

Resource Guide: Psychosocial support activities in the classroom



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This resource guide has been produced to support the training workshop, *Psychosocial support for children in education in emergencies during Covid-19: A training workshop for teachers* developed by Viva and Food for the Hungry (FH) to equip teachers and school administrators to care for students effectively and ensure that they receive the psychosocial support they need in order to cope with crisis and return to school during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of the activities and ideas included in this resource guide have been produced by other organisations, with links provided in the manual; some activities have been adapted for an online learning context.

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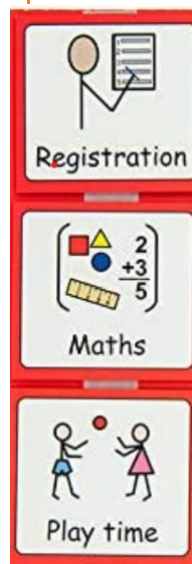
Creating a supportive environment in the classroom

Create a routine

One of the most significant ways to provide psychosocial support through an education environment is simply by creating and maintaining predictable routine and structure which helps children to find structure, consistency and security in their daily life again.

- In a physical classroom, use a **visual timetable**. It's great to have a framework that will be the same from day to day and emphasizing familiar routines such as study-time, play-time and lunchtime
- Establish classroom routines such as taking attendance daily, and always start your day's lesson with a routine the children will get to know well, such as a song or group activity
- Work on having **calm class transitions** when children come in and out of the room

Once you have started a new routine, **stick to it**. It will help your pupils know where they stand and what to expect - and they will be better able to manage their emotions and behaviour as a result.



Realistic expectations

Children feel safe and secure when they know what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and completion of classwork; however, the crisis may have disrupted children's ability to focus and concentrate for long periods of time. Rather than altering expectations, adjust (where necessary) the delivery and/or format of classroom activities (for example, change to 15- or 30-minute learning blocks and incorporate physical activity in between blocks to stimulate attention and concentration).

Restoring connections

As relationships are an integral part of social and developmental growth, any disruption to children's friendships and connections with others can very challenging to their well-being. Try to find ways to support children to re-establish connections with their peers and possibly to develop new friendship groups, particularly if their friends didn't return to school immediately or they are placed in different teaching "bubbles".

If not already in place, you could implement a cross-age buddy system whereby children are paired up to ensure that each has a dedicated support person while at school.

- **Provide choices** – help children to regain a sense of control by giving them the chance to make choices, such as by choosing between various classroom activities or choosing assignment topics
- Focus on **strengths and positives** – this can be as simple as offering praise to students when you notice a positive behaviour or personal strength they have developed or demonstrated.
- **Connect with parents** – be prepared to reach out to parents and to listen to their concerns about children's return to school or other issues
- **Create 'safe spaces'** in real-life classrooms - these areas can be used when children need some time to calm themselves down, or if the educator needs some time to talk to a child individually

Learning breaks: Short activities to create breaks in your lessons

These ideas are taken from Mentally Healthy Schools and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. Some ideas have been adapted to enable their use for online learning. The original resource activity sheet can be found here:

<https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2210/rebuild-and-recover-brain-breaks.pdf>

Following lockdown, your students may find it difficult to return to the formality of sitting at desks and concentrating for longer periods of time. To reduce this restlessness, intersperse your lessons with brain breaks, which are short bursts of activity to keep their brain and body active. Begin these more frequently, gradually reducing throughout the term as the children adapt to their regular routine.



These can also be used to give breaks during online learning sessions. Adaptations for online learning are marked with this symbol.

Musical statues



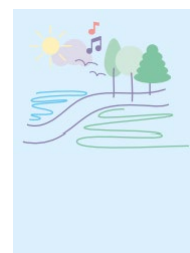
Play a game of 'musical statues' in the classroom, where children dance and move around when music is playing and must stand totally still whenever the music stops. Ask the children to dance like something, e.g. robots, jellyfish. When the music stops, encourage the children to stand still in an appropriate pose for the subject. Instead of people sitting out for moving, choose a winner each round as the best robot or jellyfish etc. This can be changed each time – encourage the children to think of dance categories to try.



For online learning, ask children to move around and then 'freeze' on screen.

Go for a wellbeing walk

Take the children for a brief five-minute walk in one of the outside areas of your school. Once you reach the destination, ask them to close their eyes and tune in to their senses for 30 seconds. Ask them to answer in their heads: What can they hear? What can they smell? How do they feel? Ask them to open their eyes and really look closely at something they normally wouldn't, then ask what they noticed about it. In partners, children can share what they noticed before walking back to class.



For online learning, ask children to stop and notice what is around them wherever they are.



Mix it up

Stand the children in a circle, spread out with at least 1 metre between them. You or a child in the centre of the circle will then call out 'Mix it up if...', and then complete the sentence with a trait or characteristic e.g. you have curly hair, you have a brother. The children who the statement applies to must swap spaces, the last person to swap goes into the centre and thinks of a statement to call out.

Mirror mirror

Ask the children to get into pairs, standing apart but facing each other. Explain that one of them is to be the person and the other is to be their mirror reflection so they must match their actions as closely as possible. Every time the person moves slightly the mirror must copy. In the classroom encourage these to be slower, smaller movements, but where space allows these can be more mobile. Allow the children to alternate roles.



For online learning, one child can be the 'leader' and choose actions to do on screen which the rest of the class can copy.

Create a musical storm



Ask children to all tap one finger of each hand on their desk gently, like the patter of light rain. Then ask them to make the rain a little heavier, adding a second finger to the tapping. Build this up to a crescendo so the children are eventually tapping all fingers on the desk. You may also want to add in some instruments to make the sound of thunder. Gradually signal to the children to bring the volume down ending up with just a light patter again before silence. As an alternative, you could ask a child to conduct the storm.



For online learning, ask children to make the noise in the same way with objects in their home workspace. You could use the 'mute' setting to add variations between loud and quiet.

Drawing the invisible

Ask the children to partner up. One becomes the artist and draws a simple picture in the air with their finger. Their partner has to guess what the picture is. Alternate so they both have a go.



For online learning, children can take it in turns to be the 'artist' and draw on their video screen, with other children guessing. You may alternatively use an online drawing tool or whiteboard for children to draw on.



Targeted Psychosocial Support activities in the classroom

Theme 1: Understanding what has happened and being able to think positively about the future

Time to talk: Talk about what's happened



There is a common misconception that talking about the traumatic event can cause more problems or lead a child to develop distress reactions. Although it is important to consider how you talk to the young person who has experienced trauma (and what sort of reactions and coping strategies you model), talking about the traumatic event and the child's feelings does not generally lead the child to develop problems. Tips for talking to children about the trauma or natural disaster:

- Place rules around 'pandemic talk' to limit potential modelling of distress and inappropriate coping mechanisms (e.g. set 10 minutes at the start of class for talking about the disaster)
- Contain any conversations which encourage fear. Remain calm and convey a clear message on what we can do to keep ourselves safe.
- Schedule these sessions when you have some extra support in the classroom. An aide may provide support for both the educator and students if needed.
- It is very important for educators to maintain the 'educator' role as they support the child. Remember you can draw on other supports within the school if you feel a child needs extra support.
- Focus on positive changes, as well as the strengths and positive coping strategies the child has demonstrated since the traumatic event.
- For younger children, talking about the event may be difficult. Some children might respond better to drawing or playing games as a way of communicating.
- For older children, talking can include more complex issues and how they have affected the family.
- Talking can still be a useful exercise for children who have lost loved ones during the event. It is important, however, to be aware of the child's circumstances where possible to pre-empt and plan for emotional reactions.

These tips are from [Emerging Minds](#)

Group drama activity: What happened to our community?

Aim: To encourage the children to share their experiences, through telling the story of what happened to their community as a result of the pandemic, disaster or crisis.

Ask the children to make groups of four or five.

Explain that they will now have about 10 minutes to prepare a silent story that they have to mime to the other groups. It should be about three to five minutes long, telling the story about something that happened to the community as a result of the disaster or pandemic.

After 10 minutes, ask each group to show their silent story. Ask the children who are watching to try to put words to the story as they are watching the mime. At the end of each group's story, take some time to talk about what the group did.

Ask questions to stimulate talking, such as:

- What happened? Who did what?
- What were the feelings of the people in the story?
- Was this something that happened everywhere in the community or only in some places?
- What do you think could be done differently if it happened again?



Complete the activity by asking the questions below:

- What was it like doing these mimes?
- What has it made you think about, in terms of your community and the impact of the disaster?

IFRC and Save the Children, The Children's Resilience Programme: Understanding Children's Wellbeing

Letting go and looking forward: Classroom or homework activity

There are lots of things that we haven't been able to do due to coronavirus – see friends, hug a grandparent, go shopping or visit a favourite place. This activity sheet helps to encourage children to accept and let go of the things they missed out on due to the lockdown, and to look forward to things they can do in the future.

<p>Things I've missed out on - Letting go</p>  <p>Talk to the child about things they couldn't do during lockdown. They can write or draw each item on a small piece of paper. Ask them how they feel about each thing they've missed. We can't change this situation, so we need to accept that those events are gone for ever. One by one, scrunch up the pieces of paper and throw them away, letting them go for good.</p>	<p>Things I am looking forward to - Future plans</p>  <p>Encourage children to make a list or draw pictures of things they are looking forward to doing in the near future. Stick this on the classroom wall or at home, to remind them of good things coming up. They can add new things at any time.</p>
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This activity was created by Partnership for Children and can be found here: [Partnership for Children, Letting go and looking forward](#)

Theme 2: Expressing feelings and emotions

The Mirror Game

Aim: To stimulate cooperation and concentration and to consider different emotions.

1. Ask the children to stand in two lines.
2. Explain that one line will be mirrors and the other line will be actors.
3. The facilitator and co-facilitator then demonstrate the game. The facilitator calls out a positive emotion, such as strength, courage, bravery, happiness, peacefulness, and the actors act out this emotion.
4. The mirrors try to copy the actor in every detail.
5. Each line takes it in turns to be actor and mirror for each emotion – the facilitator keeps in everyone in order! The facilitator calls out the emotion, and also when the actor and mirror should swap.



For online learning, all children can act out the emotions and feelings called out by the teacher at the same time.

Save the Children, (2006) Psycho-Social Structured Activity Program

Feelings Dice

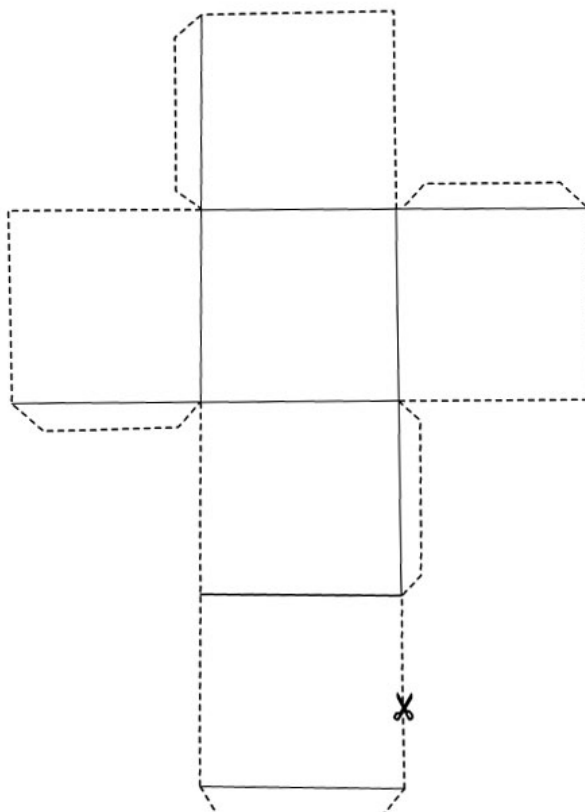
Aim: To help children feel comfortable about their feelings

You will need: A dice or cube with one feeling or picture of an emotion on each side. Include some positive and some negative feelings, for example: excited, happy, scared, proud, angry, sad. You could also use a regular dice, choosing an emotion to be represented by each number before you begin.

This game is best played in small groups. Each person rolls the dice and shares an example of a time they have felt the emotion shown on the dice. Make sure everyone knows that they can pass if they want to.



Ask: Do we always find it easy to share our feelings? Which ones are more difficult or easy to share?



Talk about the importance of listening to one another and respecting each other's feelings.

Feelings tracker

(For use with individual children)

This simple emotion and activity tracker is designed to help individual children identify emotional trigger points and moments of positivity in their day-to-day life. When a child is feeling heightened emotions, they may

sometimes find it difficult to identify specific causes. They may also struggle to employ coping strategies that work well for them. The child can work with an adult to complete this tracker throughout a day at school, naming and scaling their feelings and attributing them to events in the day that may have increased either positive or negative emotions. Regular review with an adult will help to identify points of the day that led to positive or negative emotions and can help pinpoint why this was the case.

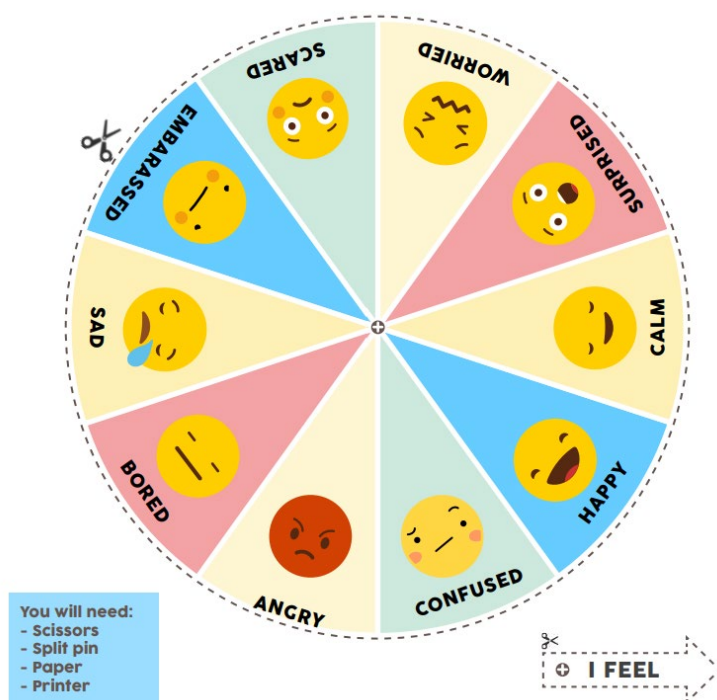
The results can then be used to plan further opportunities for positive moments, identify triggers to avoid, and build a bank of coping strategies for the child.

The Feelings Tracker tool is created by and available at [Mentally Healthy Schools](https://mentallyhealthyschools.co.uk/)

FEELINGS TRACKER				COMPLETED WITH _____			
				DATES _____			
				NAME _____			
MONDAY				TUESDAY			
	ACTIVITY	FEELING	REASON (optional)		ACTIVITY	FEELING	REASON (optional)
1				1			
2				2			
3				3			

Emotions wheel

(For use with individual children)



The emotion wheel can be used with children of all ages who are struggling to express their current feelings. By identifying an image, they can convey their current feelings. Using the wheel regularly throughout the day will help children and young people see the changing nature of their feelings and can help reduce anxiety around feeling a certain way. It could be helpful for this activity to be modelled by adults before use. Make the emotion wheel together, with the adult taking the first turn to identify their own current emotion. They could then discuss this further with the child before their turn.

Children could draw their own wheel of emotions, based on the template above. The Emotions Wheel is created by and available at [Mentally Healthy Schools](https://mentallyhealthyschools.co.uk/)

Theme 3: Building self-esteem and self confidence

My flag

Aim: To enable self-expression and creativity and promote self-worth and confidence.

You will need: Paper or material that can be drawn on or painted on. Art materials for as much creativity as possible, e.g. coloured markers, crayons, pencils, glitter, glue, paint, fabric, scissors, old magazines, etc.



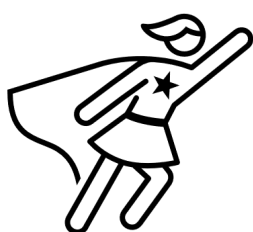
1. Ask the children to sit in small groups, and give each group a range of art materials. Tell the children that everyone is going to make a personal flag. It can be related to their heritage and family, their likes or dislikes, or something they can do that they are proud of.
2. Give them about 15 minutes to create their flags. They can do anything they want to with the paper for the flag – cut it into a flag shape, paint it, colour it with crayons, glue pictures from magazines on it, etc. using any of the art materials. Ask the children to write their names on the back of the flags.
3. When everyone has finished, ask them to sit in a circle and talk about the flags they have created.
4. Now ask the children to help attach the flags to a long piece of string. If you can, hang the flags up in the classroom.

World Vision Creativity with children. A Manual for Children's Activities



For online learning, children can complete the flag at home or during the lesson, and share them on screen.

Superhero me



These printable templates, split up by age, use the concept of superheroes to encourage children to explore their own super powers, qualities and talents. What they create could then be shared with their next teacher as a transition activity or kept to reflect on their strengths.

The 'Superhero Me' activity is created by and available from [Mentally Healthy Schools](#)



For online learning, children can complete the activity at home or during the lesson.

Nobody knows what I can do

Aim: To build self-esteem and confidence by sharing personal information with others. To strengthen group cohesiveness and respect by listening carefully and concentrating on what others are saying.

You will need: Space for two circles.

1. Ask the children to form two circles – an inner circle and an outer circle with the same number of children in each. (If there is an uneven number, the facilitator can join a circle.) Ask them to face each other.
2. Ask the children to take turns in telling the other person something they think that person did not know about them. It should be a positive quality or skill or characteristic.
Give an example: *“Nobody knows that I can sew my own clothes.”*
3. Once the first pair have shared, clap or make another sound to indicate it is time to move: The inner circle stands still, whilst the outer circle moves one person to the right. Keep doing this until everyone in the inner circle has talked with everyone in the outer circle.
4. Now ask the children to sit down in one big circle.
5. Now ask the children to share one thing they learnt about someone else. No repetitions are allowed – every child should be mentioned.
6. When everyone has been mentioned, follow up with the questions below.

How did you feel about talking about a quality or skill that you don’t normally share?

Were there some new qualities or skills that you heard about that you would like to learn?

IFRC and Save the Children, Children’s Resilience Programme

Theme 4: Cooperation and learning how to have positive relationships with others

The train of silly walks

Aim: To energize the children and to practice working together.

You will need: Space.

1. Ask the children to stand in a circle. Now ask them all to turn to their right.
2. The facilitator breaks the circle so there is a beginning and an end. Now tell the leader of the line to start walking. The person behind them copies the leader exactly. The person behind that person does the same, until everyone in the line is walking in exactly the same way.
3. The train can go anywhere and the leader can change the walk, make noises, wave their arms around and so on, and the rest have to copy the exact movements and sounds.
4. After about 30 seconds, switch and let someone else be the leader. Continue switching until the time for the activity is over.

World Vision Creativity with children. A Manual for Children’s Activities



Copy me

Adapt this for online learning by asking one child to set an action or movement that everyone should copy on screen, or pass from one child to the another with the teacher calling out names.

Working Together

Aim: To encourage observation, awareness of and respect for one another and concentration.

You will need: A stick about the length of a pencil or a pen with a lid for each child.

The aim of the game is to keep the sticks from falling on the floor. To keep the two sticks stabilized, the children have to watch each other closely and react quickly. Both children have to learn to adjust to each other's movements. This is not easy.

Depending on the number of children, the game can be played with children standing in a triangle, in two lines or in circles.

The game becomes more difficult if more children participate.

1. Give each pair of children two sticks, preferably of equal length.
2. Ask the children to stand facing each other about the same distance apart as the length of the stick.
3. Demonstrate with one of the children what the activity requires: place one end of the stick against the tip of the index finger of the first child's right hand and the other end at the tip of the index finger of the second child's left hand.
4. To keep the stick balanced, both children have to apply a little pressure.
5. Now ask them to place the second stick between the tips of the index fingers of the other's free hand. Now ask them to try taking a step to the left or right whilst holding the sticks steadily!
6. End the game once everyone has managed to keep the sticks steady for a period of time.

Ask: Was it difficult to keep the sticks balanced?

What did you have to learn to make this work?

If some of the children also try to do the activity in bigger groups, ask them:

Was it more difficult when there were more children? What did you learn about communication and patience?

IFRC/Save the Children and Catholic Aids Action Namibia (2003) Building Resilience in Children Affected by HIV/AIDS



Speaking in order

For online learning, challenge the class to say their names in a sequence, or to share a sequence in the correct order, where each child is given one picture, word or number.

For example, if each child chooses or is given an animal picture, the children could share them in order of size from small to big, with each child saying the name of their animal at the right point in the sequence. Keep practicing until you can get it right, and do it quickly!

You can vary this activity according to the age and ability of the class – for example children could give their height or birthday in order, or any other item connected to a topic you are working on as a class!

Teacher wellbeing

Mindful moments

This advice is from [Mind](#) – and also draws on their resource, ‘Mindful Moments in Difficult Times’

Mindfulness is a technique you can learn which involves making a special effort to notice what's happening in the present moment (in your mind, body and surroundings). It can help you to become more self-aware, calmer, and able to deal with difficult thoughts and feelings.

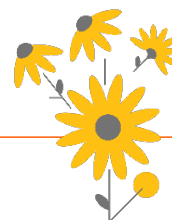
Different things work for different people, so if you don't find one exercise useful, try another. You can also try adapting them so that they suit you and are easier to fit in with your daily life.

Body scan

This is where you move your attention slowly through different parts of the body, starting from the top of your head moving all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation of different parts of your body.

Mindful moving, walking or running

Notice the feeling of your body moving. You might notice the breeze against your skin, the feeling of your feet or hands against different textures on the ground or nearby surfaces, and the different smells that are around you.



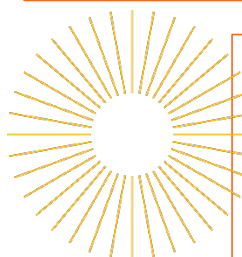
Pencil walk



Take your pen or pencil for a walk on the page for one minute. Move it slowly around the page, smoothly and randomly, focusing on the shapes you are creating the whole time. Don't let the pencil or pen leave the page until the time is up.

Breathe

Place your hands on your stomach, close your eyes and focus on your breathing for two minutes, simply noticing the rise and fall of your stomach as you breathe in and out.



Sunshine

Sit on the floor in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take some slow, deep breaths in and out. Picture a bright, shining sun. Feel the sun on your face. Breathe slowly and let the sun warm your face. Imagine the sun warming your shoulders and back. Imagine the sun warming your arms. Continue to breathe in and out, slowly and calmly. Imagine the sun's warmth spreading to your legs. Finally, feel the warmth all the way to your fingers and toes. Slowly, stretch your arms overhead and your legs and feet out in front of you. Take a deep breath in and bend over towards your feet. Exhale slowly and sit back up. Take one more deep breath in and out and then slowly open your eyes.

Teacher wellbeing: Wellbeing action plan

A wellbeing action plan can help you to put good practices in place to know how to take care of yourself. It is a good idea to complete a wellbeing plan ahead of time, so that when you feel you are struggling, you already have a plan in place. A wellbeing plan is a living document, so you can keep adding to it and reviewing it as you find more things that help you.

What helps me to stay well?

(e.g. going for a run, cup of tea, listen to music, talk to a friend, take a proper lunch break)

What things can I do every day to stay well?

(e.g. exercise, sleep and food as well as things that make you happy)

What do I want to avoid every day?

(e.g. using social media, putting pressure on myself)

What are the warning signs that I am struggling?

(e.g. feeling overwhelmed, not responding to messages)

What can I do if I notice I am struggling?

(Who can you talk to, and what can you do to help yourself? Think about who can help you as well as activities or actions you can do to help yourself)

