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Year 6 Wellbeing: An Emotionally Healthy Approach to SATs

**For Teachers, School Leaders,
Parents, Carers & Pupils**

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Teachers & School Leaders Guide

Year 6 Wellbeing for SATs

This resource has been created to support you and your pupils during an important year. Included with this resource is a 2-page Parents and Carers Guide, as well as a colourful 4-page Pupil Guide which you can send home and share with your wider community.

Why is Year 6 wellbeing for SATs important

It is widely understood that positive health and wellbeing – including mental health – contribute to a child's ability to flourish, thrive and achieve (Public Health England, 2014), and equipping children with the skills to enhance their resilience against adversity will enable them to navigate challenges without compromising performance.

The phrase "Key Stage 2 SATs" can be a trigger for stress in teachers, parents and children all over the country. Opinion is divided over these National Assessments but it is still vital that Year 6 pupils are able to navigate SATs season without experiencing undue stress or anxiety.

How do we do this?

It starts with a whole school approach to mental and emotional wellbeing, from the foundation years right through to Year 6. This doesn't mean talking about SATs from Reception, but rather teaching positive coping skills on how to communicate how you feel and how to manage when you encounter something difficult or upsetting.

By making space to talk about these things it not only gives children 'permission' to express how they feel, but helps them to understand that emotions are global experiences common to everyone, which helps counter worries of being 'different' or 'ashamed'.

'We've been told about SATs since we were in year 4 – it's too much. We know they happen, and we're not stupid so we don't forget things like that'

Culture

Start with the staff team!

Children are very perceptive and detect when morale is low or their teaching staff are stressed, unhappy or worried. An emotionally well staff team is more likely to instill confidence and reassurance in pupils and creates a positive environment in which to learn.

Look after yourself and your colleagues

- Make sure you take regular breaks.
- Work as little as necessary in school holidays.
- Rely on the support of your colleagues.
- Lead by example if you are in a senior position and model what you expect from the children.

Consider alternative, less academic homework

- Encourage outdoor activities.
- Give your class a creative task such as creating an instrument from recyclables.
- Ask the children to keep a diary of what makes them laugh or a feelings log.
- Task them with doing undetected acts of kindness.
- Give pupils permission to rest.

Remember the children who are looking forward to SATs!

They do exist! These children thrive on challenge, need additional stimulation and want to do extra work. It's important to provide suitable tasks for them.

Be visible

- Display posters informing pupils who to talk to if they are worried.
- Create spaces in class and in assemblies to talk about emotions and how to cope.

'I think my teacher was more stressed about SATs than I was. I didn't know how to deal with that'

Encourage peer support

Buddy systems or peer pals can be incredibly effective at reaching children, and may help prevent bullying or loneliness at school. Sometimes the least confident children will thrive at being given an opportunity to support others.

Language

The language we use to communicate with children about SATs can have a powerful impact on how they're later approached.

The concept of 'pass' or 'fail' for Year 6s is quite hard to digest and communicates that there are only two possible outcomes. No child likes to fail, and having a fear of failure may actually discourage them from engaging, rather than inspiring them to work hard to do well.

- **Emphasise** that everyone will get different results, as it's an individual experience.
- **Frame** SATs as assessments to see how much has been learnt at primary school – this also takes away the emphasis that it's only Year 6 input that counts.
- **Talk** them through techniques to enhance their senses (see page 9 Mindfulness in Schools Project). Immediately after the lunch break is a good time.

Environment

Children and primary schools are often a noisy combination, and so exam conditions can be incredibly alien at this age. Children are suddenly being asked to sit for prolonged periods in total silence, with no external stimulation from others. If they're used to concentrating with a backdrop of noise and movement then they're unlikely to produce their best work in silence.

- **Teach** children how to manage silence, prepare them for the exam hall, and equip them with the skills to remain calm.
- **Create** times and spaces that are tranquil and technology free.
- **Start** early. Not by mimicking exam conditions, but by having quiet times of day when talking and movement are kept to a minimum.
- **Introduce** mindfulness techniques (see the Mindfulness in Schools project) and encourage the children to practice mindfulness at bedtime or when they feel worried.
- **Talk** them through techniques to enhance their senses (see page 9 Mindfulness in Schools Project). Immediately after the lunch break is a good time.

Creative approaches to learning

The children will know that SATs are on the horizon in Year 6, and it's possible to teach them all they need to know without constant reminders. The more children hear the 'SATs' word, the more likely they are to develop anxiety around having to do them.

- **Avoid** talking about SATs until well into the Spring Term – this doesn't mean you're not still teaching them what they need to know.
- **Maintain** a normal timetable in Year 6. Some schools reduce the range of lessons and focus almost exclusively on Mathematics and English purely for SATs reasons. Not only could this get boring for you, but it won't inspire the children. Instead, try a more cross-curricular approach, incorporating SATs learning into other topics.
- **Consider** running a Year 6 homework club after school once a week for children who want a space to continue with their studies. Not every child will have their own bedroom or quiet corner at home to prepare.
- **Get** the children to share ideas on learning techniques. Some children may have incredibly creative ways to remember facts and the children who are able to devise their own plan are more likely to stick to it.

'SATs week at school was good in the end, because after our test every day we had free time – that meant I didn't go home with a full head worrying about the next day'

Spring and Summer Term before SATs

- **Model** positivity about SATs – if the children can see how much you may be dreading SATs, they're going to follow suit.
- **Be clear** about what will happen. Ensure each child knows where they'll be completing their SATs and under what conditions. Make sure they know that the school may have visitors to see how the SATs are being run, and so not to be worried if there are people they don't know in the room.
- **Reassure** children that the outcome of SATs is not an indicator of what they may go on to do later in life. Emphasise this message to parents.
- **Reinforce** how proud you are of their efforts, and that effort is more important than outcome.
- **Explain** what free time they'll have after each assessment, and how the week will run – don't underestimate what an incentive this may be for some!
- **Discuss** coping strategies – what's a good thing to do if they feel anxious or worried? Why can anxiety be a good thing and how can we learn from it?
- **Acknowledge** if there's anything negative in the media about SATs and help them to unpick it. Children are exposed to headlines in a number of settings – from online, newspapers on the kitchen table or what they see in newsagents and supermarkets – so don't assume they're ignorant to media coverage.
- **Invite** parents to a SATs information evening, and send written information. Make clear how you feel as a school about SATs and what you've put in place to help the children through the process.
- **Discourage** use of social media as a platform for expressing negative views. If possible, nominate a designated member of staff to manage parental concerns and reinforce the school policy around pupil wellbeing.
- **Remind** pupils they have already taken SATs in Year 2. It is likely they will not remember, and this may ease their concerns.

'I was so used to being in a noisy classroom that I found it hard to concentrate in silence'

Summer Term SATs Week

- **Make** the weekend before SATs a homework/revision free time. Tell the children to rest and have fun.
- **Consider** offering a free breakfast club. Not only does this ensure that all children have had a decent amount to eat ahead of SATs, but may also provide a relaxed and fun start to the school day. Play music, laugh, provide tasty food and set the mood for the day. This is a good way to make SATs week fun and help the Year 6s feel special.
- **Provide** down time before or after a paper that could include something physical (ideally outdoors) so the children can work off energy, be loud and let off steam. You could also do a year-wide art project for the week.
- **Suspend** assemblies. They're unlikely to add anything, and the children will just see them as something else to concentrate on.
- **Offer** praise and encouragement at every opportunity – children love to hear that you are proud of them.

After SATs

- **Consider** letting the children have a week of fun activities including trips and sports. Let them know about this before SATs week so they feel they have something to look forward to.
- **Return** The end of SATs shouldn't mean the rest of year 6 isn't for learning. Children like routine, so create some fun projects for them to work on during the summer term that neatly wrap up what they've been studying all year.
- **Celebrate** together! Let them know how pleased you are that SATs season has come to an end for all of you.
- **Express** pride and thankfulness in writing from the Headteacher– it goes a long way and reassures them that the outcome won't necessarily reflect the effort they feel they put in.
- **Help** them to understand the results when the time comes. Getting a slip of paper saying they 'didn't meet the required standard' can be crushing for some, and will not tell the whole story. It also doesn't reflect how much hard work they'll have put in. Don't let any of the children feel they failed.
- **Ensure** parents and carers receive ample and appropriate feedback - open channels home to reassure both parents/carers and pupils.

When should we worry about a child?

It would be unnatural for SATs not to induce a certain degree of anxiety. However, rather than being concerned about this, see it as an opportunity to instill resilience in the children, teaching them to manage (rather than avoid) it.

There is, of course, a tipping point.

SATs should not:

- affect a child's appetite
- affect a child's ability to sleep
- alter a child's personality
- induce panic, tears or disengagement from lessons
- be a reason not to attend school

'I still don't really understand what the SATs were for'

If any of the above are evident, then SATs may be causing an excessive degree of emotional distress, and the child in question may benefit from some intervention.

Again, this isn't about removing the stressor, but rather equipping the child to cope with the situation. The children undertaking these assessments are aged just 10-11 years old, so while it's important they go through the process, it's absolutely crucial they do so with the minimum of distress.

What should we do?

Talk to the family

It is important to get a snapshot of what may be happening at home. Ensure parents understand the reasons for SATs and can appreciate the child's perspective. This can help eliminate any negative attitudes the child may have picked up on outside of school. It's no secret some parents have been quite vocal on social media in the past, and while you might not be able to prevent negative comments, you may be able to lessen the impact.

Understand what aspect of SATs concerns the child

Is it the prospect of failure? If so, reinforce that SATs performance is not an indicator of what they are capable of achieving later in life. Is it the environment? Is it the unknown of the SATs papers? Identify the fear and take steps from there.

Check that the children fully understand the purpose of SATs

One of the children who contributed feedback for this resource said 'my mum told me SATs were okay, and not to be worried, but I only believed it when I heard it from my teacher; I didn't want to let them down'. Make sure you haven't projected any of your own anxieties about SATs on to the children.

Will the child benefit from additional support during SATs?

Support can be as simple as having a familiar adult nearby, or maybe completing the papers in a room with fewer students. If you need more formal arrangements, look out for the DFE Access Arrangements for SATs.

Confront any media coverage

If there's been anything negative in the media, ask your pupils to talk about what they've seen and how they feel. Reinforce the reality; children will listen to you above their parents and the media when it comes to SATs.

Good luck!

Please do remember to hand out the pupil and parents / carers guide so we can all help to ensure an emotionally healthy approach to SATs throughout Year 6 and the rest of the school.

Finally do share any thoughts or feedback on Twitter using the hashtag #SATswellbeing or email us via hello@thirdspacelearning.com.

'Feedback and encouragement from my teachers and Headteacher meant a lot'

References & Further Reading

ChildLine Annual Report 2015-2016

www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/annual-reports/childline-annual-review-2015-16.pdf

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www.mindfulnessinschools.org

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www.education-forum.co.uk/prep-for-sats-exams-damaging-childrens-mental-health/

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www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355766/Review2_Resilience_in_schools_health_inequalities.pdf

Key Stage 2 tests: how to use access arrangements

www.gov.uk/guidance/key-stage-2-tests-how-to-use-access-arrangements

About the authors

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Rachel Welch is a freelance writer and speaker specialising in mental and emotional wellbeing. She was the director of SelfharmUK for 6 years, establishing the project from the very beginning, and now works widely across the UK regularly speaking in schools and at conferences. Rachel has a long personal history of mental ill-health and the reality of recovery, and is currently studying for a Masters Degree in Mental Health Science.

Third Space Learning

At Third Space Learning we specialise in Maths interventions for primary school. As well as many free Key Stage 2 classroom resources, diagnostic tests, and sample SATs questions, we also provide 1-to-1 Maths interventions for pupils at primary schools.

Maths specialist tutors work 1-to-1 each week with KS2 pupils, who are at risk of not meeting their age-related expectations, to help them accelerate their progress and boost their confidence and love of Maths. Over 6,000 pupils are currently being supported through SATs with these 1-to-1 lessons every week.

For free Maths resources and information on catch-up and booster Maths interventions for Years 3 to Year 6, visit:

www.thirdspacelearning.com

With thanks to the former Year 6 pupils of Sheringham Community Primary School and Nursery in Norfolk whose quotes appear in this resource.

*'If I could tell
year 6 children
one thing it's
this: don't
stress;
they're not
as bad as you
think'*

Parents and Carers Guide: Year 6 Wellbeing for SATs

Why is Year 6 wellbeing for SATs important

It is widely understood that positive health and wellbeing – including mental health – contribute to a child's ability to flourish, thrive and achieve (Public Health England, 2014), and equipping children with the skills to enhance their resilience against adversity will enable them to navigate challenges without compromising performance.

The phrase "Key Stage 2 SATs" is can be trigger for stress in teachers, parents and children all over the country. Opinion is divided over these National Assessments but it is still vital that Year 6 pupils are able to navigate SATs season without experiencing undue stress or anxiety.

Keep talking

The most positive thing you can contribute to your child's wellbeing during SATS or at any time is to talk to them, reassure them, and where possible, provide a relaxed home environment.

What can I do as a parent / carer?

- Attend any meetings the school holds about SATs.
- Direct any questions or concerns you have about SATs to your child's teacher, rather than worry your child with them.
- Give your child opportunities to go outside and avoid overuse of screens - this can apply to leisure pursuits as well as how they study.
- Try to provide a quiet corner of the house for homework and study, that's as free from distractions as possible.
- Encourage your child to talk to their teacher or another adult they trust if they express persisting anxieties about SATs. Remember that a small amount of anxiety is normal and not harmful.
- If your child is unwilling to talk to their teacher, talk to them yourself.
- Plan something nice and fun for the weekends before and after SATs – this will help your child start the week well and also give them something to look forward to.
- Ensure your child is eating and drinking well, and getting a suitable amount of sleep.

Remember this about SATs

1 SATs focus on what they know about Maths and English

They won't reflect how talented they are at Science, Geography, Art or PE, and they certainly won't highlight positive personal characteristics such as kindness and integrity.

2 SATs results don't always tell the whole story

The results will say they DID or DIDN'T meet a certain standard, but not necessarily by what margin. Additionally, the thresholds tend to change each year according to overall national performance, so what was classed as 'did meet the expected standard' in 2016 may have been considered a 'did not' in 2015. Your school may be able to provide you with more detailed feedback, so don't let your child see SATs as a simple case of 'pass' or 'fail'.

3 SATs last for one week

In reality it's just one or two papers lasting 30-60 minutes each day. You can't emphasise enough the importance of keeping that in perspective.

What should I do if I'm worried about my child?

It would be unnatural for SATs not to induce a certain degree of worry or anxiety but there is, of course, a tipping point. SATs should not:

- affect a child's appetite
- affect a child's ability to sleep
- alter a child's personality
- induce panic, tears or disengagement from lessons
- be a reason not to attend school

If any of the above are evident, then SATs may be causing an excessive degree of anxiety, and your child may benefit from additional support. This isn't about removing the reality of SATs, but rather equipping your 10 or 11 year old child to cope with the situation and be stronger for it.

Steps to take:

Talk to the school

Is your child showing the same symptoms at school as they are at home? Is there anything else going on at home which may be contributing to your child's overall level of stress? Work with the school so everyone concerned can be offering the support that's needed.

Spend time with your child

Try to understand what aspect of SATs concerns them most. Is it the worry of 'failing'? Is it the worry of getting stuck on a paper? If your child can pinpoint what's bothering them most, you can take specific steps to help reassure them.

Try not to project your own anxieties or views on the SATs

If you don't believe in SATs, or do not think your child should be doing them, then neither will they.

Confront any media coverage

Show clippings if there's been anything negative and ask them to talk about what they're seen and how they feel. Reinforce the reality.

Encourage your child to talk to their teacher

SATs are obviously linked to school, so don't be surprised if they favour the reassurance of teachers above family members!

Children are very resilient and, with support from you and the school, most will have a very positive experience of SATs.

Good luck!

Did you know you've already taken your SATs once?

You may not even remember but all pupils do SATs in Year 2. In May this year you'll be sitting SATs again, this time as a Year 6 pupil. Here are some tips and advice to help you get the most out of them.



What are SATs?

SATs are assessments to measure what you've learnt in Maths and English.

They help the Government find out how your school has taught you and your secondary school understand you a bit better ready for when you start.



There are three Maths papers and three English papers.

You'll need to complete them within a fixed time (30 minutes to 1 hour) without talking to anyone else.

What's the best way to do my SATs?



- Listen to what your teacher says. Your teacher is cheering you on and wants you to do your best.
- Make sure you get plenty of sleep and stay well fed – sleep and food help keep the brain moving.
- Read the questions carefully. This can help to avoid any silly mistakes!
- Don't worry if there's something you can't answer. Take a deep breath! You can always move on and go back later but it's better to write something rather than nothing.
- Keep in mind year 6 SATs are just one week of your entire life.

'Stay focused in class so you don't have loads of extra study at home'
Current Year 7 pupil, 2016

What else should I know?



There are lots of things we could tell you, but here are the most important three bits...

- 1** SATs are just tests for Maths and English. They don't show how kind, funny, creative or quirky you are – and all those things need to be celebrated! Your value and worth is much greater than your SATs results.
- 2** SATs don't tell the whole story. Whatever your results are, trying hard is the important thing. You should be very proud to have made it through to the end of primary school and to be sitting these tests. It's a MASSIVE achievement.
- 3** Children in Year 6 will be feeling lots of different things when it comes to their SATs.
 - You might feel **unsure** and have lots of questions
 - You might feel **confident** and **excited**
 - You might feel **anxious** about a particular topic
 - You might feel **calm** and **collected**
 - You might feel a bit **nervous**
 - You may just **wish they were over** so you can enjoy the summer

These are all normal reactions. However you feel there will be other children feeling the same. Remember to talk to people you trust and share how you feel.



Who can I talk to?

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Your parent
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Your grandparent
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Your carer
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.....
Your teacher
.....

.....
Another adult at school
.....

Good luck Year 6!

☆ ☆ **Everyone is behind you; may you
shine like the stars you are.** ☆ ☆