

Back to school blues...

Returning to school after a break can be challenging time for children of all ages. This can result in children not knowing how to react to their emotions.

Often, it is the fear of the unknown that unsettles children. These fears can range from a new classroom, new teachers, new classmates, or even lessons that they may have struggled with in the past.

Although this is a stressful time for children it is however common. These fears may present themselves as anger, frustration, anxiety, or even excitement mixed in. These feelings can change your child's behaviour.

Below are some tips which may make the transition back into school easier.

Be Positive

Children may be anxious about returning to school especially if they are in a new class with a new teacher. Try to talk positively about the upcoming change and talk about the excitement of learning new things, school trips and new responsibilities now they are older.

Bedtime

A week or so before returning to school try to get your child back into a bedtime routine to make the transition back to school easier especially if they have had late nights during the school holidays. If easier move bedtime back a little earlier each day. Build in a wind down time or a 15-minute countdown to bring games, TV programmes to an end. Practice by setting an alarm and waking up earlier.

Have a consistent bedtime routine: pack away toys and games ("tidy up time"), let your child choose their pjs and get them ready before moving onto teeth, settling time (reading), dim lights, devices on charge downstairs, hugs, and kisses - lots of praise for sticking to the routine and gently reminding if they forget.

Preparation

A good idea for your child to be prepared is to set out clothes the night before going to bed. Try to organise a system for packing the school bag and preparing lunch the night before. Children can also get involved in this process to help encourage and develop independence.

Working out a routine for your family is a fantastic way to have less stress each morning for example gives your child a checklist of the following this may ease anxiety and feel less pressured as they will know what is needed from them.

1. Get up
2. Eat breakfast
3. Have a wash
4. Brush teeth
5. Get dressed
6. Leave the house by a certain time

To make this fun you could even set a timer and challenge your child to beat the timer.

Talk, talk, talk

Speak to your child about their transition day they had during their last term at school. What did they like about their new classroom or teacher? Think about all the exciting things they are about to learn. Talk to your child about what their new classroom looks like and how it is different/same as their previous class.

Answer any questions your child may have in a positive way as children will be less inclined to worry if you appear calm and happy.

It is so important to talk and listen to their fears and worries when returning to school, no matter how small this may seem to you, it may be significant to them. Try not to offer solutions right away, as they may need to just express themselves. Once you fully understand what the problem is then help by offering strategies to dealing with their problems.

Separation anxiety

Saying goodbye at the gates can be tricky for some children but try not to worry, it is perfectly natural, - below are some ideas to help you.

Be aware that your child may be both anxious at leaving you and excited when returning to school after the holidays or a period of being unwell.

Be prepared for anxious partings on the first days back: get yourself ready emotionally, keep it quick and simple - a hug and three kisses, a goodbye and see you at pick up time.

Let children know where you will be - "I'll be ... at work, at home, going shopping, getting dinner ready, working on the garden today whilst you are playing with your friends!"

Explain when you will see them again - for children who cannot tell time, you might say, "I'll be here just after story time" (or other end of day activity) or "I'll be waiting for you at 3pm. I'll want to hear all about your day!"

The farewell routine may be shaky the first week, but it should improve with consistency.

Tips and tricks

If the goodbyes with your child seem to be taking a long time - be patient. You have spent a huge amount of quality time together during the school holidays.

It may help to give your child something called a “transition object” – something that belongs to you, that the child can have nearby and touch or speak to when you are away.

Love hearts

Draw a love heart on your hand and one on your child's hand. When they feel they need you, they can touch the love heart. You can then tell each other that you were thinking about them today by touching your love heart.

Love buttons

You might want to sew a button into the inside of a jumper/cardigan that your child can touch throughout the day for comfort.

A special item

You might have a key ring, hair band or some other small item that is special to you, which they can keep with them or near them during the day.