

Supporting children's return to school during COVID-19

Children have experienced a lot of sudden change over the past few months, and may experience difficulty returning back to normality. This **Parent Guide** includes information to support your child with their gradual transition back to school.

These are uncertain times and can be stressful for both adults and children. Ensure you're giving yourself time to relax and unwind, take some time to reflect on how you're feeling.

Things to do:

It's time to get ready to come back to school! We are looking forward to seeing everyone again. Here are some things you can do to get ready. This will be different for each family, and depend on the age of your child. Here are some examples:

- ◇ Find school clothes
- ◇ Make sure school clothes are washed
- ◇ Find school shoes and school bag
- ◇ Get up at the normal school wake-up time
- ◇ Eat breakfast at the normal time
- ◇ Help make lunch
- ◇ Pack school bag
- ◇ Drive past school at the usual drop off time for practice
- ◇ Talk about the plan for after school pickup
- ◇ Talk about what your child is looking forward to doing at school
- ◇ Ask them how they feel about going back to school

Going back to your family's normal school morning routine will be a powerful way to help them get back to school successfully.



How your child may be feeling...

Excited or happy: Some children feel ready for their return to school and may be excited to see their friends and teachers again.

Nervous or anxious: Due to being away from their peers and routine structure, some children may feel uncertain about their place amongst their peers and how school will look on their return.

Frustrated or annoyed: Some children may have enjoyed learning in the home environment and do not want to return to school.

It is important to remember that all of these feelings are normal and we all react in different ways.

Your child may have a hard time understanding and expressing their feelings.

As a result, you may notice some **changes in their behaviour:**

- ◇ Changes to sleeping or eating habits, such as struggling to fall asleep;
- ◇ Becoming quieter or more withdrawn;
- ◇ Clinginess or difficulty separating from you;
- ◇ Becoming fidgety and restless;
- ◇ Seeming irritable and acting out, possibly refusing to attend school;
- ◇ Physical complaints such as an upset stomach or headaches;
- ◇ Excessively asking questions or seeking reassurance.

These are normal reactions to stress.

How should I talk to my child about returning to school?

Children may feel a variety of emotions. By providing children with a space to discuss and explore their feelings, we can support them to regulate, problem solve and overcome any difficulties.

Be aware of your child's emotions. It is important to show your child that it is safe to share their feelings by showing acceptance and holding a non-judgemental attitude.

Validate and normalise their feelings and experience. Here are some ideas:

"You feel worried about returning to school. You don't know what to expect. Everything changed so quickly."

"I can see you're so excited to go to school and see everyone."

"You look nervous about seeing your friends after so long. It is normal to feel nervous. I felt a little nervous about that too."

Listen, be curious and encourage the conversation. Here are some ideas:

"I wonder if you are feeling nervous about seeing your friends."

"You're excited! What are you most looking forward to?"

Encourage hope by supporting your child to problem solve, plan or consider a difference perspective.

When they come home from school, take the time to talk about their day, for example:

- ◇ *"What did you like about today?"*
- ◇ *"What was it like seeing your friends again?"*
- ◇ *"What did you learn?"*
- ◇ *"Is anything worrying you?"*



Maintaining Connection Whilst Setting Boundaries

Children may find it difficult to adjust back to regular daily routines and household rules. This is a difficult time for you and your child. It will be helpful to maintain connection with your child whilst setting boundaries and limits.

Communicate comfort and connection through nonverbal communication. Be relaxed in your facial expression and body, get down to your child's level, and offer gentle touch/affection.

Validate and Relate. Consider what your child might be feeling, and how they are experiencing things from their point of view.

"It is hard to get up early in the morning after you have enjoyed weeks of sleeping in."

"You have been doing a great job completing your work online. It must be frustrating not being able to do all your work on the iPad now."

Reason and Set Limits. Support your child to consider the bigger picture and help them problem solve. Communicate that wishes and feelings are acceptable, but some behaviours are not. It is important to remain calm, clear and assertive.

"It's hard to go back to school after such a big break. We have to go to school. Let's sit together and figure out how to make this easier".

"I hear you want to play more. It is important that you get a good night sleep before school. It is bed time."

"I can see you are frustrated but it is not ok to yell or hit."

Useful Resources:

- ◇ **Contact the Family Referral Service** at <http://www.familyreferralservice.com.au/>
- ◇ **Speak to your GP** about mental health support via Medicare for adults and children
- ◇ **Parent Line:** 1300 1300 52 or <https://parentline.com.au/>
- ◇ **Raising Children Network:** <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>
- ◇ **Parenting courses and seminars in your local area:** <http://www.resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au/>
- ◇ **For immediate support:** Lifeline: 13 11 14 | Beyond Blue: 1300 22 46 36 | Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511