

# VIDEO FOUR

## SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH LONG COVID IN THE CLASSROOM

### SCRIPT

Welcome to the Long Covid Kids Educational Toolkit.

Video 4 - Supporting Children with Long Covid in the Classroom

\*\*\*

#### Jake, 8, Long Covid with PANS

Video Transcript of Jake (Jake is an 8 year old white boy with an Irish accent. He has dark brown curly hair and is on the sofa. He is wearing an orange top and holding a mint green plush space dragon/cow).

"Everyday I go to school, it's like very tiring, so then I get like very tired and then when I get home I'm like really like angry and upset so it's hard to, like, rest."

\*\*\*

In the previous video, we explored how Long Covid affects education and families.

\*\*\*

In this video, we will discuss Long Covid from the child perspective, ways to support children and young people with their learning, whether they are in the classroom, learning from home, or in an alternative setting. All resources mentioned in this video can be found in the handbook that accompanies this video series.

\*\*\*

During the second and third videos, we mentioned that some children may be too unwell to attend school due to Long Covid. They may need to prioritise their health before returning to school. The Cautious Tortoise flow chart can be used to guide decision making.

It's important to acknowledge that some children may continue to be too unwell for school in the longer term. They might either be unable to attend, or only able to attend for a few hours a week. Their ability to attend might fluctuate due to the unpredictable nature of the condition.

Let's begin by listening to the voices of children and young people living with Long Covid.

\*\*\*

#### Caitlin, age 12, Long Covid

Video Transcript of Caitlin (Caitlyn is a white 12 year old girl, with a Scottish accent. She has brown hair worn down and falling just below her shoulders, and she is wearing a pink top)

"I get help at school by letting me rest and having time away from the school work to help me focus. I also don't have to do PE or any physical activities."

## How do children describe Long Covid?

Children and Young People shared their experiences of living with Long Covid [Speech bubble says "I may look okay, but I feel tired all of the time."], describing how it affects their cognitive skills, energy levels, emotions, and physical well-being.

### Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most commonly reported symptoms and significantly impacts a child's ability to engage in education.

Children describe their fatigue as tiring, exhausting, debilitating, draining and that it makes them feel heavy and weary. Some describe their head as feeling heavy and unsupported, and they may feel like they are about to collapse. Fatigue affects their overall energy levels and makes them feel disconnected from their own lives.

### Cognition

Children with Long Covid often experience cognitive difficulties such as brain fog, memory problems, word finding and difficulty focusing [Speech bubble says "It's like having no clue of anything, even not being able to think"]. They describe their minds as feeling blank, like there is nothing in there. Some compare it to not being able to think or having a car that is slowing down but never quite coming to a stop [Speech bubble says "It's like a car that is going down, going through the gears, getting slower each time but not quite to a stop"]. They may feel like their brain is slow, drained, or broken [Speech bubbles say "It's like my mind is white walls, white ceilings, just blank, like there's nothing in there" and "My brain has drained of everything"]. Descriptions vary by age, vocabulary and symptom severity. Understanding and processing information can be challenging, as if there's a brick wall or void preventing them from grasping concepts [Speech bubble says "It's like a brick wall, a void, there's nothing there"].

### Emotions

Living with Long Covid can evoke various emotions in children and young people. They express feeling sad, depressed, angry, helpless, broken and fed up. The experience is often described as horrible, scary, boring and stressful. They hate the limitations it imposes on their lives and the challenges it brings to their emotional well being.

### Social Difficulties

Children with Long Covid may face social difficulties and changes to their sense of self and identity. They miss their friends and feel left behind, alone, lonely, isolated, and trapped. Their condition limits their ability to participate fully in social activities and affects their sense of belonging and connection.

### Physical Symptoms

Children with Long Covid also experience various physical symptoms and pain. They describe feeling shaky, faint, sick or sore. Common descriptions include aches, stabbing pains, weakness and nausea. These physical symptoms further contribute to their overall discomfort and impact daily life. Long Covid Kids advises that all children are screened for Post Exertional Symptom Exacerbation (PESE), and where this is present they may need to avoid PE or strenuous activities. A healthcare professional can advise, and there is excellent information on the Long Covid Physio website on safe return to exercise and managing PESE.

### Kath, Mother of Hayden, 15, Long Covid

Video Transcript of Kath (Kath is a white mother with an English accent. She has blonde hair worn up and she is wearing glasses).

"My son only has, say 15% mental energy that he used to have and 1% physical energy and, if he goes over that, then he crashes. And, you know, to go over it, it can be just literally going out and everything being noisy and his brain having to work too hard, and then he'll be even worse symptoms and just be even worse fatigue and be laid up for days."

### SEND Code of Practice

If we take the four areas from the SEND Code of Practice:

Communication and Interaction; Social, Emotional and Mental Health; Cognition and Learning and finally Sensory and Physical Needs.

Let's first start with Communication and Interaction: Children with Long Covid may have difficulty expressing themselves and finding words when they are fatigued, are experiencing cognitive dysfunction, (also known as 'brain fog'), and finally they may feel like they don't understand or feel anxious as a result of these difficulties.

Cognition and Learning: Extreme fatigue, headaches, difficulty concentrating, memory problems and 'brain fog' are common challenges for these children [Subtitle on video adds, 'Difficulty Expressing Themselves' at the top of this list]. They may have gaps in learning due to missed school, reduced attendance or a regression in skills.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health: Long Covid can lead to anxiety due: to the duration or severity of symptoms, healthcare experience, lack of understanding of Long Covid from others, missed school or limited social opportunities. Anxiety can also be a symptom of Long Covid for some children. Children may also experience social isolation, a lack of school belonging, a sense of loss or change to their sense of self and identity.

Sensory and Physical Needs: Children with Long Covid may have new or worsened sensitivities to noise and light, changes in vision, and hearing, or distortions in smell or taste. They might also experience chest pains, palpitations, joint or muscle pain or weakness, mobility challenges, dizziness, nausea, headaches, fevers, stomach or gastric difficulties, allergies or other physical symptoms.

\*\*\*

### Hayley, 12, Long Covid

Video Transcript of Hayley (Hayley is a white girl, age 12, with an Irish accent. She has light brown hair worn up and is wearing a black Gremlins T-Shirt)

"The symptoms that I get with Long Covid could be leg cramps if I've done too much, and arm cramps, I get really tired, very often. I find it really hard to concentrate in school and often find myself zoning out.

Some of the things that make it easier to go to school would definitely be my friends because they really just bring the joy and fun of school back, rather than me just having to focus on being behind and worrying, and they will also always be there to catch me if I do need their help, so they really just make just life so much easier for me."

\*\*\*

## Support in the Classroom

As we have already learnt, Long Covid is an umbrella term which can incorporate many different and fluctuating symptoms. Different children will experience different symptoms at different times. This means that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting children and young people in the classroom and a flexible, individualised approach will be needed.

Educators will also need to consider children's access to education and their inclusion, the impact of their symptoms on learning, homework and exams as well as the impact of symptoms on wellbeing, for example considering anxiety, isolation, self-esteem, belonging and friendships.

Educators can use the 'graduated approach' which involves a staged approach to meeting the needs, and making reasonable adjustments to support children at school.

Many of the strategies can be provided from within school support; without the need for an Education, Health and Care Plan or EHCP. However, it's good to note that more specialist resources or provision may require an EHCP though.

It is also important to acknowledge the different roles that an educator may have, for example, a class teacher in a primary school, a form tutor in a secondary school, a teaching assistant or home tutor may have more opportunities for spotting difficulties as they are more likely to see a child regularly - and will be key in putting individualised and flexible support strategies in place.

However, subject teachers in secondary schools and other educators who see children less regularly, may need more information about the young person's needs and what support they need.

Additionally, a SENDCO, pastoral support or head of year may have a more strategic role in implementing statutory guidance for supporting children with medical needs, sharing information with the wider staff group, liaising with medical professionals and liaising with and supporting families.

Communication among all staff members is crucial as different individuals may spot different issues based on their relationship with the child, the time they spend with them or subject specific skills. Additionally, maintaining a strong, positive communication link between the school, child, and parents is vital.

It's important to involve the child in forming and reviewing support plans, as they will know their own situation, feelings, and what does or doesn't work for them.

\*\*\*

## Hayley, 12, Long Covid

Video Transcript of Hayley (Hayley is a white girl, age 12, with an Irish accent. She has light brown hair worn up and is wearing a pink top)

"So, things that I did in school to make it a little bit easier was, me and my friend would sometimes go on walks around that just let us both have a break from the classroom. And, I also had a special maths class that I would go to, to make sure that I was all caught up, and I was able to take it at my own pace, which was really good to have. And, one more thing would be Teams, where I was able to privately message my teacher, to let her know that I wouldn't be in or where she could update me on what we were doing the next day, and what the timetable would be like. So, that was just really good for me."

\*\*\*

## Strategies

In the following sections, we will provide examples of support arrangements or strategies. Please refer to the handbook for further details.

### Supporting Communication and Interaction.

- Break instructions down into smaller chunks, repeat instructions, check for understanding by asking the child to repeat back what they have heard.
- Provide visual breakdowns and reminders of steps to complete or tasks.
- Use simplified language, shorter sentences and visual supports and prompts to reinforce verbally presented information.
- Establish a "secret signal" between the child and teacher to communicate when feeling anxious, fatigued or in need of help or a break.

### Supporting Cognition and Learning Needs:

With respect to fatigue:

- Modify tasks and homework expectations and Allow extra time for tasks or exams.
- Provide rest breaks during tasks, lessons or exams.
- Offer a quiet place to rest during breaks or lunch-times.
- Offer an exit card to leave the classroom without question when needed and/or signal that they can use to ask for help or to show that they do not understand or need a break.
- Reduce attendance expectations and reduce timetables.
- And finally provide opportunities to learn from home or online when physically being "in school" is too difficult.

Next we will look at Supporting Brain Fog, Headaches and Promoting Attention, Memory and Thinking Skills:

- Ensure there is a clear end point for each task with clarity on what the finished task will look like, or a specified end time.
- Use visual prompts, structures, checklists, timetables or reminders.
- Use knowledge organisers, mind-maps or flow diagrams to record ideas visually.
- And last of all reduce the amount of writing or copying required from the whiteboard. Use alternatives such as a laptop, note-taking or mind-mapping.

If a child has missed school and has gaps in their learning or their skills have regressed:

- Identify learning gaps through careful assessment and monitoring of progress.
- Plan individualised support in collaboration with the child and their family to address these gaps.
- Maintain regular contact with the family to share key learning areas and progress.
- And finally make allowances for gaps in knowledge when testing to prevent children's confidence decreasing.

Now we will look at Supporting Social, emotional and mental health needs.

If a child is experiencing some anxiety caused by the duration and severity of difficulties, a lack of understanding, unknown timescales for recovery, missed school or missed opportunities to socialise, there are a range of interventions that can be put in place to support the pupil.

Support could include:

- Provide the child with a supportive keyworker (e.g., ELSA, mentor, Thrive practitioner) to build a relationship with, talk to, and listen to their needs.
- Wellbeing check-ins.
- Evidence-based anxiety interventions.
- And lastly opportunities to express themselves and their feelings for example through art, or drama.

If a child is socially isolated because they can't attend school full-time, have more medical appointments, or participate less in extracurricular activities, you can help by:

- Regular check-ins from a key staff member like a form tutor, teaching assistant, ELSA or key adult.
- Utilise online platforms to facilitate communication and connection with friends and classmates when the child cannot attend school.
- Address the possibility of stigma and a lack of understanding from peers, working with them to understand differences and to promote acceptance, empathy and kindness.
- And finally maintain a close and supportive home-school relationship.

To help a child who's lost their sense of identity and self-esteem due to reduced school attendance and limitations on social activities, hobbies, and sports, you can support with:

- Apply ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) principles for self-acceptance, presence, identifying strengths/values, and goal-setting.
- Provide opportunities for the child to develop and share their strengths and achievements, such as keeping diaries or records of accomplishments.
- Teach problem-solving and self-regulation skills to build resilience in response to challenges by asking questions like: [Speech bubble on screen says "what would x do?"] "what has worked before?", "how can we break this big problem into little pieces?".
- And lastly boost the child's confidence with specific praise that highlights their effort and approach, fostering a sense of achievement and pride.

Next, let us look at Supporting Physical and Sensory Needs:

- You can help manage physical symptoms (such as GI issues, pain, dizziness, etc.) with exit cards, teacher communication, healthcare collaboration, and personalised healthcare plans.
- Recognise that busy, noisy spaces, such as the lunch hall, may overwhelm children.
- Support mobility around the school with early exit passes, route plans and buddy systems.
- And finally liaise with relevant professionals and incorporate their guidance in addressing physical and sensory needs.

\*\*\*

### Input of Children & Young People

Children and young people's input is incredibly valuable when identifying what they want school staff to understand regarding their experience with Long Covid.

\*\*\*

Additional support and resources can be found in the accompanying handbook and also online on the following sites:

- The LCK Support Guide - [Support Guide | Long Covid Kids](#)
- The LCK Support for Schools - [Long Covid Kids Support for Schools \(calameo.com\)](#)
- Twinkl resources for teachers - ["Long Covid" Teaching Resources curated for you \(twinkl.co.uk\)](#)
- And finally Padlet for Schools and Educators - [Long Covid Kids - Schools and Education Professionals \(padlet.com\)](#)

\*\*\*

## Summary

So what can you do, as educators to support children and young people in the classroom:

- Seek the views of children and young people; ask them how they are, what would help them and how they would like to be supported.
- Be flexible and consider the individual child's unique needs; that these may fluctuate over time, put support strategies into place and adapt the child's support plan as and when needed.
- Consider that the CYP's focus may need to be on getting better and wellbeing and that this may need to take priority over attendance and learning for a while.
- And finally liaise with any involved professionals and other school staff to understand the impact of LC on the child's access to education, inclusion, learning and wellbeing.

\*\*\*

## Best Practice:

After watching all the videos in this series, you will have the tools to:

- Know how to recognise Long Covid, understand its varying symptoms in different children and young people, as well as support parents by signposting them to their GP if necessary.
- Understand the importance of prioritising recovery and health before returning to full time education.
- Be aware of effective strategies for supporting children and young people with Long Covid in their learning.
- Be familiar with alternative options for those unable to physically attend school.
- Understand the impact of Long Covid on children, young people, and their families, including issues related to stigma and bullying.
- And finally, know where to find additional information, seek support, and access further training or our accompanying handbook and support guide.

\*\*\*

## Sharon, Mother of "K", age 13 at infection, now 16, Long Covid

Video Transcript of Sharon (Sharon is a white woman, she has long blonde hair worn down and in this video she is wearing a white shirt).

"My daughter did not want to make a video herself as she was afraid of being ridiculed. This, in itself, says a lot about how Long Covid is perceived and what our kids have had to put up with. This is her message to all the teachers out there:

"If you see me in school, remember how hard I've already had to work just to get here, I have had to get myself out of bed. I have had to get washed, and dressed. I have had to have breakfast, do my teeth and brush my hair. I have had to organise my school bag, and then travel in. All this before you even see me. Each of these tasks is a challenge on its own, and trying to do them all together before the school day even starts, is at best challenging, but on a bad day totally impossible. By the time I get into school I am already exhausted. Please take notice of me. Please acknowledge that I am there and what an achievement that is. Do not just ignore me, I already feel invisible to the world. Do not berate me for not staying as long as you may have liked or planned. Be proud that I have made it in at all. Finally, remember just because I could manage it one day does not mean that I can do the same the next."

\*\*\*

Thank you for watching the Long Covid Educational Toolkit Series.

\*\*\*

Video 4 Run time (24 minutes)