

Bolton Educational Psychology Service

Newsletter – 21.05.2020

Preparing for a Return to School

The transition back to school is important for pupils, staff and parents. We need to be mindful that each adult and child will have had a different experience of lockdown. Children's return to classrooms and the social environment of school is going to be a process that requires careful planning. Research has identified five important things that help people to recover following a difficult experience such as the Coronavirus pandemic. This newsletter will focus on each of these areas and share ideas of how you can support children in managing this transition, developing new coping mechanisms and building their levels of resilience.

Going back to school and work

Transitioning back to school or work is not just about the first day we go back, it is about all the other days that follow until being back becomes very familiar and we feel safe, comfortable and confident about being there. Accepting and managing going back to school can take some people longer than others. During the transition back to school or work, it is normal for people to experience the following:

Anxiety

Feelings of loss Lack of self-esteem and confidence

Behaviour changes

It is not unusual for an individual's behaviour to change during times of transition. Changes in behaviour might include, feeling anxious, seeking more attention, asking lots of questions, becoming more 'clingy', being more tearful, being overly fussy, easily frustrated or short tempered, being overly giddy or excitable, laughing inappropriately, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite or overeating. Usually, these changes in behaviour will be temporary and behaviour will settle down after a short period.

Feeling safe: supporting children to feel physically and emotionally safe is important for learning. School needs to feel as predictable as possible after experiencing something that has felt so unpredictable.

How can parents help?

- Help your child to understand how school may look different.
- Discuss and role play with your child how they can keep themselves and others safe, e.g. washing hands, social distancing.
- Talk about any questions or concerns they have, e.g. Will the school be clean? Will I get ill?
- Discuss that they have been ill before, e.g. with a bad cold – and that they got better, talk about what they can do to help keep the school clean, e.g. putting rubbish in the bin.



How can teachers help?

- Share information on your school's website – perhaps videos or photos to show what school may look like.
- Communicate clearly new rules and routines to parents and children.
- The use of warm and welcoming language – "I've missed seeing your smile"; "When I saw... it reminded me of you".
- Ensure pastoral support is available throughout the day and that safe spaces are identified for children to talk about their experiences.
- Avoid directly questioning children on what work they may or may not have completed at home. Children who have completed work at home could be privately praised.

Feeling calm: it is natural for adults and children to sometimes feel worried or anxious, particularly in the current context. Children may well feel anxious about being in the same room as others or confused about why they are no longer allowed to sit on their friend's table.

How can parents help?

- Listen to and validate your child's emotions, e.g. "I know you miss seeing your friends. I would feel sad if I couldn't sit next to my friend too".
- Describe your own feelings and model how you manage them, e.g. "I am feeling frustrated that I can't go to Grandma's house. I am going to do something I enjoy like reading a book".
- Read stories about emotions, discuss emotions of characters in books or films such as Disney's 'Inside Out'.
- One approach for feelings of worry is mindfulness. The ability to be fully present in the moment helps regulate emotions and focus attention. You could take turns with your child to name things they can see, hear, feel, taste and touch. Further information is available [here](#).

How can teachers help?

- Provide opportunities for children to talk about their feelings and emotions throughout the curriculum e.g. circle time or role play.
- Identify designated places for children to engage in relaxation and calming activities.
- Consider scheduling regular sensory resets throughout the day (jumping jacks, skipping, running or wall / chair pushes).
- The use of well-being rating scales and daily emotion 'check ins' where children can place their name on a chart to show how they are feeling.



Feeling in control: it is important that children and adults feel that they have some control over what is happening to them. They need to believe that their actions can make a difference to how things work out and how this can make their lives happy, safe and successful.

How can parents help?

How can teachers help?

- Let children help prepare for a return to school, e.g. getting uniform ready, choosing each item, preparing their school bag (perhaps with a family picture they feel is special).
- Write lists for menus for packed lunches or discuss what they will choose from the school canteen.
- Together create games they can play with social distancing.
- Make an 'I'm good at...tree', add a leaf every day that shows something they can do (being a good friend, being tidy).
- Talk about changes in bedtime routine – let them have some reasonable choice, e.g. 8.15 or 8.30. Start doing this several days before school starts.

- Give children choices where possible – do you want to do this first or second, do you want to do this activity or that.
- Give them small responsibilities, areas they are in charge of (their desk) with task sheets.
- Ask children to contribute to a new set of rules for the classroom and playground.
- Draw posters to remind people about the new rules. Ask children to design a new 'Mr Man or Miss Handwasher', try to find examples of Mr Men books as stimulus.
- Write silly poems as groups to add some fun, ask children to provide the titles.

Feeling connected: it is important that adults and children feel they belong and have a social network that can support them. This may be difficult for some children and staff on a return to school as social distancing measures mean that they are likely to be in a smaller group of children with staff, and maybe children, who they are not as familiar with.

How can parents help?

How can teachers help?

- Complete as many of the activities/as much of the learning provided by school with your child at home as possible.
- A familiar object could help young children struggling with the idea of returning to school to feel connected and held in mind e.g. a photograph, a toy, a key ring or a scented tissue.
- Regular conversations with your child sharing what they have been doing whilst at school and discussing how they feel.
- Communicate and share any difficulties your child may have experienced during lockdown with their school (e.g. emotional, bereavement, illness).

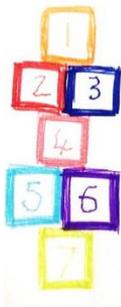
- Give priority to re-establishing relationships rather than access to an academic curriculum on return to school.
- Ensure any missed events are recognised and celebrated together e.g. missed birthdays and Easter/Ramadan etc.
- Learn a new skill together. You could focus on skills needed now e.g. handwashing, social distancing, etc.
- Consider a group rather than an individual reward system.
- Talk about acts of daily kindness, show and add each kindness to a 'kindness tree' that will keep growing leaves.
- Consider a 'My family at home' project, use circle times to talk about home, special people, pets, draw pictures, ask parents to send in photos.



Feeling hopeful: people talk about 'things going back to normal'. While this may seem difficult at the moment, it is important that adults and children feel that it will get better in the future. Feeling hopeful is something we can work on by being mindful, having a growth mindset and developing resilience.

How can parents help?

How can teachers help?



- Write or draw a list of 'I am good at', e.g. getting dressed after PE, handwriting, colouring pictures, writing stories.
- The power of the word 'yet', e.g. "You can't tie your shoelaces yet, but you will get there"
- Find old school books, pictures and talk about the skills they can see in the work.
- Write a list of positive things teachers and friends have said about them.

- Focus more on emotional well-being, have some fun activities – group snakes and ladders on the smart board.
- Focus on less academically challenging ways to learn and record work until children are more secure and resilient, focus on individual strengths e.g. drawing, writing, collage work.
- Acknowledge pupil strengths and creativity during the lockdown by asking parents for photos and videos of rainbow paintings, Joe Wicks workouts, etc.

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Need support?

Our COVID 19 community response line is now open offering vital help to people who need food or essential items

01204 337221

8.30am – 5.30pm Mon – Fri and Sat 9am – 1.30pm



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