

Five ways parents can help children adjust to being at school after months in lockdown

October 14 2021, by Penny Van Bergen, Erin MacKenzie



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Students are returning to their schools after months in lockdown in [Victoria](#), [New South Wales](#) and the [ACT](#). Many will thrive on the return to school. Others, though, may need extra practical and emotional

support to adjust in a healthy way.

Some children may experience [separation anxiety from their parents](#), for example. Others may be [worried about catching COVID-19](#) in the playground or about connecting with their friends again.

Parents and carers might be wondering what they can do to support their [child](#) as they return to [school](#). Here are five tips that can help.

1. Renegotiate routines

Like adults, children and teens are likely to have established quite different routines during lockdown. They may have also become accustomed to [more screen time](#) than usual.

To ease the transition to a regular school routine, it is worth making slow adjustments like getting up and going to bed at a more consistent time. Parents can [support autonomy](#) by negotiating new routines with their child. While teens may be more resistant to [parents](#) placing restrictions on their [screen time](#), this is [less likely](#) when parents provide explanations and acknowledge teens' perspectives.

2. Allow time for adjustment

Returning to school may bring uncertainty, excitement, fatigue or other big emotions. Some children may seem particularly tired after their first few days, while others may be more sensitive or less tolerant than usual.

Don't despair if your child seems to experience more big emotions at home than at school: this likely means that [home is a safe place](#) to return to! Help children to name any negative emotions that arise, such as frustration, and gently coach them to consider other ways of expressing

themselves.

Be tolerant yourself, and don't sweat the small things.

3. Acknowledge children's worries

Children and teens may have specific worries related to COVID-19, to changing friendships, or to being back at school. Younger children may also experience [separation anxiety](#) after extended periods of [having their families](#) as their sole source of social connection.

If your child raises concerns about whether they will be safe returning to school, it is useful to provide simple and [factual information](#) about COVID-19 while [providing gentle reminders](#) that the adults around them are there to help them stay healthy. Adopt a problem-solving approach: helping children to focus on what they can control, rather than worrying about things that are outside our control.

Regardless of the source of their worries, it is important to acknowledge and validate your child's feelings. You can point out that many children may be feeling the same way, and that their concerns are understandable. At the same time, remaining calm and focusing on the positive aspects of returning to school can help to relieve some of their concerns.

4. Coach empathy

Children and teens have had different experiences during lockdown and may have different feelings about being back at school. Understanding that other children may feel differently can help your child to be a good friend.

Before returning to school, remind children that some of their friends

will feel more nervous about returning than others. In primary school, some might also [make different decisions about masks](#).

If your child has been in a "friendship bubble" with only a small number of other friends, encourage them to include those who have not. Being empathetic towards others and acknowledging how they are feeling will not only [help your child socially](#), it is also an important [socioemotional skill](#) to master.

5. Be optimistic

Remember that most children adjust well when faced with new challenges. Parents can prompt children and teens to remember what they enjoy most about school to help them look forward to returning. Reminiscing about funny stories or enjoyable school events that [children](#) have experienced can [help with this process](#).

It is important to still acknowledge your child's feelings if they express a preference for learning from home. You may wish to share these concerns with their teacher. However, it is helpful for your own approach to reflect [optimism](#) and [confidence](#). Avoid [introducing your own worries if you can](#): parent anxiety can be contagious!

If you observe any concerning and sustained changes in your child's behavior as they navigate the return to school, their school or GP can help connect them with additional support. Other resources that can help include [Kids Helpline](#), [Beyond Blue](#), or [Headspace](#).

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