

COVID-19: Supporting Children to Return to School

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused stress and anxiety across the globe, and continues to impact our lives. As restrictions begin to ease, there will be a need to transition back into society, and we will need to help each other to do so.

For children, this will mean returning to school for face-to-face learning in the classroom. Just as the transition to learning from home took some time for children and families to get used to, so too may the adjustment back to school.

With school-aged children across New South Wales slowly returning to face-to-face learning, it's normal for them to have mixed feelings about returning to school. Children may feel anxious, scared, reluctant, excited or just overwhelmed. Their feelings may vary depending on their age and stage of development, and family situation. How children feel about returning to school may vary both between children in the same family, and it may also vary day-to-day for a particular child. It's important for you, as a parent, guardian, or someone with children in your care, to acknowledge the changes and talk with your children about returning to school.

1. Listen and support

Talk to your child about how they're feeling. Listen to them and reassure them that it's normal to feel anxious, scared, overwhelmed or worried about going back to school. It's also normal to feel excited at the same time as feeling stressed or scared about the changes and lifting of restrictions.

Talk to your children about the positives of the upcoming changes, including what they like to do at school that they haven't been able to do at home during remote learning.

2. Create a plan

Make a plan for the first day and first week of school. Planning can help reduce stress and anxiety by adding structure and routine to new, changed or uncertain situations.

- Allow time for play, relaxation and homework, as well as some tasks around the home which are suitable for your child's age and stage of development.
- Set up some playdates with school friends (while adhering to government requirements for social gatherings) to help your children feel connected with their school community outside the classroom.

- Get back into a routine, including dinner, bath and bed times.
- Restrict and/or reduce how much news and media younger children are exposed to, as this may scare or worry them. For older children, help them to source reputable and reliable media and talk about what they're reading and viewing.
- Talk about and be upfront about any concerns your children may have.
- Stay calm and allow time for your children to transition and settle back to school.
- Support kids to get plenty of rest, particularly in the first week or two after returning to school, as they will be adjusting to a much busier schedule than what they have recently been used to.
- Make positive statements to your children about what they're doing well, and how they're coping with the challenges and expectations placed on them by the teachers and the school.
- Build in some 'down time' at home when children return home after a school day. If possible, go for a walk together to the park, or engage in a relaxing activity together, and provide a healthy after school snack.
- Involve your children in preparing your family's meal for dinner, and give them tasks and responsibilities to help you in your household. While helping out is part of being a team, you can also build in some rewards to encourage and recognise their assistance.
- As a family, plan some fun recreational and social activities to look forward to on the weekends.

3. Give it time

It's important to be aware that any transition can take time and every child will be different. Some will bounce back into their old routines immediately, while others will take longer to readjust.

Remember that being away from school and then returning to a changed environment can cause anxiety and stress. Problem solve any concerns or issues together and write down strategies that will help your children to cope.

4. Get help if needed

If your children are experiencing prolonged behavioural issues, seek help, as the COVID-19 pandemic could trigger more serious stress disorders and it's best to seek help early.

If you're concerned, talk to your GP, Kids Helpline, the school psychologist or school counsellor/welfare co-ordinator, or a local health service.

Need support?

Relationships Australia NSW has more than 70 years' experience supporting relationships that are safe, respectful and strong. We're still providing services during COVID-19, including through telephone and video appointments.

Our counselling service is available to support individuals, couples and families. Contact us for more information.

This factsheet was originally produced by Relationships Australia Victoria - www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au

