

Going back to school A guide for parents

**A booklet to help parents
support their children with
returning to school after the
COVID-19 pandemic**

Why might children be anxious?

People with anxiety often have intense and constant worry or fear about every day situations. Children might also know anxiety to be feeling worried, nervous or scared. Anxiety is a normal emotion but can become a problem when it stops us doing things, such as going to school.

At any age, children can find going to school difficult. Sometimes, children may be very reluctant to get up and get ready, they might feel sick or complain of having stomach pains or headaches. Your child might get angry or upset when thinking and talking about going to school. The longer this goes on, the more worried the child and their parents can become.

At this time, your child might be particularly anxious about going back to school. This may be because they are worried about coronavirus, noisy classrooms, starting a new school, bullying or any other changes.

How can you help your child?

Talk to them about anxiety and why it happens. Many children don't understand why they are feeling anxious or why it happens. They might think they are very ill or that they are having a heart attack.

Help them to recognise their anxious feelings so they can tell when they are becoming anxious and can ask for help. Their breathing might increase, body feel tense, or feeling sick.

Give them reassurance, it might help to describe anxiety as a wave to ride that gets smaller after it peaks. You can also try focusing on breathing deeply and slowly.

Give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you. Or distract them by focusing on something else. It might help to support them to find a safe place in their mind where they can feel relaxed and happy. This might be somewhere they have been or somewhere they have imagined, help them think about the smells, sounds, tastes, and sights in their safe place.

How can you help your child?

Talk to your child, listen to their fears and respect their feelings. Try out some practical strategies to help them control their anxiety. Younger children could make a 'worry box', where they write down their worries at a certain time during the day and post it in a box, close the lid and then don't worry about it for the rest of the day. For teens and young adults, support them to use anxiety-reducing activities like sports or creative hobbies.

Talk to the school, make them aware of what is going on and agree on some strategies which might make things easier. This might include flexible starting times, a school buddy and regular check-ins during the day.

Try to reduce their fear of failure and disappointment. Help them to recognise that these feelings happen to everyone and it is okay. Give them reassurance about their worries and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling.

Make sure their routines are consistent, including times they are waking up, regular meals, homework and fun activities.

Children going into secondary school

It is very normal for your child to feel nervous about going into secondary school, particularly at this time. Your child may be worrying about the changes that come with going to secondary school, such as uniform, other students, change in teachers.

You can help them feel better about these changes by focusing on positive aspects of going to secondary school.

Some positive things might be;

- **Being able to make more/new friends**
- **Learning new subjects; design technology, languages**
- **Lots of after school clubs they can join**
- **Bigger/better playground**
- **More sports to learn**
- **New uniform**

Differences after coronavirus

Things might be different in schools after the coronavirus pandemic. This might include social distancing while at school, smaller class sizes and other protective measures put in place.

However, there are some things that your child can also do at school.

These things might include;

- **Washing your hands regularly**
- **Staying 2 metres away from others**
- **Coughing into your elbow or sleeve**
- **Taking a packed lunch from home**
- **Maybe wearing a face mask**