



Cedarwood School

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School Based Support Team Shared Spaces

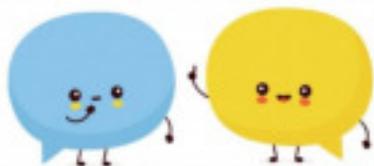
REINTERGRATION

With schools set to open in the next week, many children will be bursting at the seams to see their friends and teachers. Although children often experience 'back to school' anxiety after school holidays, the transition from the prohibited school attendance as stipulated by the mandated lockdown to phased in school approach will result in increased anxiety and uncertainty. Nationwide children are trying to reconcile the fears and concerns that were extensively communicated to them by the adults around them, with their sudden ability to go back to school communicated by those *same* adults. All of this is confusing and we must remain mindful of the unique ways that this confusion will be expressed by different children as they gear up for school reintegration.

This article documents a few tips taken from a variety of sources that we propose be applied as your children prepare themselves to go back to school, transition into compliance with the strict regulations applied by schools as well as navigate their space within the confines of the school environment post lockdown.



Tips:



Encourage your child to talk about their worries about returning to school

For the first time in their school-going years' children have spent an unprecedented time at home with their parents and other carers. The reality of having to leave this bubble is daunting and as the opening of schools draws nearer, parents might see their children experience anxiety challenges that have never been a problem before. After being compelled into adjusting to the confines of lockdown, children are now being challenged to adjust to reintegration, both of which may leave them feeling quite vulnerable. Parents need to be mindful of the degree of separation anxiety that may emerge and the unique ways that it manifests itself - as it is not just the refusal to leave home but could embody physical complaints such as headaches or sleep disturbances. Additionally, look out for health and hygiene-related anxieties that may emerge as they leave their 8-week bubble. Lastly, be observant of the omnipresent anxiety that many children may experience regarding having fallen behind on schoolwork during the lockdown. Encourage your children to talk about their worries and use these conversations to affirm to your child that it is your and the teachers' job to keep them safe, protected, and educated.





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Keep your worries regarding the reopening of schools in check

As part of the psychological struggle in the COVID-19 pandemic, we are continuously battling with feelings of being overwhelmed or on edge. The intensity of these feelings often comes in waves. The most recent of these waves is the anxiety that many parents are grappling with as they prepare for their children to return to school. Although this anxiety is a natural response to parenting, how you deal with this anxiety will communicate to your children how they too must deal with their anxiety. As parents, your responsibility now lies in modeling healthy coping mechanisms to stressful times, making conscious efforts at managing your fears, and tolerating the uncertainty that the pandemic has introduced into our lives.



Re-establish routines to assist with the transition back to school:

For many children the past few weeks have been spent in the comfort of relaxed daily routines and extended playtimes. The reintroduction of routine will be difficult and potentially be met by pushback from children who are equally as anxious as the grown-ups around them. To protect the emotional wellbeing of our children, we should recognize that although re-establishing these routines will be a challenge, these routines will provide the familiarity needed to reinforce the sense of security necessary to facilitate their reintegration to school.



Try not to pretend everything is normal:

With the opening of industries and the reintegration of the education sector, many conversations regarding this transition are centered on the idea of a 'new normal'. Although this concept was introduced to re-establish social expectations and mandate the practicing of new social behaviors. This conversation can mislead us into behaving in a way that does not acknowledge that life as we know it has been disrupted, and that we, including children, have all been changed by this pandemic. These changes have been sudden, pervasive, and demanding. As such, we are required to recognize this and allow for a soft landing, by being intentionally kind to each other and ourselves as we navigate our way into this 'new normal'.



Finally, remember that this is not going to be seamless:

The speed at which the entire world was brought to a halt and new social behaviors were introduced, did not allow for a gradual transition. Contrary, the pandemic has introduced fear, uncertainty, and debilitating grief at many dinner tables. Children have heard you discuss the overwhelming news about Covid-19 and have seen you battle with your anxieties around the pandemic. Now, they are listening as you make plans to re-integrate them into school and introduce a 'new normal' in their lives. As parents, it is important to remember that it is going to be hard, life will feel different, there will be a lot to get used to and most importantly, *this will not be seamless*. Your child's reintegration will be riddled with hurdles, tears, and seemingly uncontrollable tantrums. Just as we adjusted to the lockdown and the range of emotions that accompanied the drastic change to our society, ours is now to allow children to express a new range of emotions as they transition and be present to respond to their emotional needs.



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We hope the tips listed above will instill a sense of calm during this transition. If you or your children are struggling with this transition, we would encourage you to reach out either to someone in the school community or a health professional for additional support. It is during times like these that we need to support and encourage each other, demonstrate empathy and compassion, and know that we are not alone. For further reading and insight, the articles from which our tips were compiled are listed below.

Resources used:

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/guide/a32471971/how-to-help-your-children-reintegrate-into-post-lockdown-life/>

<https://www.wakehealth.edu/Stories/Podcasts/BestHealth-Podcasts/Talking-to-children-about-our-new-normal-during-COVID19>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/news/121522577/anxiety-concerns-as-children-head-back-to-school-after-lockdown>

<https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/excited-children-anxious-parents-swiss-go-back-school>



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