

Hints & Tips for Parents to Support Transition Back to School

The following is a collection of advice for families supporting their child returning either to their existing settings or to new settings following time at home. All strategies/suggestions can be modified to suit pupils of all ages and levels of need (suggestions have been provided in some cases). Please feel free to contact your child's school or the Advisory teacher advice line (Currently available Monday-Friday during term time, 10am-2pm on 01442 453920) if you require further support with the use of these strategies.

Things to consider ...

- The government advice is frequently changing and some of our young people may struggle with this uncertainty. Avoid beginning any transition work too far in advance of a **confirmed** return to school date for your child as this may increase anxiety.
- Remember to present transition materials visually where possible to aid processing and allow your child to revisit the information when needed.
- Keep the information you share with your child as factual as possible and avoid providing more information than your child needs.
- Present information in small chunks and revisit frequently.
- Involve your child in the planning for their return to school wherever possible and appropriate.
- The most effective transitions are when schools and families work together, sharing information and creating a plan that is flexible. Communication is the key and as parents, you are the experts on your child.

What can I do before a return to school date is confirmed?

- Reflect on your time in lockdown with your child. You may choose to complete a 'Lockdown time capsule' (proformas can be found online) or consider things like 'what worked well to help me learn at home?' 'what have I missed during Lockdown?' or 'What have I enjoyed about lockdown?' etc
- Share memories of events/experiences/ routines from your child's time in school to help build a familiarity and sense of positivity about their return. This may include looking at photos or other items from school.
- Share a social story about the potential of an upcoming return to school at **some point** in the near future. Ensure that this contains information that makes it clear that this is an unconfirmed timescale to avoid confusion. Examples of social stories have been provided to schools/settings so please contact your child's school for further guidance.
- Make initial contact with your child's school to begin discussions around transition.

Planning return once a return date is confirmed for my child.

- Contact school to discuss the specific details of a transition timetable. What days/times will they attend? How will their time increase as the days go on? Who will they be working with? What will their time in school look like?
- Create a countdown calendar that you can display at home. Encourage your child to mark off each day. Include details of what the first sessions back to school will look like. 
- Create/share a social story to help your child understand what returning to school will look and feel like for them. Read this several times a day.
- Share information from lockdown gained about child with school, how they learn etc. including any routines established at home that could support 'recover phase of transition

How do I help my child to develop or reignite relationships through transition?

- Share and display photos of key staff and peers. You can use these images to play games e.g. snap/guess who to help them feel more familiar.
- Make links virtually with key staff where possible/appropriate (This may be through video chats or pre-recorded videos).
- Encourage virtual links with peers. Arrange for your child to send/receive letters/make phone calls or send videos to familiar peers.

How do I help my child become familiar and comfortable with their new environment?

- If possible, arrange visits to your child's new/existing classroom/school building. This may initially just be to spend time on the playground, look through windows or briefly meet and greet staff.
- Many schools will create a transition book of photos and basic information that you can share with your child in the run up to their return to school. Alternatively, you can create your own using information from the school's website or social media pages.
- It can be helpful to request videos of classroom/routes around school including important 'landmarks'. This allows you to replay images to your child to help the building feel more familiar when they return.
- If your child is returning to a new setting, explore the school's website/social media pages to share photos and events with your child.



How do I re-establish routines for school?

- Practice the walk to school on a daily basis in the run up to returning to school. Begin with a short distance, building up slowly if necessary. It can help to create a video of the route you take to school to replay at home.
- Practice putting on school uniform together. Lay it out in advance so that it becomes a familiar sight for your child.
- Practice organizing resources/packing your school bag together (this may be more relevant for older pupils). You may introduce a visual prompt to help them remember what they need and encourage independence.
- Share details of your child's school timetable with them. It can help to spend time asking questions or playing games using the timetable to help them to feel familiarized with it.
- Gradually begin to re-adjust your morning routine to become more like a school day routine. Set the alarm earlier each day and encourage breakfast/getting dressed in sequence and within a timescale.



Emotional wellbeing/anxiety

- Remember each child's anxiety will be unique and stem from different sources. Anxieties may link to the virus itself, changes of routine, different cohort of friends or adults in school etc. Identify the route of the anxiety before planning how to support your child best.
- Take it slow! The steps to overcoming anxiety are often very small and slow but this doesn't mean you are failing. Don't be disheartened if you take a step back every now and then too. Focus on the destination and don't worry what shape the journey is.
- Offer your child opportunities to ask questions about what is happening etc. Some children may prefer/find it easier to write down their questions or worries and post them in a box or use a worry monster as an alternative to asking questions directly.
- Talk about positive things to look forward to about the return to school wherever possible.
- Address any anxieties with the minimum amount of factual information to satisfy their worries and avoid adding your opinion. Remember, the priority is to make our children feel safe. For some children this means having all the facts and figures!
- Practice a range of relaxation techniques with your child to ensure they have strategies to reduce their anxiety at times of need. These may include breathing techniques and mindfulness activities. Examples can be found online.

Specific Covid-19 related considerations

- Clarify (with your child's setting) and share information about any modifications to the school environment (e.g. socially distanced desks) rules, routines or class structures introduced in response to Covid-19. Use positive language and keep the information you share on a 'need to know' basis.
- Consider scenarios your child may find challenging in relation to Covid-19 adjustments (e.g. if someone coughs near me) and role-play or discuss appropriate responses
- Remember further modifications may be made to the school environment as the weeks go on so transition support will need to be ongoing and flexible.
- Ensure you are rehearsing social distancing, handwashing and good respiratory hygiene (sneezing into a tissue etc.) with your child on a regular basis. They may need visual prompts and modelling to support them.

