
Supporting the Return to School

Advice for parents and carers

Developed by Leeds Educational Psychology Team June 2020





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Supporting the Return to School – Advice for parents and carers

Transition

The return to school for children, young people, parents/carers and school staff will involve a period of transition and change. Transitions for children and young people are part of the process of moving through education and provide opportunities for growth and development. Many may be looking forward to the opportunity to reconnect with friends and establish new routines, however, some may have some worries about the return to school.

The concerns may be about:

- being able to re-establish friendships and relationships in the class / school
- the child/young person's safety, particularly if they have any existing health concerns
- any enduring emotional impact of recent events, including experiences of loss and bereavement (either their own or their peers')
- any lasting impact of the disruption to the learning and progress
- settling into a new class, new arrangements, or for some, a new school

It is important to recognise feelings of worry are understandable and normal in the current circumstances and that most young people will manage the transition well.

This brief guide aims to support parents and carers in planning for their child's return to school/education. It recognises the skills and experience that parents and carers have in supporting their children through changes, and aims to supplement this based on information from key literature. It also provides some useful links for further information.

Ideas and considerations from research

Supporting transition:

- **Provide clear information about the situation** – One of the best ways to reassure children and young people is by talking openly about what is happening and to provide honest, age-appropriate answers to any questions they have. Referring to communication from school and explaining what is being done to keep them and others safe is important. This should include any actions they can take to help, such as social distancing and washing their hands more often.
- **Be aware of your own reactions** – Children and young people often take their emotional cues from the important adults in their lives, so how we respond to the



situation is also important. It is helpful to try to remain calm, and to listen to and acknowledge children and young people's concerns.

- **Opportunities to talk:** Speak with your child about how they are feeling. Speak with them about any concerns and consider wondering aloud, e.g. "I wonder if you are feeling a little worried about going back to school? That is understandable, I feel the same about going back to work. Would it help to talk about it some more?"
- **Letting them know its ok to feel a range of emotions** – this is likely to reduce anxiety for many children. Reassure them that lots of adults (including their teachers) and children are in the same situation and it is normal to feel mixed emotions.
- **Preparation for the change to routine** – plan to adjust sleep patterns prior to the return (especially important for adolescents); build up to more structure, e.g. being dressed by 9am; prepare your child for the change by talking about what they will be doing; encourage them to think about the things they are looking forward to.
- **Keeping informed** – Access information about new routines and procedures from your child's school; ask for further information if anything is unclear; Speaking to other parents and sharing anything useful can be helpful.
- **Be prepared for a "settling-in" period** – the return to school may cause a few wobbles
- **Plan in enjoyable activities and a time to connect with each other**

At home:



The return to school will vary for different age groups, with some children continuing to spend significant amounts of time at home. The following considerations re-iterate key guidance to support families and children during such times.

- **Help children to stay connected to their friends** – Friendships are a key resiliency factor for children and young people. Most children will have been used to seeing their friends regularly so they need to continue to establish ways of connecting through other means such as Skype or WhatsApp calls.
- **Have a routine and structure** – Having a plan and a predictable routine for the day can be very reassuring. As adults we like to know what is going to happen, and children like this too. A consistent routine lets everyone be secure about the plans for the day. It can be helpful to involve children in creating this routine so that they feel part of the plan, rather than the plan being imposed on them.
- **Don't worry if the routine isn't perfect** – Remember this is not a normal situation. If you find that planning and sticking to the routines is causing more distress, then it is OK to be more 'free-flow'.
- **Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work** – Again this is not a normal situation so it might be more important to build relationships, and enjoy shared activities.

- **Try to keep the work in one place** – If children are doing school or project work at home, try to keep it all in one place so that it doesn't spread out over the house. This can help to maintain a work/home boundary.
- **Reduce access to rolling news** – Whilst it is important to keep up to date with new developments and announcements, it can be hard to switch off from the constant stream of news from media outlets. It may be helpful, to reduce the time spent hearing, reading and watching the news, to protect children from distressing media coverage.
- **Play** – play is fundamental to children's wellbeing and development – children of all ages! It can be a great way to reduced stress in adults too.
- **Looking after you own health** – as well as thinking about the children and young people in our care, it is important to take care of our own wellbeing too, by staying connected to friends and family, being kind to yourself, and taking part in enjoyable activities.



Information in this guidance has been taken from a number of available resources. Special thanks and acknowledgement to:

- **Bi-Borough Educational Psychology Consultation Service.** Transition, recovery and learning in the aftermath of a pandemic. Resources for nursery, primary and secondary schools.
- **Birmingham City Council.** Practical tools, tips and resources for parents for returning to school
- **British Psychological Society.** Division of Educational and Child Psychology. Coronavirus and UK schools closures: support and advice for schools and parents/carers. A Resource Paper
- **GOV.UK.** Guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Hull City Council.** Parent & carer Transition guidance
- **Sheffield City Council.** A guide for parents and carers to prepare their child to return to school after lockdown.
- **Wakefield Council.** Covid-19 – Advice for schools. Transition and back to school

Thank you also to the young people and parents who participated in providing their voice in the development of this guidance.

Useful links

- **MindEd** is a free online educational resource on children and young people's mental health which can support parents and carers. <https://www.minded.org.uk/>
- **Every Mind Matters** gives advice and actions to take care of your own well being https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/?WT.tsrc=Search&WT.mc_id=Brand&gclid=EAlaIqobChMI7I3uvc_C6QIVBvIRC_h1Pqwa6EAAYASAAEgLayvD_BwE
- **The STARS Team** has some good Coronavirus specific resources for parents of children with a diagnosis of Autism <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>
- **Anna Freud** has some good guidance on the transition back to nursery <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11632/early-years-pcs.pdf>
- **Childmind** <https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents>
- Resources for young children to help support their understanding of the changes they may experience at school:
- 'Back to school' story on the ELSA website <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/back-to-school-after-coronavirus-story>
- YouTube video ['While we can't hug'](#)