Four Pillars School Starter Kit

A practical first week for one class or tutor group

By Counsellor Tomass J. Wood • Tom Tom Universe • October 2026

Headteacher briefing

Approve a small, one-week introduction to a shared language for thoughts, feelings, routines and connection. Start with one willing class or tutor group, nominate a lead and review pupil and staff feedback on Friday before deciding what comes next.

What the Four Pillars mean

Pillar	Shared meaning
Brians	Thoughts and needs. “Brian” is Tom Tom’s playful name for a brain: Curious Brian, Worry Brian or Comfort Brian. These are metaphors, not separate brains or diagnoses.
Waves	Feelings and changes in energy or overwhelm. Adults help pupils notice what support they need.
Circles	Familiar routines and predictable steps, with support when something changes.
Bridges	Connections through people, interests, communication and help with learning.

The commitment

Allow 15 minutes for staff preparation, one 25-minute introductory lesson and a two-minute check-in on each remaining day. Set aside 10 minutes for the end-of-week staff review. Use ordinary classroom materials and one pupil sheet per learner; no specialist purchase is needed for this introduction.

Who does what

The headteacher approves the scope. The class teacher delivers it. The SENCO or inclusion lead checks communication access and consistency with existing support. A named lead gathers brief feedback and agrees the next step.

What a successful first week looks like

Pupils are offered an accessible way to identify a need or preference; adults respond with a practical adjustment. Participation is optional. This is an introductory educational framework, not a diagnostic tool or a claim of proven impact. A first-week trial can show usability and acceptability, not effectiveness.

Pack contents: page 2 teacher guide • page 3 sample lesson • page 4 pupil sheet • page 5 implementation checklist.

Teacher quick start guide

Start small. Use the four words alongside language pupils already know. If a metaphor is confusing, use “thoughts”, “feelings”, “routines” or “connections” instead. Pupils do not have to learn new terminology to receive support.

Prepare in 15 minutes

Read the briefing and lesson. Copy page 4 and gather pencils. Agree a help signal and a supported break option that fit existing school arrangements. Check communication preferences with the pupil and relevant staff; keep established AAC available. Choose a fictional example so nobody has to disclose personal experiences.

Day	What to do	Adult follow-through
Monday	Teach the 25-minute lesson on page 3.	Offer one support choice and explain how to request it.
Tuesday	Brians: “What might help with this task?”	Offer a worked example, smaller step or processing time.
Wednesday	Waves: “Would you like support or to pass?”	Offer less noise, a supported break or quiet company.
Thursday	Circles: show what happens now and next.	Explain one change in advance and offer a familiar cue.
Friday	Bridges: identify a helpful person, interest or way to ask.	Ask what to keep or change; complete page 5.

Use a simple response each time

Notice without guessing → offer a choice → allow processing time → follow through. For example: “This room is noisy. Would a quieter place or staying here help? You can point or pass.” Check again later; the same support will not suit every pupil or every day.

Keep participation accessible

Accept speech, writing, drawing, gesture, signing, objects, symbols or established AAC. Offer one prompt at a time and an individual check-in. Do not infer agreement from silence. For older pupils, use an age-respectful discussion about task demands and support; cartoon language is optional.

Support rather than score

Never rank pupils by Wave size or use the pillars as rewards, sanctions or a public behaviour chart. Avoid demanding eye contact, stillness or explanations during distress. Reduce demands and follow the pupil’s existing support plan. Use the school’s safeguarding procedures for any concern or disclosure.

Sample lesson for the first day

25 minutes • Suggested starting point: primary class • Adapt for tutor time or individual support

Learning intention and preparation

Pupils can choose one way to show what might help them learn or feel supported. Have page 4, pencils and the pupil's usual communication tools ready. Agree how pupils may pass, take a supported break or speak privately.

Minutes 0 to 3 Explain the choice

Say: "We are trying four words to help us talk about what helps us at school. You can talk, draw, point, use your communication aid or pass. You do not have to share anything private." Model a simple adult preference: "A clear first step helps me start."

Minutes 3 to 8 Introduce the pillars

Brians: "Our minds can be curious, worried or ready to imagine." Waves: "Feelings and energy can change." Circles: "Knowing what comes next can help." Bridges: "People, interests and ways to communicate can help us connect." Explain that these are pictures in language; pupils may use their own words.

Minutes 8 to 13 Try a fictional situation

Read: "Tom Tom arrives expecting art. The timetable has changed to a noisy group activity. He stands near the door and has not joined in." Ask: "What might help? We cannot know exactly how he feels just by looking."

Offer possibilities: Brians — show the first step; Waves — offer a quieter place; Circles — explain the new timetable; Bridges — offer a trusted adult or familiar partner. Accept more than one answer. Ask how an adult could check Tom Tom's preference.

Minutes 13 to 20 Choose one helpful thing

Offer page 4. Pupils may complete one section, several or none. Model with the fictional character first. Support pupils individually without filling in assumed feelings. If an adult records an observation, label it as an adult observation and check it with the pupil where possible.

Minutes 20 to 23 Practise asking and responding

Invite a voluntary rehearsal: point to "help", show an agreed signal or choose a support. The adult responds: "Thank you for showing me. Let us try that." If a requested option is unavailable, explain and offer an acceptable alternative.

Minutes 23 to 25 Close and follow through

Ask privately or through a choice: "Was this useful, not useful, or are you unsure?" Passing remains an option. Name one support the class can access today. Collect sheets privately only if pupils want to share them; do not display personal responses.

Adaptations: younger pupils can choose between two concrete objects or pictures. Secondary pupils can explore a changed deadline or group task. For complex communication needs, use familiar symbols and agreed access methods with staff who know the pupil; shorten the session and allow extra response time.

My Four Pillars pupil sheet

Name or chosen mark if you want _____ Date _____

You can write, draw, point or use your usual way to communicate. Choose one part or more. You can leave anything blank or pass. An adult can help you record your choices.

Brians My thoughts and learning

Something I am interested in, thinking about or want help with:

_____

_____

Waves My feelings and energy

My own word, mark or picture for how things feel now:

_____

Something that might help: quiet / movement / company / a break
Something else _____ / not sure / pass

Circles What happens next

A routine or next step I would like to know about:

_____

_____

Bridges Connection and help

A person, interest or way of asking that helps me:

_____

_____

My choice today

I would like: help now / a private check-in later / no check-in / pass

I want to share this with _____

One thing we can try _____

For the adult: confirm the pupil's choice and agree when to check back. Explain that if something suggests a safety concern, you may need to tell an adult who can help. Keep the sheet private and follow school procedures.

First week implementation checklist

School _____ Class or group _____

Lead _____ Week beginning _____

Before the first lesson

☐ Headteacher agrees a one-class introduction and names a lead.

☐ Teacher reads pages 1 to 3 and allocates the lesson and brief check-ins.

☐ SENCO or relevant staff check access, existing support and break arrangements.

☐ Pupil sheet is ready in suitable formats; usual communication aids stay available.

☐ Staff agree private handling of sheets and how to respond to concerns.

☐ Families receive a brief explanation through the school's usual channel.

During the week

☐ Explain the four metaphors and the option to use ordinary language or pass.

☐ Deliver the lesson and offer the Tuesday to Friday check-ins.

☐ Respond to requests with a practical adjustment wherever possible.

☐ Keep a short, non-identifying note of what helped or created difficulty.

☐ Ask pupils what they want to keep, change or stop using.

Friday review in 10 minutes

Record observations, not scores for good behaviour. Do not interpret quietness, compliance or a completed sheet as evidence that a pupil feels better.

Review question	Brief note
Could pupils access a choice, including passing?	
Which support did adults offer and follow through?	
What did pupils find useful, confusing or unhelpful?	
Was the time commitment manageable for staff?	

Decision: ☐ Continue with adjustments ☐ Pause and adapt ☐ Stop

Next action _____ Owner _____ Date _____

Optional message for families

"This week we are introducing Tom Tom's Four Pillars: thoughts, feelings, routines and connection. Pupils can use words, pictures or their usual communication methods to show what helps. They can also pass. Please tell us any language or support that already works well for your child."

Use this week for local improvement. Any later formal research, external sharing of pupil information or publication needs a separately agreed process; this kit does not provide research consent.