

Phoenix Outreach Service: A Parent Guide to support pupils who are returning to school

Schools are preparing for a gradual reopening. We are unsure what this might look like at this time. We do know that managing the transition for children and young people to return to school will be key to maintaining their emotional wellbeing.

Transitions and changes are challenging for everyone and there are many reasons children and young people may find them challenging too. Unexpected change can trigger anxiety. It is very important, therefore, to reassure them that it is normal to feel worried or anxious when things change or end during this time. It is important to encourage young people and children to talk about their feelings or worries and give them opportunities to talk about their concerns. Encouraging relaxation techniques can reduce feelings of anxiety.

Giving children and young people the opportunity to share and celebrate some of their achievements during lockdown is important and can be sent to schools to be added to the school website. Year six pupils could be encouraged to write down some positive memories of their time at primary school, which could be shared in a special section on the school website.

Consider writing down any useful information for staff when your child returns e.g. how they have been during lockdown; any changes in their behaviour; what has been calming for them etc.

Please see below some ideas and tips for preparing your child when the time to return is scheduled:

For children who are at the early stages of developing language:

- Prepare a visual calendar for your child showing when the return will happen – if you have a printer, you can print off a blank calendar and add the dates. If you do not, simply make one similar to the example:

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT

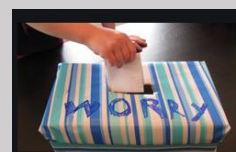
- Have a discussion with your child's school and arrange for them to let you know some of the exciting activities they will be planning for your child's return. This will support them to associate their return with positivity and fun.
- Read a Social Story to your child every day to prepare them for their return – we will provide schools with Social Stories and your child's school will send these out.
- Discuss with school whether a phased return (starting with shorter days and then increasing) might be appropriate.
- Discuss with school whether it might be possible for the child to wear their own clothes when first going back or bring a comforting item to school to introduce fewer changes at a time.

For children who have some language but are not yet able to engage in full conversations:

- Prepare a visual calendar for your child showing when the return will happen – if you have a printer, you can print off a blank calendar and add the dates. If you do not, simply make one similar to the example:

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT

- Have a discussion with your child’s school and arrange for them to let you know some of the exciting activities they will be planning for your child’s return. This will support them to associate their return with positivity and fun.
- Read a Social Story to your child every day to prepare them for their return – we will provide schools with Social Stories and your child’s school will send these out.
- Create a ‘worry box’. You can work with your child to make this box and support them to decorate with their favourite things. You can then plan times each day (not close to their bed-time) to discuss any worries or fears your child might be experiencing and get them to write these down or you can scribe for them. Discuss the worry with the child and encourage them to draw how they feel. This piece of paper containing their worry is then folded and placed in the box. The next day, you can discuss a different worry or re-visit any previous worries that are still on their minds.
- Prepare something to share with school to show what you have done during lockdown e.g. put some photos in a memory book; write about or draw a picture of things you have enjoyed doing at home during the lockdown.
- Ask school to send photographs (or look on the school website) of staff the child knows. Encourage them to talk about them.
- Emphasise to your child what will be the same about school and discuss what might be different.
- Talk about things you know they enjoyed about school to make them feel excited about some of the experiences when they return, for example: their favourite school dinner; sports they played or teachers they liked.



Children and young people who are able to engage in conversation:

- Discuss what things might be different when they return to school. Your child’s school should be contacting you to let you know what the return will look like.
- Play an observation game – e.g. what colour is the school gate? Is there a post box outside? What is the name of the street your school is on? etc.
- Emphasise to your child what will be the same about school and discuss what might be different.
- Talk about things you know they enjoyed about school to make them feel excited about some of the experiences when they return, for example: their favourite school dinner; sports they played or teachers they like.

