

# Learning for Living

## Recovery Support for Staff

### Programme for A Staff Support Group

This programme is part of the 'Learning for Living' series



**Mary Gurney**  
Grassroots Publishing

**COVID-19  
RECOVERY**

# Learning for Living

## A Programme for a Staff Recovery Support Group

**Four sessions of 30-40 minutes suitable for any staff group.  
There are two optional, additional sessions for schools.**

The Programme may be covered in two sessions of approximately one hour by combining Sessions 1 and 2, then Sessions 3 and 6. For schools, Sessions 4 and 5 can be covered in a third session, by agreement with staff.

**Mary Gurney**



**Grassroots Publishing**

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	Objectives	4
	Preparation	4
	Notes on Support Group Work	4
	Leadership	4
<b>Session 1</b>	Welcome. Sharing experiences. Setting objectives.	5
<b>Session 2</b>	Positive statements. Sources of support.	6
<b>Session 3</b>	Attending to own well-being.	7
<b>Session 4 (Optional)</b>	Supporting children in the recovery period	8
<b>Session 5 (Optional)</b>	Supporting parents in the recovery period	9
<b>Session 6</b>	Future hopes. Evaluation. Future planning	10
	Notes on planning future meetings	10
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Questionnaire on coping skills	11
<b>Appendix 2 (Optional)</b>	Parent-school relationships	12
<b>Appendix 3 (Optional)</b>	The home-school partnership	13
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Agenda of hopes	14

For schools, the author would like to bring to your attention the series '**Learning for Living: Relationships and Health Education**' which uses interactive, inclusive group work methods to build supportive relationships and social and emotional skills.

It is suitable for both whole classes and small groups and ideal to bring children back together after the disruption they have experienced.

Go to [www.learning4living.org.uk](http://www.learning4living.org.uk) for more details.

### Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank Ruth Robinson, Emotional Counsellor, and Heather Teather for their advice, and Clare Ferris, for the design and typesetting: [clar3ferris@gmail.com](mailto:clar3ferris@gmail.com).

Text © Mary Gurney 2020

The right of Mary Gurney to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

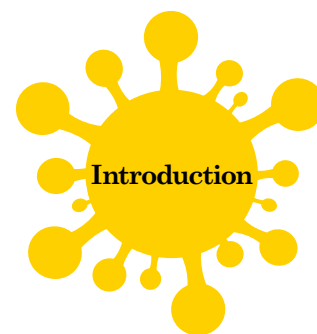
All rights reserved. This programme may be downloaded by the purchaser only for use in the single purchasing organisation. No other rights are granted without the permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-9162682-6-5.

## Introduction

### Objectives

- 🕒 Re-build staff mutual support, inclusiveness and morale.
- 🕒 Provide time for staff to look after and value themselves.
- 🕒 Provide a positive, non-judgemental place for staff to reflect on experiences; discuss current feelings and ways forward; respect and accept individual differences.
- 🕒 To counteract the stress surrounding the current situation.
- 🕒 Encourage staff to find a shared view of the ways to help the children re-build supportive relationships, self-confidence and resilience and re-gain positive motivation. *(Optional)*
- 🕒 Plan ways to strengthen the parent-school partnership. *(Optional)*



### Preparation

Set a regular, protected time (minimum 30 mins, max 40 mins) and book an undisturbed space. Plan mixed, inclusive Support Groups of between 5 and 7 members of staff, each with a named leader who has the agenda prior to the first session. Ideally all the staff will be involved. The agendas are not role-specific. It is not necessary to tell staff about group composition before the session, though if desired a list of group members can be displayed before the first meeting. For Session 2, it will be helpful to have available any information about local support services such as Occupational Health. *Please read the following notes before commencing.*

### Notes on Support Group Work

A Support Group provides a time when people come together to support each other. In this instance a group of people working together in difficult times to help others and faced with complex and multiple challenges but who are individuals themselves with their own needs for nurture. It is not a place to discuss practical or business matters, as per regular staff meetings. These must be discussed at a different time and the Support Group should not be waylaid or misused. It is probably best not to start the group at a time of great tension, controversy or confrontations. However, if started whilst staff remain under pressure, there must be an agreement that the main aim is to support staff to reflect on their feelings and their coping strategies and have 'time out' for themselves and each other. The setting aside of time for staff support conveys an important message.

The work of this particular programme does not invite the group members to make disclosures of a deeply personal nature that would be better expressed in individual counselling. If personal issues arise that suggest a need for individual support they can be followed up outside the group. The resources obtained for Session 2 could be useful.

### Leadership

The manner or style of leadership should be calm, non-judgemental and purposeful, sticking to the agenda as far as possible, and keeping momentum. Diversions should not be dismissed but put on hold – tell the group that you'll make a note of the issue and think about how and when to return to it, for example in a planned Support Group discussion. This might conceivably irritate group members but it is important to plan and stick to the plan and be aware when the Support Group may be hijacked. The leader has to listen but not necessarily always reply. Often it is better to ask what other people think and pass the discussion round, the goal being to facilitate mutual support within the group. The groups should be as inclusive as possible to widen the pool of support and recognise that staff have different but important roles in the re-building of relationships and ethos.

The leader may decide to start the session with some music, a prayer or visualisation or just a quiet couple of minutes, for people to catch their breath and have a calm start, or a silence for an absent colleague or friend. It is important for leaders to be aware of any one affected by bereavement or serious illness. Each session should start and end on time, so pace is important.

## Session 1

### Welcome. Sharing experiences. Setting objectives.



#### Introduction

- ⦿ Begin with 'thank you' for all that staff are doing and have done. Outline the purpose of the programme. Stress the importance of staff well-being. Recognise the challenges that you've experienced and the problems that lie ahead. Hence the importance of being able to talk about problems experienced in a safe and supported way and re-build staff mutual support, to enable people, together, to find ways forward as a cohesive staff.
- ⦿ Explain the plan is to first work in small groupings – pairs, threes, etc. then come together to form the Support Groups, which will remain together for the course. Further sessions can be planned according to need. Changing groupings and contacts means that support can be extended, everyone is included on an equal footing, and there is a wider range of perspectives available.
- ⦿ Remind staff of the importance of being able to trust each other re confidentiality. Also, whilst this is in no way a challenging or confrontational course, everyone has the right to pass, without comments.



#### Pair work

Form random pairs using numbers drawn from a hat or by inviting staff to find the person they know least well. Make sure colleagues do know their partner's name. Partners sit together at a sensible distance then invite them to find a way of greeting their partner, firstly, without words by gesture and expression, then using speech to find the comfortable level of talking.

Invite pairs to have a conversation about their experiences of Covid-19, outlining their situations in both lockdown and now. After about four or five minutes stop the conversations and give some further prompts, one at a time, with a few minutes on each in the pairs. Keep the pace moving and don't wait till everyone has finished a particular conversation.

- What has been the most worrying aspect of Covid-19 for you?
- What was the biggest challenge of lockdown? What are the challenges now?
- Is there anything you've liked about the past months?
- Lastly, share your particular concerns and anxieties about the longer-term recovery period, both at home and at work.

#### Support Group Work

Form the Support Groups – read out the list of group members with the nominated leader. Each group sits in a largish circle (depending on social distancing). Ask people to share and compare their concerns, expressed above, with the group and then discuss the ways in which anxieties may be overcome and what kind of help and support is needed.

Stop the discussion after a suitable time and ask group members to say how they hope the programme of group work might help them. With the permission of group members, the leader should make short notes, to be kept and used later in Session 6, to see if hopes are met.

Clarify the objectives set for the course. See page 2.

End with an affirming activity. Invite people to describe the positive aspects of staff relationships. 'As a staff group we are good at....'

Arrange next meeting date, time and place.

## Session 2

### Positive statements. Sources of support



#### Support Group Work

Form the groups, each group sits in a circle, mindful of distancing. As members of a team there are normal stresses and we have new stresses, from the fears and anxieties and challenges of Coronavirus. We can sometimes feel down and need help to lift our spirits and cope. Go round for each to say one thing that helps lift their spirits.

Put a chair in the middle of the circle. Each then has a turn on the 'hot seat', for the rest of the group, in turn, to say something positive and encouraging to them, e.g. paying them a compliment about their approach to work or people. When each person takes the seat, allow the group to have a minute or two to compose their thoughts, so as to give quality comments.

As an alternative, each person has a piece of paper and writes their name at the top. When the group is ready they pass their paper to the person next to them to write something positive about them then pass the paper on. This is repeated till each gets their paper back to read quietly, or if preferred, the group can read aloud each other's comments whilst everyone listens.

#### Pair work

Sub-divide the groups into pairs (or threes). They have a few minutes to reflect on why it is important to be positive and encourage each other.

Then get them to talk about the following, taking one question at a time:

- a) Where does your support come from?
- b) How can staff support each other?  
Make a list of specific ways.
- c) Where might you get extra support from, if needed, beyond work and the family/friendship group?

Provide any information that is available, for example, Occupational Health, local Support Groups.

#### Re-convene Support Groups

Compare views on ways of supporting each other and identify wider sources of support, sharing details about access, availability, remit, etc. If appropriate, afterwards group leaders could compile a list to circulate.



## Session 3

### Attending to one's own well-being



#### Individual and pair work

On their own staff quietly go through a copy of the *Questionnaire on coping skills* (Appendix 1). Stress that the purpose is to give people an opportunity to reflect on their 'coping' strategies and be aware, and accepting, of their range of responses, and what influences these.

When people have had time to read through and pause to reflect, invite them to form pairs, to then share some of their thoughts, as they wish. This is a suitable time to remind the group of confidentiality and also the right to pass without comment.

#### Support group work

In the groups, each briefly says what it's like discussing their personal feelings. Then, round the group, ask people to say whether they pay attention to their own well-being, perhaps giving themselves a score: 1 = don't really look after themselves; 2 = Try to, but often put others' needs first; 3 = pretty sensible when it comes to looking after themselves. How satisfied are people with their position? What could be altered and how?

Lastly, group members share the ways in which they like to re-charge their batteries. Time permitting, run through the range of ways people 'chill out' or 'switch off'.

#### What helps you to chill out?



## Session 4 *optional*

### Supporting children in the recovery period



#### Support group work

Begin with each group making a list of the possible feelings and attitudes of children back at school. When completed one group could call out a few feelings, then the other groups add ideas from their lists. Still in the groups, ask people to discuss the possible messages that parents are giving children, explicitly or 'hidden', about being back at school. Might these be mixed messages? Have the children talked about this?

#### Work in pairs or threes

Subdivide the support groups for further discussion on the children's feelings. Ask pairs/threes to take the main feelings listed above and elaborate on them, by listing the specific things that children are likely to be worried or glad or sad or frightened about. What have staff noticed so far? What are the various aspects of school life that will gradually give children confidence to accept their experiences and move on? Are there any children who may not express their feelings or who are particularly withdrawn?

Use the following questions, one at a time, to discuss the recovery process for children, with open exchanges in between:

- Is the general experience of schooling likely to be sufficient for all children to re-gain their self-confidence and resilience?
- How can children be helped to develop mutual support for everyone and enable all children to re-develop their self-confidence?
- Do you think that the recovery period offers a great opportunity to re-build class relationships to be fully inclusive, with increased peer support for all children?
- Is this the time to use an intervention such as *Learning for Living*\* to explicitly help children practically with their relationships and feelings?
- How can the children who are particularly withdrawn be helped?
- How will you help all children to re-gain positive motivation?

#### Preparation for Session 5

Session 5 would benefit from parental input. Send the questionnaire *The home-school partnership* (Appendix 3) to parents a week before and ask them for a quick return if possible, to help in your discussions. Decide how to disseminate parent's views before the meeting, for example, collate parents' views about home-schooling, or summarise the range of responses.



**\**Learning for Living: Relationships and Health Education*** explicitly teaches all the children the skills and values of inclusive interaction, for example, how to listen and communicate, ask questions, reflect, think of others, express feelings, be a leader, be responsible, etc. All the children actually experience positive interaction and mutual support and this has a proven impact on their behaviour and approach to work. See [www.learning4living.co.uk](http://www.learning4living.co.uk) for details.



## Session 5 *optional*

### Supporting parents in the recovery period



#### Optional

This session looks at strengthening the home-school partnership and helping parents to recover.

#### Preparation

This session would benefit from parental input. Send the questionnaire *The home-school partnership* (Appendix 3) to parents a week before and ask them for a quick return if possible, to help in your discussions.

#### Work in pairs or threes

Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses in your pre-coronavirus relationship with parents, using Appendix 2 *Parent-school relationships*.

After groups have had time to award themselves a star rating for the past relationships, ask for an overall interpretation, e.g. excellent/very good but needs brushing up in particular aspects/not at all easy.

#### Support group work

Compare the overall views from the pairings to see where there is agreement and note things that need working on. Feed in as appropriate a summary of parental views.

Then consider the effect home-schooling may have had on parents' feelings and attitudes towards school. Ask staff for their views before reading out parents' responses. Talk about the difficulties experienced during this period.

Given the increased involvement of parents in their children's education, discuss how you can continue to engage them in a supported and realistic way\*.

Move on to think about the future. Discuss how the home-school partnership can be re-built or strengthened, selecting pointers from both questionnaires – *Parent-school relationships*, discussed above, and *The Home-school partnership* replies. After, some feedback to parents would be good if you decide on appropriate actions.



\**Learning for Living: Relationships and Health Education* uses a unique, innovative and easy way of engaging parents throughout in a supported way. See [www.learning4living.co.uk](http://www.learning4living.co.uk) for details.

## Session 6

# Future hopes. Evaluation and future planning



### Preparation

Take four sheets of sugar paper, and write one of the questions listed below at the top on each. Display them around the room. Have some felt pens ready.

### Work in pairs or threes

Introduce this session with a question: 'After this period is over how can we become the people we want to be?' Looking beyond the immediate practical difficulties and challenges, think about your hopes and ambitions for the future. Using the *Agenda of hopes* (Appendix 4), take each question in turn, have a few moments to think then share your thoughts.

### Support Group Work

As a group, review the work done on the short programme. Look back to the hopes expressed at the start (Session 1) and decide whether the time has fulfilled those expectations for each of you. Has anything surprised you?

Then get course members to move around the room and write their answers to these questions on the sheets of paper displayed:

- What has been important for you personally?
- What do feel have you contributed?
- What have you benefitted from?
- How has the course helped the staff group as a whole?

Photo the sheets for evaluation purposes.

### Planning future meetings

Discuss the need for further meetings. Decide together whether staff would like to continue meeting specifically for mutual support, either in a dedicated meeting or a part of normal staff meeting set aside for this purpose. See notes below re planning meetings.

End by thanking staff generally for their contributions then get people, round the group, to turn to the person next to them and thank them for their contribution to the sessions and say something positive about this.

### Notes on planning future meetings

Sessions can be built on a simple framework of having time in the Support groups and in smaller groupings, when the latter will help discussion and enable everyone to contribute. The larger the group the greater the tendency for a few to do most of the talking. Each Support meeting needs a specific focus which can be decided beforehand, by asking people what they would like this to be next time. In between the Leader can create a suitable agenda by using open questions such as: What are your concerns? How can we address these concerns? What would we hope to achieve? When...or How... shall we start? Who will...? Give people time to share concerns in smaller groupings before discussing in the larger group(s). Differences or opposition or confrontation can be examined by getting people to clarify their views and asking for suggestions as to how to resolve differences, if this is appropriate.

It's often a good idea to start a meeting with something affirming, e.g. thanking people or asking them to comment on positive things that have happened over the past few days, highlighting each other's achievements. It is also ok for people to say if they are particularly proud of something that others may not have noticed. Another way is to get people in pairs at the start to tell each other what has been good for them over the past week and what has been a challenge.

## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire on coping skills

What normally gives you pleasure in your work?

---

What are the strengths and skills you bring to your work?

Share these and celebrate each others' talents.

---

Do you normally recognise and appreciate the pleasure that others take in their work and the gifts they have?

How good are you at paying compliments about each others' work?

---

What challenges you most? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel you generally cope or sometimes do you struggle?

Do you recognise when you are stressed?

a) No, not till it creeps up on you.

b) Sometimes.

c) Yes, and do something about it?  \_\_\_\_\_

What are your ways of dealing with, or preventing, feeling stressed, anxious or worried?

---

Do you feel it is ok to say you are having problems or struggling to cope?

Do people generally listen to each others problems?

---

Do you sometimes feel your efforts go unnoticed or unappreciated?

Or feel isolated?

---

Are there ways you as a staff group could improve support for each other?

For example, creating time to discuss ways of supporting each other in tackling problems?

---

#### REMEMBER

- You cannot finish everything you have to do in one day. Prioritise.
- Some time out is important for you and your family and friends.
- Do not be misled by staff who appear to cope successfully without effort or worrying. We all have to acquire experience and some people are good at 'covering up'.
- We all make mistakes. The most important thing is to learn from them.

When coping with the inevitable pressures of the job, particularly at present, which of the above advice is most important to you? Add your own reminders to yourself.

*When sharing responses, please celebrate differences – variety is a quality of human richness.*

## Appendix 2 *optional*

### Parent-school relationships

How good is the school at the following? Award yourselves a star rating, e.g.

\*\*\* proud of school reputation    \*\* average    \*try but need to persevere with this

	***	**	*
Welcoming parents (even if they are complaining)			
Listening to parents			
Communicating with parents about school events			
Readiness to contact parents if concerned			
Involving parents in working with the school to overcome difficulties			
Providing opportunities to discuss values in the children's education			
Recognising and understanding parental or family difficulties			
Willingness to listen to a parent who is having difficulties and give advice			
Helping irate parents to calm down			
Readiness to understand the relationship between a parent and their child			
Working with parents whose values differ from those of the school			
Providing opportunities for support between parents			
Providing opportunities for parents to develop their self-confidence			
Providing opportunities for parents to engage with PSHE			
Enthusiasm to involve parents in as many aspects of school life as possible			
Recognising when parental expectations are inappropriate			
Helping parents to be realistic about their children			
Add other aspects			

**Are there any areas you could develop or improve?**

## Appendix 3 *optional*

### The home-school partnership

A questionnaire for parents/carers

	Yes	No	Not sure
Did you enjoy your own school days?			
Do you feel welcome at school?			
Do you find staff willing to listen to you?			
Do you want staff to contact you if they are concerned?			
If your child had difficulties would you want to work with the school to overcome them?			
If you had problems do you think someone at school would be able to tell you where to get help?			
Do you think school staff and parents should get together to discuss important issues in guiding children?			
Do you find it helps to talk to other parents about coping with problems? Do you get much chance to do this?			
Do you feel confident about approaching the school? If not, what would help you?			
Do you stress the importance of education with your child?			
Please write something about your experiences of home-schooling:			

Please sign and return the questionnaire - your views will help us to develop our work.

Sign \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for views.

## Appendix 4

### Agenda of hopes

After this disrupted period is over, how can we become the people we want to be?

Looking beyond the immediate practical difficulties and challenges, think about your hopes and ambitions for the future.

Have you changed in any way?

Have the experiences of coronavirus altered your priorities?

Do you feel you are on the way to achieving equilibrium in your life, ie. a balanced life-style where you feel in control again?

What do you need to work on to achieve this?

What support/help do you need for this?

What are your hopes and ambitions for the future?

Can you envisage how these may be realised?

When you settle down as an organisation what do you hope you will have learned from the experience of coronavirus?

When your local community settles down what would you like to see emerge?

What part might your organisation play in this?