

# Prioritise children's wellbeing amid a COVID return to school

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

As a split return to school remains on the cards for South Australian families, early childhood experts are encouraging parents to focus on their child's wellbeing, especially in the face of another potentially difficult year.

UniSA's Professor Marjory Ebbeck says while COVID-19 remains prominent in media and everyday discussions, helping children think positively about their new school year will be important for their mental health and wellbeing.

"With debate surrounding sufficient availability of Pfizer vaccinations for [primary school children](#) (aged 5–11 years), and 'bi-model' learning (face-to-face learning for reception and years 1, 2, 7, 8 and 12; and home schooling for all others), it's not surprising that parents and children alike are confused and concerned about the current scenario," Prof Ebbeck says.

"For the past few years, children have heard, seen and experienced school closures and State lockdowns, as well as food, grocery and now vaccine shortages—they've seen it on TV, heard their parents talk about it, and had to adopt their new safe health practices, including mask-wearing and social distancing.

"As a result, [studies show that more than a third of Australian parents](#) say that their children (from babies to 18-year-olds) have been negatively affected by the pandemic, showing increased anxiety, problems with sleep and a sense of disconnection with their friends.

"With a new term just around the corner, focussing on the positives of returning to school and building your child's sense of confidence and wellbeing will be extremely important.

"Reassure children that school is a safe place, that they'll be able to play with their friends, see familiar spaces, and have great books to read. Remind them that their teachers are looking forward to seeing them, and that they'll get to do lots of fun and exciting activities with their classmates.

"At the same time, parents can also support children's wellbeing through practical things such as ensuring their child gets enough sleep as well as enough outdoor play, cutting back on technology, and settling back into a regular routine.

"By focussing on these positives, parents can help build their children's confidence, ability to cope with stress, and their overall wellbeing."

In Australia, an estimated [314,000 children](#) aged 4–11 (almost 14 percent) experience a [mental disorder](#). According to the World Health Organization, there is strong evidence that mental disorders in childhood and adolescence predict mental illness in adulthood.

Prof Ebbeck says that reciprocal, positive relationships with teachers are also central to their children's [wellbeing](#).

"Parents have a tough job. Not only do they need to cope with the pandemic in relation to their job, home-schooling and managing their own [mental health](#), but they want to make sure their [children](#) are keeping up with their education, in whatever format it takes," Prof Ebbeck says.

"It's important to recognize that starting school is stressful for [parents](#), but at the same time, can also be challenging for teachers.

"Have confidence that your child's teacher will address their learning needs and give them enough space and trust to do so. Building positive, reciprocal relationships with those who are part of your child's life will facilitate a seamless transition to [school](#) and demonstrate positive partnerships that will fare well in their future."

Provided by University of South Australia

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