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Returning to school anxiety free

by Michael Grose

Going back to school after the enforced COVID-19 break is a source of mixed emotions for many children and young people. Some students, who revel in face-to-face interactions, just can't wait to reconnect with friends and teachers. Others who have appreciated the break from constantly being emotionally switched on when at school may be reticent to return.

Regardless of how your child reacts there's bound to be a level of anxiety attached to returning to school after such a long break. The following strategies sourced from my book, [Anxious Kids](#), will help your child make a smooth transition back to school.

Park your expectations

School undoubtedly will be a different experience for students post COVID-19. It may require you to adjust your expectations, particularly academically, so patience is definitely required. Education is a long game, so if you are worried about your child missing the educational beat, recognise that this experience has been a blip on the educational curve. It's worth remembering that anxiety loves company. Park your expectations for a time, so your child won't pick up your anxieties.

Understand that their anxiety is real

An anxious child desperately wants a parent to understand that they feel anxious and apprehensive. Even if, you can't comprehend the impact that a return to school has on their state of mind and physiology, recognise that their anxiety is real. "Ah, I see you're worried that you won't know what to do when you go to school" is the type of response that an anxious child wants from a parent. Validating your child's feelings will help them feel safe and secure, putting them in a good position to make a return to

school. "Mum/dad know that I'm feeling nervous" is very reassuring for a child.

Prepare them

Worriers and anxious types in particular, like to know what's ahead. Prepare your child for a return by discussing the safety procedures the school will be implementing. Let young children know that an adult won't be accompanying them past the school gate. Ask your child what they are looking forward to and check in with how they are feeling about a return. Check in regularly with how they are feeling and correct any misconceptions.

Focus on reconnection

Make reconnection the theme for your child's return to school. He or she will have to reconnect with friends, teachers and learning, which takes time. In all likelihood, your child's teachers will use many strategies to help your child connect with their friends, reflect on their time at home and move them back into full-time learning mode. Support these activities and reassure your child that they'll feel comfortable very soon with their school experience.

Stay off the roundabout for a while

This period will mirror the start of the school year when your child had to adjust to new teachers, different classmates and a new year level. Adjusting to change takes a great deal of personal energy, so your child or young person may become tired, grumpy, even moody at home. Make allowances for these personal changes and make sure they have plenty of free time to unwind after school to relax and play.

Take care of yourself

In recent months parents and teachers have been doing significant emotional labour. The learning and adjustment curves have been massive, with little time to relax and take a break. Consider your own emotional resources and make your wellbeing a priority, which will make it easier for you to stay calm if your child experiences difficulties.

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown many difficulties, requiring us all to quickly adapt to new situations. Flexibility is a prime characteristic of resilient people, so if nothing else, getting through these times will make us all more resilient.