



Back to School Guide

For parents, carers and guardians





About this guide

As the Government starts to ease lockdown restrictions, we are working on reopening school and bringing more of our children back to the classroom. It is our shared priority to ensure that the school environment is safe for children and teaching and support staff. We are currently in the process of reviewing the risks whilst taking into consideration the complex needs of our children. As well as this, we are focussing on areas such as the layout of our building and how to create the safest space possible. A gradual, phased return will ensure a smaller number of children into school, which means there will be more room to social distance.



Your child's welfare comes first

We appreciate that some children will be worried and will need additional support to during the transition back to school. This guide is packed with information and tips to help you manage your child's return to school. This includes managing anxiety; putting routines for bed time, waking up and mealtimes back in place; how to build on your child and families resilience by focusing on strengths and supporting your child's emotional wellbeing. We hope you find this useful.

Managing anxiety

Is your child worried about coming back to school?

Here are some tips on how to help your child manage feelings of anxiety

1. Get talking

Create a space for conversation to happen, but don't force it. Be open and consistently available, so your child can talk when they are ready. It may be easier to talk while doing an activity such as going for a walk or drawing.

2. Be calm

Showing that you are relaxed helps your child to mimic this behaviour, which can reassure them that things might be difficult, but they are manageable.

3. Listen and empathise

Spend time listening to your child, asking questions, showing an interest and put yourself in their shoes. Try and normalise their feelings of worry, anger or sadness and acknowledge that everybody can experience this – it's normal!

4. Putting it into perspective

A worry is a thought, not necessarily a fact. After listening to you child, ask if your child's worry is likely to happen, if so, what would it mean if it did? Try and explore alternative ways of looking at things this might help to put their worries into perspective.

5. Keep a routine

Try and understand what makes the anxiety worse such as too much TV, screen time, or not seeing friends and make changes to reduce their effects. Remind them how important it is to be kind and take care of themselves.

6. Role play

Pump up the positivity to boost their confidence and ability to cope. Take turns and practice different scenarios and responses by role playing. 'We can't do X... but we can do Y...' and remember to praise your child's strengths and talents!

7. Check-in

See how these steps have helped by monitoring your child's response. This can be done using an 'Anxiety Thermometer' on a scale of 0 being calm to 10 being extremely anxious. This will help you to understand how your child is feeling at any point and take the right steps if they need extra support.





Ideas for building your child's resilience

Resilience is seen when individuals have a greater ability to “bounce back” when faced with difficulties and achieve positive outcomes.

Before the lockdown, we were already taking a whole school approach towards promoting health and wellbeing as part of their curriculum. We understand that secure and stable relationships between parents/carers and children are important.

Six factors known to be associated with resilience are:

- Secure base
- Education
- Friendships
- Talents and interests
- Positive values
- Social competencies



When parents/carers are reliable and children have good physical and emotional care like receiving praise, positive attention, acceptance, being kept safe, having nutritious food and regular hugs, they can be helped to feel good about themselves. Having a wider network of support such as good relationships with friends, siblings and wider family members also helps children build their resilience. But resilience doesn't look the same for everyone and each child will have their own strengths, skills and ways of coping; here are some things that you can do to help build resilience and manage the transition back to school.

• Encourage strong peer relationships

An important part of school-life is friendship building and with children having been away from their friends for a while, it's important they start rebuilding those relationships or even make new friends. A great way of doing this is for parents to arrange for their child to go on a socially distanced walk with a friend after-school or on the weekend.

• Talk to them

A lot of children have questions and worries but may find it hard expressing themselves. Start conversations with them allowing time and space to be vulnerable. Some children may have an adult they feel comfortable talking to while others they may need to build trust with someone so be the one who makes an effort to communicate. When children feel safe and loved they are more willing to open up. Also, remind them that they are valued by the wider community and that their presence makes a difference.

• Praise your child

(but don't overdo it!): Children's self-esteem may have taken a hit these past couple of months so boosting their confidence will help them feel better about themselves. Compliment your child every so often, highlighting their key skills and attributes. It's important not to go overboard though as this will be hard to keep-up with long-term.

• Be flexible

Understand that each child is different. Some have thrived while being home-schooled while others do better in the classroom. We encourage parents to send their children back to school but also realise that some children may do better spending the remainder of the school year at home. Speak to your school and make an informed decision on what best for your child.

• Give them options

Letting your child make decisions on their own will help give them a sense of identity and boost their confidence. This could be anything small such as asking what they want to have for dinner or what game they want to play. They'll also develop an understanding of responsibility, consequences and risks in different situations.

• Avoid comparing

Every child is unique so avoid comparing your child to their siblings, family members or friends and cherish what makes them different as this will make them feel special and happy within themselves.

• Keep them busy

You have less time to stress when you're busy having fun, so we've provided a list of brilliant activities and challenges to keep your young ones creative, active and entertained! (see final page)



To improve sleeping

Lockdown has disrupted our daily routines.

We've felt the pressure of having to carefully monitor every aspect of our lives in order to stay productive, which has made many of us feel very out of control. When one thing goes wrong, it can hit you a lot harder if you're isolated.

Parents' and carers' worries about kids' bedtimes having crept a little later each day during lockdown is now giving way to increased anxiety about how to get their children back on track and back to school. Children have also been feeling anxious as they worry about what school will be like under the new rules.

Preparation plays an essential role in helping reduce stress. As schools open, it's important we adapt to a new sleep pattern so that we feel energised and ready for whatever the day has to offer!

- **Discipline yourself**

Try to keep to a consistent bedtime/wake time. If things have drifted later, then start to move them slowly by about 15 minutes every few days until they are back on track.

- **Be consistent**

Our body clocks thrive on routine. Having a set wakeup time seven days a week is important.



- **Get fresh air**

Try to encourage youngsters to get outside for at least half an hour each morning. Daylight supports our body clocks, helping us to wake up and suppress the sleep hormone.



- **Go screen-free**

Make the hour before bed a screenfree zone. Screens produce a blue light that tricks our bodies into thinking it is daylight and makes us feel more alert.

- **Dim the lights**

Reducing brightness helps youngsters to produce melatonin, this is the sleep hormone that makes us feel tired and helps us to nod-off.

- **Wind down**

A bath (if they enjoy one) followed by a warm milky drink and reading them a book is a simple and effective wind-down. This gets children relaxed and ready for bed.

- **Talk it out**

Schedule in time to talk about worries away from the bedtime routine. Doing so will make bedtime a positive and relaxing experience.

Additional Links:

www.place2be.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/

www.mind.org.uk

<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>