Returning to school

Useful tips to help children return to school following COVID-19

Most children have been off school for a number of months. Some may find managing the return to school difficult but there are some simple things that parents and carers can do to make this return easier for their children.

Sleep and bedtimes- establish a good sleep routine

The bedtime routine may have changed while children have been off school and it is important that children are well rested before going back to school. A lack of sleep can effect a child's mood and their ability to learn. The following points can help to make sure your child is well rested.

- Make sure that they get enough sleep, primary aged children need around 9 to 11 hours per day while secondary aged children need around 8 to 10 hours.
- Remove distractions from the bedroom if they disrupt sleep (such as games consoles or phones)
- Practise good sleep hygiene (see advice from school nursing service and The Children's Sleep Charity)
- Start to establish a good routine two weeks before school starts.

Waking up- practise getting up for school

Some children have got used to being able to get up when they want and are used to waking up naturally. Start helping your children to wake up at the time that they normally would on a school day.

- Set an alarm so that your child is awake at a set time.
- Try to prevent you child from going back to sleep.
- Plan an enjoyable morning activity that is 'worth getting up for'.

Morning routine- getting used to the school day

The old routines of the school day may have become lost while children have been off school. Before children start to go back start to make the days more like the school day with set times for meals, snacks and activities.

- Some children will benefit from the use of a timetable or a visual timetable (more information about visual supports is available here)
- Start to eat breakfast and get dressed at the times that you normally would on a school day.
- Have a snack/break/treat time around the same time as your child's play time.

- Have a set lunch time that is the same as the school's lunch. It may be helpful to give your child the type of food they normally have for lunch in school- especially if they have a limited diet.
- Practise the school day. For younger children, this can be done by playing schools to help them familiarise themselves with the expectations of school. For older children this could be done by talking about the school day.

Access to technology- getting ready to leave technology at home.

Whilst off school, many of us have spent more time using technology. This has helped us to keep in touch with friends and provide us with entertainment. Some children may find leaving the technology behind challenging when returning to school.

- Monitor screen time using the screen time or digital wellbeing features of your child's device. This will allow you to see how much time your child is spending on each app.
- There are no set rules for screen time, but excessive screen time such accessing social media or 'junk' content can be unhealthy (for example YouTube videos or TikTok).
- Maintain control over what your child accesses and when, have a plan for when screen time happens. For older children this can be negotiated and agreed with them.
- Try to limit the amount of junk screen time and only give your child access to devices for a specific purpose e.g. read about an area of interest or watch a specific video on i-player.
- For more information see The School Nursing Service's guide.
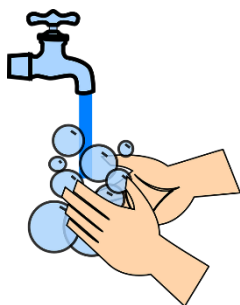
Expectations of school- what will school be like when I go back?

Schools will be different when children go back and helping them to understand these changes can reduce any anxiety or uncertainty.

- Look at your child's school website. Many schools will have information about what the first day back will be like.
- Videos and pictures are the best way of helping a child to understand new things
- Ask your child if there is anything they want to know. It's okay not to have the answers, you can try to find out together.
- If you know that your school will have new routines when your child returns (for example washing hands after play/break and before lunch), try to bring these routines into the home so your child can get used to them.
- If your child has specific needs, try contacting the school SENCo
- Role play for younger children (playing schools)
- Help your child to understand why things will be different when they go back. There are lots of resources to help with this:

  o Coming back to school in a bubble- a story aimed at younger children
  o My back to school bubble- an eBook for primary aged children
  o We're all in it together- a story about going back to school aimed at primary children

o   [Coronavirus: a book for children-](link) a story about coronavirus and the response to it.

Notice the signs that your child may be worried- behaviour communicates a child's emotions

As the return to school becomes closer, children may start to feel excited, nervous or worried. These big emotions may cause a child's behaviour to change**. Behaviour is often how a child communicates their emotions**. Exactly how behaviour links to emotion can sometimes be difficult to understand.

The Educational Psychology Service are providing telephone support over this period. Please email epscorerequests@walsall.gov.uk and a member of the team will call you to discuss any questions or concerns you may have.

Children can access free online support via [Kooth](link), an online counselling service that is free for children in Walsall.

Managing any worries

It's natural for children to be worried about returning to school after having so much time off, having conversations about how a child feels can be really helpful. Here are some useful steps for talking about feelings:

- Conversations about feelings can help your child to recognise their emotions. This can be supported by stories such as: [Everybody Worries](link)
- All feelings are normal- there are no bad feelings
- Sometimes children need to be told how they are feeling for example, "I can see that you are scared because you're worried about getting ill".
- While all feelings are okay, not all behaviours are acceptable, and it's okay to set limits on behaviour whilst recognising emotions e.g. ""I understand that you feel angry, but it is not okay to throw things at people"
- Children need help to manage their big emotions and you can make suggestions to help the to make these emotions more manageable e.g. "deep breaths", "taking a time out", "going outside for a walk", "think of a happy memory"
- More information emotions can be found in our t*alking about emotions* guide.