

# When we meet again in the school

**The document for kindergartens, elementary schools and secondary schools regarding return of children to schools after the lockdown due to Covid-19 disease pandemics was elaborated in cooperation of kindergarten and nursery Bambíno and elementary school Square, with support of Vigvam advisory centre.**

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## Foreword

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When we were watching teachers around, working at full throttle, mastering new skills, and managing the big challenge of online teaching with the energy of their own, or still dutifully taking care of children in kindergartens also in face masks and with many safety measures, we decided that we would like to help them. The number of issues to be solved in daily work is so huge from our point of view that it is not in human possibilities to look further than few days into the future. Therefore we have prepared this document for teachers to have a complex manual to follow.

Our intention was to create a document that would serve as a support for teachers when reacting to possible frames of mind of children and pupils at their return. We consider important for teachers to know when they can expect slumps in their and their pupils' behaviour and experience during the next year to be able to react adequately, and even prevent them to some extent. Based on experience from crisis work, we attach a time sequence describing usual incidence of changes in experience and behaviour. If we consider these variables in advance and have a clear plan prepared what to do and what not to do in these periods of time, it may contribute to increase of feeling of safety and better adaptation to the situation. The document includes important time periods with description of their specifics, highlighting what to focus on with the class and including proposals of possible activities for these time periods. At the same time, specifics of the school year and passing of time regarding holidays are considered. Furthermore, the document includes proposals for activities divided by individual age groups. It is important to state that each age group considered in this document has own specific topic that is more important in relation with school closure for them than for other age groups. For kindergarten children we cannot expect they would be in virtual contact among themselves or with adults; this can result in a completely new adaptation after their return. For elementary and secondary school pupils, we may anticipate that their mutual contact in the virtual world could have provided them with even closer and narrower form of socialising than the standard stay in school. Moreover, topics related to school results, school leaving, entrance exams etc. occur significantly in these groups.

The document includes both theoretical and practical information. It has been created to be print-friendly, enabling adding notes and for practical use. Our aim was not to create only academical study document. Therefore, we refrained from usual quoting standards and the references we used and offer for further inspiration are listed together at the end of the document.

At the time of finalising of the document, it is still not clear how the return of pupils to schools will look like. There are still many options open. To be able to release the document sufficiently in advance, we have decided to create it so that it described measurable time sections that could be applied as of a specific date when the pupils' return to school is clearer. We were not able to incorporate further variables, so we would like to ask you for your flexibility in adaptation of the work. At the time of finishing of the document, it is very probable that the return of pupils to schools will not be done en mass – thus, the whole team will not meet at once. This would be ideal for the work we are describing. However, also in the moment when only part of the class team meets, it is possible to work as described in the document, considering that some activities will have to be repeated. Most of interventions or experiences described in the document are focused on individuals and their existence in the group. Metaphorically, we are focusing on individual world of individuals and on the fact that these worlds are now actually meeting in one space.

Naturally, various school restarts may influence experiences of children and the consequence might be that one day, some children will be well adapted (those who have returned to school earlier) and some of them will be just passing the adaptation. Here we recommend being governed by the “slowest” group members and to increase the load to be bearable just for these pupils who are in the team for the shortest time – not to be governed by the average. The real and full adaptation to the school return to the full extent will start only in the moment when all pupils are back in the school; however, some of them may be better prepared.

Whatever variant of school restart will be applied, we recommend organising a common event for children in the last year before leaving the institution – it means for preschoolers, pupils of 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades and last grades of secondary schools. This may be a ritual, a time spent together when you may talk about what the kindergarten or the school has given to the children and what you as the main teacher are handing them over, what you want to thank them for, what they have taught you, and what is your message for them for their future life. It is ideal to do this in direct contact, even better somewhere out of school. Nevertheless, also online variants are possible if there is no other option. They are definitely better than nothing. It will be a memory that will help children and pupils to go from one life stage to another, they will realize the turning point and possibly it will help them to adapt to the new stage. Last but not least, it will confirm for them that in the world that might have been very variable and unclear recently for them, there are still things that are understandable.

We wish you the best possible work with the document, it will be hopefully practical, useable, understandable, and mainly helpful for you in your demanding profession. We also wish that the same care and kindness you are devoting to your pupils and classes, you devote also to yourselves and you can relax, support each other and appreciate for everything you have managed in this demanding period of time.

Tereza&Sylvie  
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## Backgrounds we are based on

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### 1. The current situation is of a crisis nature

The pandemic situation has a global extent and it is good to be prepared for the moment when the acute measures are eased off; we will look back to what has happened and we will have to react to the return of children to schools. Like teachers, also children have been thrown to a new situation not known to them that surely has had many positive impacts but also many disturbing and threatening experiences.

This is a crisis caused by external stressors that cannot be influenced by the people and this has a deep impact and breaches usual rules and safety. We may talk about a crisis resulting from a sudden traumatizing stressor like public danger, mass disasters and the current pandemic situation. All people have been affected in this case – some directly, some indirectly and some have become more vulnerable as a consequence of the current situation.

There are two possible views of the crisis. The first crisis was the school closure. After possible first elation, disillusion from understanding of all changes has come (when children had to learn at home, could see and hear their friends only by phone or online; trips and events that children missed because they had to be cancelled). The other crisis is the school return. Children will return to the environment that is known to them, but they do not know at all what will happen. What will be same and what will be different? What to expect? Have friendships persisted and will everybody return? How relations with adults have changed and will everybody be same? How big stress will it be to catch up learning? In this document, we are focusing mainly on this second crisis of the school return; however, in annual activities and rituals, we refer also to the school closure.

### 2. Emotional experience cannot be postponed

Even though we as human beings are on the top level of evolution, our brain integrates ancient structures with those newer. When children return to schools, there will be topics to be managed, topics to be repeated, and in general, we can anticipate that there will be a big task for them in the educational part. However, our brain cannot work analytically, rationally in all circumstances, i.e. to receive information, consider it critically, learn new things and integrate them with already possessed knowledge, store them in the memory etc. If we want our brain to work effectively like this, we need to create preconditions, and the most important one is the feeling of safety. Because if our brain feels that it is endangered, evolutionary older brain structures (limbic system and brain stem) are activated to protect the body, primarily by fight or flight. You probably know these reactions from children also from the common times – they “start” against their surroundings or distract attention and speech elsewhere sometimes in a tense moment (naturally, those are reactions also of adults – our brain doesn’t care about the age). In general, we can say that the children’s stress reaction is expressed by behaviour that is usually described as disturbing, inappropriate – simply as misbehaviour. The prevailing reaction of adults is an effort to control the child’s behaviour (either positive or negative motivation), however, it is effective to pay attention to control the driver of this stress. Thus, work with surroundings and safety.

Each of us has specific preconditions to what creates a feeling of danger and when our limbic system takes over the control (somebody is scared of spiders, other one of heights, another one is calm all the time). However, in general, it is applicable for all of us that some sources of danger are common for all of us and the crisis situation has this potential on a very high level. So, if we started work with children after their return as if nothing happened, not paying attention to their experiences, it would be highly expectable that the pupils will learn only a fraction of what we intend. And at the same time, this would be the least risk we would face. Actually, our relationship with children, our trustworthiness and authenticity would be at stake. At the same time, our approach will be a role model to teach our pupils how to deal with difficult situations – whether to pay attention to them and process them adequately, or to push them away and aside. Do not worry you would “soften” or spoil the children with this approach. On contrary, we will support them in understanding of their experiences and equip them with a crucial skill for their lives.

Not to waste energy at work with children and not to go against their natural physiological functioning (that cannot be controlled by their will), we have to be one step ahead and know what to do so that the brain may feel safety and allow the action of the grey matter in interaction with other parts of the brain. Therefore, all themes for work with children that are described in this document are always based on the most important principle – building the feeling of safety. This can be induced especially by interest in children’s experiences and by active care of high-quality relations and environment in the classroom. In practice, implementation of social and emotional learning will be helpful.

## How to start? Care of yourself.

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The situation of school return after such a long break, while considering all the circumstances, may include elements of the crisis as described above. Crises are typical by being emotionally charged and demanding, therefore we ask you to think of yourselves first and take care of your peace of mind. Remember that in crisis situations in an aircraft, adults are the first who should put on the mask. So, do something pleasant, kind for yourself, support yourself. Do not forget to rest and enjoy it as part of your preparation for work. You may have a tiny reminder of something pleasant for you, what supports your feeling of safety and stability, also in the classroom – a picture, image, statue, tiny gift etc. You may enjoy opening windows and feeling fresh air, wearing something that gives you a good feeling, or to prepare for work with the classroom with your peer teacher, or even ask him or her to stay there with you for a while. Find your way of self-support and accept it as part of your work. Your comfort and own safety is something what can be sensed by your pupils, and it is a very powerful tool for work with safety in the team. As teachers, you are the main actors in the class and your psychical and emotional condition directly affects psychosocial climate as well as ability of pupils to learn the topic being taught. The strongest form of learning is learning by imitating. Children can learn most implicitly based on a contact with another person. The teachers who work well and are satisfied in their job, pass their attitude to the children.

- For your attitude anchoring, you may imagine it is September and children are returning after summer holiday – this could be a useful metaphor (which will very possibly correlate with reality). They will come after a period of time when they have not been in school long enough so the situation without school may have become new standard (as we know, a change adaptation period usually lasts 6-8 weeks) and they have probably passed a period of intense experiences – but there is a crucial difference: children are not so relaxed like after a summer holiday and it is expectable that their experiences will have different emotional tone – they have experienced isolation from grandparents, higher level of self-isolation, demands for self-studying etc.
- Non-standard situations like this one bring opportunities to look for creative solution together and also to arrange the scale of values – we can actually experience that health is a really important value and it is not only a cliché like wishing “lot of good luck, health and love”. This can be a great launching pad for personality development of pupils.
- No reaction of children or adults is wrong at this moment. From our point of view, they may be more or less standard, however, for our attitude anchoring, we invite you to perceive them as “natural reactions to unnatural situation”. This may help us to refrain from quick judgments, labels and diagnoses, which usually prevent us in creating a sincere human contact.

## Day of return to school and first days after

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### What to expect

Emotional mood of pupils may be in a wide scale. The below listed emotions are focused on individual world of children.

- Joy being again with classmates.
- Aversion to the need to return back to regular regime.
- Anxiety whether tests will be written, how to manage the curriculum, entrance exams, school leaving exams, etc.
- Anxiety they will not be able to correct their marks until the end of the school year.
- Relief that some of their misconducts may be forgotten.
- Uncertainty what will be with the school – especially the school leaving grades or more anxious children who like to have things under control.
- Tiredness from long-lasting closeness within the family.
- Stress from leaving home where they felt good and safe.
- Reproaches and anxiety they are going to do something what is not allowed to others – gathering, being in a larger group of people, meeting with teachers, i.e. older people.
- Concerns about how their engagement in the learning process during the lockdown will be perceived in the school.
- Shock from what they have experienced – some of their relatives got ill/died, anxiety of death, illness.
- Pupils with special educational needs may have a higher level of anxiety how to catch up the curriculum, how to get involved in the educational process, and how their classmates will accept them again.
- If there is an integrated pupil with a very specific diagnose in the classroom (e.g. with an autistic spectrum disorder etc.), it may happen that the classmates have forgotten how to communicate with them safely; it is important to support restoration of mutual relations. Moreover, these pupils are usually more sensitive to a whole range of impulses.

After a long time, children will come among peers to such a big group and it might be emotionally demanding for many of them. Their experiences are actually based on relationship frameworks that may be combined with the above mentioned individual aspects. Children in a group may want to share, welcome each other, may be afraid of losing their position in the class, whether their friendships still work. The quarantine time has created a space where the children communicated especially virtually in smaller groups and may have concerns what was happening when they were absent, what was said about them etc. Some socially handicapped children had no access to the online communication and online learning at all, so they were isolated from the class much more. There is also an equally relevant variant that some children



are easy and the whole situation has not affected them significantly, they do not take it too seriously, and thus they might be confused with the experience of the others. Here we can use the perspective of natural reactions to unnatural situations.

### **What to do before children come to school**

- Try to arrange that the school and the classroom look as similar as possible like before children have left the school – maintaining working things from the past is an important element that helps adapting to the change.
- Agree with your colleagues how to proceed regarding marking and approach to the curriculum. We recommend devoting at least one week to the adaptation period without marking and then about three weeks offering opportunity to correct (standard school processes should run approximately in week 5/6 – see below for details) and using options of non-evaluating feedback in between.
- Think about how much own energy, time and will you have to offer individual assistance to children – they will probably need it. Cast the net and check if you have a colleague / friend / organisations and agencies who can help you in this matter.
- Be prepared that experiences of the children may be in a wide spectrum.
- A short message sent to parents and children may be a kind, helpful and reassuring gesture. A message for parents with information what the parents and children may expect and what are the plans for the next days. Another motivation message to the children in the sense of “Everything will be good and we can manage it together”. You may write you are looking forward to them and you will meet again as the whole class and you will have chance to spend time together, and you want to reassure them there will be enough time for “start-up”. Attaching a picture of the prepared classroom, a class pet, a notice board with pictures etc. may be a detail that may have a big impact on the initial setting the children will come to school with. In case that the whole class will not meet physically due to the development of the situation, you can alternatively schedule a common online connection of pupils who stayed at home with the pupils in the classroom. This may be supported by a team approach, e.g. everybody should take the same colour T-shirt, craziest socks, funny costume for the first day in school.
- Prepare a short summary of current news for the pupils: It might be difficult for some pupils to familiarize with the situation. Not all parents talk with their children sensitively about the current situation and not all children get in contact with information from serious media. Try to inform the pupils briefly in a form of a written text or a discussion about news from media. Depending on the age of your pupils, you may work further with the topic on the next days.

### **What to do on the first day**

- Do not aspire to teach. It is clear that it is necessary to catch up many things but if you do not invest a few days to the psychic preparedness of the children then they will not get much of the school anyway. Our brain needs to feel safe to be able to activate cortex thanks to which we think, analyse and learn.
- Prepare a classroom meeting in the form that the pupils are most used to – a community circle, pillow seating etc., as possible and based on the previous habits. If you used to talk sitting at desks before, you may stay

so for the beginning and propose children whether they would like to sit in a circle – that is ideal for such situations. However, optimally children should get familiar with it in a moment when everything is normal and safe. Therefore, if they do not know it, stay sitting at desks and the circle should be proposed later. In case of a smaller number of children, make a U shape from the desks. The circle/oval/U supports the feeling of togetherness and mutual attention.

- Let the children vent their emotions as they need – you may select one of the techniques or use a free discussion.
- Inform the children about the plan for the following period – week, two weeks. It should include how to manage the topics that was learnt at home, how to evaluate it (whether the marks will be considered or the evaluation will be pro forma), when will be big tests. Within the plan, you may say you do not know something yet and something will be tuned up later – it is good to say it aloud and specifically (e.g. “Big tests will be agreed about at the end of the month, but we will specify it later; you will know about them two weeks in advance.”).
- If you do not have yet, establish a safe relax place in your classroom where children may go to rest.
- Tell the children whom to contact if they need assistance or even if they just want to talk about their feelings/ thoughts – mention the school methodologists for prevention, school psychologist, yourself as a class teacher, opportunities for catch-up classes and individual assistance. If such contacts and information are not visibly accessible in the school or directly in the classroom, this is the best moment to do so.

### **What to do in the first week**

- Start returning to the school rhythm – repeat, encourage pupils to be active, appreciate if they have learned at home what they were supposed to – point out their skills they used to manage it.
- Support the group cohesion – appreciate that the pupils help each other, point out healthy behaviour patterns. The group has experienced isolation/pause, they also need to restart their functioning.
- Let the pupils use the established relax place.
- Prospectively, you may agree on a small test/repetition; tell the pupils in advance that they will check it themselves or mutually – just to try it. The gradual adaptation will show you if the pupils are in complete peace and you can go one step forward; or if they are stressed also by this, then it is good to remain in the adaptation stage for another while.
- Schedule a class meeting at the end of the week to discuss how the pupils felt during the week – what were their expectations from the first week and how they feel it now. Reassure them that you will manage it together.
- You also may read motivation stories with heroes overcoming similar situations. Discuss their reactions, how would they advise the heroes?
- Contact pupils' parents and tell them how the week was and what is the plan for the next period.

## First six weeks after return to school

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The period of 6-8 weeks is crucial because it is the usual change adaptation period. The situation becomes standard and if everything goes well, it is possible to return to the standard functioning after the adaptation period. The adaptation is a “closed season” and time to get used to it. During the adaptation, it is important to watch how pupils react to increasing demands and decide accordingly whether to move forward or stop and focus on work towards safety. In case of crises that impact certainties and stability, it is important “not to rest on our laurels” during these 6 weeks because slumps still may come, especially in children that may be more sensitive. If you can see that some children have problems with getting used to the school system even after a longer time, it is better to provide them with individual support and to deal with them.

The adaptation time shortens proportionally to how well adapted were the children before the change. It means that the longest adaptation time is expectable with younger children or in newly established teams (1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, combined classes etc.).

When describing adaptation, we use an assumption that the school enrolment will be done at a time when it is still possible to implement the 6-8 weeks long adaptation. This is a duration that is known to teachers and children also from the adaptation in kindergartens or in the first class. However, if children return to school as late as for example beginning of June, then it is necessary to consider that the adaptation process will not run to the full extent. Thus, our expectations should be accommodated. The work procedure will be same as having full 6-8 weeks available, but we will not reach the same result. However, this definitely does not mean that we should not implement the adaptation. On the contrary, what you manage to reach within the adaptation now, that can speed up the process in September. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the adaptation after children have returned to the school, then to think about it again in September, while considering that the after-effects of the lockdown may be still intense. Thus, the full time scale of 6-8 weeks should be considered for the adaptation in September, while it is expectable that it will be quicker depending on what the children have managed before the end of the school year.

### What to expect

- People’s needs may vary – we will find contradictory opinions of individuals and little groups both in the class and in the teachers’ crew. Some of them are trying to forget, but the event impacts are still present.
- Dilemmas will occur – should we return to it, talk about it, share it or not? People will be looking for strict criteria to follow whether to go further or to stay in the adaptation mode.
- Value conflicts will occur – the real experience will become everyday reality and outcomes will start appearing how children understand it and what lessons they have learned from the experience. Everybody may have different approach and outcome, different understanding what the school closure and the pandemic situation meant. Everybody may assign another value and importance. Various families perceive various value of safety measures. We may expect a wide range from exaggeration to their devaluation.

- We cannot please everybody –please consider that it is not possible to please everybody in such a wide scale of diverse needs and it is necessary to proceed so that the priority is given to the care for safety. It might be lengthy and useless for somebody and this brings a risk that they may be bored and fed up in class meetings or short breaks. It is important to promote respect that everybody feels it in a different way. At the same time, this risk is marginal in comparison with the risk that there is not enough time given for the adaptation.

## What to do

- Set priorities – what do you want your pupils to take from this experience? Define the message you want to pass on them, e.g. that to experience something so far from the daily reality is not common and everybody deserves sufficient time for return, that the school works somehow different than it used to; or something else you identify with.
- Always include elements of social and emotional learning to the curriculum, care of relations and safe and positive environment in the class. Be interested in experiences of the children, their peace of mind, and react to warning signals from them.
- Continue discussing with your colleagues how to proceed in the adaptation to the original way of work – have regular meetings.
- Have contacts to crisis hotlines, support organisations in your locality, school psychologists available – for the case that the adaptation will not run smoothly and it will be necessary to refer individual children or to do a specific work with the class team.
- Respect it is still applicable that various ways of adaptation to the abnormal situation are normal.
- Standard school curriculum principles should be applied – learning, evaluation, written works.
- A slump may be expected during the sixth week. When approaching the full adaptation, some children may get scared. Thus, you should work preventively and open the topic, e.g. devote one day to compare feelings/ perception of the overall situation just after the return and now – how was it then and how is it now (draw, write, talk, use emotion cards...).
- Contact parents regarding changes you implement, inform them how children are doing in the school.

## Periods to pay increased attention to

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As standard, it is recommended to focus on a period of six weeks, three months, six months and a year after crisis situations. Nevertheless, the school situation is specific and the time passing is strongly influenced by holidays, therefore we refrain from using this standardised division in the school context and we bring other important time periods when the probability of reoccurrence of the crisis is more probable.

- New school year – start of the school is an emotionally similar experience to restart after lockdown for children. It is expectable that children will remember the situation and will return to it. Simultaneously, it also correlates with half year since the school closure.
- One and a half months after the start of the year – same time period like when schools were closed in the last half-year, children were torn from their teams and the chaos has started.
- Autumn with beginning of cold, when there may be a connection of the experience with the fear of illness.
- One year from the beginning of the pandemic and the school closure.

### What to do in these periods

- The first three periods are not showed explicitly and may enter the lives of children and teachers subliminally. In practice, we may see it as strange feelings of fear, memories, anxiety, inattention that start occurring without any apparent cause. In these periods you should bear in mind that they may cause load and you should be vigilant. Preventively, you should plan more activities to support the team and individuals aiming to – what is good for us, how can I support myself in stressful situations, where are we strong as a class. Thanks to these activities, internal resources of each individual may be reminded and children may be supported both at the level of individual and the team. Also thanks to these activities, a space for sharing of current feelings of the children is open. Let's be prepared for after-effects of the situation.
- In the case that the topic of fear of illness comes out more significantly and it is named, we recommend focusing on it in these periods – we should work with the children's fear. At the same time, it is suitable to describe how the current period is related to the entire event (like there are many illnesses now and they may remind us of the situation) so that the pupil can understand why their thoughts are returning to the event just in this period of time. Other tips for work with emotions are below in the methodology.
- First anniversary of school closure – it is suitable to prepare a memory ritual with children proactively by the school in this time; this will conclude the year when everybody experienced something special. The period

following the first anniversary of the school closure will be different than last year both for children and teachers – it will be in another environment, done in another way. It will be more necessary to remember “this time last year...”, give space to it. Prepare another ritual as of the anniversary of the school return to close the event symbolically. Tips for rituals are below in the methodology.

- From the day of the anniversary of the school return, overall return to the way of work like before the event is expectable. It is good always to remember that it may be closed long time ago for some children, however for many of them it may still have intense emotional underline – especially if it happened in a specifically important time of their school attendance (preparation for entrance exams, after change to another class etc.) or the situation has impacted their life significantly (their parents have lost their jobs, there were many arguments at home and parents have divorced afterwards / it has led to discomfort, some close person has died...). It is possible that some children who were very impacted by the situation, will “appear” (come out with their experience) only now. You should have references for individual support ready for such children.

## Additional information

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### What will children need to process the situation in general?

- Enough space and time to get acclimatized in the school again – realize what has changed and what has remained same. Interconnect the old and the new worlds, adapt to the changes that have happened. It is possible that the pupils may discuss more with you about what was different before. Give it space and time, they need to settle, understand, get through in their own pace.
- Clear boundaries and plans what they can expect – thanks to them, children have an overview and control that is significantly important for them, especially after they have experienced the situation that was not under their control. When they get this control into their hands, we can significantly prevent them from taking it in other ways that could be risky for them or for the class team/school community.
- Kindness and flexibility, it means a draft adaptation period – it is expectable that the children will test our limits and will try what is possible and what is not. This is their way of looking for rules, order and understanding. It is alright that the children are testing the limits, however, it is important the kindness and flexibility is limited – thus, the rules must be always applied, while communicated patiently.
- Opportunity to talk about their feelings and ideas – enough space for ventilation of their feelings and thoughts may work as something what the children need most. It is not always necessary to use a technique for work with emotions, “mere” message and sharing without assessing is sometimes the biggest help. At the same time, children give us a great message where are they now in their internal experience.

### Non-standard manifestations of children to which higher attention should be paid

The below described manifestations are reactions that people may express if they experience something too strong to be able to integrate and “digest” it. If these manifestations occur in the first days after the return or in extraordinary situations, it is useful to watch the individual more closely and consult the situation with the school psychologist / school prevention methodologist / another school advisory worker. There is a significant risk in the case when this behaviour gets stabilised and becomes a new standard for the individual (which was not so before). Then it is pertinent to consult it with an expert and maybe an individual therapy for the child will be needed.

It is always necessary to watch if it is a one-off expression of emotional overpressure or there can be a regularity observed in use of these strategies by the child.

- Increased aggression, attack reactions – to some extent, it may be normal that the child expresses the cumulated energy, anxiety, fear, anger, and release them in the form of rage and “misbehaviour”. However, if such reactions can be observed markedly more often with child than before, or if the intensity objectively does not match the intensity of the stimulus, then we should get more vigilant. The child may attack the others verbally or physically, or he/she may destroy things around. He/she may be explosive, weepy, martyred, may talk about unfairness of the world. These manifestations of children are often very energetic and intense. They usually cannot be overlooked.
- Increased anxiety, hiding, flight reaction – when children do not want to participate in common activities, they are hiding, don't want to talk in front of the others, usually sit alone and don't want to get in contact with you or classmates, it is possible that their internal experience is beyond their limits and they need to avoid the world around them. This may be manifested also by intense daydreaming, digressing from the current topic, fulfilling completely different task than assigned. These manifestations of children are not easy to be seen because they do not attract our attention primarily; moreover, some children are champions in being invisible. It is the best visible when using discussion techniques where everybody is involved, e.g. in a community circle.
- Retreating into own shell, apathy, freezing reactions – some children may retreat into their shell and be like “switched off”. In contact with them, we may feel apathy, lack of interest, resignation. Their faces are usually without any expression, sparkle, and “I don't know” is their common answer. We may feel like talking to a child who is like sleeping, absent-minded. These manifestations of children may invoke a wide scale of our reactions, from the need to help them, save them, to anger and will to shake the child to wake him/her up. However, it is not desirable to pull the children from their shell – they have a very good reason to stay hidden and turned down, although they cannot name it. Let the children have the feeling of acceptance and safety, that you like them as they are, and arrange a professional help for them.

When perceiving the above defence reactions, you may imagine them as a traffic light. Green colour signals that the child is authentic, in good contact with his/her experience and manages it (this does not necessarily mean that the experience of the child is positive – this means it is not beyond limit. The child expresses his/her emotions like usually, he/she is in contact with them.). Orange colour may mark situations when the child is out of comfort and resorts to fight or flight strategies – those are strategies when the child automatically mobilises or internalises the energy in both psychic and physiological levels and tries to manage the circumstances. Red colour may mean the freezing reaction that is completely out of human will and appears when the child is overloaded with the situation and can only retract to the safe shelf – to freeze. All these reactions have manifestations in both psychic and physical levels.

It is important to remember two things. First – if the child is in the “red zone” and starts to feel better, safer and you manage to “unfreeze” the child (usually with a patient and professional individual work), he/she gets to the orange zone – thus, his/her energy increases. In layman's terms – a numb child may become a naughty child or a daydreamer. Remember that this a healing process and we can get to the green zone only through the energized orange zone. Second – when talking about connection of our body and our psyche, as teachers when working with the whole class, we are not so defenceless as it could seem with all the recommendations for individual care for children. We may work with the whole class so they get better from the physical, and so psychical aspect. Our internal organs in our body and the brain are connected with the so-called wandering nerve that quickly transmits excitations, therefore when we are threatened, our breathing becomes faster, our heart beats quicker etc. This principle works also vice versa, when our heart beats more slowly, our brain receives a message that we are safe. The heartbeat cannot be controlled wilfully, but we can control our breathing. When we calm down our breathing, the wandering nerve transmits a signal to the brain that the world around us is alright and safe. Very easy breathing exercises that can be done with children may have a big potential in work towards safety and calming down. A deep breathing in and long breathing out were suggested also by our grandmas and the current neuroscience can explain what is the value of this advice. We can be inspired also by remedial teachers who use a so-called logopaedic formula 3:1:7, breathing in for 3 beats, hold the breath for 1 beat, and exhale for 7 beats. Possibly you can use any other breathing exercises that are interesting for the children.



## **Routine of remedial teachers**

It is possible that there used to be individual or group lectures with a remedial teacher or even subjects of remedial care in many schools. We recommend returning to the routine of a beginning of a school year; namely watch children from a distance and consult the condition of the children with teachers in the first week. The question whether to start working regularly later with some pupils is definitely to be considered pupil by pupil and group by group. Sometimes, exclusion of pupils with special learning needs from the class may be a barrier, uncertainty and extension of the adaptation. On the contrary, it may lead to success in other cases. Anyway, in this time, the remedial teacher is a significant support for teachers who care of pupils with special learning needs.

## **When a close person of a pupil has died**

Unfortunately, it is possible that we will have a child who has lost a close person because of the coronavirus pandemic. Optimum is to know about this situation from the family of the child to be able to prepare for the situation adequately. Another option how to learn about this fact is directly from the child out of class-wide work. The last variant is that the child informs us thereabout in front of the whole class during a class meeting. Reaction to all three options are very similar in their principle, they differ only in context.

If we have learned about the death of the close person from the child's parents, we have a chance to talk to adults about how they perceive the current condition of their child before we talk with the child proper. How it seems that he/she reacts, how he/she manages grieving. This also gives us time to get support for us and think about further steps. Here we can contact the Vigvam Advisory Centre hotline; they work with families and children who have lost a close person, and they also advise schools. An individual discussion with the child should always follow. We need to agree whether the child wants to tell the others about the death of the close person, whether the child wants to say it or whether we, adults, should, disclose it. Then, it is useful to agree with the child whether he/she wants others to ask him/her about that, or he/she wishes some space and privacy. Based on opportunities of the school, it is useful to offer individual support for the child in the school (school prevention methodologist, school psychologist), if needed, and definitely you should discuss whom can the child contact if he/she does not feel good in school or if his/her schoolmates fail to follow the agreed rules. This procedure will be identical also in the moment when the child confides it to us during a break. If the child tells this information in front of the whole class and we have had no idea about that, it is crucial to manage own shock and surprise resulting from the pupil's message. Be confident that the child has decided on his/her own to tell the fact just in this place and that he/she has good reasons for that. He/she probably trusts his/her class and feels safe in its environment. The questions to be discussed with the child in this moment will be identical again: whether he/she wants to talk more about that; whether he/she wants us to ask or he/she prefers space for being quiet and be respected that he/she does not feel good now; whether he/she has or wants to have a person to contact in a critical moment (it may be also a friend). It is also useful to propose that you would like to see him/her individually after the end of the lesson to support and appreciate him/her for the courage to talk openly in front of the others. It is also possible that the child tells you more about his/her needs during the individual contact than in front of the team. Simultaneously, it is useful to remind him/her about possibilities of support available to all pupils (a helpbox, school prevention methodologist, school psychologist, etc.) because it is possible that such a close encounter with death may be a too strong experience for some pupils.

In any case, it is appropriate to inform your colleagues who teach the pupil and to give them only the substantial information – no details are needed. We want to be ethical. The information is given to the colleagues to be able to consider how to involve the child into the adaptation considering the pupil's experience of the situation – to extend the time before individual testing, evaluation etc. It is optimal to agree on this with the pupil.

# Methodical tips and inspirations

To facilitate the work, here are some tips how to work with the class. The tips are divided according to the age level of children and they always describe the same type of situation. Descriptions of possible content of lessons do not aspire to be a methodology, they are rather inspiration, open to modifications by teachers. They contain the intention, description and possible risks to be considered. In a younger school age, there are mainly painting activities that are amended with a more “talkative” variant that often includes some creative elements. For the older school age, the creative activities are amended with a higher portion of the “talkative” variant considering higher diversity of development needs and preferences of upper primary school and secondary schools.

**Methodical tips  
and inspirations**

**Kindergartens**



## First meeting with children / first class meeting

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The general intention of the first meeting with children is to give them space to talk about their experiences, how it was for them, and what helped them to manage the situation. At the same time, there should be a space for their questions. We do not anticipate that one lesson would be sufficient for this, we suggest devoting sufficient time to this start, to connect it with information about what is going to happen etc. So, it may happen that you will have a morning-long class meeting.

It is good to support meetings and rituals that children and pupils are used to – morning circles, morning activities. And remember that children may be less concentrated and inattentive, and they might need more space and time. With younger children, this may mean a higher need for changing activities; on the contrary, the older children will need more time to get in the topic and settle in it.

In general, kindergarten children have a shorter time of attention, and in the situation when they return to the kindergarten, not only a “re-adaptation” may occur in many of them, but also a bigger need for movement activities and contact with others (sometimes more careful, sometime very intense; the distance keeping rules will be very demanding for them).

### Morning rituals

- Most kindergartens have their rituals, sometimes talking circles, sometimes movement activities, and it is useful to alternate these two options.
- During the morning talk with the children, you should be prepared for the fact that in case of a common question – what did you do when you stayed at home – the time was so long and probably diverse that some children will not be able to say anything specific, others will repeat what was said by their pre-speakers, some will talk a lot and it will be very demanding to listen for all of them. Thus, you may consider specifying the question with an exact formulation, for example: What did you like most when you stayed at home and did not go to the kindergarten? Is there anything you did for the first time in your life? What were you looking forward most to doing in the kindergarten?
- If you want to keep attention of the children during the morning talk, we recommend to propose a mini-activity after each answer (maybe after five answers for older children) – a jump and a squat, stretch and yawn like a lion (relax of mimic muscles), or to say a short poem with a word that was just said etc.

### Activity focused on the situation induced by the coronavirus

- Time for the coronavirus topic should be dedicated also beyond the children’s experience, since their awareness of the situation may be very diverse. Some families have not talked facts about the situation with

their children at all, other families have discussed it in detail. Thus, devoting the morning talk to this topic will be necessary in the first days. You may find out what the children know about the coronavirus and unify the information. Moreover, it will be necessary to explain the necessity of wearing face masks (in the public, in the kindergarten, at home), principles of personal hygiene – especially correct hand washing, and last but not least, to discuss about the fear induced by the virus. To make hygiene routine, it is possible to consider it a game, for example a dance and song of the integrated rescue system that was spread in social networks.

- It is possible to use the fairy tale of the Corona Dragon, please find link at the end of the text.
- It is appropriate to divide this talk from the morning talk by a movement activity.

### **Creative variant**

- Simply, we can propose to children to draw what they were doing during the quarantine. Then, we can talk about the pictures in a group as well as individually.
- Should the child adapt, he/she must accept the place. In case of the pass situation when the children were banned to come to kindergarten from one day to another, they did not see their friends, teachers, kindergarten or toys, it is very important to consider the kindergarten space a safe place where parents bring their children, everything is good there, and then the parents pick up their child again. This basic trust must be recovered in some children. From the theoretical concept, the situation can be seen according to the Erik Erikson's theory of Nine Stages of a Man, where the first stage necessary for further development is to achieve the basic trust, first to close persons and places, then to other people and places (e.g. kindergarten). Some children may go through a regress, i.e. return to the previous development stage; this activity helps to reach the necessary trust. We may propose the following "anchoring" picture, a building set construction etc. to the children. Ask the children to draw / create a space / build a construction that is safe, where are all people, animals and things needed for their safety; then we will talk about the creations. Questions like: What is great there? Who should be there? What do the children wish to do there and how to play there?
- Better to understand the children's feelings, we may propose them to draw how they imagine the coronavirus. Of course, some have definitely seen a picture of the virus, but for the others, this may be a very abstract idea – maybe scary, maybe funny. It is important to propose large number of tools and colours (including black) to the children and let them a large extent of freedom and possibility to change and recreate their creations several times. For the beginning, it is useful to mention that this is their imagine of the coronavirus, what they think it looks like.
- When we perceive that some children are threatened by the coronavirus, or are angry with it, we may ask them what they would do to the picture. All solutions are allowed – scrawl through, cut by scissors, tear, trample. Anything that allows the children to direct and express their possible anxiety and anger. If the children do not know how to draw the coronavirus and still need to express their anger, this is the moment when you can print a specific picture of the virus, talk about it and "teach it a lesson".
- Alternatively, if we have chance to paint outdoors in a garden, you may use a large paper fixed horizontally on a stand or a fence where the children may vent their emotions by paints and paintbrushes. Big fun is to play a music while the children are painting. You may start with a quick striking music – rock, quick pop, Beethoven's

symphonies, Tchaikovsky's B moll concert; another work may be painted while happy tones play – children songs, country, dance pop and Latin-American compositions, Rossini – overture to the opera William Tell, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov – Flight of the Bumblebee; and finish with the third work at slow, calm sounds – lullabies, love songs, Bedřich Smetana – My Homeland – Vltava. You will be surprised how different works will be created and how the children will like it.

### **Movement variant**

- You definitely have own inventory of ideas for physical activities. This is the moment to use them frequently, repeatedly and in all forms. Many children have been closed at home during the quarantine; they do not only have a working nuclear reactor hidden in them that can explode in any moment, but also their muscles have started to weaken and the children do not have the physical endurance and flexibility they were used to. So, it is definitely necessary to include energy discharging into daily agenda, using games full of chasing, ball activities, climbing, jumping, rolling down the hill and other. However, do not forget right muscle stretching and workouts.
- Physical activities help us to discharge cumulated emotions in an acceptable way. The joy from the return may be expressed by dancing to crazy melodies. The anger by throwing balls to a target – picture of something that has made the children angry (coronavirus, face masks...), the anxiety by pressing a pillow or a ball. While throwing ball to the target, it will be crucial to instruct the children to throw by full force, and you also should have your background ready for it. They were warned continuously for a very long time mainly to be cautious, they did not have freedom to “let off steam”, so it is necessary to allow this now and create appropriate environment for that. At the same time, games when they catch smaller balls and quickly throw them to a certain direction can bring them the so much needed relief. And of course, we can use also other tools in addition to the balls – balloons, rings, pillows etc.
- This is an ideal moment to include relaxation into the physical activities. The physical activity – free, targeted or just a game – should be always finished with a calming activity (for example games where two children are running and the others are waiting like Duck, Duck, Goose), by a breathing exercise or relaxation on the floor and realization of own body and feelings. We always need to be aware of the fact that the children need to discharge after such a long time in relative isolation, but they also need to learn how to finish the discharging.

## **Work with emotions – when fear / anger / sadness... reappears** ———

We may take two basic directions at work with emotions (either preventively or at the moment when they appear). First, we may help the child to learn as much as possible about the emotions. If they know more about them, the situation will become more transparent for them. Another option is to work with emotion like with energy – thus using the body and movement. Some movement activities are described here, others one chapter later within outdoor activities.

Below we describe only some tips, but all of the infinite number of “mood meter” techniques belong here.

## Learning about emotions

- Use the movie Inside Out, either the available trailer or select a part of the movie. At the beginning, when the main character was a young pre-schooler, her emotions were only developing – this could be familiar to kindergarten children. Then you should have cards with individual emotions as well with an imaginary friend ready to talk with the children about when they perceive what emotion in themselves. Let them talk specific stories. Then let the children and the teachers take a toy they have in the kindergarten – this toy should have a specific emotion. The children should try how the emotion is expressed by the toy and what it then needs (e.g. if it is angry, the teacher may show stamping and shouting – and what the toy needs: for example to hold its hand, to stroke it, to admit that it may be angry now and give a paper ball to its hand to throw it away...).
- For older children (who already can name the emotions), you may draw a thermometer on a large paper for each emotion, the children may draw in their colours what is their level of each emotion. Then you may talk in what situations the given emotion appears.
- You may also use cards for talking: Emotion Cards by Be Creative. You may work similarly like with the lower primary school pupils but considering the age, only one open question should be used (What card is the most similar to how the children were feeling at home?), another one next day or after a pause (How they are feeling now? How would they like to feel?) You may also use stories of Freddie the Frog and “Emušáci”.

## Body

- To stretch the body, you may use some of the movement activities described above: The joy from the return may be expressed by dancing to crazy melodies. The anger by throwing balls to a target – picture of something that has made the children angry (coronavirus, face masks...), the anxiety by pressing a pillow or a ball. While throwing ball to the target, it will be crucial to instruct the children to throw by full force, and you also should have your background ready for it.
- Then you may focus on relaxation activities described above that lead to calming down and realizing own body and the fact that the child have their body in own hands: Lie down on the floor, put hands on the belly, it's good to breathe into the belly; possibly, the body realization can be made more intense by relaxation on the floor.

## Set off outdoors

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In general, we recommend to use work outdoors, out of the classroom – pupils spent a lot of time at home, in a closed space, without clubs and opportunities to steam off, so it is very probable they will have a lot of energy they will need to release. For the first lesson it is better to stay in the school – in the environment that is known for children and that meets the need for control and overview over the situation. However, it is useful to go outdoors for the further work with the class and to devote physical activities that may help children to release their energy. Considering safety, we recommend omitting contact techniques (both from the aspect of possible further spreading of the virus and the unreleased energy that might not be under full control of the pupils).

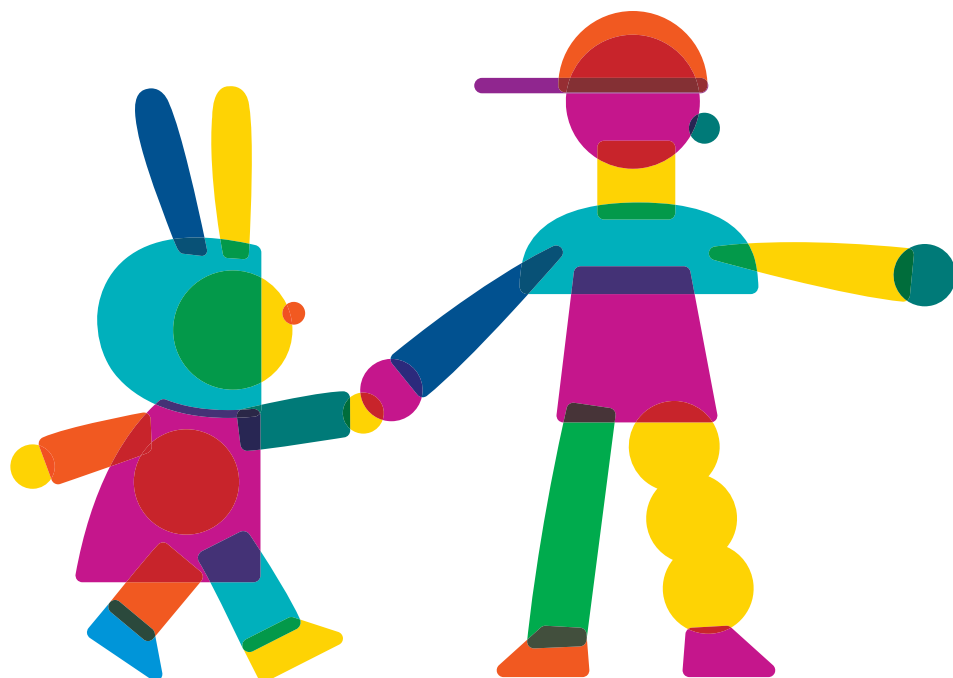
We recommend focusing on short dynamic activities like:

- Create a monkey bar: e.g. ride a push ride-on, scooter between cones, crawl under a bench, climb over a barrier, jump through a section, and finally to throw a ball to a big hat. Children will experience movement and we will make them realize that when they overcome a barrier, the second time it is somehow easier, at least they already know what is happening. This is a similarity with the situation that the children experienced – “the second adaptation” is not unknown any more.
- Animal sounds game (jungle sounds) – prepare pictures with animals. At the beginning, we will repeat together what animal makes what sound (the stronger and louder animals, the better – lion, wolf, monkey...) Then the children will draw animals and anytime the teacher says the animal, they will start making the sound. They will be shouting each other down and that is alright, the children learn that if there is overpressure and too much of something, also the noise can express the anger they have in their hands. It is appropriate to support this activity also physically – for example, children have their hands on the tummy, on the chest and realize how the sound becomes evident also in the body.



# Methodical tips and inspirations

## Lower primary school



## First meeting with children / first class meeting

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The general intention of the first meeting with children is to give them space to talk about their experiences, how it was for them, and what helped them to manage the situation. At the same time, there should be a space for their questions. We do not anticipate that one lesson would be sufficient for this, we suggest devoting sufficient time to this start, to connect it with information about what is going to happen etc. So, it may happen that you will have a morning-long class meeting.

It is good to support meetings and rituals that children and pupils are used to – morning circles, morning activities. And remember that children may be less concentrated and inattentive, and they might need more space and time. With younger children, this may mean a higher need for changing activities; on the contrary, the older children will need more time to get in the topic and settle in it.

### Creative variant

- Instruct the pupils to draw how they were in the period without school. They may draw what they liked, what they disliked, how they were feeling, what helped them to manage it, what were they looking for and what they were afraid of. Talk and share about the pictures together. You may create a pre-prepared material for the pupils where they will add how they were – please find the possible inspiration here: [www.bit.ly/3aMAzKF](http://www.bit.ly/3aMAzKF)
- For the classroom work, we recommend to consider if it is safe enough to talk about experiencing emotions on the body level and how the pupils are used to talk in front of the others; possibly to omit this and only devote to the behaviour – what were they doing, what has helped them, what they disliked...). Another variant is to draw one picture of a pleasant day (when it was fine that there was no school, and what was good in the situation) and an unpleasant day (when they did not feel good and they wished they were in school, what were they missing...). With the unpleasant picture, it is important to ask how they have managed it and what has helped them. Thus, we support own management mechanisms of each child.
- If there are a few groups occurring based on the picture type – children who were rather happy, children who were rather anxious, children with alternating emotions etc., it is good to name it. The children who feared will then see they were not alone with such a feeling, and this may be a relief for them. Simultaneously, they will realize and experience in practice that various experiences are normal.
- This type of work will bring you significant and wide mapping of how pupils experience the situation, the pupils will clarify their experiences, have opportunity to vent the emotion and experience the feeling of interest and togetherness. Devote sufficient time to the work, let the pupils say everything they need, listen to them.
- Another possible activity is a Tree of fears and joys. The teacher should prepare a pre-drawn tree trunk and each child should copy right and left hands on two pieces of paper. The child should write his/her visions of

the future – the left hand for what is he/she afraid of and the right hand for what is he/she looking forward to. The ideas and visions may be then shared by the pupils and a discussion may originate who has anything similar with whom etc. Then, the pupils will cut out the hands and we will create a large treetop from right and left palms, thus from fears and joys (you may use also colour coding/titles for the hands etc. for better transparency). We may return to this material continuously and have it as a guideline to what should be managed with the class.

- It is possible to include a movement activity in the lesson – stretching, exercise, something you used to do before, e.g. a favourite game. You may get off the classroom, at least to the corridor so that the pupils may use movement and energy – hide some items that should be found by the pupils later; in maths, pupils will not write problems to the board but they should look for it in the classroom, corridor etc. .

### **Talking variant**

- You may read some fairy tales or poems that have appeared since the school was closed (we recommend a hilarious fairy tale O zlém draku Koroňákovi (Bad Corona Dragon) by Klára Veselská). Then the children may draw what part of the fairy tale impressed them most, then you may talk about what the pupils have experienced and if it is somehow similar to the fairy tale.

## Work with emotions – when fear / anger / sadness... reappears

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We may take two basic directions at work with emotions (either preventively or at the moment when they appear). First, we may help the child to learn as much as possible about the emotions. If they know more about them, the situation will become more transparent for them. Another option is to work with emotion like with energy – thus using the body and movement. Some movement activities are described here, others one chapter later within outdoor activities.

Below we describe only some tips, but all of the infinite number of “mood meter” techniques belong here.

### Learning about emotions

- Play the trailer of Inside Out to the pupils and use the metaphor that like the little figures control the body in the movie, we have the same in our body. The movie shows greatly that we are not the emotions, but the emotions are inside us and influence us. What little figures do they often have in their heads? What do they look like? How do they feel with them? What little figures do they encounter mostly? You may talk about them, draw them. Similar types of emotions e.g. nervousness, fear and jitters may be grouped together to represent basic emotional spectrum. Then you may play movement games with the children – they should move to individual pictures to answer questions like – What emotion do you experience most frequently? What would you like to experience most frequently? What emotion you cannot manage? Which one you do not now almost/at all? What emotion do people in your surroundings have most frequently? etc. This type of technique can be then used in your own class “mood meter” that can be a quick start of each day – How are you today?/ What little figure controls your panel now?
- Draw what your emotion looks like – imagine it is a little figure living in your body – How it is like? What does it like? What helps it? What could be its name? By personification of fear / anger / anxiety, the emotions become not abstract any more for the children, they become tangible. Then we can talk about them – how (for example anger) is like, when it appears, what works well with it. In the third stage, we can discuss with the children what they would like to do with the picture. Some of them will want to keep it to have the anger under control, some of them will want to add a drawing of a big friend / a superhero who would help them when they are threatened, some of the children will want to destroy the picture. Everything is allowed. We do not assess if it is better for the child to keep the picture to take care of it or whether to destroy it. It is the child's freedom and the moment when he/she has an absolute control over the emotion. For destruction, based on our practice, we recommend a fireplace where children love to burn their pictures, or they may possibly trample or tear the pictures or let them hanging somewhere on a tree etc.
- Cards – there are many cards intended for work with emotions – e.g. Emotion Cards by Be Creative that are great for the lower primary age group. Let the children select a card based on their feelings and as they would like to feel. Or how they were feeling a half-year ago (or in the time related to a significant situation) and how they are feeling now. When working with the cards, it is important to let the children say what they want; we need to be very careful when putting additional questions not to plant any idea in their mind! For example: “You

have selected a happy fish, haven't you?", "And do you think that the fish is really sad?", etc. Sometimes children interpret the cards significantly differently from our understanding; however, this should be respected, and we should resist the tendency to soothe them in the moment when they pick a card showing they are not fine. By soothing, we only depreciate the child and show that we do take their experience seriously "Oh, it is definitely not as bad as it looks like / as you say." We are risking that the child will not want to share anything else with us or – and that is much worse – that the child will believe us because we are an authority and the child will doubt his/her own experience. With the cards, it is really sufficient when children describe how they are / were, possibly we may put an additional question what has helped / is helping to manage it, or thanks to what they are in such a good mood – we will again assist them to realize how they can manage situations and where is their power.

## Body

- If you can see that the children are in tension, you may use various stretching, loosening activities etc. to release energy from inside the children. Maybe you can ask somebody just to stand up and go to open window (if that regards an individual) or everybody to stretch (if the emotion is connected with stiffening, like at anxiety, sadness) or to shake or jump each part of the body (at emotions with "bubbling" energy – joy, anger). Select according to the emotion and whether it is suitable to let the pupils move individually or in groups. In general, groups are possible when the emotion is weak and work rather preventively (it is not really visible, but as we know the pupils, we know it is approaching).
- For classes with easy-going relations, you may use techniques when the pupils are sitting in a circle, everybody has somebody's back in front of him or her to write or draw on it (Czech version: "Milá babičko, posílám ti křečka, tečka."). You can use your fantasy within the game – to write a letter to grandma (if the topic of grandparents is appropriate in the context of the situation) or to imagine that the classmate in front of the pupil is a puppy that has got dirty and now needs to be showered, soaped, scrubbed with a brush, dried... The technique is usually very relaxing, but you must consider that it may be used only in classes where shyness is not too strong and where the relations are good. At the same time, the technique can be used only at the moment when contact and touch activities are allowed in general.

## Set off outdoors

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In general, we recommend to use work outdoors, out of the classroom – pupils spent a lot of time at home, in a closed space, without clubs and opportunities to steam off, so it is very probable they will have a lot of energy they will need to release. For the first lesson it is better to stay in the school – in the environment that is known for children and that meets the need for control and overview over the situation. However, it is useful to go outdoors for the further work with the class and to devote physical activities that may help children to release their energy. Considering safety, we recommend omitting contact techniques (both from the aspect of possible further spreading of the virus and the unreleased energy that might not be under full control of the pupils).

We recommend focusing on short dynamic activities like:

- Pure movement activities: Run three times around a schoolmate whom you select secretly, as quickly as possible / The floor will be given first to one who makes a squat and jump / Stretching with songs, poems / Let's everybody stand up and make what is good for our bodies – we may walk in a circle and everybody should try stretching of others (one is demonstrating and the others should repeat after him) / Shout – try to speak from the quietest possible voice up to the loudest – so that they hear you also over there... you may possibly alternate it with stomping, clapping... / Monkey bar – track of skills, strength and endurance (the principle is to give opportunity for the body to steam off).
- For fast reflexes: Throwing a ball and answering questions while squatting and jumping / Who will bring an item starting with letter ... as the first / Activities to interconnect brain hemispheres (many exercises can be found that are funny and end with a lot of laughter) / Tracking – individuals may walk on signs and track the previous one, etc.
- Fantasy: Imagine you are getting ready for a jungle trip – now let's everybody put on our imaginary trousers, shoes and set off for a stroll. Do you see that beautiful flower, what will you do? ... Now a tiger is heading to you... Now you want to catch a monkey but it is fleeing and you must jump to catch it... (up to your fantasy) / Human development from a baby – let's everybody imagine that we are a baby, lying, crying, now you find out you can catch own legs, now you are trying to crawl on all four, you will stand up slowly, walk carefully...

# Methodical tips and inspirations

## Upper Primary School and Secondary School



## First meeting with children / first class meeting

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The general intention of the first meeting with children is to give them space to talk about their experiences, how it was for them, and what helped them to manage the situation. At the same time, there should be a space for their questions. We do not anticipate that one lesson would be sufficient for this, we suggest devoting sufficient time to this start, to connect it with information about what is going to happen etc. So, it may happen that you will have a morning-long class meeting.

It is good to support meetings and rituals that children and pupils are used to – morning circles, morning activities. And remember that children may be less concentrated and inattentive, and they might need more space and time. With younger children, this may mean a higher need for changing activities; on the contrary, the older children will need more time to get in the topic and settle in it.

### Creative variant

- With older pupils, you may create a mandala, a divided circle, a sun with several rays to write something to each of them, a figure with thought balloons... the depiction is completely up to each teacher, what he/she thinks as the best for the pupils. The aim is to structure areas for the pupils to focus on, namely how they were feeling in the time of the school closure, what was pleasant and what was unpleasant, how they managed it, and what's on their mind now.
- These questions will create a space to discuss how they experienced the situation, to name the emotions, behaviours, balancing strategies used by them, and it will also bring message on uncertainties, needs etc. they have now.
- Then you may create one large picture and let the pupils write their observations and thus have them collected for the whole class – furthermore, this form will support the feeling of togetherness and opportunity to share ideas within the class (this is recommended for classes with safe and amicable atmosphere).
- The activity of the Tree of fears and joys described for the pupils of the lower primary school can be done also with the older pupils. The procedure is same, the content will have more philosophical and abstract dimension with the older pupils; and same like with the lower primary school, this may be a useful mapping instrument for teachers. Activity: The teacher should prepare a pre-drawn tree trunk and each pupil should copy right and left hands on two pieces of paper. The child should write his/her visions of the future – the left hand for what is he/she afraid of and the right hand for what is he/she looking forward to. The ideas and visions may be then shared by the pupils and a discussion may originate who has anything similar with whom etc. Then, the pupils will cut out the hands and we will create a large treetop from right and left palms, thus from fears and joys (you may use also colour coding/titles for the hands etc. for better transparency). We may return to this material continuously and have it as a guideline to what should be managed with the class.
- Support to others – activities focused on offer of help are activating, they bring a feeling of usefulness, opportunity to participate in the environment where I live, and deepen the togetherness. They are ideal for higher grades of



elementary schools and for secondary schools where adolescents feel the need to be involved in the world to help it to be better. A possible variant how to use this natural tendency may be creation of something lovely and supporting for their surroundings. For example, you may start a discussion with the pupils about what had helped them during the lockdown and school closure. From their proposals, later to find what was something they could offer to their surroundings, and think up variants how to offer it together with them. In very active and prosocial classes, this proposal will suffice and then you may be only a moderator of the whole event. Possibilities what to offer may be lovely and supporting messages hanging somewhere in the school premises or in the town community where they will be free to take away; tiny products, extracts from books, ideas what to do in case of bad mood etc. may meet the same goal. You may also inspire your pupils to focus on a specific target group – younger schoolmates, health care professionals in the town, senior houses, shop assistants in the town etc. This type of activity can be targeted as appreciations and acknowledgement of someone's work. When preparing the appreciations, we may lead the pupils to the skill of knowing how to appreciate specifically and we will also support their ability to feel gratitude. In principle, this is a significant work with the value system of individuals. We can do this activity also with lower grades of the upper primary school. It is recommended in a later stage of work with the class, after they have worked with own emotions and experiences. It can be used as an activity for the anniversary.

### Talking variant

- Develop discussion in a circle – pupils may throw a thing or give floor in another way. The aim is to answer several different questions; each question should be answered by everyone who wants, i.e. everybody should be given the chance to have the floor.
- 1. Ask what emotions they encountered mostly, either in themselves or in their surroundings. 2. What were their most common thoughts?
- Then the class may be divided into groups based on the most common emotions they have experienced. Then let them think up what helped them to manage the emotions (if they were unpleasant) or what was the reason of these emotions (if they were pleasant) / how it happened and what had influenced it. The aim is to support the pupils' balancing strategy of self-support. Another variant is to let the pupils to talk in pairs – it is important that everybody has a partner with whom they feel fine. A proposal to create a material how to work with individual emotions that would be available for others in the school could be motivating for the pupils.
- The same principle could be used in discussions on thoughts. There is also an option to develop a discussion on fears they had before, and they have now, etc.

## Work with emotions – when fear / anger / sadness... reappears

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We may take two basic directions at work with emotions (either preventively or at the moment when they appear). First, we may help the child to learn as much as possible about the emotions. If they know more about them, the situation will become more transparent for them. Another option is to work with emotion like with energy – thus using the body and movement. Some movement activities are described here, others one chapter later within outdoor activities.

Below we describe only some tips, but all of the infinite number of “mood meter” techniques belong here.

### Learning about emotions

- The movie *Inside Out* is well usable in practice for upper primary and secondary school students, including subsequent work like stated for the lower primary pupils. However, it is important to say that the trailer shows what is happening in heads of both children and adults (to reassure them that we consider them like adults, not like children). It's good for us that the trailer shows also parents' heads with the partnership topic, thus also adolescents can identify with it.
- Preserving jar – emotional experiences are usually demanding for upper primary pupils, emotions are mixing and they cease understanding them, it is not like before. Take enough time with your class to think up own colour codes for specific basic emotions (e.g. sadness – blue, anger – red, anxiety – yellow etc.) that will be agreed and shared by everybody. This can be reached by a discussion, drawing etc. It can be a great opportunity to examine emotions – how they are perceived by whom, whether you can agree they have a specific shape etc. Abstraction is very popular in this topic, especially in upper primary and secondary grades. When you have reached an agreement, each pupil may have own jar to put balls of individual emotions (maybe made from Play-Doh) based on their current condition / how he/she felt a month ago / yesterday / how they want to feel. For example, there will be three red, one little blue and two big green balls in a jar. We may play with the size of individual colours, how they are located etc. The technique offers a big range of abstraction, thus also safety for individual work. It is probable that when the class is communicative, then only the discussion on colours and shapes may take at least one hour. The technique is based on a children's book *The Coloured Monster* by Anna Llana – you may show it to the pupils. However, it is an illustrated children's book, so please consider whether the pupils are ready to be inspired by children or this might be degrading and embarrassing for them.
- Cards – cards are very suitable and very popular also with older pupils. The same what is applicable for the lower primary pupils and work with cards, is unambiguously applicable also here. Thus: When working with the cards, it is important to let the pupils say what they want; we need to be very careful when putting additional questions not to plant any idea in their mind! E.g.: “You have selected a happy card, haven't you?”, “And do you think that the card is really sad?” etc. Sometimes the pupils interpret the cards significantly differently from our understanding; however, this should be respected and we should resist the tendency to soothe them in the moment when they pick a card showing they are not fine. By soothing, we only depreciate the pupil and show that we do take their experience seriously “Oh, it is definitely not as bad as it looks like / as you say.” We are

risking that the child will not want to share anything else with us any more or – and that is much worse – that the pupil will believe us because we are an authority and the child will doubt his/her own experience. With the cards, it is really sufficient when pupils describe how they are / were, possibly we may put an additional question what has helped / is helping to manage it, or thanks to what they are in such a good mood – we will again assist them to realize how they can manage situations and where is their power. For upper primary and secondary school pupils, we recommend cards with a higher level of abstraction – for example, cards with pictures of animals, DiXit cards (please be aware there are many extensions of the game and some sets are completely dark), storytelling cards, or you may even create cards by printing abstract pictures like photographs. Emotion Cards type are demotivating for this age group because they look too childish.

## Body

- With older pupils, you should consider that they temporarily lose gross motor skills due to the development leap. In the current situation, it is probable that physiological changes could have happened in the pupils during the school closure that may be visually very evident at the encounter now. Thus, it is suitable to think about individual physical exercises and such exercises where there is no “correct result”, to consider their potential shyness and not to push the pupils in them. So we recommend stretching, jumping, tensing and relaxing muscles. Similarly like with lower primary pupils, the movement typology is based on the emotion we are experiencing. Thus: if you can see that the pupils are in tension, you may use various stretching, loosening activities etc. to release energy from inside. Maybe you can ask somebody just to stand up and go to open window (if that regards an individual) or everybody to stretch (if the emotion is connected with stiffening, like at anxiety, sadness) or to shake or jump each part of the body (at emotions with “bubbling” energy – joy, anger). Select according to the emotion and whether it is suitable to let the pupils move individually or in groups. In general, groups are possible when the emotion is weak and work rather preventively (it is not really visible, but as we know the pupils, we know it is approaching).
- In general when working with cumulated aggression, it is popular to let the pupils run in the corridor (where applicable) and ask them to shout as much as they can while running. This is ideal for example at the end of physical education lessons.

## Set off outdoors

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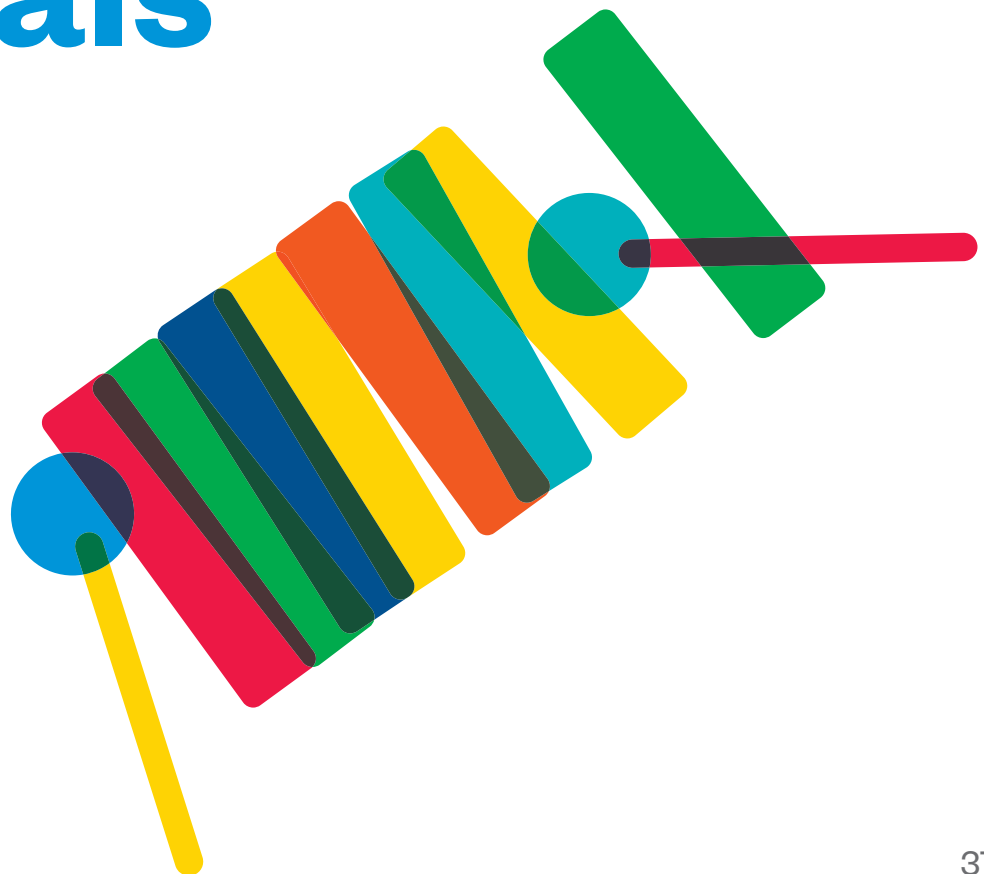
In general, we recommend to use work outdoors, out of the classroom – pupils spent a lot of time at home, in a closed space, without clubs and opportunities to steam off, so it is very probable they will have a lot of energy they will need to release. For the first lesson it is better to stay in the school – in the environment that is known for children and that meets the need for control and overview over the situation. However, it is useful to go outdoors for the further work with the class and to devote physical activities that may help children to release their energy. Considering safety, we recommend omitting contact techniques (both from the aspect of possible further spreading of the virus and the unreleased energy that might not be under full control of the pupils).

We recommend focusing on short dynamic activities like:

- Pure movement: Run three times around a schoolmate whom you select secretly, as quickly as possible. / The floor will be given first to one who makes a squat and jump. Let's everybody stand up and make what is good for our bodies – we may walk in a circle and everybody should try stretching of others (one is demonstrating and the others should repeat after him). / Shout – try to speak from the quietest possible voice up to the loudest – so that they hear you also over there... you may possibly alternate it with stomping, clapping... / As a class, make a rain shower – create noises by clapping, stomping etc. as the rain slowly comes, intensifies etc.
- For fast reflexes: upper primary and secondary school – throwing a ball and answering questions while squatting and jumping / activities to interconnect brain hemispheres (many exercises can be found that are funny and end with a lot of laughter).
- Fantasy: imagine you are a troop of aborigines from a deep jungle and create a fight dance that should show the others how powerful you are and what are your strengths (in groups, possible inspiration by "haka" dance).

# Methodical tips and inspirations

## Anniversary rituals



With a time interval from the crisis situation, people (both children and adults) show change of behaviour, emotional experience that look like experiencing the demanding situation again, even though nothing may be happening actually. In more sensible people or people experiencing something demanding, there may be slumps in a form of emotional fluctuations, restlessness, inexplicable sadness, anger, anxiety. It is completely alright and acceptance of own experiences can be strengthened with a ritual. Rituals anchor us and make us stronger in a deep level, they may work somehow as a magic. The rituals are an appropriate way of managing big emotional impacts because their course and emotional experience connected with them is as abstract as the experience they are related to. With the rituals, we recommend supporting a ceremonial and unique atmosphere that will make your acting more serious.

It is not necessary to divide the rituals by age groups, it is possible (and sometimes even needed) to have a collective ritual experience. Because it is the whole team and population that is impacted by the wide crisis – the pandemic situation that caused the nation-wide lockdown in this case. Just adapt the activities to abilities, possibilities and ideas of children and pupils. It is expectable that elementary school pupils and secondary school students are active in ideas how to experience the rituals.

## **1. period 1 – half-year from the school closure**

- It falls on September, the time of adaptation especially in kindergartens and first grades.
- It is good to consider it also with older pupils and to focus one day in the beginning of September on experiences and physical activities.
- You may use the above described tips focused on body and emotions – drawings, cards, balls.
- Then you may use the memory ritual – to draw a picture, to write a letter to a friend as well as to an unknown person who has got ill, who did not feel good and then to go out together to “send” this wish further – to burn it: the symbolic smoke will bring ideas, memories and wishes anywhere to the distance. You may use a fireplace in the school yard or a municipal fireplace in the vicinity. Or you may take a metal fireplace or an old pot to burn few pieces of paper, then children will add their papers. They may decide not to talk about their memories and wishes, just send them as a letter by smoke. Another variant is that the children may want to deliver the letter to a specific person – then it is good to do so.

## **2. period 2 – one year from the school closure – March 2021**

- You may use a fireplace again, like after half-year, but the task will be different. For example, ask the children and pupils to draw, write what was difficult for them and what would they wish now.
- Then you may create a “box/chest for the future generation” – especially smaller children may bring something they connect with the quarantine period – face masks, gloves, overalls, they may draw something; older pupils and students may write a personal confession: What they experienced? What they were concerned of? What they were annoyed about? What would they have needed? What helped them? Who wants, may share with others and then they put all items, creations and letters together to the box/chest that will be labelled – for example: Message and legacy for the future generations from the time of pandemics, or anything else, and put it somewhere in the school. This message for the future may help to give a meaning to the experience one year after the event and it may help better to adapt to common life. It may be called a meaning projection where

naming and finding a meaning of something difficult, of a stress/crisis situation, processes and closes the situation for the given person. And then it is easier to return to standard functioning.

- Variant if the teacher wants/needs the ritual only with the class or grade: It is possible to prepare a memorial activity, for example everybody brings a symbol that he/she remembers as significant from the time one year ago, for example a face mask, gloves, clothing etc., then to write together to a large poster who remembers what limitations, what was really demanding and what new and good had it brought.

# Plans briefly



# Plan before the first day



# First day

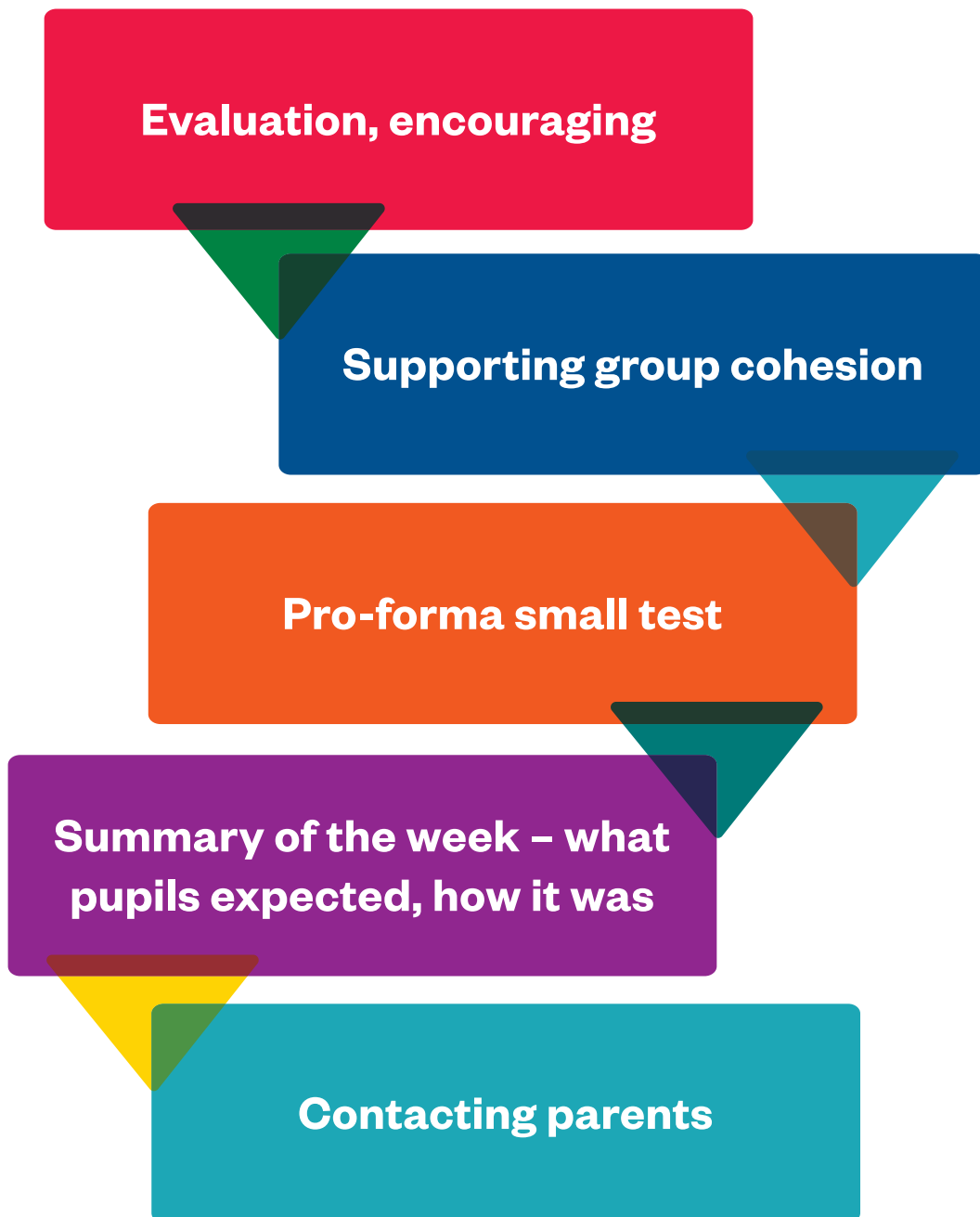
**Class lesson  
in the known format**

**Sharing, venting of emotions,  
what children experienced,  
how they were**

**Message of the plan for  
the following period  
– week / two weeks**

**Offer of support**

# First week



# Six weeks



# **What to do when a close person of a child has died?**

**How do I feel in such situation?  
Do I need support?**

**Does the child want his/her  
schoolmates to know about that?  
Who should say it to them?**

**What the schoolmates  
should do?**

**Whom should the child contact  
if he/she does not feel good?**

**Agreement on individual  
approach to adaptation  
with the pupil**

## Support network

It is always good to have somebody at own back where we can find the professional support. Here are ideas for some possibilities that can be used so that the help and support you are receiving is professional, within the workplace (preferably within working hours), and meets the ethical scale of the work and confidentiality.

Each school may have some specifics and various internal competence distribution, this diagram is only illustrative.



## References and documents

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Porges, S. W.: The Polyvagal Theory. WW Norton & Co 2011, ISBN 0393707008.

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Siegel, D.J.: Vnitřní nazírání. Praha: Triton, 2014, 1. vyd., ISBN 978-80-7387-800-9.

Příručka pro školy: Když se stane neštěstí 2011– PIT ČR, [www.bit.ly/34Qf2Q5](http://www.bit.ly/34Qf2Q5)

### Documents we refer to:

O zlém draku Koroňákovi (Bad Corona Dragon) - Klára Veselská, for download at Facebook in group of Asociace klinických psychologů v ČR (Association of Clinical Psychologists in the Czech Republic) in both written and audio version here [www.facebook.com/klinickapsychologie](https://www.facebook.com/klinickapsychologie), or you can contact the author directly by e-mail [veselska@aliviocentrum.cz](mailto:veselska@aliviocentrum.cz)

Kuba v karanténě (Jacob in quarantine) - Jana Horáková [www.terapiehorakova.cz](http://www.terapiehorakova.cz)

Emotion Cards by Be Creative

DiXit cards

Vigvam advisory centre [www.poradna-vigvam.cz](http://www.poradna-vigvam.cz)

Dostalová, M., Jančiová, S., Vlčková, H.: Emušaci - Ferda - a jeho mouchy. SCIO 2013, ISBN 978-80-7430-113-1.