



## Supporting children with Transition as they return back to school: Strategies for Parents/Carers

The transition period back to school is a process that takes time. It is important to accept that each child can settle at a different pace and that despite the strategies below may help some families in the process prior to return to school, the transition back to school is a long process that will continue as the child settles in school. Children, parents and school all wish the same goal, **a good and happy time at school for each child** – collaboration and teamwork is really key to support the child through this process.



### Listen to your child

Explore with your child how they are feeling regarding returning to school. Ask your children what aspects they are excited about and what aspects cause worry. Tell your child that it is natural to have a mix of emotions both positive and negative ones. This is also about observing your child's behaviour and question yourself about what your child is communicating to you. Acting younger is a typical unconscious way that children have to tell you that they are feeling "wobbly" inside and by noticing that you can support your child by using the same strategies that you used in the past to manage your child's behaviour. Due to the covid-19 it is possible that for some children, fear about death, and whether their parents will be OK is more intensified. It is also the case that some children would have been exposed to media, and when back to school your child may listen to things that could be scary. Be curious with your child about what has been said.



### Prepare your child by providing information

Provide your child with detailed information about what school routine will be like in order to prepare your child for the changes ahead. If possible, provide pictures or photos of the school layout, timetables, and photos and names of teachers. If possible, tell your child who is doing the drop-off and pick-up on each day. Encourage your your child to ask questions that they may wish to know; e.g., Where will lunch be? Where will I play? When possible, include your child in making choices (e.g., what would you like to take to school for your snack?). This includes to explain to your child that if someone in their class were to have covid-19, the whole class would have to self-isolate for a certain period of time prior to returning to school again.



### Re-establish a school daily routine

Prior to the start of school, start preparation for school routines by having regular sleep and regular waking up times consistent to school routines. It is helpful to consider that during lockdown some children may have been more physically unfit and may get tired more quickly once they return to school. Healthy sleep and healthy diet are really helpful. At

home, spend time with your child preparing school clothes, and making a timetable ready for school days and non-school days. If your child has been off-school for several months, it is possible that at times your child may forget about having school on the next day, so visual clues at home are helpful reminders.



### Gradual return & visits to school

For some children, having a gradual return may make it easier for them to adjust. For other children, routine from day one works best. As a parent, trust yourself. If you have opted for one option and think other would have been better, remember that hindsight is a wonderful thing and you were doing your best at the time.

Please note that if, for your child you consider that a gradual return is the best, then ensure that you discuss this with school and that this has been agreed with your school.

For some children, visiting the school in advance prior to returning to school may be helpful. You can arrange this with you school if you explain that your child has concerns about being back. Often schools accommodate these requests.



### Celebrate return to school

Share with your child the positives about being able to return to school. Talk to your child about any surprises – what were the best things? What were the tricky things? When at home, ask “**what were the three best things about school today?**”. Sometimes, asking “what did you do today at school?” leads to “don’t know”. By asking what the best things you did today, children often get more engaged as they wish to share these with you.



### Promote security and connection

Once back home, promote connection and security in your child. This is about repairing the break in the parent-child relationship and connecting with your child once you are both back home. This can be challenging at times as children could arrive home carrying a mix of emotions depending on the many challenges they had to navigate whilst at school.

During snack, you have a chance to nurture your child and this often helps regulate your child’s emotions. If you just observe your child and refrain from speaking, you may notice that your child may share aspects of themselves and of their day to you. This is great for connection.

Tell your child that when he/she was away you thought of him/her (if genuine). What does your child need after school? Some children need to run around and use unspent energy, other children need time to unwind, quietly before moving on to the next activity. Attempt to create a routine for your child after-school time that works for your child.

Finally, consider transitional objects – that is, a special toy that your child can keep in his\her school bag that remind him\her of you. At times of change and of stress for children, these strategies that may helped your child at a younger age can still be useful now despite your child being older. Due safety to avoid the spread of covid-19, your child’s school may have guidelines on what can a child bring from home. It is important to think creatively on how to overcome the challenges and enable your child to feel as secure as possible.



### Bridges school – home

Good communication between home and school is key to support your child. Let your child's teacher know of any challenges your child may have. Share strategies that work at home with school and apply strategies that work well at school at home. Continuity between school-home and home-school gives your child consistency and helps promote positive behaviours.



### Child's voice

Give your child a voice and help your child communicate his/her views within school. Your school will be asking your child to complete a **child profile** which can help give your child a voice about how they learn best.



### Accept challenges, seek support and keep hopeful

Transitions can be challenging, so be prepared for some difficulties at home. If your child has mental health needs, please seek support. Remember that things don't last forever and despite all the changes there are things you can expect, and things under your control. You are doing your best and all children have areas of strength and areas that require some support (some less obvious/visible).

## References

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