

# Tips for Parents and Carers – supporting children as they return to primary school

Developed by Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service

Returning to primary school after the 'lockdown' is likely to be an exciting but also worrying time for children. As a parent or carer, you might be a little anxious too. This is perfectly understandable. But there are some simple things you can do to help them to prepare for their 'new normal'. We hope that the following tips will help you support your child's successful return to school.

**Time to talk** – your child is likely to experience a mix of emotions about returning to school, from excited and eager, to concern, worry and anxiety. Be available to listen to your child's thoughts and concerns, and help them to explore and find ways of managing more difficult feelings.



**Offer reassurance** – explain that these feelings are normal. Like all feelings, they will change and come and go.

**Be a positive role model** – model coping strategies that you use to help you feel calm and positive e.g. being active and using breathing and calming techniques. If appropriate, talk about your thoughts about returning to 'normal' life and/or work and the ways that you are managing and coping with difficult feelings. Use stories and/or picture books to help you explain this in an age appropriate way.



**Talk about school** – talk about the routines, rules and practices that they were familiar with. Some of these will have changed (e.g. social distancing and hygiene measures, staying in teaching 'bubbles') but many will have stayed the same (e.g. the building, playground, adults and peers). Focus on the positives, for example, seeing their friends again.

**Routines** – in most families, routines around work, play, sleep and time spent on digital technology have become flexible. This is perfectly normal and something all children are familiar with, particularly during summer holidays. Prepare for going back to school the same way that you would approach the end of the summer holidays.



**Sleep routines** – during term time, a minimum of 9 to 11 hours of good sleep is recommended for 5 -11 year olds. Encourage your child to start returning to a normal term-time sleep routine at least two weeks before a return to school. Avoid lie-ins (especially at weekends) and push sleep forward by 15 minutes each day to help them adjust to earlier bedtimes and wake-ups.

**Encourage healthy routines** – healthy habits around exercise and diet will help to improve sleep, learning and wellbeing. Encourage at least 1 hour of moderate exercise a day e.g. riding a scooter, walking the dog, skipping, and climbing.



**Manage screen time** – if possible, don't have screens (e.g. TV, mobile phone, tablet) in the bedroom at night. Encourage your child to have at least 1 hour of 'screen free' time before bed. Use a blue light filter or app if possible to stop the light from screens interfering with sleep.

# Helpful tools and resources

## Helping to manage worries:

- Social Stories or stories about returning to school post-lockdown can easily be found online including from [ELSA Support](#) and [twinkl](#) (narrated version). For older children, [Dana and the Doom Merchant](#) (narrated version) is a story about change, loss and transition; what helps and what doesn't.
- [Little Parachutes](#) recommends picture books that help children cope with worries, health issues and new experiences (big and small).
- For children aged 7-11 years, [Reading Well](#) recommends expert endorsed books to help support mental health and wellbeing including in relation to additional needs.



## When things are feeling tough:

- Emotion Coaching is a simple approach to help support discussions with children about their emotions and ways of managing these. Here is an example [article](#) written for parents and carers.
- Approaches such as CBT and Mindfulness can also be used to help children to begin to explore and manage these feelings and promote resilience.
- [CAMHS Resources](#) offers a range of suggested downloads, apps and book recommendations. They also provide website links to support for children, young people and families including **Young Minds** and **Anna Freud Centre**.
- [Childline](#) is a free counselling service for children and young people (up to 19 years). They also offer online activities and information to support wellbeing.



## Be a positive role model:

- The Leicestershire NHS '[5 Ways to Wellbeing](#)' provides 5 helpful steps (including links to local resources) to help improve mental health and wellbeing during these challenging times.



## Healthy Routines and Sleep:

- The NHS provides guidance on:
  - [Sleep for Children](#)
  - [Exercise for children and young people](#)
  - [Healthy, balanced diet for 7 to 10 year olds](#)
  - [Health for Kids](#) is a fun interactive website designed for children to help learn about health. There is also a 'grownups area'.



**Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service Helpline** – available daily during the coronavirus pandemic to offer telephone advice and support to Leicestershire parents and carers.

- Tel: **0116 305 5100**; **Monday to Friday, between 9am and 11.30am** including school holidays.
- We have also developed a parent and carer guide on [Supporting children and young people with additional needs at home during COVID 19](#).