



# Staff Wellbeing Re-Entry After Disruption

A Practical Guide for School Leaders

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*Listening to Every Voice. Strengthening Every Mind.*

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## Introduction

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When schools reopen after a period of disruption, the focus rightly turns to pupils. But staff are returning too — and they have been carrying the weight of the disruption while managing their own anxiety, their families, and the demands of shifting to distance learning at short notice.

You cannot pour from an empty cup. If staff wellbeing is not addressed, the quality of support they can offer pupils will suffer. This is not a wellness luxury — it is a safeguarding and operational necessity.

This guide offers practical, realistic approaches for school leaders to support their teams in the first days and weeks after returning from disruption. It is designed to be used alongside the companion guide, *Helping Pupils Settle Back After Disruption*.

## 1. Acknowledge Before You Ask

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Before asking staff to deliver anything — lessons, pastoral care, data, reports — acknowledge what they have just been through. This does not need to be dramatic. It needs to be genuine.

- Hold a brief staff meeting or huddle before pupils arrive on the first day. Keep it short. Say thank you. Acknowledge the difficulty.
- Make it clear that perfection is not expected this week. Good enough is good enough.
- Give staff permission to say they are not okay. Not everyone will, but knowing they can matters.
- Avoid immediately loading staff with new priorities, action plans, or catch-up targets.

*Key principle: Staff who feel seen and valued will give more to their pupils than staff who feel pressured and unacknowledged.*

## 2. Recognising Staff Stress After Disruption

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Staff will not always tell you they are struggling. Just like pupils, they may mask, push through, or assume they should be coping. Watch for changes in behaviour rather than waiting for disclosures.

### Common signs

- Increased irritability or emotional reactivity — particularly in situations that would not normally provoke a response.
  - Withdrawal from team interactions, staffroom conversations, or collaborative planning.
  - Presenteeism — physically present but visibly exhausted, disengaged, or going through the motions.
  - Difficulty making decisions or an increase in small mistakes.
  - Cynicism or negativity that was not present before the disruption.
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- Physical symptoms — headaches, fatigue, disrupted sleep reported informally.

*Important: Staff in safeguarding roles — DSLs, counsellors, inclusion leads — carry a disproportionate emotional load. They are often the ones supporting everyone else while processing their own experience. Check in with them specifically and proactively.*

### 3. Practical Support in the First Week

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Grand gestures are not required. Small, consistent acts of care have a bigger impact than one-off wellbeing days.

#### For school leaders to action

- Reduce meeting load in the first week. Cancel anything that is not essential.
- Protect break times. Staff need actual breaks, not breaks filled with catch-up conversations.
- Provide cover for staff who need to step out during the day. Normalise this without requiring a reason.
- Make refreshments available in the staffroom. A small gesture that signals care.
- Send a brief, warm message to all staff before the return day. Acknowledge the disruption, outline expectations (keep them light), and thank them.
- Postpone any non-urgent reporting, data submissions, or administrative deadlines by at least one week.
- Be visible. Walk the corridors. Ask how people are. Do not disappear into your office.

### 4. Creating Psychological Safety for Staff

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Psychological safety means staff feel they can be honest about how they are doing without professional consequence. In schools, where accountability culture is strong, this does not happen by accident. It has to be built deliberately.

- Make it clear that asking for help is a sign of professionalism, not weakness.
- If your school has a staff wellbeing lead or champion, ensure they are resourced and visible this week.
- Offer confidential check-ins — a 10-minute optional conversation with a member of SLT or the wellbeing lead. No agenda, no notes. Just a chance to talk.
- Avoid performance conversations, lesson observations, or formal feedback in the first two weeks unless absolutely necessary.
- Watch your own language. If leaders talk about ‘getting back on track’ or ‘making up lost time,’ staff hear pressure, not support.

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## 5. Supporting Staff Who Need More

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Most staff will settle within the first week. Some will need additional support. This is not a reflection of their competence — it is a normal human response.

- Be aware of staff with personal circumstances that may have made the disruption harder — family abroad, caring responsibilities, previous trauma.
- Signpost to your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or equivalent support service. Remind staff it exists and how to access it.
- If a staff member is visibly struggling, have a private, compassionate conversation. Lead with concern, not performance.
- Consider temporary adjustments to workload, timetable, or responsibilities if needed. Flexibility now prevents absence later.
- If your school has access to counselling or supervision for staff, promote it actively this week.

## 6. The First Two Weeks — A Simple Framework

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**Days 1–3: Acknowledge and settle.** Focus on reconnection, reduced meeting load, protected breaks, and visible leadership presence. No new priorities.

**Days 4–5: Rebuild rhythm.** Begin to reintroduce normal expectations gradually. Continue to check in. Notice who is settling and who is not.

**Week 2: Sustain.** Return to normal operational rhythm but maintain staff check-ins as a standing practice. Review any staff who are showing signs of ongoing difficulty and offer support proactively.

**Beyond week 2:** Embed what you have learned. If daily check-ins worked for staff during this period, consider making them permanent. The best time to build a wellbeing culture is immediately after everyone has been reminded why it matters.

## 7. Giving Staff a Voice

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One of the most common findings in schools after disruption is that staff feel they had nowhere to process their own experience. They supported pupils, they supported parents, they supported each other — but no one asked how they were doing.

Giving staff a safe, private space to reflect — without their responses being visible to leadership individually — can make a meaningful difference to how quickly and sustainably a team recovers.

*Lumii.me+ provides exactly this — a private, confidential reflection space for staff, separate from the pupil platform. Leadership receives aggregated insight only, never individual conversations. If your school would like to explore how staff voice could support your team's recovery, contact us at [ask@lumii.me](mailto:ask@lumii.me)*

