Testbourne Community School

'You can't stop the waves…but you can learn to surf'

The TCS approach to supporting positive mental health and building resilience

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MIND kind

Taking Time for Testbourne Minds

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Contents

Introduction

The title of this booklet is a quotation from Jon Kabat-Zinn, the Emeritus Professor of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts, and the creator of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. His ideas and writing have been something that have had a big influence on both my professional and personal life. I am also pleased to see that his approaches can be seen in the research and strategies that are being developed to support schools, and their students, as we hopefully begin to emerge from this global pandemic.

The choice of quotation was a deliberate one, as I feel it succinctly captures what should be at the heart of any strategies to improve mental health; the idea that we have enormous capacity within us to recover and that, if we are resilient and determined, we can learn to face adversity and the unexpected more easily.

It is important to stress that Testbourne Community School is not a specialist in mental health provision nor are our staff trained to diagnose or treat mental health issues. All staff are trained, as part of their broader safeguarding responsibilities, to be aware of the key mental health issues and to report their concerns. Pastoral and SEND staff work closely with families and the appropriate external agencies to help students gain access to the support they need. It's essential that students who are in need have access to the appropriate professional care and support.

There are no quick fixes, or magic wands, to tackle concerns about mental health. It can be frightening, distressing and at times can make us angry and frustrated. These are all understandable emotions, not least if we feel helpless and uncertain as to what to do.

However, it has been shown from research and evidence, that there are some important factors that can make a genuine difference and I'll outline these in this booklet.

This booklet is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature and research in this area. It does, however, draw on significant work that has been published over the last couple of years. This research has underpinned advice, guidance and training resources that have been provided through the Department of Education (DfE). A key reference is 'Recovery, Reintroduction and Renewal: Safe and Successful returns to school' (Whole School SEND, 2020)

This booklet is split into two halves. The first half focuses on the school's mental health strategy and how our rationale is aligned with current research. The second half provides useful guidance and advice, as well as links to assist students, parents, and carers with mental health concerns.

D Hall

Part One: The mental health rationale and strategy at Testbourne School

Existing research evidence and practice shows that school communities and individuals can (and do) recover from crisis events by drawing on their existing strengths and resources. This universal recovery process of resilience, or 'learning to surf the waves' of adversity, can be seen at individual and organisational levels (Kabat-Zinn, 2012; Masten A., 2018).

There are some recognised predictors and protective factors that contribute to a successful recovery. They are:

1. Connection / Relationships – it is important for students and staff to have meaningful social interaction.
2. Flexible Coping Skills – having the capacity to adapt and respond to changing circumstances.
3. Sense of agency/control e.g., being actively involved in your own recovery process. (Herman, 2015)

Our approach is influenced by the **5 Key Principles of Recovery (see image on next page).**

These principles are based on psychological models of resilience, growth and recovery and positive psychology, as well as the evidence base linking social emotional learning and attainment.

These principles of recovery identify three levels of support (a Graduated Response)

- **Universal** support for <u>all</u> students, staff, and parents.

- **Targeted** support for students, staff, and parents in specific contexts or with specific needs, e.g., Transition groups, groups of students with SEND or medical needs.

- **Individual** support for students, staff, and parents in contexts, or with specific needs, where they require an individual response to meeting their needs e.g., children and young people with SEND. Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

The 5 Key Principles of Recovery
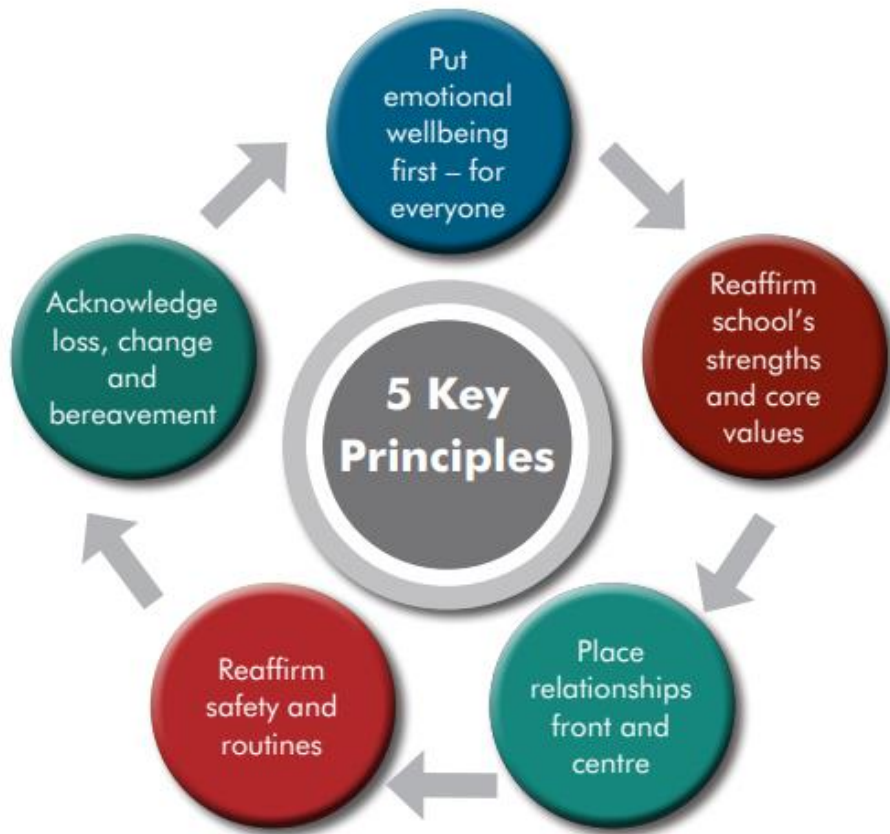
This model draws on the recent work of Biborough Educational Psychology Consultation Service (2020), Meredith (2020) and Wakefield Educational Psychology Service (EPS) (2020).

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Examples of how we apply the '5 Key Principles of Recovery' as a Graduated Response* *Not exhaustive but highlighting the key strategies we use

Principle	Universal – for all students
Emotional Wellbeing first	Focusing on wellbeing – for staff and students and parents e.g., MindKind. Access to resources and activities that promote wellbeing. Safeguarding/Pastoral monitoring of students. Carefully planned curriculum – addressing gaps in knowledge. Low stakes assessment. Developing metacognition skills and responsive teaching. Building resilience.
Reaffirm school values, strengths, and ethos	Communicating 'what we stand for' to everyone – through policy, processes, day to day interaction. Reaffirming our high expectations for learning in the classroom. Reaffirming our high expectations for behaviour, attitude, uniform etc. Recognition of our Learning Qualities and celebrating them. Consequence to modify behaviour so that it aligns with our values and ethos. Consistency across all Year groups. Assemblies and through tutor time.
Relationships front and centre	Enabling more social interaction where we can. Group activities that develop active listening. Regular communications between home and school to promote and ensure connectedness. Providing space and time for people to talk to trusted staff or student mentors.
Reaffirm safety and routines	Preparing staff and students for return to school and adaptations of routine, open and regular communication about our safeguarding arrangements. Communicating, modelling, and reminding of our routines. Creating social spaces where students feel safe. Assemblies.
Acknowledge loss, change and bereavement	Reflecting on the COVID-19 pandemic and how we are moving on in assemblies, PSHCE and tutor time. Routine acts of acknowledgement e.g., Remembrance Assemblies – learning from loss.

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Targeted Support

At Testbourne we plan for additional learning support and intervention for students or groups of students and who may, for whatever reason, struggle to re-engage with learning due to missed learning or ongoing emotional needs. This targeted support includes:

1. Targeted SEND reviews for specific areas of need.
2. Key adults being available to support children and young people if and when required.
3. Key members of staff such as Heads of Year, tutors, SENDCo, Designated Safeguarding Leads working in collaboration to support and plan interventions.
4. Preparing students before returning to school, e.g., phased return plans.
5. Small group work, specifically targeting area of need, such as specific work around emotions, emotional regulation, bereavement, loss, and change, for example: e.g., ELSA, Mighty Minds for anxiety.
6. Working with and monitoring students who may be unwell at home or struggling to return.
7. Monitoring student groups where research has shown their learning has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 e.g.,
   - Children and young people within minority communities.
   - Children in Care/Previously in Care.
   - Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
   - Children and young people at key points of transition, including those starting school for the first time.
   - Children and young people with Social Workers.
   - Young Carers.
   - Children and young people living in poverty

Individual Support

Support and intervention will often mirror the work we are doing with targeted groups, but it will also include further strategies such as Individual Education Support Plans, consistent support adults, short term personalised timetables, risk assessments and behaviour support plans.

Why do we have a focus on high standards of behaviour, attitude to learning and uniform?

These areas align with the Key Principles, *'Reaffirm school values, strengths, and ethos'* and *'Reaffirm safety and routines '*. They also underpin the important work that needs to be done to rebuild self-confidence and resilience in our students.

As the table above has outlined, Testbourne has always had the highest expectations in these areas, and it was important that we re-established them, including consequences for those students who don't meet those expectations.

There may be times, for some of our more vulnerable students, when they need greater support to rebuild their resilience and that is where energy will be directed. As the research shows, it could undermine our work on school recovery if students were excused from following our expectations or routines because of personal adversity of any kind. It can be argued that it is more important than ever to provide certainty and boundaries to help them recover and to cope with the routine challenges of everyday life.
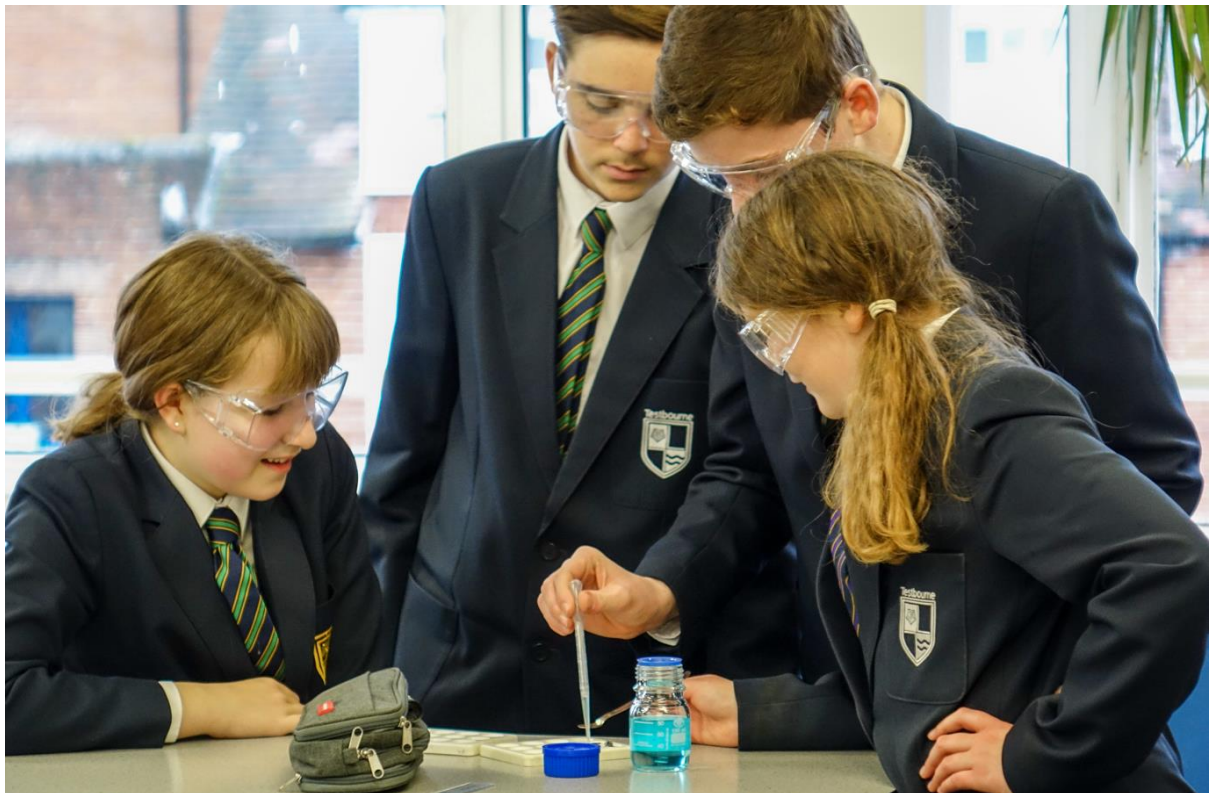
Why do we plan to return students to their lessons as soon as possible?

Mental health organisations (e.g., CAMHS) and other practitioners will often use approaches based on a graduated exposure principle, especially when dealing with anxiety related disorders.

This is an evidence-based treatment used to tackle avoidance of situations, activities or objects that can cause anxiety. This is referred to as **habituation.** Whilst avoidance may provide some short-term relief, it can in the longer-term help maintain patterns of fear and anxiety.
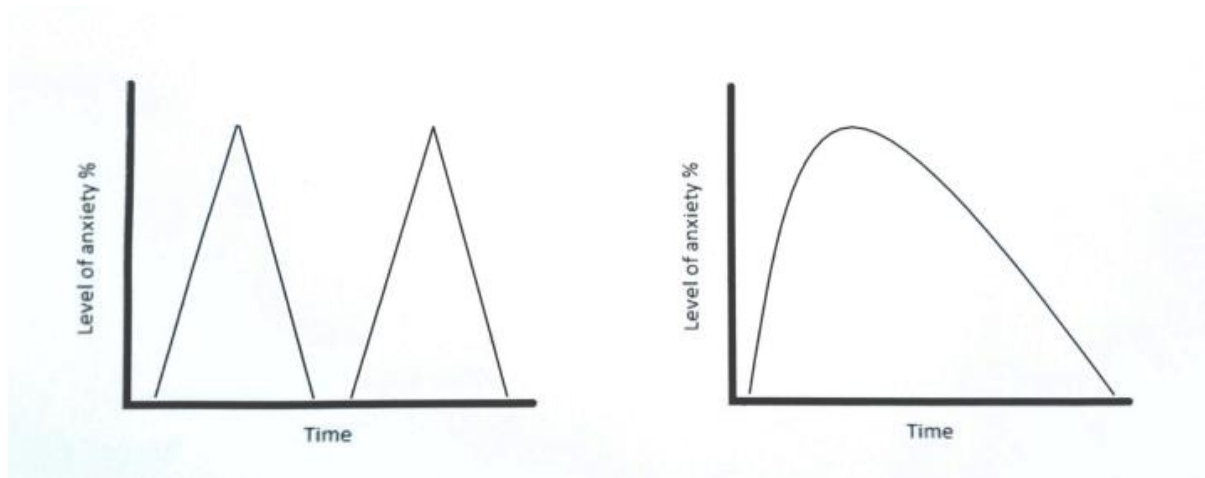
The graph on the left shows that continued avoidance can lead to heightened anxiety every time that an individual returns to the feared situation. These anxiety responses are part of our physiological '*flight and fight*' response to danger or a fearful situation.

We cannot sustain these high levels of anxiety indefinitely and, therefore, by remaining in a situation our levels of anxiety will naturally reduce. This is shown in the graph on the right and is the process of habituation. This is best achieved by taking a graduated approach to exposure to fearful situations, starting with situations that we feel able to tolerate and then building up. This allows for the process of habituation and allows for our anxiety levels to reduce over time.

We use these principles when working with our students. It is important that a plan is put in place that serves the following purposes:

- From the outset, the plan has the clear intention that a student will return to their routine timetable and activities in the longer term.
- The plan should be devised so that avoidance of fearful situations is reduced, and patterns of anxiety can be overcome.
- It allows a student to gradually be exposed to situations, activities and objects that cause them fear. This may be done through working in our Inclusion Room, by providing a quiet space or a reduced timetable for a short period of time. Over time the use of these strategies will be reduced.

Through a combination of the above, the process of habituation should help a student reduce their anxiety over time and be better placed to cope with the routine demands of school life and the future.

Bibliography

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Part Two: Mental health support and guidance

In this section we will:

- Share ways in which parents and carers can support their children when they express mental health concerns. Early intervention that promotes and fosters resilience and coping skills can be very effective.
- Highlight how the school will work with students and their families if issues persist or become more complex.

It is possible to prevent negative mental health by intervening and supporting your child in an appropriate way. Although we want to support and empathise with their feelings, it is very important to encourage resilience and remind your child that life can sometimes be tough and being a teenager can make this seem more so.

It is instinctive as a parent or carer to want to do all you can to support your child's mental wellbeing, but we should, however, remind ourselves that during adolescence, every thought, feeling and perception of things can become heightened and/or magnified.

As parents, carers, and school practitioners we can play a vital role in guiding them through these unknown and, what might feel to them, scary and overwhelming feelings. We can reassure them that this is part of life and part of growing up and then share and empathise with them through conversation and a sharing of good `life coping skills.'

By encouraging perseverance and resilience, quite often the issues that are concerning them become easier to cope with and we are, therefore, providing them with useful skills for life. As we outlined in Part One, unfortunately, avoiding situations and scenarios that make us anxious can lead to anxiety growing. It can be processed with children that thoughts aren't necessarily fact or the reality of a situation.
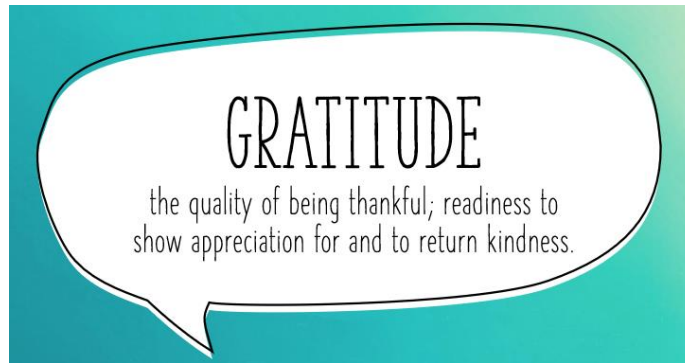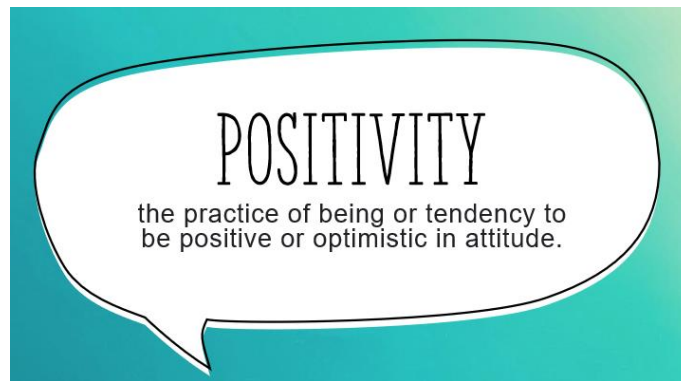
Courage in Learning

We try to encourage three main areas when discussing mental health. These are:

Writing down or discussing what we are grateful for enables us to try and stay in the present moment and focus on the positives in our lives.

There is a popular quotation, 'what the thinker thinks, the prover proves' and this can be a helpful reminder to use that our positive thoughts and attitudes reinforce positive perceptions.
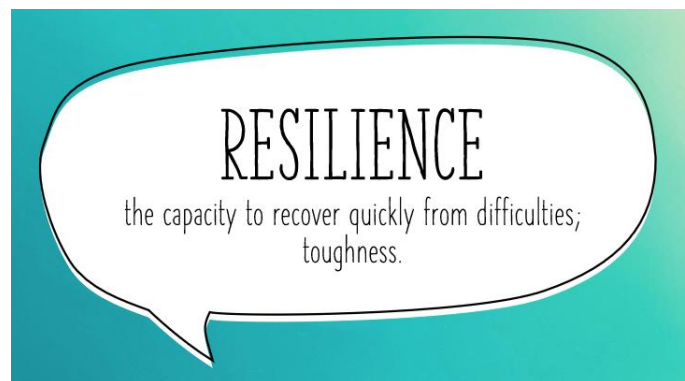
Adolescents often need reminding that the way they are currently feeling is not permanent. A certain period in their life may be difficult, but it is an opportunity to develop resilience. Reflecting on previous difficult times, or new situations, can be helpful to process how obstacles were overcome and a reminder that they are often stronger than they think i.e., focus on the capabilities and resources they already possess rather than what is going wrong. It is important to try and cultivate a positive mindset, even when times get tough.

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Useful resources based around mental wellbeing and resilience:

Webinars for parents and carers	• Webinars for Parents | Family Links | Emotional Health Training • Parents Mental Health Support | Advice for Your Child | YoungMinds
Self-harm and suicide	• Help & Advice Resources - Papyrus UK | Suicide Prevention Charity (papyrus-uk.org) • Harmless
Resilience	• 'You Can Cope' – a document on resilience • Resilience in pre-teens & teenagers | Raising Children Network • Teach your teenager to be resilient – Reach Out Parents • Building resilience in children and teens - Family Lives
Preventative information	• My-self-care-plan-secondary.pdf (annafreud.org) • Self-esteem-updated-june-2020.pdf (youngminds.org.uk)
CAMHS resources	• DOWNLOADS | CAMHS Resources (camhs-resources.co.uk)
General mental health advice and information	• Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families • Mental wellbeing audio guides - NHS (www.nhs.uk) • Prevention and mental health | Mental Health Foundation • MHF_Prevention_Report_ONLINE-VERSION_0.pdf (mentalhealth.org.uk) • Mental Health | Royal College of Psychiatrists (rcpsych.ac.uk) • Mental ill health prevention: the Whats, Whys and Hows? | Mental Health Foundation • 5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

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What if the situation becomes persistent or more complex?

As we outlined in Part One, a support plan should have the long-term aim to enable a student to return to their routine timetable and activities. We work with parents, carers, and students in a range of ways. These include several short-term strategies designed to support a graduated response:

- Use of our inclusion facility or the Hub
- Reduced timetable for a short period of time.
- ELSA (which is a short-term programme), ongoing support using ELSA techniques (which we call Ongoing ELS) or student welfare and guidance sessions (with Mrs Bateman or Mrs Day).
- Exit Cards

There is no prescriptive format for these plans, they are personalised to the needs of a student and routinely reviewed.

In addition, and if necessary, then the school can support through engaging with external agencies. For example:

- The family GP
- Children's Wellbeing Practitioner (CWP) referral
- CAMHS referral
- Medical referral via Hampshire Inclusion Services
- Children's Services
- Educational Psychologist
- Referrals to relevant external counselling services.

For some children their mental health concerns can lead to school avoidance. This is known as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and can be very challenging and stressful for both student and the parents and carers.

The school follows the EBSA guidance provided by Hampshire Inclusion Services. A copy of this general guidance can be accessed on our school website HERE

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Conclusion

We hope that parents and carers will find this information useful in both explaining our approach to mental health, as well as signposting the various routes of support that are available.

We continue to provide further support and guidance on a range of safeguarding and pastoral matters, and these can be accessed from our website.

Safeguarding - Testbourne Community School

Wellbeing - Testbourne Community School

Anti-Bullying - Testbourne Community School

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