

Practical tools, tips and resources for parents for returning to school

Birmingham Educational Psychology service has drawn up this guidance to advise how best to support parents with preparing their children for the return to school following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lots of children and young people (C/YP) might find returning to school, a time of transition, challenging and it might create a range of different emotions for them. Some emotions might be things like excitement to see their friends again or worry that things might be different. It is important to support C/YP to recognise that negative feelings such as feeling anxious, worried, scared etc. are normal and can be survived. Birmingham Educational Psychology Service has created an 'Emotion Coaching Guidance' resource pack for parents which provides detail about how to talk to C/YP about emotions and support them to develop their skills at regulating their emotions, which you might find helpful to support your conversations with your child, especially with the preparation of returning to school. If you have not received a copy of this, please ask your school SENCo or look on the Birmingham Education Support Service (BESS) website:

<http://www.birminghameducationsupportservices.co.uk/Page/16955>

It can be difficult for any of us to prepare to change our daily routines again, especially after a long time out of school. Just think how long it took us all to adjust to being out of school at the beginning of all school closures. This document might include some of your child's concerns and worries and we have tried to provide some practical tips for things you can do to help your child with these areas of difficulty. For some children, there may have been difficulties in attending school prior to the school closures and this extended time at home may have reinforced this to your child. It is important to share information with staff at school in order for additional support to be put in place.

Leaving home

Children and young people have spent a lot of time with parents/carers and they might want to stay near you. Reassure them that it is normal to feel worried about this but remind them that you will be there when they get back. It might be helpful to talk about your own worries about returning to work and try to create ways to manage these together. To support with this difficulty, you could try leaving notes in their lunchbox, or giving them something of yours to look after for the day in their school bag.



Entering a new class

Depending on when the schools re-open, your child might have moved to a new classroom, new year group and might have a less familiar teacher. It might help to seek the opportunity for your child to speak with their new class teacher before starting at school. It could be possible for their new class teacher and teaching assistants to provide a 'welcome letter' which includes a picture of themselves, pictures of their new classrooms and a little welcome message to help your child get to know them. If you feel this might be helpful, it would be worthwhile talking to school staff about the possibility of this.

Entering a new school

Some children might be starting a new Key Stage or a new school! Practice walking or travelling to the new school or keep them in contact with a peer/friend that will be going with them. You could contact the school and ask if there is any information they can provide to help prepare your child in any way. This could include letters from members of staff which include pictures and an 'about me' paragraph and could include a map of the school to help your child feel more familiar about the school layout and where they can go if they need help from an adult. It could be worthwhile completing an 'About Me' profile with your child which outlines their strengths, difficulties and information about what they find helpful, as this could be shared with the school in order for them to prepare what additional support might be useful. A blank template of this can be found on the final page of this document. You may also like to consider creating a Rix Wiki for your child, please see the link below which describes what a Wiki is:

<https://youtu.be/Ozaspdxuunw>



Difficulties with friendships

Where possible, try and maintain contact with peers prior to the return to school so they are still able to continue their friendships. Could your child talk to their friends over the phone, through writing letters to each other or through video calling? For some, seeing their friends again will be a motivator for returning to school. For others, there may have been difficulties prior to the school closures which might make their return to school even more challenging. Try and encourage your child to talk about their worries so that you are able to communicate with the school and put support in place. Schools may be able to put in place buddy systems or additional social skills support for the return to school.

General support

When considering the return to school, there will be a large number of changes to the daily routine. Here are some practical ideas to support with this:

- Re-starting a clear morning routine, with a visual timetable, to lay out all of the steps to getting ready for school again.
- Have a visual calendar on display so that your child can begin counting down the days to the first day back
- Encouraging conversations about your child's thoughts, views and emotions surrounding the return to school. Model how to share their thoughts by doing this yourself and showing that experiencing a range of emotions is normal. This is where 'Emotion Coaching' can be helpful. Please see the guidance for further information. You can also try 'wondering aloud' to try and interpret how your child might be feeling, with curiosity and empathy, to support them to recognise how they might be feeling e.g. *"I wonder if you are feeling a little worried about going back to school because you've just got used to being at home all of the time? That is completely understandable, I'm feeling the same about going back to work. Would it help to talk about it a little?"*
- Encourage the use of supported self-reflective activities such as using Emotional Thermometers or traffic light systems to



help discuss how to move down the emotional thermometer or remove stresses.

- Reading them a 'Social Story' to begin conversations with them about how they feel about returning to school. We have created a template story which has spaces for you and your child to complete so this story is more personal to them.
- Finally, keep communicating with school about any concerns.

It is important to know that all the feelings that you might observe in your child are normal in this time. There will be a period of adjustment. However, if problems persist, be aware of who you can contact, including school teacher, school SENCo.

Other advice and guidance developed by Birmingham Educational Psychology Service that may be useful to you include:

- Bereavement
- Emotion Coaching
- Family and Parent Support helpline

All about me

My Name: _____

My Birthday: _____

*Space to include a picture and summary of
'who I am'*

What I am good at...

What I find difficult....

What I find helpful in school...

What I find unhelpful in school...

How people can help me when I'm feeling *worried/stressed/upset...*