

The Solihull Approach

Let's start by acknowledging the uncertainty, loss and stress that has been generated by the Covid19 pandemic and then perhaps draw a line under it? After what seemed like an absolute lifetime of readjustments and for some, a traumatic experience, we would like you to consider the training content as a starting point or indeed something upon which you can scaffold-build in terms of your own Social, Emotional Health and Wellbeing and professional development.

With the best will in the world, we know that there is no *'one size fits all'*, when it comes to what will assist or work for any given individual in respect of their social, emotional health and well-being. We have taken the themes from the Solihull Approach along with the Take5 Steps to Wellbeing, and tailored the content for this input to assist you in looking at 'your needs'. It is worth noting, that this does not in any way diminish, the importance of the role that both the Solihull Approach and the Take5 Steps to Wellbeing can play within the context of your school. On the contrary, more so than ever, they can aid in developing our understanding; promote the use of a common *'helping language'* and assist in relation to how we manage our self-care, interactions and actions using these particular frameworks as guidance.

It is generally accepted that people's resilience and broader mental health is strengthened when they are listened to and their concerns taken seriously. In this respect, we are working from the premise that *"you can't pour from an empty cup;"* hence, the importance of looking after yourself in order that your needs are met, and you can therefore be effective, not only for yourself but those that you connect with in the School Environment. In brief; The Solihull Approach incorporates the importance of understanding brain development and its links with containment, reciprocity and how this relates to behaviour (NB: it is important to remember, with containment and reciprocity, that one cannot happen without the other). Using this approach can enable us to better understand our own behaviours and emotions in a much more insightful way as well as understanding our interactions with children/young people.

When put into action, this approach can assist us to respond in a much more effective way to, our own needs, and the needs of children/young people we work with. It can assist in developing ourselves as well as the young people we engage with through the development of self-management/regulation skills. The enhancement of these skills can positively impact your lives both professionally and personally; and those you teach, will know the impact through their learning, educational attainment and personal, social development. Using this knowledge, alongside the Take 5 steps to well-being (set out below), we may be able to provide a framework to develop a foundation and consolidate our understanding in respect of ourselves and the physical, physiological and psychological transitions facing young people in a school setting.

When we consider that having returned to school following two lockdown events and the extended breaks due to Covid19 circumstances, it is understandable that, for some, this will still remain a daunting and stressful task (especially those more at risk due to underlying health issues and less obvious adversity). For some, there may be periods of persistent sleep dysregulation, mood or appetite changes, and/or withdrawal from others. Likewise there may be some who are constantly ruminating over the same negative thoughts, or find that they now have a narrower 'window of tolerance'. On their own, these factors can exacerbate stress levels. When combined, they can provide a toxicity that can feel overwhelming. Either way, there is a clear indication of the impact of stressors on brain function, and the prominence of the Amygdala (essentially our brain's alarm system that activates when faced with threat), during this time. Containment and Reciprocity are vital in order to free up the Cerebral Cortex so that we are able to engage in the education/learning processes as well as developing our own sense of understanding, regarding how we manage stressful/anxiety inducing situations – our resilience.

Take 5, Connect:

Social and interpersonal relationships are important to support wellbeing and buffer against mental ill health. People with low levels of social participation and small primary social networks are more likely to have negative mental health experiences. 'Wellbeing' comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. Feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity and engagement are characteristics we share when we have positive experiences in our life. In relation to Solihull, this is outlined within brain development and the concept of containment, whereby, a person receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it and communicates this understanding back to the other person. This engagement can assist in restoring the capacity for the other person to feel heard, enabling them to think, engage and learn! Having a broad social network, connecting and interacting with others can have a positive benefit on our wellbeing. The strength of relationships, a key person, is important, thus feeling close to and valued by someone will, when given the time and space, both strengthen and broaden social networks and contribute to a person's wellbeing and enable their engagement with learning to be a positive experience. "When we look at long-term outcomes, we know that people who fare best are those who feel supported and connected to others," Dr Busman explains. "So while you're trying to navigate through everything, do the best you can to connect with others." The importance of this will become more apparent as the session progresses.

Take 5, Be Active:

Regular physical activity is associated with greater wellbeing and lower rates of anxiety and depression regardless of age. There is evidence that physical activity protects against cognitive decline in later life. Generally people believe that even a single bout of exercise or physical activity of less than ten minutes can improve mood and make people feel better. Activities can also have the benefit of strengthening interactions with other people e.g. when walking or

participating in a team sport. Connecting activity to transition relates to the ability to engage in something that enables people to either relax or activate the beneficial endorphin reaction in the brain that helps them to feel good, regulate mood and cope better when faced with change. Being active also refers to individuals actively seeking out supports when they recognise that they are in a slump or when they are displaying behaviours that would indicate they are overwhelmed (not contained).

Take 5, Take Notice:

The brain is designed to rewire itself all the time – this is known as neuro-plasticity. Taking notice and using grounding techniques can assist in enabling your para-sympathetic response to counteract the Fight, Flight, Freeze responses associated with stress and anxiety. Research has shown that being trained to be aware of your own senses, thoughts and feelings can result in improved wellbeing. Being aware of what is taking place in the present can lead to a more positive state of mind. Heightened awareness enhances an individual's self-awareness whilst developing their understanding; enabling them to make good and informed choices. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, research into actions that aim to enhance wellbeing have similarly found that containment can positively affect behaviour change and exchange. These need to be aligned with personal values to be successful. Teaching a member of staff and pupils to self-regulate is an important step in enabling them to understand their needs, articulate this and engage in the learning process. Untreated anxiety can make you feel irritable and overwhelmed. If you are feeling bombarded with questions, to which there may not be an answer yet, e.g. what will the timetable look like when the school resumes, while you're trying to complete other work assignments or whilst trying to manage your own household, you may find yourself being snappy! It can help to take a step back, and time, before responding.

Using mindfulness techniques, like deep breathing, to help yourself calm down, is one way to assist in this process. There are many other creative ways to take notice, which links with the next step.

Take 5, Keep Learning:

In childhood, learning plays an important role in our social and cognitive development (Early Brain development). Learning throughout our life stages contributes to self-esteem, social interaction and active lives, competence and self-efficacy. Goal setting, particularly when self-generated, has a positive impact on wellbeing. While not everyone may enjoy learning in some environments, or see positive outcomes, it is the case that the activity of learning in itself has benefits and is important for wellbeing, developing understanding and building confidence for the young person. In order to do so, the individual needs to be contained, their amygdala activity down regulated in order for the cerebral cortex to be accessed and freed for learning.

Take 5, Give:

By enabling others, through the processes of containment and reciprocity; by giving them your time; providing a safe place to express themselves; to be listened to and more importantly heard; you lead by example. Giving comes in many shapes and forms. Giving someone your undivided attention is containment in action and forms the basis of an enabling engagement. It is therefore important that you give yourself what you need in order that you feel contained and therefore available to engage in and with others in the learning process. It is worth considering what your support network both within and outside of the school looks like.

Quick Guide:

What is Containment?

Containment involves supporting someone to process their emotions, including anxiety and distress, in order to help restore an individual's capacity to think more clearly. In children, this is a core part of emotion regulation, but it is also key for adults, particularly during times when they may be experiencing high levels of stress.

Why is it so important at the moment?

We are being bombarded with information and demands, calling on all of our brain power to process and cope with the challenges we are currently facing, as well as getting our heads around the 'blended' or uncertain challenges ahead. When we become more and more swamped with these pressures, we can become overwhelmed and may lose the ability to think clearly.

If someone is able to help us process these feelings, it can give us some valuable space to mentally and physically take a breath, regroup and then be able to move on, with some of our thinking capacity restored.

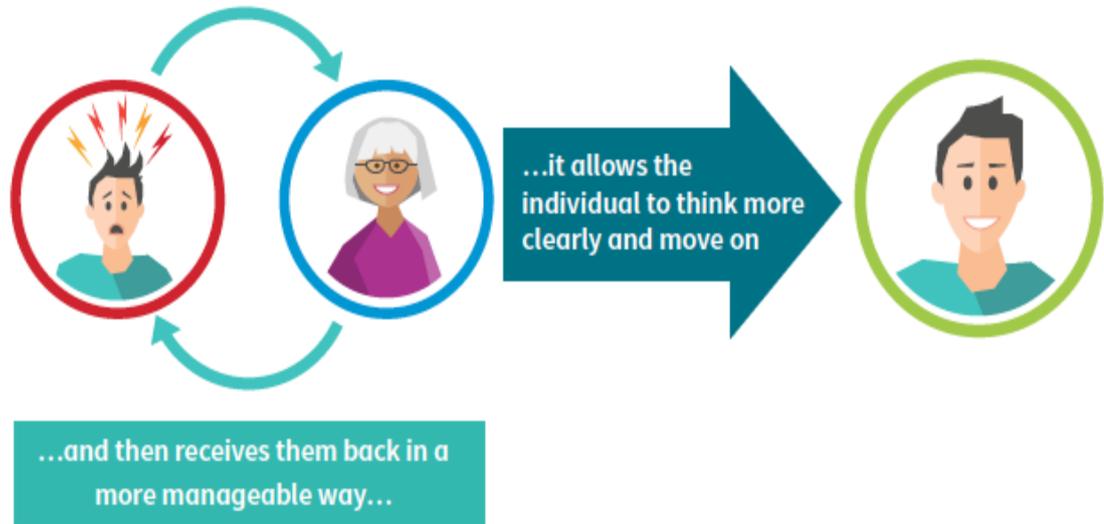
Important: Containment is not taking on someone else's emotions and shouldering these for them. Likewise, it is not about getting rid of the emotions. Containment is about helping someone to take a step back; to make sense of how they are feeling; and with this support, be better placed to manage those feelings.

How can I help to contain others?

Simply by recognising that someone may be feeling overwhelmed and acknowledging this for them can be a first step in containing their emotions.

You will already be using many of the skills that help lead to a sense of containment for others, particularly when you engage your OARS: (This is set out below). However, the most effective containment phrases used to demonstrate that you are present with someone, are less question focused (than those set out within the OARS; see below), e.g. "*I can see you're upset*"; such interactions reflect that you are paying attention to the content and observant of the visual cues/mannerisms displayed by the person you are listening to.

When an individual has opportunity to pass the difficult emotions to another to help them process them...



It is important to remember that in order to be able to help contain someone else, you need to have emotional thinking space. Put quite simply; you cannot do so effectively if you are also feeling overwhelmed. It is essential that you identify, recognise and use your own sources of containment, whether this be a colleague, partner or friend; and utilise them when needed! One of the biggest stumbling blocks an individual can come across when faced with having to think about accessing or asking for support, is their inner-fear. We often mask this within the context of phrases such as; *"I don't want to burden anyone with my problems"*; or *"It's not that bad, compared to others, I'll be fine"*. Is this a fear of appearing weak if we ask for support? Be there for everyone else and give so little to yourself? (For further reading see 'Karpman Triangle) If you recognise this trait, it is up to you to break the habit and reach out; for support. The chances are, someone has already recognised this in you!

What is Reciprocity?

Reciprocity is the dance of interaction between two individuals, when they are tuned in to each other's emotions and needs, and respond to these in a sensitive way.

Containment and Reciprocity are intricately linked; (in that, reciprocity will not be effective if a person/s is not in a contained place) as you cannot have one without the other also in place.

Why is Reciprocity so important?

Although we are all living through these strange and unprecedented times, everyone will be experiencing them differently, depending on their circumstances and their own internal and external resources.

Reciprocity is essential, in checking in with others about what their experiences are and how they are feeling about them. It ensures that we are not making assumptions and are therefore able to meet people's emotions appropriately, being in a position to offer containment as needed and to engage in constructive, supportive interactions.

Reciprocity creates a sense of being held in mind and in synchronisation with another person. Ultimately reciprocity allows the other person to feel connected, valued, listened to (being heard) and likewise respected. Positive reciprocity is an integral stage that can promote positive mental health outcomes and play a fundamental role in the development of resilience.

OARS:

- ✓ Open-ended questions – use “How, Why, What & When” questions to open up conversations.
- ✓ Affirmations – use genuine statements of support about something important that the individual has raised. This can come in the form of acknowledging that they look upset, anxious etc.
- ✓ Reflections – helps others feel properly heard & helps check out their meaning and enables us to check out their support network.
- ✓ Summaries – pulls together what has been said, which can assist in reaffirming clarification – helps individual feel understood.

Just listening improves Stress regulation & containment:

- ✓ Accept and validate – you really feel that...; I can understand why that might feel...;
- ✓ Reflect back – I can really hear that...; I can see how...; so what I heard you say was...;
- ✓ Clarify meaning – help me understand how that is for you
- ✓ Offer support – how can I help you right now?
- ✓ Offer an empathic response – I am so sorry, this feels like it's so, (hard/difficult/overwhelming...)
- ✓ Use WINE – I **w**onder, I **i**mage, I **n**otice and then **e**mpathise
- ✓ Communication matters even if what you communicate is;
'I don't know the answer to that just yet' acknowledge uncertainty

Additional Supports/Information:

Email. NI/UK: workandstudy@inspirewellbeing.org. Helpline. 0800 389 5362 (UK).

Solihullapproachparenting.com

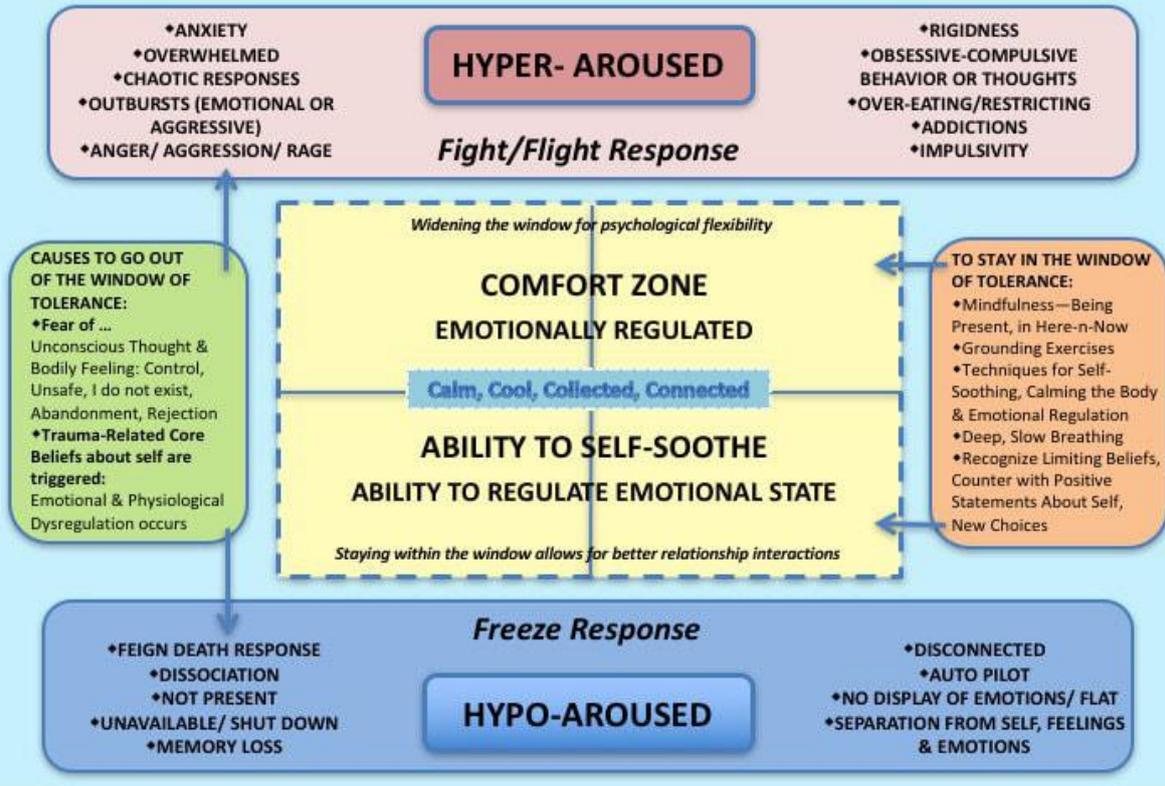
<https://covidwellbeingni.info/>

<https://healthallianceni.com> › [here-2-help-app](#)

[Minding Your Head \(MYH\) - Directory Listing - Family Support NI](#)

<https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk> › [mental-health](#)

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE- TRAUMA/ANXIETY RELATED RESPONSES:
Widening the Comfort Zone for Increased Flexibility



Recognise your 'Triggers' (situations/people/places etc.) and find what works for you to keep you regulated and safe. (The list below is not exhaustive). Remember, it's important to look out for you – Take Notice, Be Active in seeking support and Connect with your support network!

THE EFFECTS OF STRESS

How you may feel mentally and emotionally:

- Anxious
- Low self-esteem
- Overwhelmed
- Angry
- Sad
- Constant worrying
- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty making decisions
- Racing thoughts
- Frustration