

Maintaining routines for back to school

As the COVID-19 situation progresses and the Government guidance continues to change as lockdown restrictions are eased, individuals may be feeling anxious about going back to “normal life” and to how safe it is to return to work and schools. This article looks at things for parents/guardians to consider when you are thinking about your children returning to schools.

How to prepare a child emotionally for returning to school?

The advice can vary depending on the age of the child. You may like to consider some of the below points to help prepare your child to return to school as outlined by The Mental Health Foundation –

- **Start talking** - Your child might have worries about returning to school. You can explore these and help them think of ways to manage them.
- **Sleep routine** - Help your child return to their normal sleep routine in the weeks before school starts again.
- **Talk about school** - Start to talk through the daily routine that they were once so familiar with. It doesn't have to start as a conversation about worries, but these might arise as you talk.
- **Coping strategies** - Model coping strategies you use when feeling stressed such as reconnecting with friends before returning, doing regular exercise or using breathing techniques. If it applies, you could share your own worries and feelings about returning to work and ways you are managing these feelings.
- **Make yourself available as much as possible** - Children may want to come and “debrief” but maybe not when you expect. Create space for talking in different ways, such as going on a walk together or baking together – there may be less pressure in these circumstances than when sitting face-to-face.
- **Look at the positives** - As schools reopen, other things will too. It might be helpful to talk about things the child is looking forward to, like their favourite shop reopening, seeing friends in the park or getting ice cream from their favourite café.

Signs that a child may be anxious or distressed about returning to school:

- They look withdrawn, tearful or appear in low mood
- They are struggling with sleeping or eating
- They appear anxious or distressed
- Talking about negative or worried thoughts around their future
- They tend to be more upset and are struggling to manage their emotions

If you are concerned about your child's mental health, you may be able to help by:

- Spending time talking to your child
- Setting a routine for the next few weeks
- Maintaining your own mental health
- Giving your child the chance to talk about how they are feeling
- Do your best to try and understand their concerns and worries, reassure them that you understand and that you are there to support them

What Question's may I want to ask my child's school?

- What procedures have the school taken to ensure the safety of students?
- What changes have been made due to COVID-19?
- What if my child feels unwell, do they have to stay off school for a certain amount of time?
- Will any after schools clubs be on?

How can Care first help?

If you feel you may need some emotional or practical support, you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. Whilst our BACP accredited counsellors are available 24/7 to provide support with emotional issues, our expertly trained information specialists are available 8am-8pm Monday-Friday to provide advice on any practical issues that may be causing you a stress or worry and help you feel more in control of a situation. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support.

Please see the below links for more information

- <https://www.priorygroup.com/blog/managing-children-s-fears-around-returning-to-school-after-coronavirus-lockdown>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown/tips-parents-carers-return-to-school>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

If you would like to learn more about **'Maintaining routines for back to school'** Then please join our webinar on **Friday 5th March at 12pm** using the details below –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3826054587150074127>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place. If you wish to contact the Care first telephone counselling and information line then please don't hesitate to call the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.