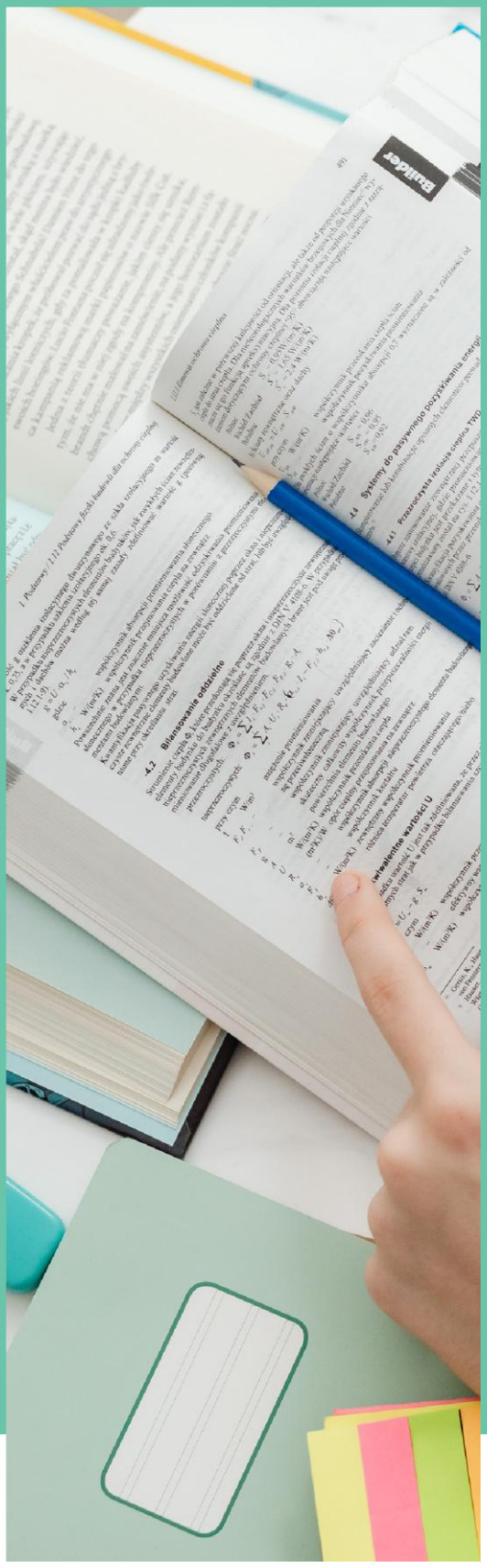


RETURNING TO EDUCATION TOOLKIT

BY JO DRISCOLL

2020 Churchill Fellow

Resource for schools and colleges in the UK to use collaboratively with children and young people to support them to return to education following a crisis episode.

the CHURCHILL fellowship

SAMARITANS

Read the full report behind the toolkit:

https://www.churchillfellowship.org/ideas-experts/fellows-directory/jo-driscoll/

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INTRODUCTION

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About the Author

Jo Driscoll is the Director of Mental Health and Wellbeing at Reigate College and has over twenty years of experience working with young people with mental health challenges. She has also worked in the NHS supporting young people back into education. In 2020 she was awarded the Churchill Fellowship with the aim of developing a toolkit to help educational professionals in supporting a young person's return to education following a crisis. She is hopeful that the toolkit is useful to you and other educational professionals.



Jo Driscoll

the CHURCHILL fellowship

The Churchill Fellowship is a UK charity which supports individuals from the UK to follow their passion for change through learning from the world. The focus of a Fellowship is to travel to learn and return to inspire others by bringing back knowledge and wisdom from other parts of the world.

Throughout 2019-2023 the Churchill Fellowship developed a Suicide Prevention Programme, which was supported by The John Armitage Charitable Trust and in partnership with Samaritans as a Knowledge Partner.

I was awarded the Churchill Fellowship to be part of this research programme. My aim was to learn from Australia by researching, exploring and developing a toolkit to support young people to get back to education following a crisis episode.

SAMARITANS

About This Resource

This toolkit was developed to enable schools and colleges to have a framework that they can use in their own educational establishment to support a child or young person to return to education following a crisis episode. An episode of this nature is considered to be an act of serious self-harm or a suicide attempt.

Recently in the UK, there has been a 53% increase in the amount of children and young people who are in mental health crisis and need emergency support. This is reflected in increasing numbers of referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) crisis teams. There were 32,521 referrals to crisis teams in 2022/2023 in comparison with 21,242 in 2019/2020 (RCPsych, 2024). It is estimated that in 2023, one in five children and young people experienced a mental health problem (NHS Digital, 2023).

This continued increase in the number of children and young people with mental health challenges has impacted directly upon the services supporting them, with CAMHS reporting long waiting lists for support. This means many children and young people are being supported in education whilst they are waiting or trying to access treatment. It is estimated that throughout the academic year 2023/2024, 84% of teachers have spent more time helping pupils with mental health issues (Teach first, 2024). This impacts on the education system and causes an ever-increasing workload for teachers and pastoral managers.

This aim of this toolkit is to facilitate a young person's return to education. This will act as a preventative plan and reduce the risk of further mental health crisis. Also, it aims to provide schools and colleges with a collaborative framework for working with children/young people, their parents/carers and with internal and external services in supporting a young person back to a regular routine and hopefully full-time education.



Who Is This a Resource For?

This is a collaborative toolkit which requires input from young people, parents/carers, staff at the school/college and as well internal and external services (if needed).
For schools and colleges, the toolkit may need slight adaptations to suit your place of work, and you will need to follow appropriate safeguarding protocols in line with with the current statutory guidance - Keeping Children Safe in Education (DforE, 2026).



Identification of a Team - To facilitate a return to education, firstly a school/college should identify a specialised team of professionals that are assigned as the Crisis Intervention Team. This team should consist of around 4-5 people depending on the size of the school/college.

Lead Coordinator - The team needs to have a nominated Lead Coordinator; ideally this would be the Senior Mental Health Lead. Their role as Lead Coordinator is to maintain communication with parents/carers, teachers, tutors, school/college administrations, exams offices (if relevant) and external services. Also, they will lead meetings, complete paperwork, conduct weekly monitoring and report to services if there is an increase in risk -taking behaviour.

Other Team Members - Alongside the Senior Mental Health Lead, the Designated Safeguarding Lead or member of a safeguarding team should also be involved. The other members of the team should consist of a key person (who is predominantly based at the safe space), form tutor and possibly a member of the pastoral support team/Head of Year (this could be a mentor or counsellor – dependent on what the provider offers).

Crisis Intervention Team Outline



PROCESS OVERVIEW

Disclosure made to the school/college about a **crisis episode.**

Lead Coordinator - **Senior Mental Health Lead**

- Liaises with parents/carers to determine whether the child or young person is well enough to return to education.
- Establishes whether the young person has medical support, and or has been seen by the crisis team or any other mental health service.
- Considers any academic requirements, exams and deadlines.
- Communicates with the Crisis Intervention Team about a child or young person's about crisis and possibility of returning.
- Follows any safeguarding requirements after the crisis episode.

Return to Education Plan – Administration

- Lead Coordinator organises a face-to-face meeting with parents/carers and student to go through their Return to Education Support Plan.
- Lead Coordinator identifies relevant staff members in the Crisis Intervention Team and determine whether they attend the meeting as well.

Return to Education Support Plan – Meeting

- Lead Coordinator to manages the face-to-face meeting with parents/carers and student to go through their Return to Education Support Plan.
- Depending on the level of risk reported, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or another safeguarding team member can be present.

After Meeting

- Lead Coordinator implements plans, and alerts staff to ensure that when the child or young person returns, the plan is in place.

Monitoring

Over the next 4 weeks the child or young person receives intense monitoring with weekly meetings to ensure their safety. Their triggers are reviewed and their academic workload is managed. The Lead Coordinator reviews progress and feedback in a post-intervention meeting with parents/carers and other services if needed.

Key Actions Following a Disclosure

Crisis disclosures can occur throughout any part of a working day within a school or college. They can be given through communication from a parent/carer in an email or a telephone call. A young person can disclose verbally or in writing about a crisis to any staff member. A friend of a young person can disclose to a member of staff about a friend in crisis. Disclosures can be distressing for the young person, the member of staff involved and subsequently for those that care about that child or young person – friends and family.

Ten key actions to help support staff when working through any disclosure:

Ensure you are in a safe space to have a conversation. Remain calm and non-judgemental about the disclosure.

Contact the emergency services, if they have consumed poison, seriously injured themselves or have rapid or pulsing bleeding.

Contact the emergency services if the young person is threatening to self-harm or threatening to harm others.

Contact the crisis lines if a young person is experiencing suicidal ideation, contact emergency services if they can't keep safe.

Always communicate with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) within your organisation.

Always communicate concerns around crisis with parents/carers and other professionals – do not manage risk alone.

Inform and refer to other appropriate services to access support.

Check and manage that the young person does not have any impending deadlines, exams or academic essential requirements on that day.

Provide, check-ins to any staff or students that may have been affected by the disclosure.

Explain to the young person, parents/carers that they will need to complete a Return to Education Support Plan.

Disclosure of Crisis in Education

Disclosure made in school/college about a significant act of self-harm or a suicide attempt.

Assess the risk.
Is this a medical emergency?

YES – Medical Emergency

- Contact **emergency services.**
- Do not leave the young person alone.
- Inform Safeguarding Team/first aid and in-house support.
- Contact parents/carers.
- Ensure the young person is collected to receive medical attention.
- Update registers.
- Fulfil any administrative academic requirements.

After Medical Intervention

- Discuss with parents/carers the welfare of young person.
- Discuss any potential referrals that could be made.
- Request any discharge, safety plans, or paperwork or any information that could support the young person returning to school/college.
- Arrange a **Return to Education Support plan** and in-person meeting.

NO

- Contact **crisis lines.**
- Do not leave the young person alone.
- Inform the Safeguarding Team/first aid and in-house support.
- Contact parents/carers to discuss safety plan, offer external services and assess ability to travel home.
- Recommend GP or crisis services.
- Update registers.
- Fulfil any administrative academic requirements.

After Intervention

- Discuss with parents/carers the welfare of young person.
- Discuss any potential referrals that could be offered.
- Arrange a **Return to Education Support Plan** and in-person meeting.

Disclosure of Crisis Outside of Education

Disclosure made to the school/college about a significant act of self-harm or a suicide attempt outside of education.

Assess the risk.
Have they received medical care?

YES

- Inform Safeguarding Team.
- Contact parents/carers.
- Update any registers required and ensure teachers are aware of delays to homework or assessments.
- Fulfil any administrative academic requirements.

After Medical Intervention

- Request any discharge, safety plans, or paperwork or any information that could support the young person returning to school and college.
- Arrange a **Return to Education Support Plan** and in-person meeting.

NO

- Inform Safeguarding Team.
- Contact parents/carers.
- Update any registers required and ensure teachers are aware of delays to homework or assessments.
- Fulfil any administrative academic requirements.
- Arrange a return to **Return to Education Support plan** and in-person meeting.

RETURN TO EDUCATION SUPPORT PLAN

This form is to be completed with the child/young person and their parent/carer. It can be completed by hand or electronically. At the end of the meeting provide a copy for the parent/carer and one for the school/college.

Key information	
Name:	
Year Group/Form:	
Date:	

This plan has been developed to help you to return to education. It is important for the people around you to understand what can help you in returning to educations. Please take some time to think about your answers so that you can be supported fully.

Do you want to return to school/college?		
○ Yes	○ No	○ I'm not sure
I would like to return.	If this is the case, what other options are available to you? In your area and for your age.	Let's come back to this question after we have completed the plan.

How motivated are you to return to school/college?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not motivated Motivated

What is most important to you while you are at school/college?

- ○ Seeing friends
- ○ Being up to date with my work
- ○ Feeling safe
- ○ Feeling supported by staff
- ○ Other:

What makes you feel as if you are having a good day and achieving at school/college?
○ Completing classwork ○ Completing homework ○ Completing exams ○ Attending lessons ○ Achieving in extracurricular activities ○ Receiving good reports ○ Other:

It is **important** you know that the topics surrounding serious mental health crisises such as, self-harm and suicide, can be discussed amongst your peers and these topics are even covered in subject lessons and tutorials. Please be aware there is **no evidence** that confirms that talking about these topics makes anything worse for you. However, if there some aspects that are triggering for you, please let us know. This means that teachers can make adjustments to support you.

What are your triggers?
○ Talking about mental health ○ Reading about mental health ○ Seeing videos about mental health ○ Other:

To help you get back into school/college, you may need to have reasonable adjustments put in place to give you more support. One of the **major reasonable adjustments** that can be made to enable a safer return to education is to complete a **phased return**. This means you may be required to attend some parts of the day and not at other times. Your method of transport also needs to be taken into consideration as to whether this impacts on your support and safety.

ACTION: Print off student's timetable
○ Identify clearly what lessons they need to attend ○ AM lessons or PM lessons for phased return ○ Or a selection of lessons due to requirements (e.g. ongoing medical appointments)

Travel plan – how do you get to and from school/college?	In some cases, independent travel will not be suitable – you will need to be dropped off and picked up by a parent/carer. Which is agreed:
	○ Parent/carer in-person drop off ○ Parent/carer in-person pick up ○ Other:

Do you have any deadlines or external assessments over the phased return?

Reasonable adjustments can also be made in the classroom and around the school/college site. These adjustments are a way that teachers and staff can adapt to support you. They can be put in place as a temporary measure and then will be reviewed to see if they are affective or not.

In lessons	
Factors that can cause overwhelm in class:	**Reasonable adjustments:**
○ Overwhelmed by work ○ Not understanding work ○ Being unable to focus ○ Being behind in classwork ○ Noise ○ Being asked questions in lessons ○ Specific subjects ○ Specific students ○ Specific teachers ○ Supply teachers/cover lessons ○ Changes to timetable without notice ○ Using technology ○ Needing to go to the toilet ○ Silence ○ Getting homework ○ Not knowing anyone in the class ○ Seating position ○ Other:	○ Work with a support worker ○ Work in an alternative environment ○ Teachers not to cold call in lessons ○ Seating plan to address position in class ○ Pre-printed materials provided before class ○ Movement breaks/time out passes ○ Leave early or late to lessons ○ Daily check-in's from support worker ○ Get extensions on deadlines.

Outside of Lessons	
Factors that can cause overwhelm:	**Reasonable Adjustments:**
○ Crowded spaces ○ Noisy spaces ○ Canteen – dining area ○ Toilets ○ Changing rooms ○ Outside space ○ Library ○ Other:	○ Leave lesson a few minutes before the end of lesson to avoid crowds ○ Walk with a member of staff to lessons ○ Be with a nominated peer for transitions ○ Spend lunchtimes or breaktimes under supervision with staff or in a safe space

Is there anything else we need to know about you returning? What support or interventions are you receiving outside of education?

By completing this **Return to Education Support Plan today**, we have discussed and agreed ways that we can help you feel safe upon your return to school/college. This form is designed to help you keep a record of our conversation. It includes what we have agreed going forward.

Going Forward - To support your return to school/college you **must** have weekly meetings for the next four weeks to ensure that you are supported and continue to feel safe at school/college. At these meetings we will discuss your attendance, work performance and any concerns/issues that may have arisen. If you are unable to attend any of these meetings they will need to be rescheduled for another time in that week. If you are unwell for a week these meetings can take place online.

Weekly meeting – day and time:

Lead Co-ordinator email:

At the end of these next four weeks, we will have another meeting to review your progress and see if we need to support you further. If you are unable to attend on any day, please contact the attendance team and let the Lead Coordinator know.

Please share completed copies of this plan with young person, parents/carers, crisis intervention team, and external agencies (if appropriate).

MONITORING – WEEKLY PLAN

Each week the Lead Coordinator needs to meet with the child/young person, to review the plan and to make any further adjustments to support them. The meetings should last approximately 20-30 minutes. It is important to remember that these meetings may be the only support that the child or young person is currently receiving.

To ensure these weekly meetings are useful it is essential that:

- **The meetings occur at the same time and place each week.** This provides the young person with consistency and predictability as to how to manage their week. If, on the day, the child or young person is unwell or unable to attend in person, the Lead Coordinator must provide the alternative of having the meeting online. If online, a parent/carer can also attend.
- **The meetings take priority.** Weekly meetings should not be interrupted. The Lead Coordinator should be able to prioritise time with that student without being called off to support others.
- **Rapport is built.** The Lead Coordinator builds rapport and gets to know the child/young person by asking them questions about their interests, hobbies, and other aspects of their lives which don't involve education.
- **The conversations are solution focused** (NSPCC, 2014). The Lead Coordinator should focus on what has gone well over the past week and what has been achieved. Even if the child/young person only manages to attend one day, this is a focus of achievement.
- **The conversations focus on problem free talk.** The Lead Coordinator should focus on the child/young person's strengths rather than their problems or weaknesses. Strength cards can be used (NSPCC, 2014).
- **Scaling Questions are used.** Ask the child/young person how they are feeling on a scale of 0-10 about being back in education (0 being not enjoying it, 10 being enjoying it). Scaling questions can be applied to all different types of emotions. These questions enable an objective quantitative measurement to be obtained which serves as a point of comparison for further weeks.
- **Core aspects about education are reviewed (see Weekly Review Template).** After spending some time with the child/young person, begin to discuss the regular educational topics, attendance, lessons, teachers, homework. Have they followed protocol and are there any other reasonable amendments needed?
- **Closing statement and feedback to parents/carers –** Lead Coordinator to summarise any adjustments to the plan for the next week to the child/young person. Then to feedback to the parents/carers the update on progress for that week. This can be written or verbal.
- **Record keeping -** Each weekly meeting needs to be accurately recorded on the school/college database.

WEEKLY PLAN – TEMPLATE

This is an example of a template to summarise each weekly review.

Year Group/Form:				
Date:				
	<u>Weekly Review</u>			
To be discussed	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Scaling question (0-10)				
Attendance				
Any concerns with safety protocols followed (Y/N)				
Safe spaces needed (Y/N)				
Coping strategies (Y/N)				
Teacher concerns (Y/N)				
Internal support				
External support				
Other:				

End Of Monitoring – Last Session

At the end of the four-week period, the final session is as important as the first session. After this period of monitoring, the child/young person and parents/carers are invited back in for a face-to-face meeting to review the progress or review if there are any changes that are needed. If parents/carers are reluctant to attend in person or it is too challenging with their other commitments, insist upon and offer on an online meeting. This is to ensure that they are part of this feedback loop and understand what support is in place for their child/young person.

In most cases there are three possible outcomes to implementing a plan like this:

The Return to Education Support Plan is a success – This means the child/young person is now attending education full time. They are coping in lessons and they have no other barriers to learning that are causing difficulties. This 'end of monitoring' meeting with parents/carers would be focused upon the successes achieved by that young person. Following this type of success, the student may still require some monitoring, fortnightly or termly.

The Return to Education Support Plan is in part successful – This means the child/young person is now increasing their attendance but is still struggling with aspects of learning inside or outside of the classroom. They are using safety protocols each week to ensure they feel safe. Following this type of review meeting, the plan would most likely be extended to ensure that monitoring can remain for a further four weeks before it is reviewed again.

The Return to Education Support Plan is not successful – Returning to education can be a complicated journey and it is not always successful. Therefore, by reviewing the situation each week, you will be able to assess, review and change the approach if needed. In these cases the individual needs to be focused upon and relevant referrals to external services will need to be made.

Example Emails

Dear
Thank you for informing us about to what has happened for xxx. We are really sorry to hear how difficult this time was and want to do everything we can to help support xxx back to school/college. After any crisis episode we carry out a Return to Education Support Plan which involves a face-to-face meeting. In this meeting we work through a support plan which needs to ensure that we can support xxx safety and hopefully get them back into school/college with as much as ease as possible.
Kind Regards

Dear
Thank you for letting us know what is going on, as we are aware you are involved in treatment at the moment. Please could you share with us any safety plans or discharge summaries when you receive them. We have updated our systems here and will contact you tomorrow for an update. We will take each day as it comes.
Kind Regards

Dear
Thank you for attending the meeting today. We hope that you have found it useful to have a plan to manage your return to school/college. Please remember each week we will be meeting and discussing how the plan is working and whether any more reasonable adjustments need to stay place. If there is anything else that comes up throughout this month, please do let us know and stay in touch so we can support you.
Kind Regards

CONCLUSION

This toolkit should enable you as a school/college to have a framework to help children and young people return to education following an episode of crisis. Please note that every child/young person is unique and therefore plans need to be tailored to meet their individual needs. To ensure the plan is effective it is important that there is a first meeting and a final meeting with parents/carers to ensure that they are collaborators in providing support.

A key component of the plan is the implementation of weekly meetings which will build rapport with a child/young person who has been in crisis. It is essential that these most vulnerable children/young people are given the time and space they need by educational professionals to feel supported coming back to education.

Final Thoughts

It is important for anyone working with children or young people in crisis episodes it is important that those in roles receive support for themselves. This could be in the form of supervision, where they are able to reflect, discuss and feel supported in the complex work that they are carrying out. Also, it is essential that risk is never managed alone. Therefore, setting up a Crisis Intervention Team is advisable to have a everyone involved and able to communicate and work together.

Feedback – Do you want to get in touch or share your experience or development of the plan?

If you try the toolkit or have other ideas that can contribute towards developing it further, then please get in touch. My aim is that this toolkit helps you to develop and support children and young people in your school and college. If you have suggestions or ideas to contribute, please contact.

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