**Some tips for preparing children/young people to return to school after a period of absence.**

As the government has indicated all children will be back to school in September, I thought it might be useful to put together some tips to prepare pupils for this return. You may want to share some of these tips with parents/carers.

It is important to acknowledge there will be a mix of emotions upon returning to school, this will include both parents/carers and their children. The more we can prepare and provide visual information the easier it makes that transition.

Please find below some strategies parents/carers can use to help prepare their child/children, followed by some tips for school.

**Tips for parents/carers:**

1. Towards the end of the summer holiday start to introduce a structure about going back to school with a routine. Think about:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What needs to be done each day for school like getting up, eating breakfast, dressing |  |
| What help does your child need from you to get ready? |  |
| What can they do on their own? (Establish these together). |  |
| Introduce a [consistent bed and wake-up](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#npa517)times. The National Sleep Foundation [suggest starting two weeks](https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/plan-ahead-start-back-school-bedtime-routines-now) before the first day of school to set sleep routine habits. But a week beforehand will help get your child on their way. Further tips can be found on their website:  <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/children-teens-sleep> |  |
| It may help your child with the transition if they practise getting dressed into their school uniform, or practise wearing their school uniform again. |  |
| Try to focus their minds back on learning as well as having fun during the weeks before the new term starts.  Look for fun learning opportunities at home.  Make a cake and ask your child to help measure out the ingredients and read the recipe together.  Or play ‘shops’, adding up how much things cost and counting money.   With older children, try to refresh their knowledge before returning to school, play words games, try home science experiments <https://www.sciencefun.org/kidszone/experiments/> |  |

## 2) Talk about going back to school

Most children deal with some level of stress or anxiety about school, so find out what worries them by asking directly.

You can offer support by normalising experiences of worry and nerves. [Reassure your child](https://www.heysigmund.com/how-to-deal-with-school-anxiety-no-more-distressing-goodbyes/) the feelings they have are common and they will likely overcome them once they have settled in. Worries and courage can exist together.

Depending on your child’s age, you can also try the following to help:

* Early years/pre-school – write [a social story](https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2018/08/free-social-stories-about-going-to-school.html)about going to pre-school or school and the routine ahead. Or read books on how to cope with worries e.g. books together “My huge bag of worries”, “Ruby’s worries”, these can also be used for primary years.
* Primary years – set up a [peer-buddy system](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/learning/trkpp6.pdf) where a peer meets yours at the school gate or walk socially distanced to school together.
* Secondary years – establish healthy routines as a family. Support each other around [technology](https://theconversation.com/how-parents-and-teens-can-reduce-the-impact-of-social-media-on-youth-well-being-87619) use, sleep and [schoolwork](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/going-to-school/Pages/tips-starting-school.aspx).

Above all, try to make the return to school a positive thing.  It can be worrying for parents on the first day of term, especially those with young children starting in reception, but your child is more likely to be anxious if they see you are too.  Talk about all the fun activities your child and their friends will be doing at school, so they can see the new term as an exciting opportunity, rather than something to be worried about.

## Help create a sense of school belonging

A sense of belonging at school [can affect](https://theconversation.com/many-australian-school-students-feel-they-dont-belong-in-school-new-research-97866) academic success and student well-being. Parents can facilitate positive attitudes about school by setting an encouraging tone when talking about it.

Also show an interest in school life and work, and be available to support your child both [academically and socially](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10648-016-9389-8). As a family you could set out what you are looking forward to doing the most when returning to school.

## 4) Look out for signs of stress about returning to school or when at school

## Possible signs (depending on age) are:

* Can be more clingy than usual or tries escape from the classroom.
* Appears restless and flighty or cries.
* Shows an increased desire to avoid activities through negotiations and deal-making.
* Tries to get out of going to school.
* Retreats to thumb sucking, baby language or increased attachment to favourite soft toys (for younger students).

If these behaviours persist for about half a term, talk to your classroom teacher, school SENCo or pastoral care staff about what is happening. Together work on a strategy of support.

## 5. Encourage questions

Encourage questions children and teens may have about the next term. What will be the same? What will be different?

Often schools provide transition information so check the school website.

Most importantly, let your child know nothing is off limits to talk about. [Set up times to chat](https://www.heysigmund.com/school-anxiety-what-parents-can-do/) throughout the school term, try not to do this just before bed – it can help with back-to-school nerves.