing what's right for **my** family - And knowing that's good enough!

My success is:
Loving them and nurturing them,
Not yet dressed by eleven.
And enjoying a walk on a sunny summer's day,
Even when that means no home learning today!

Success is a smile that goes ear-to-ear,
Success is when their worries disappear,
Success is a hug and a settled night's sleep,
Success is getting them off the computer without sulking for a week!

In Nepal there's a phrase that brings cultures together,
'Same-Same but different',
It's so simple yet clever.

We all have self-doubt and plenty of worries,
And we **all** have successes in small, little flurries.
Yet no two are the same, and nor should they be.
For what's right for one, to another is just not meant to be.

So be kind to yourselves and don't compare,
You are the experts in your family's care.
Love them and cherish them,
And do what **you** know is right,
And we'll all come through this into the light.

We are the Archbishop Benson family,
Same-Same but Different!