

## Children returning to school: Parental anxiety

At this time of year, whether you are a parent of young children making the transition in to primary school from nursery, primary school to secondary school or even the transition into a different year group, it is completely normal to be feeling anxious about the change when they return in September.



If your child is suffering from back to school anxiety, here are some tips to help them deal with the issue.

1. Preparation is key. Have an open discussion about the upcoming academic year while encouraging your child to voice their fears and anxieties. This cathartic release is vital for children as it helps them overcome their anxiety-provoking thoughts and feelings.
2. Encourage your child to talk to their friends. This can dispel fears and make them feel excited about going back to school. Perhaps meet in the park and plan some social activities before they meet in the classroom.
3. Create a positive atmosphere at home by talking cheerfully about the new school year, and all the happy and good things about going back to school.
4. Take them back-to-school shopping and get things ready for the new school year will make them feel more positive and excited about going back to school. This will also give them a sense of normality.
5. Help your child plan and organise their back-to-school paraphernalia like school bag, pencil box and stationery.
6. Begin regulating their sleeping and eating schedules at least one week prior to the school reopening day. Ensuring that they get enough sleep and eat a healthy diet will help them feel relaxed and calm. Remember, lack of proper sleep and food can make children feel angry, irritable and restless.
7. Help them structure their routine. For example, getting the school bags and uniforms ready the previous night, to avoid feeling overburdened with tasks in the morning, setting a wake-up time and so on. Remember that many

children and teenagers are not their best in the mornings and they have had a long time away from the usual school routine. It may take a bit longer to readjust their internal time-clock to be able to function properly in the morning.

### Also things to try to avoid

1. Dismissing your child's fears as baseless and brush them away.
2. Don't just tell your child everything will be okay and they need to grow up and get on with it. Children need to voice their fears to feel reassured. Avoid comparing your child with children who aren't anxious about going back to school.
3. Keep your negative views about your child's school and teacher to yourself. Never make disparaging comments about the school and teachers in front of your child. This can create a negative atmosphere and increase your child's fear and anxiety.
4. Avoid getting too involved in solving your child's problems. Give them the space and time to figure things out on their own.
5. Try not to get frustrated with your child in the morning if they are being slow getting ready for school on time. Try to prepare and plan your routine in a systematic manner, and remain calm and collected. Sometimes you can unwittingly project your own fear and anxiety onto your child.

### Tips for coping with parental anxiety

1. Be as informed as possible. Read up on the schools reopening Government guidelines [here](#). The sections on risk assessments, the test and trace process and pastoral support should hopefully calm your nerves and reassert that this is the right decision, informed by professional thinking.
2. Create social support networks with other parents. Here you can speak about the topic away from your child. Search the web for useful guides and advice such as [this one here from the BBC](#).
3. Think positive. You no longer have to home school and carry the large burden of academic development solely on your back. Furthermore, in smaller groups, the changes might be positive, especially for older children. More focussed attention and more opportunities for children to talk in class are just two of the hidden benefits of temporarily reduced class sizes. Those 'bubbles' they are in might just be a better way of learning. Children are likely to be happier and more fulfilled within their school environment, with their friends. The school routine is good for them and you and will help establish more certainty in their lives and a new normal.

### Proactive problem solving

Proactively solving the issue that gives you anxiety is a task-oriented coping strategy, the most effective type of coping mechanism.

For instance, if you are concerned about your child's development. Take an interest in the subjects they are having difficulty with, helping to build their confidence in that subject. As well as communicating this with the school. Such task-oriented coping strategies are more likely to reduce anxiety and contribute to psychological wellbeing.

## Support available to you

If you feel you may need some support, you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first and our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support.

Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

## More Information

If you would like to view the Webinar on **'Return to school anxiety – Tips for parents'** this is being delivered live on **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September at 12pm**, please use the following link to register for this session –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/892839058996370266>

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.

