

Dear parents and carers

After a period of online learning, and being away from the familiarity of school, attending classes and spending time friends, we are now preparing to send our children back. And while many families are super excited about the return to school, the recent lifting of restrictions brings for some a sense of trepidation and unease. To add to this is the reality that not all experiences of COVID 19 have been similar with many authors using the metaphor that while we're all going through the same storm, our vessels have been determined by a complex array of socio-economic, mental health and personal variables.

Professor Ian Hickie, co-director of the Brain and Mind Centre at the University of Sydney notes that as social animals who typically cope in crisis by coming together, "a return to the world of school which allows as much interaction as the guidelines allow, is likely to improve the mental health outcomes for most families". And while we are certainly not returning to "normal", Roger Patulny, Associate Professor of Sociology at Wollongong University notes this next phase "will be an approximation of the old normal", but with hugs, handshakes and all the pleasant parts of human nature still having a rest.

Most children will have become used to the routine of being at home, and now in returning to school children will be readjusting to school routines once again. As your child transitions back to school, remember you can seek assistance by contacting school staff with any concerns or questions you have about the return. In addition, the following recommendations may also assist:

Keep your child informed about the timeline for returning to school. As it is a staggered return with certain year groups returning in different weeks, for some children school may seem empty on return.

Keep your explanations simple. Communicate openly about feelings in the move back to school (both positive and negative). Inform your children how they will get to school (what transport will they take – will they catch a bus, be driven, ride their bikes etc). Drive or for a walk past your school.

Start a conversation with your child about what they are looking forward to on their return, or any possible concerns they may have. Validate concerns as a possible cause of worry and provide reassurance when you can. Look towards resolving concerns, perhaps by having discussions with key staff at the school who may be able to provide assistance.



If necessary, let your child have a familiar item to take with them to school (if not a school related item always check if your child can bring such items to school). Discuss some of the activities children will be doing when they get back to school and who they will see again. Ask your child to identify peers they may connect with who can be a support group for them at school. Where possible try not to introduce any new routines at home during the time of readjustment.

Discuss any concerns children may have in relation to COVID-19, such as their health; worry about other people's health with their teacher, so that if a staggered return is appropriate for them, this can be set up.

Reachout Australia acknowledges that dealing with change can be stressful, uncomfortable and even scary and suggest 7 tips for parents to promote coping; build resilience, and improve wellbeing. <https://au.reachout.com/articles/7-tips-for-dealing-with-change>

Wishing you all the best and looking forward to seeing you at school
Michelle (Turner Psychologist)