

## Relational Dosing

### Providing predictable positive doses of protected (safe) experience

(Perry, 2020)

As the end of term approaches, the usual excitement of looking forward to going on a much anticipated holiday, or visiting and connecting with family and friends, is not present in our lives in the same way this year. Our communities have been working relentlessly to respond to the ongoing pandemic, planning for the return to schools in August, and caring for our own children, loved ones and those in need.

As a team, we have been reflecting on these changes and giving thought to how we can both look after and support ourselves, each other, and of course, the pupils on their return in August.

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What lies behind us  
and what lies before  
us are tiny matters,  
compared to what  
lies within us.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Dr Bruce Perry is a researcher and clinician working with child trauma. He has recently written a series of Neurosequential Network webinars, and within one of these he presents the concept of **‘therapeutic dosing’** which is central to Perry’s work on recovery and has been a recurring theme in our discussions.

You can listen to Bruce Perry's 25 minute webinar to get an understanding about how he views the brain and body's response to prolonged stress activation and the neuroscience behind the idea of 'dosing and spacing', as a recovery idea for us in post pandemic education.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ATSl8XhF-k&feature=youtu.be>

Despite the difficult messages we may hear about stress in these slides, Perry concludes his webinar with simple and positive messages of hope about what we can do to make a difference for ourselves and others.

In the current context of COVID-19, we have all been exposed to significant change, unpredictability and uncertainty. It is inevitable that, regardless of our base levels of resilience, over the last few months our stress will have been activated and our resilience reserves will have been affected to a greater or lesser degree.

Our well-being can be better nourished when we let go of what we cannot control and focus on what we can control. There have been many examples of these small but powerful connections in our communities, from rainbows, and bears in windows, to joining our neighbours to clap for key workers.



## Self care dosing in practice

'Dosing' is the continued building of small sustainable experiences and interactions. The brain prefers information in small regular bursts, particularly when anxious. Perry explains that 'doses' should not be long and that they should be drip, drip, drip, throughout our day. Just 3 minutes of an interaction can provide sufficient dosing of a therapeutic experience. With each 'dose' you add something to your resilience cup.



As we know, when it comes to helping others you can't pour from an empty cup, so every moment that is adding to your own resilience cup allows you the space to 'dose' others too, your pupils, your colleagues and your pupils' care givers.

## Self Care - Dosing in practice

Notice what works and protect a little time for these little doses throughout our day



- **How we breathe and how we move can be powerful.** Leaving our 'work space' and stretching and taking a few deep breaths can help ground us.
- **Nature is known for its healing properties.** Popping short walk outdoors during our day can make a difference or planning a distanced walk with a good friend may 'top up our cup'..
- **Some experiences give us a greater sense of purpose and connection.** Making a call, sending a photo message to a friend, writing a letter to someone, making and sending a gift to a loved one, leaving a painted stone outdoors in the community, receiving an unexpected smile from a stranger or offering an act of kindness.
- **Take notice of the things which work for us to reduce our physical stress.** This may happen during the journey we take to work or when we look at a photo of someone or somewhere you love.
- **When we are physically distancing some of us may essentially be losing opportunities for sense of touch.** We may think about how we can enlarge our other senses, such as eating food mindfully, playing relaxing music or keeping an essential oil accessible. There may be ways which can help us connect through touch and movement, for example a self-hug, or joining in with the our pupils to do some yoga or dance.

We may think about ways to be proactive about interspersing these 'doses' throughout our day. And to cope with a moment of anxiety it can be useful to have a grounding technique at the ready.



## Connectedness to others is key.

A short interaction with another person contains many 5 second moments where you can take the power to build true connection. Our brains are constantly running an inner process and this is even more so when we feel stressed. **This idea of a 'true' connection is literally seconds of time within an interaction where you are 'fully present without judgement and with an open heart'**. It is the repeating effect of tiny moments of true connection throughout our day which can serve our calm or support another person's calm.

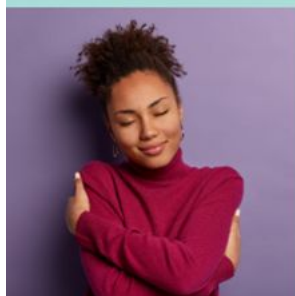
When we begin to consider what we need for our own self care we can begin to think about how we might apply it to others. Supporting another person will depend on knowing that individual. Perry talks about giving others the controllability of the dosing process, and by being present and parallel in the same space and proximity of another is one of the most powerful things you can do. Being quiet, patient and persistent can give the person the control in how they engage and use you. This seems particularly relevant for some of our pupils who may come to school with higher levels of stress activation and for pupils in the first days and weeks of term who need to respond to novel information, for example new classroom layouts, learning concepts they have lost touch with, seeing someone in a mask or forgetting to distance and having to be reminded.

It encourages us to nourish our relationship with every child and allows us to think about how we can 'stay where we are' whilst at the same time remaining connected. For a child or young person, brief moments of feeling connected, belonging, valued and listened to might help them get through those starting days and weeks with a little more calm in their body and mind.

## Connection and Physical Distance in Practice

[www.lisacherry.co.uk](http://www.lisacherry.co.uk)

Send a hug by  
modelling you hugging  
yourself



Have kind eyes, smiley  
face and lots of  
kind expressions



Use the greeting of  
Namaste through  
'prayer hands'



Hand on heart to  
show  
love and connection




When we return in the new term we know a culture of compassion and kindness will lie at the heart of our schools to support pupils back to school. However we are not going to assume that well-being is just 'going to happen' for ourselves or for our pupils. We want to think about how we can be proactive and aspire to steer this within our schools.

During her webinar 'Post Pandemic Nurture', Lisa Cherry, a speaker and author in the field of trauma, resilience, and recovery, encouraged us to actively think of and share with each other the 'relational dosing' that we have or give in our lives every single day that we often take for granted. She asked us to consider the small things that we received each day from people who supported us, and who we supported during the lockdown period that helped to keep us grounded and connected.

Actively taking time as a staff group to think about this question and share our own personal experiences may help us to reflect, and then to consider the discussion points below to think about how we can build on this idea of 'dosing' as one way of steering our school towards one of connectedness and safety for ourselves as well as our pupils.

**6**  
**Relational**  
**Dosing**

**Task**  Discuss with your small group.  
Feedback to whole group.



How can you increase in a drip, drip way what you do and receive each day to stay connected?

How can you convey the message 'You belong' to another member of staff or pupil in a varied, regular and frequent way?

(taken from the 'Whole staff discussion reflecting activities for reconnecting' resource, Resilience and Nurture: A Health and Wellbeing Recovery Curriculum for Midlothian Schools)