



## **Coming back to school- How to support your child**

We understand that after such a long break from school that some children may be very anxious about returning. We have put in all the safety measures to make it a safe environment but you and your child may be experiencing different feelings about the return to school.

This guide will hopefully give some practical ideas on how to support your child to make sure that when they re-enter the school gates they will be able to come in confidently.

**Anxiety is normal!** Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time. It alerts us to threats, protects us from danger and helps us reach important goals.

**Anxiety is not dangerous.** Although anxiety feels uncomfortable, it is temporary and will eventually decrease. The sensations we experience in an anxious situation are designed to alert and activate us. They are normal and part of our body's natural response mechanism.

**Anxiety is adaptive.** Anxiety helps us prepare for real danger, such as crossing a busy street. When we experience anxiety, it triggers our "fight-flight-freeze" response, and prepares our body to react. For instance, our heart beats faster to pump blood to our muscles, so we have the energy to run away or fight off danger. Without it, we would not survive. We need some anxiety.

**Anxiety is part of life.** Trying to eliminate anxiety from your child's life is almost impossible, and even if it were possible, we are not sure you will have created a life worth living for your child.

### **Take care of the basics:**

Ensure your child is getting enough sleep, eating regular meals and healthy snacks and has daily exercise. When your child's mind and body are nourished, tackling worries is easier. Try to keep to a routine, with activities throughout the day. However, don't add pressure if they seem overwhelmed. Instead, emphasise the importance of self-care and being kind to themselves.



**Explain that there will be new routines and rules.**

It is important children don't go into school expecting everything to look like normal, only to get a huge shock when they walk through the gate.

Explain that things will look different- but tell your child not to worry, because the teachers have been thinking about how to make the school safe and will help them get used to the new layouts and routines.

Share the school social story so that they know what the layout will look like.

Explain social distancing using this lovely film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PnnFrPaRgY&feature=youtu.be>

Reassure them about the things that will be the same.

E.g.

- They'll see the same adults around school
- They'll be wearing the same uniform
- They'll be taking the same route to school
- They will have calm and caring adults to look after them
- Some lessons will be the same

**Talk about worries or fears:**

Demonstrate that you are available to talk but don't force the conversation at the wrong time as this may feel intrusive. Children and young people often find it easier to talk while doing another activity, such as drawing, going for a walk or baking.

Listen to your child's concerns. What are they worried about? Why they expect that to happen? Let your child share their fears and talk about what's on their mind.

**Empathise and validate:**

We often want to reassure children, and to help find solutions to make them feel better, but first, spend time listening to the young person, ask them questions, and show an interest in viewing things from their



perspective. Be accepting of their worry, anger and sadness about how things are at present.

E.g.

It's normal to feel worried about the virus, but here's what you can do to keep safe.

I bet other children will be worried about the classrooms looking different but you will be safe and cared for.

**Problem solve:**

Once you know what's bothering your child, you can start to develop a coping plan. Use a plan like the one below to coach your child on how to cope.

This is the problem:	What do we know about it?
What don't we know?	What are the solutions

**Focus on the positive aspects:**


Once you have an understanding of what your child is afraid of, and a coping plan to address these fears, you can encourage your child to re-direct attention away from the worries towards the positives. Ask your child, "What are three things that you are most excited about on returning to school?" Chances are the fun aspects are simply getting overlooked by repetitive worries.

**Demonstrate calm:**

Children take cues from their parents, so the more confidence and calm you can model, the more your child will believe. We know that children are good at

noticing when others around them are anxious and will watch the behaviour of others to work out whether they too should feel anxious themselves. Even if you're feeling anxious on the inside, you can help your child by remaining calm on the outside. This will help to reassure them that things might be difficult, but they are manageable.

You may want to use some of the other resources we have sent out. Paper copies will be available for you to collect from outside the school office

**My lockdown experience** 










What I liked

Any significant events

What was difficult?

How did I learn best?

What am I worried about, going back to school?

	 Intensity	 How I Feel
 Virus		
 vaccine		
 social distancing		
 shops closed		
 Isolated		
 washing hands		
 coughing		