



Tips for Returning to School

Returning to the classrooms is fast approaching after an extended period learning from home. Your child has experienced many weeks at home and a very different learning environment. Just as it may have taken some time to settle into learning at home, we need to be mindful that there may be a period of adjustment over the next few days and weeks in getting back into learning from school.

As we return to school based classes, the reality of changes invoked by COVID-19 is about to begin. Things will look different! For many children the return to school will be a delightful experience. It will mean reconnecting with friends and teachers and they will race out the front door ready to get back to normal. For others, the return to school is likely to stir up a range of emotions; anxiety, apprehension, uncertainty and worry.

We would like to offer some tips to encourage a smooth transition back to school.

Some changes you may see in your children:

- Reluctance or refusal to go to school
- Increased clinginess – seeking out physical comfort and connection with you
- Increased tearfulness or emotional outbursts
- Difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Distraction, inability to concentrate or focus
- A greater need to play and have ‘down time’
- Somatic or physical complaints, especially stomach aches, headaches and body aches.

Some things to try:

- Start your normal morning routine in the days before school starts.
- Use visual aids such as calendars to count down to school starting ([return to school countdown calendar](#)), the return of siblings, school holidays.
- Discuss the safety measures that will be implemented with your children i.e. hand washing, using hand sanitiser, school pick-up and drop-off arrangements. Provide reassurance that your child’s teachers are here to help them.
- Be open to having conversations about uncomfortable emotions and give emotions names. These can be names such as “sad”, “angry” or “worried”.
- Ask your child what they’re looking forward to, what they think might be different, what they’re expecting. Validate any fears and correct any misconceptions.



- Use your own feelings as a model. Talk about feeling uncomfortable (if you do) and how you are managing this. Be mindful to keep the focus on how you are coping rather than the situation and uncomfortable emotion.
- Model using positive language and staying calm and confident in the school's capacity to manage the return to school based classes. Our children look to us as a guide for how to respond in times of uncertainty.
- Plan 'down time' and 'play time'. Limit after school activities as the children adjust to their 'new normal'. Children process change and emotions through play.
- Communicate with your child's classroom teacher about any specific concerns you or your child have.

Tips for Teenagers

Communication and Compassion

Create opportunities to talk to your teenager, to talk about their thoughts and feelings about returning to school. Providing a listening ear, acknowledgement and reassurance can be very helpful, and knowing they can talk to you anytime can be very soothing. How your teenager feels is personal to them and is OK. Keep things in perspective and encourage self-compassion which can assist us to respond to difficult thoughts and feelings with kindness and understanding.

Preparation

Returning to school may take a little time to adjust so give your teenager and yourself time to settle back into the routine. Familiarise yourself with the timetable and any changes to encourage predictable daily and weekly routines. This can be really calming and reassuring. Encourage your teen to have all their things ready for school, including uniform (make sure it fits as lots of growing may have happened!), lunch and drink bottle!

Hygiene and Safety

Remind your teenager about how the school has clear hygiene guidelines to relieve any worries. Keep up to date with regular updates provided by the school.

Problem Solving

If your teenager is feeling a little stuck on a situation, sometimes writing a list of solutions to a problem, working through the pros and cons, selecting the best solution, actioning and evaluating success/learnings can be helpful. Your teenager may also like to explore this idea with a teacher or trusted adult.



Health and Wellbeing

We all need to take care of our general health and wellbeing. Many teenagers may feel more tired returning to school with increased movement and adapting to change. Encourage your teenager to maintain a good sleep routine.

Some helpful information can be found at:

<https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/factsheets.html>.

Encourage nutritious food choices and regular exercise. Take some time to explore activities that are calming and even energising. Continue physical exercise and promote relaxation for everyone in the family. Consider formal relaxation such as progressive relaxation, meditation or enjoyable activities together.

Smiling Minds has lots of information to help you stay calm and healthy:

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/mindfulness>.

Contact your Classroom Teacher or Department Leader via email or phone for further advice or support.