

Tips for Parents and Carers – supporting young children as they return to nursery

Developed by Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service

Returning to nursery after the 'lockdown' is likely to be an exciting but also worrying time for young 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 nursery.

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



Offer reassurance – Acknowledge that some feelings might feel a little strange and different. 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. Practice these with your child through play. Talk about some of your thoughts about returning to 'normal' life and/or work and the ways that you are managing and coping with difficult feelings in a positive way. Use stories and/or picture books to help you explain this and help label feelings in an age appropriate way.



Talk about nursery – talk about the routines, rules and practices that they may be familiar with. Some of these will have changed (e.g. social distancing and hygiene measures, staying in learning 'bubbles') but many will have stayed the same (e.g. the building, play areas, adults and peers). Focus on the positives, for example, seeing their friends again. If possible, also take a trip to nursery to remind them (from a distance) of what nursery looks like.

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



Sleep routines – during term time, a minimum of 11 to 12 hours of good sleep is recommended for 3 - 5 year olds. Help your child to start returning to a normal term-time sleep routine at least two weeks before a return to nursery. 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. Young children should not be inactive for long periods, except when asleep. This includes long periods of screen time (e.g. TV, mobile phone, tablet) or sitting still (e.g. travelling by car). Encourage at least 3 hours of physical activities spread throughout the day (e.g. playing with toys), including at least 1 hour of moderate to vigorous exercise a day (e.g. climbing, riding a bike/scooter, and skipping).



Helpful tools and resources

Helping to manage worries:

- Social Stories or stories about returning to nursery post-lockdown can easily be found online. [While We Can't Hug](#) (narrated/visually impaired version) is a story about a hedgehog and tortoise that have found different ways of telling each other that they are still best friends and loved even in a time of social distancing.
- A range of free activity books to help prepare children for a return to nursery can also be found online. Here is an example, [Tales of Me](#).
- [Little Parachutes](#) recommends picture books that help children cope with worries, health issues and new experiences (big and small).
- [Anna Freud Centre](#) offers training and support for children's mental health services. They also provide support for families including further guidance to help support young children during COVID-19 and in preparation for a return to nursery.



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.
- [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 young children](#)
 - [Physical activity for young children](#)
 - [Young children and food](#)
 - [Health for Under 5s](#) provides support and help for parents and carers of young children including information and resources for 3 - 5 year olds.



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](#).