

Talking to your child about going back to school

Derbyshire Educational Psychology Service

Getting more children back to school is seen as the next step in reopening schools and settings for all children. Some parents and carers will have reservations about the return to school and we understand that people will make decisions based on the needs of their child and family circumstances.

Due to social distancing schools will, for the foreseeable future, look and feel different to what children and parents are used to. Many children will be keen to get back to school, to see their friends and teaching staff. However, some children, and parents, will be anxious. Children with additional needs may face particular challenges, for example coping with further changes to their routine and to the school environment.

Talking and listening to your child

Children need age-appropriate information that helps them make sense of what is happening and why. All children will need reassurance that they will be returning to school at some point in the future and that adults are making the best decisions they can to ensure that people remain safe and well.

If your child is not returning to school at the present time they will need to hear that they haven't been forgotten, that the adults in school are thinking about them. It is important to continue to offer hope about the future.

One of the most important things that parents and carers can do is to listen to their child, allowing them to express how they are feeling. Making time for children to communicate about their thoughts and feelings supports a sense of security and being 'held' by the adults around them. This can be through talk, but could also be through drawing or using images such as Emoji.

Preparing to return

Children and families will have experienced lockdown in many different ways. They will also have a variety of experiences of transitioning back into school.

It is important to be kind to yourself and remember that adapting to change can take time. You will have supported your child through transitions before, such as starting school and returning after the summer. You may want to think about what has helped in the past.

Manage expectations

Some children and young people may be looking forward to returning to school and seeing their friends and teachers. For others, this may be an anxious and stressful time. Having returned to school, these feelings may change when school is not the way that they remember or how it was expected to be. It is okay to have these feelings.



You may also feel a mixture of emotions as children return to school.

Preparing for transition and talking to school staff about expectations (your child's, yours and theirs) may resolve some uncertainties. It can also help to support relationships between children, their families and the people who will be teaching and supporting in schools.

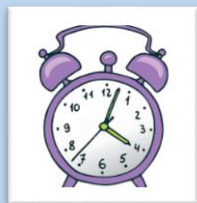
You may notice a number of changes as your child adapts to going back to school. This may include temporary changes to: behaviour, sleeping and/or eating. A focus on connection and an acceptance of difficult and painful feelings is key. Ensure that you continue to build on any good things that have come out of lockdown, for example: exercise, spending time together and new family 'traditions'.

Key messages:

- It's okay and normal to feel excited and also worried or nervous about going back to school
- Staff are looking forward to seeing you
- The school and your classroom will look different. This is so staff and children can be kept as safe as possible
- There may be new rules to keep everyone safe. Adults will help you remember the rules
- You will be able to see some of the children in your class but everyone will be in smaller groups so you may not see all of your friends

Plan for change

Sudden changes can feel difficult to manage. Making small, gradual changes in advance can feel easier.



Areas to think about might be re-adjusting sleep and morning routines bit-by-bit before returning to school.

This will minimise the shock of the first morning going back. Try to adjust bedtimes and wake up times in advance to allow children and young people to get enough sleep.

Children and young people can find routines helpful when other areas of their lives feel less predictable. Beginning to put a routine in place which is similar to that in school may be helpful. Some children may benefit from having a visual timetable or a reminder on the family calendar as to what is happening and when.

Some children may experience separation anxiety when going back into school. Children will need reassurance that you, or another trusted adult, will be picking them up at the end of the school day.

Key message:

- Change can be hard but we will find a new normal together

Take care of yourself

Being a parent can be hard work. Parenting during a pandemic is likely to have brought lots of new challenges including, for some, trying to juggle work and home education. It is important that you look after your own health and wellbeing.








Parents and carers play an important role in modelling positive behaviour and coping strategies to their children, who may be struggling. Self-care will mean different things for different people but can include: taking time for yourself, keeping active and talking to people about your thoughts and feelings.

Celebrating successes is important too; your child's successes during lockdown and when returning to school, as well as your own lockdown and transition 'wins', however large or small they feel.

Resources and links

Support for parents and carers

	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing
	https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/ Information and support for parents and carers in supporting children and young people in relation to Covid-19, includes access to parenting coaches online. Section for Top tips for foster carers and adoptive parents during this difficult time.
	https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/
	https://www.qwell.io/index.html Provides free online support for parents and carers. Available 365 days of the year via mobile, tablet and desktop devices from 12 noon to 10pm Monday-Friday and 6pm-10pm at weekends, the service provides access to accredited counselling support, peer support via online forums and relevant articles detailing a variety of topics
	www.derbyshire.gov.uk/schoolsandparents Information and links for parents and carers about Coronavirus, including mental health support

Support and resources for parents and carers of children with additional needs

<https://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/patients-and-parents/coronavirus-resources-for-children-and-families/>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines/coronavirus/resources/helpful-resources.aspx>

<https://www.contact.org.uk/advice-and-support/coronavirus-information-for-families-with-disabled-children/>