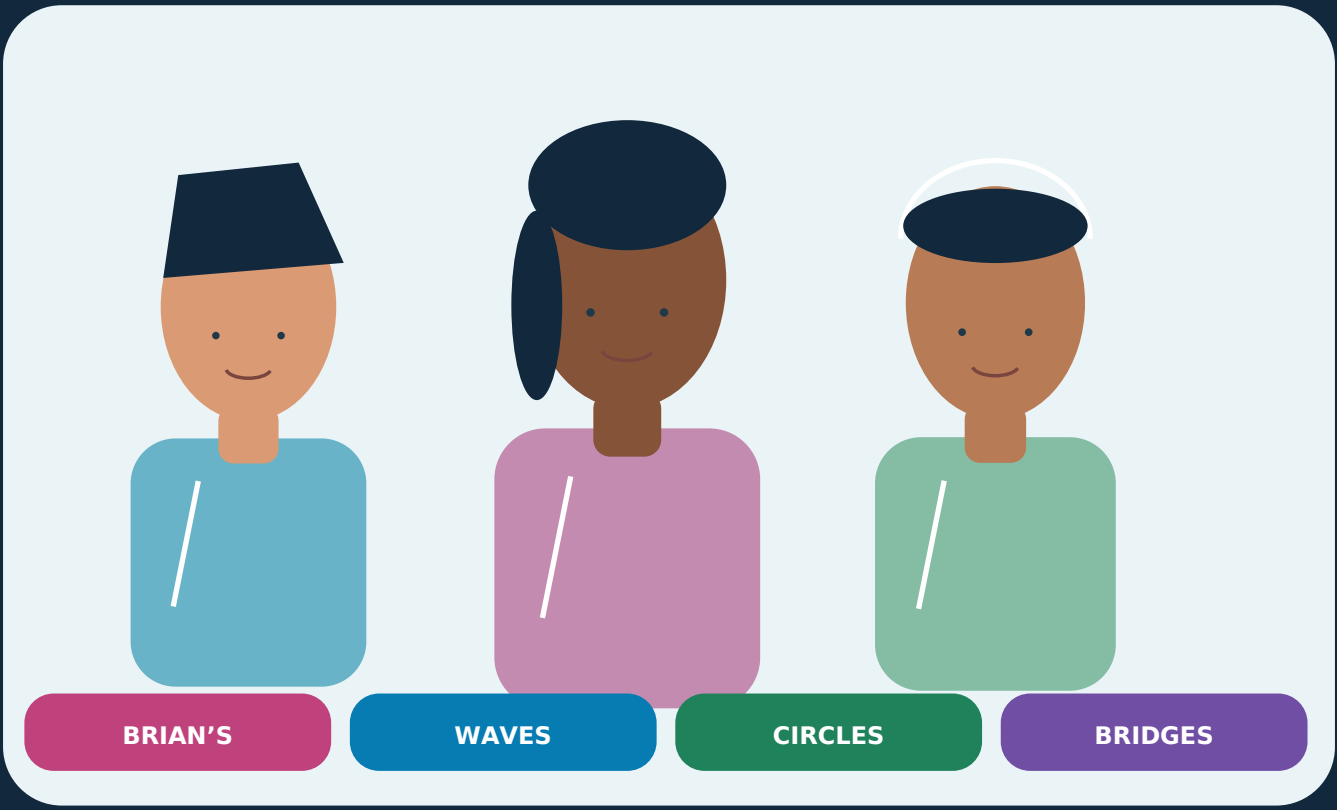
TOM TOM UNIVERSE

THE TOM TOM WAY
FOUR PILLARS

A Secondary Schools Resource

Identity • Emotional literacy • Belonging • Self-advocacy

For ages 11–18 | KS3, KS4 and sixth form



A complete staff implementation guide, eight lessons and reproducible student materials

By Counsellor Tomass J. Wood

What this resource is

STAFF GUIDE

The Tom Tom Way is a structured, story-informed vocabulary for helping adolescents notice inner experiences, navigate emotional intensity, identify what supports them and choose ways to connect. It builds on four linked concepts: Brian’s, Waves, Circles and Bridges.

This secondary edition has been written for real school life: crowded corridors, subject changes, friendship tensions, online communication, revision pressure, identity development and the increasing independence expected of older pupils.

WHAT STAFF CAN USE IMMEDIATELY

A whole-school quick start, staff briefing, daily response routine, eight ready-to-teach lessons (with differentiation), case discussions, printable student worksheets, an individual support plan, a family handout and an evaluation template.

An important distinction

The Four Pillars are the author’s developing educational framework. They are not a diagnosed condition, psychological test, accredited therapy or independently proven intervention. Related research on social-emotional learning and inclusive teaching informs some of the practices suggested here; it does not demonstrate effectiveness of the Tom Tom framework itself.

How to read this pack

- Leaders and SENCOs: start with pages 4–6, 19–24, and 44.
- PSHE and tutor-time staff: use the eight-lesson sequence on pages 25–33.
- All classroom staff: use the shared language, scripts and inclusion guidance on pages 11–18.
- Young people: student sheets are private, optional thinking tools; never require public disclosures.

CORE PRINCIPLE

A young person is more than a behaviour, label, diagnosis, grade or difficult moment. The Four Pillars are prompts to listen and adapt, not to categorise pupils or transfer responsibility for accessibility onto them.

Inside this secondary school pack

CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGES	WHAT YOU GET
Foundations	4–10	Quick start; adolescent identity; four pillars explained; working model
Everyday school practice	11–18	Staff language; co-regulation; SEND; subject-specific and real-life scenarios
Embedding the approach	19–24	Whole-school roll-out; training; student voice; assessment; safety
Teaching sequence	25–33	Eight complete lessons, 40–50 minutes each
Printable resources	34–42	Eight student worksheets; support plan; staff observation log
Family, review and sources	43–46	Family information; 6-week review; glossary; references

A practical route through the materials

01 Agree the purpose. This is optional school language for wellbeing conversations and classroom access, not a replacement for PSHE, SEND provision or behaviour policy.

02 Teach the model. Introduce the four ideas with fictional scenarios before asking for personal reflection.

03 Practise the language. Use a calm, private, non-judgemental prompt only when it helps a pupil.

04 Review with pupils. Ask what is useful, what feels childish, what needs adapting and what they do not want to use.

05 Evaluate modestly. Gather voluntary feedback and track practical access changes without promising mental-health improvement.

BEFORE YOU SHARE THIS PDF

Agree safeguarding processes and local accessibility adaptations with your designated safeguarding lead (DSL), SENCO and PSHE lead. Staff must follow current school policies and statutory guidance.

Quick start: one-page implementation

LEADERSHIP

WHEN	ACTION	WHO
Before launch	Designate a lead; review PSHE/SEND fit and safety; consult student voice; check resources.	SLT / PSHE / SENCO
Week 1	Give a 20–30 minute staff briefing; agree consistent terms and opt-out language.	Year leads / all staff
Weeks 2–9	Deliver eight flexible lessons in PSHE or tutor time; model the language neutrally.	PSHE / tutors
Daily	Offer private access supports: movement, written instructions, quiet check-in and clear transitions.	Teaching and pastoral staff
After 6 weeks	Collect anonymous student feedback and staff notes on what pupils found useful.	Project lead
After 10–12 weeks	Review participation, accessibility, burden, safeguarding and whether to adapt or stop.	SLT / pupil reps

The simple four-question prompt

BRIAN'S

What might be going on in my thinking or feeling right now?

WAVES

How intense does this feel, and what would make the next few minutes safer or easier?

CIRCLES

What routines, environments, people or resources help me feel grounded?

BRIDGES

What communication, support or shared interest could help me move forward?

Staff rule: ask one question at a time. You do not need to use all four. Prioritise safety, dignity, choice and an appropriate learning adjustment.

Why identity matters in adolescence

Secondary pupils are developing a sense of who they are beyond family labels: their interests, identities, relationships, communities, values, hopes, culture and experiences of difference. A pupil may be confident in one subject and frightened of being noticed in another.

The educational opportunity

- Self-description: give a young person permission to describe strengths, needs and preferences in their own words.
- Agency: support them to choose from safe options rather than being told what they “should feel”.
- Belonging: recognise that friendships, identity and being respected at school influence engagement.
- Help-seeking: make it ordinary to ask for clarification, a break, space, more time or a trusted adult.
- Reduced shame: separate the behaviour being addressed from a fixed judgement about the pupil.

EXAMPLE: A YEAR 9 STUDENT

A pupil says “I’m the problem in every group.” A useful adult response is: “That sounds hard. One difficult group task does not define you. What was happening around you? What would help you participate safely next time?”

Build identity without making assumptions

HELPFUL QUESTIONS

Do ask: “What matters to you?”, “When do you feel most like yourself?”, “What helps you feel respected?”, “Which part would you like support with?”

AVOID THESE SHORTCUTS

Avoid: deciding a pupil’s identity from behaviour, asking them to represent an entire group, requiring diagnostic disclosures, or turning their personal reflections into display work.

Students who do not identify as neurodivergent can use the same vocabulary. Neurodivergent pupils may reject some terms: their preference takes priority.

The four pillars: one connected model

The four concepts are lenses, not boxes. A situation often involves several at once. Students can choose to use a single lens or none.

BRIAN'S

Notice beliefs, thoughts, hopes, conflicts and emotions.

WAVES

Identify intensity, stress signals and safer next steps.

CIRCLES

Find environmental predictability and stabilising routines.

BRIDGES

Choose ways to connect, ask, participate and repair.

A worked example: a late assignment

PILLAR	WHAT IT MIGHT REVEAL
Brian's	"I will look stupid if I ask what to do."
Waves	Anxiety is rising; starting feels physically uncomfortable.
Circles	The online platform changed unexpectedly; the pupil lost the usual sequence.
Bridges	A written checklist or a two-minute teacher conversation creates a way in.

THE QUESTION THAT CHANGES THE RESPONSE

Instead of "Why haven't you done it?", try "What got in the way, and what would make the first step doable?"

Brian’s: thoughts, identity and choices

BRIAN’S

THE CORE IDEA

Brian’s is a child-friendly metaphor for different thoughts, expectations, fears, interests and feelings. With older pupils, offer “inner perspectives” or “different parts of my thinking” if Brian’s feels too young.

Why this can matter at secondary age

The framework helps separate “I am a failure” from the temporary thought “I am afraid I will fail.” It supports curiosity about internal conflict without treating thoughts as facts.

How to teach and use it

01 Model two believable positions: “Part of me wants to ask; part of me worries about looking silly.”

02 Use third-person or fictional scenarios first; invite optional private response only.

03 Ask what matters to the young person, not which “Brian” the adult thinks they have.

An age-appropriate example

CLASSROOM SCENE

Year 10: “My Achievement Brian wants to revise all night; my Health Brian says I need sleep.” Discuss a balanced, safe decision.

Respect this boundary

Do not use Brian’s as a diagnosis, imply separate personalities or press for disclosure.

Waves: recognising changing intensity

WAVES

THE CORE IDEA

Waves represent the rise and fall of emotional or sensory intensity. Students can use numbers, colours, words, a physical signal map or no rating at all.

Why this can matter at secondary age

The aim is earlier recognition and flexible support. A pupil can learn that emotions vary, but must not be expected to self-regulate alone when support or an environmental change is needed.

How to teach and use it

01 Teach the difference between low, rising and high intensity using invented examples.

02 At higher intensity, prioritise fewer words, time, safety and an agreed adjustment.

03 Afterwards, explore what helped, without punishment disguised as reflection.

An age-appropriate example

CLASSROOM SCENE

Year 8: “My wave rose in the noisy canteen. A different lunch space and a friend helped me settle.”

Respect this boundary

Never demand a rating publicly, suggest that a wave score reveals risk, or promise quick calming.

Circles: safety, routine and predictability

CIRCLES

THE CORE IDEA

Circles are the patterns, spaces, connections and objects that make school life more navigable: route plans, seat preferences, clear instructions, trusted adults and familiar routines.

Why this can matter at secondary age

Predictability can free attention for learning. Students also need respectful opportunities to grow and explore without unwanted exposure or removing adjustments.

How to teach and use it

01 Invite a private “what helps” map and ask which supports can be put in place.

02 Offer advance notice for timetable or assessment changes where possible.

03 Build choice into routines: a quiet start, written task order or optional movement.

An age-appropriate example

CLASSROOM SCENE

Year 7: “A map, a two-minute early transition and knowing where I can go if lost make moving rooms possible.”

Respect this boundary

A Circle is not an excuse to restrict opportunities or insist everyone needs the same comfort.

Bridges: communication and connection

BRIDGES

THE CORE IDEA

Bridges are ways into relationships, participation and help: interests, explicit invitations, communication choices, collaborative tasks and trusted adults.

Why this can matter at secondary age

A student can be socially connected without being loud, talkative or constantly present. Meaningful participation looks different for different people.

How to teach and use it

01 Offer multiple response modes: write, speak, type, point or schedule a check-in.

02 Teach consent, mutual respect, repair and recognition of unsafe peer pressure.

03 Use shared interests carefully and do not force a pupil to explain a diagnosis.

An age-appropriate example

CLASSROOM SCENE

Year 12: “An email to the tutor and a clear revision plan became a Bridge back into the lesson.”

Respect this boundary

Do not require eye contact, physical contact, public sharing or forced friendship.

The regulation ladder: support before demands

A “Wave” is not simply a problem inside a pupil. Sensory load, conflict, uncertainty, unmet access needs and adult responses can increase or decrease pressure. Adults should change what they can in the environment and offer co-regulation before requesting analysis.

STATE	WHAT STAFF MAY NOTICE	WHAT TO TRY
Available for learning	Engaging or choosing to work; flexible attention.	Teach the skill, offer choices, use normal routines.
Pressure building	More mistakes, withdrawal, restlessness, terse responses.	Reduce competing demands; clarify first step; offer space, water or support.
High intensity	Panic, shutdown, visible distress, conflict or inability to speak.	Maintain safety; speak less; follow agreed plan; involve appropriate staff.
Recovering	May be tired, embarrassed, slow to restart.	Give recovery time; arrange a calm follow-up rather than instant explanation.

MICRO-SCRIPT FOR STAFF

“I can see this is difficult. You do not have to explain it right now. Would it help to move somewhere quieter, write it down, or have a short break? We can work out the next step together.”

A 90-second response sequence

01 Notice: describe what you observe without assigning an emotion (“I see you have stopped writing”).

02 Offer: choose between two realistic, safe access options.

03 Reduce: remove unnecessary pressure and sensory demand.

04 Reconnect: return to learning through a small, agreed first step.

Consistent staff language: say this, not that

IF YOU HEAR YOURSELF SAY…	TRY INSTEAD…
“Calm down.”	“We can slow this down. What would make the next minute safer?”
“You are overreacting.”	“I can see this feels big. Let us work out what needs to change.”
“Everyone else can cope.”	“People need different supports. What works for you?”
“You should know this by now.”	“Which part is unclear? Shall I show the first step?”
“You need to make friends.”	“Would you like help finding someone you feel comfortable working with?”
“Tell the class how you feel.”	“You can pass, write privately or use a fictional example.”
“Your behaviour is who you are.”	“This choice needs addressing. It does not define you.”

A 20-second Four Pillars check-in

Use privately or in a voluntary reflection. “What feels hardest right now? Is it the thoughts, the intensity, the predictability or a connection we need to make?” It is fine if the young person does not answer.

WHEN A YOUNG PERSON SAYS “I DON’T KNOW”

Try: “That’s okay. We can look at the task and the environment first.” Not knowing is meaningful information; do not press for a hidden “true feeling”.

SEND, neurodiversity and communication access

The Four Pillars are for all young people, with adjustments where helpful. They must never create an additional demand on pupils who already have to work hard to access school.

NEED OR PREFERENCE	REASONABLE DESIGN CHOICE
Speech is difficult under stress	Offer pointing, a card, typing, email, drawing or a later check-in.
Sensory overload	Change noise, lighting, crowding or proximity; agree a low-stimulation option.
Dyslexia / literacy needs	Provide uncluttered versions, reading support and no requirement for long written answers.
ADHD / executive function	Give clear first steps, chunked instructions, time cues and permission to move.
Autistic communication differences	Be literal, avoid ambiguous metaphors, and allow pupils to reject the Four Pillars language.
Anxiety or low trust	Do not force public reflection; build predictable, private choices and relationships.
Cultural or language differences	Offer translations or visual examples and respect differing ways of naming feelings.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Universal provision plus individual adjustment. Ask pupils which examples and terms fit, then alter the tools. The right outcome is greater access and agency, not universal adoption of the vocabulary.

Coordinate any individual adaptations with the student, SENCO and relevant support plans. Do not change agreed provision merely because the Four Pillars pack offers an alternative.

Year 7: the corridor transition

SCENARIO

THE SITUATION

A pupil misses the lesson bell after struggling with a crowded corridor. A teacher sees them arrive shaken and silent.

Four Pillars reading

BRIAN'S

"Everyone is looking at me."

WAVES

noise and fear rise.

CIRCLES

unfamiliar rooms disrupt their routine.

BRIDGES

a planned route and an agreed check-in.

A proportionate adult response

Offer a room map, discreet arrival routine and a short quiet transition. Do not punish without considering access needs.

Three questions for a staff team

- What can we change in the environment before asking the pupil to change their response?
- What would preserve this pupil's dignity and sense of choice?
- Is any safeguarding, SEND or peer-conduct policy relevant?

Year 9: group chat exclusion

SCENARIO

THE SITUATION

A student notices friends have started a group chat without them. They stop contributing in class and fear they have been rejected.

Four Pillars reading

BRIAN'S

"They hate me."

WAVES

hurt and anger.

CIRCLES

expected friendship patterns are shaken.

BRIDGES

a safe conversation and support with digital boundaries.

A proportionate adult response

Validate the feeling without confirming a conclusion. Check whether bullying, harassment or safeguarding concerns need formal action.

Three questions for a staff team

- What can we change in the environment before asking the pupil to change their response?
- What would preserve this pupil's dignity and sense of choice?
- Is any safeguarding, SEND or peer-conduct policy relevant?

Year 11: revision overload

SCENARIO

THE SITUATION

A pupil has prepared colour-coded revision notes but has not slept and fears that any break will ruin their results.

Four Pillars reading

BRIAN'S

ambition competes with fear of failure.

WAVES

pressure climbs.

CIRCLES

a rigid revision ritual stops helping.

BRIDGES

planning with a teacher, family or pastoral adult.

A proportionate adult response

Plan realistic chunks and rest, clarify what is essential and signpost support if distress persists.

Three questions for a staff team

- What can we change in the environment before asking the pupil to change their response?
- What would preserve this pupil's dignity and sense of choice?
- Is any safeguarding, SEND or peer-conduct policy relevant?

Year 10: friendship conflict and repair

SCENARIO

THE SITUATION

A pupil sends an angry message during an argument. A screenshot circulates and the pupil refuses to come to school.

Four Pillars reading

BRIAN'S

regret, defensiveness, fear.

WAVES

shame and anger.

CIRCLES

school feels unpredictable.

BRIDGES

a trusted adult, clear boundaries and supported repair.

A proportionate adult response

Follow anti-bullying, online safety and safeguarding procedures; avoid forced reconciliation or public apologies.

Three questions for a staff team

- What can we change in the environment before asking the pupil to change their response?
- What would preserve this pupil's dignity and sense of choice?
- Is any safeguarding, SEND or peer-conduct policy relevant?

Year 12: uncertain next steps

SCENARIO

THE SITUATION

A sixth-form student has changed their mind about university and feels embarrassed telling adults who expect a particular path.

Four Pillars reading

BRIAN'S

"I'm disappointing everyone."

WAVES

uncertain future feels overwhelming.

CIRCLES

a long-held plan has changed.

BRIDGES

a careers discussion and a choice-led action plan.

A proportionate adult response

Avoid framing one route as a failure. Offer careers guidance, alternative pathways and time to reflect.

Three questions for a staff team

- What can we change in the environment before asking the pupil to change their response?
- What would preserve this pupil's dignity and sense of choice?
- Is any safeguarding, SEND or peer-conduct policy relevant?

Introducing the approach across a school

Phase 1 — Listen and prepare (2 weeks)

- Identify a named lead, PSHE link, SENCO contact and DSL sign-off.
- Ask a small, diverse student panel which terms feel appropriate for their age. Consider alternatives to “Brian’s”.
- Select a manageable pilot year group or tutor cohort; ensure access support is in place.
- Agree how staff will respond if activities prompt distress or disclosure.

Phase 2 — Teach and practise (8 weeks)

- Give staff a short briefing and a one-page language guide.
- Deliver the eight lessons, with opt-outs and alternative response formats.
- Use fictional examples across subjects; model the language without labelling individuals.
- Invite pupils to choose one practical adjustment or support to test.

Phase 3 — Review and adapt (2–4 weeks)

- Collect anonymous feedback: relevance, accessibility, safety and enjoyment.
- Review missed learning time, adjustments requested and staff usability (without implying causation).
- Record what needs editing; drop activities students find uncomfortable or patronising.
- Decide whether a further pilot, revision or pause is appropriate.

WHAT COUNTS AS A GOOD FIRST RESULT

Pupils say they felt listened to, could decline sharing, understood at least one new support option, and were able to access learning more comfortably. Those are practical signals to explore — not proof of clinical or academic impact.

Tutor time, subjects and school culture

SETTING	A REALISTIC USE
Form time	Anonymous “Which support might help this fictional student?” discussion.
English	Character motivation: competing thoughts, emotional intensity and choices.
Music / arts	Explore how familiar interests connect identity, sensory experience and belonging.
Science	Separate observation, interpretation and assumption in emotional scenarios.
PE	Normalize differences in sensory needs, confidence and participation routes.
Homework / revision	Make deadlines and task steps predictable; plan what to do when stuck.
Pastoral / SEND	Create individual choice-based support plans if the pupil finds the language useful.
Transition points	Map what remains familiar and what new Bridges can help during change.

A shared adult commitment

01 We do not ask for personal stories in front of peers.

02 We respond to safety and access first, then support reflection.

03 We keep boundaries: actions have consequences but never erase dignity.

04 We accept students’ own language for their experiences.

05 We revisit classroom demands and environment, not only the pupil’s coping strategies.

Staff briefing: a ready-to-run 30-minute agenda

TIME	FACILITATOR PROMPT	OUTPUT
0–5 min	Explain the aims and limits; show the one-page pillar map.	Shared purpose.
5–12 min	Work through Year 9 group-chat exclusion in pairs.	Multiple possible explanations.
12–18 min	Practise the 90-second response script in pairs.	Safe language and choices.
18–23 min	Discuss boundaries: private reflection, safety, opt-outs.	Agreed response route.
23–28 min	Plan one change in classroom predictability or access.	One practical commitment.
28–30 min	Invite anonymous questions and name the pilot lead.	Clear next steps.

Facilitator prompts

- “What happens if we assume a pupil is choosing difficulty rather than experiencing a barrier?”
- “Which of the four Pillars could help us ask a better question?”
- “How do we respect a pupil who dislikes this language or wants no emotional check-in?”
- “Which existing school policy takes priority when risk or harm appears?”

TAKEAWAY FOR STAFF

Use the Four Pillars as conversation starters rather than a script to apply to every child. If your response helps a young person access school with more dignity and choice, it has served its intended purpose.

Student voice and meaningful co-design

An adolescent resource should be shaped with adolescents. Invite pupils across year groups, including those who have experienced exclusion or barriers to learning, but do not ask anyone to disclose reasons for joining.

Questions for an anonymous listening exercise

01 Which Four Pillars term is most useful? Which feels childish, unclear or unhelpful?

02 Are the examples believable for your year group? What is missing?

03 Which school situations create uncertainty or unnecessary pressure?

04 Would you rather speak, write, type or not answer at all?

05 What would a respectful adult response sound like?

06 What changes would make school feel more predictable, fair and accessible?

Make co-design real

- Show students two alternative terms for Brian's: "inner perspectives" and "different thoughts".
- Allow translation, visual symbol replacement and different formats.
- Test the sheets with a small cohort first; make tangible edits based on feedback.
- Offer feedback routes that do not require speaking to the project lead.

DO NOT

Use a pupil's story or identity in case studies, marketing or staff training without the appropriate, specific permissions and safeguards. Use invented or fully anonymised examples in teaching materials.

Assessment without labelling or overclaiming

Assessment is about whether the resource helps pupils practise skills and access participation, not scoring their emotions or identity. No Pillar is a diagnosis, personality type or behaviour score.

LOOK FOR	HOW TO GATHER IT	AVOID
Vocabulary / understanding	Anonymous exit tickets on fictional cases.	Assessing “correct” personal feelings.
Agency and help-seeking	Ask pupils to name two possible ways to get support.	Making disclosure a success indicator.
Access and inclusion	Track whether agreed adjustments were actually available.	Attributing all attendance changes to the pack.
Staff confidence	Short feedback on clarity and classroom feasibility.	Declaring proven effectiveness.
Pupil experience	Anonymous opt-in comments, including criticism.	Collecting unnecessary health detail.

Example four-question exit ticket

01 I can explain at least one Pillar using a fictional example.

02 I know an appropriate way to ask for support in this school.

03 The activities allowed me to choose how much I shared.

04 One thing staff could change to improve this resource is…

EVALUATION RULE

Keep group summaries anonymous where feasible; follow school data-protection rules. If individual notes are needed to provide support, put them in the appropriate secure school process, not on classroom worksheets.

Safeguarding, confidentiality and boundaries

Before delivery: staff must follow their school's safeguarding, SEND, behaviour, online safety and data protection policies. In England, Keeping children safe in education 2026 is in force from September 2026; staff must read and follow the required Part One and school procedures. This pack does not replace those duties.

What facilitators must do

- Set ground rules: students may pass; nobody is required to disclose personal experiences.
- Use fictional scenarios for emotionally sensitive activities and avoid graphic prompts.
- Explain that staff cannot promise secrecy when someone may be at risk.
- Respond calmly to any disclosure, take the pupil seriously and follow the school's reporting procedure promptly.
- If a student is at immediate risk, use the school's urgent safeguarding response; never wait for a lesson review.
- Do not ask pupils to reveal protected or private information to peers or publicly rate distress.

When to refer, not teach through

A disclosure of abuse, exploitation, bullying, self-harm concerns, significant distress or other harm requires appropriate safeguarding or pastoral action; it should never be handled by asking the student to complete a Four Pillars form.

STAFF SCRIPT

"Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you said something. I may need to share this with the right safeguarding staff so we can help keep you safe. I'll explain what happens next as far as I can."

Eight-lesson overview

40–50 MIN LESSONS

LESSON	FOCUS	STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME
1 · Who am I?	Identity, strengths, preferences	Can describe identity as more than labels or grades.
2 · Brian’s	Thoughts, predictions and choices	Can distinguish a thought from a fact in a fictional example.
3 · Waves	Intensity, body clues and co-regulation	Can identify a safe option for rising pressure.
4 · Circles	Routine, safety and access	Can name environmental supports that help participation.
5 · Bridges	Communication, connection, boundaries	Can offer respectful response choices in a peer scenario.
6 · Digital life	Online misunderstandings and repair	Can apply the Pillars without assuming intent or sharing private detail.
7 · Exams / transitions	Planning, agency and help-seeking	Can create a proportionate study or change plan.
8 · My approach	Integration and evaluation	Can explain which tools they might use or reject, and why.

Delivery notes

- Each lesson: low-stakes fictional starter, explicit teaching, supported practice, private/optional reflection and exit ticket.
- KS3: shorter scenarios, more modelling and visual templates. KS4: add peer complexity, revision and independent decision-making. KS5: add autonomy, transitions and nuanced dilemmas.
- Facilitators may shorten to 25-minute tutor sessions by splitting each lesson into two parts.
- Lesson materials are not therapy. For distress, follow safeguarding and pastoral procedures.

1 · Identity beyond labels

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students recognise that identity involves strengths, values, relationships, cultures, interests and needs, not a single label or recent result.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter (5 min): show fictional statements “I failed a test, so I am a failure” and “I found this test difficult.” Which is more accurate?

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach (10 min): distinguish moment, behaviour, achievement, identity and chosen values. Invite language that respects difference.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise (20 min): fictional character profile; identify three strengths, one support preference and one pressure they face. Pupils can write or discuss in pairs.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect (10 min): optional private “what matters to me” map. A student may choose a fictional persona.

45–50 EXIT

Exit (5 min): write one respectful sentence a classmate might need to hear after a setback.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: offer a values word bank. KS4: include social comparison. KS5: add careers and cultural expectations.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

2 · Brian’s: thoughts and choices

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students recognise multiple thoughts can coexist and practise testing assumptions without invalidating feelings.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: fictional student thinks “Everyone noticed my mistake.” What evidence supports or challenges the certainty?

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: label the thought as a thought, not a fact; explore Curious, Worry, Safety and Hope Brian’s as optional metaphors.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: small groups rewrite three sweeping predictions into balanced alternatives. No personal disclosures.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: pupils choose an internal conflict from a fictional exam, performance or friendship scenario.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: name one question that helps when a thought sounds absolutely certain.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: visual speech bubbles. KS4: discuss social media assumptions. KS5: discuss performance pressure.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

3 · Waves: intensity and support

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students can describe rising emotional or sensory intensity and select safe responses including adult or environmental support.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: discuss an imaginary crowded assembly and different possible reactions.

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: wave size is descriptive, not a judgement or test; supports can be interpersonal and environmental.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: review a fictional day; identify where pressure rises and where school could reduce unnecessary demand.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: optional private “early signals and support options” card; pupils may use a fictional persona.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: one sentence that offers a choice rather than “calm down”.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: four simple wave stages. KS4: add exam pressure. KS5: add independent help-seeking.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

4 · Circles: predictable does not mean fixed

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students understand that familiar routines, environments and relationships may support access and that adaptations should preserve agency.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: compare two versions of a day with and without timetable warning.

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: a helpful Circle might be a route, quiet space, clear plan, song, familiar person or routine.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: create an access map for a fictional new pupil; include two adjustments and one way to invite exploration safely.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: choose a school transition and one thing that could stay predictable.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: complete “Knowing ___ in advance could help someone participate.”

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: transition maps. KS4: controlled assessment preparation. KS5: work placements and new routines.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

5 · Bridges: connection without pressure

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students identify respectful ways to connect while recognising choice, boundaries and different communication preferences.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: list three non-verbal or written ways two people might communicate helpfully.

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: Bridges can be shared interests, clear instructions, an email, a trusted adult or supported repair.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: teams design three ways to include a quiet new student without singling them out or demanding disclosure.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: optional private choice of a helpful communication mode.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: state one difference between a kind invitation and social pressure.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: friendship basics. KS4: boundaries in peer groups. KS5: professional communication.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

6 · Digital life and misunderstandings

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students use the Pillars to explore ambiguity in group chats, screenshots and online pressure without excusing harmful conduct.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: fictional message “Fine.” Discuss why tone cannot be known with certainty.

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: thought assumptions, rising Waves, disrupted Circles and safer Bridges. Reinforce school reporting routes.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: analyse an invented group-chat disagreement; plan a safer response, including when to report.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: choose from sample scripts for setting a digital boundary. Do not ask for real chats or screenshots.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: one reason not to share another person’s private message or image.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: sharing boundaries. KS4: peer conflict and images. KS5: coercion, privacy and responsibilities.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

7 · Exams, changes and next steps

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students practise preparing for a demanding change without promising to eliminate all anxiety.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: fictional pupil says “If I cannot do everything, there is no point starting.”

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: recognise competing Brian’s, intensity, supports and routes to request help.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: build a one-week realistic plan with breaks, tasks, contingency and an adult or service for support.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: choose one manageable first step for a fictional revision timetable or transition.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: name one thing that is changeable and one source of support.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: homework and room changes. KS4: exams. KS5: applications, placements and leaving school.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

8 · Make the model yours

LESSON PLAN

LEARNING INTENTION

Students can explain or challenge the Four Pillars and select supports that fit their own preferences.

Equipment and preparation

Project or print the fictional prompt; provide a sheet or digital alternative; remind students they can pass or work with invented examples.

00–05 CONNECT

Starter: revisit an earlier fictional scenario and invite two different, both reasonable responses.

05–15 EXPLAIN

Teach: the model is optional. Young people can rename, adapt or reject its language.

15–35 EXPLORE

Practise: in groups create a short advice sheet for a fictional student, including one school-level adjustment.

35–45 REFLECT

Reflect: choose between personal private plan, fictional plan, diagram or “not for me” review.

45–50 EXIT

Exit: anonymous feedback on usefulness, comfort and what should change.

DIFFERENTIATION

KS3: illustrated map. KS4: nuanced dilemmas. KS5: proposals for school policy or access.

Safety: do not ask pupils to disclose personal experiences; provide quiet alternatives and follow school procedures for concerns.

Worksheet 1: Identity, in my own words

PRINTABLE

You decide what to share. You may write, draw, type or use a fictional character. No diagnosis, personal history or feelings disclosure is required.

MORE THAN ONE LABEL

What interests, values or strengths might shape a person’s identity?

BEYOND ONE MOMENT

A student gets a disappointing mark. Write a fairer story about who they are.

RESPECT AND BELONGING

What would make a school feel more welcoming for a young person who feels different?

REMINDER

Your identity does not need to be explained to a class to be respected.

Worksheet 2: Brian’s and different thoughts

PRINTABLE

Think about this fictional pupil: “I want to ask for help, but I’m worried people will laugh.” Which different thoughts could be present?

ONE THOUGHT SAYS…

Write one possible worried thought.

ANOTHER THOUGHT SAYS…

Write a helpful, realistic alternative (not forced positivity).

A SAFER CHOICE

What could the pupil do next? Who or what might help?

THOUGHTS ARE NOT ORDERS

A thought can feel powerful without being certain or requiring action.

Worksheet 3: Waves and early signs

PRINTABLE

Use this sheet privately or complete it for a made-up character. You can describe intensity with words instead of numbers.

STAGE	WHAT A PERSON MIGHT NOTICE	POSSIBLE SUPPORT
Settled	Able to listen or begin.	A clear next step.
Rising	Faster thoughts or more noise sensitivity.	Less demand; an agreed adjustment.
High	Hard to speak, think or stay in the space.	Calm adult support, space, safety.
Recovering	Tired, uncertain, embarrassed.	Time; a low-pressure restart.

SCENARIO

A student is overwhelmed by a crowded bus. How might their Wave change?

SUPPORT CHOICES

Which two supports might make their journey more manageable?

Worksheet 4: Circles and access

PRINTABLE

A Circle might be a routine, known place, comforting object, plan or relationship. Create an access plan for a fictional new student.

BEFORE SCHOOL

One predictable routine or piece of information that could help:

DURING THE DAY

One environmental adjustment or helpful resource:

WHEN SOMETHING CHANGES

How could an adult give advance notice or provide an alternative?

CHOICE MATTERS

A useful Circle helps participation; it should never be used to stop someone trying new things.

Worksheet 5: Bridges and boundaries

PRINTABLE

A Bridge can be a shared interest, clear words, a note, safe online communication or a trusted adult. Good Bridges respect consent and boundaries.

KIND INVITATION

Write a no-pressure invitation to someone who is new or quiet.

SETTING A BOUNDARY

Write a respectful way to say “I need some space” or “Please stop”.

ASKING FOR HELP

Write a short private message to a tutor or teacher requesting support.

Worksheet 6: A four-part case study

PRINTABLE

Case: Sam arrives late to a test. Their phone was broken, the bus changed route, and a friend has sent an upsetting message. Sam sits down but cannot start.

BRIAN’S

What thoughts might compete?

WAVES

What signs suggest rising pressure?

CIRCLES

What routine or resource has been disrupted?

BRIDGES

What help could staff or a peer offer?

Not every difficulty belongs to the pupil to fix. Name one school action that could remove a barrier.

School action

Worksheet 7: My optional support plan

PRINTABLE / PRIVATE

Private choice-based tool. Students may use a fictional example instead. If completed for real, store and share it only through appropriate school support processes, with suitable explanation and agreement.

WHEN SCHOOL IS EASIER

Conditions that make learning or participation more manageable:

EARLY SIGNS OF PRESSURE

Things I might notice — if I wish to record them:

WHAT HELPS / WHAT DOESN'T

An adjustment I prefer and an approach to avoid:

HOW I WOULD LIKE TO ASK

My preferred communication route (including choosing not to explain):

A TRUSTED SUPPORT ROUTE

A role or agreed adult I can approach (no personal contact details needed):

Worksheet 8: Feedback and reflection

PRINTABLE

This resource is being developed. Your feedback, including criticism, can help make it more respectful and useful. You can leave any question blank.

WHAT FITS

A Pillar or activity that felt relevant — or “none”:

WHAT FELT WRONG

A phrase, assumption or activity that should change:

SCHOOL ACCESS

One adjustment staff could make so more pupils can participate:

MY CHOICE

If you wanted to use this approach, what would you keep, change or reject?

THANK YOU

A model should change in response to the people it aims to serve. You are allowed not to like it.

Staff observation and adjustment log

REPRODUCIBLE

Complete only if needed for school practice. Record practical supports and access adjustments; do not record speculative emotion labels, clinical interpretations or unnecessary sensitive information.

DATE / SETTING	ACCESS BARRIER OBSERVED	ADJUSTMENT OFFERED	REVIEW / NEXT STEP
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Staff reflection

WHAT CHANGED IN THE ENVIRONMENT?

Did an adult adjust an instruction, routine, seating, transition or communication route?

WHAT DID THE YOUNG PERSON PREFER?

Record only what is needed to make the chosen support available.

RECORDKEEPING

Use the school's secure processes. Safeguarding concerns must be recorded and escalated via the proper safeguarding system, not this worksheet.

Information for parents and carers

SHAREABLE

The Tom Tom Way: Four Pillars is a developing set of child- and teen-friendly ideas used to encourage reflection, communication and access to learning. The secondary edition focuses on everyday teenage experiences, identity and knowing how to ask for help.

BRIAN'S

Our different thoughts, hopes, worries and inner perspectives.

WAVES

How strong feelings or sensory demands may become.

CIRCLES

Routines, familiar people and resources that make life feel manageable.

BRIDGES

Ways to communicate, connect and find support.

How families can use it

- Ask "What would help next?" rather than demanding a detailed explanation.
- Respect a young person's preferred words: they may dislike the Pillar names.
- Offer practical choices around planning, study breaks, communication and predictability.
- Keep boundaries and safety clear; this is not a reason to ignore harmful behaviour.
- Share school-related access needs with appropriate staff where helpful and agreed.

The Four Pillars are not a medical assessment or proven treatment. For safeguarding, mental-health or SEND concerns, use relevant school and professional support routes.

Creator: Counsellor Tomass J. Wood | Website: www.tomtomuniverse.co.uk

Six-week pilot review for school leaders

Use these prompts to decide whether the pilot is usable, safe and worth adapting. Avoid treating changes in attendance, grades or behaviour as proof that this framework caused them.

REVIEW QUESTION	EVIDENCE TO CHECK
Did pupils recognise the examples?	Anonymous pupil comments across year groups and communication needs.
Was participation genuinely optional?	Whether staff offered passes, fictional cases and alternative formats.
Were access barriers reduced?	Availability of promised adjustments and pupil feedback.
Did staff find the routine manageable?	Time cost, consistency, staff concerns and training gaps.
Were there safety or privacy concerns?	DSL feedback, any inappropriate disclosure requests, recording practices.
What should change?	Specific revisions, translated materials, alternative language or withdrawal.

DECISION

Continue, adapt, restrict to certain contexts or pause? Why?

ONE IMPROVEMENT FOR NEXT CYCLE

What will the school change in teaching or access?

Quick glossary and essential distinctions

TERM	MEANING IN THIS PACK
Brian’s	A metaphor for internal thoughts and feelings; not independent beings or a diagnosis.
Waves	A descriptive metaphor for emotional and sensory intensity; not a risk score.
Circles	Familiar structures and supports that can aid security and participation.
Bridges	Safe, respectful ways to connect, communicate and engage.
Co-regulation	Support from another person and the environment while a young person is distressed.
Self-advocacy	Being able to communicate preferences, needs and choices where possible.
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities; schools retain their statutory duties.
PSHE / RSHE	Personal, social, health and economic education / relationships, sex and health education.
DSL	Designated safeguarding lead; follow school policies on escalation.

Good language is shared, not imposed

Ask young people whether these terms make sense to them. “Thoughts, pressure, supports and connections” is a perfectly acceptable translation for older pupils. A student who rejects the terminology can still benefit from thoughtful teaching and inclusive adjustments.

Evidence, guidance and acknowledgements

Evidence and status: The Four Pillars are an original, developing educational approach by Counsellor Tomass J. Wood. No controlled evaluation or independently replicated evidence of its effectiveness is presented in this pack. The references below provide wider educational context, not validation of the Four Pillars.

Selected sources and guidance (England)

01 Department for Education. Keeping children safe in education 2026 (in force September 2026). https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

02 PSHE Association. Programme of Study for PSHE education (KS1–5), 2026 edition. https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-5/programme-of-study

03 PSHE Association. Statutory RSHE: 2025 guidance implementation from September 2026. https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-4/statutory-rshe

04 Education Endowment Foundation. Social and emotional learning (Teaching and Learning Toolkit). https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning

05 Education Endowment Foundation. Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools guidance report. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/SEND/

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AI-assisted language and document production have been used as accessibility and production support. The Tom Tom Universe concepts and creative direction are those of the author. This resource should be reviewed by a school's safeguarding, SEND and curriculum leads before implementation.

THE TOM TOM WAY

Understand the person. Notice the pressure. Create safety. Build a connection.
www.tomtomuniverse.co.uk