

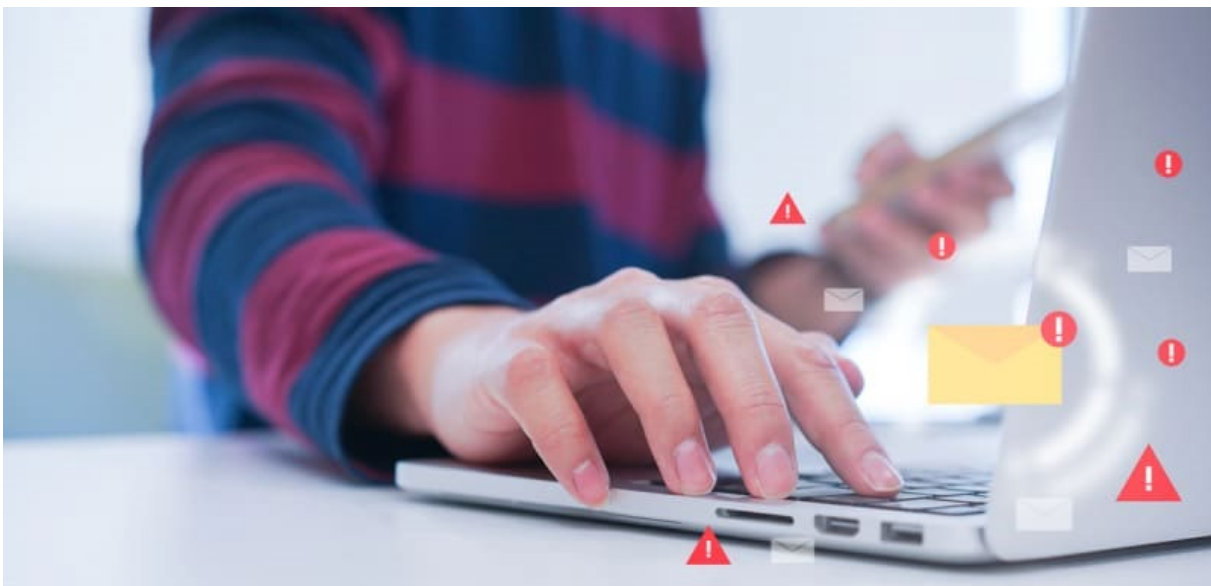
Eight solutions to adapt safeguarding & well-being curriculum for remote learning environments

By Susie March and Linda Woolcock

As schools moved education online in response to Coronavirus, a sudden shift to home-based learning and concerns about students' academic progress meant that key elements of some schools' safeguarding and well-being education were paused or weakened. Concerns about delivering sensitive sessions in remote learning environments have also led to some topics being skipped this year.


At the same time, some safeguarding and well-being risks have increased for many children as a result of the virus and the changes we have had to make. These include, for example, online grooming and sextortion, exposure to harmful content online, economic hardship and instability, domestic abuse, loss and grief, uncertainty and disruption. The isolation of large numbers of children from school-based interactions has also deprived them of critical sources of support and hindered educators' ability to identify students who are struggling or exposed to harm. The increase in disclosures that many schools have received after reopening their campus highlights these factors.

Given these risks, safeguarding and well-being education is more important than ever.



"[The Coronavirus] has up-ended our present and scrambled messages from the future ... PHSE education has never been more vital"

—Jonathan Baggaley, CEO of the PSHE Association



In this blog, we look at different approaches to terminology, explore challenges, and offer eight steps/solutions schools can take as we draw on examples from CIS Accredited schools and on the work of experts in this field to provide guidance on:

- delivering safeguarding and well-being education in remote learning environments—which topics should be adapted or delayed and how can educators deliver lessons on sensitive topics safely?
- key messages for schools as they start to reopen campuses
- broader considerations related to safeguarding and well-being practices.

Terminology

Safeguarding and well-being education refers to ways that schools talk to, learn from and educate students about how to keep themselves safe and well. This includes how to recognise and report harm and abuse, how to form healthy relationships, and develop social emotional skills and resilience. Different countries use different terminology to describe this education. Some commonly used terms include:

- Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is a term from the UK which describes a school subject through which students develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to keep themselves healthy and safe, and prepared for life and work ([The PSHE Association](#)).
- Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.
- Child protection education is abuse prevention student education that is developmentally appropriate and based on children's rights and healthy development. It helps children identify unhealthy and abusive behaviour by others, normalizes reporting, supports reporting persistence, and prevents the development of abusive behaviours. The [Child protection curriculum](#) issued by the South Australia Department for Education is a child safety programme which teaches children and young people to recognise abuse and tell a trusted adult about it, understand what is appropriate and inappropriate touching, and understand ways of keeping themselves safe.
- Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989; IPPF, 2016) sets out our responsibilities to deliver this type of education to all young people—regardless of whether we are facing war, economic depression or a pandemic.

Challenges and solutions

Challenges

There are numerous challenges associated with safely delivering safeguarding and well-being education in remote learning environments. These include:

- Educators' ability to identify and support students who become distressed is limited compared to in-person sessions.

- It is also more difficult to read non-verbal cues and to identify indirect disclosures in an online environment than it is in person.
- The ability to monitor the impact that a session might have on student well-being is limited in an online environment.
- Given the increased time that young people learning from home spend online unsupervised, it's possible that some topics related to online activities could make it more likely that students will go onto harmful websites.
- It is harder for students to reach out for support after a session, whether to make a disclosure or just to discuss the topic in more detail.

Solutions in eight steps

It is critical that schools put in place the right procedures to counteract these challenges. Schools should consider the following eight steps:

1. [Review your child protection policies](#) to make sure that communication channels and reporting lines for staff are still appropriate and understood, and that all staff delivering safeguarding and well-being sessions know who to contact in the event of a disclosure or a student becoming distressed, and how to contact that person quickly.
2. Take proactive steps to [identify students who are struggling](#).
3. Involve and partner with parents where possible and appropriate and keep them informed about the learning programme (see below for resources involving parents).
4. Prioritise key topics in light of the challenges your students are facing. Social emotional learning and online safety have emerged as two key areas for schools to focus on (see below for resources).
5. Use techniques during the sessions to create a safe space for discussion whilst discouraging personal disclosures to the group, including:
 - Group operating norms—set the scene for respectful discussions, and interactions, using a third person technique, the right to pass and confidentiality
 - Use distancing techniques such as stories or case studies to stimulate discussion whilst de-personalizing conversations,
 - Explain that during these lessons they shouldn't share personal stories to the group or talk about other students' stories outside this environment. It is very important that they do share information that makes them or others feel unsafe but privately to a trusted person,
 - Practice [protective interrupting](#) to avoid public disclosures.
6. Provide a list of trustworthy support services and sources of good information, so that students know where to look for further information to minimise the risk of students accessing false or inappropriate sources, particularly online.
7. Make it as easy as possible for a student to reach out for support after a session, either from a trusted adult at school or via a [trusted child helpline](#). Schools should also consider technical solutions like a 'report a concern' button.
8. Review planned topics to determine if any are too sensitive or inappropriate to deliver in a remote learning environment. The PSHE Association provides the following safe topic checklist of questions to consider in this regard:
 - Might the topic be difficult for some students to discuss or learn about in the home environment?
 - Will this encourage or make it more likely that a student will go onto inappropriate or potentially harmful websites as a result of this lesson/activity?
 - Might any content cause distress or anxiety to students?
 - Might any content re-traumatise a student with personal experience of the topic?

- Does the lesson/activity provide sufficient signposting to trustworthy sources of support available to students should they wish to discuss the topic further, make a disclosure, or get advice and help?

Topics to consider postponing

Curriculum and online safety experts suggest that the following topics might be too sensitive to cover in remote learning environments. The school's context and professional judgment should be used in each case:

- Sexual parts of the body
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse
- Intimate relationships
- Sexual consent
- Dating violence
- Pornography

Topics to emphasise


To equip students with the skills they need currently and prepare them for the future, the PSHE Association Coronavirus hub and Childnet International suggest there is much we *can* do safely through distance learning. Topics that can work well for remote/home learning at this time include:

- Strategies for preventing infection
- Ways of promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being
- Sleep and good sleep habits
- Managing screen time, balancing time online with other activities
- Managing online friendships and social media
- Thinking critically about what you see online and building digital resilience
- The importance of keeping your personal information private online
- How to interact with others online and how to recognise and report harmful behaviour
- Online grooming and the importance of staying safe online
- Maintaining healthy eating habits and physical activity
- Study and revision skills
- Careers education
- Shared responsibilities in caring for others

Reopening school campus

Schools that are reopening their campuses should ensure that they prioritise the mental health and well-being of their communities and allow for a period of readjustment. Providing opportunities for people to talk about their experiences, the challenges they've faced and the strengths they've gained allows for important reflection.

Creating safe spaces and opportunities for children to come forward to talk about their worries or harm they've experienced is also critical. We know anecdotally from CIS members that many schools have seen an increase in disclosures since reopening, which has enabled them to provide much-needed support to those students who experience harm in lockdown. Being prepared for these and ensuring that your policies, practices and training are all up to date is also important.



If schools have postponed some safeguarding or well-being topics in remote learning environments, then they should be ready to address these once their campus reopens, prioritising those that have become even more relevant over the last few months. See below for resources for schools reopening their campus.

Examples of safeguarding and well-being practice when reopening campus

Given [the impact of the Coronavirus on young people's and educators' mental health](#), and the [safeguarding implications of online learning](#), schools have been working hard to address not only the curriculum but also wider safeguarding and well-being practices. Key amongst these is recognising that young people and educators alike have gone through numerous transitions in recent months, whether it's the transition to home-learning, moving back to their home country, moving to a new school or university, or transitioning back to school. It's important that schools recognise this and support their communities through these transition periods.

"To rebuild thriving schools, we need to prioritize safe, supportive, culturally sustaining, and equitable learning environments that promote the social and emotional competencies of both students and adults. This requires centring our transition plans and processes in relationship-building and authentic partnerships that honour the voices and experiences of all members of the school community."

—The CASEL organisation in [Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Roadmap for Reopening School](#)

Safeguarding and well-being in Beijing City International School (BCIS)

For BCIS, their mission and their policies underpinned their practices during online learning. The policies they drew on and updated included:

- Child Protection Policy & Professional Code of Conduct
- Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum
- Digital Citizenship—reviewing our responsibilities and agreement to digital citizenship and reaching common understanding with online Zoom meetings.
- Positive Relationships and Well-being Policy

"Counselling and Learning Support services worked together to support student learning & well-being, teachers and families. The Secondary School connected child protection to digital citizenship and online interactions so that students understood the expectations and remained safe and respectful of each other online. Their Secondary Advisory programme is focused on building positive relationships, strategies to support mental health through mindfulness and relaxation practices, staying connected with each other, and strategies to both understand and release anxieties"

—Jane Farrelly, Middle School Counselor/Child Protection Team Leader, Beijing City International School

Jane added: "We know that preparing and knowing what is coming at us helps relieve some of the anxieties we may be feeling. We also understand that rolling into this new academic year we will need to continue to promote selfcare and well-being. We ask ourselves:

- What have we learned?
- What is important to us?
- What is working?
- What do we need to refine?
- How do we keep our community informed about the ever-evolving situation?

The complexities are mindboggling with so many considerations."

"We recognize that a strong emotional student is going to be more well equipped to face the challenges put before them academically, whether through online or in-person learning"

—Julie Lawton, Head of School, Beijing City International School

Safeguarding and well-being in Munich International School (MIS)

In the initial phases of distance learning at MIS, students used the school's established online platforms with which they were already familiar. Microsoft Teams was gradually introduced after communication to parents and training for staff and students had been carried out to ensure that digital safety and usage expectations were clear.

Staying true to the mission and values of your school and using these as a tool to help communicate can be helpful in building community responsibility and understanding. MIS' mission is to: Nurture, Challenge and Inspire, and in order to help make decisions and communicate throughout the crisis, this mission and the school's core values of care, respect, integrity and trust have been used.

Timothy Thomas, the Head of School communicated the plans for reopening school at the end of August and the guiding principles by which these decision have been and will continue to be made, which prioritise the health and well-being of the community, student learning and academic achievement and convenience for the all community members in these uncertain times.

The school has also emphasised the need for social and emotional learning, drawing upon its core values and looking at how these can be applied to keep everyone as safe as possible in the current situation.

"Schooling is not just about academic learning. It is also about social and emotional development. At MIS, we aim not just to support students' achievement in core academic areas, but we also invest significant time and energy into developing students' understanding of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society and to promote students' personal, social, and emotional well-being."

—Timothy Thomas, Head of School, Munich International School

Conclusion

We believe educating students to acquire the skills and attitudes to enable them to take control of their own choices, when much of their autonomy appears to have diminished, should remain central to teaching and learning in schools. This pandemic has not left us powerless, we must continue to listen to student voices, as we plan and deliver safe, appropriate and inspiring social and emotional learning.

Resilience is key. The Coronavirus has significantly affected the way we educate and care for students in our trust. We do however need to ensure that we instil hope and resilience during these difficult times.

We have been forced to reconsider the way we safeguard students and with careful planning and efficient implementation we can make sure the core components of PSHE/CSE and well-being are in place and provide support for child protection through education.

Get more support for this topic at the virtual Mental Health & Well-being Workshop 7–9 October

[Find out more and register](#)

Resources

Online safety resources

- Be SMART online rules for primary aged children: <https://www.childnet.com/resources/be-smart-online>
- Online grooming resources: <https://www.childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals/hot-topics/online-grooming>
- Trust me resources are designed for primary and secondary school educators to help young people develop critical thinking online: <https://www.childnet.com/resources/trust-me>
- Advice on embedding online safety throughout your school: <https://www.childnet.com/resources/embedding-online-safety>
- Online safety resources for parents and carers: <https://www.childnet.com/blog/free-internet-safety-resources-for-parents>

Social emotional learning resources

- SEL <https://casel.org/what-is-sel>
- Aspen Institute resources: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/national-commission-on-social-emotional-and-academic-development/ncsead-our-work/>
- Harvard Graduate School of Education resources: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news-tags/social-emotional-learning>

Back to school resources

- Social Emotional Learning roadmap for reopening schools: <https://casel.org/resources-covid/>

- Coronavirus: Transitioning Back to School: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/june/returning-to-school-after-coronavirus-lockdown>
- Managing Transition Back to School: <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11727/managing-transition-back-to-school-jun2020.pdf>

General resources

- PSHE: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/content/coronavirus-hub> and [watch this video of Jonathan Baggaley, CEO of the PSHE Association](#)
- CSE: <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/thai-international-technical-guidance-sexuality-education-evidence-informed-approach>
- CASAL: <https://casel.org/covid-resources/>

Lead authors:

Susie March is a sexuality educator, find her at [Susie March Consulting](#). Susie has worked exclusively with international schools around the world for more than ten years, delivering Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). She supports and works with school leaders on policy development, curriculum planning and implementation, with the aim of improving CSE teacher training standards through professional development—making teachers confident and skilled in delivering an age-appropriate and whole school approach to the topic. A Council of International Schools (CIS) Affiliated Consultant, and member of the International Task Force on Child Protection, she collaborates with CIS, offering training on strategies for addressing the educational elements of the new Child Protection accreditation standards; these include physical abuse, grooming, online safety, commercial exploitation and disclosure.

Linda Woolcock is Manager, Child protection curriculum at the Department for Education, South Australia. You can contact her at linda.woolcock@sa.gov.au. Linda provides oversight of the [Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum](#) (KS:CPC), a child safety and respectful relationships curriculum for children and young people age 3–17+. The curriculum provides age and developmentally appropriate activities structured in a sequential manner and is designed to be embedded in the teaching and learning programme. The overarching themes focus on ‘we all have the right to be safe’ and ‘we can help ourselves to be safe by talking to people we trust’. The KS:CPC was developed through an extensive consultation process with child protection experts and experienced educators and has been mandated in all department preschools and schools since 2008. Teachers must complete a full day training course prior to implementation. The KS:CPC is also used by 45 international schools across the world and 12 sectors throughout Australia.

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