



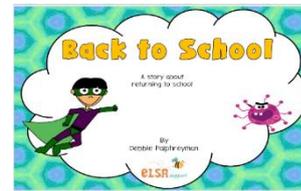
ELSA newsletter 9: Thinking about coming back to school

After 10 weeks of lockdown, it’s finally time for some of our children to start coming back to school. For Year 6, this is a “mini-transition” in itself, before their “big transition” to Secondary school in September. For both children and adults, this may bring a mix of emotions. Children may feel excited but scared; carers may feel relief but also some trepidation. The first day back at school might be a little like the first trip you made to a supermarket while we were in lockdown: the thought of getting out of the house was exciting, but when you got there everything was a little different and unsettling, and you were still concerned about catching the virus. Your heightened anxiety may have left you feeling on edge, jumpy or irritable and you may have been disappointed or frustrated at the things you still couldn’t do. If you imagine your child feeling this way about returning to school, it may help you put yourself in their shoes.

Children are very resilient and many will take this latest change in their stride, but some may be feeling a little wobbly. Let them know that however they are feeling is ok, and that they won’t be the only ones feeling that way!

For some children, a heightened sense of alert at the invisible threat of the virus may lead to challenging behaviour, outbursts, clinginess or a regression to younger behaviours. Try to see beyond the behaviour to work out and empathise with what your child is feeling. Are you dealing with a frightened child rather than a “naughty” one?

If your children are confused about what is happening, this story explains why and how they are coming back to school, in quite general terms. (As each Year group returns to GJS we will be sending them details about what will now be the same/different for them at school.)



<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Coronavirus-back-to-school.pdf>

If you have a date for when your child is returning, consider making a countdown chart so they are prepared for their start date. Help them get their belongings together, so the anxiety of the first day isn’t compounded by stress over lost shoes! (or is that just in my house?!).

Talk to your child about what they are expecting, what they are looking forward to, and what they are concerned about. This gives you the chance to correct any misconceptions and manage their expectations about what will be happening. Emphasise what will still be the same, as well as talking about what will be different for the time being.

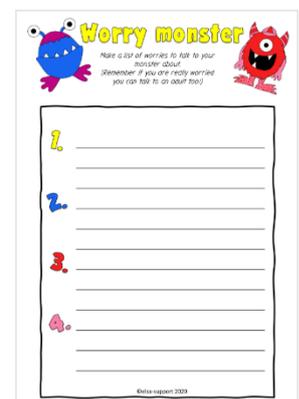
Your child will pick up on your feelings about their return, so be calm, reassuring and positive. Let them know that you are comfortable with them coming back to school and confident that they will be safe there.

Your child might have a few worries about coming back to school - after all, they have become used to the “Stay home, Stay safe” message, and now we are encouraging them to go back out into the world that could seem scary to them.

If they seem anxious, encourage them to share their worries, so you can help unpick what their concerns are, and give them the facts that they need. They may like to use a “worry monster” like this one to share their fears:

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Design-a-worry-monster.pdf>,

Or work through the Help them work out which are worries that they can do something about, and which are out of their control. For example, if they are worried about work they have been set and which they haven’t understood, can they send a message to their teacher? If they are worried about catching the virus, remind them of what they can do to stay as safe as possible. Other worries



may be beyond their control - for example being in a different “bubble” to their friends, or being with a different teacher. In this case, help them think through what that will feel like, and how they will be resilient and find ways to cope. Encourage them to problem-solve. Let them know that it’s normal to have worries, but that they can find ways to cope with them, so they don’t get too big.

Some children may have loved being at home, and now seem unwilling to go back to school! Talk to them about the things that they have missed about school and spending time with their friends. What are the benefits of going back? Who have they missed? What games will they play when they get back?

The ELSA support site has a great resource to help children who are worrying about coming back to school, called “George doesn’t want to go to school.” It has strategies to help children tackle their fears, such as banishing the “What if” worry monsters; focusing on the positives of school; making a plan for separating from parents and replacing worries with memories of a happy time . For free access, go to <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/godalming-parents/> and use the password “godalmingparents”.



For some children, returning to school after such a long time in lockdown with their parents or carers will be hard, and trigger feelings of separation anxiety. There are some ideas to help with separation anxiety here:

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/separation-anxiety.pdf>

The book “[The Invisible String](#)” can also be a comfort to child ren finding it hard to be apart from loved ones.

And finally...please let your child know that the grown-ups at school have missed them, are looking forward to seeing them again, and will do everything they can to make their return happy and safe.

