



Returning to school:

A Guide for parents of children with a Physical health condition

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected us all. Life is completely different to what it was only a few months ago.

As a parent or carer you may feel concerned about your child returning to school. This is both an understandable and normal reaction as shielding over the last few months has taught you to avoid something that could potentially harm your family, so it is natural to be wary.

The rules around shielding are now changing as we begin to learn more about coronavirus (COVID-19) and the measures that need to be in place to create safer environments in schools.

As shared public spaces and schools re-open, it is understandable that feelings of uncertainty, stress and anxiety are rising. Some children may be feeling worried too – and this is okay. These are normal responses to an abnormal situation.



Parents can look out for signs of distress in children such as:

- Finding it hard to manage their emotions eg. going from 0-10 rapidly
- Appearing clingier or asking for more help
- Increased trouble with sleeping and eating; withdrawn or tearful
- For younger children, there may be more bedwetting or behavioural concerns.

Things will be a bit different when children return to school. Outlined below are some suggestions to support your child through this process of adjustment:

School environment To help you feel prepared to answer any questions, contact the school and find out how the school environment will be different and discover what specific safety measures will be put in place. Teachers may be able to provide photos or videos so your child can see what the school will look like. You can also speak to your school to develop an individual health management plan for your child.

Talking together Having open conversations with your child can increase understanding, reduce those feelings of anxiety and worry, and help your child to learn coping skills. Try to understand and interpret their feelings eg. "I am wondering if you are feeling ...worried/angry/sad... right now".

Listen Find out what your child already knows or what they have heard about returning to school. Listen and acknowledge what they have said, reassure them it's OK to have these worries and praise them for sharing them with you. Remind your child that the grownups in their lives are there to help them feel safe. Help your child write out their own 'return to school plan' answering any questions they might have. Correct any information that is not factual. Ask if they have any questions and remember it is okay to not have the answer straight away.

What are they looking forward to? Seeing their friends again; renewed independence; their favourite subject; seeing their favourite teacher; and buying new school items.

What will they miss from being at home? Reassure them that you will continue to make time for these things.



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Help your child feel in control:

Teach your child how to stay safe Regular hand washing, catch coughs and sneezes in tissues, maintain social distancing and wear face coverings when advised.

Build up confidence outside of the home Gradually build up the length of time your child is spending outside of the home. For instance, begin with short trips and gradually build upon this with greater time and exposure to other people and activities. Schedule into your daily routine some fresh air and exercise (even a short walk/scoot/cycle around the block).

Play dates Children might feel nervous about seeing their friends after such a long time. Ask yourself whether it is possible to arrange a play date before returning to school?

Routines Many family routines have changed over the past few months. Practice the new morning school routine eg. wake up early a few days before school starts to adjust your child's body clock. Make this routine as fun as possible eg. make a morning music playlist.

Play Join in and engage in playful play, this helps children to connect and communicate better with the adults in their lives.

Coping as a parent: If you are finding it hard to stay calm and relaxed, try to tune into what exactly is causing you to feel anxious - Is the news or social media making you feel worse? - Then turn it off or ask family to talk about something else. If it is the fear of something happening to your children, then arm yourself with knowledge and facts (from a couple of reliable, reputable sources). Your medical team may also be able to answer some of your questions.

Things that may help you as a parent or carer

Maintain a healthy lifestyle Healthy food, exercise and good sleep practices will contribute to this. Make contact with a friend or family member. Sit down and watch funny video clips. Listen to music - this helps the brain calm and release happy hormones.

Using calming techniques



Coping statements

'I feel anxious right now, but I am safe',
'It's okay to feel this way, it's a normal reaction'

Using grounding techniques If we feel overwhelmed, it helps to connect with the present moment. Use your senses to do this - name three things around you that you can see, hear and touch.

We know parents are having to make lots of difficult decisions right now. Every family is different and has different needs. Taking time to make decisions will help ensure you make the right decision for your family, and that is the most important thing.

Other resources

The Little Elf and the Flowers of Hope and Bravery Video to watch together:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIKe9GRnhtE>

Building resilience - Back to school tips
<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/backtoschool>
<https://view.pagetiger.com>