
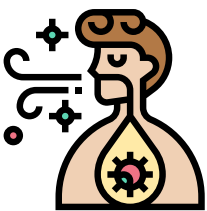



BACK TO SCHOOL



With schools beginning to gradually reopen, it brings a period of change for young people, preparing to transition back to school life. Managing this transition effectively is important for maintaining their wellbeing. Children have already managed a range of changes and disruptions to their school life due to the outbreak of Coronavirus and it is important that these are considered and managed well during their transition back to school. This poster details a range of tips for supporting for children back to school, including helpful resources.

Managing unexpected ending and transitions

- Communicate honestly-** Encourage children to look to the future positively, promoting optimism and hope to manage worries. However, it is important to avoid making unrealistic promises about what the future will look like.
 
- Normalise worries and anxiety-** It is important to remind children that it is normal to feel anxious or worried when activities end during times of change or uncertainty. Encourage children to talk about their worries and support them to engage in relaxation strategies to manage their anxiety (e.g. breathing exercises).
 
- Sustaining social support networks-** The coronavirus pandemic means children are experiencing periods of transition without their usual social support systems. It is important to sustain social relationships with others to enable children to feel connected and supported. Schools can encourage this by arranging online social activities.
- Focusing on accomplishments rather than worries-** It is helpful to frame an ending as a moment of transition and growth. Giving young people the opportunity to share and celebrate some of their achievements whilst on lockdown is a useful way to achieve this (e.g. recording positive moments, providing certificates). For those children moving onto a new school in September it may be usual to make and reflect on yearbook journals.
 
- Preparation-** Preparation gives young people time to come to terms with change. Having supportive conversations at home about the transition and planning the new routine. Schools who are welcoming new students in September can support these children by providing virtual welcome packs. Using peer support models is also a further way to ease anxiety about transitions, enabling children to hear about others experiences (e.g. of moving up to secondary school).

**"Managing unexpected endings and transitions"-Anna Freud
National Centre for Children and Families**

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/11627/managing-unexpected-endings-transitions-may2020.pdf>



Ten tips for parents to help children cope with change

Choose health- Give your child the basics that they need (e.g. exercise, sleep)

Be wise- listen to your child, be interested, give boundaries

Communicate- e.g. keep talking, hugging, listening, smiling

Get learning- Be involved and find out more (e.g. social media, what it is like to be young in the current world)

Move on up- Encourage children's independence

Work together- share ideas, enjoy achievements



Be calm- try to stay calm whilst your child is feeling distressed

Have fun- Provide lots of light relief by doing fun activities together



Be the anchor- In times of change you are comforting, routine, home

Look after yourself- Support yourself to best support your child

Managing anxiety following the pandemic

Whilst many people are looking forward to the world transitioning back to a time closer to 'normal life', this period of uncertainty and the transition back to 'normality' and school can cause heightened anxiety in many young people. There are a range of tips and resources available to support young people with managing these anxieties.

Supporting children and young people

Important not to assume how they will cope with reintegration- some may manage the change with little difficulty, others may struggle.

Children may struggle to understand, express or communicate how they are feeling. There may be indicators instead in the way they behave (e.g. the way they interact with others, sleep). Ensure to keep a supportive, consistent and empathetic approach to meet their needs.

May be helpful to provide family based support if parents/carers are struggling with their own emotional wellbeing.

Acknowledge, validate and discuss children's questions and worries. Validation of worries helps children to develop coping strategies to deal with uncertainty and anxiety.

Predictability and consistency- helpful to send in advance plans for reintegration and helpful to be transparent about any plans that remain subject to change.

Children may benefit from practice in getting themselves back into a routine before school integration starts (e.g. getting up early in the morning and re-establishing a good bedtime routine).

Regular use of praise, validation, empathy, kindness and compassion help the child feel contained and supported.

With older children it is important to acknowledge and validate young people's emotional responses to GCSE's and A Levels being cancelled.

Some children may feel worried about having missed work/fallen behind and may feel as if there is a lot of work to complete when they go back to school to catch up. Sharing proposed timetables and expectations of what young people will be doing is useful.

Communication is essential between parent/carers and professionals working with or supporting a child. Regular meetings, telephone calls, or using communication books which document how the young person coped with isolation and whether there are ongoing worries that can be shared between adult caregivers can be helpful.

Where possible, some young people (due to pre-existing needs or increased anxiety/emotional coping difficulties) may require a flexible or phased reintegration back to school. Important to have conversations and agree plans as soon as possible and communicate them effectively.

Given children will have been exposed to differing levels of information and have varied experiences around the pandemic; it may be helpful to have general school guidance and rules around language and information that is shared in playgrounds or class group settings.

Supporting parents, carers and professionals

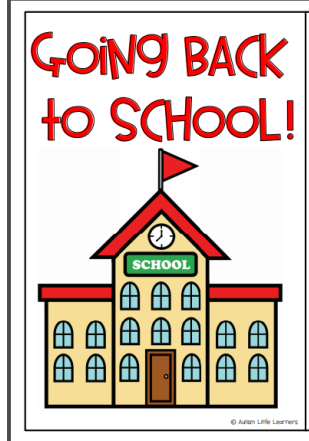
- Talk to your friends, families and colleagues about how you are feeling and ask for help if you are struggling or worried about the 'reintegration' back into 'normal life'.
- Take time to find your new routine- making plans and being organised can help when you feel you have to juggle multiple demands.
- Ensure you have regular opportunities for rest and downtime- be kind and compassionate towards yourself.
- Remember it's ok to struggle or feel overwhelmed at times.

'How to cope after Covid-19 and the pandemic' (Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/coronavirus-help-support-and-advice/> - There are also a range services provided on this resource that can provide further emotional support

Resources for supporting children and young people with worries and anxiety

There are a range of resources available that can be used by young people to support their anxieties and worries during this period of reintegration.



'Going back to school- COVID-19' Story- social story for young children about going back to school

<https://www.autismlittlelearners.com/2020/05/going-back-to-school-story.html>



'Place2Be' resource pack- 'Find your Brave'- mental health resources for both primary and secondary school children.

<https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/schools-and-youth-groups/>



'The tale of going back to school (after the Covid-19 Lockdown)- a tale to positively prepare children for the transition back to school, by helping them understand how their school life will be different and most importantly, how it will remain familiar.

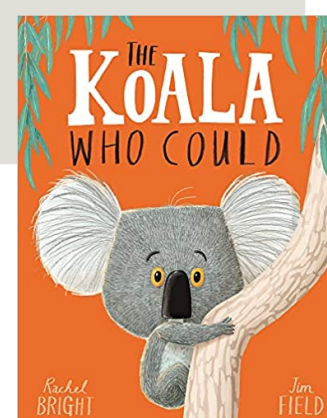
<https://www.talesofmebooks.com/products/the-tale-of-going-back-to-school-after-the-covid-19-lockdown>

SEA inclusion and safeguarding- 'The many problems of returning to school' blog- Blog post from Sara Alston (SEND and Safeguarding Consultant and Trainer) providing recommendations of how to support children with the transition back to school

<https://www.seainclusion.co.uk/post/the-many-problems-of-returning-to-school>



'The Koala who could' book (Rachel Bright 2006)- feel good rhyming story portraying a positive message about facing up to change



'Stem4- supporting teenage mental health'- Information and recommendations around supporting anxiety in teenagers.

<https://stem4.org.uk/anxiety/>



'Mentally Healthy Schools'- quality-assured resources to help primary schools promote children's mental health and wellbeing.

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/>



"Child Brain Injury Trust"- tips and resources for supporting children with brain injuries with the transition back to school.

<https://childbraininjurytrust.org.uk/2020/04/considerations-for-returning-to-education-for-children-young-people-with-brain-injury-during-covid-19/>



"'Angry, fed up, isolated": Coronavirus and children's mental health' (Anne Longfield- Children's Commissioner for England)- article about how the Coronavirus pandemic can affect children's mental health and recommendations/resources of how to support children.

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2020/04/03/angry-fed-up-isolated-coronavirus-and-childrens-mental-health/>



STARS resources- range of resources for supporting children with Autism with the transition back to school and coping with the pandemic

<http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

