

FREE!

'SUMO4Schools has had a profound impact on the wellbeing of the children and staff in my school.'



7 **SUMO** Strategies to Support Children Returning to School

A Guide for Parents, Carers & Teachers

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7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School
A free resource produced for schools and parents/carers
by the SUMO4Schools Foundation during the Coronavirus pandemic.
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Also from the SUMO4Schools Foundation



7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School Introduction

Most children will need some support to return to school after the disruption of the Coronavirus.

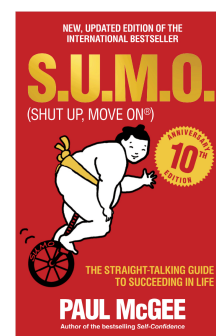
Parents, carers and teachers will need to place their children's mental health and wellbeing front and centre. Many children have low levels of resilience and will need time to digest and process their experience of life during a pandemic. Many will have been missing family and friends, some will have experienced the loss of a loved one, and all will have experienced disruption to their young lives.

Parents, carers and teachers do not have to become specialist counsellors or psychotherapists to provide the necessary support to help most children settle back into a school routine, heal and prevent an escalation of need. For many children, a return to friendship groups and the strong community ethos of schools will be the pull to their parents, carers and teachers' push.

Like all of the **SUMO4Schools** resources, the 7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School are based around *S.U.M.O: Shut Up, Move On* the Sunday Times bestselling book by my business partner and fellow director of the SUMO4Schools Foundation, Paul McGee.

S.U.M.O was first published in 2005 and went on to be a Sunday Times bestseller. It was updated and re-published in 2015. The book has been described as a thought provoking and for many a life-changing read. As well as the 'Foundation Formula' of $E+R=O$, S.U.M.O introduced the six SUMO principles of:

- Change Your T-Shirt
- Remember The Beachball
- Develop Fruity Thinking
- Hippo Time is OK
- Dare to Dream (Ditch Doris Day)
- Learn Latin



Under its alternative name for S.U.M.O: *Stop, Understand, Move On*, the SUMO4Schools Foundation supports young people and the professionals who work with them to:

- Get more out of themselves
- Get more out of others
- Get more out of life

Like all of the SUMO4Schools resources, this free publication has been written by me, a lecturer, teacher and educator for over 30 years. I have introduced and delivered SUMO to countless schools across the UK and beyond since 2014. The approaches incorporate proven psychological techniques including cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), reframing, growth mindset, self-talk, distraction, mindfulness, self-reflection and thinking strategies.

The 7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School are provided as tools for your toolbox to support children as they return to school. I really hope they help. If you have a child who is overly anxious, withdrawn and struggling to readjust, they may require specialist help and you should consult a qualified medical practitioner.

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7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School

SUMO STRATEGY 1 HELP THEM TO BE WORRY WISE

All children will benefit from the reassurance that they have access to listening and support for their worries.

Regular check-ins will reinforce the message that the adults understand how difficult this situation is and that they are there for support, and if a child is struggling, that they want to know. If they fall, that someone is there to catch them.

Worry occurs when the mind becomes focussed on a particular problem, concern or challenge which is perceived as a threat.



Worry can be either constructive: 'Worth-it Worry' or destructive: 'Worthless Worry'.

Worth-it Worry leads to some form of positive action to resolve the problem, concern or challenge. 'Worthless Worry' provides nothing more than hinderance.

A **Worry Bank** is a proven cognitive behavioural therapy technique in which children deposit their worries to help them let their worries go.

WORTH IT WORRY

Leading to positive action



WORTHLESS WORRY

Provides nothing to help



When children deposit their worries, even if only temporary while they read their favourite book or listen to their favourite song, they are being distracted, allowing time for the more considered, calmer and slower rational brain to take over from the stress and anxiety fuelled primitive brain. Over time, they will be able to regularly deposit their worries into the bank. They will also learn to categorise their worries into worth-it and worthless worries.



Worry Banks give the worry a boundary. The worries are still there but they have been acknowledged and expressed by words or pictures, but they weaken and lose control by their expression. They are filling a space other than the child's mind.

A stuffed toy can be the Worry Bank 'guard' and sit next to the Worry Bank to watch over it and scare the worries into staying in the box where they belong.

The children should choose the location of the Worry Bank.

Some will want it far away from them.



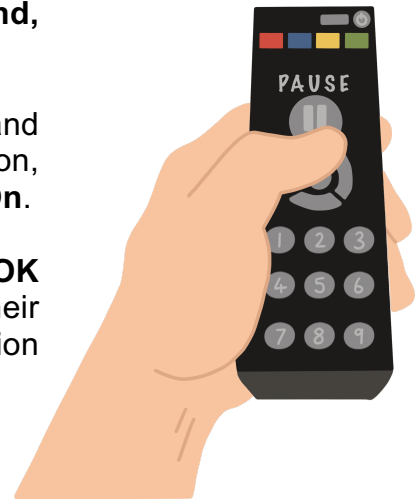
7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School

SUMO STRATEGY 2 HIPPO TIME IS OK

SUMO stands for **Stop, Understand, Move On.**

After the disruption of Coronavirus and many weeks at home in social isolation, many children will find it hard to **Move On.**

The **SUMO** principle: **Hippo Time is OK** allows children time to acknowledge their sadness, their confusion, their frustration and their anger.



To feel mad, bad or sad.

Hippo Time is a useful 'mini break' for quiet, calm and for thinking: to get events, situations and life in perspective. A time to find some balance and some clarity.

When children block negative emotions, they are blocking the path to positive recovery.

Why Hippo Time?

What do hippos love to do?

Hippo Time Detour

They love to wallow in the mud! They do this to get out of the heat, to cool down and to play. Therefore, Hippo Time for children means time for them to process and digest.

I've Had My Hippo Time, I'm Ok Now

Hippo Time is a key part of the SUMO process: Stop, Understand, Move On.

But... and this is the really important bit...

Hippo Time is temporary.

'Move On' means moving out of Hippo Time.

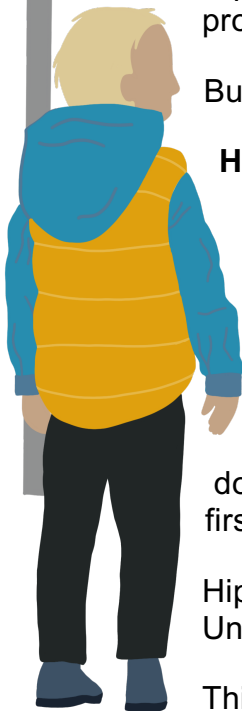
Moving On is saying to yourself:

'I've had my Hippo Time and I'm OK now.'

As much as we would like our children to be able to SUMO immediately, even the most resilient are unlikely to be able to do this. Most children will need to take a **'Hippo Time Detour'** first.

Hippo Time can be seen as a bridge between the Stop and Understand, and the Moving On. A place and time to press pause.

This is OK.



7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School

SUMO STRATEGY 3 LISTEN WITH EMPATHY

A proven technique for helping children to process and come to terms with difficult, distressing and traumatic events in their life is to revisit and discuss them.

Parents, carers and teachers who are able to listen with empathy during a child's **Hippo Time** are performing an important therapeutic function to support children. Placing mental health and wellbeing at the centre.

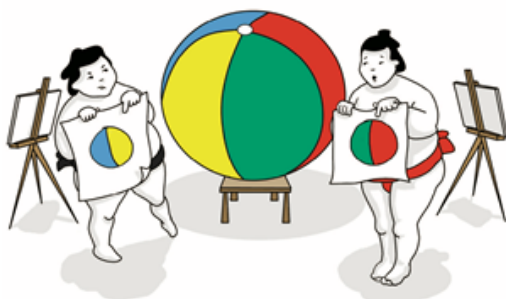
Listening with empathy means sensing your child's emotions and imagining what they might be thinking or feeling. This is like stepping into your child's shoes and seeing a situation from their perspective.

Some children might need help with understanding and processing their experience of the pandemic. In the aftermath of a difficult, distressing or traumatic event, some children can have negative and intrusive thoughts and will need help to re-frame them.

The SUMO principle **Remember The Beachball** teaches children techniques for exploring different perspectives and helps them to re-frame where they are stuck in thinking traps or negative thinking.



Remember The Beachball



Why a Beachball?

Imagine two children sitting opposite ends of a table with the beachball in the middle between them.

The beachball has four colours and one child can see two: red and green. The other child can see the two other colours: blue and yellow.

Both children are looking at the same object but are seeing things completely differently.

Children can get trapped into thinking their way is the only way to view a situation but there may be other, more positive, more productive views.

With support, they can help to turn the beachball around so that they see all 4 colours.



7 SUMO Strategies to Support Children Returning to School

SUMO STRATEGY 4 MATES MATTER

Psychologists agree that a major influence on a child's happiness and wellbeing is the company and friendship of other children.

Indeed, many believe that making friends in school is every bit as important as passing a test in terms of development.

The Coronavirus has required decreasing levels of contact with friends and, in some cases for some children, the absence of any contact with other children.

Many of these children will need support to build and re-build positive relationships, especially those who might struggle to form social bonds. For these children, some specific reaching out to them will be required to encourage them that 'mates matter.'

The more that children experience moments of simple, human connection and kindness, the greater the healing and repair.

The American Psychologist, Professor Paul Schwartz, has five pieces of good advice for children who need to build and re-build positive relationships:

1. It takes one to know one

Friendship is a two-way street. Good friends deserve good friends. Be Kind.

2. Put yourself out there

You'll only find new friends if you are open to getting to know other people and letting them get to know you.

3. Friends come in all sorts of different shapes and sizes.

Its ok to have different types of friends.

4. Good friends are out there

Good friends make you feel good about yourself and that you matter to them.

They might not be perfect – neither are you, but they should care about you and your feelings.

5. Be flexible

Friendships are never about doing one thing. You need to be flexible. Your friends also need to be flexible with you too.



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SUMO STRATEGY 5 BE SAFE

If children do not feel safe, they are going to struggle to learn.

If parents do not feel their children are going to be able to keep themselves safe, they are going to have concerns about their child's return to school, no matter how valid the educational and relational benefits.

Since we can trust that all schools will follow the guidance to create the safest environment possible for children, a critical requirement is to ensure that children clearly understand the rules and boundaries so that are both psychologically and physically safe to return to school.

It is inevitable that some children will find re-joining their school community a challenge. Some will even be frightened at the prospect. Let's remember that they will have internalised the message that only by staying at home can they be safe.

Children can be supported to navigate the return to school by:



Being provided with advanced warning

The earlier children are brought into the conversation the more time they have to process and prepare.



Re-establishing and maintaining routines

The familiar and routine will provide some comfort and sameness for the child to hold on to.



Anticipating and answering questions

Children are likely to have a lot of questions. Some may be repeated many times.

Anticipating behaviour

Some children might regress to earlier behaviours during change.



Be realistic

Have realistic expectations based on the child's emotional intelligence and temperament.



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SUMO STRATEGY 6 DON'T BE A VICTIM

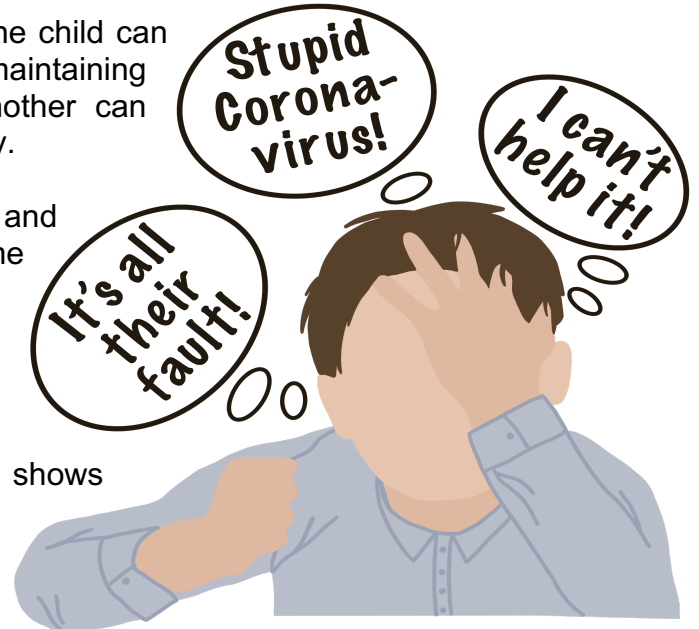
One of the traits of a child who lacks resilience is a tendency to behave like a victim. Of course, there are genuine victims in life. However, in SUMO, when we talk about behaving like a victim, we are referring to those children who refuse to accept responsibility for their own actions.

For example, where one child can take responsibility for maintaining a positive outlook, another can adopt a victim mentality.

They blame the Coronavirus for everything and stack up their excuses rather than take some positive action.

It's as though they wear a T-Shirt with the word "VICTIM" on the front!

The SUMO principle: 'Change Your T Shirt' shows how this works.



Children who choose to wear a victim T-shirt can believe that their current situation in life has nothing to do with:

- The decisions they made
- The actions they took
- The attitudes they adopted.

Apart from that, they take full responsibility for everything!

Children who grow up with an attitude that the events that have happened or will happen in their life directly lead to outcomes over which they have no control, are in **real danger of spending a lifetime wearing a victim T-shirt and not realising their potential.**

Supporting children to replace their victim language with more positive, more optimistic S.U.M.O language is a good start to helping them to take responsibility and avoid the victim mentality: to SUMO:

VICTIM LANGUAGE	SUMO LANGUAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life is not fair • It's not my fault • I can't change • There's nothing I can do • Everything always goes wrong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm unhappy about this, what shall I do? • I need to SUMO: STOP, UNDERSTAND MOVE ON • I can always improve • There's always something I can do • There's reasons why this happened and I can learn from them



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SUMO STRATEGY 7 $E + R = O$

A key element to support children to avoid being a victim and take some responsibility is the **SUMO formula**: The $E+R=O$. Put simply, $E+R=O$ demonstrates how it is the **Event** plus the **Response** that influences the **Outcome**.

**Event +
Response
= Outcome**



Some children can take the view that the formula for life is 'E = O' - the event that leads directly to the outcome.

They can fail to take the importance of their response into account.

In other words, some children can adopt the viewpoint *'the outcomes in my life are down to the events that have happened. I have no control. Certain events will trigger certain outcomes. Period.'*

Of course, this is rarely if ever true.

React

Respond

Children can recognise the role they all play in influencing the outcomes which follow the events and changes they experience, even something as serious as a pandemic.

They can choose how they respond, and their response will influence the outcome.

One of the most powerful lessons that we can teach children is that they have the power to control their thoughts, their actions and thereby influence the results they get.

This closely links with the SUMO principle **Develop Fruity Thinking**.

Fruity Thinking promotes the concept that like fruit is good for physical health, Fruity Thinking is good for mental health.

Fruity Thinking helps children to see the opportunities and the possibilities, rather than use Faulty Thinking which highlights the pitfalls, increases stress and anxiety and leads to self-doubt.

Fruity Thinking teaches children that when they think differently, they feel and behave differently and can ultimately achieve different results. The Fruity Thinking principle therefore helps to make the connection between thinking and results in life.

Develop Fruity Thinking



The SUMO4Schools Foundation is a not-for-profit community interest company providing:

- * Training, professional development & coaching
- * Whole-school strategies to support mental wellbeing & PSHE
- * In-school SUMO workshops for students & parents
- * SUMO curriculum resources & products



STOP, UNDERSTAND, MOVE ON

www.sumo4schools.com