
Ensuring a Smooth Transition Back to School

Advice for Teachers



January 2021

It is important to remember that the return to school is a big change for teachers, parents and children. All returning children and teachers are likely to have some degree of anxiety about the spread of COVID-19.

Managing Children's Anxieties

Many children will return to school without difficulty. However there will be some for whom it will prove more challenging. Many children will have picked up anxieties about COVID-19 from others around them. Young children do not yet have the experience that enables them to 'talk sense to themselves' or seek support from others to manage their anxieties. Young children often do not realise nor analyse why they are feeling uneasy or anxious.

Teachers can help by:

- Encouraging children to talk about their feelings.
- Showing understanding and empathy.
- Acknowledging feelings rather than belittling and dismissing them.
- Acknowledging that starting or returning to school **will** feel a little strange at first but that these feeling won't last long.
- Focusing on the things children enjoy.

Children may express their anxiety in a number of ways.

- By being reluctant to attend school
- Being fearful or withdrawn
- Running away from school
- Being unwilling to do as they are told or picking quarrels with other children

These are universal reactions to danger; that we all experience fear, flight or fight. The best way to help is:

- To be a calm and use a quiet voice
- Be consistent and firm but not to demonstrate alarm if children engage in a COVID-19 risky behavior, for example hugging another child.
- Reassure them about when they will go home.
- Tell them, at the beginning of the day, the plan of activities for the day, including reminders about COVID-19 protocols.
- Be positive about the exciting and enjoyable things they will do.

Teachers' Anxieties

Managing teachers' anxieties is also a high priority. It can be helpful to

- Acknowledge your own level of anxiety
- Ensure you have had a good night's sleep
- Have a clear plan of how you will manage the day in addition to the Daily Plan
- Have some strategies for releasing your own tension such as:
 - Talk to others who are positive about the return to school
 - Find out the medical experts' support for the return to school

- Ensure you follow the masks, hand washing and social distancing protocols in school and at home
- Focus on the benefit to children of returning to school
- Use break time to de-stress if possible, by taking a quick five minutes' walk outside
- Discussing with your head teacher strategies that might help you remain calm

Children will relax, enjoy and learn if a calm, consistent atmosphere can be established.

School Expectations and Routines

The expectations of children who are starting school for the first time will be similar to every child's starting school experience. However, the experience for five and six year olds going into KG2 and P1 will be very different from the usual return after a holiday break.

Children's sense of time is different from an adult's. Nine months is a significant portion of KG2 and P1 children's lifetime and not only will their memories of their previous class be hazy but they will be going into a class beyond the one in which they had spent only about half the usual time. Had children been in school they would have been anticipating the move to KG2 or P1 in their own minds, in discussion with friends and at home, in addition to preparation their teacher would have undertaken to ease that transition. In a normal year, some KG2 classes would also have had KG graduation ceremonies to mark the transition to P1.

Re-teach:

- Signals
- Rules
- Routines
- Other expectations of behaviour

Children are unused to the routines of the classroom and will need to be retaught your expectations of behavior over time. In addition, the government and GES guidance on keeping safe will be important routines to establish by explaining what your expectations for hand washing and age appropriate plans for some social distancing are going to be. These routines will need to be practiced while keeping the situation calm. Children are probably no longer used to being with a large group of others and may get over excited and need strategic handling.

If children are becoming too noisy or out of control, break off to:

- Sit down and shut their eyes and listen to their own breathing while you talk gently about imagining a time when ... e.g. the wind was blowing gently through the trees, or a tap running.
- Tell a short story
- Take them outside to run twice to a designated spot and back (calming them down with a quiet song before returning to the classroom)

Children will readapt quickly if classroom practices are retaught and reinforced consistently.