



# Supporting Children's Wellbeing During Distance Learning

An Emotion Coaching Teacher Guide with Activities | All Year Groups  
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Schools across the region are moving to distance learning following recent events. This guide — written from an educational psychology perspective — gives teachers practical, evidence-based tools to support children's social and emotional wellbeing across all year groups. **Wellbeing first. Connection before curriculum. Learning follows safety.**

1. Wellbeing First	2. Age Strategies	3. Emotion Coaching	4. Activities	5. Staff Wellbeing	6. Session Plan	7. Resource Hub
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## SECTION 1 | Why Wellbeing Must Come First

You are already doing something remarkable. Teaching children through uncertainty, disruption and fear — while navigating your own feelings about it too — takes real skill, commitment and care. This section is not about adding to your list. **It is about understanding what children need most right now, so that every minute you spend on wellbeing genuinely supports learning.**

When children experience threat or disruption, their nervous system naturally prioritises survival. This is not a discipline issue or a learning barrier — it is a normal human response to abnormal circumstances. The part of the brain responsible for focus and reasoning becomes less accessible when a child feels unsafe. Your warm, consistent presence is the most powerful classroom resource you have right now.

The single most useful principle to hold onto is **connection before curriculum**. Children who feel seen, heard and safe are children who can learn. A five-minute check-in at the start of a session is not lost teaching time — it is the foundation everything else sits on.

Children may experience...	Your role as their safe adult...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Anxiety and heightened alertness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Acknowledge feelings warmly and without judgement</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sleep disturbance and tiredness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Keep routines predictable and consistent</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Withdrawal or emotional quietness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Stay warm and communicative throughout</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clinginess or worries about separation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Allow a gentle check-in before academics</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Big emotional reactions or irritability</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Model calm, regulated responses yourself</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Difficulty concentrating</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Hold expectations gently this week</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Regression to earlier behaviours</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Celebrate connection and effort over outcomes</li></ul>

## ■ Safeguarding Reminder

If any wellbeing activity or conversation prompts a concern about a child's safety or welfare, report this immediately to your school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Do not investigate concerns yourself. Record what the child said in their exact words. Emotional disclosure is common during wellbeing activities — this is a sign of trust, not a problem. Follow your school's safeguarding procedures at all times.

## SECTION 2 | Age-by-Age SEL Strategies

### ■ Early Years

Ages 3–5

- Begin every session with a feelings check-in using picture cards or emojis
- Use visual timetables — predictability creates safety for young children
- Build in movement and breathing breaks every 20 minutes
- Offer comfort activities: colouring, drawing, playdough, sensory play
- Reassure children warmly and frequently: "You are safe. I am here."
- Share simple co-regulation activities with parents for use at home

### ■ KS1 — Years 1 & 2

Ages 5–7

- Start with an emotion thermometer check-in (scale of 1–5)
- Name and validate emotions: "It makes sense to feel worried right now"
- Teach simple breathing: balloon breath, wave breathing
- Use stories and puppets to explore feelings safely
- Build in structured peer connection — it reduces anxiety
- Keep tasks short and achievable — early success builds confidence

### ■ Lower KS2 — Years 3 & 4

Ages 7–9

- Feelings wheel or colour check-in at the start of each session
- Introduce the Window of Tolerance in accessible language
- Teach 5-4-3-2-1 grounding and box breathing as daily tools
- Explore gratitude, kindness and positive emotions through activities
- Offer choice in tasks to restore children's sense of agency
- Celebrate effort and resilience rather than just academic outcomes

### ■ Upper KS2 — Years 5 & 6

Ages 9–11

- Brief daily check-in — written or verbal — at the start of sessions
- Introduce emotion coaching: name the feeling, validate, then problem-solve
- Use journalling as a self-regulation and reflection tool
- Explore circles of control — what can and cannot be changed right now
- Build peer support through structured partner and group activities
- Signpost trusted adults and Psychology Flows for additional support

### ■ KS3 — Years 7, 8 & 9

Ages 11–14

- Acknowledge the situation directly, honestly and age-appropriately
- Offer autonomy and choice wherever possible — it reduces helplessness
- Teach evidence-based mindfulness and self-regulation strategies
- Create structured connection time before formal learning begins
- Notice students who go quiet — a gentle individual check-in matters
- Normalise help-seeking and reduce stigma around mental health

### ■ KS4 — Years 10 & 11

Ages 14–16

- Acknowledge that this is genuinely hard and that their feelings make complete sense
- Teach stress management: cognitive reframing and problem-focused coping
- Maintain a calm, steady presence — your regulation supports theirs
- Facilitate peer support — shared experience reduces isolation
- Maintain clear and fair expectations while holding them with compassion
- Actively signpost Psychology Flows and school counselling services

## SECTION 3 | Emotion Coaching in an Online Environment

Emotion Coaching is an approach rooted in empathy and connection — it means responding to how children feel before focusing on what they do. Developed by Dr John Gottman, it involves noticing, naming and validating emotions and building the kind of trust that makes children feel safe enough to learn.

### Name the Feeling

Start every session by acknowledging how children feel before focusing on what they do. "I can see some of us might be feeling unsettled today — that is completely okay." Naming emotions reduces their intensity and signals that feelings are welcome here.

### Validate, Don't Fix

Resist the urge to reassure too quickly or solve the feeling away. "It makes sense you feel that way" is more powerful than "everything is fine." Children who feel genuinely heard are children who can move forward.

### Connection Before Content

A five-minute connection activity before academic work is not lost learning time — it is the condition for learning to happen at all. Children who feel connected to their teacher and peers can access their thinking brain.

### Empathy and Choice

Offer small, real choices wherever possible — which task to start, how to share a response. Genuine empathy combined with agency helps restore children's sense of control when wider events feel uncertain and out of their hands.

## SECTION 4 | Psychology Flows Wellbeing Activity Toolkit

The following activities are original Psychology Flows content, written from an educational psychology perspective. Each one is grounded in evidence-based approaches including Positive Psychology, Emotion Coaching and VIA Character Strengths. **Click any link below to download the full printable activity sheet directly.**

Activity 1	What Are Positive Emotions?	All ages	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 2	My Feelings Check-In	All ages	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 3	My Gratitude Journal	Ages 5+	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 4	My Bravery Shield	Ages 5–14	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 5	My Kindness Calendar	All ages	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 6	My Hope Bubbles	Ages 7–16	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 7	Breathing & Regulation Toolkit	All ages	<a href="#">Download</a>
Activity 8	Finding the Hidden Treasure	All ages	<a href="#">Download</a>

## SECTION 5 | Looking After Yourself as a Teacher

You cannot pour from an empty cup. **Regulated adults create regulated classrooms** — your wellbeing is not separate from your pupils' wellbeing; it is foundational to it. Here are five things you can do right now, alongside recommended mindfulness resources designed specifically for teachers.

### 1 Name it to tame it

Acknowledge your own emotional state before going online. Even 30 seconds of box breathing can shift your nervous system from reactive to responsive. You cannot give what you do not have.

### 2 Connect with colleagues

Brief daily check-ins with a colleague significantly buffer stress. You are not meant to carry this alone — shared experience reduces the load considerably.

### 3 Set a clear finish time

When working remotely the boundary between work and home dissolves. Protect it deliberately. A clear finish time is essential to your recovery, not a luxury.

### 4 Hold your expectations gently

This is not a normal week and normal expectations do not apply. Good enough is genuinely good enough right now. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to one of your pupils.

### 5 Seek support if you need it

If you are struggling, please reach out to your school's pastoral lead. You can also visit Psychology Flows for professional support, resources and guidance.

## Recommended Mindfulness & Meditation Resources

### Headspace for Educators

Free premium Headspace subscription for all teachers

[headspace.com/educators](https://www.headspace.com/educators)

### Calm for Teachers

Free Calm app subscription for teachers — sleep, stress, focus

[calm.com/schools](https://calm.com/schools)

### Teacher Wellbeing Podcast

Evidence-based wellbeing strategies for educators

[psychologyflows.com/resources](https://psychologyflows.com/resources)

## SECTION 6 | Emotion Coaching Online Session Framework

This simple four-part framework takes less than 15 minutes of your lesson time and significantly affects how settled and ready to learn children feel. Use it consistently — predictability is a form of care.

<b>■ OPEN</b> 5 min	Warm greeting by name • Feelings check-in (emoji, colour or 1–5 scale) • Brief breathing exercise • Overview of the session
<b>■ BRIDGE</b> 5 min	Short connection activity • Acknowledge any worries briefly and validate them • Celebrate something positive from yesterday
<b>■ LEARN</b> 20–30 min	Focused, reduced content • Movement break built in at the midpoint • Choices offered where possible
<b>■ CLOSE</b> 5 min	One-word or one-emoji check-out • Warm, positive close • Reminder of when you will meet again • Clear and caring sign-off

## SECTION 7 | Psychology Flows Resource Hub — By Year Group

Click any link below to open the Psychology Flows lesson plan, activity sheet or resource for that year group directly. All resources are original Psychology Flows content written from an educational psychology perspective.

### ■ Early Years

Reception | Ages 3–5

- [Feelings & Emotions Lesson Plan](#)
- [Breathing Buddies Regulation Activity](#)
- [My Safe Place Guided Visualisation](#)
- [Kindness Stars Class Activity](#)
- [Positive Emotions Introduction](#)

### ■ KS1

Years 1–2 | Ages 5–7

- [Emotion Thermometer Check-In Lesson](#)
- [Balloon Breath Regulation Activity](#)
- [My Gratitude Journal Activity Sheet](#)
- [Worry Monster Activity](#)
- [My Confidence Cape Activity](#)

### ■ Lower KS2

Years 3–4 | Ages 7–9

- [Window of Tolerance Lesson Plan](#)
- [5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Toolkit](#)
- [Circles of Control Activity](#)
- [My Hope Bubbles Activity Sheet](#)
- [VIA Bravery Shield Activity](#)

### ■ Upper KS2

Years 5–6 | Ages 9–11

- [Emotion Coaching Lesson Plan](#)
- [Resilience & Character Strengths Pack](#)
- [Journalling for Wellbeing Lesson](#)
- [Peer Support & Connection Activity](#)
- [My Kindness Calendar](#)

### ■ KS3

Years 7–9 | Ages 11–14

- [Understanding Anxiety Lesson Plan](#)
- [Mindfulness & Self-Regulation Lesson](#)
- [Self-Compassion Activity Sheet](#)
- [Stress Management Toolkit](#)
- [Positive Emotions Deep Dive](#)

### ■ KS4

Years 10–11 | Ages 14–16

- [Exam Anxiety Lesson Plan](#)
- [Cognitive Reframing Activity](#)
- [Building Emotional Resilience Pack](#)
- [Wellbeing & Study Balance Guide](#)
- [Hope & Future-Focused Thinking Lesson](#)

## SECTION 8 | Context-Sensitive Lessons — See Next Pages

Six fully self-contained lessons designed for the current context are included at the end of this guide. Each lesson teaches emotional and wellbeing skills through a **skills-based approach** — with teacher scripts, step-by-step instructions and a pupil activity sheet in one document. No prior training is needed. Teachers do not need to open difficult conversations. See Section 8 for Early Years, KS1, Lower KS2, Upper KS2, KS3 and KS4.

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## SECTION 8 | Context-Sensitive Lessons for Unsettled Times

The six lessons below have been designed specifically for the current context in Dubai. They take a **skills-based approach** — teaching children and young people how to understand and manage their emotions, build resilience and find hope, **without requiring teachers to facilitate difficult conversations about current events**.

Each lesson is fully self-contained: teacher guidance, a safe opening script, step-by-step instructions and a pupil activity sheet are all in one document. Teachers do not need additional training or therapeutic expertise to deliver them. The activities are grounded in best-practice research including Emotion Coaching, RULER, VIA Character Strengths, Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build theory and Snyder's Hope Theory.

### The Key Principle

**Skills-based delivery means teaching the tool, not opening the wound.** Children learn to name feelings without explaining why they have them. They build regulation strategies without identifying what they are regulating from. They grow positive emotions and strengths without discussing what is making those things harder. This is the gold standard approach for universal school-based wellbeing programmes during periods of collective stress or threat.

#### ■ Early Years

Ages 3–5

##### **Feeling Safe: Breathing, Bodies and Belonging**

*Body check-in, balloon breathing, safe people, Strength Star activity sheet*

→ [Download full lesson](#)

#### ■ KS1

Years 1–2 | Ages 5–7

##### **My Feelings Toolkit: Naming, Breathing and Growing Kindness**

*Feelings grid with drawn faces, box breathing, weather metaphor, kindness plan*

→ [Download full lesson](#)

#### ■ Lower KS2

Years 3–4 | Ages 7–9

##### **Understanding My Stress Response and Building My Calm Kit**

*Body stress map, stress science, early warning signs, personalised Calm Kit*

#### ■ Upper KS2

Years 5–6 | Ages 9–11

##### **My Strengths Shield: Resilience, Character and Positive Emotions**

*VIA strengths grid, positive emotions wheel, Strengths Shield activity*

→ [Download full lesson](#)

#### ■ KS3

Years 7–9 | Ages 11–14

##### **Managing Anxiety: Understanding My Brain and Building Resilience**

*Brain science, anxiety map, 3 regulation strategies, 4S Resilience Plan, gratitude*

→ [Download full lesson](#)

#### ■ KS4

Years 10–11 | Ages 14–16

##### **Thriving Under Pressure: Stress, Strengths and Hope**

*Stress mindset science, cognitive reframing, Strengths and Hope Plan, gratitude*

→ [Download full lesson](#)

### A Note for Teachers

Each lesson includes a **disclosure guidance section**. If a child does share something concerning during an activity, the lesson tells you exactly what to say and do. You do not need to handle it alone — your role is simply to listen, avoid investigation, and refer to your Designated Safeguarding Lead. These lessons are designed so that even if a child does disclose, you have everything you need to respond safely and calmly.