



A Guide for Parents



Preparing Your Young Person for Return to School
through the Pandemic

Dear Parent

Over the last year our young people have experienced huge changes in their lives. The familiar routine of going to school every day changed so quickly into lockdown and now, as we plan for their return to school, young people are expected to change again! We all adapt to change in different ways.

Your young person may have settled quickly and happily into being at home and enjoyed the new learning environment, or they may have struggled with the lack of structure, feeling upset at not seeing their friends and teachers every day. All young people and families will have experienced these changes in different ways - there is no "normal" or "right" way for us to have experienced lockdown.

We all get used to things staying the same and it is reassuring to know what is happening now and what is going to happen next; routines, structures and familiarity help us to feel calm, in control and happy in our lives. When we know what to expect we can begin to understand how we feel about things and how to adjust our behaviours and this helps us cope with life.

As we prepare for return to school, the prospect of leaving the security of our home and family and being around others may be daunting after the experience of lockdown. Some, whether adult, teenager or child, may have spent extended periods shielding, isolating from friends and family, all will have spent considerable time at home.

Even children and young people looking forward with excitement and anticipation to returning to school may also suffer from underlying fears about safety, particularly if they or a member of their family is classed as clinically vulnerable. Many may also be worrying about the class work and learning they have missed and feel uncertain about their future. However planning for changes can boost your young person's ability to cope and adapt.

This guidance aims to help you prepare your young person for returning to school and provide information on additional supports and services available to parents.

Some Ideas To Help Support Your Young Person

Be Calm

Your young person will take their lead from you and be encouraged if you are steady and matter of fact -reassure them that, following medical guidance and additional controls, school is the best place for them to be for their socialisation, learning and development.



Be Positive

Thinking positively can help us to overcome challenges of all sorts. Remind your young person of all the ways they have learned to help keep themselves safe: washing their hands regularly, sneezing and coughing into a tissue/their elbow, not hugging others and staying in their own space. Reassure them that hygiene and safety measures will all be in place in school to support them.



Be Curious, check in with how your young person is feeling



These are strange times and your young person's imagination may be running away with them and they may be thinking the worst. It can be helpful to open up conversations, for example, ask 'How are you feeling at the moment?' or 'It's been a tough time lately, how are you getting on?'

Try to really listen to your young person when they are talking to you and not minimise their fears but validate how they are feeling – "it's completely fine to feel like that at the moment" or "I can really understand why you would feel like that".

It may be helpful to look also at positive ways for your young person to express and release their feelings through drawing, imaginative play, writing a journal, physical activity. You can also help them think about what makes them feel better when they are down or upset, including helping them to learn relaxation strategies.

Click here 



Be Thankful

Help your young person to think about things they are looking forward to – being with their friends, meeting their teachers, getting back to good routines. Consider also favourite activities they enjoy but be mindful that some of these may not be immediately available for them.



Be Supportive

Your young person may be worried about leaving the security of you and your home and may become tearful, clingy or act out. Reassure them that you will miss them too and think of them throughout the day. Being available to talk to your young person about any worries they may have and showing you understand their concerns will be a big support to them.



Be Prepared

Support your young person to be aware of changes that may occur in the classroom environment since they were last at school and rehearse any new routines that school may have shared. Encourage your young person to get into a good sleeping pattern before returning to school.



Make contact with School

In preparing for return to school, it will be important to familiarise yourself and your young person again with the safety measures and hygiene standards that school has put in place to protect everyone and how they are implemented. Find out practical information about routines and what the first few weeks will look like including any changes to timetable, staffing, classroom etc that may have occurred.

Support for your Young Person

Let school know if your young person has experienced bereavement or loss or if there have been any changes in your family. Equally, if you have concerns for your young person's wellbeing, or your young person has additional needs and may need changes or adaptations to assist their return, talk to school. Find out what additional supports and provisions are in place to support your young person's return to school.

Help your young person stay in touch with friends

Encourage your young person to stay in touch with their friends in ways that do not breach guidelines. This will be particularly important in the run up to return to school and will help ease the transition for your young person.

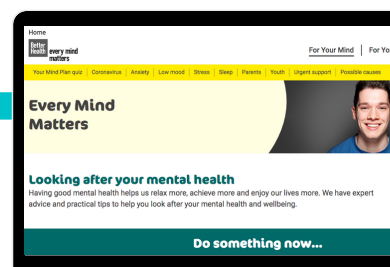
Try and make time for yourself

It's important to find ways to recognise and address stress you may be feeling – both in relation to parenting, work, family and other commitments. You may also be feeling a sense of loss with your young person's return to school.

Whilst it may seem counter intuitive or impossible, it is important to make time for yourself, to think about yourself or practice self-care. How well you are able to look after yourself will also affect how much emotional energy you have available to care for your young person.

The NHS Every Mind Matters site offers a range of resources to support your mental health alongside MHF tips about looking after your mental health .

Click here



Further Guidance and Wider Supports

If you are struggling with parenting you are not alone. There is Government guidance on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing here .

Click here



It is not a sign of weakness to reach out, it is a sign of strength. You may want to speak to a friend, or relative or may have an online parent's group or forum like Mumsnet to call on.

Click here



There are also a number of parenting helplines and charities that can provide one to one support including Children in Northern Ireland which provides a helpline on all aspects of parenting.

Click here



Further information about coronavirus and how it is affecting education settings in NI can be found here .

Click here



