

Back to School Anxiety



In total, our children have spent at least six months away from the classroom over the last year, unable to have face-to-face time with their teachers, mix with friends or take part in extracurricular activities such as sport, music and after school clubs

So, as millions of children prepare to return to school on 8 March after the third – and hopefully final – pandemic lockdown, the relief amongst families is huge. Parents have managed the daily schooling whilst also working from home themselves. In homes where there have been limited on line resources the pressure on families has been immense. There have often been several children trying to manage on one device and this has led to frustration re those who have the means and those who don't. No child, no family want to feel they have been let down re the education of their children or, that their children will be behind their peers once they return to school

Whilst for many who can't wait for the day to come to return, many are experiencing anxiety about the return and this applies to both parents and the children. Charities including Barnardo's and Childline are offering advice for "back to school anxiety" as some pupils admit they are nervous about what lies ahead and so contacting them for help may prove a helpful step.

"It's natural for some children to feel worried about returning to school even in a normal year so it's perfectly understandable why they may feel anxious after the past year," says child and adolescent clinical psychologist Dr Melanie Smart.

A year in and out of lockdown has meant our children's usual routine has been more disrupted than ever before.

Lots of children will be anxious about the return to school and will need significant emotional support, there are also practical things parents and carers can do to help prepare

Routine activities: Encourage your child to have a similar set of activities that they do each morning after they wake up. This is important because routines can help to provide a sense of stability and something for us to anchor onto. Feelings like anxiety can often make a person feel like they are not in control and therefore some form of a routine can create comfort and stability. You can help with this by talking to your child about the importance of a routine. Remember to remind your child that it's okay if it doesn't always work out, and that there's always tomorrow to try again

Role modelling: Encourage your child to get dressed out of their pyjamas each day by modelling this yourself. It might also help to choose clothes with them the day before and lay these out ready for them to put on. Encourage them to be "school ready"

Have some sort of a plan: Try to plan activities where you can. This can either be for later that afternoon or even better for tomorrow or the rest of the week. Having something to look forward to can help to lift our mood and give some structure to each day.

Look for activities: Look for activities that your child/children would be interested in doing as a whole family

Family time: Organise family time activities. This could involve games or other activities you can organise and do together, whether it's at the dinner table, on the bedroom floor or while you're taking a walk to the shops

Sleep routines: These are likely to have changed during lockdown as there doesn't have to be the dreaded morning rush to get out and drop children off at school and all the stress that accompanies this. Make sure a good sleep routine is re-established as soon as possible. Make the end of their active day clear and stick to the routine.

Tips to help anxious primary school children

- Suggest and encourage them to write down some words about how they are feeling and either draw or write what their face looks like.
- Ask them whether their feeling is comfortable, uncomfortable, a bit of both.
- Ask them to explain why they think they feel this way and remember this doesn't have to be with words, they can draw or even "act them out" Remind them it is okay to feel all feelings. There is no such thing as a bad feeling.
- Tell them if they are feeling sad, angry, worried or frustrated they can take ask for help by talking to someone about their feelings and also suggest they write down some things that make them feel calm. (this will redress the balance)
- Talk to them about some of the things that have changed because of the pandemic like not being able to hug and keeping a safe distance.
- Suggest they list which ones are in their control and which ones are not. Perhaps do this exercise with them

Pupils struggling with anxiety after lockdown should be allowed a gradual return to school, the government's youth mental-health ambassador says. He says that schools should give anxious students "a bit of time to integrate slowly back in the classroom". So do speak with your child's teacher or head teacher. Remember you won't be the only parent needing to do this so there is no need to feel uncomfortable about it

Remember too, that Care first is there to support all parents who themselves may be anxious about their child/children's return to school. Take time for yourself and try to work out what you would need to help with the anxiety. Having a plan a routine or a thought process to help with this is useful and allows you to "order your thoughts"

You can join our live webinar on Monday 8th March at 12pm by registering on <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6096270121226844688>. If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.