

# Helpful Tips

for parents & carers

Great 8 Guide to help with back to school preparation, after Covid-19



**NHS**

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**Top Tips, our “Great 8 Guide” to help you and your children feel better prepared for the return to school in September 2020**



**We offer more detail about these tips on the next page**

# Top Tips

## 1. YOUR OWN SELF CARE – you first

As parents and carers we are best able to support our children when WE feel as well as we can. Take some time to think about your own self-care, what would help you to feel better able to cope with this transition phase, would it be improved sleep, seeing family and friends or some time to relax by yourself? As well as feeling better in yourself, this really helps to promote good self-care to our children, as they can learn how to soothe themselves by watching us.



## 2. TALKING & LISTENING – being available

If you have started with Top Tip #1 then you might have been talking to family and friends as part of your own self-care, it is completely normal for us to have our own worries and emotions as adults, parents and carers and it is important for us to have outlets for this away from our children. If we can do this, we will feel better able to listen to and support them.

We can find it easier to talk when we are more relaxed, so if you wanted to start a conversation with your child about returning to school, consider talking alongside doing something like colouring, baking, playing football, walking or gaming. You could talk about what happens in a typical school day and what their favourite parts of the day or week used to be.

To give you the best chance of really listening to your child choose a time when you know you can give them your full attention, and if you can't be fully available, try telling them that you really want to hear what they have to say and that you will be available "in 10 minutes" or "after tea".

Communication with school is important too, this is new to everyone, including your child's teachers, so as we learn together try to keep communication open and help each other to support your child.

## 3. HONESTY – we don't know what we don't know

It's best to be honest about things being different rather than say we are going back to the way things were, as if we are going back to school like any other September. Share what you do know to help to prepare your child for what to expect. It is OK to let our children in on the fact that we don't know everything.

If your child asks questions that you can't answer, you can tell them that you will try to find out, and what you will do to find out (ask their school); this shows them you are being honest and it sets them a good example of what to do when you don't know – ask!

#### 4. POSITIVITY – a little goes a long way

It's amazing how far a little positivity can go and a little excitement from the simple things like a new school bag or lunch box; if getting new isn't possible maybe your child can decorate their existing bag or lunch box with stickers or pens.

Help them to see some more of the good things about going back to school; as well as learning they will be able to see more of their friends, for example.



#### 5. LOOKING FORWARD – more good things may come

Talk together about other things to look forward to, school is one place where we are starting to see our 'new normal' and there are other things that are likely to come after schools open, such as sports clubs and things your child or family used to enjoy doing.

#### 6. ROUTINE – getting the day back on track a week or two before September

A good daily routine of regular wake, meal, exercise and sleep is really important to help children feel safe and secure and able to cope (goes for us adults too).

Just like during the usual summer holidays, our routine often changes while we are on a break from life's demands and it can be a bit of a challenge to bring those routines back. This time though, most of our children have experienced this break from their regular routines for a much longer period, so re-introducing good and regular patterns at least a week or two before the return to school is likely going to be helpful for your child.

Electronic devices have felt like a lifeline for many of us and our children during the past few months, they have been very useful to many people to help stay connected to others and as a source of entertainment; consider reducing the amount of screen time if needed over the remainder of the summer to help transition, try to substitute with more family based activities if you can.

Making sure there is plenty of time for the morning routine so that having breakfast and getting ready isn't rushed, can really help everyone to feel less stressed and able to cope better with their day ahead. Organising as much as possible the night before will help, such as putting the packed school bag by the door and preparing a lunchbox, involving your child in the preparation will help them to feel involved and promote independence.



## 7. REWARDS – they've earned it (we all have)

Let your child hear from you that you know it feels like a big change for them, and use this conversation as a chance to be positive about their efforts. Praise them and plan a treat to look forward to for the end of the first day, and maybe the end of the first week.

This can be anything from one to one time with a parent/ carer, to choosing the family TV or evening meal / dessert. These are also great ways to help your child experience some element of control in these changing circumstances, within supportive boundaries this can help to build their confidence in themselves too.

Be aware that you might find it hard as well and so plan a treat for yourself, remember again the thoughts about self-care right back at Tip #1



## 8. BE CONSISTENT – “this is the beginning of a process not an event”

Your child could show a variety of responses to their first day, it would be normal to expect them to be tired, excited, irritable, hungry, not hungry. This is understandable and this process is likely to take more than just the first day for them to adjust to.

Some children will want to tell you lots about their day and others don't want to talk about it - both are normal. Try to avoid asking lots and lots of questions and if your child doesn't want to talk you could try a subtle approach, one idea is:

- At family meal time, ask everyone to share one thing they liked about their day, or something funny, or something new, you need to share too!

Consistency from you is going to help your child to adjust and cope easier, so keep up with the great start you have made on the top tips here, routine, sleep, exercise, a healthy diet and communication are going to continue to help.

*This is an extract from “Helpful Tips Including Managing Worry”, Winsford CAMHS 0-16, July 2020, please see original document for the full list of resources available*

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# Helpful Resources

## Resources & Services you may find useful:

**ADHD Foundation** – The Neurodiversity Charity, [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk)

**Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families** – Mental Health Charity with online resources - [www.annafreud.org](http://www.annafreud.org)

**Anxiety UK** – National Charity offering online resources and support – [www.anxietyuk.org](http://www.anxietyuk.org), Helpline 03444 775 774 (Mon – Fri 9.30 – 7.30, Sat & Sun 10am – 2pm)

**Child & Educational Psychology Service** - 0151 337 6836 (or via your child's school link)

**Children & Young People's Wellbeing Hub** - for professionals, parents & carers concerned about the mental health of a child or young person who has a GP in the Vale Royal & South Cheshire areas: call 01606 555120 between 13:00 and 17:00 Mon-Fri (Excluding Bank Holidays)

**Cosmic Kids Yoga** – Yoga and Mindfulness for Kids – [www.cosmickids.com](http://www.cosmickids.com)

**CWP Mental Health Crisis Line** – 24/7 support for Children, Young People and Adults, Freephone 0800 145 6145 (*if in an immediate life-threatening emergency you should still always call 999 or visit A&E*)

**My Mind** - [www.mymind.org.uk](http://www.mymind.org.uk) – CWP online resources dedicated to Children and Young People's Mental Health

**National Autistic Society** – online resources and support at [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk), Helpline 0808 800 4104

**Open the door** – Support and advice about unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse – [www.openthedoorcheshire.org.uk](http://www.openthedoorcheshire.org.uk)

**Oxford Owl** - Online library with free ebooks – [www.home.oxfordowl.co.uk](http://www.home.oxfordowl.co.uk)

**Starting Well** – [www.startingwell.org.uk](http://www.startingwell.org.uk)

**The Happiness Trap: FACE covid: How to respond effectively to the Corona crisis (May 2020)** by Dr Russ Harris, [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com)

**The Sleep Council** - [www.sleepcouncil.org.uk](http://www.sleepcouncil.org.uk)

**Twinkl** – [www.twinkl.co.uk](http://www.twinkl.co.uk), home learning resources including emotion based work

**Young minds** – [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk), online resources and support, parents helpline 0808 802 5544, there is also a young person's crisis text line available 24/7 – support can be accessed by texting YM to 85258

You may find this article helpful:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-your-child-is-anxious-about-going-back-to-school/#breathing-techniques-and-grounding-exercises>