

Dear Teachers,

Throughout the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, I (in my role as a Play Therapist) have been supporting a number of families remotely. I have become increasingly concerned by the number of children who are reportedly so scared of catching the virus, that they are afraid to step outside their homes. It has become clear to me that these children are the tip of the 'anxiety iceberg' you are likely to face as schools start to re-open their doors. I have written this story in the hope that it might support you during the transition of schools reopening and moving to embracing a 'new normal': I am sure you will agree that it has been truly brought to life by Sarah Hercod's beautiful illustrations.

My hope is that your youngest pupils might engage with the characters in the story playfully and, under your guidance, imagine themselves to have their own invisible, protective bubbles on in school, thereby employing social distancing but in a way that is fun, meaningful to them and reduces their anxiety.

I hope that this story might be a useful way to introduce a discussion around having mixed, and often conflicted, emotional responses to returning to school - and this might extend the use of the story into KS2. Maybe asking your pupils questions in relation to the story, might give you additional information about how your children are feeling, thereby offering you further ideas for coping strategies.

Suggested questions:

*Which of the Mountain Dragon children were you most like when you heard that you were coming back to school?*

*Can you think of anything else that Mrs Rose-Quartz or Mummy Mountain Dragon could do to help the dragon children feel safe and happy at school?*

*What do you think would be the best / hardest thing about having to wear a magic protective bubble to keep yourself safe?*

Having worked with a great number of children who have experienced distressing life events, I am well aware that children are likely to display a whole range of unexpected, often confusing, and sometimes 'challenging' behaviours, as they communicate the distress they feel, but cannot put into words. It is normal to see children temporarily 'regress' in their social and emotional development, as well as their academic learning, in response to fear - this may also include young children reverting back to being unable to manage tasks (including toileting) independently. Parents and Carers are likely to be concerned and distressed to see these changes in their children, particularly at this time of global uncertainty. Therefore, parents, carers and children alike, will be reassured by you letting them know this range of different behaviours is to be expected at this time and should ease, once their children's anxiety reduces.

Having the opportunity to read this to your class in a calm voice, with a reassuring smile, will help regulate your pupils' nervous systems. It might be that you follow this story up with some creative play to help your pupils process the contents of the story further. Creative play (such as colouring, painting, clay work) in response to the story, offers children further ways to stay calm and regulated in school - creating this sense of 'safety' is an important first step before a child can engage in any meaningful academic learning. Perhaps your class might even embrace some Dragon Yoga!

Good luck!

With all best wishes,

Mandy

