

COVID-19: Supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of children returning to school – A brief guide for Parents and Carers of primary school children

Since 23 March 2020, nurseries, schools and colleges have been closed except to children of key workers and vulnerable children. With support from the local authority, schools are currently planning how they can begin a phased return of children in a measured way that prioritises the safety of children and staff.

Some children will be happy to go back to school. However, others may feel worried or uncertain. Parents and carers might also have mixed emotions about the proposed return to school; these feelings are understandable and normal in the current circumstances.

This document will help you prepare your child/children and yourself for their return to school.

How can I help to prepare my child for returning to school?

What can you do?

- Talk to your child about school and what it might be like. We know that things will vary by school and year group but it is likely that class sizes will be smaller; classrooms could look different or your child may be in a different classroom; more lessons might be outdoors; things such as school start times, assemblies and breaks may be staggered and school drop off and collection arrangements might not be what your child is used to.
- Think what the routine will be that your child needs to follow before they return – a bit like when you return to school after the school holidays.
- Some (but not all) children may be worried about leaving their families. If this is the case, reassure them that you will be safe while they're at school, that school know how to contact parent carers – just like before, and explain your drop off and collection arrangements.
- Be patient and prepared to explain more than once what the drop off and collection arrangements are, and what will be happening at school. This may be helpful for younger or vulnerable children.
- Explain that the school staff will understand that it might take time for children to settle in and remember how things work when they return to school. Reassure them that it's the same for other children and the staff – things are different for them too.
- If you or your child has any particular needs, worries or concerns that you want to share with their teacher, let your school know.

Where can you find out more?

- Your school should send you and your child information about what to expect and any changes.
- All schools will have risk assessments, policies and procedures and will let you know how they will work to keep you child physically and emotionally safe while they are in school.
- Find out who you and your child can get information, advice and support from at school to support emotional health and wellbeing e.g. teacher, pastoral lead, SENCO etc.
- If you haven't heard from your school yet, check their website for any updates or contact them in the usual way while your child has been away from school.
- Emotional health and wellbeing information and advice to support you and your child can be found on the Calderdale **Open Minds** website:

www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk

- **Emotional health and wellbeing support for coronavirus** section on the Calderdale **Open Minds** website: www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk/category/help-and-support-coronavirus
- Information about school transition support can also be found on the Calderdale **Open Minds** website www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk/school-transition-support
- **Anna Freud Centre** parent carers section: www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-parents-and-carers
- **Calderdale Open Minds Partnership** (the new name for CAMHS) – COVID-19 arrangements www.calderdaleccg.nhs.uk/cyp-ehwd-c19
- **Time Out Listening Line**: for CYP aged 10-19 gives young people the opportunity to get some simple advice and guidance about how to keep busy and reduce their anxiety about the current situation. Available Wednesday's 1-6pm, call 01422 345154.
- **Kooth** (Xenzone): a free, safe anonymous online counselling and support service for children and young people aged 10 to 25. It's open until 10pm every evening, 365 days a year. www.kooth.com

My child is worried about catching the virus if they return to school

What can you do?

- Evidence suggests that children are less likely to be poorly with COVID-19.
- Reassure your child that staff in school are working hard to make things safe for when they return, and any changes put in place for school drop off and collection, in the classroom, going to the toilet, moving around school and at breaks and lunchtimes will help to keep them safe
- Your child can help to keep themselves and others safe. Remind them to wash their hands with soap and water regularly for 20 seconds and if they cough to cover their mouth with their arm and if they sneeze use a tissue and put it straight in the bin. Remind them not to touch their nose, mouth and eyes, and if they feel unwell they should tell an adult.
- Explain that when they go to school they'll get plenty of help to remind them what to do.

Where can you find out more?

- The **Government** have provided advice to schools on the steps they should take to support children of key workers and others who are returning to school. This can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers
- Your child's school will take steps to limit the amount of contact between different groups of children, such as smaller class sizes and staff spread out more. They will also increase cleaning within school and encourage children to have good hygiene.
- **Calderdale school nurses** can be contacted via text: 07480 635297 (young people) or 07507 332157 (parents/carers).
- **British Psychological Society** – Talking to Children About Illness www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public/talking-children-about-illness and talking to children about coronavirus www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/public/talking-children-about-coronavirus
- **Young Minds** guides: Talking to your child about coronavirus youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus and What to do if you're anxious about coronavirus youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus
- A resource pack from **NHS Grampian** for children under 12 years old It's ok to worry about coronavirus 36bcba96-c643-4a57-97c9-a5d0a468fe3a.filesusr.com/ugd/e3ca78_2a91693cc1b84b5bb9742f30bee5867b.pdf
- **Government** guidance - Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1 June: Guidance for parents and carers

www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june

My child seems upset/worried about returning to school

What can you do?

- Be positive and talk and listen to your child. Don't dismiss any worries even if they seem unrealistic.
- Remind them that it's OK and normal to feel worried, and that other children will be worried too.
- Some (but not all) children may be worried about leaving their families. If this is the case, reassure them that you will be safe while they're at school, that school know how to contact parent carers – just like before, and explain your drop off and collection arrangements.
- Be patient and prepared to explain more than once what the drop off and collection arrangements are, and what will be happening at school. This may be helpful for younger or vulnerable children.
- Explain who your child can get support from while they're at school e.g. teacher, pastoral lead, SENCO etc.
- Encourage your child to get plenty of sleep and limit screen time before bed. Put normal school-time bed time routines back in place.
- If you or your child has any particular needs, worries or concerns that you want to share with their teacher, let your school know.
- Make sure you are ok and seek support or advice if you need it.

Where can you find out more?

- Your school should send you and your child information about what to expect and any changes.
- Anna Freud Centre parent carers section: www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-parents-and-carers
- **Emotional health and wellbeing support for adults in Calderdale can be found at www.calderdaleccg.nhs.uk/looking-after-your-emotional-health-and-wellbeing**
- Emotional health and wellbeing information and advice to support you and your child can be found on the Calderdale **Open Minds** website: www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk
- **Emotional health and wellbeing support for coronavirus** section on the Calderdale **Open Minds** website: www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk/category/help-and-support-coronavirus